Real Design: Designing Ourselves, the World, and Reality

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AKA:

'LIFE'S SUCKS AND THEN YOU DIE BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THAT WAY'

Who the hell am I?

- Oli Anderson
- From Bradford in the UK (born in London)
- I'm a writer ('Personal Revolutions: A Short Course in Realness' and some other stuff)
- Also work as a coach and on a number of mental health projects (most interesting one is with people that hear voices)
- Involved in service design projects and coaching

What is this presentation?

- This is a simple presentation about a seemingly complex topic:

Human nature in reality.

- It will examine how our thinking about these things informs how we design our world.

- We will look at how our assumptions about ourselves (often limited by our **fears, doubts**, or **denials** about ourselves, the world, and reality) affect the systems and services that we build.

- Will suggest that we know 'enough' to start designing systems that are good for humans.

- Key point: Our thoughts about our thoughts affect the world that we build.

- Longer version: Concepts are not real; they are just fragments that occasionally signpost us towards reality but never get there completely (because reality is 'whole'). When we identify with concepts we take ourselves out of reality/wholeness.

- Bonus point: Concepts limit our POV (put things in boxes); we have become addicted to them because they help us hide our pain from ourselves. We need to face this pain to be 'happy'.
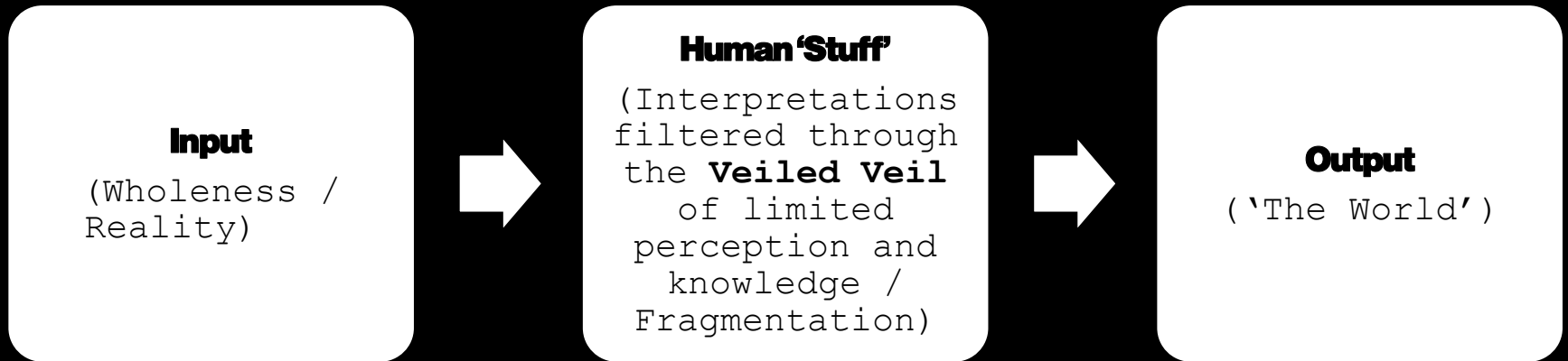
Problem / Solution

- **Problem**: Many of the systems we build end up crushing human nature. We need systems that engender our full potential.

- **Solution #1**: We need to tweak our assumptions about ourselves, the world, and reality (which gives a better understanding of truth – helping us step beyond the illusory subjectivity of duality which is the main 'problem').

- **Solution #2**: We can do this by acknowledging the fragmentary way of our thoughts and testing our assumptions about ourselves in the areas of biopsychosocial experience.

- If we do this, the concepts we carry in this area will point more closely to reality and we will allow **Collective Creative Intelligence** to emerge from the real systems we build.

Erm…

- Wasn't this supposed to be a simple presentation?

- My head hurts.

