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## Where am I on the Landscape of Consciousness (my “toothbrush”) by Michael Striem

To my best understanding consciousness is the subjective feeling of an organism.

This statement reflects what I sense is consciousness for me.

Obviously, this seems to be a quite broad description, and so is the term ‘consciousness’.

Let me become free here for a moment. After having a nice lunch with hamburgers and wine at my son’s home, I feel very blessed. My youngest grandson, who is over a year old, is expressing happiness with seeing me, stretches out his arms to come to me from his mother, my heart explodes with joy [no AI will ever experience this feeling]. My eyes catch the smiles of all around, the richness of the food on the table (with the smell of the smoke from the grill outside), I feel very comfortable in my chair (next to another older grandson). The taste of the wine, which we made ourselves, with freshly cut vegetables, salads and bakery. This moment of awareness is worth a lifetime. Yet, we repeatedly have these moments, in very different situations. My father and mother are mentioned from time to time, as source of reference to “lifting eyebrows” or keeping things nicely clean and appetizing. Great-grandchildren grow into these stories [no AI will ever experience this feeling]. On the sofa outside on the balcony, with glasses of wine (and cigarette) I listen to my son’s “report” on his weekly work meetings. A life full of colors and stories. Let it just stay this way and improve.

My apologies for not having the talent of literature authors. After all, I am just a farmer with some degrees in agriculture, genetics, and molecular DNA markers and transformations. Nonetheless, my conscious daily lifestyle is helping me focus on happy threads pulling me forward. I may not witness any “collapse of waves” or entanglement of particles, yet my conscious experience is not missing a beat. This is just to emphasize full awareness of the overall span of my life (not in every moment specifically).

In order to convey a precise and comprehensive array of feelings, more than one sentences is needed. Probably a whole page or more.

I find my conscious awareness to have many layers.

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- First comes my **inner voice** – which never stops talking to me. I wish to know how to calm it down and fall asleep in the early hours. Unfortunately, this inner voice is accompanied by a high pitch tinnitus, which gives me no rest of complete quite silence.
  - Second comes in my **thoughts** which trigger emotions. Among those are love, joy, satisfaction, curiosity, gratitude, pride, envy, jealousy, anger, frustration, sadness, fear, anxiety, shame, guilt, hesitation, anticipation. These include drafts for greetings, discussions and arguments. These may sometimes seem to run in loops in my mind, where I hear myself telling them: “STOP! I’ve heard this more than once already”.
  - Third, is my **body sensation**. hunger, thirst, bladder fullness, heartbeat, breathing rhythm, fatigue, warmth or cold, muscle tension, nausea, sexual arousal, pain (acute or chronic), comfort or relaxation, and so on. In many cases I feel very proud of myself for getting a pretty good handle on those, to find relief with simple attention.
  - It is not possible to ignore **external sensory** input and perception. Vision - light, color, movement, faces, Hearing - voices, music, background noise, Touch - pressure, texture, temperature, Smell, Taste. These form a sensory landscape surrounding the internal experience. Influence with almost no way I can control, probably only try to avoid or accept with love and humility. Recently I came up with the sense that maybe some electromagnetic fields, at various wavelengths, also penetrate our body. They may come from mechanical devices or biological sources.
  - Now 72 years old, some **memories** have accumulated. There are episodic memories (events in my life), semantic memory (facts about me and my life), emotional memory (some are spirit lifting and some can be depressing), procedural memory (skills, I have several of those). Often my memories appear triggered by emotion or perception. For example: when I listen to classical music, I remember fondly my father setting up his portable gramophone / record-player, in his study on Saturdays.
  - Another layer of consciousness is ‘**attention**’. It goes across other parts of **awareness**. It determines what becomes dominant in consciousness at a specific moment. It acts like a spotlight selecting part of the field. For example: I may simultaneously have background music, a full bladder, a call to plan tomorrow’s schedule. Paying attention highlights only one or two at a time.
  - **Intuition / Gut Feeling**: These are fast, non-verbal evaluations produced by unconscious processing. For examples: sense that something is wrong, feeling of trust toward someone, creative insight, sudden clarity. Some excellent ideas came to me through this important part of my conscious life.
  - **Agency** (feeling of choosing) is often related to the **sense of self**. For me it also brings autobiographical continuity, I feel like a lucky descendant of my parents and

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grandparents who survived WWII. This also strengthened my feeling of identity, as an observer who had the opportunity to fulfill a life of those which came before. This gives me a special feeling of been me, the one combining traits of my ancestors, and transferring them to my offsprings, with the whole package of skills, faith and luck.

