

Dr. John Weir Perry

A CONVERSATION WITH DR. JOHN WEIR PERRY

*From When The Dream Becomes Real:
the inner Apocalypse in mythology,
madness and the future*

By Michael O'Callaghan

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Thanks to Wendy Perry for the photos of her father.

"When conscious life is characterised by one-sidedness and by a false attitude, primordial healing images are activated – one might say instinctively – and come to light in the dreams of individuals and the visions of artists."

— Carl Gustav Jung

"All we have learned of psychotherapy suggests that it is at the precise time when the individual feels as if his whole life is crashing down around him, that he is most likely to achieve an inner reorganisation constituting a quantum leap in his growth toward maturity. Our hope, our belief, is that it is precisely when society's future seems so beleaguered – when its problems seem almost staggering in complexity, when so many individuals seem alienated, and so many values seem to have deteriorated – that it is most likely to achieve a metamorphosis in society's growth toward maturity, toward more truly enhancing and fulfilling the human spirit than ever before. Thus we envision the possibility of an evolutionary leap to a trans-industrial society that not only has know-how, but also a deep inner knowledge of what is worth doing."

— Willis Harman

INTRODUCTION

"True sanity entails in one way or another the dissolution of the normal ego, that false self competently adjusted to our alienated social reality... and through this death a rebirth and the eventual re-establishment of a new kind of ego-functioning, the ego now being the servant of the divine, no longer its betrayer."

— Dr. R.D.Laing

"Our greatest blessings come to us by way of madness, provided the madness is given us by divine gift."

— Plato (Phaedrus)

"If the human race survives, future men will, I suspect, look back on our enlightened epoch as a veritable Age of Darkness... They will see that what was considered 'schizophrenic' was one of the forms in which, often through quite ordinary people, the light began to break into our all-too-closed minds."

— Dr. R.D. Laing

The idea that the inner Apocalypse experience might be the guardian of the gate to a sustainable future has a metaphorical ring of truth which I find appealing. To explore this further, I went to California in the early 1980s to visit Dr. John Weir Perry MD, a man who was especially knowledgeable on the subject. I had first met him a few years before in Boston at the first conference of the International Transpersonal Association (ITA), [1] and was impressed by his compassion, wisdom, and humility.

John Weir Perry (1914 - 1988) [2] was a Jungian psychiatrist who founded an experimental residential facility called Diabasis, in San Francisco, California, during the 1970s. This was designed as a comfortable home where young adults, who were experiencing the initial days of their first "acute schizophrenic break", could live in and be empowered to go through their Apocalypse on the way to greater health and happiness. The results were amazing: without any treatment by medication, electroshock or locked doors – but with opportunities for painting, dance, massage, meditation and conversation – full-blown "schizophrenics" were able to go through their ego-death and emerge on the other side, as Perry put it, "weller than well." Instead of being sent to a mental hospital and/or being expected to taking medication for the rest of their lives, these people would live at Diabasis for the first three months, spend three more months in a half-way home, and then return to the outside world, with few if any relapses of their "schizophrenia"! [3]

This corroborated the results of R. D. Laing's famous Kingsley Hall experiment in London in the 1960s [4], in which only nine out of sixty-five "certified psychotics" who were tracked afterwards were re-admitted to hospitals again. Those who insist that "schizophrenia" is a disease will have to admit that it is curable! The principal differences between Kingsley Hall and Diabasis were the deliberately anarchic organisation of the former and its rather dismal location in a London slum, and the more organised approach of the latter in a more pleasant location in Berkeley on San Francisco Bay.

Dr. Perry met Carl Jung in Switzerland as a young medical student. He then became a psychiatrist. As a conscientious objector during World War II, he served for two years as a medic in the U.S. Army, attending to war victims in China. Here he was impressed by the character of the people and profoundly touched by their ancient philosophy of the Tao. He noticed the similarity between the traditional Chinese view of the universe as a self-organising system [5], and Jung's idea that schizophrenia is not a disease which the psychiatrist should

attempt to control, but rather a *spontaneous healing process* which a subtle therapist might indeed facilitate through a kind of psychological *shiatsu*. After the war Perry returned to San Francisco, where he went into practice in 1949. The introduction to his first book **The Self in Psychotic Process**, published in 1952, was written by Jung himself [6]

Perry then wrote **The Far Side of Madness** (about Diabasis) [7], and **The Heart of History** [8], a trans-cultural study of mythological evolution. The book is interesting, since individuation is normally thought of in the context of a given mythology or world view. Here Perry explores the individuation process not in the context of a given world view, but within the larger macro-historical evolution of the world views themselves. He thus tracks the individuation of the deepest dimensions of the Self, as reflected in the symbolism of the metamorphosis of the world's great mythologies from the power-preoccupied cosmologies of the first city-states to the more compassionate world views which seem always to follow. Ironically, in the 1980s he found himself invited to teach psychiatry at the University of Wuhan, in China - where official dogma had it that the unconscious does not exist! His latest book, published not long after his death in October 1998, is **Trials of the Visionary Mind: Spiritual Emergency and the Renewal Process**. [9]

John and I met three or four times for lunch at his delightful office in a townhouse on San Francisco's Steiner Street. Gregory Bateson [10] sometimes stayed the night there on his way back and forth from Esalen [11] down the coast at Big Sur, where he spent the last years of his life. I pushed the half-open wooden gate that leads to the back garden, walked past a trellis of Heavenly Blue morning glory flowers, and found my friend John – a soft-spoken, melodious, rosy-cheeked, smiling man in his mid seventies, smoking his pipe in the sun. The following conversation was recorded that afternoon.

