

Commentary by Rubinoff during the 2009 Forum

Jeffrey Rubinoff May 2009

RUBINOFF'S COMMENTARY FOLLOWING PRESENTATION OF From the Garden of Eden to Terra's brain: A New Humanism

On making the 'Turn' away from the evolutionary path of agriculture

"I think our first steps here, and a lot of them will come out in the papers, is to try and understand what it is that we're talking about before we look for a solution or a vision past it. We are missing a tremendous amount of information. That information is contained in the acts of first inventing, then dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki . To me, this was the equivalent to an asteroid strike for human cultural evolution.

There have been a limited number of periodic mass extinctions that have had major affects on evolution. The last major one was 65 million years ago which accounts for the extinction of the dinosaurs. In the period of the destruction of the dinosaurs, there was a cataclysmic event or cluster of cataclysmic events that turned evolution away from its continuous direction. The momentum of evolution will keep it on its inertial path unless something enormously powerful turns that path.

So I think that the first level of consciousness, especially for the humanities at this point, is that our asteroid, the thing that turned ...our human evolution, was the dropping of those two bombs. But the inertial momentum of the evolution of civilization—consciousness that was rooted in agriculture—continued in the same direction in the inertial period.

We were very lucky that although the turn happened, we have managed to survive thus far. Because, those of us who lived through the Cuban Missile Crisis [also] died. It was as though the bomb *had* dropped. There was immeasurable mass trauma at that point, and I think most of us denied it. We survived it. But we also accepted: 'This is a disgrace. Let's forget about it.'

The genius of human beings in the last 50,000 years, which makes us, *us*—our evolutionary state—is that we can anticipate and build a future. So, when we lose the sense that we can anticipate and effect the future—which I think happened in 1962—we also lose the genius of our humanness.

And I think that's probably more of what you're talking about—rebuilding the confidence that we can actually make it through."

On the wreckage of 1962 and the failure of the Humanities to make the turn

“Surely the terror must have gone through everybody at that point. We were all at ground zero. The unthinkable became thinkable, and we all underwent an irreversible transformation. The difference is that we've all had our own way of hiding it. ...Many of us have raised children since then. And so the denial factor of this thing must be overcome, because the inertial parts of all of this are the wreckage that we've seen of John Kennedy being assassinated, the wreckage that we've seen of Martin Luther King being assassinated, the wreckage of Vietnam and Johnson's presidency, the wreckage of Richard Nixon's presidency, the residue of Richard Nixon elected—Rumsfeld, Bush and Cheney. And clearly this list is incomplete. We're still living in the wreckage of 1962.

The unthinkable came to be thinkable, and we in the humanities, as far as I can see, haven't applied ourselves to that reality: we know there are people managing the levers [since 1962] and the weapons remain. ... And what I have come to understand... is that you have to first recognize the facts before you can make the turn. “

On evangelicals controlling US armed forces education and rapture by default

“The problem that happened in 1962 was that this progressed on its inertial path because we defaulted. ...And as long as it's been done by default, then we have to answer for it. Now, one of the continuations of that default is that the evangelicals may be gaining an army. They've reportedly taken a prominent position of influence in the American Air Force Academy as well as other American military academies. Very serious stuff. Now, there are attempts to back that off.

So if by default, we leave it to them, we have to account for their vested interest in the rapture. We must assume that they will attempt to bring it about. The alternative is to turn the corner.”

RUBINOFF'S COMMENTARY FOLLOWING PRESENTATION OF Cultural transmission, network architecture, and the evolution of human self awareness

On the transition between tribalism and metaphorical tribalism

“My opinion is that religion in fact is metaphorical tribalism. It has nothing to do with truth. It has to do with the perpetuation of the tribe and at the agricultural level the perpetuation of a community and its justification for all of the things it's going to do in relation to invasion and slavery and everything else. But it does begin from that very first premise of, 'I will die for my brother, I will die for my first cousin, I will not die for my fourth cousin.' ”

On examples of meme transmission among artists

“What he's (Sam Yeaman) talking about is the ability to pass a meme along, which is a framework. You're talking about the Chauvet cave. It's 200 miles from Florence, and if you look at it, you'll find the same artistic drawing lines in the Chauvet Cave in Michelangelo and in Leonardo. So that was passed from generation to generation to generation. What we're talking about is a meme—that part of something that can pass along consistently over and over through generations. And it's amazing that the possibility exists that for 30,000 years, artists in that part of the world were passing along a concept for viewing reality. Those are the units we're looking at. We're trying to get some subset, just a hypothetical subset, of memes that would allow that subset to be passed along and held. So that's the value of this particular conversation.”

