



Quo Vadis Social Artistry?
Social Artistry Network Conference Call
 Tuesday, March 7, 2006
 NOTES L. Reisser

We stand at a critical moment in earth's history. As social artists, we believe that another world is possible, and that we can live it into being.

One of the people I admire, Joanna Macy, has been speaking a lot lately about "the great turning." The 5000 year era of empire is dying. The earth community is rising. I've been calling it "the global civilization."

Look at all the things that have accelerated in the world. What do they say about the role of the social artist? All of the different patterns and forms and infrastructures that were birthed in the old era are falling apart. Beneath the chaos, something extraordinary is taking form, from the manure or carcass of the older empire. We are so wrapped (and rapped) by media, selling its attention economies, that we are often focused on the dying rather than the potential new forms.

Our role is to help make what is trying to come into being more apparent, and to help others become part of this midwifery. I use the **metaphor of the caterpillar**. Elizabeth Sahtoris says that it eats up everything around it, without caring about its environment. Its gluttony is carried to absurd proportions. Finally when it has eaten enough, it binds itself to a twig, and decides to rest. It builds a chrysalis around it. The structure then begin to dissolve into a mushy soup. As these structures dissolve, what also happens is that something innate begins to guide it. In the soup are these millions of living cells, and they begin to rejoin to form imaginal cells that give the faintest outline of a new creature. The caterpillar's immune system can't figure out what's going on. It attacks the cells as intruders. The cells link up with each other in this miraculous cooperation, and they create networks of new beings. The butterfly is literally a rebirth. It lives lightly on the earth. It pollinates. It can travel great distances. It can see the world in ways that were impossible for the caterpillar. It has become "psyche" (butterfly in ancient Greek).

We are in a time of dying structures. We are trying to discover within ourselves and with each other, those cells that are part of the earth community--our psyche-wise and psyche-wide community. Neale Donald Walsh and I have been talking about writing a short, spiritual manifesto for this time.

We as humans don't seem to be on any predestined path. We are the pioneers. I've been reading a lot of books that are talking about our time as the end of an era. Many are brave and valiant. Plan B 2.0: Rescuing a planet Under Stress and a Planet in Trouble, by Lester Brown, is an example. But he doesn't talk about changing consciousness. Michael Lerner's new book, The Left Hand of God, talks about how spiritual progressives and liberals can get together and change things. But it's also

reaching rather than experiential. **To Social Artists, I say, “Think of yourselves as imaginal cells that are co-creative, co-operative networkers.”** Osama Bin Laden did this. He created demonic forms of teaching/learning communities, which were also imaginal cells. Buddha also sent people out to become lamps unto the world and form ashrams.

David Korten, a friend who focuses on corporations, says that the Era of Empire began in the Tigris-Euphrates valley, which is Iraq today. (See <http://www.davidkorten.org/Books/greatturning.htm>) In his next book, he will address how the empire approach is one of domination of economies, disenfranchised people, and oppression of the many. Now we see a kind of growth of the cancer of the old empire, with the privileged oppressors who create fear of “the other.”

Yesterday, Neale and I talked about using the Constitution—that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. What are the potentials of life that are still latent? **The Social Artist explores the nature of life and human development in our time, in the light of human complexity.** What does it mean to be a butterfly, to create a civilization in which we have the “win-win” world (as Hazel Henderson wrote)? What is the vision? This has obsessed me for years.

Other writers have imagined things in terms of mechanistic systems. You re-do your neurons, etc., use new technology, etc. For what? For new appliances? People are not looking at the depth levels of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (or opportunity).

The American Revolution occurred in the midst of the reign of a mad king. America became a vision of human possibility that people all over the world came to admire. It's incredible, given the backdrop of the previous 5000 years. Now we see active aggression to the worst forms of empire. We have lost democracy, and now have the power of money in a plutocracy. I want to say, “Stop complaining.” **It's time to have a proactive strategy to create the imaginal cells that bring something new. We need local, living economies, locally owned by the people whose well-being depend on it.** There are so many ideas that are coming forth now. We can begin to be generative.

Michael Lerner asked why so many people voted for the old empire? They voted for their **longing for identity and community in a world of breakdown.** Conservatives drew attention away from this, and blamed other groups (gays, feminists, etc.). Other writers are saying that with galloping materialism, we lose our humanity. We munch like the caterpillar. Lack of imagination occurs, and we don't tune into our spiritual nature. We've been manipulated away from our longing for source connection to longing for “stuff.”