- Consciousness always has a **temporal structure**. I build upon my experience with the anticipation of the future, today, tomorrow, and beyond. This gives my conscious awareness a sense of **time**. From episode to episode. From lesson to homework. From experiment to conclusion. From 'First Grade' to 'Post-Doc'. I am aware of the moment, I respect the process, yet I build upon my past to anticipate my future.
- With this in mind it is here probably the best place to refer to **the nature of living organisms to die**. It is not something I am afraid of and on the other side I am not trying to die soon. The **food-chain** of material in nature will take care of the body. **The mind**, however, is separate. As my ancestral generation continues to live through me, I have the opportunity to create as many reminders as I can to be left for the future. With full conscious attention I flourish this thread.

So, here is my take on my conscious experience. Definitely not one sentence. Probably no simple way to apply a category label. Philosophers call this type a **biological-embodied view of consciousness**. Consciousness is not merely information processing, but a lived, subjective, organism-level phenomenon emerging from a self-maintaining biological system.

The [map of the landscape of consciousness](#) was clearly presented by Robert Lawrence Kuhn, creator and host of the renowned documentary series "[Closer to Truth](#)". He has undertaken the monumental task of mapping 325+ scientific theories of consciousness, organizing them into ten categories, from materialist accounts to quantum approaches, from Integrated Information Theory to panpsychism and all different forms of idealisms, amongst which, Analytic Idealism.

In an outstanding [conversation](#) with Hans Busstra of the [Essentia Foundation](#), Kuhn talks about the categories of his map and the metaphysical commitments they imply. While Kuhn was careful to remain neutral in his published work, [here](#) he speaks more openly, sharing which theories he finds more or less plausible. It was nicely described as not just having too many theories but having one too few 😊 Everyone has its own, which is fine for an issue dealing with subjective feelings. To me this means that the term is probably referring to many different issues. Somewhat like the term '[Life](#)', which contains many different aspects of a common phenomenon.

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Read the full paper here: "[A Landscape of Consciousness: Toward a Taxonomy of Explanations and Implications](#)". Kuhn does not seek to evaluate or adjudicate among these theories, but rather to classify and arrange them. In doing so, Kuhn offers the first comprehensive scientific overview of how humanity conceives of consciousness and its metaphysical underpinnings in 2025.



All 325+ Competing Consciousness Theories In One Video.

Figure 1. Copyright © 2025 Essentia Foundation. All rights reserved.

Middle note: *I apologize if have misdescribed* – [PLEASE let me know](#) 😊

### **My “toothbrush”:**

Based on everything I’ve expressed across my website, my position is not strict physicalist.

I respect biology, nervous systems, and embodiment deeply.

I’m a scientist rooted in physical reality, but not purely mechanical, with emphasis on consciousness as trainable coherence. Not mystical.

I do not view consciousness as merely a byproduct or accident.

I would like to place my view relative to four major thinkers whom Robert Lawrence Kuhn has interviewed extensively, and who represent distinct “peaks” in the consciousness landscape:

- [Anil Seth](#)
- David Chalmers
- Giulio Tononi
- Donald Hoffman

Each offers a different structural model of consciousness.

**It seems I sit in a very interesting position relative to them.**

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## 1. Anil Seth - Consciousness as “Controlled Hallucination”

[Prof. Anil Seth](#) claims that it is impossible to separate the “hardware’ from the “software” of the brain. The brain is a living organ which does by its nature very complex activities, including computation and many other functions of metabolism and self-maintenance, necessary for its physical and physiological needs.

Seth argues that we are ‘embodied’ and ‘enTimed’. Consciousness is part of this biological system. Perception is the brain’s prediction of reality constantly generating models and updates them using many sensory feedback sources. Consciousness is the brain’s best guess about the world and itself.

