

Reflections on a Research Expedition to South Africa's Ancient Ruins

Haley Fox, 1 September 2018

Abstract

This article summarizes learning highlights from a research expedition to Michael Teller's Stone Circle Expedition in Mpumalanga, South Africa, 6-20 August 2018, including several excursions to surrounding stone circles and other sites, most notably two trips to Adam's Calendar. The content of this writing is best understood and appreciated through a heuristic, art-based research methodology. As such, artistic methods (in this case, writing, drawing and improvisational flute-playing) serve as primary modes of inquiry, and given the highly personal nature art-making, the process is inherently heuristic (that is, learning through self-examination). (For a more detailed description of art-based heuristic inquiry, see Fox, 2018.) While the exploration goes deeply into personal experience, an argument can be made that "the universal lives in the particular," and by probing personal experience, more general conclusions—rooted in the place where all humans connect, via our very humanity—may actually be possible.

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The moment I arrived at the Stone Circle Museum in Mpumalanga, South Africa, I found myself face-to-face with sights, sounds and ideas that challenged the familiar, if timeworn, consensual reality within which I'd been residing. I was in good company. A diverse band of co-conspirators from all over the world assembled--drawn to the stone circles for different reasons, perhaps, but all eager to enter those barely explored ancient ruins, led by Michael Teller, the brilliant *and* controversial public figure who had stepped up to host and guide the expedition.

Curiosity, Skepticism and the Scientific Method

One of the first inspirations that came to me has evolved into this essay on curiosity, skepticism and the scientific method. The topic seemed a useful way to find grounding in some principles that could guide my (perhaps our) way(s) forward.

Original ideas predictably meet with certain controversy, potentially dividing people and forestalling scientific progress. This is a common enough occurrence, sadly. At times even the most brilliant thinkers are not fully recognized for their genius until after they've died.

We live in extraordinary times where waiting for people to come to their sense seems like a luxury we can no longer afford. Indeed, how can we position ourselves for optimal progress in an era where bidding our time seems potentially devastating—not only to the preservation of valuable ancient artifacts but also perhaps to the very preservation of human livelihoods and earth's survival?

It is my habit to examine such problems from a psychological lens.

As I see it, optimally effective scientific thinking requires a *balance* between an attitude of flexible thinking on one hand (open-mindedness, the willingness to embrace new ideas and findings) and of healthy skepticism on the other (the willingness to let go of “accepted,” *status quo* knowledge to make room for new learning). We must not forget that each of these attitudes has a shadow aspect—the dark underbelly, so to speak, of open-mindedness being gullibility, which can put us on loose footing and lead us down erroneous paths; and the shadow side of skepticism being utter denial, sometimes of a reality right under our noses, and this habit can keep us stubbornly stuck and not moving forward at all. Both gullibility and denial interfere with the scientific process, in different ways.

It occurred to me as I was privileged to have a direct experience of Michael Tellinger that he has often enough been recognized for his *wide* open mindedness—but perhaps not as readily for his healthy skepticism. Without the latter, he would not have been able to pull back the veil of complacency related to false information we have been handed. Michael joins a growing movement in the world that is “waking up” to new understandings and possibilities. And it is not only an open mind but also a healthy skepticism that makes such awakenings possible.

This is not to say that his or anyone else’s new observations and teachings should be accepted by us with gullibility, any more than they should be discounted via stubborn denial. To hold tightly to a belief that “It must be!” or “It can’t be!” will never fail to keep us stuck. Both attitudes stall scientific progress. I’ve come to appreciate that Michael, like the best scientific minds, can be most frequently heard making observations more on the order of, “Isn’t that an interesting finding/outcome? I wonder what that means? Could it be this, or that? I have no idea, but I’d like to look into that more.”

And here is where true scientific progress begins.

I continually returned to this open-mindedness/healthy skepticism during my two weeks in South Africa, and new worlds opened up to me. I found few answers but generated some increasingly provocative questions that have the potential to fuel new areas of research. A few examples follow and fall in the areas of musical resonance, art and human experience, toroidal fields, and primal archetypal imagery. I will spend a little time on each topic here.



Musical Resonance

This area of study has been an interest of mine for some years now, and it marked my point of entrée into the work of Michael Tellinger. (His name came up in a search for literature on the subject, and before I knew it I was devouring more of his work and even became involved in the Ubuntu movement.)

