

cultural ecology. Each of these historical mentalities has expressed itself in a great, climactic text that rose above its historical limitations to become a universal work of art. The Gilgamesh epic, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Tao Te Ching* are therefore not simply ancient texts that are the intellectual property of scholars and academic specialists; they are last wills and testaments through which the ancients bequeathed to us the wealth that belongs to all of us, not simply to the scholars of ancient languages in the academy. If we come forward and claim these ancient texts as our own, then paradoxically the past of the sages that never really had its time to manifest as a civilization creates a visionary future that our present industrial society is not capable of becoming on its own. All of this is not about them; it is about us.

12

THE ROAD
NOT TAKEN:
CHAOS DYNAMICS
AND THE COSMIC
FEMININE IN THE
TAO TE CHING

Throughout this study of literature and the evolution of consciousness, I have used the metaphor of the catastrophe bifurcation and said that humanity is experiencing a catastrophe bifurcation in the emergence of a new global civilization. "Catastrophe" is a word that English has taken from Greek; it means "to turn over." When we turn over material in a compost heap, we create a catastrophe for the anaerobic bacteria in the rotting garbage as we suddenly flood them with oxygen and sunlight. The chaos dynamists say that there are three kinds of catastrophes: subtle, explosive, and "out of the blue." The mathematicians' use of these poetic metaphors makes me feel as if it is quite all right for me to return the favor and use their idea of a catastrophe bifurcation as a poetic metaphor for a cultural transformation of history. Since I have been arguing all along that literature and mathematics have been inseparably linked throughout history in the arith-

metic, geometric, dynamical, and now chaos dynamical mentalities, this collaboration between metaphor and math is quite appropriate. Since I am a cultural historian and not a prophet, I have no idea whether this catastrophe will be subtle, explosive, or out of the blue. I tend to think that our process of global cultural transformation is so complex a dynamic that it will be all three at once. The economic shift is subtle, the cultural shift is explosive, and the spiritual one is out of the blue.

To perceive our unique historical condition in time in this shift from an international culture of economically competing and warring industrial nation-states to a biospheric ecology of noetic polities, we need to look at other times in history during which humanity experienced systemic transformations of culture. Each of the earlier transformations has a certain descriptive power, but each is limited because all of them seem to be descriptive; it seems as if we are experiencing a great coda and recapitulation of human evolution. Because genetic engineering and the newly emerging nanotechnologies allow us to tinker with evolution by natural selection, we can say that our contemporary cultural transformation is greater than the one that took place during the industrial revolution and is more like the hominization of the primates, when we stepped out of nature into culture for the first time. Because our new global systems of electronic communication seem to be so constitutive of our new informational culture, we can also look back to the Renaissance, with its shift from medievalism to modernism, to see it as a metaphor for our historical situation. But what is unique to our time, and what makes these earlier examples of cultural transformation inadequate as models of our time, is the change in the rate of change itself. The hominization of the primates took place over millions of years, and even those comparatively rapid transformations such as the Renaissance and the industrial revolution took place over more than a century. The rate of change for our contemporary cultural transformation is so rapid and so intense that it is occurring within the space of an individual's lifetime—which is another way of saying that the individual life and consciousness is now constitutive of the dynamic of the planetary transformation. Our consciousness is now actually part of the phase-space of the new noetic polity; in fact, this is why I choose to use such new terms as noetic or musical polities. The quantum physicists have told us that this intimate relationship between mind and matter is true for the microcosm of elementary particles, so we should suspect that it is even more dynamically perceivable for the macrocosm of our global cultural situation.

If the individual consciousness is part of the complex dynamical system of our new biospheric cultural ecology, then we need to develop a healthier appreciation of consciousness and not simply look to descriptions of technology as if they were descriptions of culture. Historians, for the most part, simply do not do this, but continually limit their descriptions to technological terms such as the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the "plutonium age." If I seem weird as a cultural historian, and disturbingly unprofessional to my academic colleagues in the universities, it is because I do not restrict myself to technological and economic descriptions and reach out for models of consciousness in art, religion, and more highly developed explorations of consciousness in the world's mystical traditions. My fascination with mysticism as a model of consciousness has gotten me into a lot of trouble in the normal worlds of journalistic and academic criticism, but I think that if our culture in general were to adopt the "eliminativism" of the neurophilosophy of Patricia and Paul Churchland and the nonexplanations of consciousness of Dan Dennett,¹ then we all would get into much more trouble as the noetic polity of our planetary culture went into collapse. Our failure of imagination in the effort to understand consciousness would generate, not simply an economic depression, but a cultural dark age, in fact, an evolutionary collapse. The most immediate and external expression of this collapse would be "the war of all against all" that Rudolf Steiner predicted could be a possible end for the twentieth century. This condition would be one in which global systems of organized crime—the Medellín cartel, the Italian Mafia, the Russian Mafia, and the Chinese Mafia—interlock with nuclear terrorist attacks and ethnic and national warfare to produce a cultural condition of entropy that could not be brought under the control of any national system of governance. The American president would not be able to go on television to give a speech in which he told reality to stop and begin to behave in a civilized manner.