Neurological activities of computation could theoretically be imitated by silicone machines. Intelligence of databases analytics and learning algorithms might be even more efficient (not by energy consumption requirements), but the compilation of all other activities of the brain with Intelligence and it cannot be substituted by computation of silicone.

I enjoyed very much the [interview for Essentia Foundation](#), it aligns strongly with my view.

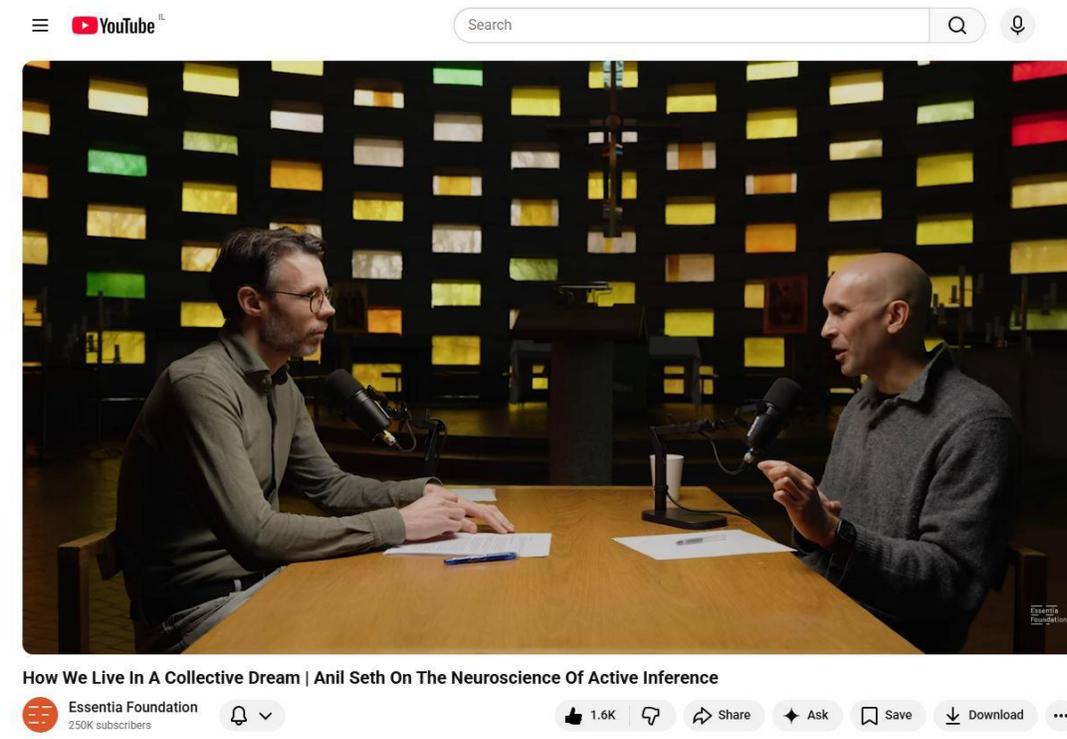


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## 2. David Chalmers - Consciousness as Fundamental but Structurally Linked to Physics

Chalmers is famous for defining the “Hard Problem of Consciousness.”

Why should physical processes produce subjective experience at all?

He argues consciousness may be a fundamental property of the universe, like mass or charge.

Where I align:

- I recognize consciousness cannot be fully reduced to mechanism.
- I treat it as structurally important, not accidental.

Where I differ:

Chalmers focuses on the metaphysical existence of consciousness.

I focus on its developmental refinement.

He asks: Why does consciousness exist?

I ask: How does consciousness mature and improve?

My orientation is evolutionary, not metaphysical.

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## 3. Giulio Tononi - Consciousness as Integrated Information (IIT)

Tononi proposes Integrated Information Theory (IIT):

Consciousness corresponds to the degree of integrated information in a system (called Phi,  $\Phi$ ).

More integration → more consciousness.

Less integration → less consciousness.

I consistently describe consciousness as:

- Increasing resolution
- Increasing integration
- Increasing coordination
- Increasing efficiency
- Increasing clarity

Tononi describes it mathematically.

I describe it phenomenologically.

