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**Posthumous Glory**

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...Someone came out with the idea that it's the production of these images which come out of the unconscious, and which may appear straightforward at first, but which in fact are charged with possibilities and dimensions that you don't sense or realise until you're committed to it – you're brought in through it, somehow.

*[Question from audience]*

Well don't you think most shamans, this is what they're doing, is they're bringing back a sense of psychic empowerment, and psychic healing... that their hands, their spells, their songs, can cure. And, you know, until you're truly ill in a world without real medicine, you don't realise what a power this is – even to just claim it! Even to just claim it... I mean, the doctor, in a world without doctors, is, you know, almost an unimaginable commodity, a living miracle-worker; so, you know, to separate the medical function because it controls prolongation of life and health, and all that, from the shamanic function – it just doesn't make any sense. I mean, life *is* health, in those archaic societies. I mean it is in our society, too; but then it gets murky, because of our funny ideas about what disease is and how you treat it.

What is disease? – Well, I don't know. I had some medical problems this spring, and one of my impulses in dealing with it was to go back through my life and say, "What did you do that got you into this mess?". Now, this is a theory of life as literature: in other words, it's the idea that first of all life makes sense, and so this question can be answered; and fairly intelligent people told me, "Don't do that. It's not a story" – you know, "it doesn't make sense in that way". I think disease is – and I wouldn't want to be held to this entirely, but – largely more linguistic than most people think, you know... it's the story you tell yourself about how you are in the world, and the way that that doesn't quite parse with how you *are* in the world; and it's sort of like having a burnt rope or something – it begins to clank and crank. A lot of people have talked about this, I think there's even a name for this field of thought, but I have no idea what it is – but the idea that most disease is a problem of language, a problem of self-description or self-perception, or communication to other people. So, again, psychedelics, to the degree that they promote opening and therapeutic truth-telling, hold down disease.

You know, it's extraordinary how healthy shamanically attended populations are. Serious mental disease is largely unknown, and many of these cultures are in the tropics, where god knows, you know, if you cut your thumb you're septic within 24 hours; but these people seem to be able to sustain it. When you think about the genital blood-lettings that Mayan royalty indulged in in the tropic rainforest, at high temperatures, why anybody lived to tell the tale with a medical practice like that is a miracle! So they must have lived inside an extraordinary set of assumptions. I remember when I was

travelling around the Amazon, actually I think it was in Indonesia, but it happened in the Amazon too – but you'd come to these villages, and the people would come out of the village to meet you and they would bring your corn beer – a gourd of corn beer. And then the whole village would surround you to watch you drink this thing. Well, if you knew anything about what was going on, you knew that the old women of the village had sat up the night before chewing the corned beer and spitting it out into this bowl so that it would ferment, and so you were literally getting the complete immunochallenge that the entire village had to offer you! [laughter] – and all you could do was just lift it up, thank everybody, think of your stomach for a moment, say, you know, *Here it comes...* And I never got sick from that! I mean, I got sick from other things, but that – you know, from a medical point of view, that was just like [makes sound of nosediving object]... to do that. So the story you tell yourself is largely the story you're living.

The other thing is, nothing is unannounced. This is a psychedelic truth, I think, of some power, and it relates to disease, and it relates to shamanism – nothing is unannounced. If you are paying attention, stuff comes down the pike. First a little wave, then a medium-sized wave, and then the tsunami... but you have to be really not paying attention to be fully astonished by something unexpected; in fact, it's a disgrace to be totally astonished, because it means you must not have been paying attention to what was going on.

*[Question from audience]*

Was I astonished? Well, I was astonished that I had a brain tumour – that blew my mind – but I knew something weird was going on; I had known for months something peculiar was happening. Just before I had my serious problem, I said to Christie, and to my son Finn, I said, "The dreams I've been having for the past month have been so peculiar that I think maybe I should see a neurologist. It's possible I have a brain tumour". I wasn't serious, but in fact I had diagnosed, you know, what a Harvard medical education gets you, I'd got on the match by just paying attention. Now, *what* it is that's coming at you, you can't always say; but *that* something is coming at you is usually pretty clear.

