



## The Alchemy of Creativity and the Social Artist

The social artist has an obligation to his or her own creativity as well as to being an inducer of creativity in others. This requires a reflection on the very nature of the creative if we are going to be fine evocateurs of creative innovation and change in and for others.

When we look at the lives of great creative souls - we find that they feel themselves to be hooked up to, guided, incarnated by or allied by a power that is beyond or deep within themselves. This power is felt as an inner spirit, a vision, an inward voice, an invisible life's companion, and can be formidable motivation for a quest for truth. There is a mystery here that verges on the paranormal, and shakes hands with the infinite.

The people of the breakthrough, the ones who change our perception of reality because of the power of their own unique perceptions differ from most of us, I believe, largely in degree not in kind. Discuss how we all have something of the same capacities that they have but theirs is taken to a degree of development that most of us consider more mythic than real. We all have capacities for vision, for motivation, for absorption, for courage, for facing constant defeat, for stick-to-it-ness, but most of the time we have it with one of these qualities singularly, rarely together. With the highly creative person as with the social artist, it is their degree of vision joined to talent joined to motivation, joined to absorption in the quest, joined to formidable courage in the midst of the bleakest and most disempowering circumstance, joined to a leaping at opportunity when it comes by, a sense of their own *kairos* and a willingness to go the distance with it- this is what makes for brilliance, for radical creativity, for formidable Social Artistry and yes, even, sometimes, for genius. It also means that they and you move out of mere humanity and into myth.

Genius is tied up with genesis, with generation, with creation in its finest form. Genius may even mimic Creation, may be the micro lens of the Creator entering into human experience for a while. And, it is the very lifeblood and bones of the social artist. For if you are nothing else you are all about genesis, ingenuity, generation, and engendering!

It is never solitary, cut off, or insular though it may appear to others to be just that. It is resonant with stores of information felt as personal. It is love in its most emphatic aspect, passion in its most blatant form. Above all it is the dissolution of the membranes of the local self and absorption, communion, identity even with Reality itself. It is this capacity for communion that is the greatest of all hidden talents, the ability to be changed by the process of deep perception, contemplation into the nature of things. Emily Dickinson as was her wont said it best, and told it true:

There's a certain slant of light  
On winter afternoons  
That oppresses like  
The weight of cathedral tunes

...Heavenly hurt it gives us  
We can find no scar,  
But internal difference  
Where the meanings are?

The genius, the innovator perceives the hidden reality behind reality and takes it as his or her task to communicate this reality to others. (As Virginia Woolf says in another way, her "shock-receiving" capacity is a vital part of her writing power and, in fact is part of what made her a writer, for "...a shock is at once in my case followed by the desire to explain it." Thus they extend the boundaries of the world, open the doors of perception, give us a larger, clearer, more-faceted universe and sometimes an entirely new one.

One of the things that John Briggs does in his wonderful study of creativity and genius, *Fire in the Crucible* is detail what exactly goes into the alembic of creativity. Let us look at some of these ingredients and work with them from a somewhat different point of view than the one he takes.

Briggs speaks of themata as informing the lives of many geniuses. Beginning with themata for example --what are they, what is their deeper purpose and meaning? I see them as patterns of creation for which we are specially tuned, each of us tuned differently by the special sense organs in ourselves which pick up variations on these themes throughout the world. The famous example of the child Einstein and his fascination with the magnetic operation of the compass which then influenced his entire life of looking for the electromagnetic field in the unified field of reality. Each of us then is given as our gift a kind of guiding visionary theme which recurs throughout our life, and when we attend to it as an ally and helper, it gives us unique perspectives on working with reality. They stay with us because of their strong emotional component when we touch into them. Perhaps, in some way they relate to the Beloved of the soul, the archetypal friend and companion, the one who is our partner in the depth world. Just as we sometimes speak of Guardian Angels, perhaps we can speak of Guardian themes which are given us to help chart our path. Scientists may see this friend almost entirely within the province of the themata and literally fall in love with an abstraction--felt as god-like. Darwin waxes positively sacramental about the theme of gradualism in evolution--it becomes the universe unfolding itself through time. Einstein was positively religious, and stood in mystic rapture before the notion of the unified field of Reality. The rapture, the wild attraction and sense of rightness serves to establish the commitment, the engagement to

a lover, a friend, who is at once a mystery to be deciphered, an abundance to be explored.

