

SOME NOTES ON COSMGRAPHY: Reminding Our Place in the Universe

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1.

All cultures have stories to account for their origin. Of course it is only natural for a species that has a sense of its ephemerality---as far as we presently know, humans are the only earthlings to have of precognition their death--- to also be curious about their origin, be it historical or mythological, usually a clever mixture of the two.

For scientists, who call their myths theories until experimentally proven, origin stories include: a fluctuation in the quantum field caused the Big Bang and created this universe; or perhaps this universe is just one of countless others that come into, and go out, of existence, *ad infinitum*. There is also the Many Worlds Theory. In this scenario, a person exists simultaneously in other worlds, and whatever decision one makes in this world alternative decisions are being made in other worlds.

Cosmologist Tim Maudlin sums it up: “I think we don’t know enough to make any plausible guess about even whether there was an initial state, much less what it might have been. This goes beyond what we have good evidence or theory for.”¹

Cosmography, too, had no perceivable beginning, except that my work on as a Digital Literary Artist began in 1995, when I was a Writer-in-Residence at the University of New Mexico’s Center for Southwest Research. Having access to the nascent public Internet, via a telephone modem, one night while cruising for new websites, the university library’s catalogue appeared on my monitor’s amber screen. It was as if the whole world had opened a secret door of my home. A little later, I joined Webartery, an international group of artists and writers who were experimenting with digital software on the network.

Cosmography’s basic software was Dreamweaver MX, a program I’d been using since it was released in

2002, along with GIF and morphing animation software, and Xara's Photo & Graphic Designer 2013.

My strategy was, and continues to be, to employ the simplest tools possible for developing a Digital Literary Art mated with Arts-Based Research: genre and methodology.

Making art is like an act of theft, in which the thief is stealing from him(her)self. This is because in our collective unconscious, in our dreams, the boundary between I and others is in continuous play.

In an important essay, "The Therapeutic Value of Alchemical Language," James Hillman points out that the language of psychotherapy, in its interpretation of dreams, is not the language of dreams.²

Here we see the conflict between a dynamically creative psyche and efforts to rationalize, e.g., civilize it.

In the field of artmaking, the more that remains hidden in the work the more chance it has of remaining relevant over such whims of the market and ephemerality of critique. Of course I am addressing the rare masterpiece, such as Picasso's "Guernica," whose images continue to critique humanity's unrelenting capacity for violence. However, because of the present climate emergency, which threatens the future viability of all life on this planet, along with the survival of human civilizations' cultural achievements, we must, as much as possible, raise our work to a conscious transdisciplinary practice, one that overcomes the strictures of anthropocentrism.

While the philosopher Bruno Latour uses the metaphor "landing on Earth,"³ the problem, I suggest, is rather how to see the Earth from a clarifying distance *without leaving it*; and how to land on other planets by not depending on powerful rockets but on individualized imaginations.

2.

In *Cosmography*, each of nine planets, plus Terra Incognita, a planet hidden by its darkness, is linked with a corresponding god borrowed from Ancient Greece's pantheon. With this hierophany in mind, the first text of *Cosmography*'s Moon/Selene section begins with this epigram:

An astronaut told a class of Navajo children, "If you study science, someday you too can go to the moon." One student spoke up: "My grandfather's been there several times." The class nodded, wisely.

But the project actually begins with Sun/Helios, the "shining one" we can only look at obliquely without damaging our sight.

Without the Sun cruising at the optimal distance from the Earth, life on this planet would not have begun, much less evolved into the billions of species (some still not discovered) amongst whom we presently live.

On the other hand, because of our abuse and mishandling of the planet's resources, especially since the Industrial Revolution of the extended 18th Century, in particular our over-dependency on sources of energy that emit large volumes of CO₂, methane, and other heat-trapping gases, the Sun's proximity is triggering erratic, if not deadly, weather. These events so disastrous that scientists have declared a new

epoch, the first since the Holocene began at the end of the last Ice Age, around 11,000 years ago. Appropriately named the Anthropocene, this is the epoch in which human activity is mostly negatively affecting every meter of the planet's Critical Zone, the thin layer of atmosphere on which almost all life on this planet depends for its survival.

3.

Now to the text. The first Sun/Helios text is a white font on a solid black background, perhaps conjuring up a Paleolithic cave in which the flickering light of small grease lamps “can lead to the perception of movement even when all is still.”⁴ On the screen is an animation of the Sun morphing just enough so that an image that looks (to me) like a phoenix, the immortal bird reborn every 500 years, appears in its midst. Here is the text:

Werner Herzog, one of the most renowned German directors of the twentieth century, set out on a walk across Europe to visit his friend Lotte Eisner, a well respected film critic who he believed to be dying.

Walked in another direction this morning, to the the eastern edge of town. As sun crested a mountain storing what history can't recall, I faced the math of ninety-three million miles.

