



EDITORIAL

by Gyrus

DREAMFLESH WAS CONCEIVED in despair and hope. Its roots are nurtured by these entwined opposites that characterise our “interesting times”. Either may lead to action: grasping at straws or at carrots dangled on sticks. Either may lead to inaction: why act when “all is doomed” or “everything will work out in the end”? When both play their part, when their hidden bond is quietly accepted, wholeness may flower.

Well, that’s the theory. Beautiful ideas and expressions are all well and good, even essential; but they inspire as much, if not more, in their creation as in their reception. It is hoped that this journal will not be just read, but also inspire creative acts that try to embrace wholeness—to find everything in a discarded fragment, to discover personal relationships within alienated grandiosities.

THROUGH THE LAST decade of the 20th century I edited and published *Towards 2012*, a journal inspired by the late Terence McKenna’s notion that the exponentially accelerating pace of human culture points to a unthinkable transition in the very near future. Just as the *coincidentia oppositorum*, an irreducibly paradoxical union, lies at the heart of mystical and psychological traditions of self-discovery, this

union was perceived to be the nature of the “transcendental object at the end of time”, as McKenna envisioned this transition. Because this improbable attractor emits waves of influence back through time, the unfolding of history was predicted to become ever more contradictory and paradoxical as we approach.

Amidst the realities of the early 21st century, much of the “2012” model now seems quaintly literalist. While I don’t dismiss the possibility of this date holding something mysterious, I do dismiss anything approaching rigid adherence to dubious cosmic schedules.

Nevertheless, the paradoxes are indeed multiplying. The balance between prospects of catastrophe or breakthrough seems impossible to fathom. Each possibility reveals aspects of the other as their apparent opposition fragments into a chaotic dance. The despair of material limitations and mortality, and the hope of millennia of ceaselessly creative invention; the despair of knotted thoughts and hollow dreams, and the irrepressible hope called “the survival instinct”, whose cunning is inscribed in our animal bodies.

AT THE CORE of the obsessions represented here is something often referred to with that tired, self-fulfilling philosophical phrase, “the mind/body problem”. Of course, this human dichotomy relates to many other dualistic pairings: male/female, spirit/matter, light/dark, and so on. We want to shed the dead-ends that most attempts to tackle these dualisms have led to, through a multiplicity of tactics. Dualism is not defeated through direct opposition—this, of course, feeds it. We want artful reformulations that blur the boundaries and create a dance; cathartic intensifications that push opposites to the place where they become each other; complexifications that transcend dualistic thinking, by adding a mediating or tricksterish third player into the game,¹ or by inviting a refreshing rabble in, a polytheistic multitude to oust

1. See *The Good, The Bad & The Funny* by Adamai Philotunus (The Mouse That Spins, 2002).

the godawful dullness of monotheism; ecstatic union that nevertheless resists centralizing tendencies and remains open-ended...

We want to extend outwards, re-evaluating our relationship as individuals to society, and especially our relationship as a species to the rest of the biosphere. It is here, in ecological consciousness, that science and animist religion or magic find common ground. They're often prissy about each other, but they've been apart for a while and need to get reacquainted. To know each other well enough to allow each other their own domain. For each to bring their wisdom to bear on this vital overlap: the maintenance of ecological balance.

And inward, downward, into our selves—selves as plural because there are many beings in the world, and selves as plural because there are many beings *within*. We contain a community of selves, as our dreams show us each night. Dysfunctions in the web of relationships inside us are of a piece with the social and ecological maladies all around. Sometimes the connections are subtle or counter-intuitive; sometimes they are so obvious we persistently neglect them.

Looking across space, and back through time, is always crucial to addressing dysfunction within your own culture. I reject all linear approaches to this, whether it be the positivist model of cumulative historical “advance”, or the idea that we can simply rewind back through the track of “progress” to a simpler state of being. That said, animist cultural paradigms from around the world and throughout history (in addition to Nature herself) offer a wealth of hints, tools and inspiration for our efforts to cultivate our irreversibly technological society along more harmonious lines. Especially when it comes to our chronically confused ideas about the relations between the material and psychological or spiritual realms.