I brought some questions with me to the stone circles: Can improvised music amplify vibrational frequencies in already resonant spaces? If so, how does that work? What is the experience for the listener? --the player? How might the live, *in vivo* experience differ qualitatively from an experience of a *recorded* soundtrack?

I had an opportunity to experiment with musical resonance in stone circle spaces and, even more compelling, at Adam's Calendar. I had brought with me a beautiful, Native American F# flute made of madrone wood. The flute was new to me; I have played a classical Gemeinhardt for many years, but this new flute seemed more suited to ceremonial spaces and purposes. The wood itself is revered for its mystical qualities:

...amongst all the trees of the Pacific northwest, the Arbutus or Madrone Tree holds the title of most sacred tree to the original inhabitants of this vast region. In the legend of the great flood, the Salish First Nation describe how the...tree provided an anchor for their canoes to hold steady and not drift away. And that's why, to this day, they don't use the Madrone tree as firewood. It is their way of thanking and honoring the memory of the refuge and survival for the People it provided long ago (ArbutusArts.com, 2018).



As a music therapist and educator, I have had previous experience with bringing music into intentional spaces for purposes of encouraging group cohesion, assisting with relaxation and meditation, and facilitating therapeutic experiences. I generally use an improvisational approach, tuning in and “playing the room,” as it were, to highlight energies and vibrations already present. Most often I will enter a “zone” in which I have no discernable recollection of the music I have played. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi would call this a “flow state” (2016).

I applied this same improvisational approach in some of the ancient ruins we explored, particularly at Adam's Calendar. The experience at Adam's Calendar is particularly noteworthy, and I will detail it here.



[An experience of musical resonance and vibrational frequencies in Adam's Calendar](#)

It is noteworthy that before entering Adam's Calendar, the research group was "primed" for a potentially extraordinary experience. Leading up to the event, we had all heard accounts from Michael Tellingier of higher-than-normal vibrational frequencies being measured in the space previously and of other people entering that space and being profoundly impacted by it, even recounting what was experienced as a healing effect. The priming was further intensified when we all gathered in a circle and voiced three consecutive "Om"s (ॐ) together before walking into the space. This priming alone was enough to trigger a strong emotional response one participant. The rest of us filed into the space in a quiet and respectful manner. For my part, I endeavored to remain open to whatever might transpire for me and for the group as a whole—with my mdrone flute in tow in my backpack.

Once in the space, we each seemed to engage in a highly personal experience. Individuals spread out among the calendar stones, several lying on the ground, some standing or leaning against stones. I found myself perched upon a large stone and breathing deeply until the impulse to play my flute arose within me. I picked up the instrument and waited until a simple tune began to move through me. While I have only a vague recollection of the precise tune I played, both then and now I had a strong felt sense while playing: calm, compassion, and a sense of bold probing. While I had been primed to expect that I might pick up on the unusual vibrational pattern of the space itself, in fact, it felt more as though I were picking up on the unique vibrational patterns of the people in the space, which indeed may have been amplified by the space itself. I cannot be sure how much time passed—perhaps 10-12 minutes? Unbeknownst to me at the time, Michael recorded the music, and I look forward to reviewing it.

When the music did conclude, I placed my hand on my heart (a gesture that had periodically been coming to me since a few weeks prior), breathed deeply, and quite unexpectedly began to sob. At about that time, I felt someone's hands placed on my shoulders from behind. The unknown witness was sobbing a well. Of course, the tears intensified then for a time. When I was able to breathe again, I turned to the man. (It was Michael), and we closed that encounter in a warm embrace, without words.

Another member of our troupe approached me then; clearly he had been weeping as well, and he shared a personal story with me about the personal impact of this experience on him. We embraced as well, until the flute called to me again, and I took my leave to return to playing.

This time the melody seemed a bit more lifted and lively. I had a sense now of gathering souls together (as opposed to reflecting a web of powerful individual experiences). As before, I cannot recall the melody I played, but he felt sense was lighter than before, yet strong, deliberate, clear and determined.

Gradually, and quite organically, individuals moved into dyads, then dyads in to triads and small groups, and eventually we all sat together in another large circle and debriefed our experience. I learned that virtually *everyone* in the group had been weeping during the experience, with each person being touched in a different and highly personal way. One young man among us shared a new clarity he had arrived at regarding his life purpose, where before he had felt only confusion and worry about having too many interests pulling at him. Another individual shared a strong vision about past life retrievals that involved many members of the group. Yet another felt he had finally come to terms with and overcome previous personal challenges and felt ready to get on with life in a new way.

