

## Opening the Doors of Creativity

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Well, the theme that unites these lectures is creativity and the techniques by which the artist can refine his or her vision, expand the vision, communicate the vision. And before I get into that issue, I thought I would talk just a little bit about my notion of creativity *per se*. What is it, in and of itself?

And when I think like that of course I cast my mind back to nature. Nature is the great visible engine of creativity, against which all other creative efforts are measured. And creativity in nature has a curious distribution. It's something which accumulates through time. If we stand back and look at the universe, we see that at its earliest moments, it was very simple. It was a plenum. It was without characters or characteristics. It was what is called in Hindu mythology the Toriah, which is described as attribute-less. And naturally if something is without attribution, you can't say much about it. It takes a while for it to undergo a declension into more creative realms. And these creative realms are distinguished as domains of difference. The precondition for creativity is, I think, disequilibrium. What mathematicians now call chaos. And through the light of the universe, as temperatures have fallen, more and more complex compound structures have arisen. And though there's been many a slipping back in this process, over very large spans of time we can say that creativity is conserved. That the universe becomes more creative. And out of that state of creative fecundity, more creativity is manifest. So from that point of view, the universe is almost what we would have to call an art-making machine. An engine for the production of ever-more novel forms of connectedness... ever-more exotic juxtapositions of disparate elements. And out of this, I believe, arises implicitly, a set of principles we can then apply to the human artist in the human world.

Nature's creativity is obviously the wellspring of human creativity. We emerge out of nature almost—and this idea I think was fairly present close to the surface of the medieval mind—we emerge out of nature almost as its finest work of art. The medieval mind spoke of the productions of nature. This is a phrase you hear as late as the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The productions of nature. And human creativity emerges out of that, whether you have a model of the Aristotelian great ladder of being, or a more modern evolutionary view where we actually consolidate emergent properties and somehow bring them to a focus of self-reflection.

Now, I'm sure that we couldn't carry out a discussion of this sort without observing that the prototypic figure for the artist, as well as for the scientist, is the

shaman. The shaman is the figure at the beginning of human history that unites the doctor, the scientist and the artist into a single notion of care-giving and creativity. And I think that, you know, to whatever degree art, over the past several centuries, has wandered in the desert, it is because this shamanic function has been either suppressed or forgotten. And we've... different images of the artist have been held up at different times: the artist as artisan; the artist as handmaiden of a ruling class or family; the artist as designer for the production of integrated objects into a civilization. This notion of the artist as mystical journeyer, as one who goes into a world unseen by others, and then returns to tell them of it, was pretty much lost in the post-medieval and renaissance conception of art. Up until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where, beginning with the Romantics, there is a new permission to explore the irrational.

This really is the bridge back to the archaic, shamanic function of the artist. Permission to explore the irrational. The Romantics did it with their elevation of titanic emotion, of romantic love specifically. The symbolists, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, did it by a reemphasis on the emotional content of the image and a rejection of the previous rationalism, and that emphasis on the image and on the emotions set the stage, then, for what I take to be the truly shamanic movements in art, which begin really with Alfred Jarry, in the late 1880's and early 1890's. Jarry you may remember was the founder of something called the *Ecole du Pataphysique*<sup>1</sup>—the Pataphysical College. Jarry announced pataphysics is *the* science. Problem was, no one could understand what it meant or what it stood for, including Jarry. Jarry was tight with Montremont, who you may recall said: I am fascinated by that kind of beauty that arises when a sewing machine meets a bicycle on an operating table. See, this was a true effort to bend the boundaries of art, to create new permission... permission really for the unthinkable. And this again reinforces the shamanic function.

What do we mean when we say the unthinkable? We mean the envelope of that which can be conceived. And for at least 200 years, the ostensible mission of the artist has been to test the conceptual and imagistic envelope of what the society is willing to tolerate. This has taken many forms: the deconstruction of imagery that we get with abstract impressionism going back into impressionism and the pointillists. Or the permission for the irrational imagery of the unconscious; surrealism and German expressionism make use of this permission. Always the idea being to somehow destroy the idols of the tribe, dissolve the conceptual boundaries of ordinary expectation.

