Global Consciousness and the Coronavirus – a Snapshot

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In late February and early March 2020, the news was filled with concerns about a novel coronavirus first identified in Wuhan, China. In the US, analysts began warning that there would be worldwide spreading of the virus, as we have seen with other diseases including SARS and Ebola. In the intervening weeks we recognized that we were dealing with a pandemic, likely to infect a large proportion of the world population. One of the concomitants of the viral spread was another "viral" effect – on the world's economies, with serious and continuing disruptions of business as usual. Market activity has shown unusual fluctuations over the last few weeks. The major stock indices have had huge variations, with one-day declines of up to 13%, and recoveries of somewhat smaller dimension. These are globe-spanning effects, disrupting our shared, though unconscious, perceptions of a stable world.

The Global Consciousness Project (GCP) network is designed to capture effects of shared experiences that produce or enhance unconscious interconnections. These connections are fostered by resonant or coherent emotions felt by large numbers of people responding synchronously to events. We test the hypothesis that major events in the world will correspond to changes in data from a network of random number generators (RNG) placed around the world. We predict that normally random output from our network will become slightly correlated during "global events" that bring us into resonance. Tests of this hypothesis depend on *a priori* specification of the parameters defining an event, most often an initiating moment (an explosion, an earthquake, an attack) followed by a few hours for the global response to develop via spreading news. Other GCP events are less sharply focused but still limited in scope, for example Earth Day, when people all over the globe gather to promote ecological sanity, or the Kumbh Mela, when tens of millions gather to bathe away their sins in the Ganges in north India.

Understandably, many people have asked about GCP readings of the pandemic, but the technology is designed for focused events and cannot readily be applied to long-lasting turmoil such as the slowly developing coronavirus crisis. A rigorously defined event can be distinguished from the mass of other major happenings in our complex world because the latter form a background of randomly timed events against which our fully specified event stands out. For a continuing crisis, we can at best take snapshots, preferably when there is a notable moment that represents the general trend.

We defined probes to assess the GCP response to our shared coronavirus experience. The extreme shifts of the stock markets provided markers, along with news of big changes in public and official attitudes such as W.H.O. announcements, and policy reversals from the White House. To implement the sampling, I decided to look at the 7-hour long trading period of the US stock exchange, on several days beginning with March 11, 2020. The results cannot be interpreted rigorously, but they are interesting, to say the least. The following pages show the results for March 11-13, 16, 17. Of the five days, four have strong departures, one upward and three downward. The fifth case shows typical random variation. Overall, these probes say unequivocally that the GCP network was not producing normal random data.

The figures representing the samples don't require much explanation beyond a general description. The jagged line represents the history of variations in our measure, which is a calculation of the correlation between RNGs in the network. This should vary up and down but show a basically level trend. What we see instead are pronounced slopes indicating substantial correlations among the RNGs.

The coronavirus timeline published by the New York Times notes that on March 11, the World Health Organization (W.H.O) declared the coronavirus a pandemic. Stock markets, which already seemed to be in freefall, plunged further. In a prime-time address from the Oval Office, President Trump said he would halt travelers from European countries other than Britain for 30 days. Figure 1 shows the GCP response. The 1-tailed probability for this strong trend is p = 0.0004, meaning odds of about 4 in 10,000 that it is just chance or random variation.
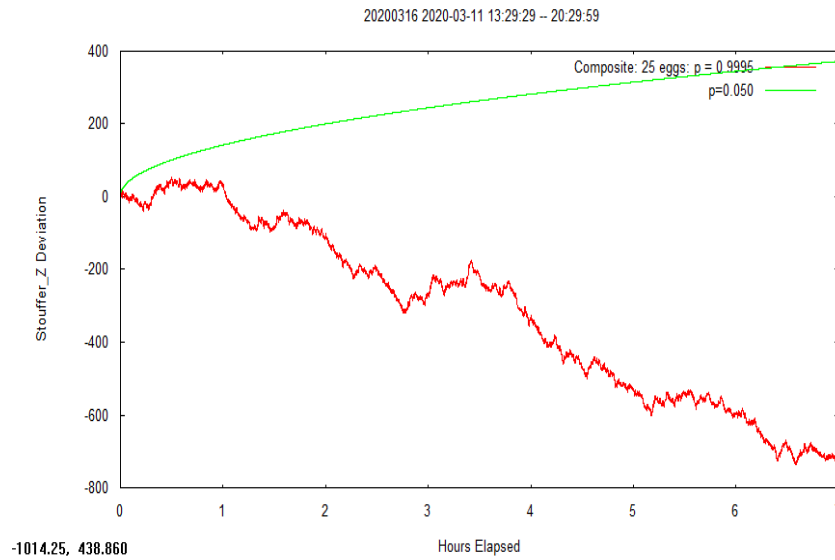

