

In and out (and around)

Awareness - a dialogue

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In Humanistic Psychology the problem of Awareness is a touchy subject. Everyone seems to be *aware* of its meaning in varying degrees. Some explanations are technical, some intuitive, some metaphysical or philosophical, while others are nothing more than ridiculous. For the purposes of this dialogue I would like to draw attention to the Gestalt interpretation of Awareness, as I feel that technically, it affords the greatest scope for further study, and as such, may well produce - once it is thoroughly understood - a foundation on which to build a comprehensive, and down-right meaningful Growth Movement.

In Gestalt terminology, awareness is immediate experience developed with, and an integral part of, an ongoing organism-environment transaction in the present. This transaction includes 'thinking' and 'feeling', and is always based on current perceptions of the current situation. According to this definition, awareness also includes *some* intention and directionality of the self towards the world, and in *pure form* creates a 'weakening' of the self-other barrier. When this happens, the 'object' of awareness seems momentarily to be included in the self.

Rather than attempt a critical article based on this definition, I have instead taken a 'living' extract in the form of a dialogue between two characters from

something I am writing at this moment, and hope that the reader, although unfamiliar with what has gone before, will 'enter into the spirit' of the transaction, and thereby glean my direction, and intention.

The setting is a flat somewhere in London.

Sabazius shook his head slowly and stared at me when I attempted to describe my experience. I stopped mid-sentence, momentarily thrown by his expression.

'Do not think about it,' he said softly, 'just let it wash over you, enter and leave you when it wills'.

Taking a deep breath, I said, 'I don't seem able to break the old pattern.'

Something keeps on coming to the surface, demanding that I 'think' things out, that I 'understand' them logically'.

He nodded, chewed at his mouth. 'You're facing the subtlety of a displaced 'I', ' he replied. 'This 'I' will keep moving around in you like a cork in a bottle of badly opened wine. It will come up and pester you when you least expect it, demand things, shout orders, create images and all sorts of weird internal phenomena; but don't fight it, for the moment you direct energy towards it, it will take that energy and grow all the stronger, feed on the very fact that you recognise it as 'being there'.

To recognise it as 'being there' is to offer it autonomy'.

'But it's already autonomous'.

'That only seems so'.

I was about to ask another question, but stopped myself. Sabazius laughed at me, not unkindly, and got to his feet. 'Now the work really begins,' he said. 'Up until this moment you have been struggling with what you are, from now on you will be struggling with what you are not'.

I did not understand what he meant.

'Everything now goes into reverse,' he went on quietly. Whereas before you thought things out now you have to think them 'in'. Progress on this path means eventually knowing that there is no path to follow, that every good conclusion is only a beginning, and that all beginnings by their very nature are false starts'.

What he said sounded like a huge contradiction, and I immediately tried to 'work it out' in my mind, only to remember instantly that this was what he had said should not be done.

'What's the matter?' he asked.

I explained my confusion.

'Think of it this way,' said Sabazius. 'When a man is in a dark room, and cannot see, he desires light to eradicate that darkness, so he seeks out light, and darkness is expelled.

But his darkness came out of darkness, for without darkness light is meaningless. So what I am saying to you is seek the darkness out of which light springs, seek the reverse of your seeing, and you will comprehend that out of which you seeing erupts'.

Tension.

'Up until this moment you have been struggling with what you are, from now on you will be struggling with what you are not'. I do not understand what he meant.

His words screwed me up inside, knotted my muscles and made my breath irregular. There was 'sense' in what he said, but I could not fathom it, and knew now that I should not attempt to do so. But that thing which Sabazius had identified as a displaced 'I' would not let go, it demanded that I understand his words, that I *take to myself* knowledge, and use that knowledge to comprehend what at that moment was beyond my comprehension. So I sat there in my flat caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, unable to go backwards, as I did

not know how to reverse my attitude, and unable to go forwards, as that was only to seek light, not that out of which light sprang.

'I'm stuck,' I said.

'What are you stuck in?' asked Sabazius.

Myself.

'In what?' He was staring at me hard.

'I -

'What?' he said again.

I began to laugh (at least I think it was a laugh), a rather tight, choking laugh which forced me to expel air through my nose. Sabazius pulled me to my feet, told me to shut my eyes, and proceeded to massage my face with his thumbs. He kept pushing the flesh of my face upwards away from my mouth, gathering it below the eyes, then from above the eyes pushed it up yet again to the hair line.

'Do not think,' he exhorted.

Rippling colours in my head. A fan of light moving up and out in time with his thumbs. And then a curious circle, indistinct, but nonetheless visible, and at its centre a violet, jagged spot.

'Do not think,' he said a second time, 'just watch. Watch and feel'.

The violet spot evaporated suddenly, as if going back into itself, then it was nearer, and larger. Again it evaporated, and again it was nearer and larger.

A thought interrupted this process.

The spot, when it evaporated the third time, re-appeared far away, and then, just as suddenly, it was gone, and the screen of my mind was just a mixture of dark tints.

