

BECOMING CONSCIOUS

Luke Yates navigates the collective consciousness. Interview by Sundry Sullen

Luke Yates has a background in studying, teaching and researching in the fields of mathematics and theoretical physics at the University of Tasmania, as well as training and practicing in the fields of mindfulness and meditation. He is the author of *Compassionate Living*, “a small reflection of an awakening realization on this planet that a new and most beautiful way of living in the world is both possible and necessary,” and he also runs the private meditation practice *Mindful Movement – Working with what presents* in Hobart and Blackmans Bay, Australia. Luke was kind enough to do an interview with Sundry Sullen and discuss the origins of his book, the work he does at his private practice, and to give insights on the nature of collective consciousness.

“Collective consciousness has always existed and always been evolving, but it may only be in this era that its self-reflective capacity is developing and emerging through humanity.”

A couple months ago I picked up the book titled *Compassionate Living* while in Dharmananda, Northern NSW, Australia. This little blue spiral bound book lay there on the table glowing at me, with its stark simplicity and poignant title. I was hooked from reading the table of contents and the intro. Luke, you put most of what I'd been discovering and feeling into such clear and lucid words. What spurred you to write such a book? Where did all this profound wisdom come from?

What spurred me? Well the content began emerging during conversations. I remember I was at a party one night and just started talking to a guy about compassion and inspiration. I don't remember why or how we got to the topic but I was moved and surprised by the things that I was able to say to him. Later that evening I went home and felt the need to write about it. What came out were to become the sections called 'Inspiration as Truth' and 'A fragile Identity' in the third chapter of *Compassionate Living*.

This exemplifies the overall process for me. I was working towards a PhD in theoretical physics at the time and I took a much-needed break by attending a 16-day shamanic meditation retreat called *Returning to Source*. The time spent meditating and some of the group processes we did together seemed to awaken something within me. Again when I returned home I felt the need to write. For a period of about 8 weeks I would wake most nights at about 2am, which is incidentally the time I have woken to write these words, with inspiration and insight just bursting out of me. I would literally run to the computer or scrap paper and get the words down as quickly as I could. In this way the book was streamed into more or less the condensed format that you find it in now. It was an exciting and beautiful time for me. As to where it came from... I think that is precisely the theme of the book. There is much discussion of collective consciousness – that which arises from ourselves, and indeed all life forms, collectively but which in turn streams back down to us individually. This entanglement, to borrow a physics term, blurs the line of what is personal and what is collective, and it was profound experiences of this that really initiated the book and also provided the content.

Do you consider yourself enlightened or awakened? What is your definition for such potent and powerful words?

No, I don't consider myself enlightened or awakened. If you take the Buddhist definition of enlightenment as being the end of suffering then it is clear to me that I am not enlightened. I don't know how to define these words. I know that I used the term "awakened" quite frequently in the book but the definition is implicit rather than explicit.

These potent and powerful words, as you put it, point to that which is beyond the mind. Definitions belong to articles of the mind, and so it follows that that which is beyond mind remains without definition. So I guess I would define these words as pointers but isn't that true of all words?

You work one on one with individuals, guiding meditation, teaching mindfulness and making discussion. Can you explain this process a bit, and what kind of results you've experienced?

I haven't been doing this work for long and I am discovering a lot about the process as I go along. It seems that my role is to hold a space for people to do their inner work. I hold an inward focus, listen, ask questions and share what I am feeling and thinking in response to our shared experience.

I call my practice *Mindful Movement – Working with what presents*. The "what presents" refers to whatever is occurring in the present and this is the point of access for an individual to do the work of becoming conscious of what is happening within. This inner awareness may at times give rise to recollection of past or present events that require attention and/or the unexpected reception of insight or inspiration with regard to present or past life circumstances. 'Mindful Movement' refers to one of the techniques of meditation that I teach which essentially involves making very slow, and sometimes very small, movements of the body. I might ask a person sitting down to raise the angle of the head by just a few degrees where the chin might move about 2cm and taking one full minute to do this before pausing and returning similarly. Different parts of the body seem to have a different effect and it is different every time and for each person.