In our debriefing experience, two or three members of our group shared an experience of noticing an elevated heart rate immediately upon entering the circle, which subsided upon leaving the circle; surmising that this could be attributed to strong vibrational frequencies rising from the earth in this unique space. I and most of the group did endorse any awareness of such a physiological response; however, someone had the wherewithal to notice one member wearing a Fitbit™ activity tracker. A quick check of the data showed a clear and significant rise in heart rate precisely corresponding with the time spent within Adam's Calendar; although he had not sensed the change, the data confirmed it was there. Here lies an interesting area for further research on resonance and vibrational frequencies.

The personal awarenesses linked to emotional responses shared by the rest of the group seemed even more compelling to me. My own experience, while strongly evocative, did not offer me clarity on any personal issues. I still wonder if my tears represented a kind of channeling of the *entire* group. That is hard to identify. But I can say that I walked out of Adam's Circle that day feeling as though this was the First Day of something new for me—perhaps for all of us.

It was an unforgettable experience I will treasure always.

How Art Reflects Human Experience

The myriad ways in which art reflects human experience (and vice versa) informs my work as a teacher and art therapist. As I hiked around and through these ancient sites, examining stone architecture, imagery, glyphs and artifacts, I found myself thinking more deeply about the role(s) art plays in human life. Although I generally consider such questions through a psychological lens, several stone circle research participants presented another line of thinking worth entertaining. Perhaps, they mused, the sophisticated technologies we encountered (for example, the magnetron stone circle we explored and the torus stones and cones we had examined in the Stone Circle Museum) had extraterrestrial origins. To further inform that line of questioning, in the evenings our group adopted a habit of viewing pertinent documentaries and feature films, particularly “disclosure” films.

The term “disclosure” was a new one for me in this context, generally referring to efforts intended to help ease the public’s eventual acceptance of extraterrestrial existence and activities in a nonthreatening manner, for example through work with filmmakers on “predictive programming.” Films like “Close Encounters of the Third Kind” and “The Matrix” are popular examples. As noted by the staff at Gaia:

When applied to what the government may have done, or is currently doing, predictive programming provides just enough information to the people concerning the presence of UFOs and ETs so that it “penetrates their subconscious.” By the time the people are faced with the reality of the information, they will be psychologically conditioned. The real facts and information will be acceptable since the fictitious event has been “downloaded” into their subconscious. Then, they are less likely to object to the information and question it. They are most likely to not view it as being false (Gaia, 2018).

Of course, disclosure is not the sole purpose of film or the only way that art may reflect experience. Indeed, art can be a useful tool for human expression and communication in a variety of ways. I will delineate some here in order increase appreciation for the larger context from which disclosure may arise:

1. **Direct communication.** Art can be used as a vehicle for a clear and “realistic” expression of egoic biographical or autobiographical expression of human experience.
2. **Indirect or coded communication.** This method refers to the use of artistic modalities in an intelligent packaging of something that can be deciphered. Metaphor is common here. Disclosure and predictive programming would fall within this method of using art to reflect experience.
3. **“Unconscious,” intuitive channeling.** Here the artist channels an artistic creation from a standpoint of: “I know what I see but not necessarily what it means.” Psychedelic art, such as the work of Alex Grey (<https://www.alexgrey.com/>), produces a good deal of material that would fall within this category. However, many artists channel their work without the assistance of psychedelic or meditative prompts. Imaginative material emerges in artistic endeavors in essentially the same way as in dreams.
4. **Active Imagination.** Borrowing a term from Carl Jung, active imagination is an intentional method that utilizes the imaginative process in a more purposeful way than is possible through, say, dreaming. One might, for example, reflect upon a dream and endeavor to further expound upon or extend it through an active imagination process. Some view the Star Trek episodes as exemplifying active imagination (see the film “How William Shatner Changed the World”); viewed in this way, the imaginative technologies presented served to inspire young people who grew up and found ways to “invent” the things that had inspired them. Essentially, one begins with the thought, “This could happen; wouldn’t it be cool?” and later manifests it. One can see how disclosure may also play a part here (with disclosure planting the seeds in the hopes that the ideas will one day be taken up and realized), but not necessarily.
5. **Propaganda.** Propaganda utilizes the power of media to influence—not always with good intentions. Like any powerful tool, art *can* be used to corrupt or to spread untruths. The target audience becomes more vulnerable to the influence when media

literacy is poor, but people (even children) can be taught to identify the strategies used by propagandists to influence people.