Sabazius withdrew his hands immediately. 'Shall we have some coffee?' he asked.

Without waiting for me to reply, he went through to the kitchen, leaving me standing there. I did not move, but instead closed my eyes. There was the same dark-tinted scene, and a very strong feeling of having been deserted by something, and yet at the same time a vague, intuitional feeling that I had not been deserted, for what I had seen was not a 'thing', but somehow beyond thingness. So I was neither deserted, nor not-deserted, for what had appeared had not appeared. That was when my thinking intervened, asked me what I meant, that all my conclusions, although seemingly leading somewhere, were in actual fact leading no-where.

Empty.

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Sabazius returned with the coffee and placed it on the small table near the window. He remained silent for some minutes, then he said, 'Are you disappointed that you do not understand everything?'

My mouth opened, but something stopped me from speaking.

'Don't you know what you would like to know?' He was smiling at me now, looking at me over his cup. 'Or would you prefer to know something that you know you do not know?'

Formulation was beyond me.

When I attempted to *put together* what it was I wanted to know, I was faced with so many facts that did not seem to relate, that the question itself

would not form, and logic told me clearly that if I could not formulate the question, then the answer I was seeking was a myth - for how could I possibly seek an answer to a question I could not ask?

The end of reasoning indeed.

We spent most of that afternoon in silence. Sabazius lay on the sofa for a couple of hours with his eyes shut, and I potted about the house like a mindless vegetable, quite content to simply be there, standing or sitting, eating or cooking. However, by five o'clock, that other part of Peter Derwent activated, and Sabazius immediately - as if by a signal - started talking again. He recalled to my memory a number of things that had happened over our short period together, and intimated that he was continually surprised that I had got this far at all. As I sat listening to him, it occurred to me that the experiences I had had, although real enough in my mind-memory, were somehow without significance, as they neither assisted, or blocked what was happening to me now. They were 'things' in my mind, mere objects bundled in with the other million memory objects I carried with me at all times. And yet, somehow, I was also the summation of these experiences. I was, as I sat there, although I could not bring the feeling to a knowing conclusion, totally my history, an aggregated completeness of experience. But try as I might, I could not realise this completeness, for at all times this completeness kept breaking down into its component part through the interruption of memory: memory was therefore the stumbling block and the key simultaneously.

'What are you thinking about now?' asked Sabazius.

'Memory,' I replied. 'I've come to the conclusion that my memory is what my history *is to me*, instead of *me being that history*. I keep thinking of myself 'as' a history, instead of becoming that history - so memory is what's stopping me.

'How can you become what you already are?'

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I stared at him, then I said, 'But you've been saying all along that I must 'become' my history.'

'There are two things here,' replied Sabazius. 'There is what you 'think' you are, and there is what you are. As you cannot bring memory to heel, and realise entirely what you are as a single event because memory fragments the total picture, you get the after feeling that you have to *become* what you are; but in reality you are what you are at all times.'

Then how do I stop missing the point?'

'By cutting the bond with time.'

'How can I cut the bond with time?'

'By becoming what you are.'

'But you've just said that I can't become what I am because of time!'

'Only because you believe in time.'

Then how on earth can I stop believing in time?'

'Just work it in.' said Sabazius.

'The world . . . is made up of objects which are all intrinsically related,' I said aloud. 'I myself am an object in and of this world, for even though I think of myself as a subject, I am perceived as an object by others...'

'So you are both subject and object,' said Sabazius, smiling a little.

'I suppose so,' I said.

'What does that mean to you?' 'I'm not really sure.' I replied.

'Just work it in.' repeated Sabazius.

'Okay,' I said, 'so I'm both subject and object, and as subject and object I ...'

'Yes?'

'I still can't see where time comes into the picture?'

Sabazius remained silent for some seconds, then he said, 'By what means do you perceive the world as object?'

'Through my senses.'

'So perception allows you knowledge of the world?'

'Yes.'

'So?'

'So perception ...' I hesitated, then suddenly it came in a rush of in-sight.

'Time is the time I take to perceive,' I said excitedly. 'Perception is duration of time. Without perception and its duration I would not be aware of the world as object, and therefore not aware of time.'

'So perception is time or duration,' said Sabazius, 'and all objects are only visible and knowable because of duration of perception.' I nodded.

'What does that mean?' he asked.'

It means that subject and object are bound by time, and if time were short-circuited, they would be the same.'

'And how does that relate to memory?'

I took a deep breath and said, 'Memory is duration of perception remembered

as object ... so if subject escapes from time, then subject as remembered object ceases to exist.'

'Which means?'

'That subject is itself.' 'And when subject is itself,' added Sabazius, 'then it ceases to be subject or object. That is what to become both means.'

I had broken through, but only intellectually. I would remember the points of this conversation, but only as a verbal abstraction in time. So I was still an object perceived, and as a subject, a receiver of objects.

'Where are you now?' he asked.

'Stuck.' I said again. 'Knowing all this doesn't seem to change anything.'

