

## 13.7: Cosmos And Culture

### Improvisational Dance and Global Civilizations

09:47 am

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by STUART KAUFFMAN



Julie Jordan Scott/via Flickr

A remarkable, gentle, evening transpired three days ago here in Burlington Vermont at the University of Vermont. Susan Sgorbati, an old friend and improvisational dancer on the faculty of Bennington

College, was kind enough to come for the evening.

Susan, who also mediates in widening worlds, told me of a magical recent experience. She was hosting dancers from Inner Mongolia and West Africa. All were deeply skilled and open dancers, each in his or her own tradition.

Susan, who has long pursued improvisational dance, responded to the request of the group to guide them all in a collaborative improvisational dance uniting, in some unforetrollable way, their three traditions.

Susan gave simple guidance of the kind I wish to call “enabling constraints.”

The entourage flowed together, slightly stiff at first, then a becoming in the music.

The dancers cried. They cried with a joy at their mutual creation that they could neither have planned, nor foretold. They cried at their own shared creativity.

Susan is now being invited to venues around the world to lead similar improvisational dance events. And she finds a similarity with mediation when the parties are able to work together to create that which they had not foretold.

I think we can understand, even in written words, the joy that arises. And that joy is a talisman for an emerging global civilization.

We are some twelve civilizations across our world, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Persian, Indian, European, North American and more. Our civilizations have deep roots, some are thousands of years old.

Civilizations are how we are in the world. Those ways evolve slowly and the roots carry both our fundamental values and beliefs and less deeply rooted aspects of our being in our worlds.

Chinese-Cuban cuisine flourishes in New York. We love this kind of exploration of what we can create across our culinary traditions. Susan's transcultural improvisational experience makes it wonderfully obvious we can share an unknown range of our cultural traditions. We can create together.

A global civilization of some kind will emerge. As our civilizations crush together due to global commerce, now in the disarray we share in so many ways, and due to the world wide web, fear that our diverse roots are endangered is driving many to fundamentalisms, often hostile, often lethal.

I have a dream for this global civilization: Forever diverse, "global civilizations", not "civilization", not homogeneous, forever inventing new cultural forms in the interstices between our cultures, yet honoring and even protecting together the slow to evolve roots of our diversity.

We cannot know what we may create together. But we can begin to glimpse a world beyond the "price tagged" first world believing it must pursue ever increasing economic growth on a finite planet, when our Post-Industrial capitalism, useful as it is in raising living standards, also does not serve our deepest humanity.

Then it is up to us all to look anew at our own humanity, fruit of 3.7 billion years of creative biological evolution, several million years of hominid evolution, and

100,000 years of our cultural inventions. What do we think we truly are, want, and need? We so need to talk to one another, particularly in face of the monied power structures we face.

Among what we need is a shared reinvention of the sacred, a spiritual rebirth of a substantially secular first world society robbed of its immersion in its sense of a sacred, and a sharable global ethics that may serve as a scaffold for such a diverse global civilization.

## comments

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**Basil Roche (NagaJr)** wrote:

While we ponder these deep things, it's worth noting that the current representatives of the major global civilizations have just wound up their meetings in Seoul (G20) and Yokohama (APEC). Far from any agreement on a shared reinvention of the sacred or a sharable global ethics of sustainability, all they could agree on was yet more economic growth, 'development' and trade liberalization - and the brutal repression of street protests. In the wake of the US midterm elections, meanwhile, Cancun, I see, has abandoned any hope of global agreement on CO2 emission targets.

As Mike says, we're screwed.

November 15, 2010 12:16:25 AM EST

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**Mike Gottschalk (Gotts)** wrote:

Part 3. cont.

It's natural for us to grab anything we can to cover our vulnerability: for Adam and Eve, their cover was fig leaves; for Lake Minnetonka culture, it's SUVs.

Ernest Becker, in his book, "Denial of Death" writes most exquisitely in describing how much the causa sui of culture is about short cutting the difficulty inherent to the Being and Becoming of authentic human life making. This Causa Sui I would say, is what fuels the power behind "stardom": one doesn't have to be a star themselves, they only need to identify with one who has a sufficient "herd".

To sum things then, Real human Being and Becoming entails the vulnerability innate to a DANCING which is fully open to Life--and each other; a vulnerability that comes at a cost that no money can cover. Yet we keep trying to find ways to SPEND our way into a longed-for authentic human experience, in the hope we won't have to pay that cost of vulnerability.

One implication of what I'm describing here is this: as long as the very symbols of Being and