

PREDICTIONS: THE NEXT 200 YEARS

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*There is more to history than politics. Politics is to civilization
what the ego is to the self.*

-- William Irwin Thompson,
At the Edge of History

First some preamble, then some predictions.

At the turn of the century Henry Adams, a man good at predictions, wrote in *The Education of Henry Adams*: “At the rate of progress since 1800, every American who lived into the year 2000 would know how to control unlimited power. He would think in complexities unimaginable to an earlier mind. He would deal with problems altogether beyond the range of an earlier society. To him the nineteenth century would stand on a plane with the fourth – equally childlike – and he would only wonder how much both of them, knowing so little, and so weak in force, should have done so much... Evidently the new American would need to think in contradictions... it would require a new social mind.”

The America of the 1980s is trying very hard to put off acquiring that “new social mind.” Of course, we can't put it off. We struggle against ourselves. For we live in a consciousness-expanding society whether we like it or not. All our economic and cultural efforts are bent on creating a society teeming with myriad and often contradictory stimuli that provoke precisely the “new social mind” that we, at the same time, are trying to resist.

Resistance is high at the moment. The fundamentalist movements all over the world have essentially the same appeal: to turn back this terrifying onslaught of cacophonous stimuli that's expanded our awareness so far beyond the old limits. Not only the religious fundamentalists of the United States and Iran, but capitalist fundamentalists, Marxist fundamentalists, technocratic fundamentalists, East Coast liberal fundamentalists, New Age ecological fundamentalists – they all spend a tremendous amount of energy trying to turn off the stimuli, or rather, selecting from the stimuli what benefits their particular platform, and trying to turn off the rest. Their aims are opposed on specific issues, but the basic pattern of their purpose is phenomenally alike. Each group insists on protecting its own favorite stimuli while curtailing the stimuli of the others. This is at present called “politics.”

If we look at the events of our era politically, we are left thrashing about between inadequate alternatives, like our politicians. If we look at our era personally, with reference only to ourselves, we feel dwarfed. And if we deny our urges to act “in our time,” we feel useless. How can we relate ourselves to history in such a way that action is conceivable within a personally sane framework? And what do we act *in* when we act in history?

One obvious answer is that no matter what we do we act historically. History is not a spectator sport. There is not you *and* history. There is you, in which history lives. And there is history, in which you live. If you are concerned about Nicaragua, that produces history; if you are unconcerned, that produces history. There is no way you can be ineffectual.

Yet virtually everyone feels ineffectual. Media reproduces “world-class” events magnified in scope and compressed in time, distorted out of human scale. People feel distant from the events when they are actually feeling distant from the distortion. So instead of feeling our integral connection with events and through events, we feel a tremendous anxiety at being surrounded by distortions. This anxiety has become our connective tissue. We are connected neither by a shared worldview nor common goals, but by a common and thorough anxiety.

Yet in a consumer society certain connections should be obvious enough, at least. When you decide what to buy at the supermarket and what to buy at the health-food store, you are deciding between a revolution in agriculture and its counterrevolution. Neither can exist apart from you. If you own a computer you are turning the world of our parents on its ear. Television, the car, air travel – the examples are legion. They are important historically insofar as they have become important to you. You and I are the terms of history.

Which is to say: history is the psyche writ large. It can't be something unimaginably beyond the power and scope of the individual when we make history every day with everything we say and do and dream. We are history. Our psyches are tumultuous. History is tumultuous. Where is the surprise? And where is the “problem” to be “solved”? One does not solve one's nature, one lives it out. One struggles with it, and for it, and against it. One succumbs. One transcends. Sometimes both in a single breath.

Within any hour we can be enmeshed in a nineteenth-century idea of the family, a first-century belief in a divinity, a prehistoric instinct for danger, and a twenty-first-century skill. We are subject to, and expressive of, many histories at once because we are composed of many selves at once and are constantly trying to decide between various dominants among those histories and selves. What is an *event* but the eruption into a particular time and place of these uncountable impulses, reactions, dreams, selves? Events are a crude notation of the intricacies of consciousness. “One group may be in power, but all are in consciousness, and it is consciousness that creates culture.” So wrote William Irwin Thompson in *Passages About Earth*, and we have always lived that sentence.