Short Version:

Input
(Wholeness / Reality)

➡️

Human 'Stuff'
(Interpretations filtered through the **Veiled Veil** of limited perception and knowledge / Fragmentation)

➡️

Output
('The World')

Life is more 'simple' than we've been led to believe

- The commodification of information and **conceptual** knowledge has romanticised ideas and concepts; we have become more and more in love with fragmentation which is the source of most of our problems.

- As we mentioned, concepts are not real (though some are more real than others because they 'point' more closely to reality).

- The attachment to concepts has caused us to build an unnecessarily 'unreal' world that has made us more miserable than **necessary**.

- Really, human nature hasn't changed for thousands of years – the only thing that has is our environment (because of how we changed it or how we used it to hide from ourselves because of trauma, shame, guilt).

- Most people confuse 'The World' for 'Reality' but they're different (one is symbolic, the other is necessary).

- If we want to be 'happy' (as far as that's possible), we have to disentangle all of the confusion (or at least stop adding to it). We don't have to add anything – we have to remove things (concepts blah blah).

An Incredibly Abridged Version Of Universal Human History

- The universe explodes into being (nobody really knows **why** or **how** but it doesn't really matter anyway – we pretty much know **what** we got which is enough to work with

- Everything is shattered into **physical** fragments

- Life somehow evolves over millions of years by crawling out of the 'primordial soup' blah blah blah – we now have **biology**

- Fragmented life forms begin to fight for limited resources against other fragmented life forms

- Language somehow evolves as we realise our own separateness from others

- We use this language to analyse everything

- Eventually, we think that language is 'real' and begin to think that we are our interpretations

- We develop something called an 'Identity' (a set of concepts and ideas we attach to because they help us define ourselves in an ultimately chaotic universe)

- We can call this identity the 'ego' (a short way of saying anything we identify with that isn't real in the sense of being whole)

REALITY IS THE OPPOSITE OF EGO

An Incredibly Abridged Biography Of The Average Human Being

- In womb (wholeness)

- Brought screaming into the world and slapped. Fragmentation. Starts crying.

- Has all needs shoved in its face whenever it cries. Feels whole again.

- Becomes fully active and basically enjoys life, doing whatever it wants and feeling good about things (unless traumatised which is short cut to later stages).

- Starts to become self-aware and begins to question - uses and identifies with language.

- Shamed by the world (or traumatised if unlucky)

- Starts to hide from 'real' self – builds a fake image of oneself to protect itself from the world by hiding behind a 'mask'

- Eventually forgets that it is wearing a mask as it reaches 'adulthood'; thinks it is the mask.

- Constantly interacts with self, world, and reality in an unreal way and wonders why isn't as satisfied as could be – eventually this frustration turns to misery.

- If lucky: something removes the mask and the human being becomes 'real again.

- If unlucky: the human being keeps fighting to keep the mask in place and dies embittered and restless.

- Dies.

If the Mask Designs the System or Service, the System or Service Masks What's Real in Us.

Short version...

- Most people live in two worlds: the one that they experience and the one that they think about to hide from the pain of reconnecting to themselves via this experience.

- There is a difference between what we really are and what we think we are (wholeness / fragmentation).

- We can refer to this as 'Realness' vs 'Ego' for simplicity

None of this stuff is 'new'...

- It doesn't need to be.

- For human beings to be satisfied or fulfilled we just have to be human ("The unexamined life is not worth living" - Socrates).

- This means we don't have to be 'more than' or 'less than' human .

- The systems that we build should reflect this if we want to reach our real potential.

