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Authentic Grokking

Emergence of *Homo conjugens*

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Introduction

This exploration was inspired by a documentary on the poorly understood displacement of the Neanderthal people by the Cro-Magnon. What skills and attributes did the Cro-Magnon have, and the Neanderthal lack, that enabled this transition? How might we envisage such a transition at this time? Does the key lie elsewhere than through the fashionable understanding of "cultural creatives"? For 60,000 years the Cro-Magnons, lived side-by-side with the Neanderthals, our closest biological cousins who had flourished for a quarter million years - but then, about 30,000 years ago, they disappeared. From evidence presented by archaeologist Alexander Marshack, it seems that the Neanderthal's extinction may be linked to humanity's first Information Revolution [[more](#)]. The question is what happens next, when and how?

Authentic grokking

This term is used to summarize the articulation in what follows. It points to a new way of encountering the world, sensing it as a whole, and seeing it reflected in oneself. The jargon term "grok" is used to point to ways in which this goes beyond a purely conceptual understanding and is rather a mode of being in relationship with the world. This is to be contrasted with its purely conceptual use in proprietary knowledge management software (see [Grokker](#)).

The term was introduced into science fiction by Robert Heinlein (*Stranger in a Strange Land*, 1961) as meaning literally "to drink" and metaphorically "to be one with" -- connoting understanding in a global sense involving intimate and exhaustive knowledge. It has been taken up by cognitive scientists, philosophers and neuro-cosmologists -- as well by practioners of zen. Its German origin as *verstehen* implies a special form of sympathetic, experiential and intuitive understanding. Milo Clark ([The Art of Grokking](#), 2000) summarizes his use of it, in contrast to the unwitting perpetuation of conditioned thought, as:

For my purposes, to grok extends beyond ordinary and even extraordinary levels of comprehension moving far into the vestigial core of being human and possessing, as well as using qualities rarely engaged these days. We may grok more from our reptilian brain segments than from the later evolutionary lobes. As we move beyond transcendent experiencing to genuine transmutations of consciousnesses [plural intended] of being, we move from understanding to grokking -- and then stay there, leaving behind all which is behind without, in any fundamental way, negating the qualities of knowing personally, individually and collectively the histories of humankind on this planet -- now quite lost, barely available through ordinary processes, education, etc. to most. Meditation practices pursued to realization, first levels of samadhi, for example, provide some sensing relevant to and transferable to ordinary, daily life which helps to break, to free from the lulling dualities dominating most.

Also spelt as "groking", Bill Hayashi has explained it as "moving from a merely conceptual, mental understanding to a personally felt and experiential knowing" ([Grokking: Transformational Knowing](#), 1997). For Obafemi Adewumi:

"Grokking occurs naturally when we practice whole body listening. To grok something is to grasp it: to get the marrow, the inner meaning, the crux, or the gist of it. It is to get the essence of a communication or sharing such that we are able to recreate it in

our own language. By practising grokking, we can all become contributors to the planetary evolution. Grokking enables us to learn quickly and to share what we have learned with others". [\[more\]](#)

The qualifier "authentic" is used to contrast the experience with more superficial or formal modes of knowing and being -- determined by circumstance and from without. The qualifier would be superfluous according to some understandings of grokking. But it also suggests that such authenticity can be sensed by others and can trigger and sustain a response in kind. It is this which will enable and sustain new modes of organization responsive to the needs of world society and local communities at this time. In the world of philosophy, "individual authenticity" was a particular concern of Sartre, whilst "radical authenticity" was a concern of Heidegger. It is a theme much explored in religion. It can be usefully related to understandings of entelechy [\[more\]](#). The notion of "personal authenticity" is cultivated by the "cultural creatives" as identified by Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson, in their book of that name. For them:

Authenticity means that your actions are consistent with what you believe and what you say. The people in this new sub-culture prefer to learn new information and to get involved in ways that feel most authentic to them. Almost always, this preference involves direct personal experience in addition to intellectual ways of knowing. (*Cultural Creatives*, 2000) [\[more\]](#)

The subtitle playfully suggests that beyond *Homo sapiens* lies a species, *Homo conjugens*, that is fecund in ways that *Homo sapiens* could only project into biological reproduction. The emergence of *Homo conjugens* signals a new way of engaging and joining with the world.

Threads and clues

Paradox and ambiguity: To *Homo sapiens* the conceptual associations and logical steps used by *Homo conjugens* are not rational in any cartesian sense. They do not appear justified and they should not result in anything viable. They contrast fundamentally with the form of "thinking" which distinguished *Homo sapiens* in the first place. Most problematic is the lack of any apparent coherence to this mode of thought. It is partly understood in the contrast to the strategic thinking required for the Eastern game of "go" as opposed to the Western game of "chess". To *Homo conjugens* it is this ambiguous space which provides a new degree of freedom that contrasts greatly with the constraints of the grid thinking of *Homo sapiens* as evident in urban planning, classification systems, organization charts, timetables, etc.