A CONVERSATION WITH DR. JOHN WEIR PERRY



The Persistence of Memory, Salvador Dali, 1931

"It is justifiable to regard the term 'sickness' as pertaining not to the acute turmoil but to the pre-psychotic personality, standing as it does in need of profound reorganization.

In this case, the renewal process occurring in the acute psychotic episode may be considered nature's way of setting things right."

— Dr. John Weir Perry

Michael O'Callaghan: How does one define so-called schizophrenia?

John Weir Perry: Jung defined it most succinctly. He said "Schizophrenia is a condition in which the dream takes the place of reality." This means that the unconscious overwhelms the ego-consciousness, overwhelms the field of awareness with contents from the deepest unconscious, which take mythic, symbolic form. And the emotions, unless they're hidden, are quite mythic too. To a careful observer, they're quite appropriate to the situation at hand.

The way "schizophrenia" unfolds is that, in a situation of personal crisis, all the psyche's energy is sucked back out of the personal, conscious area, into what we call the archetypal area. Mythic contents thus emerge from the deepest level of the psyche, in order to re-organise the Self. In so doing, the person feels himself withdrawing from the ordinary surroundings, and becomes quite isolated in this dream state.

Did Jung really see this as a healing process?

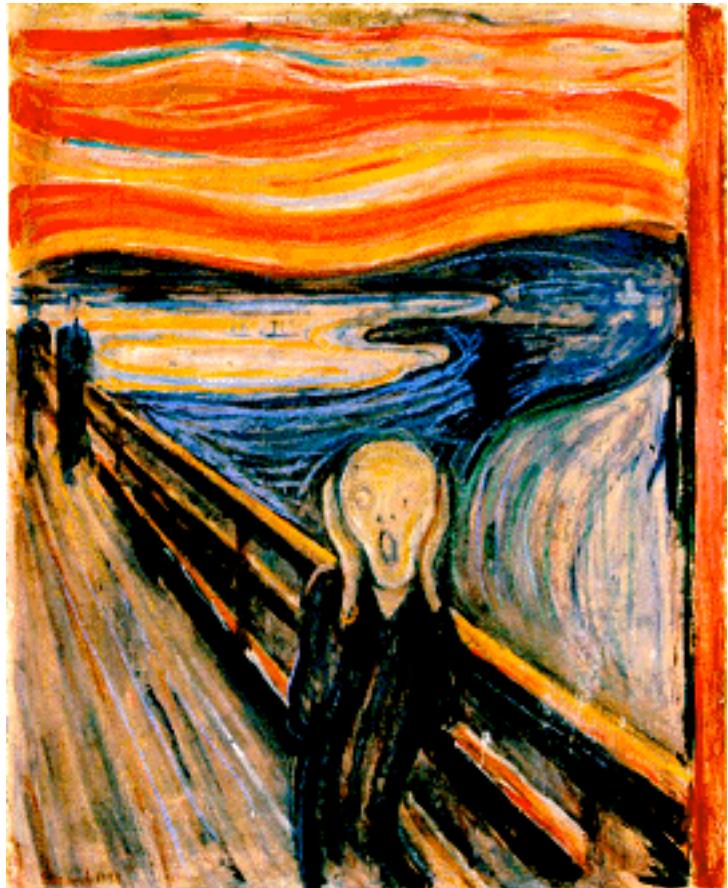
He did indeed! He believed that "schizophrenia" is a self-healing process – one in which, specifically, the pathological complexes dissolve themselves. The whole schizophrenic turmoil is really a self-organising, healing experience. It's like a molten state. Everything seems to be made of free energy, an inner free play of imagery through which the alienated psyche spontaneously re-organises itself – in such a way that the conscious ego is brought back into communication with the unconscious again.

How long does the experience normally last?

The acute hallucinatory phase, during which these contents go through the re-ordering process, usually lasts about six weeks. This, by the way, corresponds to the classical description of visionary experiences in various religious texts, such as the proverbial "forty days in the wilderness" often referred to in the Bible. Anyway, six weeks is roughly it.

So are you saying that the reason we have so-called "chronic schizophrenia" in our society, – where a person is medicated, distressed or hospitalised for decades – is really cultural? A society which refuses to understand the healing nature of the phenomenon?

Yes, it seems so. Of course, there are some unusual cases where the individual simply can't handle the impact of all this unconscious content, or doesn't know what to do with it, and freaks out. But from my experience at Diabasis, I've seen so many people go the other way that I really do feel "chronic schizophrenia" is created by society's negative response to what is actually a perfectly natural and healthy process.



The Scream by Edvard Munch, 1893
© 1999 The Munch Museum

I hate to think of what happens to people who go into the mental hospital...

Who experiences a "schizophrenic break"?

Well, there's a lot of controversy about this! There is a constitutional element, which is often interpreted as a "genotype of pathology", but this depends on how you see it. I see it as a genotype of sensitivity! Among adolescent siblings in a family, for example, it's usually the most sensitive one who's going to catch it.

How many people are "schizophrenic?"

Approximately two percent of the world population – that's over 110 million people! It's about one in five of all the hospital beds.

What does it feel like to go through a "schizophrenic break"?

The overall experience is described as falling into a kind of abyss of isolation. This comes about because there is such a discrepancy between the subjective inner world that one has been swept into, and the mundane everyday world outside. There seems to be a total gulf between these two. Of course, this is exactly what happens in our society: the individuals around such a person are bewildered and frightened. They have absolutely no trust in what is going on! So everything is set up negatively, and this gives rise to fear – on both sides.

So it starts with a feeling of isolation...

Yes. Now the symbolic expression of this is falling into a death – not only a death state, but also a death space – the "afterlife," the "realm of the ancestors," the "land of the dead," the "spirit world." The common experience here is for the person to look about and think that half the people around him are dead too. While in this condition, it's very hard for one to tell if one is really alive or not.