Truck's horn bellowed over fields, disturbing an important conference of crows. To take the path thousands of years ago by the Milling Stone People, is not to speak this simultaneous sense of deeper and deeper recesses of oneiric inwardness within the stillness of the stone, and **the name we gave them.**

**'There are many, many worlds,' he told me.
'One day you will see that the many worlds
are separated by little more than a dream.'**

Cosmography took its first steps on the edge of a small town in Southern California, in a valley ringed by forested mountains, and where the main road through town runs East and West. On that morning, as the Sun rose I imagined the city on the East Coast I had left over fifty years ago, not looking back. So I stuttered “the the” on a sudden flurry of memories “that history can't recall,” from a past as distant and volatile as the sun that was rising in my eyes.

I am always searching for the ghostly rudiments of paths made by people who walked on this ground hundreds, even thousands, of years ago, whose feet created trading routes, hunting routes. trails walked between villages to visit friends, relatives, or lovers.

The oldest community of which we know who populated this region is the Milling Stone Horizon, “the name we gave them,” what they called themselves having been lost in the rupture of history's lost languages. What we do know it that it was a “culture marked by extensive use of milling stones and mullers, a general lack of well-made projectile points, and burials with rock cairns.”⁴

The sudden change in font signals an “invagination,” a trope that has been used by several philosophers, including Jacques Derrida, for whom an invaginated text is a narrative that folds in upon itself. How I use it is best narrated in an interview I gave in 2010:

“My trope of invagination surfaced during the mid-1980s, from reading Derrida, Deleuze, Ulmer, Jabès, and others. The original idea was to interrupt a sentence by placing quote within quote, each one smaller and printed lighter, until they completely disappeared . . . then slowly emerged again, until the original sentence was able to continue. However, as you can imagine, that proved awkward. Yet the trope continued to be viable as single interruptions, or intrusions, within a paragraph.”⁶

4.

The second, of twenty texts in each series, begins the standard a black font on a white background. The epigram, by C.S. Lewis, warps phenomenology toward poetry while keeping in mind what the philosopher Rosi Bradotti cautioned: “Unless one is at ease with multi-dimensional complexity, one cannot feel at home in the twenty-first century.”⁷

It is the language of poets, in so far as they create true metaphors, which must restore this unity conceptually, after it has been lost from perception.

I leave before dawn. While the sun tries to enlighten me, my bones are already warming the earth. A breeze rustles the leaves; golden flowers chime in: *Blue tongues personify sparks that leap into darkness...*

**where our ancestors
are dancing
in ever tightening
circles.**

On mornings when heading for the mountains, especially during the hot summer months “I leave before dawn.”

What comes next in the text is a move toward Zen’s “Mind only,” that Emmanuel Kant echoes in his correlationalism. Simply put, we cannot know anything outside of what the mind can perceive. “My bones are already warming the earth because I know that someday my life time will come to its end. “Now I am become Death,” Vishnu says in the *Bhagavad Gita*, which Robert Oppenheimer famously repeated upon seeing the first nuclear explosion light up the early morning sky at Trinity Site, New Mexico.⁸

Where he saw a thousand suns, I see a golden flower, in concordance with the Chinese alchemical text, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*.⁹ After all, the making of the Atomic Bomb was modern alchemy. These flowers also remind me of a haiku by Matsuo Basho (1644-1694): “After the temple bell stops ringing / their sound continues / through the flowers.”

The flowers can also be blue, “And expire in the damp violets / Whose dawns fill these forests,”¹⁰

Whatever color the flowers assumed that morning, the Sun, Moon and Earth met “where our ancestors / are dancing in ever tightening / circles,” Here is where *Cosmography* began.

NOTES: (Ctrl+Click links the image above to the project’s Internet page.)

1. T. Maudln, “Modern Cosmology Versus God’s Creation.” An interview by Gary Gutting.“ New York Times, June 15, 2014.
2. *Alchemical Psychology. The Uniform Edition of the Writings of James Hillman.* Volume 5. Putnam CT. p.14. 2.
3. B. Latour, <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/838.html>
4. Z. Zorich, “Early Humans Made Animated Art.” *Nautilus.* Issue 11. March 17, 2014.
5. R.T. Fitzgerald and T.L. Jones, "The Milling Stone Horizon Revisited: New Perspectives from Northern and Central California." *Journal of California of Great Basin Anthropology.* Vol 21, No 1. (1999)
6. In, E.Picot, “The Gateless Gate. An Interview with Joel Weishaus.” *Rain Taxi*, 2010.
<https://www.raintaxi.com/the-gateless-gate-an-interview-with-joel-weishaus/> This invagination is from Geoff Dyer’s essay, “The Awakening of Stones: Rodin.” In, *Otherwise Known as the Human Condition.* (Minneapolis MN, 2011. p.103.
7. R. Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge.* Cambridge UK & Medford MA, 2019. p.3
8. See J. Weishaus, “Trinity Site.” In, S. Rowland & J. Weishaus, *Jungian Arts-Based Research and ‘The Nuclear Enchantment of New Mexico.’* Oxon UK & New York, 2021. pp. 162-3.
9. R. Wilhelm, trans, *The Secret of the Golden Flower. With a Commentary by C.G. Jung.* New York, 1962.
10. A. Rimbaud. From, “Comedy of Thirst.”

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