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<sup>1</sup> And writer of the play *Ubu-Roi*

Well, in order to do this, it seems to me there is a precondition for the creation of art which I call understanding. And I don't mean this in an intellectual sense; I mean it in the sense that Alfred North Whitehead intended when he defined understanding as the "apperception of pattern as such." As such. There's nothing more to it than that. You see, if we were to look at this room, and we were to squint our eyes (and I'm doing this right now) and I see that the room divides itself into people dressed in red and people dressed in blue. This is a pattern and it tells me something about what I'm looking at. Now I shift my depth of field. Now I'm looking at where men are sitting and where women are sitting. This is a different pattern and it tells me more about what I am looking at. The number of these patterns theoretically present in any construction is infinite. That says to me, then, that the depth of understanding cannot be known. It cannot be known. Everything is imminent. William Blake makes this point, you know, that you can see infinity in a grain of sand.

So, understanding, then, is a precondition for creativity. And this understanding is not so much intellectual as it is visual. Visual. And in thinking about this, I realized what an influence on my own ideas in this area Aldus Huxley was. Not the Huxley that we might ordinarily associate with my concerns, the Huxley of *The Doors of Perception* and of *Heaven and Hell*, but the Huxley of a very modest book that he wrote in the early 50's that he called *The Art of Seeing*. The Art of Seeing. And in that book, he makes the point that a good art education begins with a good drawing hand. That to be able to coordinate the hand and eye and to see in to nature—to see into the patterns present as such—is the precondition for a kind of approach to the absolute. Now, out of this process of seeing, which I'm calling understanding, the creative process ushers in novelty. And many of you have heard me speak of novelty in another context: in the context of nature being a novelty-producing engine of some sort. And ourselves, almost as the handiwork of nature. But this same handiwork of nature which we represent, we also internalize and re-express through the novelty of the human world. Well, now, if we take seriously the shamanic model as a basis for our authentic art, then certainly in the modern context, what we see missing from the repertoire of the artist are shamanic techniques. And it's for the discussion of these shamanic techniques, I believe, that I was brought here this evening.

I want you to cast your mind back to a great seminal moment, germinal moment, in the history of human thought, which was about 25,000 years ago. The great glaciers that had covered most of the Eurasian land mass began to melt. And human populations that had been islanded from each other for about 15 millennia began to re-contact each other and reconnect. Out of this comes what is called the Magdalenian Revolution, from 18,000 to 22,000 years ago. And

what it is, is nothing less than a tremendous explosion of creativity and aesthetic self-expression on the part of the human species. We find for the first time, bone and antler technology takes its place alongside stone technology. Musical instruments appear over a wide area. And cave paintings—some paintings so remote from the surface of the ground that it takes several hours to reach them—are painted and set up in dramatic tableaux specifically designed to bring together sound, light and dance in hierophonies. Extravaganzas of aesthetic output that invoke a kind of transcendent *other*, that human beings, for the first time, are trying to come to grips with and make some kind of cultural statement about. And this pulling into matter of the ideas of human beings—first, you know, in the forms of beadwork and chipped stone and carved bone—within twenty thousand years, ushers into the kinds of high civilizations that we see around us, and points us toward the kind of extra-planetary mega civilization that we can feel operating on our own present like a kind of great attractor.

Now, this whole intellectual adventure in exteriorization of ideas is entirely an aesthetic adventure. Until very recently, utility is only a secondary consideration. The real notion is a kind of seizure by the tremendum, by the *other*, that forces us to take up matter—clay, bone, flint—and put it through a mental process where we then excrete it as objects that have lodged within them ideas. This seems to be the special unique transcendental function of the human animal; the production and the condensation of ideas. And what made it possible for the human animal is language. If you're seeking the thumbprint of the transcendental on the myriad phenomena that compose life on this planet, to my mind the place to look is human language. Human language represents an ontological break of major magnitude with anything else going on, on this planet. I mean yes, bees dance and dolphins squeak and chimpanzees do what they do, but it's a hell of a step from there to Wallace Stevens, let alone William Shakespeare.

Language is the unique province of human beings, and language is the unique tool of the artist. The artist is the person of language. And I've, you know, given a lot of thought to this because the work that I've done with psilocybin mushrooms and the observations of psychedelic plant use in the Amazon centered around ayahuasca lead me to the conclusion that it is the synergy and catalysis of language that lies behind not only the emergence of human consciousness out of animal organization, but then its ability to set a course for a transcendental dimension and pursue that course against all the vicissitudes of biology and history over ten or fifteen thousand years. Language has made us more than a group of pack-hunting monkeys; it's made us a group of pack-hunting monkeys with a dream.