I've been told, by people looking back on the experience, that one thing that stands out most of all, beyond the feeling of isolation, is the perception that everything that comes up is divided into opposites: Good and Bad, God and the Devil, Us and Them, or whatever. It's confusing, it's bewildering, it causes tremendous indecision and a total arrest in motivation in which everything is cancelled by its opposite.

So both these things are very distressing: the fear that you have died and dropped away from the world of the living, and the fear of conflicting powers, conflicting values and thoughts. It's a very aggravating feeling. This experience of opposites very quickly takes on a rather paranoid form.



Attack on World Trade Center
New York

I think this is really what the paranoid content is based on. It takes the form of experiencing the world as caught in the grip of opposing forces, whether they be political, spiritual, cultural, ideological, or even racial. In recent years I've noticed it's "those who might destroy the planet" versus "those who are ecologically minded." The prevailing idiom of the decade seems to shape the particular form in which these opposites arise. The main thing here is a great clash of forces; and this clash is usually of rather cosmic proportions, not just a local affair at all.

Right away at the beginning, the death experience is accompanied by the feeling that you've gone back to the beginning of time. This involves a regression, a return to the state of infancy in one's personal life history. But hand in hand with this is the feeling of slipping back into the world of the primordial parents, into a Garden of Eden. For example, it's a very common experience to feel one is the child of Adam and Eve, say, at the beginning of time. This is very symbolic, obviously. It's pretty much a representation of the psyche at the start of one's individual career after birth.

So these are the outstanding features. All kinds of imagery comes tumbling across the field of awareness. It's like the mythological image in a perfect stained-glass window being smashed, and all the bits and pieces being scattered. The effect is very colourful, but it's very hard to discern how the pieces belong to each other. Any attempt to make sense of it is an exercise in abstraction from the actual experience. The important thing is to find the process running through it all.

The thing that I'm particularly interested in here is the clash of opposites. The individual usually has a feeling of intense fear, as he contemplates what seem to him to be the forces of disruption, of chaos, of the Antichrist, of the Communists – whatever the ideology happens to portray as "evil." In any case, these forces are seen as tending to destroy the world, and the "good guys" are those who would try to preserve it.

This is the element I try in particular to explore, because it connects to all kinds of other general cultural and political phenomena that we could talk about!

What makes this visionary state appear so very psychotic, is that an individual with a paranoid ideology or ideation tends to identify with everything that comes up from below, and one is very apt to get confused.

A woman who identifies with the Virgin Mary, for example, may then believe she's about to give birth to a redeemer. Actually, there's many a pregnancy test that we do in these emergency situations, you know, because you can never be sure! And the men are very apt to feel they're specially elected to be the second coming of the Messiah; or, if they're very paranoid, a great political or military leader such as Napoleon or Hitler. The delusions of grandeur become very evident, for as soon as one's identity gets hung up on such archetypal identifications, there immediately arises the "enemy out there" who is trying to undo what the supreme power has brought about. There is a deeply-felt fear of being toppled, a feeling of immense danger. This again has many cultural connotations...

So if the person experiences himself as God, might he then feel the Devil is out to get him?

Yes, that's pretty much adequate. If one is Christ, the Anti-Christ is around somewhere at work; and if one is in a supreme position of political rule, then there is sure to be a disruptive revolutionary political party on the other side of the planet which is trying to topple you! It's rather scary, when you consider that the collective unconscious projects such huge shadows upon whole nations or superpowers...

What about the death / rebirth aspect?

Well you see, the state of being in a realm of death in the beginning is pretty soon accompanied by the idea of either being born, or giving birth. This is really the fundamental ground of the whole experience.



The Apocalypse: Breaking of the Sixth Seal
by Albrecht Dürer • 1496 - 98 (detail)
[See page 16 for full view](#)

So there are two or three transformative elements that run through the phenomenon in a sort of overall direction. First, the feeling of death and rebirth, which is really symbolic of the process of disorganisation and reorganisation; second, the fact that this happens both on the world level as well as on the personal level – the world is also going through a disruption and a regeneration; and finally, the initial inflated notion that one is a supreme power (a great spiritual force, a supreme being, a supreme intelligence from outer space or whatever), gradually yields to a deeper overall preoccupation with the issues of relationship. The feelings and motivations tend toward love and affection in general. The sexual element is stirred up quite a bit, but mostly it's on a symbolic level. The process of psychological individuation required to achieve this feeling of loving relationship is also what social evolution is all about.

In this regard, the concerns of the regression to infancy are no more personal than one would expect. They are mostly concerned with the interpersonal field, with the parents and siblings, and with the problems of childhood and adolescence. The great surprise, during these weeks of turmoil, is that even more of the concern is about cultural and societal issues. I was totally unprepared for this: in the Freudian setting of medical school, there was no mention of it at all. At first, when Jung told me about it in Switzerland, I found it very hard to believe. I had to see for myself if he was right. This then became one of my motives for going my alternative way with these people.

Our new understanding shows that the process of re-connection to the unconscious, which these millions of people go through in a way that's usually so very hazardous, isolated and uncreative, is nonetheless made up of the same stuff as seers, visionaries, cultural reformers and prophets go through. They also experience much of the same content, except that in their case it is specifically concerned, first and foremost, with the culture itself. Any kind of personal subjective ideation is made to serve and clarify that end.