An understanding of the myriad ways in which art can reflect human experience is important to me, as it not only shows how humans can become victims of art-based propaganda and the intentional influence of others, good or bad. But it also reminds me that I also have *direct access* to wisdom and information—and the ability and opportunity to channel that, as noted in method #3, above. The Divine, or certainly a path to it, resides within me and within all of us, and this lends an awesome and formidable power. It is also a key to healing human suffering—certainly important to my profession as an artist/psychotherapist and teacher of the same.

I began to appreciate during the week how this connection can be described in the image of toroidal fields.



Toroidal Fields

What if the basis of all humanity and cosmology were rooted in and able to be described by toroidal imagery? This suggestion points to a provocative area of inquiry I have barely touched, but it does resonate deeply with me. The toroidal field offers tangible imagery that would describe how all knowledge is knowable through each single member of humanity, so long as we have the courage and wherewithal to see and acknowledge it. Propaganda and “smoke-and-mirrors” approaches put upon us by others can lead away from this knowledge, but it is always available to us—as are the arts, which offer an elegant path to the knowing. Certainly disclosure can offer a path to deciphering what is real; but even when that is not made available to us, or marginalized by loud voices intent on keeping humanity stupid, we still have method #3, above: intuitive channeling through art, dreams and psychedelic experiences.

Primal, Archetypal Imagery

If toroidal imagery is indeed central to our understanding of cosmology, then one might say it falls within the category of primal, archetypal imagery.

My primary academic influences have been Carl Jung (originator of the concepts of the collective unconscious, human shadow and archetypes, all referenced in this article) and even more so James Hillman, a neo-Jungian who more accurately identified with the label Archetypal Psychologist. Hillman departed a bit from Jung (or perhaps more accurately advanced Jung's thinking) by placing a great deal more emphasis on the autonomy of images, their capacity to exert intent and the importance of respecting these aspects of their nature.

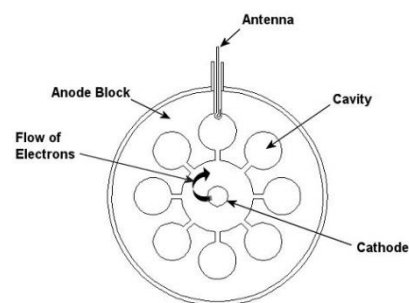
Neither Jung nor Hillman integrated their artistic identities into the ways they conceptualized their professional work, as I do, so they worked primarily with images emerging in dreams. As an artist/psychotherapist, I commonly work not only with dreams but also with the arts and art-making, another viable source through which images and archetypes emerge.

I have myself departed a bit from both of these influential thinkers (or perhaps more accurately have further advanced their thinking), by paring down the notion of the archetype from typically complex figures (such as the Mother, the Critic, the Anima and Animus, etc.) to bare-bones images that I also think can be fairly characterized as archetypal.

Consider that the image of the circle, for example. Human beings all share something in common in the way we experience a circular shape. When priming ourselves for our entry into Adam's Calendar, our group stood in a circle. Such a shape allows for no corners or breaks, everyone can see everyone else, and a feeling of cohesion and safety is naturally conveyed, by the shape alone. Moreover, the circle is not only experienced visually; it has a definite sound (O), a feeling of felt-sense of wholeness; one could argue that even certain tastes and shapes can be described as rounder (without sharpness). Jung himself chose the circle (Mandala) as a shape to hold his own personal explorations into self-discovery through painting.

When they appear naturally in visual art produced by humans, primal images, like the circle, may not necessarily exemplify "abstract" art. The latter suggests an *abstraction* from a representational idea, whereas true primal art emerges directly from organic human experience. The circle is one of the first shapes young children organically explore in their doodling.

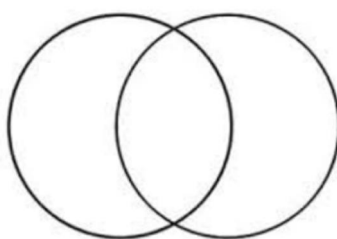
A compelling shape I encountered in our stone circle explorations was the magnetron. The magnetron shape is important and conducive to the production of energy, and it is a shape with which I was already familiar. My early doodles as a child included many veritable magnetrons. Others saw the scribbles and called them "flowers"—but do flowers really look that stylized? Or is the magnetron imagery in fact something humans can access quite naturally via our collective unconscious?



