

# Perspective

A newsletter for widening your point of view

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Richard Bach, in his book *Illusions*, states a handy aphorism: **Perspective – use it or lose it.** This periodical – distributed by Rob Greenaway & Associates – shares amongst recreation and tourism management professionals, and others, several tools and concepts which will help exercise your perspective.

This edition spans the mundane, the quantum and the practical. But first, the funnies.

## Meta-ethical humour

A relativist, an absolutist and a consequentialist go into a postmodern bar.

The relativist sidles up to the bartender and asks, with an ingratiating smile, "So, what do they drink around here?"

The absolutist thumps the table and demands: "A martini with a twist of Meyer lemon, and swirl it – don't bruise the gin!"

The consequentialist stands back, arms akimbo, surveys the scene and asks, "So, who's driving?" ❖

## Doodling good

I caught myself doodling during a meeting the other day, but confidently carried on, knowing that surely everyone present had read a relevant 2010 article in *Applied Cognitive Psychology*. Something that one of my primary school teachers clearly never did.

At the beginning of my 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year of school I doodled around the staples in the middle pages of my maths exercise book (7mm quad). For many weeks I knew I was going to be in deep trouble. Sure enough, later in the year when I handed in my sums – carefully enumerated around the big blue staple scribble – I got the strap. In contrast, my desk-mate Simon threw up on his maths book with no reproach.

Which rather put me off pink dairy-food.

Anyway. Jackie Andrade of the School of Psychology at the University of Plymouth in the UK tested the power of doodling by blind-testing the abilities of scribblers' and non-scribblers' to recall key parts of a long and monotonous telephone message.<sup>1</sup> The message contained the names of various people who could, or could not, attend a party. She had one group casually colour in various shapes while they listened, and gave no paperwork to the others. The doodlers recalled 29% more information during a surprise memory test and were better at monitoring data that was not related to the main thrust of the message.

Why? One explanation offered by Andrade is that doodling stops us from daydreaming, which kills concentration and our ability to absorb information. Doodling might be the lesser of the two evils. Daydreaming requires the brain to divert to a relatively active mental task – such as pondering the wonders of the upcoming weekend.

Doodling disables that diversion by occupying just enough mental capacity and, despite a desperate state of boredom, maintains an adequate level of focus.

Erich Fromm would be appalled, I suspect. Fromm was a humanist philosopher and psychologist born in Germany in 1900. Although my link between doodling and his book *The Art of Loving*<sup>2</sup> might be tenuous, I'm willing to pursue it.

Fromm's book is not *that* sort of book. It considers, the various states of mind that one should possess (according to Fromm) when relating to other people in a complete manner. In terms of mental focus, Fromm is quite clear that there is only one acceptable mental state when awake: one of ... "awareness, alertness, activity. Sleep is the only proper situation for inactivity; the state of awakeness is one in which laziness should have no place. The paradoxical situation today with a vast number of people is that they are half asleep when awake, and half awake when asleep, or when they want to sleep. To be fully awake is the condition for not being bored, or being boring .... To be active in thought, feeling, with one's eyes and ears, throughout the day, to avoid inner laziness ... is an indispensable condition ...."

Doodling would be anathema to Fromm. You're either switched on or off. There is no acceptable alternative state. Doodling is the sign of a lazy mind casually trying to stay tuned.

Certainly, my inability to establish that I could have removed the central pages of my maths

book, with no one the wiser, suggests that my mind was not fully on-task in the early 1970s, and doodling apparently didn't help. But, this I suspect: the mind is a sneaky beast, and whatever keeps yours ticking is perfectly acceptable. Doodling could have been a good option for my colleague in that recent meeting. He was quietly snoring. ❖

## Quantum entanglement

Sir Terry Pratchett – possibly the greatest humanist author alive (he's funnier than Richard Dawkins) – theorises in *Mort* that the only thing that travels faster than the speed of light is monarchy.<sup>3</sup> For when a king or queen dies, the next in line to the throne succeeds instantaneously, meaning there must be some elementary particles – Pratchett suggests kingons or queons – which confer the royal status at great speed across potentially vast distances.

<sup>1</sup> Andrade, Jackie. What does doodling do? *Applied Cognitive Psychology* Jan 2010. 24 (1): 100–106.

<sup>2</sup> Fromm, Erich. 1956. *The Art of Loving*. Harper & Row

<sup>3</sup> Pratchett, Terry. 1987. *Mort*. Corgi

Pratchett is having fun with the concept of quantum entanglement, about which I only know a little more than does Schrödinger's cat. You'll recall that Schrödinger wasn't very fond of various theories about quantum mechanics, along with Einstein, and came up with a feline thought-experiment to show how silly it all was. Quantum theory postulates that elementary particles can exist in more than one state, called quantum superposition. That is, if something like an electron has an option of travelling down two routes, it will travel down both, until its position is measured, at which point one option will decay and only one particle will remain. Experiments show that this actually occurs (unless the quantum engineers are just having us on).

Schrödinger expanded the idea to suggest that if the life of a cat depended on which of two routes an electron took, and the cat was hidden inside a sealed box, there would be both a dead and an alive cat inside (because the electron would have taken both routes). When someone peeked, the superposition would collapse and the cat's condition would be 'decided'.