The discussion and meditation intertwine throughout the session and the format is not prescribed. I have shared some profound, healing and deeply connected spaces with individuals through this work and I enjoy it so very much.

Something that hit me in a very simple and subtle way, was how you pointed to what collective consciousness and awareness is. Can you elaborate on this?

I would say that individuals generate the collective and that the collective, in turn, generates the individuals. This is true within and across all matter and life forms. What this points to is a bigger process than we are used to perceiving. We are involved in the grand and singular process of life – and we are deeply involved – it defines us and yet we define it. This is approachable at many different levels. At a social level for example we may understand collective structures such as economics and politics to be emergent phenomena defined by the complex inter-relationships of numerous individuals and yet these larger scale structures feed back into the behaviors of the individuals themselves.

When it comes to affecting change in the world, say within the structures in question here, I would always say that change comes from the ground up, from grass roots movements, from individuals awakening... But where does the inspiration for this individual change come from? This question takes us to a deeper level of collective awareness. In addition to saying the above I would always say that inspiration comes from beyond the individual. We can only find inspiration within but just what is the source and nature of our within? True inspiration feels so good to the individual and I think this is because it coincides with connection to something grander than the individual. What is more, the actions that follow from such inner inspiration implicitly embody the knowing of the collective from which it arose. Thus inspired individual actions may serve a grander collective purpose and movement.

What comes from deep within comes from far beyond.

The more I travel and meet people from all over the world, the more I feel like my 'family' is everywhere. And I'm witnessing this beautiful thing all around; people are waking up to their reality, and acting positively in the face of all its challenges. What is your understanding of the evolution of this collective consciousness... this collective awakening? Wouldn't we quite literally be on the forefront of this evolution, in this very moment?

Yes I believe that right now is always on the forefront of evolution, where else could the forefront be? Just as all life forms have consciousness but not

necessarily self-consciousness I think that collective consciousness has always existed and always been evolving but it may only be in this era that its self-reflective capacity is developing and emerging through humanity. What is new is that what was previously unconscious is becoming conscious. The blind evolution characterized by traditional 'survival of the fittest'-type paradigms has ultimately given rise to a consciousness so complex that it is giving sight to the evolutionary process itself. We are transitioning from blind or unconscious evolution into conscious evolution and this opens new possibilities, and humans seem to have an important role in this process. What humans are awakening to is their co-creative role in the evolutionary process via their emerging capacity to access collective wisdom through creative vision and inspiration and ultimately through their conscious choices and actions in the world.

Yes! I think this really is what's happening, awakening to our individual part in the evolution of life. To be conscious of my individual evolution as it happens, to be conscious of how that is a part of the whole human evolution, and to see my interconnection with all life forms, seems to be such a powerful thing to be aware of. I don't know what other life form perceives, but I can definitely perceive my own evolutionary process, sometimes with greater depth and clarity than at other times. What is great about this perception is that it seems to be helping me make the decisions that will hopefully benefit not only myself, but also the whole of humanity, and the whole of the Earth. To see this would mean that helping the collective whole is really helping myself.

Do you think that it might be possible that we are the only life form on Earth that is actually capable of doing this? And when you say that humans have an important role in this process, might we say that we actually are that important role in the process? Come to think of it, wouldn't this very process of discussing this topic, and putting it in a form for others to read, be an example of this evolution?

Yes, I do believe that what we are doing here, discussing and sharing these thoughts with others, is an example of this evolution...and to the degree that it brings forth new awareness to this process that we are all a part of it might well be helping to accelerate it. I also think it is likely that we are the only life form capable of doing this work on Earth and at this point in time, however in saying that I believe it is most important to realize that our unique capacity to fulfill this role is dependent upon, and works along side, the capacities of countless other life forms. Ultimately it is only our mode of perception that distinguishes and separates humanity from other life, so whilst for each and every one of us our role is both important and unique, these new and emerging potentialities are arising from life collectively and for this they are most beautiful.

