

The Symbiotic Revolution

Humans and many other organisms will become extinct by 2023 unless we dial down our pollution of the atmosphere to zero in the five years we have left. This dire warning comes from James Anderson, the scientist who alerted people to the ozone layer's depletion.

Value in art and culture is controlled by Capitalistic interests of ownership alongside Universities that validate for socialistic studies within their aegis. How do we assert an environmentalist platform that can compete against these dual exclusionary domains and give voice to a culture for change?

The alarming CO₂ warning is actually misleading. While we have to reduce these emissions, the vast reservoir of CO₂ in the ocean itself will just replenish it. There is a simple answer though and it is still possible to cool down the planet and stabilize the climate. Walter Jehne, climate scientist, explains how the water cycle operates and how to manage it so we can rehydrate the dry earth as if it were a sponge needing to be filled. The greenhouse effect accounts for 95% of global warming while CO₂ emissions contribute 4%. Carbon is also good for us and is a building block for life. It's easy to see that the solution lies in establishing, retaining and nurturing the moisture in the soil, giving rise to foliage, which then affects the precipitation. Ancient Australian Aboriginal people called it Stormwater Dreaming.

Metaphorically, art and aesthetics are at the cliff face of meaninglessness. It is an arid desert out there that has been depleted beyond its capacity to sustain culture. Artists are scrabbling around trying to survive in a hostile world that cannot provide sustenance.

The ocean is in a similar state. Ideally the ecosystem there relies upon huge numbers of whales releasing plumes of waste into the water that become nutrients for phytoplankton. Currently there is a lack of oxygen in the ocean, such that dead zones are appearing where nothing can grow. More than half the world's oxygen is generated via phytoplankton photosynthesis.

At the heart of empathy is the archetypal 'mother', providing nutrients and tending the soil. We are at a crisis point of life itself and must mobilize our resources to take care of our world. We need to cleanse our philosophical structures of selfish subjective individuality: the "I think therefore I am" idiocy of Descartes. The 'self' is an invention of the mind. We have to amalgamate with the entire organism and think with all our feeling. In California wildfires rage out of control but the Eucalyptus tree was extracted from Australia and transported to California without the soil microbes which function to biodegrade the trees. California is deforesting to eradicate these trees and control the wildfires. Yet forests are essential. Our thinking must broaden beyond the narrow confines of subject, object and empty space in time to accept symbiosis.

Antonio Damasio's new book, "The Strange Order of Things: Life, Feeling, and the Making of Cultures", lays out a trajectory that impacts upon art and aesthetics. We

have laboured under misconceptions about consciousness for centuries and it's time to reconstitute our narrative of origin.

Damasio is a neurologist who focuses on feeling and how it impacts the body and brain. Indeed, there is no separation and feeling is the motivator that galvanizes all problem solving and cultural construction. He refers back to primitive bacteria and asserts that feeling governed their communal success. The feeling is experienced by all organisms through its vital processes, and in our case is located in our gut. So, these uni-celled organisms have the capacity to mount defenses and to join where food is scarce or to separate where it is plentiful. Scientists have recently revealed that the bacteria *Staphylococcus epidermidis* helps to protect against skin cancer. Symbiosis is the key to survival and was key to evolution. Lynn Margulis, evolutionary theorist and biologist, explains this in Symbiogenesis.

Nearer to our societal structures is the world of certain organizational insects such as bees, ants, wasps and termites. They are very sophisticated despite having only a portion of the hive brain. They create architecture, farm food, establish traffic flow, work out ventilation and waste removal, guard the queen and can regulate the number of workers needed depending on energy resources. Collectively, they are driven to act by 'feeling' to regulate homeostasis, or the core of life. They exist in symbiosis with microbial organisms and fungi that help them survive and flourish.

There are three types of feeling: those stemming from bodily processes of chemical and neurological type taking place in the background. Then there are emotive responses to phenomena like smells or visual cues. Finally there are drives like lust or play, hunger and thirst, or joy and sadness. These feelings are not adornments of consciousness but are integral to everything. They arise from the gut, abdomen, thorax and thick skin of the body, informing and motivating the mind and brain.

What can we, as artists and cultural workers do to restore balance in the ecosystem? Empathy is the expression of emotion or feeling that seeks to nurture and reinforce homeostasis. It is pointless for art to be a beautiful object destined to be an elite possession, removed from societal access or placed in a revered museum. It's equally inane to imagine that academia will lead the way through cultural studies of Post Modernism or Relational Aesthetics. We need a collective groundswell of feeling to motivate and take action.

We have to reinvent our artistic language to communicate outside the conventional philosophical perception. This would not be limited to artistic media but would embrace all expressions in whatever media, across disciplines. I propose "Chaosmosis" as a philosophical manner of thought. Felix Guattari, psychotherapist and philosopher, spawned the term and I think of it as a process of 'loosening identity', reducing structure to allow a free flow of information. We need to make art as if we are mothers of the world intent upon establishing and transmitting meaning that supports life.

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