Dualism and polarity: *Homo conjugens* thrives on duality rather than being torn by it like *Homo sapiens*. It is through the dynamics associated with duality that the essence of *Homo conjugens* is born. Polarity and polarization become a game to be explored as with contrasting notes and melodies in music. [\[more\]](#)

Intercourse: As the name implies *Homo conjugens* engages with reality in a way quite different from *Homo sapiens*. Where the latter seeks to effect a separate reality and mould it primarily for "selfish" purposes, *Homo conjugens* is involved with reality in ways that are most easily described through the sexual metaphors that poets of all cultures have traditionally used with regard to mystical experiences. In the Lake District, William Wordsworth, for example, claims to have "held unconscious intercourse with beauty". The *haiku* poet Matsuo Basho would "enter into the object, the whole of its delicate life, feeling as it feels". Reality is then encountered in a way that is not founded on separation but on conjoining. Each becomes the other in ways which lovers often endeavour to describe and embody -- and in so doing give expression to a larger unity. *Homo conjugens* will view *Homo sapiens* as having "thrown the baby out with the bath water" in confusing such engagement with all the negativity that past centuries have projected into the evils of sex and the temptations of the world -- by which *Homo conjugens* is not entrapped. By contrast, *Homo sapiens* has indeed been entrapped as defined by Geoffrey Vickers (*Freedom in a Rocking Boat: changing values in an unstable society*, 1970): "a trap is a function of the nature of the trapped".

Consummation: As is implied by the above phrase "give expression to a larger unity", there is a way in which *Homo conjugens* is exemplified by the quality of the encounter with reality -- for which one common term is "peak experience". But this consummation is one which effectively defines *Homo conjugens* in other dimensions within which a new integrity is sustained. It is the pattern of thinking and being of this integrity, the quality of knowing, which sustains *Homo conjugens* in ways beyond the ken of *Homo sapiens* [\[more\]](#). As expressed by Gregory Bateson (*Mind and Nature: a Necessary Unity*, 1979): "The pattern which connects is a meta-pattern. It is a pattern of patterns. It is that meta-pattern which defines the vast generalization that, indeed, it is patterns which connect." And it is from this perspective that he warns, citing Jung: "Break the pattern which connects the items of learning and you necessarily destroy all quality." [\[more\]](#) *Homo sapiens* has become committed in practice to a form of tunnel vision ("knowing more and more about less and less") -- and relating instrumentally to it. Whereas *Homo conjugens* effectively seeks ways "to know less and less about more and more" whilst emphasizing a more fruitful relationship with it.

Enactivism: There is a way in which this engagement, intercourse and consummation by *Homo conjugens* are all part of what has been explored under the term "enactivism" -- associated with the notion of the embodiment of mind. This has been notably pioneered by Francisco Varela (*Laying Down a Path in Walking: essays on enactive cognition*, 1997) [\[more\]](#). It may be understood as an aspect of the creation of reality and of "world-making".

Reflection-within: A major contrast with *Homo sapiens* is that for *Homo conjugens* the world is not separately "outside". There are a variety of ways in which the external world is reflected within -- controversially described on occasion by the phrase "there is a Hitler in every one of us" (or a Saddam Hussein). In this sense the values, qualities, attributes and diversity perceived without also have their correspondences within -- without which we would in all probability be unable to distinguish them without. In this sense *Homo conjugens* is the joining up of the "outer" world within. [\[more; more\]](#) This is in some ways implied by the ideal expressed in the phrase a "man for all seasons".

Reflection-without: Similarly, for *Homo conjugens*, the world without is understood as a reflection of the diversity experienced within.

In a sense each outside feature carries qualities characteristic of the inner world of *Homo conjugens* -- although it may well be that these qualities need to be projected onto phenomena distinguished "outside" as a way of holding great complexity in a manner accessible for awareness. The "outside" world is then used like a large wardrobe with a myriad of coat hangers for conceptual garments that can only be donned under particular circumstances. [more; more]