RUBINOFF'S COMMENTARY FOLLOWING PRESENTATION OF The Inherent Value of Art at the End of the Age of Agriculture

On judging art with your own conscience

“To explicate that a little farther—the act of will in accord with a mature conscience—I wanted a definition of art that did not define art in any way, shape or form under a specific set of conditions, but rather one that exposed the idea of a mature consciousness as well as a mature conscience. So you can't have a mature conscience without having a mature consciousness. The level of awareness and the level of learning that you yourself know becomes the measure of what art is.

The other part of this is the measure that the individual artist has of his own work, which only he knows. But he knows, he knows deep down in his soul. So your friend who's dropping the potato chip bags knows. He is the one who will be the ultimate measure of it.

The problem I had with post-modernism was feeling that it was totally vacuous. So, in order to have a measure, I needed those 30,000 years. I needed knowledge of those 30,000 years. I needed the experience of those 30,000 years. Then when I could access that, I could say, to myself—'...I think this act is in accord with what I know, and I'm still doing it'. It means that instead of dismissing that knowledge and its necessity, 'I did it in spite of it'. And 'in spite of what I know' is really the whole body of this knowledge that a mature artist really does act on. “

On leadership by example

“What I've tried to do with some of the things that I've outlined is tried to say that leadership comes from example. So if there is an ability to act at that level of consciousness with a mature conscience, that that is something that is self-generating. So there have been leaders in the world who have done that. Gandhi, Mandela.

So there are acts both politically and in leadership that are acts of art, by my definition. And those people who can act at that particular level are becoming fewer and fewer as we go on. I really believe that the world went through a time when it no longer believed it had a future. And when it no longer believed it had a future, the derivatives of the culture itself had no value. And derivatives are essentially betting on future value. So once you are able to have a false sense of future values or no sense of future values, then anything goes, so nothing really matters.”

On art not being absolute but along a continuum of consciousness and conscience

“One of the things that is missing from Karun's [summary] presentation today is his graphic of the continuum of cognition. There's no evolution without a continuum. There is no direct, absolute, this goes from here and it goes to there. So what we're really talking about is a continuum. And how an individual or how an artist measures him or herself on that continuum of cognition.

So you as an audience (of one) perceive it from one continuum and the artist perceives it from another continuum. What I'm saying is, and what Karun's contention is, is that there is a scale of maturity to these particular actions measured on the continuum. “

RUBINOFF'S COMMENTARY FOLLOWING PRESENTATION OF
Interrogating The Peninsular Individual: The Dialectical Relationship Constituting Individual
Minds and Group Mind

On the combination of social and biological studies of human behaviour

“Okay, now the second part, which I would love for you and Sam to be able to get together on and Karun has described a gap that is absolutely enormous between you two intellectually, which I would like to see filled. Because I think it’s ridiculous that it’s there.

Cro-Magnon man—modern man—is ourselves. This brain pan, this body shape, everything else, is only fifty thousand years old. The distance between us and chimpanzees could be millions of years. So, you can see that there is this enormous continuum of diversion. The modern chimpanzee and modern humans have developed along very, different paths for very, long periods of time.

You can’t just look at a chimpanzee and say that’s you, without dealing with the entire other history that goes with that. So, what I would like, if you two could work together at some point, because I think you (Sam Yeaman) want to move deeply into social reality. That’s Jerry’s field, he’s done this for so many years and he’s done it in isolation from Darwin. The perception in my opinion, of sociologists in regard to Darwin, is “Social Darwinism”; it’s a put down and natural selection just hasn’t been part of their study.”

RUBINOFF'S COMMENTARY FOLLOWING PRESENTATION OF
The Threat of Nuclear Winter: The Art Historical Perspective

On the audience and the profound in art

"The profound in art is the sense of how the artist-ancestors speak to the artist and how the artist answers to them. When I see those cave paintings, I feel the ancestors speaking to me. When I was feeling that my soul as an artist was dying, was when I realized that I no longer had any contact with my ancestors. Having been a postmodernist and being part of it growing up, it was the disconnection from my ancestors that I felt was the death of my soul.