Because the transformation of culture is now an event that takes place within the time frame of an individual human life, our consciousness of culture is actually part of the dynamical system of the cultural transformation. The chaos dynamists have taught us about the "butterfly effect," of how the flapping of a butterfly's wings in Mexico can generate a blizzard in Moscow. In the cascade of accumulating events, an individual event can generate an enormous difference in the complex dynamical system. One single bifurcation can lead to an entirely new evolutionary chreod.² If individual consciousness is now constitutive of our global complex of nature and culture, amplified as it now is by electronic networks, then the individual

consciousness can be far more dynamically effective now than it has been before in history. Now more than ever, we need to appreciate the linkage of consciousness and culture. And one very good place to look to gain an appreciation of the effect of consciousness on the transformation of culture is to that period of global change that the German philosopher Karl Jaspers called the first axial period of world civilization, the sixth century B.C.E.

In this great coda and recapitulation of human history, we are now turning on the spiral of time and the first axial period that expressed a spiritual evolution of humanity all across the world—from Pythagoras and the Greeks to the Hebrew prophets to Buddha in India and Lao Tzu in China—is closer to us now than it was to our great-grandfathers who lived in the era of the European empires and the technological expansion of the West. The esoteric teachings of the conquered peoples—yoga, Zen, Sufism, Taoism, and Native American spirituality—are being retrieved by the children of the technological overlords. There are now literally thousands of teachers and spiritual leaders moving across cultural boundaries.

In the first axial period, the civilizational movement that had begun in the fourth millennium B.C.E. reached its end and crystallized in militaristic terror. Assyrian militarism and collectivization through terror was what civilization at that time was all about. Militarism and the suppression of the feminine brought forth a new dark age culture of violence. And yet, right in the heart of that culture of militarist violence came the global emanation of all the initiatic dispensations, including Pythagoras, the Hebrew prophets, Buddha and Kapla, and the unknown author of the *Bhagavad Gita* in India, and Lao Tzu and Confucius in China. This first axial period expressed a cultural shift from militaristic empires to moral civilizations. And now, once again, we are in a period of militaristic violence—in Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, Afghanistan, Armenia, Chechnya—and because of fundamentalist and nationalist hysterias everywhere, we are quite possibly moving toward a form of global cultural entropy. If we attempt to stabilize our condition by seeking to go back to the familiar world of the nation-state, the race, the fundamentalist religion, or the tribe, we will end up increasing violence in a planetary Bosnia in which each of these social forms of identity seeks supremacy over the other. The only way out is up, but to understand the openings of this higher dimension, we need to have just the kind of insight that the visionary philosophers of the first axial period provided for their time.

The *Tao Te Ching* is a major document of this cultural shift of the axial period. The anarchic Taoism of Lao Tzu held out a vision of culture to humanity, but humanity voted no. Taoism is the road not taken. The ancient

Chinese chose the other road in the fork—the road of hierarchy and order, of Confucian propriety crystallized into an imperial civil service, and of a geometrization of the world space in which the Chinese were at the center of the universe and inferior foreigners were at the periphery. The flow of the Tao and the anarchic wisdom of Taoism went underground to surface again in isolated springs of Chan and Zen Buddhism.

I see the *Tao Te Ching* as a once and future vision of possibilities, as a metaphor for where we are once again as we enter a second axial period, and in the catastrophe bifurcation of the present, confront the fork in the road to wonder about the road not taken long ago. To appreciate the historical context of Lao Tzu, known as "the Old One of Long Ears," consider the following poem from the *Book of Songs*—which was supposedly edited by Confucius. The poems are, of course, much older than Confucius's edition, and the date assigned to this poem by its translator is 685 B.C.E. The poem gives us a sense of where the culture was then in terms of the nature of the community and the relationship between masculine and feminine in the articulation of nature.

Ceaseless flows that beck,
 Far stretch the southern hills.
 May you be sturdy as the bamboo,
 May you flourish like the pine.
 May elder brother and younger brother
 Always love one another,
 Never do evil to one another.
 To give continuance to foremothers and forefathers,
 We build a house, many hundred cubits of wall;
 To the south and east its doors.
 Here shall we live, here rest,
 Here laugh, here talk.
 We bind the frames, creak, creak;
 We hammer the mud, tap, tap,
 That it may be a place where wind and rain cannot enter,
 Nor birds and rats get in,
 But where our lord may dwell.
 As the halberd, even so plumed,
 As an arrow, even so sharp,
 As a bird, even so soaring,
 As wings, even so flying.

Are the halls to which our lord ascends,
 Well leveled is the courtyard,
 Firm are the pillars,
 Cheerful are the rooms by day,
 softly glowing by night,
 A place where our lord can be at peace.
 Below, the rush mats; over them, the bamboo mats.
 Comfortably he sleeps,
 He sleeps and wakes
 And interprets his dreams.
 'Your lucky dreams, what were they?'
 'They were of black bears and brown,
 Of serpents and snakes.'
 The diviner thus interprets it:
 'Black bears and brown
 Mean men-children.
 Snakes and serpents
 Mean girl children.'
 So he bears a son,
 And puts him to sleep upon a bed,
 Clothes him in robes
 Gives him a jade scepter to play with.
 The child's howling is very lusty.
 In red greaves shall he flare,
 Be lord and king of house and home.
 Then he bears a daughter,
 And puts her upon the ground,
 Clothes her in swaddling clothes,
 Gives her a loom-whorl to play with.
 For her no decorations, no emblems;
 Her only care the wine and food
 and how to give no trouble to father and mother.³

Lao Tzu's celebration of "the mysterious female" is in direct opposition to the dominant culture of his time. The world around Lao Tzu is the patriarchal world of warriorship, of hierarchy and geometrical order. In the Mandarin model of the world space, there is respect for the ancestors, for the fathers, and for the women—mothers, wives, concubines, daughters—

who all know and keep their place. The settlement is square. From early Anyang to the later Forbidden City of Beijing, the human settlement is square and is a crystallization of the four quarters. In this geometrization of the world space, life is fixed in rigid custom and the imperial civil servant is its avatar.