Environment: The two preceding attributes point to the distinguishing feature of *Homo conjugens* with respect to the natural environment and its biodiversity. The streams that arise in springs and run "without" are echoed by streams that arise and run "within". *Homo conjugens* can only tolerate the degradation of the natural environment at the price of degradation of personal identity. This is equally true in the case of biodiversity. The myriad species "without", in all their complex relationships, are effectively carrying attributes and qualities of *Homo conjugens* essential to the sustaining dynamics of the person. Loss of biodiversity is tantamount to significant diminishment of the person. Conversely of course, it is the exemplification of the potential of *Homo conjugens* "within" that enables a new kind of stewardship "without" -- healing and sustaining the environment in new ways. It might be said that *Homo conjugens* has a "conjugal" relationship with the environment -- married to the world in ways that *Homo sapiens* can only guess at. *Homo conjugens* might even be said to "know" the world -- in the biblical sense. [more]

Instrumentalism: In responding to the environment, *Homo sapiens* is most characterized as a tool maker and user with an instrumental orientation -- leading to the development of a multitude of tools via which to relate to the environment and to change it. By contrast *Homo conjugens* might best be understood through the design and use of instruments in the aesthetic sense -- such as musical instruments through which harmonies and ways of resonating with the environment can be evoked. These are instruments that focus awareness, playfully (as noted below), on the many ways in which aspects of the environment are conjoined through patterns of associations.

Possession: It follows from the preceding points that *Homo conjugens* has a way of relating to possessions and property that is quite distinct from that of *Homo sapiens*. The identity of the latter is distinguished in wisdom by the manner of grasping and possessing knowledge -- increasingly described as intellectual property. *Homo conjugens* is however as much possessed by the property he/she might be considered by others to own -- in ways similar to those that indigenous peoples have long endeavoured to articulate. For example: *This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself* [Chief Seattle, 1852]. Rather than clutching it for exclusive material use, *Homo conjugens* effectively embodies it in the celebration of larger identity.

Inter-personal relationships: As implied above, the reality and environment with which *Homo conjugens* engages in these new ways are of major significance for personal relationships. Those encountered "without" are understood to be echoes of those active "within". People encountered "without" are then necessary projections of those encountered "within" -- constituting dynamics by which one is severely challenged. Problematic phenomena like "Adolf Hitler" and "Saddam Hussein" may need to be encountered and held "without" in order better to understand how they are to be handled "within". But this also applies to the saintly figures and gurus of this world and the strange dynamics and values that they represent. The challenge is to understand how to discover them "within" and develop an appropriate relationship to them there. Such richer insights into inter-personal relationships "within" will sustain richer patterns of relationship "without". [more; more]

Group activity: More prosaically, the previous point also applies to any work or community initiative -- with its potential range of eccentric personalities. It is in the latter respect that *Homo conjugens* will perhaps be most obviously distinct from *Homo sapiens*. The dynamics of groups will be quite different from those favoured by *Homo sapiens*. The new style will be inherently more dynamic and less reliant on fixed structures. To sustain such group activity, patterns of communication and dialogue will develop and evolve in ways that *Homo sapiens* will find incredible and difficult to comprehend. Time will play a much greater part -- where *Homo sapiens* is entirely dependent on linear time for group organization, *Homo conjugens* will rely on a variety of times. This may perhaps best be understood by the contrast between plainsong and the complex melodies of the later evolution of music. [more; more; more; more; more; more; more]

Commitment: *Homo sapiens* has successfully given form to interpersonal bonds through contracts and other kinds of commitments -- of which those based on the proverbial handshake may be the most binding. The quality of authenticity out of which *Homo conjugens* will act will distinguish bonds and agreements to a degree unfamiliar to *Homo sapiens* -- except perhaps as suggested by the quality of moral obligation exemplified by untranslatable concepts such as the Japanese *giri*, typically experienced as irrational to the western business mentality.

Paradigm shift: The much sought "paradigm shift" will acquire significance and sustainability with the emergence of *Homo conjugens*. In effect the previous points will also apply to conceptual relationships which will acquire and sustain their integrity in new ways. Invariance and transformation will be understood in relation to extra dimensions, including non-linear time. The static approaches to knowledge organization favoured by *Homo sapiens* will be superseded. The dynamic forms will be vital to new forms of coherence in any understanding of organization. *Homo conjugens* would be amused at the checklist of characteristics in this document, when the enabling paradigm is dependent not only on their configuration but on the dynamic between them, on the process of engaging with them, on being entrained by them, and on their function in navigating alternative realities [more; more].