The question became: is the profound dialogue of an artist with his ancestors, relevant to the people who are contemporary to him? That is, not the artist answering to the audience, but the artist answering to his or her ancestors.

When I was dealing with the art market at the highest levels, their only issue was: can they sell it? As a consequence I started opening this Park to people, without having any knowledge at all whether the work— obviously profound to me—could be profound to anyone else.

I only sought the audience afterward. I couldn't deal with the objectives of the audience first. Prior to the creation of the work, the artist must accept that what is sacred to the artist is not necessarily sacred to the audience he or she seeks. If I were going to dig to that depth I realized that my final attachment could only be to the dialogue with my ancestors.

Is the profound in art still relevant? The discussion around the table has been: what is the relevance of metaphor itself to the values of society? We are forced to ask that question by the purposeful disconnection of the last 50 years. The way that this forum was laid out, is to help the profound to emerge as the essential value of art once again."

RUBINOFF'S COMMENTARY FOLLOWING PRESENTATION OF
Living Sculpture: Multiple Dimensions in the Six Suites for Solo Cello by J.S. Bach

On counterpoint as the beginning of the liberation of art from the unitary voice

"I was amazed how liberated music was from the Gregorian Chant. I would have to say, as a sacred music and a complete music, the Gregorian Chant pretty much did it. So the question was: why did it ever progress beyond that? And music did a much faster jump into the sense of abstraction and began to do multiple voices (i.e. instrumental, independent of a literal narrative)—much ahead of either sculpture or painting at that time. It may have been that the painters and sculptors were paid to create analogues in order to advertise their benefactors. It's their analogical talent that allowed them to be paid.

So, the liberation of music always fascinated me. That it was able to go to multiple voices long before painting or sculpture ever could.

The liberation of painting and sculpture in the 20th century and freeing it from the boundaries that were binding them to a single voice (i.e. literal or pictorial narrative) had been done much earlier in music. And, so in looking at the progression of sculpture from the early Renaissance onward, I realized that extraordinary artistic transitions happened on different timelines in different arts as well as in their social and political cultures.

Counterpoint to me is the essence of art. Metaphor resides in counterpoint. Counterpoint is ultimately the means of liberating art from prescription."

On Viewing the Written Music of a Bach Cello Suite Score

"Right, so now a magic thing happens, and so this is the magic that we have in front of us. The analogue is here, the analogue is an historical reference, it comes from two hundred and fifty years ago, and here it is. Now for those who can read music, then perhaps you can look at it and listen to it while you are looking at it. And certainly we know that Beethoven composed when he was deaf.

When Brian looks at that, the first thing that happens is, he hears that visual thing and now that analogue goes through one stage to the next, which is, he can look at that and actually hear it. Now that may seem odd—but it's not really odd in terms of the spoken word. When the spoken word is written, we hear it when we look at it. But, what's interesting about this particular analogue is that it is pure analogue, it was done only for this purpose. It is in and of itself and bears no individual history of metaphors as words do.

So, now it has to go through a transformation. He sees it; he hears it; he plays it. Now there are players who will never be able to move that analogue into the realm of the art that was secreted there. But Brian, in that transformation from analogue—bringing himself to it—liberates the art.

The art resides in the counterpoint.”

Liberation of art from the analogue

“So, he then brings that alive and that is in the essence of what I see a sculptor doing and this is what I see in how we move from these analogues whose art weight is near zero. When steel comes into my studio, it brings to me grey nothing. If it's stainless steel, it's gray nothing; if it's sandblasted steel, it's gray nothing.

That was the way I wanted to start all of these works. The first shape forms the first melodic phrase. So, that you start from the analogical and you then move to the metaphorical in counterpoint to realize art. And, so I think that we've reached the parallel, and the most interesting part about this—which is why I've used a unitary statement as to what art is: that at an initial point of departure, music and sculpture share this same approach to human consciousness.”

On art made to kill time

“When you vegetate in front of a television set, you're really killing time. So, there's an aspect of crossing over into the killing of time from the living of time, and I think that's a very important thing. What we were listening to here was living time from the past, living time in the future.

The Buick is about dying time. It was conceived in dying time, it is viewed in dying time and its life is dead time.

Is it a valuable statement for art? Only in the ironic sense.

Art is about living time”