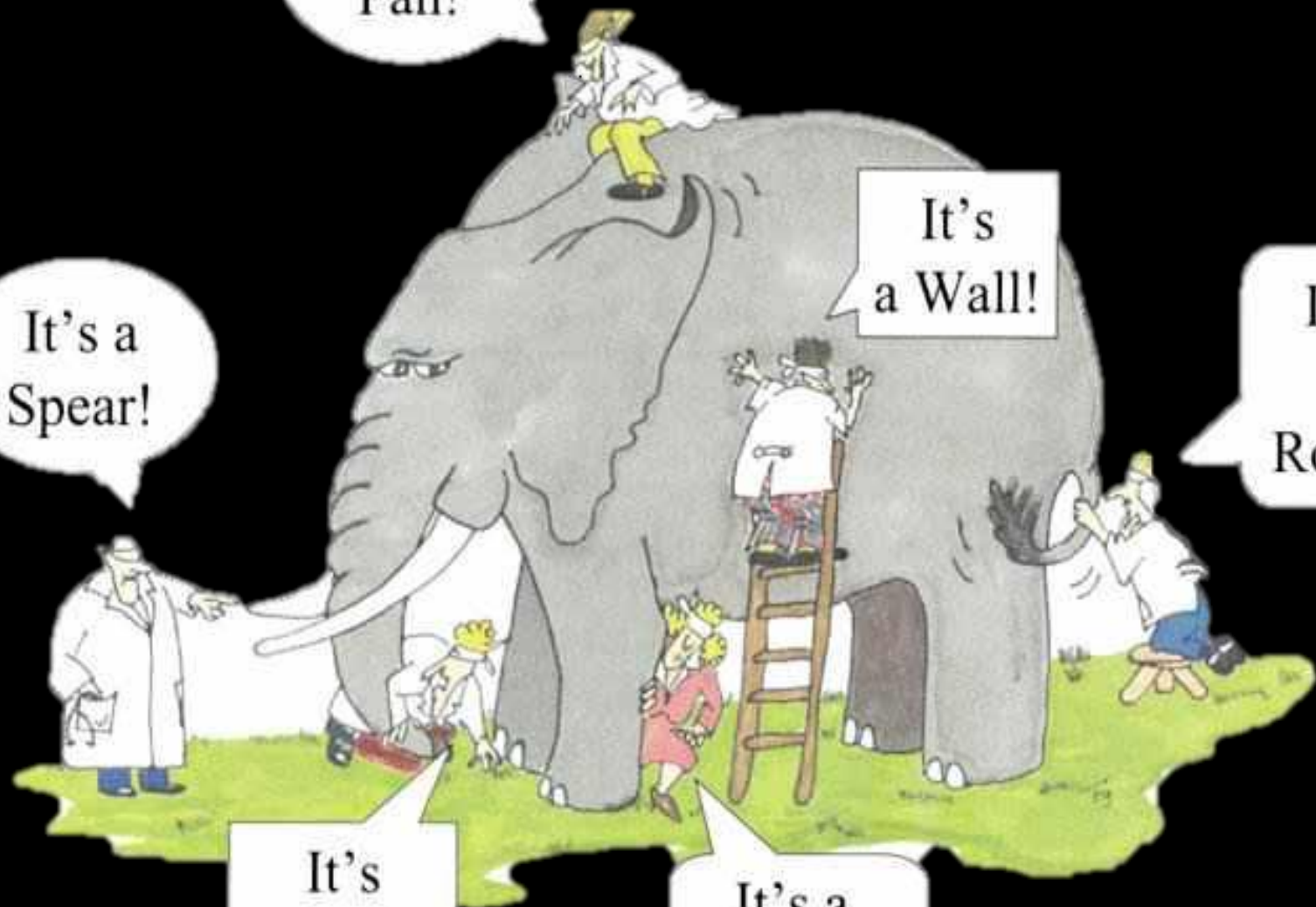Some pretty old paintings and stuff that show people have known this for ages…

The Blind Men and the Elephants

- A metaphor for the **Veiled Veil** of limited perception (because of our fragmented bodies) and limited conceptual knowledge (because we can't 'know' everything and no concept is real).

- This analogy / parable has been around for thousands of years; we still do this and always will because of the nature of our bodies and minds.

- In one version of the parable, they all argue and agree to disagree.

- In another, they all argue and get in a fight.

- Either way; they're all wrong at the level of their conceptual interpretations: everything is already in agreement in reality because it is beyond **value judgements** or **duality**.