When I started looking into these cultural parallels of the "schizophrenic" process, I also began to find very clear similarities in the rituals of almost every society. There are striking parallels in the visionary states of reformers and prophets and Messiahs. Messiahs are found all over the world, you know! Almost any culture that's going through a profound upheaval of rapid turbulent change, produces seers and visionaries who glimpse the new myth-form and express its guidelines – the basic ideas and paradigms that give the people a new sense of direction. This is particularly true, of course, at the tribal level – in almost every part of the world. The shamanic visions are particularly close to what we see in "psychosis," with all the ideation of death and rebirth, and symbols of world destruction and regeneration.

Are you saying, then, that the psychosymbolic images, feelings and ideas which emerge into consciousness during the "schizophrenic" process, also carry basic symbolic relevance – at the level of the collective unconscious – to the alienation of Humankind as a whole?

Yes! One thing that is quite significant in this respect is that each decade shows a marked difference in the typical content of the ideation. During the Fifties, for example, I used to see a lot about "Democracy" and "Communism." For many Americans at that time, the coincidence of opposites was symbolically expressed in terms of America versus Russia, and a big showdown between the forces of

liberty and oppression. A little later on that content tapered off, and the moral values and the issues of war and peace that typified the Sixties came to the fore. In the Seventies, I saw a lot of concern with global concerns like preserving the planet and paying attention to nature. The "bad guys" in this case were cast in the role of those who had a disregard for the needs of Nature.

Now of course this is not too different from what one finds in dreams. For dreams also tend to reflect cultural issues, and as soon as one gets into any kind of therapy that deals with the psyche at this deeper level of the collective unconscious, one comes to the inevitable realisation that we are not going along in our psychic life, you know, just in a realm of interpersonal relationships. A very powerful culture such as ours projects huge patterns, huge conflicts and turmoils, and we all experience them, although we may not be conscious of their inner meaning at all. In this sense, Humankind is still enormously alienated; the point is, it doesn't happen just in Washington and Moscow – it happens within the psyche of the whole people. The political spokesmen are only giving voice to what is going on in all the individuals...

This brings up the question of myth-form. You see, the big problems facing society are perceived in symbolic, mythic expression, and for this reason their resolution takes place on the symbolic, mythic level as well. If there's work going on in a culture to reorganise itself, then it's a process that must occur on both levels simultaneously: individuals will go through their personal visions, and collective spokesmen will express collective visions, which get worked out and implemented on a cultural level.

Graduate student in clinical psychology:

"Dr. Laing, I still don't understand the theoretical basis of your therapeutic approach to schizophrenia. Could you please explain it?"

R.D. Laing:

"Certainly. The basis is love. I don't see how you or I can be of any help to our clients in a visionary state unless we are capable of experiencing a feeling of love for them. Therapy, as opposed to mere treatment, requires that we have a capacity for loving-kindness and compassion."



The Tower of Babel, Pieter Bruegel, 1563

Graduate student (perplexed):

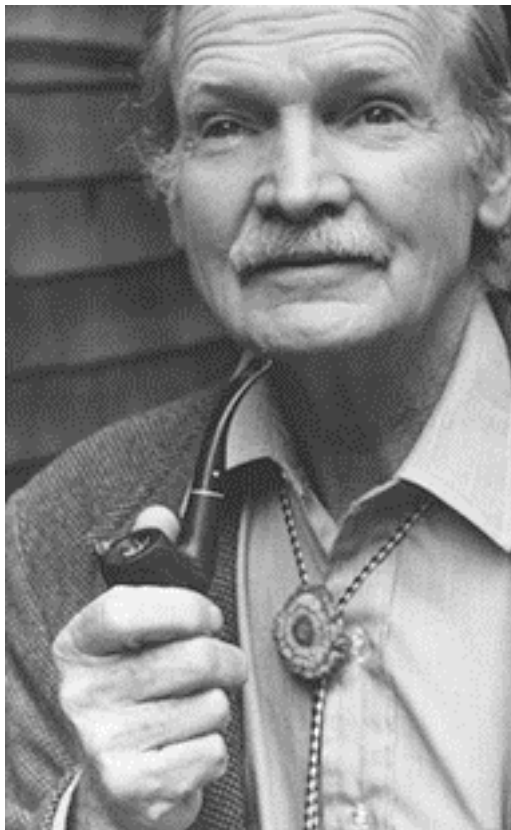
"But Dr. Laing, what is your clinical methodology for developing this approach?"

— Overheard at a talk given by R.D.Laing in New York

In your book *The Far Side of Madness*, you describe how at Diabasis – the home for "schizophrenic" individuals which you set up in San Francisco in the 1970's – they could comfortably get into their visionary process in a totally supportive atmosphere. What are the necessary conditions to enable a person to go through the experience of madness and be renewed by it when they come through, as you put it, on the far side?

That's a question with many facets! The first one, which we touched on briefly toward the beginning of this conversation, was about the conditions that are set up around such an individual.

What we did at Diabasis was specifically to set up what we hoped would be the most ideal, least toxic (smile), least damaging environment for a person in the visionary state.



Dr. John Weir Perry

First off, this means a home. You need a place with friendly, sympathetic individuals who live there.

These people have to be companions, have to be willing to listen and not be frightened and not be judgmental about it, and not try to do anything to anybody.

One has to let the visionary process unfold itself spontaneously.

Under such conditions, to our surprise, we found that our clients got into a clear space very quickly! We had started out with the notion that we would surely be in for a lot of bedlam with all this "madness" going on, but actually the opposite was true!

People would come in just as crazy as could be on the first day or two, but they'd settle down very soon into a state of coherency and clarity.

Often, when I would come in for a consultation at the end of the week, I would see someone who had been admitted in a completely freaked-out state just a few days before, sitting at the dinner-table indistinguishable from anybody else; sometimes I couldn't tell if this was a new member of the staff, or one of our clients. The calming effect of a supportive environment is truly amazing!

It's a well-known fact that people can and do clear up in a benign setting. Actually, they can come down very quickly.