The Tao, like light, seems to be both wave and particle, and Lao Tzu and Confucius archetypally express its complementarity. Confucius saw the Tao as immanent in human relationships; he strove to embody the Tao in the modes of justice and propriety. For a time, he even served as a chief of police, and for the last fourteen years of his life he traveled all over China, trying to establish a society of justice and decorum; but in spite of his efforts China slid down into civil war and chaos.⁴ Lao Tzu is the mirror opposite of this call to the world of civic duty; his Tao is the long wave and not the discrete particle. Small wonder that he left the court and the centers of princely power and took to the hills. In our century, this archetypal opposition is like the difference between the revolutionary nationalists Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo: one moves into revolutionary politics but cannot avert a civil war, the other moves into exile and the politics of human evolution. Legend has it that as Lao Tzu left the kingdom, the border guard demanded that he leave something behind, so the old anarchic sage took brush in hand and left him—and us—with the poems of the *Tao Te Ching*. So opposite to patriarchal, warrior society is Lao Tzu that he seems to reach back into the world that existed before civilization, before patriarchy and the militaristic organization of society. The anarchic—which in Greek means of the original—Taoism of Lao Tzu expresses what in anthropology would be called a nativistic movement.

Nativistic movements are revitalization movements that seek to take a culture back to its roots in a mythically recreated past. When a traditional culture is at the edge of extinction, then a mystery school springs up that seeks to go back to the ways of the ancestors as a way of avoiding the decadence of the moderns. Think of the Ghost Dance of the American Plains Indians in the nineteenth century. Think of the insurrection of the Métis in Canada led by the messianic figure Louis Riel, of the revolt of the Mahdi against the English in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, or of Patrick Pearse, the leader of the 1916 Easter Rising of the Irish against the English. Think of Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya and Malcolm X in New York.

The nativistic movement is a universal phenomenon. When a traditional culture is at the edge of extinction, and when a new technological civilization is consolidating its conquest and dominance, then the last light of

the old flares up. Most often the nativistic leader is the divided man who in his own parantage feels the intense conflict between the dominant culture of the father and the ancient culture of the mother. Malcolm X, the fair-skinned Black man with red hair, said that he hated the White rapist's blood that flowed in his veins. One can trace this archetypal pattern all the way back to Moses in the Bible or Quetzalcoatl in Mexico. Recall the famous picture of Gandhi in top hat and morning coat—when the English had him caught in their culture—to understand the passion with which he traded his British clothes for an Indian loin cloth. Think of Aurobindo, the Cambridge University graduate, the man British Intelligence identified as the most dangerous revolutionary in India, and then consider the passion with which he throws it all aside to return to his native Mother India. Lao Tzu is one of this visionary company of men who seek to revitalize an ancient and ignored culture.

The leader of a nativistic movement is someone who is torn apart by the "cognitive dissonance," the contradictions of his simultaneous belonging to two worlds. The nativistic leader is one who rejects the technological, dominating masculine culture of the overlords to identify with the culture of the downtrodden, the culture of the raped mother. Often, in his own family life, the nativistic leader experiences the cultural clash as embodied in his parental relationships. The archetypal situation would be one in which the alien father enters as the warrior, conquers the local culture, kills the men, and rapes the women. From this violent union, a child is born who does not know who he is or which culture he should affirm. But while the father is busy with empire and conquest, the son is raised by the mother, and she whispers to him subversive tales of the old ways, the old culture. And so as an adolescent feeling the first stirrings of his own emotional and sexual force, he vows to win back the body of the mother from its domination by the cruel father. Thus, Patrick Pearse as a boy gets down on his knees and vows to free Mother Ireland from the domination of the English. Patrick Pearse changed his name to Padraic in the spirit of the Gaelic Revival, but Pearse's father was English, and Padraic's baptismal name was Patrick Henry Pearse. There were several Quetzalcoats in Mexico, some mythic, others legendary, but the last of the Quetzalcoats was a prophetic leader named Ca Acatl Topiltzin. This Quetzalcoatl probably had a Toltec father and a Teotihuacan mother. I have written about this legendary figure in my book *Blue Jade from the Morning Star*.⁵ I suppose I have written two books on nativistic movements, one on Quetzalcoatl, the other on the insurrection in Dublin in 1916,⁶ because the collision of two worlds, of two religions, fascinates me since my mother was Roman Catholic and of southern Irish

ancestry, and my father was Presbyterian and of northern Irish ancestry. The Lindisfarne Association, in its own way, is a highly refined version of a nativistic movement; it attempts to counter technological domination through a resacralization of science brought about by an energizing of the old esoteric mysteries. Having learned the ways of the overlords at MIT, and having succeeded in their world on their terms, I took a radical turn in the 1960s and abandoned that technological definition of culture to seek out the ways of the ancestors. Against a global backdrop of religious warfare, I worked to bring all the esoteric yogic practices of the world's universal religions together in a spiritual fellowship of artists, scientists, and contemplatives. Of course, having the benefit of history, and seeing the delusions of messianic grandeur expressed in people such as Padraic Pearse and Louis Riel, I had enough of my father's good Protestant common sense to avoid both the revolutionary delusions of politics and the paranoid delusions of religion to seek out the way of the writer who moves to the edge as a way of avoiding the basin of attraction of the center. I read Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* when I was sixteen, and the archetypal pattern of the sage who abandons the capital to take to the hills and write poetry and practice yoga was absolutely entrancing to me. It was another confirmation of James Joyce's vision of "silence, exile, and cunning" as a way of creating a conscience higher than Roman Catholicism or Irish nationalism through art.

