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LAWRENCE KIMMEL

"EVERYTHING FLOWS": THE POETICS OF TRANSFORMATION

Prefatory Note

Plato famously dismissed art as thrice removed from reality, holding that *mimesis* is a copy of a copy, a distraction from the more serious affairs of truth. Two millennia have done little to remove this stigma of dissembling deceit leveled at art. Metamorphosis provides an alternative view of reality, and of the access of art to that reality, that I will consider in the remarks that follow. On the opposite view of things from Plato, Heraclitus, addressing the question of reality—of what and how things are—declared "*Παντα Ρηει*", Everything Flows: the idea that reality is flow not form. On this view of elemental being, there are no discrete things, only a continuous process of transformations: the natural life of things is metamorphosis. Quite apart from philosophical conjectures, experience of flow is perceptual/literal—rivers flow, lava flows—and conceptual/figurative—time flows, ideas flow. Experience occurs at different theoretical and metaphorical levels: electrons flow, crowds flow. The idiom of everyday reality is that of discrete objects and forms, in which discourse about the world is measured in units of utility, the placement and use of objects as resources for the exercise of human interests. Artistic intuition and philosophical interest look through the convenience of the ordinary and equipmental, to the question of reality as such, to the world as it is, to things in themselves. Although science refines the process of function in terms of theoretical explanation, the language of mathematics and physics is divided in its view of the language of the universe. The standard view since Newton is that of the calculus, that regards motion as elemental—that between every motion is another motion. But there is a more recent and powerful view of science and mathematics, familiar in computers, photoelectric cells, as well as quantum theory—committed at a fundamental level to iteration—to a digital reality. In any event, the issue of reality seems an undecidable issue within science; moreover science itself is more under an agenda of

empowerment than truth. The world of art, however, has no limitation to the instrumental utility of its images and discourse and is free to pursue perspectives on the truth of reality however it manifests itself in creative expression. Perspectives about the ultimate nature of reality are not the signature domain of the arts, but there is merit to the idea that the fundamental metaphor of the arts is that of metamorphosis, that transformation is at the heart both of what art strives to express, and the process and discourse of that expression.

## I

Metamorphosis is an elemental change in the form of one thing such that it becomes another thing. The logic of identity, however, does not allow that one thing can be another—proscribes a change in identity that is a change in being. Even so, what is a puzzle in logic is transparent in life. The familiar natural paradigm is the chrysalis: the caterpillar becomes the other, the butterfly. And this is only an external version of what is common to all life; for example, the ontogenetic development in which the human fetus becomes a person. Many analogues grow out of this natural paradigm into parables of reassurance: the ugly duckling becomes the beautiful swan, the grotesque frog a prince, Cinderella a Queen. Equally there are the classical reversals in which a man becomes an insect or an ass. Metamorphosis occurs in the stories we tell at every level—of cosmology, ontology, and psychology. The transformations of most interest to the arts are those anchored in the phylogenetic scaling of human life, emerging from the sea to lose its gills, to climb into, then out of the trees, to stand and think, to dream and create, and scale the very heavens. The ascent of life absorbs our interest, ties us to a common root of existence even as we strive to transcend it, and the images of metamorphosis in art reflect and reconfigure this fascination. Works of art, in the palette of painter, poet, sculptor, and composer, seek out the transformational range and transgressive possibilities of the human metamorph: from beast to man to god and return. Progressive and regressive paradigms of metamorphosis frame understanding: from accidental variations in cosmic chemistry and entropic

systems of energy, to mutant transformations in species life; from the dust of creation to dust of decay and resurrection. The scope and range of human self-conception flows into every space that yields to imagination and remembrance.