Both point in the same direction.

**Key alignment: Consciousness is not binary.**

It exists in degrees. It can increase. It can become more coherent.

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#### 4. Donald Hoffman - Consciousness as Fundamental Reality

His position: [Consciousness is primary](#) (fundamental). Physical reality is not fundamental; it is an interface constructed by conscious agents. His famous analogy: Reality is like a computer desktop. The icons are useful, but not literally real. If we think consciousness been fundamental, we need to understand experiences, free-will, action, learning memory, problem solving, intelligence, notion of the self, emotions and so forth.

##### Where am I:

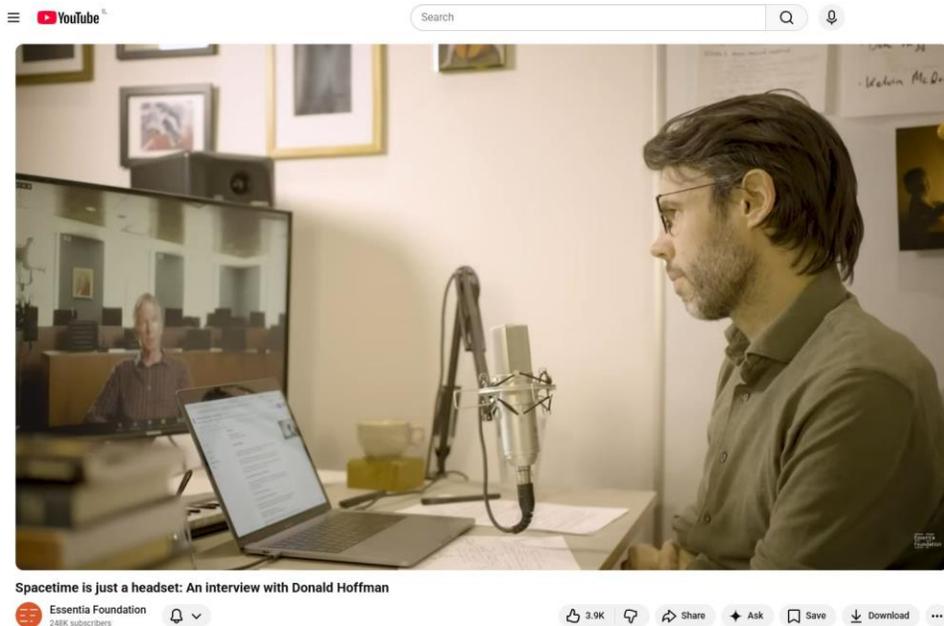
- I agree that perception is not raw reality.
- I agree consciousness is not merely passive.
- I use the “interface clarity” metaphor.

##### Where I differ:

- I do not reject physical reality.
- I remain biologically grounded.
- I see consciousness as emerging through biological systems, not existing independently of them.

##### Conclusion:

- I am less radical than Hoffman.
- I am not an idealist.
- I am more biologically anchored.



Interview on Essentia Nov 6, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5Q8kbsrE9o>

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## Where I Sit “Precisely” 😊

If I plot myself relative to these four thinkers:

- Very aligned with Seth Anil.
- Very aligned with Tononi structurally
- I am less radical than Hoffman.
- Less metaphysical than Chalmers.

I would like to add something not yet emphasized strongly:

### **Developmental cultivation.**

I look at consciousness not just as a property... but as a skill, Trainable, Refinable, Stabilizable.

## **My Contribution:**

### **Consciousness as Resolution and Alignment**

Consciousness is an evolving regulatory coherence of biological systems. It is increasing through integration, predictive accuracy, and intentional cultivation, enabling smoother alignment with reality and reduced unnecessary suffering.

Consciousness is our bridge between our body and mind (awareness). It feels the physiological status of our organs and tissues doing their metabolism, and by doing so we have the causal power to become more energetically efficient (joy) with less effort and friction (pain).

Consciousness reads the information written into the biological structure of living organisms by creating constant and immediate feedback - the feeling of ..... red, vanilla, love, etc.

In plain words:

**Consciousness is the intrinsic regulatory capacity of living systems to align perception, intention, and action with reality, increasing in clarity and effectiveness through development.**

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