I've always wondered why the cat couldn't just check on its own condition and render the whole experiment pointless. In reality, there are only two states in which a cat exists: hungry and not hungry – although our cat is able to exist in both states simultaneously, which is called feline superposition.

mCow ←

Charles Seifi in his book *Decoding the Universe* considers this quantum muddle with regard to quantum information.<sup>4</sup> This might explain how one superpositioned electron knows what its twin is doing. You would think that one particle which has gone down two paths simultaneously has to have some form of communication going on between its two optional states, because when it finally becomes a single entity its superpositioned twin has to disappear. This state of dependency between the 'two' particles is called quantum entanglement. Like Pratchett's royals, where a ruler and their heir must be somehow linked, regardless of where they are, so too is a superpositioned particle.

First, Seifi gives a nice explanation of why Schrödinger's cat will always be either dead or alive, and not both. He points out that a measurement requires an interaction – a photon or some other particle must strike whatever is being measured and carry away some form of information. With an elementary particle, like an electron, you can, if you try, prevent it from interacting with other particles, and it will happily sit in a superpositioned state without being measured (that is, being struck by another particle). A cat, however, is a lot bigger and there is no way of preventing it being hit by any number of particles all the time. It is constantly being 'measured' by the basic forces of nature. Superpositioned particles are being struck by other particles pretty much all the time (they are constantly measured) and so we don't end up with a universe stuffed full of tiny undecided twins.

And entanglement? How do the two states of a superpositioned particle communicate? Seifi reports that they don't. They can't. "There

is no good explanation as to why this is; it just is," he writes. Which seems odd until you recall that there is no particle which transfers majesty, but the condition is transferred nonetheless.

Of course, this does rather render Seifi's book pointless. Quantum information of the really interesting kind (that which travels faster than light) doesn't exist.

Seifi wonders, however, if multiple universes might be created each time a superpositioned particle is 'measured', allowing information to travel faster than a photon. While it is easy to believe that there is more than one universe (if you can have one, why not more?), it seems a stretch too far that we get a new parallel job each time someone threatens Kitty with a dual existence.

I was an expert in quantum mechanics as kid. I could be in two places at once when something went wrong (there could be no other explanation) and nowhere when something needed doing. ❖

## Starting and stopping an auto

I was brought up with the knowledge that one should always warm the motor in a car before driving away by letting it idle for a while. My father also taught me and my siblings to double-clutch in case we ever had to drive a vehicle with a crash gearbox. The only useful double-clutching I recall required the car to be stationary. A Mini. Tricky.

I was rather shocked to read in a car manual the other day that one should drive off immediately after starting, but avoid high speeds initially. This gets the motor to its operating temperature quickly and reduces wear. Of course, if you have a turbocharger, you have different problems. The first is, you have a turbocharger.

Stopping an auto is a different game. Let me explain.

Having only one screen on your computer is like trying to write an essay relying on a number of text books, with the proviso that you must keep all the books, and the paper you are writing, in one stack. When you read a text, your writing paper gets buried. I love my two big screens and often have a huge number of files, spreadsheets and web pages open simultaneously, as well as the text I am writing. When things are really complicated I occasionally leave everything running overnight so that I don't lose my place.

It really grips me therefore when I return to my computer to find that it has carried out an auto restart after downloading a software update, and all my files and web pages have been closed. How dare it!

But there is a way to stop this auto:

Go to: <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/328010>

Or Google: No auto-restart for scheduled automatic updates installations.

If your IT department gets upset, blame an undecided superpositioned image of yourself. ❖

## For Your Interest

I am not too fond of tendering for projects and am relieved when work keeps rolling in. The past 12 months have been busy with: wind farm projects (Mount Cass and Centre Hill in the Hurunui, and Puketoi and Castle Hill in the Wairarapa/Tararua area), hydro and/or irrigation proposals (Mokihinui, North Bank Tunnel (Waitaki), Rakaia, Nevis, Waitaha, Waiiau, Lake Kaniere, Hurunui/Waitohi), mining (Denniston Plateau), reserve planning (Kaiteriteri Recreation Reserve, Tasman District Council reserve general policies, Queen Elizabeth Park for Greater Wellington), a small contribution to the Christchurch CBD Plan with TRC Tourism, and a few other consenting issues, such as a road stopping in the Kaipara, a national cycleway in Tasman, and the Porter Ski Area redevelopment with TRC Tourism. We are just starting to look at the King Salmon plan change proposal in the Marlborough Sounds for the Marlborough District Council and have various other interesting tasks on the horizon. A new wee job close to my heart is helping with the quarterly publication of the Nelson Marina newsletter. Continuing to be a member of the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Recreation Council remains great fun and is very stimulating.

On the home-front, we had an appalling summer and the yacht got very little exercise. We had a beautiful autumn and early winter, with lovely clear days and no wind, and so the yacht continued to get very little exercise. We built a new office which is separate from the house and is very cosy. I did as much of the finishing work as possible, leaving little time for yachting. Importantly, the past six years of house renovation is virtually complete. We will never move house again.

<sup>4</sup> Seifi, Charles. 2007. *Decoding the Universe*. Penguin