As an indulgence, man's celebration of himself in art is not so different from other life-forms that exhibit the glory of existence—the peacock's fan, the gliding grace of the swan, the melodic wonders of the forest's feathered sounds of trill, warble, whistle, and coo. Biological evolution traces and records the seemingly infinite variations of emergent life forms; art, in a parallel activity, traces the seemingly endless variations in the changing forms of life in man himself. That changeling creature who moves so easily between risen ape and fallen angel, who finds a home as easily in Caliban as in Christ, eases into and rages through whatever appeals to his interest. Energy that feeds the expressions of art draws equally on joy or sorrow, exhilaration or despair, and the work that results is a living portrait of the modes of existence that make up human consciousness.

Metamorphic conceptions of Man that have framed his cultural destiny have ranged from molded earth into which a living breath is gifted in Hebraic scripture, to the archaic Greek claim that men and gods are of one race, to the familiar modern rendition of man as a naked ape. These are general categories and contexts within which art has always taken liberties, to search out oppositional and endless arrays of complex subtlety that become life in human form. Familiar examples of metamorphic antinomies fill the field of art: limbs and fingers branch into leaf, hair mushrooms into bloom, out of the dead corpses of Auschwitz grows the tree of life, the shaman's arms become wings, or his legs scale into webs in the sea, a girl metamorphoses into a plant, a man into a beast. Symbols and signs of Nature's encoding: things are unstable, boundaries are indeterminable, life is undecidable, and the very foundations of the earth, erratic and random. The human imagination seems to find freedom in such ambiguities, and for reasons of resonance with the nature of things, takes delight even in the endless transformations of clouds. The artist is drawn to fissures in stone, the shapes of ground shadow, flickering light cast upon a cave wall.

Our initial interest in the relation of art and metamorphosis is prior to any consideration of Fine Art. We will consider art in two elementary ways: as a fundamental activity in response to the human condition, that is, as a need of human beings to give expression and meaning to experience; secondly, as an emergent form of understanding in which the truth and beauty of reality is disclosed. In its most crude expression, we will be concerned with art as a mode of existence. So conceived, art is a metaphysical activity essential to human understanding.

It is constructive first to consider primitive art and the primitive artist as a responding to a raw experience of the world—where art is concerned not to delight in the miracle of imagination, but rather and simply to frame reality. In this context, one may find an elemental relation of artistic meaning and existence. The model of the primitive artist was not man in ideal form, in the image of a god, but rather a human creature without any of the cultural attributes that later will fascinate the arts of refinement. The key to metamorphosis in art may be discovered in this radical context of awakening reflection.

The re-discovery and recovery of the emotional force of primitive art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has a cognitive component of interest to philosophy as well. Sartre, in an essay on art, refers to Giacometti's desire to place himself at the beginning of time. Giacometti's project connects his sculpture with the primitive artifacts of the paleolithic hunters of Southern France, to those first men who conceived to carve a man from a block of stone. At ground zero, art responds to the world directly, not to the work of earlier artists. Such primitive artists are not concerned to creatively variate expression, they are not polishing a philosopher's stone, looking for nuances of difference in the work of earlier thinkers; the set task is somehow to directly engage understanding in an expression of existence. The familiar figures of Man that Giacometti sculpts provide some idea of an art still close to the source of its creation. Imagine these figures as silhouettes framed against a full moon on an open horizon; or again, picture a solitary figure in the empty sands of a desert waste. Pared of the opulence of flesh, the figure is still human, in its form and movement. The sculpted space of the figure embodies movement in its stillness,

emanates life in its fragile isolated existence. The primitive impulse in shaping a stone into the figure of a man is of course only a beginning of the transformations that will become man and art. Sartre anticipates the future of artistic expression and understanding from this beginning, referring to the impulse which first fashions a lump of clay into a man as the manifestation of a being that is an enchanter of signs: "...they cling to his hair, shine in his eyes, dance between his lips, perch on his fingertips. He speaks with his whole body; when he runs he speaks, when he talks he speaks, and when he falls asleep his sleep is speech (*Essays in Existentialism*, p.388)."

Art, from the first crude fist of stone formed, to the final stroke of a fine brush, mirrors and manifests the metamorphosis that is Man. That man is both ape and angel requires the genius of art, to survey the barbaric and benevolent impulses through which Man searches out his destiny, and in the process, transforms the life and world that feeds his fate.