Figure 1. GCP Network Variance on 11th Mar 2020, 09:30 to 16:30 EST

Reporting on March 12 showed no major events on the coronavirus timeline, but markets continued to be unstable. The GCP data in Figure 2 show a modest trend, with a 1 in 4 chance it is random variation.
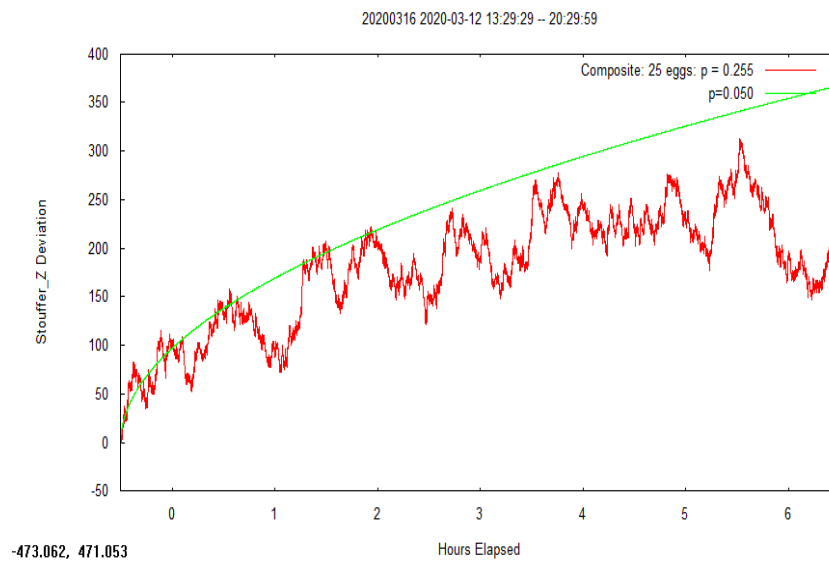

Figure 2. GCP Network Variance on 12th Mar 2020, 09:30 to 16:30 EST

On March 13, Mr. Trump officially declared a national emergency, and said he was making $50 billion in federal funds available to states and territories to combat the coronavirus. The GCP data in Figure 3 show no trend. It is the only day of the five we assessed with normal random results.
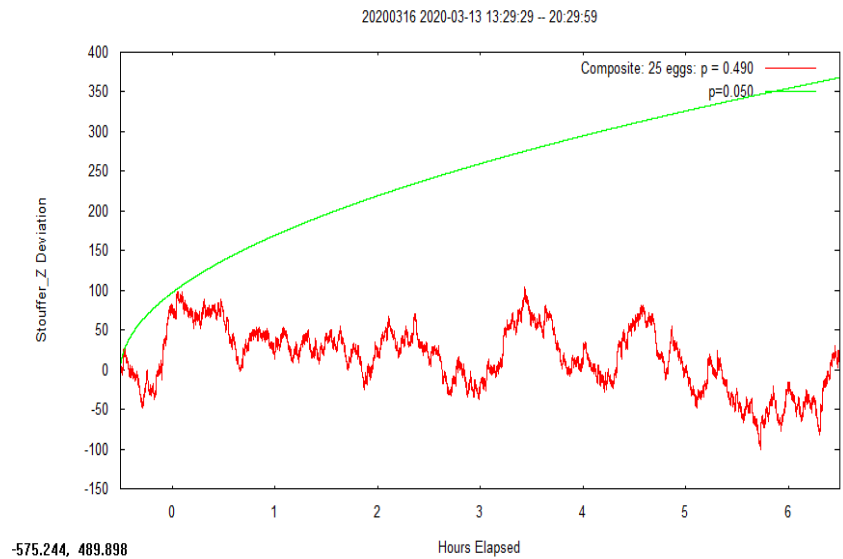

