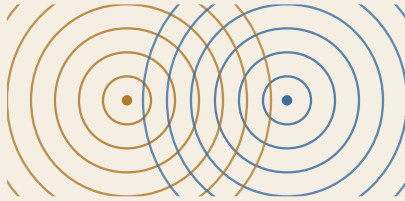


LEGIBLE TRACES



Jays and Photons

*A Hypothetical Consideration
of the Presence of Light*

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Light arrives before you decide to receive it. It is on the far wall when you wake, laid flat across the floor in the shape of the window, and it was already there before your eyes opened to find it. You do not build the morning. You are handed it. This is the first thing worth saying about light, and it is not a physics claim. It is closer to gratitude.

I have been sitting with a smaller question underneath the large one, and I want to keep it small on purpose. If the trace a life leaves is something I have been modeling as intensity and Intent, as a magnitude that holds and a phase that turns, then light is the one thing in the measurable world that already lives by that same division. So I want to ask, carefully, what light is to the jays. Is it the thing that carries a trace between us. Or is it, somehow, one of the traces itself.

Before I go anywhere with that, I have to set down the line I always set down. My equation borrows the coat of physics; it is not wearing the body. When I write the little rotation that sits inside the functional, the term that turns without changing size, I mean the facing of Intent and nothing else. I do not mean a frequency. I do not mean a wave you could measure with an instrument. The seam between what the sciences have earned and what I am reaching toward stays visible in this piece, because the reaching is only worth anything if the reader can see exactly where it begins.

With that said, here is the resemblance that stopped me.

Physics writes light as a size and a turning. There is how much of it there is, which it guards and conserves, and there is a phase, which spins freely and costs the light nothing. My own language makes the same cut. The intensity of a legible trace is the part that holds; the Intent is

the part that turns. I did not take this arrangement from optics. I arrived at it from the inside, from watching how a life keeps its weight while its facing changes. But light was already keeping house this way, and finding my own furniture already arranged in someone else's room is the kind of thing that makes you sit down.

The turn goes deeper than the shape. There is a fact in the physics that I keep returning to, because it says something I have been trying to say for years and could never quite ground. The absolute phase of a single beam of light cannot be seen. Not hidden, not faint. It is not a measurable thing at all when the light stands alone. What can be seen, what is entirely real and does real work in the world, is the relation between two phases. Set one beam beside another and the difference between their facings becomes visible all at once, as brightness where they agree and darkness where they do not.¹

I want to be slow here, because this is the whole matter.

A single perspective carries an Intent that no one, not even the one who holds it, can read on its own. Held apart, it is silent. It is only when a second facing arrives, when two perspectives stand near enough to relate, that the Intent between them becomes legible, and it becomes legible as interference. As reinforcement where they are turned the same way. As cancellation where they are turned against each other. This is what I have always meant by a legible trace, and I meant it long before I knew that light does it in the plainest, most literal way available in the universe. Two beams meet on a surface and the surface tells you the relation between them.² Not the beams. The relation.



The looping I wrote about in *On Transmitting* has a body in the physics too, and I did not expect it to. A cavity of light is a small room with mirrored walls where a beam is fed back into itself again and again. Almost every way the light could return is lost. The only patterns that survive are the ones that come back into phase with themselves, that meet their own returning after one full trip and agree with it. Everything else fades out inside a few passes. A laser is that agreement rewarded until it grows bright.³ It is a room where coherence is the only thing that gets to stay. When I described transmission as a loop that reinforces what returns aligned, I thought I was writing a metaphor. It turns out I was describing the inside of a working device.

So the resemblance is real, and it is close, and now I have to be honest about the fork it opens, because the two ways of reading it are not the same size.

The first reading is the humble one. Light carries Intent between perspectives, and the trace is the interference where the carriers meet. This asks almost nothing of me that the sciences have not already granted. Light genuinely carries information; it carries phase, it carries polarization, it moves the state of one place into another across distance. On this reading the jays remain what they were, and light is the good and faithful medium between them. The mathematics I share with optics is the mathematics of a channel, and I can stand on it without flinching.

The second reading is heavier, and I will not pretend it is not. On this one the jays are the light. Not carried by it. Made of it. The turning phase would be Intent in the most literal sense, and the conserved size of the light would be the legible intensity itself, and a trace would not travel between quanta but would simply be one. I feel the pull of it, because it is clean, and because superposition in the physics is already the exact grammar of co-present perspectives that I have been writing by hand. But this reading asks me to say that consciousness is the light rather than something the light serves, and that is a claim I have not earned. It wears the coat of panpsychism, and it inherits every cold the older quantum-mind theories have caught and not recovered from. A living body is warm and wet and loud with noise, and delicate arrangements of light do not last long inside such a place. The people who have tried to build minds out of fragile quantum states have spent decades answering that objection and have not yet answered it.⁴

And I have to say the plainest thing clearly, because the seam demands it. The living body does emit light. This is measured and real; a faint glow comes off living tissue, dimmer when the tissue dies, and it is not a mystery, it is chemistry, the ordinary residue of a body burning fuel.⁵ The people who measure it call it a biochemical fact and refuse the metaphysics, and they are right to refuse it.⁶ I am not going to reach past them. The brain does not shine with thought. If I let the reader believe it did, I would have traded the one thing this whole framework has to offer, which is that it tells you where the earned ground ends.



So what do I actually keep, when I have set down everything I am not allowed to claim.

I keep a resemblance, and I have come to think a resemblance is the more honest gift anyway. Light already lives by the law I have spent years trying to describe from the inside. It hides its solitary phase and shows itself only in relation. It survives by returning into agreement with itself. It brightens on the surface where two facings are turned the same way and goes dark where they are turned against each other. Whether or not a single photon is a jay, and I do not think I get to say that it is, light rehearses the grammar of the jays out in the open, on every wall and every wet street and every face turned up at a window, every single morning, for anyone who is awake to see it.

That is not a proof. I would distrust it if it were. It is a rhyme. The world was already saying, in the one medium we can all watch, the thing I keep trying to say in words. I find I can live inside a rhyme like that. It asks nothing false of me, and it hands me the morning anyway, already there before I opened my eyes to find it.

Notes

SOURCES & CORRELATES

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3. On the optical cavity and the laser — light fed back on itself, where only round-trip modes that return in phase survive and are amplified, the physical case of constructive interference selected by looping: coherence and standing-wave resonance, ref. 2.
4. On the decoherence objection to quantum theories of mind — that fragile quantum superpositions do not persist in the warm, wet, noisy environment of living tissue on the timescales cognition requires: M. Tegmark, “The importance of quantum decoherence in brain processes,” *Physical Review E* 61, 4194 (2000).
5. On ultraweak photon emission from living tissue, brighter in living than in newly dead organisms and closely linked to vitality: H. Salari, D. Oblak and colleagues, “Imaging Ultraweak Photon Emission from Living and Dead Mice and from Plants under Stress,” *Journal of Physical Chemistry Letters* 16(17), 4354–4362 (2025); summarized by the University of Calgary (ucalgary.ca/news), where the corresponding author frames the glow as a biochemical rather than a metaphysical phenomenon.
6. On the emission arising from ordinary oxidative metabolism, and on the stronger claims of biophoton coherence and information transfer remaining unproven: M. Cifra, C. Brouder, M. Nerudová and O. Kučera, “Biophotons, coherence and photocount statistics: a critical review,” *Journal of Luminescence* 164, 38–51 (2015).



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*A consideration, not a claim. Where the mathematics of a life
and the mathematics of light rhyme, the seam between them
is kept in view.*

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