## II

The aesthetic rendering of reality: In an important sense we intuitively know that in philosophy, in the basic reaches of metaphysical discourse, we have it all wrong, that we inevitably ask the wrong questions, or some limited form of the question to which we really want the answer. The most elemental philosophical question we can put to ourselves in wonder is the ontological question of being: "What is there?" And, as every first year philosophy student knows, this question presupposes its answer: "*Is is.*", that is, "Everything."; and this answer comes to not much or nothing. The response doesn't *explain* anything, and one has either to decide that the question makes no sense, or else try to enumerate "everything". Either way the discipline divides and subdivides still looking for contexts—particular or general, specific and concrete or universal and abstract—toward some foundational form that will satisfy our craving for an anchor in the continuing phenomenal experience of a moving, seemingly fleeting existence. It strikes us with a force of recognition in our very being, that if the world is the

totality of things, such “things” including those things we are and are not, are of multiple kinds in motion, better thought of as energy in motion than things given or defined at rest.

In philosophy, the cultural manifestations of contextual research produce the three orders of the Kantian *Critiques*: the pure reason of the understanding—science; the practical reason of autonomous command—ethics; and finally, the reflective judgment of aesthetics—art.

Philosophy defends its worth in the pursuit of these constants in the human search for the genius of its own identity: the true, the good, and the beautiful. Arguably each of these contexts can conceivably address the whole range of concerns. Science can also articulate what the good is in a form of aesthetic simplicity or elegance, and Ethics can in turn anchor moral concerns in the beauty of truth; but it is in Art that human beings discover the most complete and full acceptance of their own possibilities. Art has no stake in fixing the nature or character of a thing under a determining rule. Kant rightly suggests the characteristic mode of aesthetic interest is found in the free play of imagination which is cognizant of an implicit design or meaning just out of reach in its movement—some intimation of truth in the perception of beauty or sublimity of a work or object. We recognize in and through art the multiform existence of things, the dynamic energy in things, in their transient forms, the flow of existence. The creative imagination in art is an activity resonant with the motion of life and the world itself. Art is free motion in a kind of intuitive response to the reality in which it finds expression, of which it is the expression. We find that we are moved by a poetic or melodic line, a shaping of space or sound, or else it is not art. The movement in art affects *soma* and *psyche*, sense and soul.

But recall that Heraclitus intended an elemental recognition to which art adheres, in celebration of the fact that *everything* flows. Everything? In what sense does architecture flow, or that sculpture flow, or a painting? The thesis is to be understood in material terms, that it is not only the river that flows, but the great living trees at its banks, and the immense enduring mountains above. The trees flow from seed to saplings to their full maturity before once again becoming transformed into the soil of new life. Artistic expression captures the essence of this

fact. Tennyson's familiar lines in *Tithonis* are not simply an aesthetics of conscious existence, but a poetics of being itself in which the woods decay, and fall, the vapors weep their burthen to the ground...in which Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath...and after many a summer dies the swan. Dust to dust defines not only the brief span of the human being, but the being of mountains as well, a process that intimates the ceaseless motions of the sea, and the very universe itself in its ebb and flow. Heraclitus' dark saying leads us into a concept of life and world as metamorphosis. Man as metamorph marks the Changeling's search for the secret of life in motion, for the genius of identity in the multiplicity and multiformity of being in the moving manifold of sense.

What in this search produces the arts in Man? To what real need does this elemental and refined activity respond, and from what beginning does it flow, to what end ebb? How, in art, do human beings seek the essentially human in its expression; how in its practice does it find resonance with being itself? The long history of dispute about the relation, if any, of art and reality, more often than not, grounded in a complaint that art is a digression from a search for the truth about the world. Epistemic dismissals of art by the modern empiricists Hobbes and Locke do not differ that much from the Idealism of Plato. They acknowledge that poetic metaphor should be given its due as attractive distraction, but be excised as a serious resource in the task of discovering the truth about things that really matter. Art fares better with idealist thinking about aesthetics, for example, in Kant and Hegel, but as with the early paradigm of aesthetic defense in Aristotle, the value of Art is contingent upon subsumption within the framework of cognitive logic. Serious thinkers concerned to understand the role of art and artist in the ongoing project of culture tend to divide and still think of art as limited to a world of appearance that serves only to enhance, celebrate, idealize, and otherwise tamper with a clear perception of the phenomenal world.