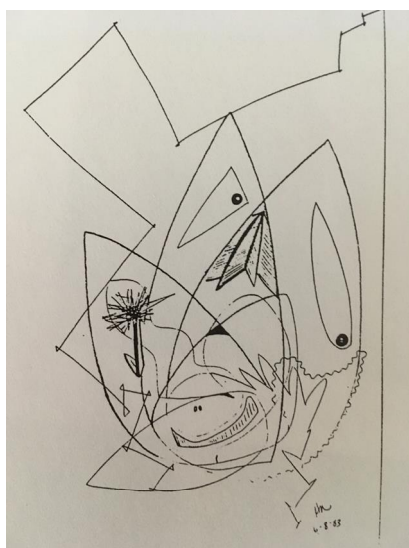
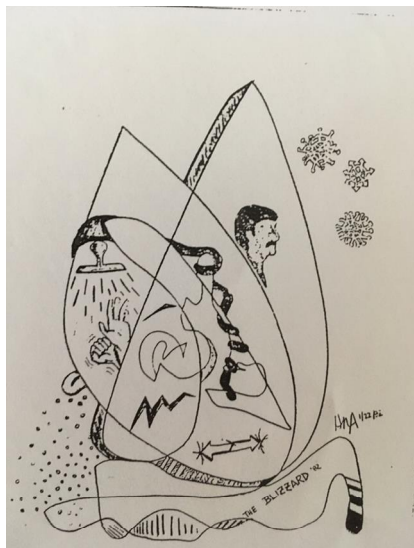
People are naturally pattern-makers and pattern seekers, so there is always the possibility that we construe shapes and patterns around us in what could also be seen as randomly occurring shapes—in the same way we see lambs, dragons and angels in clouds. This would be the primary explanation endorsed by constructivists. But I think it more likely that a range of possibilities exist when we see something strikingly familiar in our surroundings, in our dreams and in our art.

For my master's thesis (Author, 1988), I explored recurring imagery in art, and while much of that study involved interviews with other artists, I also explored recurring imagery in my own art. While the recurring imagery of the other artists was typically somewhat complex (bearded men, teapots), mine tended towards more primal shapes. Interestingly, the most predominant primal imagery (which took me several months to spot) could best be described as a teardrop-shaped mandorla, which functioned for me somewhat like a mandala, in that the image tended to encircle an entire drawing or collection of doodles, enclosing the content.

A simple mandorla is represented by two intersecting circles, and in my view it also, quite compellingly, constitutes a simple representation of a toroidal field, which I suspect is itself strongly archetypal.



What I am calling a “teardrop-shaped” mandorla, the continuing subject of my own visual art-making, is similar to the mandorla shown above but includes pointy ends on the upper parts of the shape. (See examples, below.)



I spoke earlier about the human predilection for pattern-seeking, and I experienced evidence of my own tendency towards this practice when several stones stood out to me in my explorations through the stone circles. I'll share a few photos of my finds.

Teardrop shapes were quite common and worth exploring further not only from a symbolic standpoint but also because of their potential importance as triceritops fossils.



Teardrop mandorla shapes were far more rare, but I found a few. Here are two favorites:



As noted, this teardrop-mandorla shape has functioned for me in the same way that mandalas appear to have functioned for Carl Jung (2009), as a visual container to assist self-discovery and self-understanding. Over time I have come to understand the teardrop-mandorla image as being perhaps less one-dimensional and individualistic than the mandala and indicating a strong relational aspect. The two teardrop shapes at various times move further apart or closer together, and the content of the intersecting space has also evolved over time.

Heuristic experience of magnetrons, mandalas, mandorlas, the teardrop-mandorla shape—and innumerable others—offer an intriguing path in research. In what ways can these images be considered truly archetypal? What does this mean for us in terms of accessing the center point of the toroidal field? How do these same shapes appear in art, in nature, in dreams, and how can my personal/collective understanding of them inform a deeper shared understanding of human experience? These are all questions for another day.

Summary

I have devoted these few pages to touching on highlights from my experiences at the Stone Circle Research Expedition with Michael Tellingner. Clearly, more questions are raised than answered in this brief tome, and a myriad of avenues for further research are suggested in the areas of musical resonance and vibrational frequencies, art and human experience, toroidal fields and primal/archetypal imagery. While perhaps unusual in the annals of current art therapy research, these topics are all pertinent to human experience and therefore to the work of creative arts therapists of all kinds. We had best get to it.

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