These are really exciting times we live in, and the more I travel on this journey, the more enriching it becomes ... the more enriching it becomes, the greater the challenges become, but all these great challenges seem to be met with a deeper and deeper love, and with this deep love arises the deepest joy. Though I can't claim to be enraptured with joy and infinite equanimity all the time, I feel these moments coming and going more and more often, and the bigger picture of this whole movement I call my life, seems to be opening itself more and more naturally. This, for me right now, is the heart. And, I seem to be coming closer to an understanding and a witnessing of the unfolding uniqueness

of what I actually am. Would I call this true self? What is your understanding of true self and the heart?

I resonate with many of the words you just used – 'uniqueness', 'whole movement' and 'deeper and deeper love'. As you describe it true self appears more as process than as thing to be uncovered or understood per se. I understand 'whole movement' to be all that we've been talking about in terms of the interrelatedness of the collective consciousness and the individual. Whilst this picture of whole movement dissolves the perception of separateness of the individual it can also serve to strengthen in each one of us the awareness of our own uniqueness. I believe that we each embody a unique aspect of the collective, of the whole, and as such we perceive vision and act upon our connection to the whole in a unique and necessary manner. By this I mean that our uniqueness is necessary and that our individual existence is necessary in order to make manifest the wholeness that life is.

In this light I see true self as a process engaged upon by the individual and, as always and for all processes, as part of the entire evolutionary process. We are each upon the true self process and the more conscious we become of the process the more the process reinforces itself and it accelerates revealing to us a 'deeper and deeper love'.

This is the first issue of Earth. I feel like we're reaching out to people who are on the verge of waking up, who are seeking change, who want a movement to be a part of. Not that we are making that movement, but perhaps helping to awaken and strengthen what's already there. It's so much like what you write about in your books, I feel this great need to help stoke those flames, help awaken the sleepers, and strengthen the ones who feel they might be alone. I'm wondering what you might say to someone reading this right now?

Firstly, the movement is already within us, it cannot be made or destroyed, its future is not determined and you cannot ever be separated from it.

Secondly, the work that lies before us all is inner work. The work of recognizing and honoring our own feelings and needs. The work of self-care and self-love. The work of creating the space to listen within for the voice of inspiration and the movement of creative impulse. The work of finding and being receptive to the support that we need. Whilst all this may appear so very self-oriented, it is the foundation of true responsibility, and when worked upon gives rise without any further effort to a profound compassion. This compassion takes the form a new born capacity for intimate connection through empathy and vulnerability. It takes the form of strength and confidence. At times it urges us to stand up and take bold action, and at other times, to be still and watchful. It takes whatever form it needs to in order to be in service of this very moment.

Finally, our inner work allows us to create change for others and for the world in the only way that we ever can – by modeling it – by truly being it.

To contact Luke for more information about *Compassionate Living* & *Mindful Movement*, visit www.lukeyates.net.au

ART IS MAGIC



Till Gerhard brings it all to the surface. Interview by Vincent Pacheco

Till Gerhard is an artist living and working in Hamburg, Germany. He creates large-scale oil paintings that are dream-like, full of mysticism and the supernatural. His work exudes a fascination with 1960's utopian communities, and seems to investigate Man's relationship with the natural world. Till was kind enough to answer some questions about his work, its relation to magic, and his thoughts on the new counter-culture.

“Art is comparable to shamanism when it brings together the two worlds of unconscious and the conscious.”

Till, can you give us a little history lesson about yourself? What has your path been like?

I grew up in Ahrenburg, a small North-German town near Hamburg. I started to study art in Kiel and continued to study in Hamburg. First years of being an artist were pretty tough, but after a couple of years things came together pretty well for me, so that I could make a living off of my art.

I still do live in Hamburg and withstood the suction to move to Berlin, where a lot of artists moved in the last 15 years. It feels good to have a certain distance to the busy, distracting art world and to stay focused on my own stuff. Maybe there's another reason why I'm in Hamburg: geologically Hamburg is part of Scandinavia and I always felt a strong connection to Scandinavia.

What is art's purpose in the world?

Art can be a way of thinking or communicating beyond words. It can work through images, speaking to senses rather than to the logic of the mind. So it can transport things and bring them to mind, which language is not able to transport.