What is plain, when you come to the end of this train of thought, is that we do not know where the human individual ends and the human race begins. We have never known. Democracy, fascism, monarchy, and socialism are four models of how it *might* be, and they are all inadequate. And if tribal life had been enough it would have stayed enough. We remain confused about the relationship of the one to the whole. But it *is* plain that in the way that individuals organize their lives into projects – career, marriage, raising children, hobbies, what-all – the race as a whole takes on what could be called “historical projects” as if by mutual consent.

For instance, the people of Europe didn't get together and decide to dominate the rest of the known world. Until 1492 only a handful believed that there even *was* any more world. Yet, without new technologies to spur them on, suddenly, in the 1500s, they pretty

much stopped building cathedrals and devoted their surplus resources to discovering, occupying, and milking the rest of the planet. Everything that has changed drastically since 1500 has changed because of that historical project. What we call “technology” is its direct result, and now with this technology we are setting out on new historical projects.

We do not announce these projects, they announce themselves. We do not decide on them, yet as a race we devote our best energies to them. When I said I was going to try my hand at “predictions” I was using a hyperbolic word to say that I was going to try to identify what the new historical projects have become and where they might take us – since the sensation definitely is that we *do* them but they *take* us. What has humankind mutually, unconsciously, and nonverbally decided to embark upon, and how long will these new voyages take? We cannot “see” this future when we look through the eyes of personal, ambition-oriented, lifespan-limited time – one’s personal scale is too small. Nor is vision possible through the eyes of political, issue-oriented time – historical projects contain all the issues, but they are far more than the sum of their parts. But historical time, like the time of the Freudian/Jungian psyche, contains all sides and contains all time while being suprapresent: all-at-once. Seeing through the immediacy and eternity of historical time, we can see a long way and yet remain on a human scale.

So what are the historical projects we are embarking on now? The most obvious, the one that contains all the others, is the crystallization of a planetary culture. Not the *formation* of one. That’s already happened. We have a planetary culture right now. Tehran, Los Angeles, Rio de Janeiro, Moscow, Sydney, Peking, Jerusalem are next-door neighbors, borrowing each other’s tools, gossiping about each other, sleeping with each other’s spouses, carpooling, and watching their kids play and fight together. But that image is far too peaceful, of course, because this planetary culture is in a state of anarchy. Order is not about to collapse; order has collapsed.

No culture presently existing on earth is applicable on a planetary scale. Period. And that’s what all the fuss is about.

Because we’re not just going to be neighbors. *We’re going to be each other.* The new technologies make separation ultimately impossible.

Since we are already living on a planetary scale, this means that every existing culture has been rendered obsolete. Russia, North America, Europe, the Islamic nations, China, the Third World – all are getting more and more frantic as it becomes more and more obvious that their present ideas and customs can’t cope with, hence will not dominate, the coming planetary civilization. Neither the Bible nor the Koran, nor *Das Kapital* – the three books that everybody is at present hitting each other over the head with – is capable of the flexibility demanded by an instantaneous planetary civilization. And yet the struggle between Judeo-Christian capitalism, Moslem nationalism, and socialism *is* what we call “politics” on a world scale. Which dismisses politics as the place to look for resolutions.

None of these systems will win. What they will do for the next hundred years is exhaust themselves in continuous conflict, while the new crystallization of planetary culture, the new human order, takes place far beneath them, so to speak – under the brouhaha, within the ever-widening cracks in their social fabric. The prevailing powers will be displaced *from the inside*. Orientation toward a true planetary culture will happen everywhere, at varying rates, connecting up slowly until the prevailing “great powers” of

nationalism and commerce will simply fade out and/or join up. This is hardly farfetched. Precisely the same general schemata was played out when the Church gave way to nationalism 500 years ago; and again 1000 years before that, when the Roman Empire gave way to the Church. I don't mean to suggest that just because one can state it succinctly the process will be peaceful; it will be messy. Very. The Inquisition, the massacres of the Provençals, and the religious wars that wracked Europe for two centuries and more were all part of the hysteria of the Church giving way to nationalism. We mark the dates of the wars but we can't really mark the date when the Church's opposition to the new order ceased to be a critical factor. In these huge transformations there is never an exact date of "revolution"; instead, things inexorably revolve.