What seems to be a more positive view of art suggests that art is a transfiguration of the ordinary sense of reality in everyday life and world, and that the great value of art lies in just this



escape from the routine commonplace of mundane existence. No one among any of these theories, however, suggests that one can compare the indulgence of art with the empowerment of science. On the other hand, it is equally clear that aesthetic experience, first and last, is rooted in sensuous experience, visceral, carnal, material, erotic. As such it is oriented toward the object, and experience of world. But the work of art is also an internal moment and movement, emotional and spiritual, an engagement of the soul. It is a response of pathos, an active reception of sense and emotion, but also an activity of reflective judgment.

So understood, Art is not an activity separate from reality, but one mode of its expression. As such it does not separately transfigure or transform reality, but is an articulate aspect of reality that proclaims or expresses the phenomena, fact, idea, of transformation. In a doubling of consciousness, Art is a form and transformation of understanding. In the understanding of design—apprehending the form in change, or the form intuited in the perception of change—the aesthetic *telos* constitutes a continuing process of transfiguration and transformation. Aesthetic awareness of transformation may be experienced either as immanence or transcendence, ecstasy or growth, modalities of birth and death.

### III

Perhaps the most dramatic fact that underscores the aesthetic interest and expression of metamorphosis is the spiritual sense of a creature that, in the womb of gestation, experiences the history of its mutations, relives the biological transformations in its journey from out of the depths of the sea. In this sense the creative arts are a primary resource for recapturing and expressing the Being that has come to consciousness in human-being. The arts, so considered, become a ritual of acknowledgment in which human-beings celebrate the genius of nature that sustains life, the germ of being that finds in its own resources a way to articulate the meaning of being. Both Nietzsche, in the *Birth of Tragedy*, and Heidegger, in his later essays, try to articulate this idea that the artist is the voice which Nature or Being produces, and through which it speaks.

In this sense it is Art itself that speaks through the work of the individual artist; Art is the medium in which and the relation through which we come to recognize fragments of what we can be. Art is a crack in the mirror of the actual, a fracture of ordinary discourse and language of the business of living. As a spiritual adventure of possibility, Art glances both ways into a dissembling structure of time—of what we have yet to become, but also what we have been. It allows us to step through a mirror to glimpse a reality that seems just beyond consciousness, but nonetheless a reality that we are. Nietzsche refers to the “I...” of lyric poetry, in which the individual artist is, as it were, a universal surrogate, the expression of a consciousness as much a phenomenon of nature as the sunrise or rainbow. The longer story, and every account is only a story, is that the metaphysics of art—art in its most elemental intuitions—provides an intimation of the development of life itself, in which the nature of Being comes to self-consciousness in the continuing stages of its evolution. Heidegger’s account of truth as *aletheia* transforms the possibilities of art so that it becomes a fundamental resource of being, into the truth of being that art discloses.

Art is not burdened with explanation or social responsibility for dependable descriptions or depictions of normalcy or of the ordinary. Magical realism suits the aesthetic sense of truth as well as material realism; naturalism carries no less aesthetic charm than the enchantment of fantasy. Questions crucial to art span the many different dimensions of the human quest for self-understanding through colors of imagination and the echoes of memory. The range of artistic conception in metamorphic expression may be progressive or regressive, judgments or accidents, punishments or rewards, just, unjust, its effects comic or tragic, magical, mundane or majestic. Consider the many literary examples of metamorphosis from Greek mythic literature in the transformations of beauty and passion, of heroes, villains, demi-gods and wood-nymphs; from Circe’s menagerie in epic drama to the much traveled and tribulated ass of Apuleius’s *Romance*. Is there a common theme of conceptual intent in all these classical reconfigurations of the human in literature, art, and music from the *Laocoon* to Lucius, from *Das Lied von der Erde* to *l’après-*