A US hydrogen bomb explosion in the Pacific Ocean

But if some of our cases had gone to the mental hospital, they would have been given a very dire message: "You've had a mental breakdown. You're sick. You're into this for decades, maybe for the rest of your life!" and told "You need this medication to keep it all together."

I am quite certain that if some of our clients had been sent to the mental hospital, they would have had a long, long fight with it.

The outcome of their stay at Diabasis, however, was that their life after the episode was substantially more satisfying and fulfilling to them than it had been before!

Would the determining factor then be the person's realisation that one is in a non-ordinary state of consciousness – i.e.: a state which, although very different from that of the people around one, is in fact completely natural and good – and that the hallucinatory imagery carries a symbolic meaning, which pertains primarily to the inner reality, rather than to the outside world?

You said it! The tendency, as you suggest, is to concretise all the symbolic stuff and believe there are enemies out there, and that the walls are wired, that there are people with guns at the window, and subversive political parties trying to do things, or that one is being watched because one is the head of some organisation and everybody knows it. All of that is a mistaken, "concretistic" tendency to take too literally things whose correct meaning is actually symbolic.

So yes, the therapeutic goal is to achieve that attitude which perceives the symbolic nature of the ideation which belongs to the inner reality. Now the inner reality is real! It's very important to grant it that reality, but not to get the two realities mixed up. That's the trick! Actually, for most people it's surprisingly easy. Certainly, the more paranoid a person is, the more difficult. There is a certain paranoid makeup, a style of personality which tends to focus on the objective world around. It's what we call an attention style. It is difficult for such people to see the inner meaning of their visions. On the other hand, the average person tends to go along with the inner journey and to realise – well, they do need to be reminded – but once they're reminded, they tend to quickly perceive that it is a spiritual test, or a symbolic test, and not the actual end of the actual world.

The second condition needed for a successful outcome of the "schizophrenic episode" is not just a benign surround, but also some people who can relate to the visionary process in a sympathetic way. I believe very strongly that it's not just enough to have a benign community around such a person: the thing that really makes the process move and reach its conclusion, is an intense relationship with one or two people. Sometimes with a man and a woman, who may play a symbolic role like two parents, or like the opposites, which can be taken care of in this way.

Bringing the whole supercharged process into a relationship seems to make it bearable, containable, manageable. Of course, some people go through it alone. They tell me this is highly painful, very frightening. But if one has a therapist or counselor to whom one can relate the experience, one need not suffer a whole lot once the process gets underway. There will always be some tough moments, nightmarish times, bewilderment. One wonders what the dangers are, whether there are evil forces out there. But through these weeks, somehow, the prevailing mood is actually one of buoyancy. At Diabasis, there was a general atmosphere of jocularly. People would be joking around, having fun, playing music and dancing and humming tunes and painting...

Yes, in fact wasn't that part of the design? You had all sorts of ways for people to communicate their experience and externalise in through various forms of art?

The whole environment was organised into various "spaces." One of these – a very important one – was called the rage room. This was sound-proofed and padded, for the individual's own protection, and we put things in there that they could whack to pieces like old cottons and mattresses. But the door was not locked; it was not like the padded cell in the mental hospital, where the person is isolated against his will... We set it up so that if a client was having strong feelings of rage, he or she could share it with a staff member, particularly the counselor or primary therapist, and thus deliver it. This was found meaningful. The anger is a very important part of the growth of the ego, you see.

We also had the opposite: a room for quietness and meditation. This was equally important, for integrative purposes. We had an art room, but I must say, people didn't seem to spend much time there (chuckle). These so-called "sensitive personalities" were all hanging around the dining room table, doing water-colours or modeling in clay, and giving creative expression to some of the imagery inside their head. We also had a sand tray and figurines for sand play

therapy. It works like a dream: you set up a dramatic scene, move the figurines, tell a story. This avenue of expression is easier than painting. It's very dreamlike, so it hits the visionary state very well. We also had poetry...

Another thing we provided was a variety of body movement sessions, dance and martial arts, with skilled facilitators. And finally, we had interviews at least three or four times a week, for an hour and a half to two hours each, with the primary counselor/therapist. But really all of these creative outlets put together became part of the interview itself – verbal expression combined with image expression in these various media.

Now throughout all this there was nothing scheduled, nothing mandatory. It was all informal. We'd just respond to things as they came up. Our only house rule really was "No violence to property or persons!" The clients could dash out nude into the street if they had to; we didn't like it, but they did! You see, we wanted them to be in this house of their own free will. They had to realise their own desire to belong in the house, and they did.

So this whole approach is essentially one of releasing, rather than suppression. We allowed everything and encouraged its expression – not toward chaos, but toward communication! Communication tends to order. This is a most important point in psychiatry, but the common opinion is that it is very dangerous... When you actually do it, however, you find exactly the opposite is true: people get over their preoccupations very quickly.

The whole point here is to deliver the visionary content to somebody and to be able to appreciate its symbolic relevance to the inner process of personal and social renewal.

Once it's delivered, the process keeps moving by itself. It's really unfortunate there is so much misunderstanding about it all.

The truth is really very simple.

"The gigantic catastrophes that threaten us are not elemental happenings of a physical or biological kind, but are psychic events. We are threatened in a fearful way by wars and revolutions that are nothing else than psychic epidemics. At any moment a few million people may be seized by a madness, and then our leaders may precipitate us into a blood bath of war and radioactivity... Instead of being exposed to wild beasts, tumbling rocks, and inundating waters, man is exposed today to the elemental forces of his own psyche. Psychic life is a world power that exceeds by many times all the powers of the Earth..."