The crystallization of our planetary civilization will have five basic themes:

1. *The creation of a world economic system.*
2. *Advances in cybernetics, biology, space, and brain research.*
3. *The empowerment of brown, black, and yellow peoples.*
4. *The equalization of men and women.*
5. *The creation of a new cosmology that will replace Judeo-Christian-Moslemism.*

They are interwoven, of course, but for the sake of discussion let's take them theme by theme.

The creation of a world economic system. "To incorporate" means literally "to inhabit a body." Stretch it further: to create a body. Like it or not, and for good or ill, multinational corporations are the first entities operating coherently on a world scale. In much the same way as the New World was explored and settled first by traders and slavers bent on exploitation, the skeleton of the next stage of planetary culture is being created by the corporations. New Age advocates are loath to admit it, radicals and liberals are furious at it, national governments are outmaneuvered by it; nevertheless, it's happening, and there's nothing anybody can do to stop it.

Right now these corporations are performing the first essential steps toward a world community: they are taking jobs and dollars out of the United States and rooting them in other parts of the world. A crucial step in a world in which 6 percent of the population (the United States) consumes 80 percent of the resources. Before the year 2000 a catastrophic depression, possibly ignited by the ripple effect of nations' deficits or the default of Third World loans, will cause the corporations to institute the equivalent of a world currency. The destabilization of existing currencies, some artificially low and some artificially high, will demand this if world trade is to continue. This will not solve many problems in and of itself, because the *system* now functions as a world currency anyway, though it wastes a great deal of energy in the awkwardness of dealing with particular currencies; and a new system would have to make provisions to enable the various major nations to finance themselves by printing their own money; nonetheless, that can't get anymore awkward than the present system. But the institution of a world currency or its equivalent, a huge simplification of the current system, will significantly weaken nationalism and *that* will be important.

If the major nations are battling a depression, they will have to accept any feasible proposals that multinational corporations offer. As nationalism weakens, a world economic system will grow more quickly. No one can say what that will be like. Some insist that all future economics will, or indeed must, be based on ecology; others say the corporations will strip the planet of resources before we can achieve the world economy. What will likely happen is an interplay back and forth between these poles of possibility. What is certain is that to settle into a workable and more or less equitable (or it would not be workable) economic world order will take at least a century. Probably longer. We are just at the beginning of the sorting-out process.

Advances in cybernetics, biology and space. The leaps in biology and the militarization and exploration of space are wild cards. Will we be able to create new human beings, and will they really be all that new? (They, too, will have tumultuous psyches.) Or will the unused portions of our brains wake up? Will we be able to develop and harness the psychic, “extra-sensory” or psi powers that we see in many individuals in our culture and in whole tribes in aboriginal cultures? Will that help the integration of our various parts? Will it make a difference to have missiles in space stations instead of submarines? What is certain is that these developments will put a tremendous strain on the Judeo-Christian-Moslem cosmologies through which most are viewing reality. A view of the infinite such as only mystics once had will increasingly become the stuff of news broadcasts, and the present cosmologies will seem increasingly claustrophobic.

The advances in cybernetics and electronics are networking the world. Humans have an impulse to gather in cities so they might continue to do it anyway, but because of computers cities are no longer necessary. Cities are for storing information, that has always been their power; but with computers, any place can have instant access to any information; any place can be a center. The answer to overpopulation may live in this fact. There is a great deal of unused space on this earth, and cities don't have to be the nodes of massed humanity that they are now. When you see a satellite dish beside a trailer in the middle of a Mojave, you are seeing the beginning of the end of cities as we've known them for the last 10,000 years.

But it is easy to overestimate computers. Human beings work with information but they don't dream information. And information is a poor substitute for meaning. And without meaning we become maddened – sometimes slowly but always surely. It will take a new cosmology, beyond what we've known, to make this information explosion meaningful. And making it meaningful is all that will keep us from being mad.

The empowerment of black, brown and yellow peoples. White-dominated corporate capitalism is at present trying to control, to stem the tide of, the empowerment of nonwhite peoples. Rhetoric aside, that is much of what Vietnam was about and that is what most of our Latin American involvement is about. Our military-economic machinations are causing massive suffering not because they're working but because control is not possible. The attempt simply causes chaos.