So for me the *Tao Te Ching* is more than an ancient archival document, a quaint scholarly antique. It is a work that determined the formation of my life. As a work that captures the whole genius of the axial period, it captures the whole sense of mystery through which culture is influenced and inspired by the impulses from another realm. One cannot explain the axial period of Pythagoras and Lao Tzu in a simple system of cultural trade and transmission. One has to think of this global cultural transformation more in the way that Doris Lessing describes it in her novel *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*.⁷ This is a story about souls in the spiritual world before birth organizing a rescue mission in which several people determine to take incarnations in various cultures as a way of countering a great evolutionary crisis. No one culture owns or is to dominate the transformation. So the New Age movement of my time is not owned by Findhorn or Auroville, by Steiner or Aurobindo, or Anybodynanda. Followers always try to own the transformation. So the anthroposophists lock on to Steiner, or Satprem, a follower of Aurobindo and secretary to the Mother, literalizes the metaphor of the cells, deifies the Mother, and, essentially, canonizes himself. The substitution of cult for culture is the mistake all followers make, but it is a mistake that

anarchic Lao Tzu did not make. He did not found a religion and build temples to himself. He celebrated a process and did not try to sell a product. A Foucault pendulum has a distinct point, but its phase-space is vastly larger than its point. Looking at the prophet and ignoring the phase-space of cultural transformation is stupid because that system of idolatry just drags us down into a civic religion. We end up back in the world of the temple, the palace, the imperial civil service, and, eventually, back into the conquering armies of empire. What we have in the case of the nativistic leader is someone who feels the cognitive dissonance of the conflicting cultures, but identifies with the dominated feminine rather than the dominating masculine, who identifies with the subtle rather than the objectively obvious, with the weak rather than the mighty, with the past rather than the present. So I see Lao Tzu as a nativistic leader who is seeking to go back to a more ancient Taoist culture. Lao Tzu did not invent Taoism, and he was called "the Old One" not so much because he himself was old, but because he is an invocation and recovery of the ancient culture of the ancestors, of the Old Ones. The *I Ching* is more ancient than the *Tao Te Ching*. There are clear indications that the idea of the Tao and the alchemical process that proclaims that "Reversal is the movement of the Tao," as well as the hieroglyph of yin and yang are all traditional materials that antedate Lao Tzu.

So Lao Tzu is clearly not creating a new religion. He is attempting to go back and hold on to ancient wisdom, and the worldview he is trying to recover is the exact mirror opposite of everything that is ascendant in his time. If one wants to understand Lao Tzu, one has only to hold the text up to a mirror and ask oneself, what is the mirror opposite of what Lao Tzu puts forth. Reality for the civilization of his time meant hard masculine action, accumulation of wealth, and possession of vast territories in big states; reality was the weapon, war, the territorial conquest and expansion of a supremely empowered ego personified in the figure of the emperor. Now, negate all those values, deconstruct each one of these objective realities, and you get the anarchic subtlety of Lao Tzu. Rather than the celebration of the spear and the sword, we find in the *Tao Te Ching* the celebration of the prehistoric vulva as the primordial icon of the cosmos:

Chapter 6:

The valley spirit never dies;
We call it the mysterious female.
The gates of the mysterious female—

These we call the roots of Heaven and Earth.
Subtle yet everlasting! It seems to exist.
In being used, it is not exhausted.⁸

The phallus, by contrast, in being used is exhausted. It dramatically expands, triples its size, trumpets forth its seed, and then collapses into exhaustion as it withdraws back into its humble state. Cock or king, organ or empire, it's much the same thing.

Now, if we recall the writings of Marija Gimbutas on "the Civilization of the Goddess," we will remember that the world's first universal religion, from Iberia to Siberia, was the religion of the Great Goddess. This religion of the great mother was spread everywhere, even into the New World. I remember how surprised I was when I was in Tiahuanaco in Bolivia and one of the Quechua Indians at the site was selling a little piece of hand-carved stone that he called *Patcha Mama*. Two figures were joined at the hips into the rock that held them in common; one woman was the matron with fully developed breasts, the other was the maiden with small and budding breasts. James Mellaart, the excavator of Catal Hüyük, found an almost identical small figure from Neolithic Anatolia, dating from 6500 B.C.E. This archetypal couple of the matron and the maiden is older than the patriarchal couple of dad and mom, Zeus and Hera. These images of the eternal feminine—Goethe's *ewige Weibliche*—are part of the most ancient tradition of humanity's first universal religion. Lao Tzu's project is, therefore, the expression of a nativistic movement that seeks to recover the values of this lost culture.

The gates of the female are obviously the vulva, and the valley is, of course, another kind of vulva. As I have mentioned before, our English word "cunt" is really an ancient sacred word that is connected to a cosmology. You can still see it in Spanish: *cuztza* means ditch, and so the archaic notion of the feminine is this fertile ditch of Mother Earth. Priests and ministers will tell us that "cunt" is "a bad word," but anyone who has seen the artist Judy Chicago's famous installation of the dinner party knows that the cunt is a wisecrack.

Chapter 28:

When you know the male yet hold on to the female,
You'll be the ravine of the country.
When you are the ravine of the country,
Your constant virtue will not leave.