Figure 3. GCP Network Variance on 13th Mar 2020, 09:30 to 16:30 EST

On Sunday, March 15, the C.D.C. advised no gatherings of 50 or more people in the United States over the next eight weeks. The following day, Mr. Trump advised citizens to avoid groups of more than 10. New York City's public school system announced that it would close. On March 16, several countries across Latin America imposed restrictions on their citizens to slow the spread of the virus. The data (Figure 4) again show a strong departure from expectation with odds of about 6 in 100 that it is chance variation.
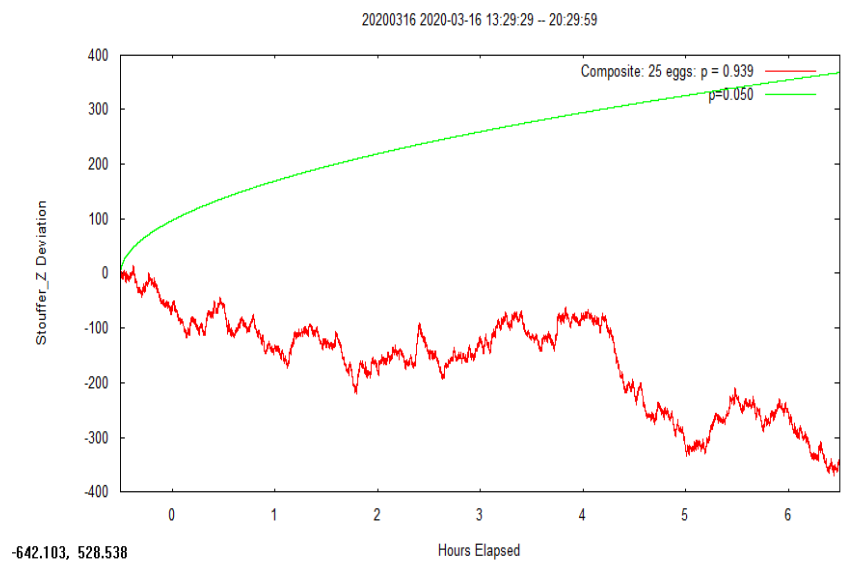

Figure 4. GCP Network Variance on 16th Mar 2020, 09:30 to 16:30 EST

On March 17, France imposed a nationwide lockdown, prohibiting gatherings of any size and postponing the second round of municipal elections. While residents were told to stay home, officials warned that meeting a friend on the street or in a park would be punishable with a fine. By this time, France had more than 6,500 infections with more than 140 deaths, according to the W.H.O. Also on March 17, the E. U. barred most travelers, in the first coordinated response to the epidemic by the European Union. Figure 5 shows a strong trend, with 2 in 100 odds of being chance variation.
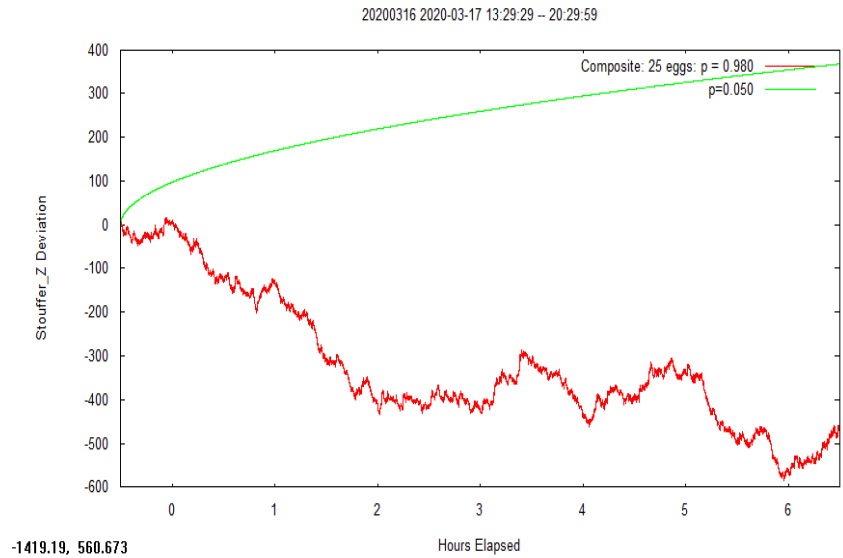

