

**Mark TURNER**

*What Are We?*

*The Convergence of Self and Communications Technology*

Cognitively modern human minds are built to make sense of scenes and situations that are at human scale. At human scale, we detect, acquire, and manipulate objects—often as instruments for action—and we engage with relatively few people and relatively few objects in orchestrated patterns of ambition, invention, and learning, over human-scale expanses of time and space. Consciousness is disposed to grasp such scenes.

But cognitively modern human minds have an all-important basic mental operation—conceptual integration, also known as "blending"—that can be used to turn diffuse ranges of information that are not at human scale into useful and congenial human scale scenes. This is a profound power. It permits us to draw that which is alien to us into our own sphere, and so to comprehend, manage, and organize it.

Consciousness works with small, human-scale stories and framings. It comprehends personal identity—what we are—in human-scale terms. As cognitive science has repeatedly shown, these human-scale folk theories are full of simplification and error. Our everyday notions of the nature of language, communication, vision, memory, reason, judgment, and the other phenomena of higher-order human cognition are thin and flawed. We are not built to look into what we are. Investigating what we are is a great scientific struggle.

Yet marvelously, the devices that we make as instruments for our action—and here I am thinking particularly of communications technologies—are indeed at human scale. We know our technology better than we know our selves. We can detect these devices, grasp them, manipulate them, and use them as local instruments for our actions. Accordingly, it is natural that we should try to comprehend what we are by blending our concepts of self with our concepts of communications devices. This paper will explore the nature and history of such human-scale blends of self and communications technology.

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