And the fallout from that dream has given us our glory and our shame. Our weaponry, our technology, our art, our hopes, our fears. All of this arises out of our own ability to articulate and communicate with each other. And I use this in the broad sense. I mean, for me, the glory of the human animal is cognitive activity. Song, dance, sculpture, poetry... all of these cognitive activities... when we participate in them, we cross out of the domain of animal organization and into the domain of a genuine relationship to the transcendent. As you know, shamans in all times and places gain their power through relationships with helping spirits, which they sometimes call ancestors, which they sometimes call nature spirits. But somehow the acquisition of a relationship to a disincarnate intelligence is the precondition for authentic shamanism. Now, nowhere in our world do we have an institution like that—that we do not consider pathological—except in the now very thinly spread tradition of the muse. That artists—alone among human beings—are given permission to talk in terms of “my inspiration,” or “a voice which told me to do this,” or “a vision that must be realized.” The thin line—the thin thread of shamanic descent into our profane world—leads through the office of the artist. And so, if society is to somehow take hold of itself at this penultimate moment, as we literally waver on the brink of planetary extinction, then the artist like Ariadne following her thread out of the labyrinth, is going to have to follow this shamanic thread back through time. And you know one of the most dis-empowering things that has been done to us by the male-dominant culture is to brush out our footprints into the past. We don’t have a clue as to how we got here. Most people can’t think back further than the first Nixon administration, let alone, you know, the arrival of the Vikings, the fall of Catal Huyuk, the melting of the glaciers, so forth and so on. We have been dis-empowered by a rational tendency to deny our irrational roots, which are kind of an embarrassment to science, because science is the special province of the ego. And magic and art are the special province of something else. I could name it, but I won’t. It prefers to be unnamed, I think.

So, how seriously then, are we to take this, um, I’ll call it an obligation to follow this shamanic thread back into time? Well, I think that it is a matter of saving our own souls. That this is the real challenge. You know, I love to dig at the Yogans by saying “nobody ever went into an Ashram with their knees knocking in fear over the tremendous dimension they knew they were about to enter through meditation.” Still truer, and more sad, is the notion that very few of us pick up our sculpting tools or our airbrush with our knees knocking with fear because we know we are invoking and acting with the muse at our elbow. And somehow, I think the artists need to recover this sense of mystery. One of the most depressing thing to me about the art scene—and I had a chance to reconnect with

this because I was just in New York—is that it now has a kind of directionless quality. You can go into a gallery and you cannot tell whether it is 1990, 1980, 1970 or 1960. Because a kind of eschatological malaise has settled over art. All notion of any forward movement toward a transcendental ideal has been put aside for the exploration of idiosyncratic vision. And I grant you this is a tension—and perhaps in the question period we can talk about this—there is a tension between the individual vision and the notion of an attractor or a collective vision which wants to be expressed. But to my mind this is the same dichotomous tension that haunts the individual in his or her relationship to Tao. You know, we don't want to be lost in ego, but on the other hand, if we completely express the Tao, we have no sense of self. The ideal seems to be a kind of *coincidentia positorum*... a kind of literalizing of a paradox where what we have is Tao, but we perceive it as ego. And in the application of this notion to the art problem I would say what we need is a situation where schooling—if you want to put it that way—or a tendency toward a coherent vision expressed by many artists—is *spontaneous*. Each artist imagines that they are pursuing their own vision. Yet obviously, they are in the grip of an archetype which is rising through the medium of the unconscious. Now, the last time we saw this in American art was in abstract impressionism. Which was probably—in terms of the values... in terms of tension and the amount of emotional gain between one artistic moment and another—the break between abstract impressionism and what preceded it was the most radical break in American art in this century. Abstract expressionism actually carried us into a confrontation with what the quantum physicists were telling us. That the universe is field upon field of integrated vibration. But there is no top level, there is no bottom level. That the ordinary structures of space-time are simply that. That if we can rise out of the human dimension, then we discover these larger, more integrated dimensions where mind and nature somehow interpenetrate each other. A vision like that, a coherent vision, has yet to announce itself here in the post-history pre-apocalypse phase of things.