For instance, it seems to me that animist cultures such as the tribes of the Amazon are able to allow more cross-fertilization between spirit and matter because of their *intimacy with both*. While no Amazonian shaman would confuse a “magic dart” with a real one, as might a schiz-

ophrenic, their close familiarity with either end of the spectrum—the sensual realities of the jungle and the fathomless intricacy of the spirit world—may be the key to their ability to allow each realm ingress into the other, to see one realm in terms of the other. The borderlands, so heavily patrolled in our culture, usually only accessed by psychotics who burst through the fences without guidance, are allowed to become areas of interaction between the two worlds. Nature and material culture can be imbued with the luminosity of soul, the qualitative value that holds human interest and engenders our care and attention; and psychological complexes and images embodying the complexities of the world at large—spirits, if you will—can be addressed with the matter-of-factness and sophistication accorded to other humans.

Animism cannot be imported as a discrete paradigm, to be donned like some ethnic garment. It does not need to be; it forms a deep infrastructure in our psychogenetic make-up, with up to 170,000 years of successful adaptation to its credit. Our recent millennia or few of frantic splitting from it is assumed by many to be an inevitable arc away from this obscure but dominant chapter in our history. Reality, as ever, will no doubt prove more ambivalent and intricate than this tunnel vision. Regarding the success of our break from animist engagement with the world, the jury is still out. But they seem to be close to a decision.

SINCE THE FIRST Neolithic cities, we have perpetually refined our capacity to decouple our success from the limitations of natural ecologies. Fuelled by beliefs in deities abstracted from the biosphere, and by a progressive suppression of the cyclical mutuality of life and death found in pagan cultures, our ability to manipulate the world through technology has gradually veered away from any purely practical role in helping us survive and enjoy life in the present moment. A demonic element has come into play.

Is this demon serving life or inimical to it? Are the trials of ecologi-

cal devastation and human inequality to be seen from the perspective of geological timescales—messy transformative steps as life reaches for the stars, straining to be birthed out of its earthly womb? Or are they the sorry consequences of a very human hubris, the psychotic inflation of self-image in a species struggling like a narcissistic child with its very recently developed self-awareness?

In *TechGnosis*, Erik Davis characterizes the technological demon as a trickster, earthing our Christianized image of the demonic back into the ambivalence of mythical tricksters such as Loki and Hermes. Such an image seems prudent; evidently technology is a boon in many respects, but our vision of it as an unqualified force for good has often left us helpless in the face of its shadow.

Weaponry has usually formed the leading edge of technological development, and nuclear weaponry formed the 20th century's terrible apotheosis of centuries of intellectual striving. Conceived as a race against the possible development by the Nazis of similar technology, the Manhattan Project generated a momentum independent of this expedient goal. Speaking of his work at Los Alamos developing the atomic bomb, Robert Wilson said:

I would like to think now that at the time of the German defeat, I would have stopped and taken stock, and thought it all over very carefully, and that I would have walked away from Los Alamos at that time. In terms of everything I believed in before and during and after the war, I cannot understand why I did not take that act. On the other hand, I do not know of a single instance of anyone who made that suggestion or who did leave at the time. . . . Our life was directed to do one thing. It was as though we had been programmed to do that and as automatons were doing it.²

This unconsciousness now seems to be diffused throughout civi-

2. Quoted in *Dreaming the End of the World* by Michael Ortiz Hill, p. 32.

lization, creeping into both large-scale and innocuous corners of life. From the perilously sluggish political, corporate and social response to climate change, to individuals simply accepting a plastic bag in a shop when they physically don't need one. Billions of thoughtless acts and neglected pangs of conscience form a destructive power at least equal that of the Bomb, aimed via the convoluted matrix of globalized capitalism at the rest of the natural world, which we began walling ourselves off from thousands of years ago.

Speaking of the transition in our psyches between the threat of nuclear holocaust and that of ecological collapse, Michael Ortiz Hill remarks:

The profundity of the image of the mushroom cloud has been a blessing and a curse—both terrifying us into wakefulness and numbing us with its immensity, inspiring awe and assuring helplessness. It is possible that the earth's ecological desecration will not yield to us an image of that magnitude. The slow disappearance of species, the unravelling of the web that happens imperceptibly within our "progress" might be a very quiet apocalypse. For that reason, our vision needs to be exceptionally acute, our imaginations alive, and our hearts willing to break. In a society addicted to anaesthetics of one kind or another, this may be a very large demand, but nothing less than the world is at stake.³

A FEW WORDS should be said, then, about the fact of this journal being printed rather than distributed via the web. It would be easy to glance at the multitude of print publications, distributed by the lorry-load every week, and encouraging nothing but mindlessness, and say: "There are much worse things." This is true; but if that's where your buck stops, there only needs to be one mindless fuckwit and we can all rest easy in our foibles on his account.