And when your constant virtue doesn't leave,
You return to the state of the infant.⁹

It is hard, in our language, to translate these ancient ideas. Although Lao Tzu is speaking about the cosmic feminine, Henricks, in his transition, uses the word "virtue." But virtue comes from the Latin word for man, *vir*, and so millennia of patriarchal association cling to this classical term; it carries ideas of manly virtue, nobility, the intrinsic male seminal essence. So even our very notion of virtue carries with it several thousand years of patriarchal cosmology. Since Lao Tzu is trying to deconstruct the whole complex of warrior values, translation becomes supremely difficult.

Chapter 76:

When people are born, they are supple and soft;
When they die, they end up stretched out firm and rigid;
When the ten thousand things of grasses and trees are alive,
they're supple and pliant.¹⁰

In the processual worldview of Tao, we encounter the mirror opposite of the geometrical worldview in which all things are fixed into their proper place in an abstract, mental space. Objects located within this world space, are hard, fixed, and crystalline, but the Tao is subtle, soft, and feminine. The cosmic process of the Great Mother can embrace opposites; it is a dynamical and inclusive movement in which "reversal is the movement of Tao." Objects that are fixed within an abstractly idealized world space can be thought to have single causes, but in a processual world view, whether it is Lao Tzu's or Whitehead's, simple location and single causes are naive simplifications. What Lao Tzu is celebrating is what has finally come round again now in our second axial period as we move from linear systems of causation to chaos dynamics and what, at the Santa Fe Institute, is called "the new sciences of complexity." The primary metaphor for the object in all its obviousness is the erect phallus, and the primary metaphor for the subtlety of the Tao is the ravine, the vagina, the form whose very nature comes from its emptiness.

When they are dead, they are withered and dried out.
Therefore we say that the firm and rigid are companions of death,
While the supple, the soft, the weak and the delicate are
companions of life.¹¹

Here we encounter the archetype of the rigid phallus versus the soft vulva.

If a soldier is rigid, he won't win;
If a tree is rigid, it will come to its end.
Rigidity and power occupy the inferior position;
Suppleness, softness, weakness and delicateness occupy the superior position.¹²

When all of these images — of flow, of process, of softness and subtlety, of reversal in which that which is completely empty holds the essence of life — are added up, then what we see is an anarchic vision of a culture that is the antithesis of everything we would understand as the State. Confucius affirms *li* (propriety), the virtue of each person and object in its place in the geometrical worldview. But propriety can all too easily become simply property as women are tamed and domesticated into mothers, wives, concubines, and obedient daughters. Eventually, if they are not killed at birth as unwanted daughters, they become objects of display whose bound and mutilated feet are not allowed to contact the powerful ground of Mother Earth. Through the power of literacy — the technology that split humanity between literate and illiterate — the bureaucrats of the imperial civil service would wed writing and militarism to create the hierarchy of the State.

Lao Tzu's anarchic vision may seem impossible and utopian, but what is being presented is really a vision of the prehistoric matriastic village. If one reads Marija Gimbutas's *Civilization of the Goddess*, and looks at her excavations of those prehistoric villages that were not fortresses but agricultural villages, one can see that the way of life that she describes as the Old Europe of 6000 B.C.E. is basically what Lao Tzu is trying to recover in 600 B.C.E.

Chapter 80:

Let the states be small and people few —
Bring it about that there are weapons for "tens" and "hundreds,"
yet no one use them;
Have the people regard death gravely and put migrating far from
their minds
Though they might have boats and carriages, no one will ride them;
Though they might have armor and spears, no one will display them.
Have the people return to knotting cords and using them.

They will relish their food,
 Regard their clothing as beautiful,
 Delight in their customs,
 And feel safe and secure in their homes.
 Neighboring states might overlook one another,
 And the sounds of chickens and dogs might be overheard,
 Yet the people will arrive at old age and death with no comings
 and goings between them.¹³

This is not a vision of capital-intensive economies of scale and state transport systems but rather of autonomous individual villages saturated with a sense of the larger process of circularity of the Tao. And what is empowering the release of possessions and possessiveness is the practice of a yoga that enables the completely autonomous individual to connect directly with the Tao. Now here is where translations really become important. Some of the yogic practices that Lao Tzu describes are very clearly knowledge that only an initiate could have. Only an initiate practitioner of these yogic techniques would recognize what the metaphors are describing. When one looks at Stephen Mitchell's translation of the *Tao Te Ching*,¹⁴ one sees a politically correct, New Age text, one that says "she" instead of "he." Mitchell is trying to show that New Age sensitive males are not as bad as their NFL-watching, beer-drinking contemporaries. But the difficulty is that Mitchell translates the text into his contemporary subculture. So what we get is Marin County rather than ancient China.

Consider Mitchell's translation of chapter 10:

Can you coax your mind from its wandering
 and keep to the original oneness?
 Can you let your body become
 supple as a newborn child's?
 Can you cleanse your inner vision
 until you see nothing but the light?
 Can you love people and lead them
 without imposing your will?
 Can you deal with the most vital matters
 by letting events take their course?
 Can you step back from your own mind
 and thus understand all things?

Giving birth and nourishing,
 having without possessing
 Acting with no exception
 Leading and not trying to control:
 this is the supreme virtue.¹⁵

Robert Henricks's *Te-Tao Ching* seems much closer to the Chinese worldview, and so if we are trying to excavate the evolution of consciousness—to tell the human story from one end to the other—then getting a feeling for the archaic Chinese mind is critical to understanding the unfolding of one mentality into another. If modern translations make the text sound too much like our time, then they make it impossible to get a sense of what another mentality might have been like.