- We need to step beyond our fragmented views (and the systems that we build because of them).

- We need to build from what's behind the mask (and remind ourselves that we're wearing it when we have to).
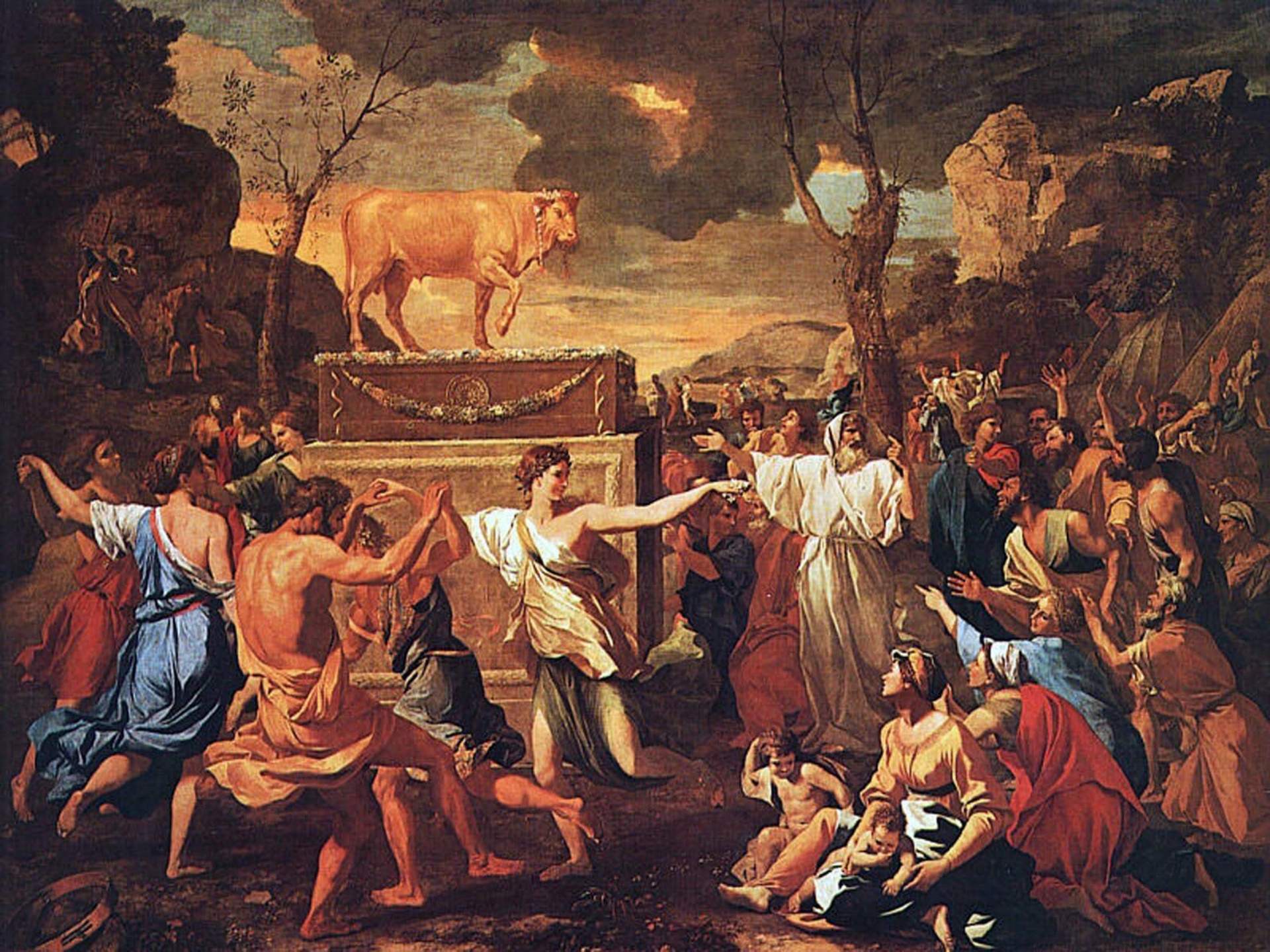
Golden Calf

- A metaphor for our need to worship something.