If one voluntarily takes the burden of completeness upon oneself, one can avoid all the unhappy consequences of repressed individuation – one need not find it 'happening' to one against one's will in a negative form. This is as much as to say that anyone who is destined to descend into a deep pit had better set about it with all the necessary precautions, rather than risk falling into the hole backwards."

— Carl Jung

"The journey is there and it's an experience that we have at some stage to go through... Every single one of us has got to go through it... until we gradually build ourselves up into an acceptance of reality."

— Jesse Watkins (former "schizophrenic" client of R.D. Laing [4])

"The time will come when Humankind will have to make a choice between suicide and adoration."

— Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Here's a broader question which I've been thinking about for years. If nature's self-organising way of healing an alienated individual is for one's psyche to go through a world view transformation process involving a spontaneous temporary non-ordinary state of consciousness, do you think it possible that an entire society, or perhaps even the whole of Humankind – which is undoubtedly alienated and obviously having a hard time adapting to its new global environment – could conceivably have to pass through some kind of collective non-ordinary state, on the way to greater wisdom? And if so, would not such a process also take the form of either a horrible mass psychosis, if suppressed, or a creative breakthrough, if we were culturally prepared to understand its inner meaning?

Yes indeed! You know, there are many examples of this in anthropological studies of societies going through periods of cultural crisis. What you're referring to is right around the corner! You don't have to look very far to see a culture deteriorate, to see individuals in deep distress...

The cultural historian Anthony Wallace is very lucid about this. He did a study of periods of turmoil in various cultures, and formulated a ground-plan for the process of sudden culture-change. It goes like this: first, under the new conditions, the old answers don't work, the old methods no longer hold, the old ways prevail no more, and the old values are no longer held in esteem. This leads to a demoralisation, which results very quickly in psychosomatic distress, and the abuse of alcohol or other drugs. From out of all this, some sort of restitution may then emerge through the activation of visionary states within certain people in the society. The gifted ones are those whose visions reach beyond the personal sphere, into the realm of the collective unconscious, out of which the new myth comes forth.

Now the crucial point here is whether that myth is then received. You see, in a psychosis, part of the problem, as we were saying, is that the vision is not received. When the individual, and his family and friends and society regard the vision as unacceptable and they reject it, that is the experience of going crazy!

On the other hand, a prophet is given a lot of esteem. If his vision happens to coincide with what the people need to hear, he will eventually be held in great reverence and his message will be received. If his myth-making capacity is working well, he may deliver the new myth that is going to be accepted for the next phase of that culture's evolution. That then leads to a whole cultural renewal, which Wallace calls a revitalisation movement.

So what's particularly interesting about this collective, cultural dimension of the visionary experience, is that the historical evolution of culture recapitulates the same process that happens within the individual. It begins in fear of death, lust for power and supremacy, but soon leads over into this concern with relationship and Eros, intimacy, caring. In history, the myth original that parallels this process is one that was first conceived during the urban revolution: that's about 3000 BCE in Egypt and Mesopotamia, 2000 BCE in China, and about 1000 BCE in Israel. With this first growth of cities, a vast psychological transformation took place in society, and new myths emerged which served a guiding function for the motivations within. Now these first urban societies were preoccupied with power. Power and dominance were held in high esteem and sacralised. Some centuries

went by, and you had prophetic movements, philosophical movements that arose in opposition to that.

These later myths redefined the cohesive power in society. They asserted that the thing that binds the people together into a working whole is not power and dominance but caring, brotherhood, and love. If you check out the ancient literature, you will find that this idea of the overarching importance of love or compassion is simply not mentioned in any urban texts up to a certain point.... The function of social leadership was first projected exclusively onto the persona of the Pharaoh or King. All the people had to do was to follow orders and do what they were told. The mythologies of the early urban phase were all in the power idiom at first: the King is the embodiment of the whole people. Only he can care for them. He is the one who is compassionate. He is the one who is loving, as a father is toward his children.

So what took place over the following centuries was a complete transformation of that type of myth. The first time in recorded literature that there is any mention of the Kingship belonging not only to the elected king, but also to the people, was around the middle of the 1st millennium BCE, in China. They affirmed that every individual has within himself the potentiality to be sage-king or sacral king. It was specifically expressed in these terms: "Every man shall become a sage-king!"

Very interesting! Who said it?