*midi d'un faun*? There are obvious inferences to be made from contexts in which the beauty of the girl is transformed into the glory of the laurel, meandering plunderers of *Ilium* transformed into piggish pen pals, the blundering curiosity of the amateur magician transformed into a long-eared, less than golden ass. No less consequential to the spectrum of human possibility are those favored and fevered children of the gods, those disfavored by fate, or strapped to the turning wheel of fortune. Transformations of Man into plant, animal, or element, whether invited, happenstance, curse or blessing explore the spiritual variations in Man's conception of himself and his relation to earth and world. Feuerbach's conception of the history and development of religious consciousness records the projection of the ideals of human being displaced onto the godhead—a way of deifying and distancing attributes and possibilities of human beings. Feuerbach has additional questions about the motives that become of major contemporary interests in psychoanalysis, once again related to the fascination of imagination with expressions of the aberrant. The language of mathematics has several analogues in the arts, in the common idea of elegance and consistency. But art embraces contrast in the collusion of beauty and horror, in distortions of harmony and figure in music, all cacophonous cadences of metamorphic reality. Typically we approach the poetics of metamorphosis from two directions in the flow and counter flow of humanity: Man to Beast (a reversal of the evolutionary flow) and from Man to God (the natural flow of cultural expression, reversed so that God is the creator of all things, including Man's conception of the God). The images in art frame both impulses and their reversals.

#### IV

Two primary roots of Western metaphysics, both of funding interest to the Fine Arts, are seeming-contradictions. One view is that change does not exist in reality; the other, that reality itself *is* change. Both can be argued; each takes a different thread and perspective on the mediations of consciousness. Another early and famous fragment of Heraclitus (#51) is directed

to the heart of intuitions concerning relation of change and reality expressed as metamorphosis. It is the first part that is always quoted, but it is the second part that will be of most interest for us here: "One cannot step twice into the same river...nor can one grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again gathers; it forms and dissolves, approaches and departs." It is in reference to this general conception that Plato, in the *Cratylus* 401.D credits and criticizes Heraclitus' view "*Panta Rhei*."

So far we have argued that the most important philosophical reason for an investigation of metamorphosis is that its primary domain is *reality*. This domain is not limited to familiar constraints that determine "objective" knowledge—that is, to techniques of explanation common to traditional epistemologies. A typical example of literary exception may be seen in our continued interest in mythology, the creative value of which has always been not that it yields a geometry of facts, but that it opens up dimensions of sense and expressions of truth not shorn of beauty. Similarly, in the artistic expressions of fantasy, metamorphic configurations overstep the actual to access a deeper recess of human consciousness, a more elemental relational range between the bestial and beatific. This is equally true of the sacred, in the aesthetics of religious ritual. The larger point is, that if it is logic that gainsays and confirms fact, it is imagination that reaches through to reality. But there is a further paradoxical twist, in that the creative arts extend the reach of reason to the possibilities of elemental reality through a poetics of transformation. Art is both window and mirror framing transformations in the flux of existence. It is a primary mode of recognition in the coming to presence of Being. The common idea of metamorphosis in literature might seem to define its home in fictive language, but we have seen how even the artifice of an aesthetic device is fused to a more fundamental level of substantial concern with reality.