To prove to you that I am not being too hard on Mitchell, let me give you the same poem, chapter 10, as it is translated by Henricks. The first line—"In nourishing the soul and embracing the One—can you do it without letting them leave?"—means can you practice yoga so that the soul and the subtle bodies are not actually leaving the body and thus putting you into a kind of comatose death-state, but instead can you practice observing your state of consciousness so that you experience a conscious death. The stopping of the heart in meditation and the suspension of the breath is an advanced yogic practice.

In concentrating your breath and making it soft—can you make it
 like that of a child?¹⁶

In contrast to Henricks, Mitchell turns the image of the baby's breath into a sweet, California metaphor for having a skin soft as a baby's:

Can you let your body become
 supple as a newborn child's?¹⁷

The text is not talking about baby skin and a California getting in touch with one's inner child; it is talking about an esoteric yogic breathing technique. To be specific, there is one yogic technique in which one says "hong" upon inhalation, and "sau" upon exhalation. (In some other Indian dialects, this is written as *ham-ra*.) One sits at the edge of one's breath, and watches the waves come in and out—the thoughts like clouds in the sky coming and going—and eventually, breath, thoughts, and heartbeat go away, and one

passes into a state of immersion in the Tao. As one begins to sit at the edge of one's own breath, the breath gets softer and softer, like a baby's breath, and eventually it disappears totally. When the breath disappears, then the heart stops also and one's mode of consciousness shifts from waking mind into *yamahi*. Of course, this is an advanced practice, so it doesn't happen right away. It takes some years of faithful, committed practice. But when it happens, "the gates of heaven open," as Lao Tzu describes it in Henricks's translation of this same chapter 10.

In opening and closing the gates of Heaven—can you play the part of the female?

Lao Tzu is using "the gates of heaven" as a metaphor and icon of the vulva, of the cosmic feminine, of what in yoga would be called the *shakti*; but the gates are also symbols of the chakras and the subtle body system. When one sensitizes oneself through the practice of yoga, then one shifts one's consciousness from the conventional feeling of the muscular, meat body to these other swirls of energy. Then one begins to move through the gates of heaven, then one feels *tan tien* or *Hara* in Japanese Zen—the center below the navel. So Lao Tzu, here in the poem of chapter 10, is metaphorically describing a particular yogic practice:

In cultivating and cleaning your profound mirror—can you do it so that it has no blemish?"

Lao Tzu's image of cleaning one's profound mirror is one that passed over from Taoism into Zen Buddhism. In his book *Religion and Nothingness*,¹⁸ the great Buddhist philosopher and Zen practitioner, Keiji Nishitani—who I met in Kyoto shortly before his death—discusses this metaphor of Dogen's (the founder of the Soto Zen lineage) of the profound mirror inside the mind and how through Zen meditation one must polish the mirror so that it is without blemish. Another image that Nishitani uses is a silver bowl filled with snow. There is a famous tale of koan practice in which the Zen master looks at his student and asks him, "Have you had your breakfast?" The student answers yes, and then the master responds by saying, "Then clean your bowl." Koan language is a highly metaphorical code in which practitioners signal back and forth to one another in the highly stylized culture of the Zen monastery. What this language means, when translated into our sensibility, is this: The Zen master, being an advanced initiate, can see the aura

of the subtle bodies of his students in the meditation hall, the Zendo. He sees that one of his students has achieved an advanced level of attainment, so he asks him, metaphorically, if he has had his breakfast, and in this case the breakfast is of light rather than miso soup. The student responds in the affirmative, but with such a sense of attachment to his own achievement that it indicates there is still a lingering sense of pride of accomplishment, so the master counsels him immediately to avoid the dangers of inflation by cleaning his bowl, his vessel. The goal is a state of unity in enlightenment in which there is no lingering sense of the self that can say, "Wow! I've just had an enlightenment experience." The chosen image of this union of vessel and light is snow in a silver bowl. Henricks's translation preserves the clarity of reference to meditative practices:

In loving the people and giving life to the state—can you do it without using knowledge?

In opening and closing the gates of Heaven—can you play the part of the female?

Can you become passive? Can you get out of your own way? Can you give birth without trying to own the child? All the metaphors chosen are expressions of the feminine. Henricks's translation concludes:

Give birth to them and nourish them.

Give birth to them but don't try to own them;

Help them to grow but don't rule them.

That is called Profound Virtue.

"Virtue" is not *le mot juste*, but we don't have a word for it; presumably, the word should be something like *femina*. All in all, when one tries to reach across time to enter into the spirit of the *Tao Te Ching*, it is necessary to read more than one translation. The translation that inspired me when I was a teenager was the verse translations of R. B. Blackney, which I still prefer to Mitchell's, but Henricks's is very good and does enable one to recognize the esoteric practices. Each translator has his own agenda, and so if he is a White sensitive New Age male from Marin County who has done some Zen, then what you are going to get is a White sensitive male's New Age *Tao Te Ching* that will make it sound as if it were written in northern California in 1994. Superficially, Mitchell's version may seem more poetic, and his edition may be more popular, but Henricks's is superior. It expresses the strength of a

Sinologist who has studied recently discovered ancient texts that antedate the canonical text of the *Tao Te Ching* and has undertaken the labor of an entirely new translation. But unlike scholars of religion who translate esoteric texts without any feeling or knowledge of the experiences they present in their translations, Henricks has preserved the allusions to yogic practices. This combination of rigorous scholarship and gentle sensitivity is appropriate to the text and fitting expression of "the mysterious female."