- It can be anything.

- The point is that we need to have a sense of control over an ultimately chaotic universe.

- We do this by imbuing fragments with the weight of the whole (or convincing ourselves this is possible).

- This is only a short-term solution though as it hides us from our real selves which is chaos as linked to the whole.

- We create these idols so we can keep our EGOs where they are and avoid facing our own SHADOW.

[Insert picture of whatever you're not over or can't let go of, or whatever goals you chase to hide from yourself, not be yourself]

- **A metaphor for the way that we fall in love with ideas, not real human beings, because we are identified at the level of concepts.**

- **Co-dependent dysfunctional relationships are what happens when one idea falls for another to keep the mask in place.**

- **Doesn't have to be about personal relationships: applies to any time we fall for a concept over reality which will eventually lead to the gap between expectation and result closing in on us.**

"Whenever two people meet, there are really six people present. There is each man as he sees himself, each man as the other person sees him, and each man as he really is."

-William James

Designing a real world is about the way we communicate with ourselves...

- To truly make an impact on the World we have to be able to listen to ourselves.

- If we can do this, we realise that we can communicate better with others and reality.

- We do this by exploring the gap between our expectations and result (or between the **World of Symbols** and the **World of Necessity** – this allows us to enter the **World of Relationships**).

- This allows us to build better systems.

'Changing the world' ™ is a communication problem.

- Better design is about knowing ourselves and then others through INSIGHT (the only thing that can change anything)

Two-way Dialogue Is Overrated

- Two-way dialogue is two ideas trying to communicate with each other.

- But ideas are empty.

- We need three or even four-way dialogue: ideas of me, ideas of you, our real selves, and reality.

- Our goal should be to build systems that unblock communication with ourselves then others.

[Insert picture of anything that keeps you distracted from your mission or real self and leads to being lost in the ego (the only true death)]

- The modern world is one huge distraction

- Most of us got off the boat (realness) and now we're dying to illusion

- Sorry to be melodramatic

Graffiti from Pompeii

Nearly 2000 years ago, we really weren't that different.

- "I screwed the barmaid."
  - Door

"Antiochus hung out here with his girlfriend Cithera."
 - Gladiator Barracks

"Cruel Lalagus, why do you not love me?"

"A small problem gets larger if you ignore it."

Inhuman vs Human Design

Designing a 'human-shaped' world means that we have to have realistic assumptions about what human beings are.

We have to design from a place of identifying with ourselves at the level of **experience** and **concepts** that point closely to reality, not just one or the other (i.e. only experience or only ideas).

Anything else just causes more confusion and entanglement.

- **Service Design** can help us to do this!