Nietzsche, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, identifies, as the foundational prejudice of traditional western metaphysics, a belief in the reality of opposites. Philosophy centers knowledge within the prejudice—presupposition, belief, perspective—of disjunctive divisions of

discrete things and beings, frames inquiry in the predication of subjects and attributes. The resulting conception is of a world of constructions, bifurcations of appearance/ reality, self/other, mind/body, truth/falsity, good/bad, reason/faith, fact/fiction. In reality, however, as we are arguing, with Nietzsche and in concert with critical thinkers from Heraclitus to Heidegger, there is only a continuous transformation of *this*, a continuing mix of energy in motion—at very slow or very fast rates of flux. This means that it is only in the domain of formal knowledge—that is, of logic and language—that there are things at all. The *logos* of knowledge is the enterprise of making distinctions: "this/ that", and of making connections: "this is..." The *logos* of reality is a serialization of "*this*, and *this*, and *this*..." But the point is that in every case the defining articulation is *logos*, "word". Can we speak of, or know reality independently of discretion?

In trying to make the shift between the traditional conception of knowledge as connections between discrete things, and the aesthetic perception of reality as flow, perhaps the best one can do, through a kind of indirection, is to point toward what cannot be said, only shown. It is in this last sense, particularly, that art becomes an essential mode of metaphysical understanding. Initial access to this point may be found in Wittgenstein's thesis that the world exists not as a totality of things, but of facts, which ironically becomes the reductive mantra of positivism. Although Nietzsche's view of the world was radically different from that of Wittgenstein, the two share something worth noting in the interplay of perspectives. Nietzsche might well concede that Wittgenstein is right about "World"— that the standard as well as scientific meaning of this *concept* is dependent on the comprehensive coherence of the totality of true propositions. It is important to note that Wittgenstein later recants this reduction of meaning, or at least acknowledges that its defining limits are those relevant to science, and do not extend to concerns of morality or religion. But Nietzsche's concession would contain the codicil that, as considered by either the traditional conception of world or in Wittgenstein's correction, "world" is a construction of language, a network of meanings, a productive conception of perspectives that make distinctions and connections that are not in nature itself.

Nietzsche is not alone in pointing out that there is no beginning or end in nature, any more than there are discrete things in nature. These are conceptual conceits within the framework of design for knowledge and explanation: whatever claims we make about nature and world, these first facts of constraint and dependency need recording. In the perception of reality, independently of a claim to such propositional knowledge, there is only flow, only process, only energy in motion. Life, whether of rocks or plants or animals, remains that of transformation, a continuous natural poetics of metamorphosis. The contrast between poetics and logistics—between calculative thinking designed for explanation and verification of truth claims, and imaginative thinking designed for exploration of human consciousness—does not mean either is preclusive of a fuller account of reality. Reality is not limited to propositional truths, nor to fixed limits of rational inquiry. It must include is, has been, and will be, must consist of the possible as well as the actual. The "possible" takes in and requires all the effort and languages of human invention—the stories of human experience whether in the languages of physics or philosophy, biology or theology, economics or epic drama, history, hagiography. Language is in this sense an instrument through which nature is transformed into world—in the works of law and literature, architecture and science. The many languages that constitute human discourse create many different worlds—of religion and art, of science, politics, and commerce. Language is the means by which Being becomes framed and divided into discrete beings. In reality, there is only flux, but in the discourse of its articulation reality becomes re-presented as detached fragments.

There are no knockdown arguments to demonstrate that the persistent images in literature and the arts of metamorphosis are not, as such, idle flights of fancy. Even so, it is philosophically important to plead the case that metamorphosis as a way of perception and expression is no fictional distortion of reality, but a means of closer connection to and with the reality that we are, no less than the reality of which we are aware. It is only an insensible insistence that description be confined to the *logos* of factual knowledge that would dismiss the aesthetics of metamorphosis as derivative or distortional. If anything, the argument needs to be reversed to require a

justification for calculative languages of explanation that fund the functional schemes exclusive to positive science. In short, the languages of the arts provide both augmentation and an alternative to the logistics of scientific explanation. They provide fluid access through imaginative perception and expression to the natural process of metamorphosis.

