

## ***Where Thoughts Come From (part 2)***

What can you make from the pieces of yourself?

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*“’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe.”*

— Lewis Carroll

In [part one of the series](#) I presented the contrast between what we see and what we think we see as an analog to how we think. I made the point that our mind creates the illusion of well-formed vision and how it is that we do not question this. There are components to this mechanism:

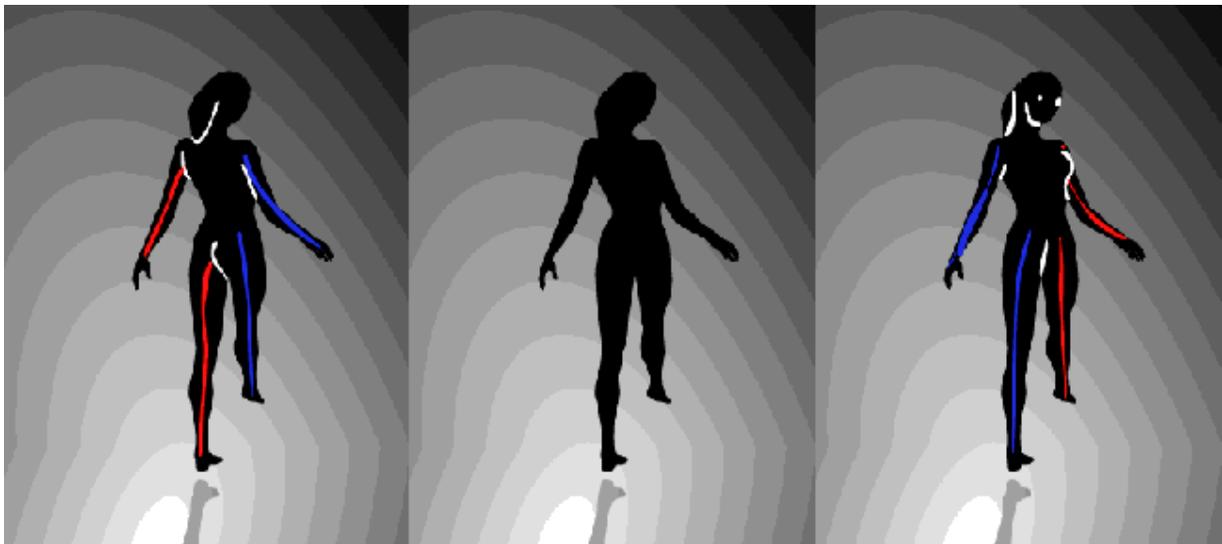
- Perception is a mental illusion.

- We guess at the appearance of what we don't perceive.
- Memory and guess-work fills in what's uncertain.
- Always believing what we see, we justifying it regardless.
- We trust what works and work with what we trust.

This is the normal, ongoing process of vision, of which we are unaware. Many things in our pre-conscious, imaginary field of vision are handled in this fashion and most of them never reach our consciousness.

We see before we know what we see and we accept what we see without judgement. If something that we see changes, then we change what we think without judgment. If a cat becomes a shadow or a shadow becomes a cat, we don't question it. We not only believe what we see, but what we believe can change instantly without disturbing us.

A small number of ideas and images become important enough to enter our consciousness. These are the ideas and images we need to think about. Once we start thinking, we become more attached to our beliefs. We remain largely unaware of the many images that do not pass this threshold.



## Time

Unlike vision for which we can close our eyes, there always seem to be thoughts in our mind. Our mind is aware of the passage of time whether or not we're seeing things. We can compare the length of time during which we have sight with the length of time we don't. This is not the case with thoughts.

Thoughts clock our sense of time. In order to sense time passing we need a flow of thoughts. They don't have to be cogent, focused, or precise. They can be nonsense, repetitive, or hallucinatory. But when our thoughts stop, so does our sense of time. Training yourself to accurately judge the passage of time requires carefully controlling your flow of thoughts.