Well, I guess I have a kind of reactionary side when I think about the creative endeavor. I believe that the psychedelic experience, as encountered by each of you in the privacy of your own mind, or as encountered by a pre-literate society somewhere in the world, that that psychedelic experience is in a way the Rosetta stone—not only for understanding the encryption that our own lives represent, each to ourselves—but it's also a Rosetta stone for uncoding the historical experience. Art is this endeavor to leave the animal domain behind. To create another dimension, orthogonal to the concerns of ordinary history. And this orthogonal domain, to my mind, is glimpsed most clearly in the psychedelic

experience. The psychedelic experience shows you more art in an hour and a half than the human species has produced in fifteen or twenty thousand years. Now, this is an incredible claim. This is why I make it. The energy barrier which separates us from this tremendous repository of transcendental imagery is very low. You know, it's a matter of a little personal commitment and the substances which make the transition possible. The perturbation of brain chemistry is easily done. What is not so easily done is the assimilation of the consequences of this act. Ordinarily, we assume that consciousness is channeled between tremendously deep walls. That there is no way to force a confrontation with the *other* or the transcendent or the unconscious. We tend to assume that we're going to have to do double-duty at the Ashram for three decades before we're vouchsafed even a glimpse into these places. This is not true.

Culture—and this is my message to artist and anyone else who cares to notice—is a plot against the expansion of consciousness. And this plot prosecutes its goals through a limiting of language. Language is the battleground over which the fight will take place. Because what we cannot say, we cannot communicate. And by say, I mean dance, paint, sing, mean. What we cannot say, we cannot communicate. We can conceive of things that we cannot communicate. And I think every one of us here has done that. And that's a thrilling thing. That's the deep homework. The psychedelic inner astronaut sees things which no human being has ever seen before, and no other human being will ever see again. But in fact this has no meaning unless it is possible to carry it back into the collectivity. And what motivates me to talk to groups like this is the belief that we do not have centuries of gently unfolding time ahead of us in which to gently tease apart the threads of the human endeavor and create a bright new world. That's not our circumstance. This is a fire in a madhouse. And to get a hold on the situation, I think we are going to have to force the issue. One way of forcing the issue, or a chemical definition of forcing the issue when you're talking about a chemical reaction, is catalysis. We want to catalyze consciousness. We want to move it faster toward its goals, whatever those goals are. Well, I believe that to the present moment, language... again in the broadest sense: speech, dance, musical composition... language has just been allowed to grow like topsy. It's been a kind of every-man-for-himself situation. Now, what we really need, as we see ourselves moving from one species among tens of thousands of species on this planet, over the past ten thousand years, we have redefined ourselves. And now, like it or not, we are the custodians of the destiny of this planet. Our decisions affect every life form on the planet. And yet, we are still communicating with each other with the extremely precise medium of small-mouth noises mediated

by ignorance and hate. This doesn't seem like the way to do business as we approach the third millennium.

What I'm hopeful for, and what I actually see happening—I mean, I think we're on the right track—the birth of a new kind of humanity is going to take place. But there are still a lot of decisions to be made. How violent shall this birth be, what toll shall it take upon our mother the earth, what shape shall the baby be in when it is finally delivered... these are the decisions that artists can mediate and control. Most people are afraid of the unconscious. This is why you can have a psychedelic compound like DMT, which is very much like ordinary brain chemistry, appears completely physiologically harmless, only lasts ten minutes, extremely powerful, and generally in this society you have no takers. This is because there has been a failure of moral courage. And the failure of moral courage is perhaps most evident in our own community: the community of the artist. In a way, it's the poets who have failed us. Because they have not provided a song or sung a vision that we could all move in concert to. So now we are in the absurd position of being able to do anything, and what we are doing is fouling our own nest and pushing ourselves toward planetary toxification and extinction. This is because the poets, the artists have not articulated a moral vision. The moral vision must come from the unconscious. It doesn't have to do, I believe, with, you know, these post-meaning movements in art: deconstructionism, and this sort of thing. But that art's task is to save the soul of mankind. And that anything less is a dithering while Rome burns. Because if the artists, who are self-selected for being able to journey into the *other*... if the artists cannot find the way, then the way cannot be found.

Ideology is extremely alien to art. Political ideology, I mean. And if you will but notice it is political ideology that has been calling the shots for the last seven or eight hundred years. We can transcend politics if we can put some other program in place. You cannot transcend politics into a void. And I believe that a world without ideology could be created, if what were put in place of ideology were the notion or the realization of the good, the true and the beautiful. You know, the three-tiered canon of the Platonic aesthetic. Reconnect the notion of the good, the true and the beautiful; then, use psychedelics to empower the artist to go into this vast dimension that surrounds human history on all sides to an infinite depth, and return from that world with the transcendental images that can lift us to a new cultural level. The muse is there. The dull maps that rationalism has given us are nothing more than whistling past the graveyard by the bad little boys of science. You only have to avail yourselves of these shamanic tools to rediscover a nature which is not mute, as Sartre said in a culmination of the modern viewpoint. Nature is not mute; it is man who is deaf. And the way to

open our ears, open our eyes, and reconnect with the intent of a living world is through the psychedelics.