What is a human being anyway?
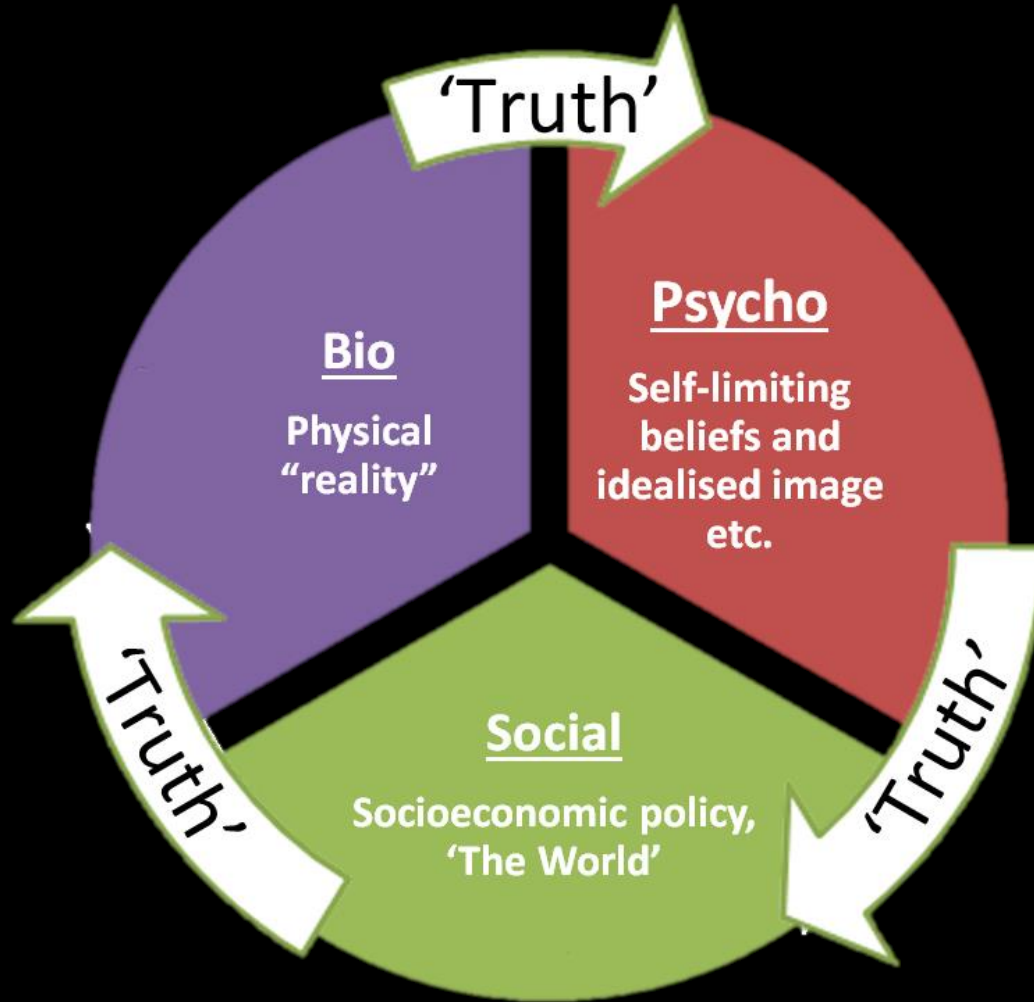
Most Attempts To Define Us Fall Into…

- Bio: Biological, evolutionary, etc. (Nature)

- Psycho: Psychological stuff – our beliefs, etc.

- Social: Social influences (Nurture)

- **Bio**: The cards you've been dealt.

- **Psycho**: How you allow yourself to play these cards.

- **Social**: How society prevents you from playing them.

'Holistic' Revolution

- To build real systems then we need to take all of these segments of human experience into account

But:

- We also need to take the emergent properties of what happens when they all come together

We Live In Three Worlds (If We're Lucky)

- **World of Necessity**: That of physics, the body, and anything inevitable (flux, death, etc.)
    -Bio

- **World of Symbols:** The world of symbols, concepts, and ideals.
    -Psycho / -Social

Both of these are fuelled by the **illusion of independence (fragments).**

- **World of Relationships**: The world that we can enter occasionally if we live according to our values or the Collective Creative Intelligence that emerges from the sum of the parts.
    -Emergence/'Truth'

This world is fuelled by the **reality of interdependence (wholes).**

Human Beings Need Three Main Things To Be 'Real'

- A purpose aligned around REAL values and intentions

- A connection to others

- To constantly find their conceptual or experiential 'edge' (this helps them test the limits of the ego and break the object-subject boundary)

Emergence

- Emergence is what happens when we allow the interactions between fragmented parts to lead to 'more than the sum of the parts'

- For human beings, this involves unblocking communication in the system and allowing **Creative Collective Intelligence** to emerge through insight