One can, of course, in philosophy, if not in life, abjure metaphysics, wash one's hands of any attempt to make claims about reality one way or another. But it really doesn't work out that way—in philosophy, science, or any other cultural enterprise of human beings. The fact is that we have an interest in such things, and whether or not a final calculus of reality is beyond us, a continuous search for the significant forms of its expression is a defining feature of our collective existence. There is not only the common presupposition and acknowledgment of a binding background of reality in our lives, but even in the theoretical disclaimers of science regarding metaphysics, the functional presumption is that here one has a solid grasp of reality, rather than in an idealistic poetry, surrealist art, or the languages of religious or philosophical transcendence.

Wittgenstein centered referential appeal for the foundation of meaningful discourse within the domains of ordinary language. This seemed to him both a simpler and more adequate solution to a "final vocabulary" than legislating limits of analytical sense in some version of meta-theory. This move in contemporary philosophy came about after endless and seemingly futile disputes between idealists, realists, rationalists, empiricists, over setting the proper locutions of description for reality. This ended as it began, in disputational futility: since the conflicts had to do with contending grounds of theoretical authority, no theory could be other than self-justifying—and that left no one better off. On the other hand we necessarily share "ordinary language" even in our common activity of framing theoretical difference. His point was to back away not only from meta-theoretical adjudication, but from any theories of language that would replace ordinary shared and common discourse as fundamental to the further development of analytic sense in whatever language of science or séance.

This point has application here. Consider the range of possibilities of reality that must allow for possible as well as the actual, for the future no less than the past. Even if one were to concede truth to the domain of the sciences, to reverse the figure of Quine, the issue of reality is still open to the subject and motive, appeal and imperative of the whole of the human enterprise, comprising all the arts and sciences, business and commercial practice no less than political policy, or moral and religious experience. Reality is both a wider and deeper domain than any theoretical configuration, and sense a more comprehensive and fundamental domain than truth.

The poetics of metamorphosis, as an element of inquiry and form of expression, centers in the search for a comprehensive sense in reality in opening imagination to meaning. In any genre, metamorphic transformation of being tries to capture an essential fact that we are all creatures in process—physically, mentally, emotionally, morally, spiritually. The transformations we are most interested in, are the ordinary and extraordinary transformations of human beings, and we look for analogues in the natural as well as spiritual world—in the caterpillar become butterfly, the pollywog become frog, the word become flesh, the saint become sinner. The process in which ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny is replicated in every aspect of human growth, including the model of education in which to reach the current state of cultural literacy, one must proceed through the most elemental forms in which the mind became conscious of itself and world.

Nietzsche makes use of this literary and philosophical transformation in his famous metamorphosis of the self, in which the person must first become a camel, then a lion, and finally a child. Each represents not merely a stage of growth, but a transformation of the spirit, in which different empowerments are formed, then overcome. Consider the parallel account in Freud's psychodynamic model of the development of the person from id to ego to superego, each formation responsive to the different instrumental principles of pleasure/reality/ideality. This transformational model is mostly an animating of the very ancient notion of the tri-partite self,



most familiar in Plato's account of appetite/spirit/intellect in his analysis of the structures of psyche and state. This has another obvious parallel in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

There are countless parallels worth noting in the growth and transformations of culture. In the primitive totems of tribal peoples that draw on the energy of animal ancestors, in the continuance of life in doctrines of reincarnation, in the resurrected bodies of the dead in Christianity, there is an acknowledgement of the persistence of consciousness, of spirit, of life, through birth and death. In the quite ordinary command of religious life familiar to the Christian that one must become as a child, is counsel that one has not only to change her ideas about things, but become a different person. To be "reborn in the spirit" is not a change of life-style, but a transformation of existence—one, presumably, is to become a different being, a different kind of being. Inuit sculpture is almost invariably infused with the magic of the changeling, capturing the moment in-between in which a man becomes bird, or bear. This form of expression and this frame of becoming represent a profound expression of spiritual life for a whole culture. The Christian ritual of the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of the savior god to be consumed by the faithful is a familiar ritual bonding a community. The more sophisticated the culture, or the more self-conscious a culture becomes about the credibility of its expressions of wonder, the more the language becomes referenced as symbolic, and, in a secular society, the more its professions become ironic. Even so, the persistence of expressions of metamorphosis is testimony to the deep sense of wonder that once animated human imagination about the mystery of life that in our time has come to seem so ordinary.