To bring all of this to a close, I choose to end this discussion of literature and the evolution of consciousness with Henricks's *Ta-Tao Ching* because it presents us with the fork in the road that is relevant to our future evolution of consciousness. The Taoist vision takes us back to the prehistoric feminine and points to a posthistoric feminine we are only now beginning to appreciate. In this celebration of the feminine, this recovery of the first universal religion of humanity, this celebration of anarchic decentralization and dispersed villages, we glimpse the possibilities of a world that is an alternative to the gigantism of transnational cyberpunk corporations and monstrous cities such as Tokyo, Mexico, Los Angeles, and São Paulo. Like the meta-industrial villages I wrote about almost a generation ago in *Darkness and Scatterd Light*,¹⁹ these villages cannot come into being without a certain yogic knowledge of coming into Being. Lao Tzu's villages can be dispersed because they are saturated with the experience of the Tao. Obviously if we don't have this sense of the Tao then what we do have is what Karl Marx called the idiom of rural life. Without the yoga, the village doesn't work. With the yoga, the unique individual is an exemplar of the Universal. Right now we are at a crossroads and do not know whether the distributive lattice of electronic information will be controlled by transnational corporations that produce a global MTV culture or by individuals dissolving the mediations of the state to generate the immediacy of cultural communion and solitary meditation. It's a choice between the culture of media or the culture of meditation.

At our second axial period, we turn on the spiral of history and confront the archetypes of Lao Tzu and Confucius once again. We have a choice between two types of global management—Taoist or Mandarin Confucian. In the first axial age, humanity opted for violence and rigid order and chose to articulate the geometrization of the world space. It moved with all its power into the geometrical mentality with its hierarchical civilizations run by warriors and priests. With writing as the dominant means of communication, perhaps there was not much chance of achieving the decentralized, anarchic vision of Lao Tzu. The question that confronts us now is

whether or not our new global means of communication can give us a second chance for something better. The world of NAFTA and GATT that energizes the gigantic transnational corporations also energizes the peasant insurrections of Chiapas, so we had better come up with something better pretty quick.

The Confucian model of society is one we all can understand because it was the hierarchical, geometrical model that took over civilization everywhere, from the nobles of China to the knights and priests of medieval Europe. When these two cultures—decentralized and centralized—conflicted in the West, they struggled over the destiny of Christendom. The Taoist vision was that of the Celtic church, a culture in which there were no cities only monasteries. The Roman church with its hierarchical papacy and college of cardinals triumphed, and the rest is the dreary history of the suppression of women, the Inquisition, and the witch burnings.

These battles have occurred over and over again in history, but what is fascinating for our time is that now we have a chance to understand what Lao Tzu was trying to put forth. Now we can have a completely contemporary understanding of chaos dynamics, the new sciences of complexity, and a world of process in which reversal is the movement of Tao. Or we can have a monocrop world in which gigantic corporations control the media, patent genes, produce new animals, and through medibusiness monopolize fertility and the technologies of human reproduction. In this world there would no longer be a feminine, in the sense of a womb and vulva that gives birth to the human; there would only be the laboratory in which the human body is an archaic biological content within a larger enveloping technological structure.

An understanding of decentralization in the Tao can only work if individuals live in a supersaturated solution in which they all have access to an interior yoga through which they can connect with the cosmos. If they have to get their culture from the conglomerates of the entertainment industry, then such global collectivization will generate a thousand different versions of the peasant revolts of Chiapas.

All the ancient texts that I have used to explore our modern world are once and future poems of possibility. Once they are seen all together in the imagination of the reader, then they can become a hypertext description of our contemporary evolution of consciousness. The project for our time is not one of simply moving from one elitist mathematical mentality into another—say from Newtonian mechanics to chaos dynamics—but of moving from one culture into another. This new culture involves the recovery of the feminine; the deconstruction of patriarchy; and the deconstruction of

capital-intensive economies of scale run by military-athletic-entertainment-industrial complexes with their shadow economies of drugs, arms traffic, and crime. The Taoist project remains the same as it was in the first axial period, and we are again at a catastrophe bifurcation in which humanity has a clear choice to adopt the mandarism of big science or the yogic anarchism of Lao Tzu. If we recover *anarché* as the original, then the anarchic form of empowerment should be one in which the unique individual, through the immediacy of his or her own breath, can connect to the universal Tao and the Zen of their original nature. Over two thousand years ago, humanity chose the militarist and hierarchical path at the fork in the road. Now here we are again, and I, of course, hope that the road not taken 2,000 years ago will be the road we take this time for this axial shift of the year 2000.

Notes

Foreword

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Trust, 1989).
2. Conversation with Marshall McLuhan at the Coach House, St. Michael's College, the University of Toronto, in the winter of 1972.
3. The first campus of the Lindisfarne Association was on eleven acres on the shore of Fishcove in Southampton, New York. This activity ran from 1973 to 1977. The second campus was the four buildings of the Holy Communion Church at the corners of Sixth Avenue and Twentieth Street in Manhattan. (This facility is now the discotheque Limmelight.) This program of "Lindisfarne-in-Manhattan" lasted from 1976 to 1979. In 1979, the Lindisfarne Association moved to Crestone, Colorado, to establish a mountain retreat and a summer conference center. In the autumn of each year, a Lindisfarne symposium has been offered at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York.