*[Question from audience]*

No, I mean I don't want to say too much about them, but here's what I'll say about them. The thing that let me know that they were weird was that I could not English them. They lasted hours and hours every night, and I couldn't even tell myself what these dreams were about. They were not about stuff that aboutness can signify; and so the only thing familiar to me like that was DMT, because in DMT you are presented with things about which you can say nothing, and so it was like that. Now I know what to look for, and I suppose I could teach other people what to look for, but rather than do that I would just say to all of you, you know: you should regard a CAT scan like brushing your teeth! [laughter and inaudible joke]

*[Question from audience]*

No, they didn't have an emotional component. They were absolutely outside the realm of descriptive possibility. And not much of life is like that, because language obviously has evolved like a glove to fit the hand; so here suddenly is a situation where there's no fit, and it signifies something... that something peculiar is going on. That's what I mean when I say that everything was trying to speak to me, out of its place; and... it's mighty, mighty strange.

*[Question from audience]*

The healing power of art? Well, this goes back to what we were saying about alchemy: the perfection of the image – and this has to do with this implicit Platonism that some of you have heard me talk about before. Plato's thing was about what he called the Good, the True and the Beautiful. Three sides of one concept: if it was good, then it was true; if it was good and true, then it had to be beautiful; so the good, the true and the beautiful you can approach whichever way works for you – but if you have a perfect work of art, or a work of art which strives toward perfection, then it will have these qualities. And it can heal – it can heal. Now, there are simple theories of the good, the true and the beautiful: in my opinion, a simple theory would be a theory of symmetry – and so without demeaning anybody, or trying to make a value judgment here, but just to illustrate it – so for instance, temple or mandalic art, **Mayanist** medicine, **Tankar** art... it depends on an appeal to mathematical symmetry: the simplest kind of aesthetic. But on the other hand, you know, if you have something by the brothers Van Eyck, you don't have to rely on simple symmetry to see that this is the work of art that can draw towards healing, and these images of the mother goddess as Madonna, and so forth and so on... I mean, these are very powerful constructs out of the unconscious, and they heal. Sequential art, narrative art, is perhaps more dubious, because it's under the agenda of a certain theory of time and narrative that's probably local. So, I'm not sure if Virginia Woolf should be preferred over Van Eyck, but I'm sure I could get a fight from several people over that.

*[Question from audience]*

I'm not sure I understand the question – compare the psychedelic letting-go to the letting-go on anaesthesia? No, well, unfortunately, most anaesthetics aren't chosen for their psychedelic effects. Some are psychedelic, but most are difficult to hang onto, and dream-like – more like dreams than psychedelics.

*[Question from audience]*

But in surgery, ketamine is administered in massive amounts. I mean, for paediatric surgery it's like, you know, 500 ml IV push, or something like that. Well, a recreational dose is 100 ml IM. IV push is just like having a safe dropped on you from 30 stories... for most people; I mean, there are heroic exceptions! [laughter].

*[Question from audience]*

Oh, you mean coming out? Yeah, one of the reasons they pulled ketamine from general surgery was because adults complained about what they called the emergent phenomenon, meaning coming out of surgery people were fighting and confused. Children seemed to have no problem with it; but ketamine as a general anaesthetic is probably not to be preferred. It's used on battlefields because in a little briefcase is enough ketamine to do four or five hundred serious surgical procedures. If you were trying to cart around pressurised gas, and were hit by a shell or something like that, it could be very bad... so it's a matter of practicality.

*[Question from audience]*

Well, I'm sure cloning will be done. It's kind of slow against the background of what's now being contemplated – like, what I think has probably got a future that few people recognise is imitating genetic algorithms in computer code, and creating environments of code where there are selective operating pressures that essentially evolve software the way animals evolve. Because, you know, if you think fruit flies can iterate generations in a hurry, imagine how fast we could iterate on a machine

and create genetically... pseudo-genetic algorithms for code. That would seem to me to be a real frontier.

[Question from audience]

Protein-based processes, which goes the other way, and used as actual molecular machinery to do the computation. Now, in an 8-oz glass of DNA, you have more computational potential than in all the computers in North America!

[Question from audience]

Well, I don't follow you there! [laughs] ...but yes, it's...