'Quite.' said Sabazius. 'To know something is to be bound in time through perception, for to 'know something' is to be subject to something'.

'Then how do I escape?'

'By realising that there is no-thing to escape from,' he said obliquely. 'This is what I meant when I said that the path must eventually be eradicated, for to believe in a path is to believe that you are travelling from here to there, and mean to arrive at some-THING. If you want to be what you are, then stop trying to *be* what you *are*.' 'But -, this is all so different from what you said before'.

'What I said before was only the first layer of paint on the canvas,' replied Sabazius. 'Everything that has happened to you has constituted an experience in-time, and has now become a re-membered object in-time. You as an 'I' are a re-membered object in-time, and as such, are subject to your own objectivity. Cease to be an object, and you will cease to be a subject, cease to be a subject, and you will similarly cease to be an object'.

It dawned on me suddenly what he had meant when referring to my displaced 'I'. Due to my experiences, my attitude - the old Peter Derwent - had suffered some dramatic blows to its singular importance or individuality, so making it unstable. But unstable or not, it was still there, bobbing about, naming itself as 'I', and demanding recognition. The moment I allowed it to 'be there', that is, allowed it the recognition it wanted, it gained strength, for 'recognition' was the energy on which 'I' fed: that which strengthened my belief in myself as 'subject', so reducing me to 'object'.

I told Sabazius of my conclusion.

'What does that suggest to you?' he asked.

'That I stop thinking of myself as 'I'; I replied.

'Is that not one of the very first things I told you?'

'Yes,' I admitted, 'but I obviously didn't understand what you meant'.

'You mean you 'would' not understand'.

'Why do you say that?'

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'Why do you say that?'

Sabazius laughed. 'Why should any man want to recognise something which will do away with him as the man he thinks he is? This is the *survival instinct* he continually talks about. By 'survival' he means that through which he recognises himself as 'I'. Without an 'I' a man cannot have 'objective' existence. Yet at the same time he seeks to escape from his pain and suffering as a human being, and as his pain and suffering is only due to his relentless struggle to survive as an 'I' object, then he is caught in a circle of never-ending act-tivity: the act of an 'I' continually seeking its true self, but

never finding any trace of it, for 'it' is the ever 'unobtainable object', and 'I' the 'never finding subject'.

'Okay', I said nervously, 'I accept that, but as I've already said, merely knowing is not enough. HOW do I go about it?'

'You're always answering your own questions', replied Sabazius. 'When

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you say 'How do I go about it,' you are in reality saying 'How do I walk around myself'. So to ask that question is to answer it, for self is only ever found when a man's 'I' stops activating as an individual'.

'But -'

'Is there no end to your but's', asked Sabazius softly. 'Every 'But' is a step backwards into 'I', every 'why' an attempt to escape from what you 'are'. Every word you utter is an object, and every word uttered makes you its subject. This is why I have said that all logic is limited, and eventually false, for every string of words you put together makes you subject to your own objectivity'.

'Then I am reduced to silence!' I exclaimed.

'Reversed to silence,' qualified Sabazius.

Never had Sabazius made such an attack on me. I was stunned to think that we may never say another word to each other, that our dialogues had ceased, leaving me with my ultimate question answered intellectually, but still there, because 'I' still wanted to ask something else.

In spite of myself, I said, 'Where do we go from here?'

'No-where,' replied Sabazius.

Stuck.

My expression must have been comical, for Sabazius then said, 'Your face is like a piece of set concrete, has your mind seized up at last?'

'Almost,' I said hopelessly.

'Good,' he replied lightly, 'now maybe we'll get down to some work'. I looked at him in expectation.

'What did you see when I thumbed your face?'

'A spot of jagged, violet light,' I said.

'What happened to it?'

'It kept jumping closer, and getting larger, then it suddenly vanished. 'Why did it go away?'

'I started thinking about it'.

'Did you like the violet light?'

'Yes'.

'When?'

'What do you mean - when?'

'As it happened'.

'I remember liking it'.

'Do you mean that your liking,' said Sabazius slowly, 'for the violet light is only now available because you are remembering, and subsequently evaluating?'

The jig-saw fell into place.

I now remembered that I had felt suspended as the light approached, so my 'liking' for it was indeed as Sabazius suggested merely my liking for it now as a re-membered object, or re-created object/experience. As the experience took place, I had neither liked or disliked, for what I had seen, although re-membered as an 'object', and evaluated as 'likable', had momentarily suspended my knowledge of myself as 'I', so dissolving for a fleeting second my *relationship* to the violet light as 'subject' viewing 'object'.

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'You look as though you understand something,' said Sabazius. I explained.

'Do you see the difference between this and the realisation of 'being?'

'I think so'

'What is that difference?'

'Through drawing all my bodily resources together at any given moment,' I said slowly, 'I can come to a 'sense' of myself; but to enter into myself as a sense object is only the launching platform, for when I truly become myself, my objectivity vanishes, and I 'am'.

Sabazius sat looking at me fixedly, then he said, 'Now maybe you'll be able to crawl out of your logic box, eh?'