Chapter 1

1. James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking Compass, 1959), p. 52.
2. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), p. 45.
3. See Marija Gimbutas, "The Sacred Script," Chapter 8 in *The Civilization of the Goddess* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 307-323.
4. Because the word "matriarchy" suggests a centralized state ruled by a queen or matriarch, many scholars now prefer the more general term "matristic." A matristic society may have authority in the hands of a ruling mother, but military power is in the hands of the mother's brother. Matristic, as a term, allows for many different cultural balances between custom and government, authority and force.
5. Eörs Szathmáry and John Maynard Smith, "The Major Evolutionary Transitions," *Nature*, March 16, 1995, p. 227.
6. Ken Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution* (Boston and London: Shambala, 1995).
7. The English edition is Jean Gebser, *The Ever-Present Origin*, trans. Noel Barstad with Algis Mickunas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1991). There is a German paperback selection, Jean Gebser, *Ausgewählte Texte* (München: Goldmann Verlag, 1987). Gebser's complete works are published in a boxed, eight-volume edition: Jean Gebser, *Gesamtausgabe* (Schaffhausen, Switzerland: Novalis Verlag, 1986).

1. *The Work of Rudolf Steiner*, compiled and edited by Richard Seddon (London: Temple Lodge Publishing, 1993), p. 20.
2. See Rudolf Steiner, *The Spiritual Hierarchies and their Reflection in the Physical World* (Spring Valley, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1970).
3. Michael Murphy, *The Future of the Body: Explorations into the Further Evolution of Human Nature* (Los Angeles, CA: Jeremy Tarcher, 1993).
4. See R. B. Orians, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1951; 1983), p. 109.

Chapter 10

1. *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, three vols. trans. Robert Goldman and Sheldon Pollack, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), is a translation for scholars of comparative literature. The *Ramayana*, as retold by William Buck (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976) is for the general reader.
2. See Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophy of India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series, 1951), p. 142.
3. Paul Davies, *Other Worlds: Space, Superpace, and the Quantum Universe* (New York: Touchstone Books, Simon and Schuster, 1980), p. 11.
4. There is a hardbound reissue of the Flash Gordon comics. See Alex Raymond, *Flash Gordon* vol. 1, *Manga, the Planet of Doom* (Princeton, WI: Kitchen Sink Press, 1990).
5. *King René's Book of Love*, ed. F. Unterkircher (New York: George Braziller, 1980)
6. See Henri Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdaean Iran to Shi'ite Iran* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Editions, 1977), pp. 73, 81: "The historian Tabari (ninth century) has preserved for us some of the earliest information available about a mysterious region, which his description enables us to identify as the 'Earth of the Emerald Cities'... So, to become aware of it is to see the world of the Soul, to see all things as they are in the Earth of Hurgalya, the Earth of the emerald cities, it is the *visio smaragdina*, which is the surrection and the resurrection of the world of the Soul."
7. For an analysis of the cosmology of the fairy tale of *Rapunzel*, see my "Rapunzel: Cosmology Lost," chapter 1 in *Imaginary Landscapes: Making Worlds of Myth and Science* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 1-43.
8. D. Michael Stoddart, *The Scented Ape: The Biology and Culture of Human Oobur* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

9. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam Classics, 1984), p. 291.
10. T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), pp. 222-223.

Chapter 11

1. *The Song of God: Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood; introduction by Aldous Huxley (New York: Mentor Books, New American Library, 1944; 1972).
2. Sri Aurobindo, *The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1972).
3. *Rig Veda*, trans. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (London, Penguin Classics, 1981), verse 20, p. 78.
4. *The Upanishads*, trans. Juan Mascaro (London: Penguin Classics, London, 1965), p. 80.
5. *The Upanishads*, trans. Ekknath Easwaran (Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1987), p. 111.
6. *The Upanishads*, trans. Juan Mascaro (London: Penguin Classics, 1965), p. 88.
7. *The Upanishads*, trans. Ekknath Easwaran (Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1987), p. 60.
8. See Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1970), p. 279.
9. *Lao-Tzu, Te-Tao Ching*, trans. Robert G. Henricks (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), p. 62. *Tao Te Ching* is the most familiar word order for the title, but in Robert G. Hendricks' new translation based on the recently discovered Ma-wang-tui texts, the word order is changed to *Te-Tao Ching*.
10. See Carlos Castaneda, *The Art of Dreaming* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 169.

Chapter 12

1. See Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991); see also P. S. Churchland, *Neurophilosophy: Toward a Unified Science of Mind/Brain* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, A Bradford Book, 1986).
2. "Chreod" is a term introduced by the biologist C. H. Waddington; it means an evolutionary path of development, especially a new one that opens up after bifurcation. See Erich Jantsch, *The Self-Organizing Universe* (Oxford and New York: Pergamon Press, 1980), p. 57.

3. *The Book of Songs*, trans. Arthur Waley (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937), pp. 283-284.
4. See *The Essential Confucius*, trans. Thomas Cleary (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 11.
5. William Irwin Thompson, *Blue Jade from the Morning Star: An Essay and a Cycle of Poems on Quetzalcoatl* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1983).
6. William Irwin Thompson, *The Imagination of an Insurrection: Dublin, Easter 1916* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967; Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1982).
7. Doris Lessing, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (London and New York: Viking, 1971).
8. Robert G. Henricks, *Te-Tao Ching*, p. 58.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
14. Stephen Mitchell, *Tao Te Ching: A New English Version* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).
15. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
16. Henricks, *Te-Tao Ching*, p. 62.
17. Mitchell, *Tao Te Ching*, p. 10.
18. See Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982).
19. William Irwin Thompson, *Darkness and Scattered Light: Four Talks on the Future* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1978).

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