

The Learning Project

by Lincoln Stoller

Interview with Myself

From an experience in San Antonio, TX. August 30th, 2008

Born: 1956 in Port Chester, New York

“The purpose of seeing through one’s own nothingness is to see beyond into what is really there to which one’s real self can relate.”

— Indries Shah, in *“Learning How to Learn.”* (Penguin, 1983, p. 75)

“... one of the deepest truths about the archetypal energy of the Shadow (is that) everything that is unconscious and not yet clearly manifested and understood in the world of the ego appears nasty, ugly, frightening, ‘dark,’ and dangerous. However, since the deep unconscious contains all that waking consciousness desires and longs for the most... the dark and frightening mask of the Shadow always hides the thing devoutly wished and sought.”

— Jeremy Taylor in *“Where People Fly and Water Runs Uphill”*, Warner Books, 1992, p.32

“...learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good.”

— Plato, *“The Republic”*, Book VII, written 360 B.C. Translated by Benjamin Jowett

Making Sense

I tried the herb *Salvia Divinorum* several times, many years before, using a tincture that I held under my tongue. The most I'd achieved was a mildly dissociated state before ejecting what had become a mouthful of bitter spit. Whatever *Salvia* did, I conjectured, my center would hold. Now I was being offered *Salvia* in its smokable form -- the simple dried leaf -- and I accepted it for these reasons:

- 1 – It was guaranteed to have an effect.
- 2 – This professional meeting provided a supportive environment, though it was cold and unemotional.
- 3 – I was familiar with the three psychologists joining me, and our crossing paths seemed fortuitous.
- 4 – Journeying with these people tested whether psychologists could be effective "watchers".
- 5 – It was an opportunity to test my own mettle in less than perfect conditions, and to gain deeper insight into the risks of traveling to different realms.

I added some water to a small water pipe. I tested the pipe, tested the lighter, packed its bowl with *Salvia*'s brittle leaves, arranged the pillows, and sat back unsure of what to expect. The experience would be short and my three friends would simply and soberly watch me until it was over. I asked one if he expected me to drop the pipe. Would the effect be that rapid? I had a moment of uncertainty, and then I struck the lighter.

The leaf burned quickly, the smoke was easy but became acrid. I held in my breath, poised and watchful, waiting for "The Diviner's Sage" to emerge from her mouse hole in the wainscot of reality. I don't recall exhaling.

I was looking at Kay in the soft light as she sat in a chair at the foot of my bed. Moving from bottom to top I beheld a blue sweater, a deep red bolster, her blond hair, and a cream colored wall. This stripe of colors



narrowed to the width of my central field of vision, surrounded by blackness. As soon as I told myself, "Something's happening..." this stripe repeated twice horizontally, forming a double cross extending from the center of my vision out to the periphery.

The area that surrounded my vision, which we learn as babies may disappear from view but is still there, was no longer there. My vision shrank down to the interior of a straw. All that surrounded me was black, empty, and unknown. All that I knew of myself was foreshortened: the passage of time, the direction of time, and my place in time. I watched my own disintegration, and then lost consciousness.

The EEGs of people experiencing *Salvia* show gross, global neurologically distortions in the first 10 seconds. Slow-wave oscillations dwarf the brain's normal voltages by an order of magnitude; they last one period and quickly diminish. Correlating this distortion to subjective experience is conjecture, but the shape of these oscillations corresponded to the flow of my experience.

From Somewhere

I regain full consciousness in an unfamiliar world. I lack perception of anything but my own inner voice. My mind holds only two memories: a snapshot of myself as a child, and a memory of three people walking through a hotel lobby. Accompanying these memories is the sense of a whole life's history but, try as I might, as in a lucid dream, I can recall none of it.

My sense of the present is unlike anything in my two memories: it is dark, forbidding, and intangible. I have the dim notion that I am an Aztec soldier wearing some feathered garb, waking from a reverie into a world of struggle and loneliness, and entirely forested with large bulbous things. What are they... giant mushrooms?

I am deeply sad and I am afraid. The details of the present, which I cannot yet recall, fill me with dread. I need protection; I feel like a child. My sadness arises from realizing these memories are just a reverie, a hopeful daydream, but nothing more. The life that seemed a reality moments before was just an hallucination. The emptiness that now surrounds me, on the other hand, is not a dream.

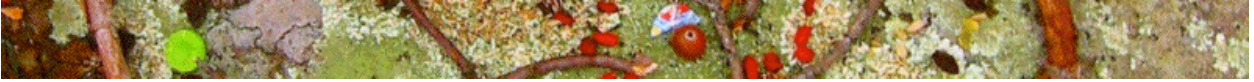
It dawns on me that I loved that image: that fantasy of what should have been but never was. For a while I struggle with my lack of sensation and memory, aware only of a dark area in front of me. My only certainty is that I am waking from a dream, awaiting a recollection of who I am.

My intellect falters and a knot forms in my throat. I am overcome with feelings of love and pity. Love, from the realization that I really *do* love the person I imagined myself to be; a self that could experience a happiness unmatched in this dark world. Pity, from having lost this forever. Like Odysseus tied to the mast, I would give anything to escape the present and regain that paradise. "One, two, three, four,..." I count seconds to assure myself that time is passing.

I have glimmers of recollection. Memory fragments suggest the fading past might be more than a total invention. I muse, "Those people in the hotel lobby: had I been in contact with them? Was I involved with those people between then and now? Had something happened?" Perhaps Lincoln Stoller is more than just a reverie imagined from some postcard vision, the invented story of someone else's childhood.

An awful thought strikes me and I recoil, "Had I retired with some people to a private hotel room to take drugs?" I am stunned by the horrible picture of a witless teenager playing a foolish game of "chicken," and dying. "Could a good person, like me, willingly toss away that all that he had ever known? Could the person of my imaginings be such a fool?!" Surely this is nothing more than a sick fantasy. I quickly relax, reassured that no sane person would be so stupid as to take "The Red Pill" and be forever locked out of the dreams of hope, and love, and meaning. And yet...

Where is reality? Why is this hypnopompic state taking so long to clear? Why have I no recollection of other people, family, community, or culture? I rack my brain for some wider context, some connection that will puncture my isolation, something good that I love, my center; but there is



nothing.

Through Vibration

In my struggle I consider moving my arm and speaking, but neither action seems to have any purpose; I'm not sure how to do those things anyway. I recall playing my flute in the empty hotel stairwell: how lovely its reverberation. The memory stirs my heart; its sound pierces the silence and I begin to sing. This is my first utterance and I sense, rather than see, that it freezes the entities who are watching me like laboratory technicians.

A small window opens out of my darkness, and through this window I perceive people, and I remember. They are the watchers, but we do not love each other. I am still alone. The shock of this hits me and I shut the window. Then, in a world that is only sound, I begin to speak and I tell this story.