Time-binding: Although the points made above contrast *Homo sapiens* with the emergent species of *Homo conjugens*, a prime characteristic of the latter is the manner in which value is attached to phenomena of different times. This is exemplified in the case of the environment by the recognition that there are many "prehistoric" species (sharks, coelacanths, trilobites, etc) that continue to have their place in the ecosystem. This is equally true of "dangerous" species and pests (wolves, snakes, etc). The same might be said of their human counterparts (thieves, drunkards, etc). For *Homo conjugens* it is not a case that outdated and dysfunctional models should be "replaced", as has been a favoured approach of *Homo sapiens*. It is recognized that in a complex world there is a vital need to provide integration over time -- if only as a learning experience of those born to *Homo conjugens*. Consistent with this view is the sense in which the past is embedded in the present -- as is any future potential of humanity ("the oak within the acorn"). In this way *Homo conjugens* is

already amongst us and within us -- and has been so recognized under a variety of labels. Equally *Homo sapiens* will be with us and within us for a long time. The challenge lies in their co-existence and communication. [more; more]

Language: *Homo sapiens* gave birth to language as it is currently known and articulated through grammar. *Homo conjugens* will transform the manner in which language is used in ways that would now best be understood by poets. In particular, as suggested by the association between *conjugens* and the discipline of "conjugating verbs" in their various tenses, language in the moment will derive new and unique power from what might be described as its tensional integrity -- binding time in unforeseen ways. The classic poem of T S Eliot starts with the lines: *Time present and time past, Are both perhaps present in time future, And time future contained in time past* (Burnt Norton). Such tensional integrity will transform understanding of the temporal dimension in ways that the "tensegrity" of R Buckminster Fuller transformed spatial integrity -- most notably in the structuring of geodesic domes. The spatial emphasis of network organization, as in semantic networks, will acquire a temporal dimension. [more] Possibilities are suggested by exploration of "conjugation patterns" in other disciplines, notably biology and molecular organization.

Self-constraint: It is the inherent understanding of conjugation patterns that will give *Homo conjugens* the sense of "goodness of fit" that will naturally constrain the fundamental flaw (and unwisdom) of *Homo sapiens*, namely the commitment to the biological procreation of humans whatever the cost to the environment. *Homo conjugens* will have a design sense of appropriate configuration -- where *Homo sapiens* equates quantity with quality. The point has been made through the phrase "small is beautiful".

Dynamic: Implicit in several of the points above is the sense in which the identity of *Homo conjugens* will be associated to a far greater degree with patterns of movement rather than with the more static attributes favoured by *Homo sapiens*. Aspects of this have been explored in terms of the "flow experience" [more]. Since these patterns are less tangible and less easily measured than are the more static attributes (wealth, status, beauty, etc), there are many respects in which *Homo conjugens* will be "invisible" to *Homo sapiens*. The latter will tend to be caricatured as "stolid" by the former. The challenge is exemplified as explained by one character in Heinlein's novel: "Grok means to understand so thoroughly that the observer becomes a part of the observed -- to merge, blend, intermarry, lose identity in group experience. It means almost everything that we mean by religion, philosophy, and science -- and it means as little to us as color means to a blind man". [more; more]

Playfulness: *Homo sapiens* has invented a multitude of games which are a prime focus of attention, notably as a form of recreation. The propensity has even led to a characterization of humanity as *Homo ludens* by Johan Huizinga [more] -- especially where gambling is the focus. Games are understood as defining culture. Self-esteem may be intimately related to being perceived as a "player" -- in initiatives in which there is as much a chance of being a "winner" as a "loser". *Homo conjugens*, however, approaches playfulness in other ways -- best briefly described as playing (with) the world -- that could indeed be described as a process of "recreation" involving the "entertainment" of possibilities in a kind of "engaged detachment". As noted above, the world might then be understood as a gigantic musical instrument to be played -- in ways inspired (notably on the web) by the allusive indications of Hermann Hesse's *Magister Ludi* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969). It might also be understood as a kind of existential learning environment in which *Homo conjugens* is also "played". In a sense *Homo conjugens* strives to give coherence to the Game of Life, as indicated more by the intent of works such as Mary Catherine Bateson's *Composing a Life* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989) than by the many computer simulations of that name -- although the characteristic playfulness in the moment is better indicated by the classic troubadour role.

Humour: Whilst *Homo sapiens* sees humour as one of the prime characteristics distinguishing "humans" from animals, it is partly in the nature of the humour cultivated by *Homo conjugens* that key differences from *Homo sapiens* are to be found. The quality of such humour, and its integration into the existential paradoxes of the uncomfortable spontaneity of living, have perhaps best been exemplified by the various Taoist, Buddhist and Sufi approaches to "crazy wisdom" -- notably Chuang-Tze, Lieh-Tze (Columbia University Press, 1990), Chogyam Trungpa (*Crazy Wisdom*, Random House, 2001) and the Nasruddin tales.

The (Updated) Last Whole Earth Catalog (1974) carried on its cover the phrase:

"We can't put it together; it is together".

Does this partially reflect the nature of experience of *Homo conjugens* in the moment as something that is a natural given that can only be defined artificially as absent?

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