As we move from “stuff” to “essence” we work on alternative visions and ways to develop them. The teaching/learning communities can serve as imaginal cells, where

we can get a vision of what the future can be. It's so challenging that it draws in possibilities, and you are energized to be a nest for the holy egg. We long for spiritual meaning—for the emergence of the world mind/soul, for the activation of our butterfly potential. The religious right has co-opted this, and they talk about values and provide zippy experiences in churches. **We need to tell spirited stories of human possibilities, whether from myths or stories of what's happening down the block.**

The great story is the story of evolution—toward ever increasing complexity, self-reflective consciousness. There is spiritual guidance, purpose behind it. It's spiritual intelligence that knows itself through beings like us, and we are part of this unfolding. We did a Mystery School on nature, and biomimicry. Life has extraordinary capacity for generating life. It has no empire. No central control. Life is essentially cooperative—cells and plants in relationship. It's not survival of the fittest.

One of the things I find all over the world is that people want to put values, meaning, and community ahead of their own self-interest. We can tell the stories that talk about people finding meaning, value, and community. Swamp Gravy started in Georgia, from a Mystery School, and is moving out into other states (as a creative vehicle for story-telling). Thank God our time is now. We have to be in community to remind ourselves that the mind of the creator is at work in us, in our roles and possibilities.

Social Artistry needs small groups, linked to each other, to feel the coming together into a co-creative butterfly. Use what you have learned, and begin to generate the larger picture—the earth and its people becoming conscious of itself and its co-creative future.

Discussion:

Speaker – was building a labyrinth in India, with colleagues. This presentation gives context for the inspiration that occurred there. Images of women giving birth, butterflies, labyrinths carved in stone.

Adele – Many of us get caught in fear, and in our thinking, which causes duality. We think of ourselves as separate. We need a new definition of meditation, so that we let go of our material selves, an alternative to going inside of ourselves so that everything else is other. Feel ourselves as being formed by nature, or by God, and able to rest in that and feel at peace, and then listen for what we are to do.

Jean – singing and dancing together creates another sense of co-consciousness and celebration. This is the ecstasy that allows for harmony between the inner and outer world. You enter into the great hum of being, of joyousness, and it brings the world back into focus.

Anele – When young people get together with more experience ones, it's awesome. Young people have much to gain.

Jean – Anele has pulled together a conference in New York on March 14 to work with 35-40 young people to create a vision for a new world.

Wendy – I've been doing a lot of work on how we actually bring this work forward, and am aware of the kind of helplessness about the news of the world. We don't have to be off elsewhere doing this work. It's just as important working with our neighbors. What we're doing in our home communities connects with others doing the same in theirs.

Marty – In Mendocino County, we are working on a five year plan for sustainability. It's drawing groups that have not come together before. Mixing of young and old is new. I feel this emerging.

Jean – Below the radar, ignored by corporate media, people are working from the fringes, working on different paths, and different ways to find meaning, community, abundance, etc. in sustainable ways. People like you are living lightly on the earth, on the fertile, growing edges of the culture.

Susan – recommends a book by Michael Shuman, Going Local. He's started groups that are fostering local economies.

Jean – there is a food revolution going on. Americans are losing their appetite for anonymous food. We want the joy of food made by our neighbors.

Lisa – Another group that is ripe for inspiration is local government. In Sebastopol, California, the local leaders are sponsoring solar retrofits, local food self-sufficiency, policies that support this. There will be a conference in Willits to look at regional strategies.

Jean – Los Angeles is also becoming a center of activity. The TreePeople are retrofitting the landscape so the city can function as a living ecosystem. (See <http://www.yesmagazine.org/article.asp?ID=318>)

Walt – When we view ourselves as separate, and reconnect to source, through inner work or external celebration or activity, those separations dissolve.

Jean – What are you doing in Los Angeles to help this happen?

Walt – working with groups, coaching them about more effective communication (visual, auditory, auditory/digital, and kinesthetic). The kinesthetic is the least developed and the most powerful. I work with them to use all four learning styles so that the message gets across to everyone.

Suzanne – We're on the edge of what will happen energetically.

Dick – Input on Edward Cornish, on futuring? Looking for a text for a course on this.

Jean – please read it and share your impressions. The ideal is Barbara Marx Hubbard, who writes about the future, but is dynamically in the present, learning from the lessons of the past.