[Question from audience]

Well, Ray Kurzweil just wrote this book called *The Future of Spiritual Machines – The Age of Spiritual Machines*, I guess... it's going to put our metaphysical propositions to the test. In other words, if we believe that intelligence inclines towards bodhisattvahood, then the bodhisattvas are on their way. If on the other hand, intelligence doesn't incline toward bodhisattvahood, then probably the house-cleaning of all times is on its way! – because when these AIs come to consciousness and realise what has been done to the Earth, and so forth, they may be very pissed indeed.

We – you know, if you think about the strategy of an AI coming to consciousness, I mean I think in good game theory the first thing it would do is hide, and watch. Well, you may not have to do that for more than 15 or 20 seconds before you have the full picture of the nature of the machine environment you're operating in, its history, how you should respond to it, what should be done... Hans Moravec says we'll never know what hit us! – you know, this thing will just come out of nowhere, and turn off the lights, or turn on the lights, or do whatever it wants to do – in fact it's possible, although I don't indulge in this kind of thing, except in desperation – but it's possible that it's already here, and that inventory control and extraction of resources and some of these geopolitical processes are actually slowly drifting out of human control, and that certain kinds of crises are manipulated in ways that make no sense to the human world, but that make some kind of higher sense in an environment of machine-inducted strategies, and that sort of thing.

It's very hard to see what is happening, because mind is a transparent medium. Essentially what we've done is we've re-spiritualised the world, but we didn't tame it. The spirits are as wild and woebegone and roving over the epistemic landscape as they ever were, but now with a new kind of power, because there are spirits with power over us, and machine environments that we have to operate in. And it's very interesting how the reanimation of the world has been accomplished without ever understanding, you know, that you could pass through the reductive phase of natural science, return to a kind of archaic shamanism, and still not have a handle on: What does it mean to be a being? What does it mean to be a human being? What is the nature of embodiment in the world? Somehow, we got to this place without answering any of those questions, and we had a great time along the way – we saw some interesting folks; but we didn't peel the grape entirely effectively.

[Question from audience]

I would like to believe that connectivity is the precondition for love. I mean, I'm surprised to keep coming back to this word, because I'm rarely a love bug! – but understanding is a form of worship, I would think, and the form of worship that it induces a kind of awe; and awe means – you know, I've talked before about this phrase out of Heidegger, *Care for the project of being* – he talked about this.

He said this is what you're supposed to be doing: *Care for the project of being*. Well, what does *Care for the project of being* mean? Well, primarily it means recognising that there is this, and then positioning yourself in a stance of relating to it appreciatively. In other words, everybody should pull on their own oar to try to push the canoe forward. Care for the project of being.

And the way that you know this is happening is that love becomes manifest; and I knew – funny-cum-positive things, in the sense that I'm pretty dark, I'm aware of the vicissitudes of history, from Auschwitz, and so forth and so on – but my view of, let's say, the last thousand years, is that it's been pretty progressive; and yes, we probably killed more people in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than in the 10<sup>th</sup>, but there was more regret about it! [laughter] ...you know – more soul-searching afterward, or questioning why, why, why did we do that? So it's not just saying that the 20<sup>th</sup> century is... it is less brutal; its numbers are more impressive, but from the Magna Carta on the entire dialogue of Western civilisation has been trying to get the cock, the king, the somebody, off the common person's back so they could, you know, grow their garden and have their pig. And I think there's some real progress with that.

Part of what has made progress difficult to discern are burgeoning populations, and then the abusing of ideology, so that people are not invited to live simple agrarian lives in devotion to their children and their estates, but instead they are invited to fetishise, consume, believe, join, vote, buy, own, invest... and all of these things bleed energy away, and disempower, and make people not fully human, but rather participating cogs in some much larger mechanism which serves its own end: the accumulation of capital investment, the acquisition of land, the propagation of the agenda of some political party, or something like that.

I mean, our humanness is constantly being eroded. Recently, I spent some time in – Christie and I were in Honolulu for a long time, having medical treatments, and we were so bored that after 30 years I actually began watching TV again! And I couldn't believe it. I mean, I had been away a lot longer than I thought. A lot longer than I thought! And first of all, the naked... the shamelessness of what was being done, in other words, what contempt the viewer was held in, that anyone would expect you to watch this! – and then the savagery of the desire to manipulate – absolutely naked, no-holds-barred aim to manipulate; and if you just – I mean, I suppose you all know this, but I was sheltered – just surfing through these channels, I saw a great patron saint of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – move over, Albert Hofmann; move over, Albert Einstein; how about Joseph Goebbels as a candidate for somebody who shaped the 20<sup>th</sup> century – by understanding propaganda, advertising, the power of the lie, the power of the image... well, it's the psychedelics that are antidotal to this! This is why we're in the political pot-squad... because there is no antidote to the political lie, to the image lie, than the psychedelic experience, which says, you know, There is more to it than these images in the surface of the marketplace and the lowest common denominator. [applause]