- We need a bottom-up system to really do this

Real humans = Force of nature

- 'Only human' isn't an excuse

- 'More than' human = Neurotic / heroic wannabe (I can do everything / I can save the world)

- 'Less than' human = Passive / Victim (I can't do anything / I need saving from the world)

- 'Real Human' = A Leader that takes responsibility (I can't always touch the stars but I will do my best to reach out for them)

'Less Than' Human	'More Than' Human	Real Human Being
• Too Passive • Plays the victim • Blames others to justify • Externalises everything • Avoids personal responsibility (often reflected in political views) • Has 'authority' issues with mummy and daddy (often reflected in relationships) • Uses conceptual knowledge as a tool for avoidance of one's own stuff.	• Too active • Plays the 'superhero' • Blames self to justify • Internalises everything • Avoids irresponsibility (often reflected in political views) • Has issues internalising erroneous assumptions from mummy and daddy that remain untested. • Uses conceptual knowledge to 'know' more than other people.	• Adaptable • A leader • Accepts and moves on • Learns and grows • Takes responsibility when its possible to do so • Has tested assumptions from childhood and worked through own 'stuff' (knows parents are human too). • Uses conceptual knowledge to experience more deeply and keep growing.

Problem

- Often, when we try to build systems for ourselves it's inspired by the assumptions of the 'ego'

- Either in the form of our own 'stuff' or somebody else's unreal agenda

- This leads to us being stuck in the ego (and being miserable) instead of breaking free of it and living real

Solution

- We have to align our thoughts as closely as we can with reality as possible.

- We will never be 'fully' aligned because we are in fragmented bodies but we can still peak behind the curtain every once in a while.

- This is a bit simplistic though as this will start to expose new problems (mainly around current power structures and socioeconomic slavery, etc.).

- This is why we have to ultimately start at the level of the individual: we only really have influence over ourselves.

What does all this mean?

- Short version: The World we have designed around us is unreal and becoming increasingly unreal because of unnecessary complexity.

- This is shown in record levels of depression and other mental health conditions amongst other things.

A new definition of design?

Design:

Manipulating the **symbolism** and **structure** of some **necessary object(s)** to provoke a response from other **subjects** who interpret that symbolism through their own 'stuff' to ideally enter the **World of Relationships.**

Service Design:

Manipulating the structure of services to ensure that all of the parts play a role in the experience of the whole.

What can we do?

- We can still make a real, human-shaped world if we act now.

- We have to figure out how we can change the system in increments so that we can have the 'bottom-up' revolution that so many people pay lip service to.

Peak Experiences

- A term coined by Abraham Maslow

- Allow us to break the object-subject boundary and step beyond duality even if just for a moment.

- This is our 'real' identity

Value Judgments

- Reality is beyond value judgments like object-subject, good-bad, in-out, etc.

- Thinking in systems helps us realise that it's just about **is**, not **ought.**

- Stepping beyond duality is the way to evolve and get over your 'stuff'

Merging the emergence

- We have to merge the **World of Necessity** with the **World of Symbols** to enter the **World of Relationships** (linked to wholeness)

- We do this by ensuring that the concepts we carry point as closely to reality as possible

- We do this by using our psychological intelligence to master our obsolete biological wiring and erroneous social conditioning/programming

How can we do this?

1) Dialogue Circles

- Individual and community level change

- We can start dialogue circles where people learn to communicate with themselves and then each other in a human way.

- Ideally, this dialogue circles should arise in cities and towns all over the world.

2) Service Design as 'Real' Design

- Organisational and societal change

- The World that we have built is a combination of the socioeconomic systems that we have created and the organisations that sit within them.

- Service design allows us to change the system in increments, one service at a time, until it becomes more 'real'.

Read 'Personal Revolutions: A Short Course in Realness'

PERSONAL
REVOLUTIONS

A SHORT COURSE IN REALNESS

OLI ANDERSON

Use the 'Truth Bomb Brand Design and UX Canvas' to make sure you're designing something REAL.

The End