Figure 5. GCP Network Variance on 17th Mar 2020, 09:30 to 16:30 EST

I assessed one other event that is related to the Coronavirus crisis, identified in a different way from the preceding examples. This is a sharply focused event that fits the template of GCP's formal event specifications. Pope Francis made an unusual, special ritual Urbi et Orbi, on Friday, 27 March at 6 PM, praying for relief from all the suffering brought by the Coronavirus that has so tragically affected Italy, as well as the rest of the world. I extracted the corresponding data (2 hours beginning at 18:00 CET). Figure 6 shows the result, a statistically significant positive departure from random expectation. We cannot reliably interpret single analyses, but this is an outcome that supports the hypothesis of the GCP, that when a mass consciousness forms in response to a powerful event on the world stage, we will find deviations from expected randomness in data from our world-spanning network of physical RNGs.
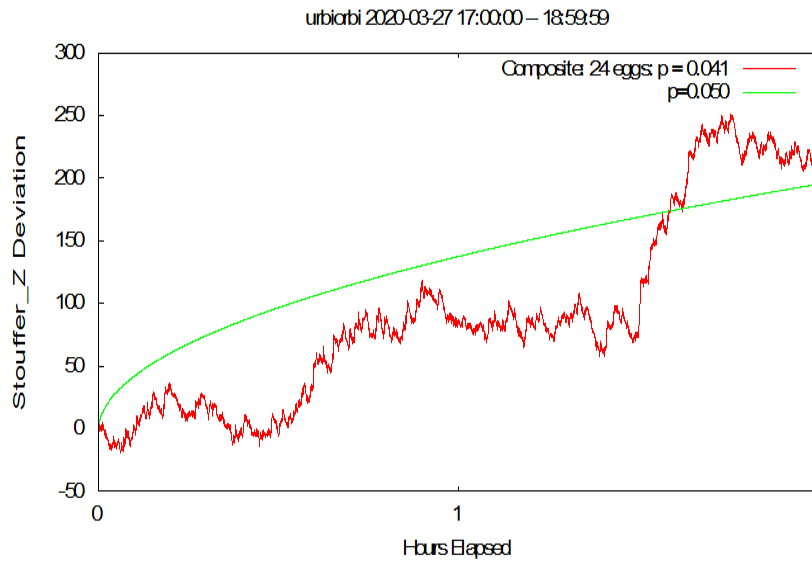
Figure 6. GCP Network Variance, Pope Francis' Urbi et Orbi, Mar 27 2020

It is tempting to think these samples show mass consciousness responding to media moments or shifts of the market, but as interesting and suggestive as the graphs look, we are careful not to make strong claims. They don't necessarily demonstrate that there is a "global consciousness". A true representation of our human condition remains the domain of our hearts and minds. Yet, the scientific abstraction suggesting global interconnection is worth considering as we work our way toward the future. Optimally, these indications of direct effects of shared consciousness mean that we can be actors in our destiny, not just passive observers. We can manifest the future of our choice if we become more aware of the power that rests in our unconscious connections. We need to help ourselves, and I think we can do that. When we bring our unconscious interconnections up into awareness, we will be able to change the world. Cooperation and collaboration are a birthright that is more powerful than we know, and the evidence suggests it is ready to claim now.