



The Jumps of Jump Time

I often attend conferences of high-minded folk from many disciplines that address the problems of an old world passing into a new. The millennium has brought many to the table. Some are radical visionaries proposing utopian global house cleaning. Others are reformers devoted to redressing old wrongs. Each attempts to push the membrane that wraps us in unknowing. With all their practical skill and accomplishments, they are humble before the mystery of a world in transition.

“It is as if we are in a giant womb, trying to figure out what happens next,” a United Nations official said to me recently at the State of the World Forum.

I was startled by her remark, for earlier that day, I had been chatting about international politics with a Bulgarian cab driver as he drove me around San Francisco at dawn looking for an open Kinkoís so I could print out from disk the speech I was to give.

“I have just been present at the birth of my daughter,” he told me. “I was very afraid, for I had never seen such a thing. It was very messy and very beautiful. And after all the hours of my wifes labor and the painful contractions, a new life! Maybe that is what is trying to happen in our world.”

I often describe my work as a kind of midwifery. Organizations and cultures, as well as individuals, sometimes need a steadying hand as they birth themselves into a world as strange and unexpected as the one babies face when they emerge from the womb. If we are to grow up to become stewards of the Jump Time that is upon us, I tell them, we must make the best use our capacities. This is the task of Social Artistry--to help people gain access to their enormous innate capacities and then bring these to bear upon the canvas of social change.

Our bodies and minds are coded with an extraordinary array of possibilities and potentials. Some no doubt were cooked in ancient caves. Others were laid down even earlier. On the genetic scale, we humans encompass all that has gone before. We are inheritors of the star stuff from which life came and relatives of every organism on the planet. The remembrances of things past are coded into our bodies. We crawl with single-cell organisms and are home to a universe of bacteria. Briny oceans pool in our blood. Our brain is a nested creature, its oldest reptilian and amphibian core covered over by mammal and human brains--and the promise of something burgeoning, something more.

When my research has given me the opportunity to take depth soundings of the continents within human beings, I have marveled at the enormity we contain. Somewhere in the vast treasure trove of the body/mind, I am convinced; we remember everything we have learned over the past 13.8 billion years. We are the ultimate evolutionary hybrids, and the vigor of human genetic inheritance, if we could but claim it and work with it, is more than enough for us to get on with it.

Michael Murphy in *The Future of the Body* argues persuasively that human capacities stand on the shoulders of earlier evolutionary developments, even as they move toward extraordinary complexity and application:

We can cultivate somatic awareness and control. . . . Because nerve cells that evolved from analogous structures in the earliest vertebrates are deployed throughout our bodies. Relaxation exercises are effective because we possess a parasympathetic system that developed during the long course of mammalian evolution. We can become creatively absorbed in work, perhaps, because we have inherited capacities for catalepsy, analgesia, and selective amnesia that facilitate escape and hunting.

In short, self-regulation skills, regenerative relaxation, and performance trance, like other kinds of creative functioning, are based on capacities that developed among our animal forbears. And while transformative practices draw upon our animal inheritance, they also employ uniquely human activities. The imagination we use to enjoy books can be cultivated to induce metanormal cognitions or to facilitate extraordinary physical skills. The self-reflection we sometimes practice when confronted by difficulty can be deepened by means of sustained meditation. . . . (Los Angeles:Tarcher, 1992, 543)

Each evolutionary jump that we can name in the history of the universe is clear to us because some human jumped to see it and then created a story about it, which we could understand. A primitive hand finds a stick, sees it as a tool and uses it to find food. Guttural sounds deep in the throat give warnings, directions, and eventually express thoughts and feelings. Ice melts; caves give way to huts and houses; women collect wild seeds and poke them into the ground. A man watches grapes being crushed, and the printing press is born. Moon longings become moon landings. What we see in evolution is the push towards greater levels of complexity, increasing diversity, organization, and connectivity. Looking back at how we got here may provide us with clues to where we are headed:

The first jump was the Big Bang, an explosion of light and sound so intense that whatever was before or from some otherwhere imploded itself into a tiny charge of hydrogen and jumped into universal form.