In an age when the dominant if not exclusive discourse is framed in deference to science and technology, and religious expressions often become an embarrassment, the forms of expression which must carry this originating sense of wonder revert to *poiesis*, and aesthetic expression in literature and the arts. It may be that such a sense of wonder at some level of consciousness and public expression is an imperative for sustaining human life through recognition of the interdependency of all life.

The point for our purposes is finally not whether any of this is true in the sense of verificational hypothesis, only whether its expression is intelligible—whether it finds resonance with human imagination and spiritual possibility. While literal facticity can be withheld from expressions of artistic metamorphosis, there is no use in debunking spiritual possibility as unreal. The connection between metamorphosis, reality, and art, is reason to reconfigure the continuing quarrel concerning the nature of metaphorical expression. When we listen to the Shaman's story of searching for a child that has wandered off into the woods and discovering the child's footprints gradually become those of the bear, we look for a symbolic or metaphorical meaning. But it is important to recognize that in doing so we have not dismissed our interest in the question of what is real. There is mystery in the child's disappearance. Did he become a bear? "Yes and No" is a better answer than a positive dismissal. But better still is to remain within the sense and magic of the story, the transformation of the imagination into the mind of the child: Does it keep its thoughts of mother and father, its memory of other children? What of the mind of Daphne as her arms are tortured into limbs, her feet into roots, as consciousness becomes wrapped in the still beauty of the laurel? What is the blessing of an eternal green of spring with consciousness held bondage? In the absence of stories and images, we may come to honor fact before all else, and its validation through independent verification, but reality is a much broader and deeper affair. It cannot do without the beauty of truth to which art provides access.

The processes of metamorphosis, whether of beast to man, or man to god, is a common enough experience and neither irrational or unnatural, since we can indeed think it, picture it, paint it, sculpt it. To do such in the arts is not to abstract from reality, but to find expression for an experience of process which is primal and in accord with a very deep need of our being, not for description or explanation—methods which distance us from reality—but idiomatic resonance with consciousness, reciprocity with nature, and concurrence with the natural history of human development.

### Concluding Remarks:

The paradigm for metamorphosis has been that of nature—a happening. The production of art, *poiesis*, is an activity, a making. But it is also a making of a space in which happening can take place. In Art, the artist applies as well as perceives or intuits the process of transformation, conceptually and instrumentally. Motives, models, and techniques vary among arts and artists, genres and forms. In the *Satyr* plays that form the last movement of the Greek tragic drama, there is a rejuvenation of life in the libidinal release of energy in the erotic forms of the goat-men: the would-be god becomes the resurrected beast, and life is affirmed in its transformations. Striving with the god, the defeated hero is returned to the beginning of things, and we are reminded not of mortality of death and cultural aspiration, but of the vitality of life and transfiguration. Picasso taps the same energy in the primitive forms of the *Minotaur*. Michael Angelo's sculpture of the *Slaves*, mere human forms clawing free of the stone that entraps them, portrays human consciousness caught up in the form of its embodiment. In Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, the metamorph Gregor persists in his concern to get to the office on time, will not part with his obsessions in the face of the transformed levels of being.

Metamorphosis is a fixture of human expression and explanation from cosmic conjectures, to physical, biological, and psychological explanations, to mystical visions. Stories of creation vary from lightning striking the primal murk, to *Deus Faber* bending down to breathe life into the clay. Biological paradigms shift from phylogenetic tracings to the serendipity of mutational leaps. Cultural, social, historical and psychological schemes range in development from logical necessity to revelational fantasy. Religious faith and ritual embrace a myriad of ethereal visions of death and transfigurations. But finally it is art that captures in its many frames the living motion of reality, a fully inclusive resource that can embrace the whole of human reality in all its diversity and depth. The genius of art, and the case for art begins and ends here.