As sleep lacks thoughts, sleep lacks time and we cannot sense sleep-time passing. A hypnotic trance lacks the normal duration of thoughts and a hypnotic trance is perceived as lacking the normal duration of time. The perception of shortened time during hypnosis is called time dilation.

We have a limited ability to be aware of thoughts, and we automatically throttle back our sensitivity when our minds are active. We can't have too many thoughts or we become confused. When we don't have conscious thoughts, unconscious thoughts enter our awareness. Our flow in time requires them.



## Mind

Our minds are severely limited in the rate at which we can process information. We've all had the experience of having our train of thought disrupted by outside issues. When this happens we cannot perceive, process, or respond effectively. We need to focus our attention on what we see and eliminate outside distractions. When that fails, we struggle to organize our thinking.

We do this internally as well, even if we're not seeing anything. We shut out the cacophony of elemental ideas and associations and only recognize an idea when it reaches a threshold of form. Sometimes ideas come fully formed as phrases, images, or recognizable feelings. We're clearly aware of much in our environment subliminally, though we are not aware at a conscious level. Magic tricks work by manipulating what we're subconsciously but not consciously aware of.

Rarely do we recognize what does not have an expression. Without a clear impression all we have are suggestions and possibilities. In such a state we are uncommitted to our perceptions and suggestible in our thoughts. If you're listening carefully, then you'll be aware that you hold your judgments until you understand what's being said, and before that point you might be aware of several ideas forming.



## Oughts

In Part 1, I introduced the notion of oughts, bits of mind, memory, and ideation that comprise a thought similar to the way that letters comprise words. They are the consequential elements that make up an idea. Oughts are not abstract symbols, they are bits of meaning. We don't recognize the oughts, or thought elements, until they assemble to a critical point.

An aspect of anxiety is being unable to reach closure with thoughts that you feel are important. Being undecided is the same as having multiple lines of thought vying for primacy. Anxiety is reduced when you feel that you understand your choices and their outcomes. This is different from being fearful, which is a state where you feel certain of something threatening.

You may recall having half an idea, having the urge to speak a sentence that you can't finish. This is rare, as even people who speak gibberish finish their sentences. This would be a type of aphasia which is localized to language, but I want to think more broadly in terms of something below language.

Sometimes, we lose track of our thoughts, getting ahead of ourselves and having a second thought distract us before a first thought can be completed. This gives the strange sensation that we had something to express and have organized our emotions in order to express it, but the idea is gone and the emotions have nothing to attach to. We'll say, "I forgot what I was going to say!"



## Dreams

One of the reasons dream images feel disconnected is that the thoughts in the dream do not form complete thoughts. We can learn to perceive these thoughts in a similar manner to the way we recognize feelings evoked by images before we think about them.

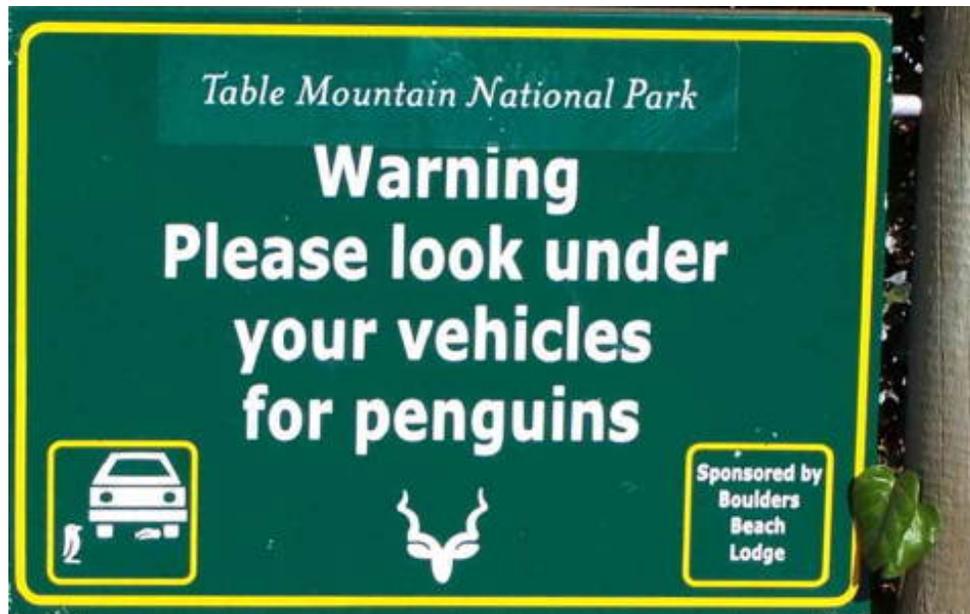
Elements in dreams map onto full or partial thoughts—that is thoughts. We don't have these visual thoughts during waking consciousness because in waking consciousness we suppress partial thoughts. In this way, the dream presents us with our thought-assembly process.