3. *Dreaming the End of the World*, p. 157.

My own experience is that the web is the technological trickster *par excellence*. It promises a multitude of blessings, and delivers some. But, as we think we all know, the medium carries its own message. Reading on a computer, we lose the sense of touch and smell that we have holding a book, uprooting us from the imprinted *sensorium* that most of us associate with the unfolding of knowledge from texts, and with our imaginative interaction with them. And crucially, especially as broadband proliferates, the screen seethes constantly with possibilities. Your peripheral awareness, if not vision, is crowded with the chaos formed by practically limitless streams of information. In these circumstances, retaining a quiet depth of imaginative focus seems to be a meditative challenge even for a Tibetan monk.

We embrace the new modalities of interaction and information sharing delivered by the web. However, we refute the linear evolutionary mindset that deems one form of media as “past it” as soon as a new one appears. The reflective shifts of consciousness we’re aiming at here seem to be best achieved through print. The existence of the web can goad us into a sharper awareness of how print media impact the environment, in turn encouraging us all—in both writing and reading—to try to make every piece of paper and every drop of ink count. To make matter, once again, matter.

THE AIM HERE is not singular. Style and content will gravitate in certain directions due to my own obsessions and tastes, but I seek broader as well as deeper engagements with this journal’s multi-faceted concerns.

Occult writers figure heavily here due to the fact that the position of the magician is so deeply suspect, ridiculed or ignored in our culture that it—ironically—affords a certain useful objectivity. Not a sober, placid kind of objectivity, but one formed by deep obsessions, traumatic experiences, and a taste for the bizarre. Those who thrive may emerge with extensive knowledge of navigating between power and psychosis,

between myth and reality—and the world needs as much input on these problems as possible. Their occlusion from every respectable “discipline” makes them radically non-partisan. Few academics will actively fold gnostic experience into their research (at least, not publicly); but occultists are usually eager magpies, who will happily study the latest academic works in support of their esoteric quests. And it seems that whichever direction our civilization takes—Singularity, collapse, or anywhere in between—the ontological flexibility of the magician will inevitably be something to learn from.

I hope to bring many fields and perspectives to bear on our concerns here. Science and academia, as their ranks absorb more generations of people raised in increasingly psychedelic and broad-minded cultures, are generating more and more interesting ideas. Journalistic reports are necessary to add social and ecological context to more subjective explorations. And personal, sensual expressions can help deflate any excess of abstracted zeal, any tendency to lose immediate reality in the shadows of large ideas. Let a thousand flowers bloom...

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Further reading

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- Ballard, J.G., *Quotes*. RE/Search Publications, 2004. Incisive snippets, more relevant than ever, from Shepperton's visionary.
- Bulkeley, Kelly, *Among All These Dreamers: Essays on Dreaming and Modern Society*. State University of New York, 1996. An excellent collection aimed at overturning the Western belief that dreams are of purely private importance.
- Diamond, Jared, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. Penguin, 2005. A brilliant education in past societal collapses.
- Dukes, Ramsey, *The Little Book of Demons: The Positive Advantages of the Personification of Life's Problems*. Aeon Books, 2005. Subversive self-help from one of the best modern occult writers.
- Gray, John, *Al Qaeda and What It Means to be Modern*. Faber & Faber, 2003. Cuts away the post-Christian delusions of secular liberalism.
- Hillman, James, *The Thought of the Heart and the Soul of the World*. Spring Publications, 1992. An inspired call to an animistic social awareness bursts the bounds of private therapy.
- Louv, Jason (ed.), *Generation Hex*. Disinformation, 2006. Contemporary magic lived, suffered and celebrated.
- Tudge, Colin, *So Shall We Reap: What's Gone Wrong With the World's Food—and How To Fix It*. Penguin, 2004. An eye-opening survey of the many problems faced by world agriculture.

Websites

- The Anthropik Network: <http://anthropik.com>. Preparing for post-civilized tribalism from a “cultural materialist” perspective.
- WorldChanging: <http://www.worldchanging.com>. Smart ideas and solutions in response to our technological and social problems. Watch out for the forthcoming book.