The forces that will empower what Jesse Jackson calls the rainbow peoples are more inexorable than politics or economics. The white peoples have stabilized their population growth while the rainbow peoples are growing at unimaginable rates. Their growth is too fantastic for the present famines, and even the worse famines that threaten, to prune them down to white levels. The machinations of the West caused the population explosion by upsetting the careful centuries-long balance of indigenous peoples. Now that explosion

will swamp the West. Is swamping it. Cheap foreign labor produced by overpopulation is taking thousands of jobs from the United States very year.

Within thirty to fifty years the United States will become a Latino-dominated country. Whether or not Latinos become a majority (and even that is conceivable) they will be our most culturally cohesive faction, the deciding factor. It will utterly change the valence of North American thought. Who knows what we will be like when our fundamental racial connection is not to Europe but to Latin America? Meanwhile the planetization of the world's economy will take more and more money from the white masses. Whites sense this now in the United States, and that is one reason why they seem to care for nothing anymore except prosperity.

This process will be *messy*. The white race is already the most despised on earth, so who knows what will happen as other races begin to have the clout to match their hatred? As James Baldwin once put it, it is "remarkable that a people so quick and proud to boast of what they have taken from others are unable to imagine that what they have taken from others can also be taken from them."

The equalization of men and women. This movement is taking root everywhere. In Latin America it invigorates the revolutionary movements, while in Islamic countries it drives the fundamentalists into frenzies. There seems to be a real difference between the masculine and feminine ways of carrying out tasks and perceiving gestalts, but these effects are the least predictable. Here is where the future goes past anything we know. The fundamental unit of civilization is not the individual but the family, so the equalization of men and women is changing civilization at its root. This literally changes our dreams. This is the change that must absorb all the other changes. We know from what we see around us in relationships and marriages that in the end this is the hardest change, the change that effects people most intimately. It means that the future of the world is the future of the heart – as it has always been. It means that our capacity for love will ultimately have more effect than our capacity to store information. For the family is the crucible in which the psyche takes form, and history will continue to be the psyche writ large.

The creation of a new cosmology that will replace Judeo-Christian-Moslemism. This is the most subtle, and possibly the most drastic, change that faces us. As Judaism, Christianity, and Moslemism become more and more politicized, which is to say power hungry, they lose their moral authority. They are agendas now, not religions. They are no longer channels between the individual and the infinite, they are political parties. The Judaist faith is so tied up in the Judaist state that they are no longer perceived as separate. Moslemism is frantic in its inflexibility and is exhausting itself in wars. Whether or not these wars are lost, they cannot be won.

Moslemists will not achieve their goal of keeping the rest of the world out, especially as they are fighting with the rest of the world's weapons. Another decade or so of increasingly insane warfare will exhaust not only the people but the faith. This is not apparent now because the only people who get into the media are extremists. But there are also millions who want only to live normal lives. It is a question of their inertia and suffering pitted against the zeal of the fundamentalists, and the two cannot coexist indefinitely. If the region weren't being artificially stimulated by massive armaments supplied by East and West, it would already be dropping with exhaustion into *de facto* solutions.

As the world economy progresses it will no longer be advantageous to East and West to continue the arms flow, and the region will cool. The faiths of Moslemism and Judaism will be the final casualties. The way the Crusades were the beginning of the end for the authority of the Roman Church, so these wars would be draining these faiths even if the world weren't outdistancing their concepts.

But the most desperate religion today is Christianity, partly because it is so dependent on the very systems that are subverting it. The Christianist revival in the United States is a media phenomenon. It couldn't exist without high-tech concepts and skills that can't help but perpetuate – even among the fundamentalists – the very things they deny.

Desperation can bestow an attractive glow, however, so its very desperation is giving Christianity a surge of power in the United States. But with all the hoopla it is easy to overlook the fact that the New Right is not trying to initiate anything – it hasn't got that sort of intellectual power or flexibility; the New Right is expending all its resources in attempting to roll back what others have initiated.

