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MATTER, GESTURE, AND SOUL—“SUCH STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF”

Torill Christine Lindstrøm

“We are such stuff that dreams are made of”—says Prospero near the end of Shakespeare’s “The Tempest.”—And indeed, we are matter, body, and soul. Our minds and sciences dig into the abysses of atoms and galaxies, and transcend the time-space horizons of meta-physical realities of both matter and mind. And in the multitude of the possible and the potential, we try to grasp, capture, envision—and express our experience of reality.

Not only we. In the depth of time, as far back as archaeology can reach, “we,” our ancestors, whose genes still vibrates in our bodies, created art.—What we call “art,” that is. Their concepts and ideas may have been different, but “different” can mean anything from “totally different” to “slightly different.” Yet, as long as we, as well as the earliest hominins, are human beings, there are abilities and interests that we share. One is to create art, whether it is pictures, patterns, rituals, performances, sounds, sculptures, body-art, gestures, dances, decorations, and much, much more.

Art captures the essentials of life—and what may lie beyond.

Art stretches beyond the obvious and objective, transforms it through the subjective experience of enlightened persons, and is shared with a community, even with humanity itself, in shared collective archetypes.¹ That is why art from ancient times and distant places can touch us, move us, create emotions, motivations, and motives.—Matter, the materiality of art, creates our souls.

Creativity reduces the “otherness” of “the other.” Creativity makes us feel closer to prehistoric people as well as to people from various cultures; and makes us look at the world differently.—The difference between the ordinary and the exceptional disappears.—In art, the exceptional that lies deeply embedded in the ordinary, is extracted and exaggerated. This creative process makes us see things with new eyes, our perception is transformed.—Immediate impressions become expressions, further to be laden with symbolic meaning, and channeled into solid symbols.

Every creation has a creator. A person with a creative soul is somebody who touches others by their voice, body, movements, gestures, and material products, - or simply by pointing out the exceptional in the usual. Creative persons see and experience things differently. Natural forms of stones and stone walls in caverns may ignite and stir the creative mind into fascination, imagination, awe, perhaps even to aesthetic arrest.—Lappesteinen *sieidi* (The Lappestein sacred stone) is one (see Fig. 1).² A sculpture formed by natural forces, and transformed by mental forces to become a symbol and sacred sanctuary for Sámi populations at Hardangervidda, and a loved landmark for later populations.

But matter can be further transformed. And in the perceptive process, as well as in the material transformation, also the soul and mind of the creator is transformed. The

¹ Jung, 1943

² Lappesteinen (“the Sámi Stone”) is a sieidi. A sieidi can be of wood or stone, and is a sacred object, indicating a sacred area, and a sieidi is also a site for offerings, for the Sámi (Åikäs, 2011). Sieidi stones are usually large and stand out in the landscape. They are unshaped by humans, but have spectacular shapes that appeals to the imagination. The Norwegian main road Riksvei 7 (Rv7) now runs close to Lappesteinen. It seems that this modern road was deliberately curved around it, so that Lappesteinen is preserved for the future as one of many Sámi cultural heritage sites (Thomassen, 2009).—Personally, I feel a thrilling anticipation when approaching it, and a deep sense of awe when seeing it, and touching it.

present ordinary state of mind can turn into altered states of consciousness, even states of transcendence and trance.³

The creative mind is blessed with insights and enlightenment, but may bear the curse, or perhaps we should say, the challenge, of being exceptional and different. In the Five-Factor Theory of personality the trait “Openness to experience” encompasses personality characteristics such as: openness to new ideas and experiences, unconventionality, untraditional ideas, engagement in fantasies, rich emotional life, curiosity, creativity, and an ability for aesthetic appreciation of visual and tonal arts.⁴ This “Openness”—trait is also associated with intelligence.

What role could people who were high on this trait have in prehistory? Actually, in (what we tend to call), “primitive societies,” conformity, tradition and “business as usual” were, and still are, important adaptive survival strategies (Francesco d’Errico, personal comment). New ideas and practices could lead astray. “Astray” both in concrete and symbolic meaning. Therefore, creative persons could be met with reluctance and resistance. However, through millennia, human cultures developed. People with creative minds and souls did indeed create new shared experiences, new symbols and symbolic systems of meaning, language, new practices and customs, new artefacts (literally arte-facts) as well as new intricate art laden with symbols, information, and communication.⁵ They worked with and transformed matter, communicated with words, gestures, and sounds—and they enchanted souls.—Human culture grew out of their creativity.

Some of them were shamans. Persons with uncanny insights into the totally of being, and with existential and ecstatic visions that were transformed and transferred into dance, music, symbolic gestures, utterances, mythologies, songs, stories, symbols, and insights.⁶ Their “magic” was the sciences and arts of their times. Through millennia they transcended the human-animal division and depicted their personal transformations.⁷ A stunning example is the approximately 38.000 years old hybrid “Löwenmensch” (Lion Man).⁸—Their engravings, figurines, and paintings of dances and rituals were the art of their times. In these ways their impressions were expressed. Their visionary souls touched the souls of others.—They still touch us today.

Souls and matter met and united in the embodied experience of material engagement and visionary creative ideas, in shamans and other persons alike. They created the acts and processes of creativity.

We tend to think of technology and art as belonging to different realms, but archaeologically and historically, they are entwined. The ancient Greek word for “art”, techné (techne) and techni (τέχνη) seems to us to point more to technology and objects meant for matter, materials, and practical use, than to artistic creativity meant for the mind and soul. Yet techné meant crafts as well as to be skillful at doing or performing something, almost anything, from navigation to medical curing. Techné encompassed creating, shaping—artefacts and arts alike.⁹ In this ancient Greek concept, material and symbolic culture are united, interconnected, interlaced, and entwined. There is no difference. And indeed, neurologically, in our brains, the same areas and connections are activated in the creative processes.—Matter and mind are one.

We are both.—In us, matter is animated.
The Norwegian word for “animated” is “besjelet,” literally: “given soul.”
Matter creates our souls.—Our souls re-create matter.
In gestures, our souls are expressed through matter.
In this unity we create – and are created.

Matter, gesture and soul—“Such stuff that dreams are made of”...



Figure 1. The Lappesteinen siedi. A large stone, sacred as a landmark and offering site for the Sámi populations at Hardangervidda, Norway. Photo by Torill Christine Lindstrøm

3 Fischer, 1971; Gisiger, Dehaene & Changeux, 2000

4 McCrae & Costa, 1999

5 Lindstrøm & Kristoffersen, 2001

6 Clottes & Lewis-Williams, 1996; Price, 2001

7 Lindstrøm, 2012

8 Lumley, 2009

9 Østergaard, 2001

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