In the best case it might give your mind insights beyond the veils of illusion almost like a Zen koan. I always like art that is humorous, playful and serious at the same time and has various levels of being read. Art should go deeper and speak to something within you, even if you don't really know what that is. If it doesn't, it's bad art.

Maybe one purpose of art is to look at the shadow side of the collective consciousness and bring it to the surface...

What is man's purpose in the world?

Big Question. A lot of wisdom traditions explain that we always come back and incarnate as human beings lifetime after lifetime, because only in this world we can learn certain aspects and make experiences in the circumstances our souls chose before coming here.

As Joseph Campbell puts it man's purpose in the world should be to "follow his bliss," which means you have to find out what you are really here for, what your soul wants to experience in this life time so that you can take on the challenge of the "hero's journey" and go your very own way. C.G. Jung calls this individuation, a process of psychological integration, where you go through a lot of psychological experiences which might be painful, for example, being confronted with your shadow side. But this can make you a "whole" human being in the end. Maybe then you don't have to come back...

I've been noticing that a lot of my friends and people I come into contact with are waking up and questioning their realities. Do you feel a cultural shift happening with our generation, or a change in the way we see ourselves and our place in the Universe?

I do think we are witnessing an enormous cultural change at the moment. A lot of established institutions and power structures are crumbling, and at the same time like-minded people are able to connect much easier via internet, for example. People get together and create new things much faster today. Society as we know it will completely change in next years and not only locally, but globally I feel that a lot of people wake up from the collective dream of materialism and the ever growing economy, which actually of course is a nightmare. People start to feel that we have to come to an end with exploiting the natural resources and things have to change from the core if we want to survive on and with this planet. A big number of people are still asleep and will dream on that nightmare of illusion, but as this downward spiral will accelerate, the upward spiral will as well. So it's sure gonna be exciting in the next couple of years.

Are you exploring any of this in your work?

For a while I have been exploring ideas and the history of communes and spiritual groups from the sixties and seventies. How they started with good intentions and often failed or even ended with a horrible aftermath. I am interested in this tipping point between good and evil. The 60s and early 70s were a time of a huge openness and willingness to explore new ideas and spirituality, but failed in a

lot of cases.

This led me to explore the roots of the hippie movement, for the example the "Nature Boys" and the commune of "Monte Verita" from early 20th century, where a lot of hippie ideas were lived already.

Also I am strongly interested in pagan rituals that survived the Christianisation until the present days and are still being celebrated in England, Wales and around the Alps for example. How did people relate to nature in former times and why are we so detached from it today is one thread going through all of my works.

How do you feel when you are creating a new piece?

I start with an idea or image for a new painting for example, but I never know where it will lead me and how it will look in the end. That makes it exciting for every single piece I start. Sometimes it feels very easy to do a new painting and mainly those turn out good pretty quick, sometimes it is more like a fight and I have to force myself to continue and bring it to an end. Some works have to stand for months in the studio until I find the right title to complete them.

Has the process of creating new work been affected or influenced by the popularity of your older works? Do you feel inherent pressure to please gallery owners, art buyers, fans, peers? And does this remove you from the experience of making art?

You always should keep it interesting for yourself and not care about what other people think or would like you to do. Sometimes it's hard to hear your inner voice, because the outside can be too loud, then it might be better to take a break. But actually my inner voice is what takes me further and further. It's about my very own interest and I know I can trust it. People sometimes are disturbed by the darker imagery or the pagan aspects of the newer works. I always felt attracted by the bizarre and ludicrous side of things.

Do you believe that art is a form of magic or shamanism?

There can be something like magic included in the process of making art in such way that the artist does not really consciously know what he's doing and becomes more like an instrument through which something can be expressed beyond his own intention and ego.

At least that is my experience that some good works were made like that without having a strong intention. Somehow everything came together or kind of fell into place, the image, the colors, the title. That feels more like being a vessel for the work than being an active producer. I even had experiences of synchronicities when later it was explained to my mind what I actually had done. That really feels like magic, when you read in a book or see on TV a new or greater interrelation for what you have created.

Maybe art is comparable to shamanism when it brings together the two worlds of unconscious and the conscious.