The cultural seesaw between Right and Left now camouflages a planetarily ineffectual administration that is completely in the hands of the multinationals (128 of the top 500 U.S. corporations paid no taxes during '83-'84, so efficiently is our government serving their needs); and the corporate agenda has nothing to do with the New Right's. While the American people fight among themselves over who gets what civil liberties, how much money we can spend where, and whether a woman can control her own body, the multinationals solidify positions that are fundamentally subversive to American nationalism and that will ultimately result in the disintegration of American influence as the planetary economy begins to gain strength. The jingoistic Bible fundamentalists are being duped on a grander scale than they are duping.

But it is the *faith* of Christianity that is fading. Its influence is fading more and more, everywhere, and has been fading steadily for several centuries, before the increasing obsession with Armageddon of the last twenty-five years. First the atomic bomb, then the apocalyptic fervors of the sixties, then the deterioration of the international situation ever since, have revived not so much belief in Jesus as belief in the Book of Revelation -- Revelation is the foundation for American fundamentalism. The present fervor is being drummed up by Revelation's assertion that these disruptions presage the Second Coming. Analyzing this, it is helpful to think back to the year 1500. Like the year 2000, the year 1500 was a magic number for Christianists. Mystics intellectuals as brilliant as Hieronymous Bosch believed, with many peasants, rulers, and clergy, that Christ would return in 1500 and it would be the end of the world. When this failed to happen, faith and thus the authority upheld by that faith diminished. By 1517 Luther could nail his proclamation to the door of a church and make it stick, cracking Christendom in two, spurring the nationalism that was already deflating the Church, and giving a religious basis to the capitalism that was to become the new order. By 1543 Copernicus could publish his thesis that the sun was the center of our solar system and that the earth revolved around it, as opposed to the whole universe revolving around the earth, which was a central thesis of the Church. From that point the Church was, conceptually as well as politically, in retreat.

Christianism survived that blow essentially by becoming more secular and decentralizing. When Jesus fails to arrive in the next twenty-five years, what's left of Christianity will be shaken to the core. Unable to accommodate the massive world

changes, and no longer being fueled by an apocalypse that never showed, its psychic residues will continue for ages but its force will be quickly dissipated. For we have now what we did not have in 1500: a new, utterly different cosmology growing in strength and faith, manifesting everywhere, and ready to become the dominant mode of thought as it becomes more unified. Call it New Age, call it what you will, it combines Eastern thought with relativity physics with cybernetics with Sufic and Franciscan and Hasidic and Zen mysticism with pagan animism with tribal ritual with Jungian and Freudian and Gestalt psychology with ecology with the arts with African aesthetics with Jefferson with Marx with... Well, the point is that one of the historical projects in force now is a planetary movement to form a new faith out of what's applicable in many old thoughts and what's fresh to our time, a new faith that can handle the complexities of planetary culture.

This movement is doing precisely what Christianity once did. It is blending the newest thoughts with what has gone before, alchemically transmuting the used ideas along the way. In this manner, 2000 years ago, the early Christians blended Judaism with the Isis-Osiris mysteries of Egypt with Roman law with Greek philosophy with the pagan shamanism of Europe, and included all in disguised form within the Church.

Right now the new cosmology is showing many faces. It can take on the corporate mask of *est* or the authoritarian mask of so many gurus. It is playing with forms. They are everywhere you look. For me, its most appealing are in the explorations and meditations of people like Robert Bly, James Hillman, Joseph Chilton Pearce, Ilya Prigogine, Buckminster Fuller, Gioia Timpinelli, Lewis Thomas, Cecil Taylor, William Irwin Thompson, Miles Davis, Doris Lessing, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Thomas Pynchon, Marie-Louise von Franz, Lawrence LeShan, Antonio Machado; or it is in the quiet, nondoctrinaire mystic communities like Findhorn; and it is reaching mass form in films like *Poltergeist*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *The Last Wave*, *My Dinner With Andre*, and the *Star Wars* trilogy, and with the entire literature of science fiction, an enormously potent force for getting new thoughts out there amongst us all – science fiction is a new generation of Arthurian-like stories in a relativistic context. In short, the spiritual issues that in the West have been the exclusive province of Judeo-Christian-Moslemism for a thousand years are being explored now all over the world with hardly a reference to standard Judeo-Christian-Moslemism.