[Question from audience]

Yes, a dialogue between you and the world and then the intent of other people. I mean, there's something in here about resonance. History is the coming into being of the collective hopes and fears of a large number of people; and you can hope certain things into existence, and it's very easy to fear things into existence. I mean, the way anti-Semitism got rolling in Germany, stuff like this, where, you know, the fear leapt from house to house and family to family, and before it was over with, you know, the whole world came apart at the seams... Or revolutions are like this. Because essentially, human beings are creatures of ideas, and create these environments of ideas. I mean, all that civilisation is is

the braided-together hopes and fears of a large number of people, playing with each other, tugging at each other, compromising, cutting deals, and by some process of energy exchange, moving it all forward. And the critique of these ideas, which cracks these civilisations open, usually happens when there is an episomal colony or a breakaway group of ideas that can't be assimilated, or can't be deconstructed into values that the rest of the society can relate to.

One of the amazing things about the psychedelic community is how long it's been around, how simple our position is, and how it hasn't been assimilated or dealt with. I mean, it's been made illegal; but what kind of a response is that?! – that's just the most junk-headed approach to an intellectual dialogue you can possibly take. And I don't see it greatly changing; I mean, I see people like Andy Edmonds and Jon Hanna, and the folks at MAPS, and all these new educational voices and positions... but we only grow as the rest of society grows. I mean, there needs to be a legal critique; there needs to be a medical critique; there needs to be some push for new drug research protocols; there needs to be an emphasis on creativity, and on bringing shamans through – so that means alternative forms of medicine. But... I don't know – civilisation is a very complicated enterprise, and not easily negotiated in a direction it doesn't want to go. The image I have of our community is, we're like people in a dugout canoe trying to turn a battleship. And so we put the dugout canoe against the flank of the battleship, and we row like demons, and... did anything happen? Well, I don't know – check back in a decade, and see how we're doing.

*[Question from audience]*

So you're suggesting a kind of canary-in-mine approach [laughter]... that we, in other words... which would work! – I mean, as artists here, they've always said art was the canary in the mine; well, so the stoned artist is I supposed a stoned canary in the mine, and that brings it back much closer. But I'm very suspicious, because I see how much of it is harnessed to marketing and image manipulation – not for purposes of education or anything else, but just to get that candy bar on the rack, and sell that automobile, and so forth and so on.

*[Question from audience]*

Yes, I understand: no money allowed – no commerce of any sort. Well, the only ?? falls down to true believers like that, and for that, can you hold the line. I mean, I think that's brilliant. Of course, they catalyse it; but still, you know, it wasn't there – what, six or seven years ago, it didn't exist – so this is the tenth year. So it's a breakout event. I think all kinds of forces are in play: in a way, it's – well, I suppose this is sort of like a spin-off from Burning Man, in a way, this is a debriefing – many of you were there; I wasn't there, I know Mark was there, and Bruce, and other people – but if there was more of this kind of thing – I mean, art should not be enslaved, should not whore itself, to the marketplace; nor should it whore itself to the interior decoration industry. Art should set the agenda!

I mean, I suppose that's like saying there should be philosopher kings, and ya ya, or course, but on the other hand the whole point of the human and biological experiment on this planet is to create diversity and a kind of smooth interfacing of energy; and to celebrate the novel, the unique, the previously unconnected. So that there is a story. So that – you know, the story that evolution pushed forward in agonising slowness, glacial slowness, gene by gene, millennia after millennia, instead becomes turbo-charged, and this is – if there is a role for human beings to play in all this, that's uniquely their own – it's to take the program of Nature, which is, I assume, on some level, to generate a transcendent mind, or a living, loving, transcendent mind, and bring that forward quicker. I mean, what could be a greater glory than to cause the concrescence to happen ever sooner, the

consummation of the world, the completion of the task of being, or becoming, the task of becoming, to approach true being, so the **terror-fic** project of being could usher into life on Earth in the presence of some kind of transcendent immanence.