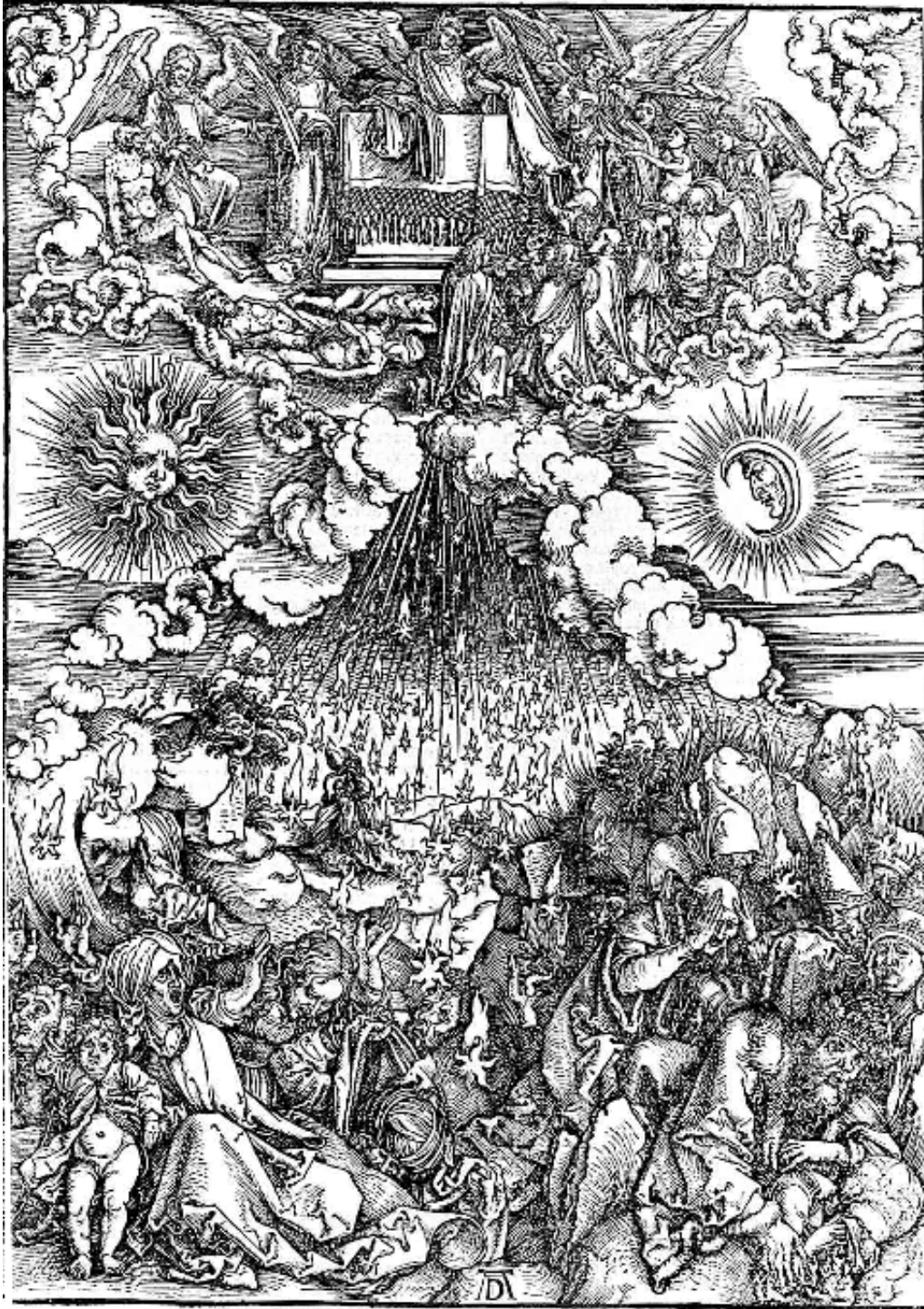
Interestingly enough, it was Confucius who expressed it first – you wouldn't expect it really! He was a great promoter of the idea of the inner kingship, democracy, self-rule, and social caring. He had the Golden Rule – the idea of returning good for evil and responding to violence with non-violence – quite clearly expressed long before Christianity. The same thing happened in India, with the Buddha. In Israel, it didn't arrive until much later on. The Old Testament prophets, projecting their image of God as the vengeful Yahveh, did not talk of this kind of brotherhood or compassion; you don't find that really until the Christian era. The point is that the central importance of love and social caring was just not mentioned in any of these cultures before their initial perception – in visionary states – by sensitive individuals.

Now regarding the second part of your question, regarding the current cultural upheaval in the world today, I think we must be prepared, as you were mentioning earlier, for a change in world outlook, that is, a new world view or mandala.

The original mandalas were conceived and designed as world-images, meaning that they are condensed compact versions, in symbol form, of a way of perceiving the world.



Simply put, the new world view will become explicit when its symbol moves into consciousness.



The Apocalypse: Breaking of the Sixth Seal • By Albrecht Dürer • 1496 - 98

This image depicts a scene from the *Apocalypse* or *Book of Revelations* (the last section of the New Testament of the Bible), which Saint John the Divine wrote after obtaining a vision whilst held prisoner in a cave on the Greek island of Patmos. Describing his vision, the Saint mentions an end of time, a resurrection of the souls of the dead, a divine last judgement, followed by a grand entry of the souls of the blessed into Paradise.

The word *Apocalypse* is interesting. Its English meaning is assumed to be "the end of the world." But as the psychiatrist R.D. Laing pointed out, if you scrutinise the text, you will not find a single indication that St. John was talking about an external phenomenon! The word itself, in Greek, simply means "revelation," or more precisely, *the uncovering of something that was hidden*.

ENDNOTES

1. Founded by Dr. Stanislav Grof, MD, Ph.D, and others, the International Transpersonal Association (ITA) is a scientific and educational organisation with the following purposes: (1) to provide an orientation that can reconcile the viewpoints of various disciplines and formulate a comprehensive and integrated image of human nature; (2) to facilitate the development of new paradigms that will synthesise presently disparate approaches in education, research, teaching, psychotherapy, spiritual practice, the arts and media, socio-economic theory and other areas of human life and knowledge; and (3) to promote scientific research, development, and communication in all areas related to the transpersonal dimensions of human nature. For more information, contact the ITA in Mill Valley, California (tel: + 1 415 383 8779). The ITA can also put you in touch with the Spiritual Emergency Network, a worldwide group of psychotherapists specialising in a gentle, non-drug, transpersonal approach to personal crisis.

See also www.holotropic.com and the following books by Stan Grof:

Grof, Stanislav. *Realms Of The Human Unconscious: Observations From LSD Research*, E.P.Dutton, New York, 1976.

Grof, Stanislav. *Beyond The Brain: Birth, Death And Transcendence In Psychotherapy*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1985.

Grof, Stanislav. *The Adventure of Self-Discovery, dimensions of consciousness and new perspectives in psychotherapy and inner exploration*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988.