Now these great themes appear as fractals, vibrations in different modes and events throughout ones life. Examples drawn from Virginia Woolf's early childhood listening to waves, and then the effects of waves on her writing, in which she builds up levels and levels of repeating sets of waves --and writes *To A Lighthouse* and *The Waves*. She gets into the very nuance of it-- the emotion, color, smell, cadence, subtle knowing of it--and that nuance carries her like some ephemeral but nonetheless very efficient magic carpet wherever her mind and art would roam. As Briggs suggests, "it appears that for many geniuses an obsession with some particular nuance or complex of nuances burns at the core of vision." (Build up as picture: the vision that is always there as our entelechy?, The themata of ones life which are the fractal themes that repeat themselves and that trigger the vision, and the complex of nuances playing as the auric field around and within these themata, which trigger ones commitment to the thematic.)

**Exercise:** What is your theme as a social artist and what are its nuances, how do they strive to play themselves out in your role as a social artist.. Think of it as the magic carpet given perhaps at birth for you to ride. Briggs describes nuance as the "aura that surrounds a thema or several themata, the energy that infuses thematic convictions. It is the vibrating field around thematic magnets." p. 47.

What is innate in the neurophysiology of these things?. Consider the triune brain, each part of which I suspect has its own transcendent function. For example: the old brain, which includes spinal cord and what Paul Maclean calls the reptilian complex, governs the basic elements of attention and arousal. It is the brain of survival and basic life energies. Stored within it perhaps as its transcendent function is its capacity for kundalini -- an evolutionary potential for a new order of energy and transformation that uses the ancient structures as a vehicle through which it may enter, energize and increase ones evolutionary potential.

The next brain to emerge in evolution is the paleo mammalian brain which includes the limbic system, the hypothalamus, the place of pleasure and right next to it, the amygdala, the place of rage.. Included also are the functions for heart, blood pressure, respiration, digestion and hormonal activity, which means of course that all of the emotional components of our being are situated in the limbic system of this old mammalian brain. It is very important to note that the hippocampus is also located here. Most researchers now feel that it is this organ that serves as the retrieval system for memory. It allows us to take our long term memories and make them current and put our more recent memories into long-term storage. Thus it is extremely important for both dreaming as well as creativity. The limbic system also mixes and matches what we receive from our senses allowing us an integrated perception that is still loaded with emotional content. The transcendent function is one, I believe, of radical identification, radical communion with any one and anything that we see. The mystic sense of union which is at the same time total empathy and utter seeing from both inside and outside

is located neurologically in this part of the brain as its ultimate potential. The third brain -- as MacLean describes it -- the neo cortex or new mammalian brain, with its integration of right and left hemispheres gives us our capacity for thought, abstraction, data processing, linear analytic thinking as well as intuitive, creative, inventive and imaginative thinking. It allows us to abstract from all our perceptions in such a way that we become creators and constantly help in the reinvention of the world. The pre frontal lobes of this cortex gives us our vision, our intentionality and the passion to extend the boundaries of our world. On the transcendent level the function is that of the creator; in this brain we are a microcosm of creation itself. Perhaps it is our god lens through which we join, in our own local space and time, the cosmic intentionality.

But without feedback of interlocking loops of electrical and hormonal activity circulating between these three brains there would be no nuance, no feeling tones, no passion for creation.