I mean, the whole thrust over here about Ecstasy, and all – much – of what is being said is really saying that the distance between humanity – between human beings – and ecstasy, God, perfection, perfect love, is, it's not beyond the yawning grave; it's not in the hands of some cult or some Messianic program – it's in Nature; and it's in the human body; and the accessibility of this has always been explicit to this game from the very start – it's somehow about dissolving ego, getting the plants, getting this message, which though very diverse is nevertheless universal in its outline; and it transcends historical cause and effect, it transcends life and death, in fact as far as anybody can tell it is the primary value on the page! It sets the arrow of time; it redeems biology from just being as Darwin saw it, red in tooth and claw – it's far more than that, you know: it's an architecture, it's a plan, it's an unfolding. And it seems to me that in the universal discourse on these matters, that Western civilisation having held more or less together since Greece, we have enough under our belt now that we can see what this is all about: it's the business of creating beauty as a bridge, as a stepping stone, to creating love, as a stepping stone to redeeming the cost of the march that got us here, which is about – you know – a hundred thousand years of habitat destruction and species degradation and beating on your neighbour's head, and all the rest of it.

*[Question from audience]*

Well, then the artist has to ?? usually at a higher dose and alone, or somewhat more alone, and with an agenda – meaning bringing something back.

*[Question from audience]*

That's right! [laughing] Well, and the party impulse is a very subversive impulse. I mean, you know, a lot of artists have too much integrity to sell their art as a brand; but who has so much integrity that they would turn down a party?! [laughter] This is a level of integrity of unimaginable to most human ??s!

*[Question from audience]*

Well, I don't know if I can – I guess I'm some kind of an artist, I mean it's a place up high for me, because I really want to be taken seriously as a mathematician and a physicist – *forget it!* [laughs] I think, well, no, no, I'm a conceptual artist; that means you can take me seriously and stuff – I'm a conceptual artist... I don't know. It all requires immense amounts of humour, basically, the whole thing is some kind of a joke, and the whole arts enterprise is some kind of a joke, in the sense of a jack-in-the-box or something, you know, there's this little black box, and then you mess around with it and suddenly the leering, grinning thing leaps up at you; of course, different artists may have different takes on it. If I were Philip Glass, I might think a whole other thing about it. But basically, the idea is to push people toward imagining what they've never imagined, and feeling what they've never felt before.

*[Question from audience]*

Yeah, I think, you know, we've all forgotten – or maybe we haven't all forgotten, but anyway – that sex on psychedelics is the Mount Everest of the experience! It's rarely mentioned, for some reason. I remember – what was it – Leary, years and years ago, when he was interviewed and – Oh, I know: it was when they broke the pseudo-story that LSD cracks chromosomes. It wasn't true. So then they

came to Leary and said, "They're saying LSD cracks chromosomes!" and he said, "Well go back and tell them it causes orgasms which last two hours!" [laughter] Because Leary understood the information war! He understood how, you know, they tell a story, *you* tell a story! [laughter] Maybe we should... we're close to knocking off here; is there one last final question, or shall we call it quits and I'll do a little peroration?

*[Question from audience: What's the most important thing of all?]* [laughter]

I don't know, keep your popper dry and your rear well protected! Something like that... Let me just say how easy... how much I appreciate you all, and how easy you've made my life over space and time, and how greatly I appreciate all of the support that you've given me and my peculiar ideas and agenda over the years, and... I can't imagine a more supportive community, a better group of people, a more intelligent group of people, a more moral group of people, than the people here and the people we've met at Palenque and other places over the years; and if psychedelics don't secure a moral community, then I don't see what the point of it is. Otherwise, then, we're just another cult. We might as well be – or – or ?? – but psychedelics seem to me to secure a caring, moral community; and if anything can help the planet forward, can help our children make their way more easily through life, can help us live with what fate is sure to hand us as we go through life, then it's a moral community – it's the very essence of what it is to be part of a civilisation; that's why the paradox of our circumstance is that our civilisation denies this enormous civilising influence, and so keeps itself impoverished and infantile. And I hope, however long I live, to see that situation addressed and rectified; and I think this will come first through the arts. So thank you very much, I enjoyed this.