Were there any other career or life paths you were considering along the way?

I was pretty interested in archeology when younger, but not in becoming the Indiana Jones type of guy, more because I was always really into prehistoric and old cultures.

As a kid I built all these primitive furnaces, weapons and huts in our garden, kind of as experimental archeologist. Still I sometimes have the idea of living a simple life close to nature as an organic farmer or so.

After all is said and done, how do you hope to be remembered?

I don't really think about that.

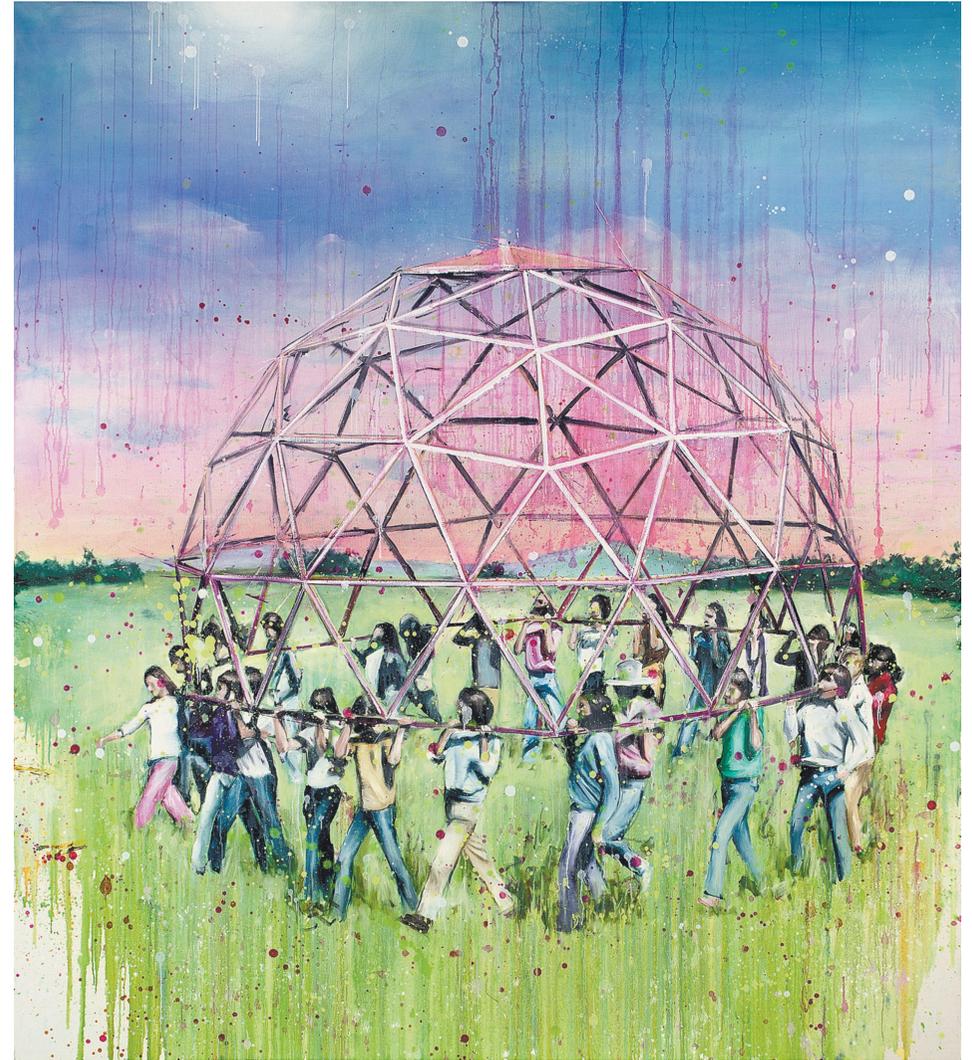
To see more of Till's work, visit his website at www.tillgerhard.de



Secret Source, 220x280cm, 2010, oil on canvas. By Till Gerhard



Female String Theory, 200x180cm, 2011, oil on canvas. By Till Gerhard



Oberbau, 200x180cm, oil on canvas, 2005. By Till Gerhard