Grof, Stanislav; and Grof, Christina (ed.); *Spiritual Emergency - when personal transformation becomes a crisis*; with contributions from R.D.Laing, Roberto Assagioli, John Weir Perry, Ram Dass, Lee Senella, Jack Kornfield, Paul Rebillot, Holger Kalwert, Anne Armstrong, Keith Thompson and others; Jeremy Tarcher Inc., Los Angeles, 1989.

2. The San Francisco Chronicle published this obituary of Dr. John Weir Perry on 3 November 1998:

John Weir Perry, a psychiatrist, author and expert on the disorder known as brief-reactive psychosis, died Thursday of cancer in his Larkspur home. He was 84

Known as a radical thinker in the mental-health field, Dr. Perry believed that schizophrenia had benefits and that the psychotic state could lead to higher consciousness if allowed to run its course.

A native of Rhode Island and a graduate of Harvard University and its medical school, Dr. Perry studied in Zurich with Carl Gustav Jung and trained as a Jungian analyst. In 1960 he moved to San Francisco where he practiced for more than 30 years.

He was an assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of California at San Francisco and a lecturer at the Jung Institute in San Francisco.

Dr. Perry wrote six books, including "The Far Side of Madness," a 1974 work that described certain psychoses as visionary states.

In the 1970s he founded Diabasis, a San Francisco residence for young schizophrenics where therapy included painting, dance, massage, meditation and conversation. Such treatment usually worked better, he said, than "the men in white who come rushing up and the whole atmosphere becomes antagonistic."

He is survived by his children, Wendy Perry of Larspur, Brian Perry of Denver, Alice Garofalo of Seattle, Anne Weir of Portland, Maine, and John Weir Ferguson Perry of Vermont.

A private memorial service will be held Sunday.

3. For a description of Perry's therapeutic facility at Diabasis, see Perry, Dr. John Weir. *The Far Side of Madness*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1974.
4. See Laing, Dr. Ronald D. *The Politics of Experience*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1968. Regarding the self-organising aspect of the acute schizophrenic syndrome, see Jesse Watkins, *A Ten-Day Voyage*, quoted in
5. Regarding the self-organising aspect of the Universe, see the following classic texts:

Tsu, Lao. *Tao Te Ching*, 6th. century B.C.E.; translated from the Mandarin by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, Wildwood House Ltd., London, 1972.

Bateson, Gregory. *Steps To An Ecology of Mind*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1972.

Jantsch, Erich. *The Self-Organizing Universe: Scientific and Human Implications of the Emerging Paradigm of Evolution*, Pergamon, New York, 1980 (re-issued by Pergamon Press 1980, ISBN: 0080243126).

Maturana, Humberto R. and Varela, Francisco J. *Autopoiesis and Cognition*. D Reidel Pub Co, 1980, ISBN: 9027710163.

Bohm, David. *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1980.

Capra, Fritjof. *The Web of Life : A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems*. 1 Anchor Edition, Anchor Books, 1996, ISBN: 0385476752.

Gleick, James. *Chaos: Making a New Science*, William Heineman Ltd, London, 1988.
6. Perry, Dr. John Weir. *The Self In Psychotic Process: Its Symbolization in Schizophrenia*, with an introduction by C.G.Jung. University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1953.
7. See note 3 above.
8. Perry, Dr. John Weir. *The Heart of History: Individuality in Evolution*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1987.

9. Perry, Dr. John Weir. *Trials of the Visionary Mind: Spiritual Emergency and the Renewal Process*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1999.
10. Gregory Bateson (1904 - 1980) was a brilliant and unusually eloquent scientist and biological philosopher with a poetical turn of phrase. Born in England and educated at Cambridge, he carried out early anthropological work on pattern and communication in New Guinea and Bali. He then did research in psychiatry, schizophrenia, and dolphins. He played a major role in the early formulation of Cybernetics, and helped introduce Systems Theory and Communications Theory into the work of social and natural scientists. His influence is most strongly felt in the fields of education, family therapy and ecology. He was married to the anthropologist Margaret Mead for many years; sat on the Board of Regents at the University of California; and was Scholar-in-Residence at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur. Bateson rose to international prominence through his book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, followed by *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* and finally *Angels' Fear*, co-authored with his daughter Mary Catherine Bateson. He may yet be recognised as the most important thinker of the 20th century.

His key texts are:

Bateson, Gregory. *Perceval's Narrative: A Patient's Account of his Psychosis*, Stanford University Press, 1961, Stanford.

Bateson, Gregory. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. Ballantine Books, New York, 1972. Reprinted with a foreword by Mary Catherine Bateson, University of Chicago Press, 2000. ISBN 0-226-03905-6. Includes a republication of *The Double-Bind Theory of Schizophrenia*.

Bateson, Gregory. *Mind and Nature : A Necessary Unity*. Ballantine Books, New York, 1979.

Bateson, Gregory & Mary Catherine. *Angels Fear*. Macmillan, New York, 1987.

Bateson, Gregory & Ruesch, Jurgen, M.D. *Communication, The Social Matrix of Psychiatry*. W.W. Norton, New York, 1951.

See also: The Pattern That Connects the world situation to our own way of seeing it, by Michael O'Callaghan, at www.global-vision.org/bateson.html

11. Esalen Institute, in Big Sur, California, is a non-profit organisation that has been devoted to the exploration of human potential since the 1960's. Historical luminaries like Aldous Huxley, Joseph Campbell, Jack Kerouac, Alan Ginsberg, Joan Baez, and countless others have gathered here to develop revolutionary ideas, transformative practices, and innovative art forms. Today Esalen is a retreat center where people live and work in a communal setting. Residents and guests participate in an incredible variety of alternative education and personal growth programs in subjects ranging from meditation to massage, yoga, psychology, ecology, spirituality, art, music, and much more. For details visit their web site at www.esalen.org.