In dreams we “see” thought fragments and experience their incomplete assembly. The result leaves us confused if we're aware of it happening. This inclines us to forget our dreams.

We have trouble rising to self-awareness in our dreams because dreams don't make sense. Without sense our self-awareness is hog-tied. How do you become self-aware when part of you is absent? If you can become aware of your truncated self, the result is often unpleasant.

Our conscious mind expects full thoughts, but we can learn to accept and even participate in the incomplete thought process. We can do this by experiencing dreams as a witness rather than a participant. Participation is how we approach dreams from our normal, conscious state, a state whose comfort requires thought completion. Being a witness relieves our anxiety, and reducing your anxiety is crucial for remaining lucid in a dream.

By gaining awareness of thoughts as they pass through our minds, and by establishing a sense of self that can survive the amputation of its parts—a process that's constantly happening in dreams—we gain the ability to be relaxed dream participants.



## What Is Lost

If you compare your self-created identity with a finished film, you'll recognize that there are other ways that you can be put together. The "finished film" version of yourself is something you've created for general viewing. The viewing audience is not just other people but also includes you. You adopt the story that you tell and you identify yourself with it. Your identity is a thought about yourself that you believe in.

You would like to have more options. You'd like to be more of a film maker than a film viewer. To do this, you need to go back to the original material. You need to consider the pieces left on the cutting-room floor. These are the bits that were removed from the final version.

In the large sense, these could be whole narratives that don't fit comfortably into your story. But on a smaller scale they could be elements of timing or meaning that you've trimmed from your self-awareness. Different tones and timbres, or different rhythms of attention or expression. These little bits are oughts of your identity. They may be small but they can make big changes.

If you can focus your mind on things smaller than thoughts, then you will start to recognize similar unexpressed parts in the identities of other people. You will start to notice what isn't there, or what could be understood in different ways. This is most easily seen in another person when they're going through a decision-making process. We often feel that we can sense another person forming ideas.

While these parts of ideas are not verbalized, they may be expressed unconsciously. You can see them in the face of a surprised person as they filter through various impressions, searching for understanding. You may have to imagine these parts, to intuit them based on fragmentary evidence. You might be wrong, but that doesn't mean that you didn't see something.



## Numbers

I'd like to put some numbers on this. I'd like to build a network-picture of oughts linked together in configurations. I think these oughts are persistent things. They are like some physical mode or excited state. They might even exist in a place in your brain though that's not necessary. Like thoughts themselves, oughts might be complex assemblies of many aspects of perception, combinations of many sensations and impressions stored in various locations in your brain.

I think we can build some simple mathematics using the logistic equation. That's the equation that describes processes of growth and decay, as happens with populations. I propose that our oughts behave like the population of a species. When they elicit reward they grow in power and number. When they have a negative effect their strength and population is reduced. The ones that are rewarded are linked together and emerge as thoughts. The ones that are inhibited remain unexpressed or fade away.

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In the next installment on this topic I'll add numbers to give oughts some weight.

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