This cosmology is chaotic and contradictory now, as Christianity was in the first century after Christ. The slow unification of Mediterranean Christians during the first century during the first century wasn't very interesting to the Roman population either. They thought of it as a novelty, as a crazy cult. The new cosmology is in the same stage. It is not news, it is not politics, but it *is* history. The news and the politics will follow. The coherence of the world a century from now, its very ability to support life, probably depends on how successfully this new cosmology will articulate itself.

Carlos Fuentes has reflected that instability "comes when societies cannot see themselves reflected in their institutions." It is being demonstrated every day that the institutions our planetary civilization needs cannot be supplied by our present forms of government and thought. This demonstration is what we call "news" and we watch it every night. But there will slowly grow a unification of the new modes of thought and consensus about them, and this will express itself in the *form*-ation of the new societal forms, the sustaining culture, that we need. For the sustaining culture that we seek is at

the other end of these changes. But it is not a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow; if it's not made every day in our vision as we go day by day through this dangerous time, then it will not be. We may not live it but we *must* see it. Only the act of envisioning can one day become an embodiment.

The crises of our world express themselves as political crises but they are without political solutions. This drives everybody concerned with solving them quite crazy. The only possible solutions are cultural, and cultural solutions can't be legislated and they usually can't be willed. Cultural solutions evolve.

Culture proceeds out of the necessity of private, individual yearnings, decisions, and attempts; first and last stands taken alone, yet growing out of and feeding into a sometimes real and sometimes merely envisioned community. Buddy Bolden's community was real. Walt Whitman's was envisioned. When the community is real, the effects go taproot-deep and spread wide and are virtually impossible to eradicate until they've run their course. Buddy Bolden's music may have been despised or ignored by the dominant mainstream culture, but fifty years later it had become the mainstream's music. This wasn't willed. Not only did nobody legislate for it, many tried to legislate against it. It wasn't supported by governments or by the rich. But it happened.

When the community is envisioned, the individual's work can attract a community-in-spirit if the work is strong enough – almost all that is greatest in America's literature has followed in Whitman's path, has been attracted to Whitman's community, and this was his stated goal from the beginning. The same might be said of Einstein, Freud and Jung. These private and intimate decisions, intentions, and stands – relating to, depending on, either a real or envisioned community – are finally the only way to redefine and redirect any culture.

We shy away from this thought because we have been spoiled into expecting large and fast results, but that, too, is media conditioning – an emphasis on the grandiose that keeps us from deep change. Yet Whitman just wrote a poem, Einstein just conceived a brief mathematical formula, Freud and Jung and Marx just wrote books. Buddy Bolden just played the blues. Jesus and Buddha merely spoke and healed, mostly among very small groups of people. We may be nostalgic about previous mass movements and wish there were new ones, and there *are* times when our individual, deeply private stands accumulate into mass movements – that's a step in a process. Then waves like “the women's movement,” and “the civil rights movement” arrive from our privacies and lift the culture to new levels of awareness. You'll remember that what sparked the civil-rights movement was an old black woman's refusal in Montgomery, Alabama, to go to the back of the bus – not out of any political stand, not with the intention of starting a mass movement, but because she was sick of being treated badly. And her action inspired her minister, Martin Luther King, Jr., to wider action. [*Correction, 2006: Rosa Parks was not old and I'm not sure the Rev. King was her minister, but the general sense of those sentences holds.*]

But just as often there are times when the mass are reactionary, are the accumulation less of private yearnings than of private panics, and their object is to crush the awareness that has been won. To depend on mass waves is to leave oneself helpless before forces utterly beyond one's control. That passivity is beneath contempt to, say, Marie Laveau, who coalesced a whole community, the community that would inspire America's world-shaking music, by simply focusing intensely on what she believed and cared about.

This is (1) corny and (2) terrifying. It is, in fact, corny in proportion to how much it can terrify. For as Confucius really did say, “The way out is via the door. Why is it that no one will use this method?”

It’s your own door, to your own life, whether that door is the blues or physics. As long as it’s truly yours, your act will have effect.