Now, as you know, biology runs on genes. And genes are the units of meaning of heredity. But we could make a model of the informational environment that is represented by culture. And in fact, this is done. A word has been invented: meme. A meme is not the smallest unit of heredity; a meme is the smallest unit of meaning of an idea. Ideas are made of memes. And I think the art community might function with more efficiency in the production of visionary aesthetic breakthroughs if we would think of ourselves as an environment modeled after the natural environment, where we as artists are attempting to create memes which enter an environment of other memes that are in competition with each other, and out of this competition of memes, ever-more appropriate, adapted and suitable ideas can gather and link themselves together into higher and higher organisms.

Now, in order for this to happen, there is an obligation on each one of us to carry our ideas clearly. Because in the same way that a gene must be copied correctly to be replicated or it will cause some pathological mutation, a meme must be correctly replicated or it will cause a pathological mutation. For instance, I would say what the Nazis did to Frederick Nietzsche's philosophy was a miscopied meme [that] became a toxic mutation inside a culture. So, I would suggest to the people in this room tonight, that you take a good look around at who's here. Artistic people, psychedelic people, look pretty much like everybody else out in society. But we have come here tonight, self-selected for our interest in the empowering capacity of psychedelic plants and the empowering capacity of art. So we represent an affinity group; a population with the potential for mutagenic impact on the ideological structures on the rest of society. So, look around. Someone here has what you need. And if you can only figure out who it is, you can make a novel connection to move them into a new level of creativity.

Well, what is this new level of creativity? Some of you may be familiar with the theme that is very big in medieval religious art, which is the apocalypse of St. John or of somebody; there are a number of these apocalypses. And I think that many of us may come out of a secular background or have not given this kind of a religious idea too much consideration. But my idiosyncratic conclusion, based on trying to be honest about the content of the psychedelic experience, is that human history really is on a collision course with a transcendental object of some sort. It is not going to be business as usual into the endless unfolding confines of the future. The very fact that human history is occurring on this planet; the very fact that a primate has left the ordinary pattern of primate activity and gone into

the business of running stock markets and molecular biology labs and art museums indicates to me the nearby presence in another dimension of a kind of hyper organizing force, or what I call the transcendental object. And I believe that this transcendental object is casting an enormous shadow over the human historical landscape. So that if you're back in ancient Judea, you have an anticipation of the Messiah. If you are at Eleusis, at the height of the practice of the Eleusinian mysteries, you have an anticipation of the dark god.

These anticipations of an unspeakable transcendent reality, that are always clothed in the assumptions of the individual artist and the society in which he or she is working, are in fact genuine. You don't have to give yourself over to fundamentalist religion to connect with the fact that human history is an adventure.

This adventure has a number of startling reverses and sudden plot shifts that are very difficult to anticipate, and that we are coming up on one of those. The civilization that was created out of the collapse of the medieval world has now shown its contradictions to be unbearable. And though no one of us knows what the shape of the new civilization will be, somehow in the singing of the ayahuasca songs in the rainforests, in the tremendous hypermetallic transcendental off-planetary flash of psilocybin, in the teaching of the self-transforming machine elves that seem to dwell in the DMT dimension, we see that the ordinary linear expectations of history are breaking down, and that the truth of the imminence of the mystery is breaking through all the structures of denial of the male-dominator paradigm that has been in place so long.

The way to make this birth process smooth, the way to bring it to a conclusion that will not betray the thousands and thousands of generations of people who suffered birth and disease and migration and starvation and lonely death... so that we could sit here this evening... the redeeming of the human enterprise all lies, then, in helping this thing come to birth. And each artist is an antenna to the transcendental *other*, and as we go with our own history into that thing, and then create a unique confluence of our uniqueness, and its uniqueness, we collectively create an arrow. An arrow out of history, out of time, perhaps even out of matter, that will redeem, then, the idea that man is good. Redeem the idea that man is good. This is the promise of art, and its fulfillment is never more near than the present moment.

Thank you very much.

*From a talk in Port Heuneme, CA, sponsored by Carnegie Museum of Art, early 1990's. Transcribed from Palenque Norte podcast 123 (7:18 - 58:03).*