I suspect that most geniuses or highly creative people keep their childhoods up -- to put it nicely -- or reside in a state of developmental impairment -- to put it meanly. They simply stew much longer and information is not processed in any particular mode -- as with infants. Instead, as with infants and small children, information is stimulating for its own state, is electrically active in the brain, without falling into set categories. Piaget would not know what to do with geniuses. Thus they always stay in a state of wonder and incompleteness. This is what pulls them forward. Perhaps we could speak then for a greater capacity for resonance and overtone, a special sensitivity to the enjoyment of the nuance of things. One always finds in the study of the phenomenology of creativity that people who keep their capacity for feeling tones and enjoying their emotional resonance with that which they are studying, have a much larger ability than most of us for understanding complexity. That is because, I think, they allow this emotional information to loop continuously through all channels and stations of the brain. So that the feeling tones act as an organizing focus, allowing relevant data to continuously link up. This limbic system, neo cortex loop when kept active, allows for a constant interaction between that which is coming from outside -- information, perception -- with that which is coming from inside -- thought, reflection, internal imagery, memory, dream. When this is then brought to bear upon a particular study or creative activity then one is in a hothouse for coaxing creative innovation into the world. Feelings, thoughts, memories and perceptions course into each other in a pulsating field, a rich, rich field in which the creative idea is seeded and is marvelously well nourished so that inevitably it grows and flourishes.

Original grace is how I experience this -- Neurologists like Matti Bergstrom call it the cloud of possibilities and he believes that it is a pure electrical field of neuroelectric impulses from the brain stem. To me it is experienced in the early morning state, before my neocortex has kicked in, as a state of amplified pure being. If I with great delicacy then -- so that I can

stay open to this possibility cloud -- drop in an emotion or gentle in an idea, then I discover that this electrical field or possibility cloud or great wave of original grace envelops the idea with its power and patterns, giving me new information, new thoughts, new possibilities of seeing and being.

The question also arises as how to bring forth these states during ordinary waking consciousness. A very major way would seem to be the manner I have discussed in previous writings about gaining skill in the use of internal imageries connected with altered states of consciousness. By shifting level as in altered states you allow again for the propagation of the field of neuro-electric impulse which serves as a referent beam upon which the concerns of the neocortex can play in a manner which allows you to find a plethora of new connections, new possibilities. Then, as you practice these things you will find that your brain-mind system continues to keep up this creative activity even though you are asleep or unaware, so that self-creating works of art or invention which have been gestating beneath the surface crust of consciousness suddenly are there for you to use and discover. You may feel some guilt about acknowledging these productions as your own but the fact is by allowing for the larger play of realities you served as the producer of the play of consciousness. You just weren't aware, nor should you have been, of what the other players were doing. Expand the theatrical metaphor with the brain.

It is my belief that the ultimate impetus behind creativity is the establishment of an identity between the personal and the universal. You have heard me speak of myth as that which allows for a growing identity between the personal particulars of your human existence with the personal universals of mythic heroic existence. Now I'm suggesting something much larger, to wit that the whole blooming universe, its story and its unfolding is about the creation of multitudes of personal particulars who contain the mythic spiritual resonance of the universal and through their creativity are recapitulating on a microcosmic scale the very nature and process of the creation itself.

There has been much written in our time of the desire to achieve wholeness, perhaps more so than in any time in history. The word holistic itself implies the desire to bring in all attributes, all possibilities. With genius however, these are not vague aspirations; there is instead a wild hunger to go cosmic, to understand everything, to utterly justify our being. Because let's face it folks, we are that intersection between cosmology and biology. Our work whether it be a poem, a play, a social project, the creation of a new organization, a therapeutic procedure, a relationship, a new way of being or the reinvention of ourselves, serves as the interface, the marvelous madcap melange of everyday muchness, between the creator and the cosmos. It's not unlike what William Faulkner said about the world he created in his stories of Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. "I like the idea of the world I created being a kind of keystone in the universe. Feel that if I ever took it away the universe around that keystone

would crumble away. If they believed in my world in America the way they do abroad, I could probably run one of my characters for president.”