So, in this light, to cast a vote in an election, say, or to organize or join a demonstration, or to take any overtly “political” action whatever, is not a futile exercise. Issues will come through your door that must be fought for or against, in whatever way, political or otherwise, you can find to fight. But your heart doesn’t swell with victory or break with defeat. Instead you are participating in (or choosing not to participate in) a process the limits of which you know in advance, as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson knew in advance the limits of *their* political process, though that knowledge didn’t paralyze them. At best such activity, whether as follower or leader, constitutes a cohesion of private passions into a public forum that takes all of society forward into a world where *all* of the many-faceted human psyche will be welcome and useful; at worst, it’s a holding action, a skirmish providing you with a Rorschach of the state of flux. But this overt political action is only a fragment of your true historical action; your true historical action is the force of your entire life within the emerging pattern, a pattern that you influence even in your dreams. Which is to say: what goes on in your head is connected to the future of the planet.

A future being worked out, in broad terms, in the huge historical projects I’ve tried to describe – the creation of a world economic system; the advances in cybernetics, genetics, space and brain research; the empowerment of brown, black, and yellow peoples; the equalization of men and women; the creation of a new cosmology – all constellating as a whole, a planetary culture wherein people view their entire planet as they now view their nation or their city.

There are obvious pitfalls. The worst is the possibility of a homogenous planet, as Americanized as the Western cities are now, under a world government that enforces its will through satellite laser weapons. That’s the most paranoid mix of possibilities, but there are many more. Yet even in a planetary culture, Brazil and China and New England will never be alike. It is important to remember that historical projects on this scale are not deterministic. For instance, even on the comparatively unified scale of the eastern half of North America, European dominance expressed itself one way for New Orleans, another way for Atlanta, another for New York, another for Boston. Which is to say, we can name the overall movements and their elements, but no one can predict culture. Nobody in the rabidly racist America of 1950 could have predicted that white children would, without “intention,” transform black music into a unified youth culture – a culture which, from roughly 1958 to 1972, would feel purposeful enough to be the catalyst for the antiwar movement, the ecology movement, and the feminist movement, and would give tremendous energy to the movement toward the new cosmology. We can see the patterns of what is to come, but we can’t dance its dances or hear its music.

And it is important to remember that this historical project of a sustaining planetary culture *will take at least a century, perhaps two*, to work out. This will be a time of upheaval. Wars, famines, depressions, and probably a few atomic bombs, probably dropped by and on Third World countries. The word “panic” comes from the name of the great god Pan, from the times when he would suddenly make his appearance and drive

people crazy with ecstasy and terror. Obviously we are now in a state of panic, driven to these projects by who knows what forces? And we do not know if we can survive. I have not mentioned nuclear destruction because it is plain to everyone that in panic at these changes we might emulsify ourselves. We also might not. Ecological disasters will also no doubt occur. They might finish us. They also might not. The planet may have its own projects, for which it does not need us. But why would we be here if it did not need us? “What to do then?” the poet Antonio Machado asked. And he answered his own question with, “Weave the thread given to us, dream our dream and live; it is the only way we can achieve the miracle of life.”

There’s a century or two to survive, and even with all the poetry we can bring to our lives this will be quite a prosaic task. In such an era, if one judges one’s state by personal time, one can’t help feeling caught naked in a massive storm. If one judges by political time, then the issues offered are frustrating and elementary, however necessary it may be to engage them. But if you look at your life on the level of historical time, as a tiny but influential part of a century-long process, then at least you can begin to know your own address. You can begin to sense the greater pattern, and feel where you are within it, and your acts take on meaning. Meaning is the beginning of power.

We have taken on these historical projects, or they have taken us on, and they are our work for the next 100 years. More like 200. The human being in the year 2200 will consider our era to be as primitive, as dark, as chaotic, and no doubt as romantic, as we now think of the Middle Ages – though perhaps some of them will know that some of us were trying to build their world, even now, and that without our commitment to what they *could* be, they wouldn’t have any world. But we don’t know if they’ll be thanking us or cursing us. For myself, I like to think of the words of the physicist Niels Bohr: “The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may be another profound truth.” We are moving from one constellation of profound truths to another. And as we make that movement, we are how history breathes.

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