Then, some five billion years ago, a supernova reached Jump Time, and with an unimaginably fierce explosion, offered itself to the Universe in billions of pieces.

Another jump came for us when elements spun out of the explosion, coalesced into a ball that condensed into our mother, our molten planet.

Many jumps of cooling, crusting, boiling, steaming, raining. Seas form, the crust roils, land masses jump and shift, break off and crawl over each other, pulverizing everything in their wake. Meteors whiz by, raising blinding dust storms, or carom into the earths crust,

tossing pieces of it sky high.

It's a set up for the biggest jump of all--life. Lightning spikes the Earth. Molecules break apart and recombine, jumping through change after chemical change.

At the edges of the rock in the shallow waters the feast of life begin. Giant proteins play with RNA and DNA. Some jump to form enzymes, which hurry everything along. Nucleic acids hold the information to make the huge jump to self-replication. Molecules build on each other, combine and recombine, building ever-larger structures, modeling and learning from each other.

JUMP! Cell walls that move and flex, letting food in and wastes out.

JUMP! Bacteria form, creating food for themselves. As a waste product--a deadly poison, oxygen, is released.

JUMP! Cope with oxygen.

JUMP! Grow or die! Cooperate or perish! Make agreements! Enjoy diversity. Put it to work.

JUMP! The mothers and fathers of us all are born--the nucleated cell!

JUMP! Cell mitosis.

JUMP! Sexual reproduction--organisms unite so the species can continue.

Plants, JUMP! Sea creatures, JUMP! Land creatures, BIG JUMP! Dinosaurs, insects, flowers, birds.

JUMP! Heads up, snouts rise, eyes converge, brain grows!

JUMP! Walking upright.

JUMP! Vocal communication.

JUMP! Awareness of ourselves.

JUMP! Tool-making, clothes wearing, plant gathering, seed setting, wheel turning, horse taming, water channeling, plow rooting, loom spinning, food storing, star charting, tower building, metal smelting, myth telling, hieroglyphs and cuneiform and alphabets to record all this.

JUMP! Bureaucracy and Empire, religions and scriptures. Buddha, Confucius, Pythagoras, Christ.

JUMP! Book scribing, print pressing, art making, play writing. Telescopes, microscopes, spectrosopes, stethoscopes. Renaissance, revolution, resettling, migration. Liberty, fraternity, equality, democracy.

JUMP! Vaccination, sanitation, medication, refrigeration. Computers! Air travel, space travel, life extending, gender choosing, species making. World links, world banks, global village. And here we are, because it's JUMP TIME!

And the jumps continue, for it seems inevitable that future developments will follow this path. Everything is accelerating, the jumps coming closer together. Human knowledge is doubling every ten years. Our mapping of the genetic sequences of the DNA molecule is doubling every two years. Computer power is doubling every eighteen months. The Internet is doubling every year. And of course, almost daily, we read of new advances in space exploration, computer technology, medical science, telecommunications, each jump in complexity occurring in a fraction of the time of the previous one. Reading the science pages of the New York Times, I am reminded of the words of the prophet Daniel: "Many shall run . . . to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." [Dan:12.4)

Churning as we are in this sea of so much change, jumps abound in our everyday lives as well. Our lives now regularly contain many times the amount of experience of our ancestors of earlier centuries; as a result, our personal jumps seem to be accelerating in frequency as well as amplitude. We are heirs to an extraordinary speeding up of the evolutionary process. We jump to new professions, partners, lifestyles, and religions seemingly at will. Nothing, it seems, is impossible for us. Nature, through us, seems to be entering a new epoch--not so much biological evolution but conscious evolution. We have become conscious of our capacity to direct the next phase, not only of our personal lives, but of the world's destiny as well.

We have become conscious of our capacity as Social Artists to help direct the social process of evolution.