It is as if worlds grow in us like whole symphonies grew in Mozart, like fields of mathematics grew in the soil that was Descartes. If you would be so bold as to investigate your own private network of enterprises, the spill of projects and plans, explorations that tumble through your life, you would see a remarkable growing up among and between these networks, one that seems to have its own life for which you are the progenitor. And if you were to take this further, and begin to craft this world, then you would be at the very center of this again and discover what your place in the ongoing equation between the universal and the individual. You would come much closer to your own reason for being. You will discover, too, that any part that you make will represent the whole. To me the finest statement of this was made by Leonardo Da Vinci, discussing the meaning and importance of his own paintings, “Every body placed in the luminous air spreads out in circles and fills the surrounding space with infinite likenesses of itself and appears all in all and all in every part. This is the real miracle, that all shapes, all colors, all images of every part of the universe are concentrated in a single point.”

This is not to say that there isn't ambivalence. Just remember when you are tormented by unfinished projects, the agony of the great Leonardo himself who existed in a torment of self hatred because of finishing so little, the ambivalence that the creator feels toward the creation, may be both the shadow and the impetus for the creative process itself. Creative people blame themselves, but I personally believe that it is part of the entropy process of the universe. It has been my experience that whenever I was trying to do something truly innovative every bit of trivia rose up to keep me from my task, every roaring self-doubt I had ever had loomed before me to vitiate my intent, to challenge my commitment. This is perhaps part of the homeostasis effect by which the earth tries to keep itself going on in the same way. As creator and innovator, one is required to prove the commitment to ones pursuits, the power of ones will and courage to create. After a while reality relents and you are allowed to cross the threshold into new creation.

As social artists, how do you get around this ambivalence, not be plagued with feelings of suicide as was Hemingway or driven to drown one's creativity in drink or drugs, as were too many or get caught in one or another obsessive cycle of some repetitive action or task that would take up so much of your time and interest that you could justify your lack of creation. There are I believe several ways. One is to observe your nausea quotient. I find for example that with myself, that whenever I am staying away from creation too long either in small or larger cycles I am afflicted by little and then larger increments of nausea. I am caught in a static loop and the nausea warns me that it is time to get back to the task or experience even greater nausea and self-disgust.

Another is to take everything that you really are ambivalent about -- men, women, your own inadequate childhood -- and write it out, play it out, turn it into satire, make it interact with the wildest associations. One of the great hidden talents that all human beings have is for associative thinking, and there I something about the impossible association that breaks the hold of the ambivalence over us. Picasso, for example, whose wife spent four hours every morning just coaxing him to get out of bed and get on with it, could only actually do so after he had thought of an impossible association that would shatter all expectations.

Another way is to get a high tolerance of ambivalence, what Keats called a Negative capability which he describes as being when a person "is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." What we would now call holding the tension between things, or living at our edges. Fortunately, we live at a time that is History at its edges, and which demands our genius as well as our ability to act.

One of the most creative times in my life is when I was a member of the Tarrytown Group with Margaret Mead. We held monthly meetings over issues which we were confident we couldn't solve. We knew they were impossible so we did it lightly and joyfully. We were playing at being social artists and so we became artists of society. This allowed more of our skills to come forth. Using a kind of negative capability, we explored all the conflict and polarities inherent in the issues and ended up finding viable solutions to virtually all the problems we dealt with. Sometimes at the ends of these meetings we experienced something not unlike the coincidence of opposites that mystics experience, the state of mystical union. This leads one to another way of getting over ones ambiguity, and that is to identify with ones higher nature or archetypal friend, who is immersed in the realm of pattern and creation anyway. One lets ones personality become leaky and thus available to the archetype and it is from there then that one does ones creative work. Substantially unbothered by the nagging resentments and cavilling of ones local self.

