

Extract from MEDIA: The Bio-Tech Rehearsal for Leaving the Body

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During The First Moment Of Your Death: Remember

Now you've decided to take a stance now that you are dead. Is this stance an attempt to hold on? Do you think that if you take a stance, now that you're dead, perhaps you can be brought back to life? If that is your reason for taking a stance now during the first moments of your perception of death, then all of your stances will be of no avail. You're still holding on. You're still trying to get it back. You're still trying to put the in-crowd in front of you and the critics in back of you. You think they will protect you. You won't let go. You think you are insulated.

Now is the time at the moment of your death to take your mind out of its prison of poison and liberate your art. Now you must be yourself. Allow yourself to be vulnerable. You cannot hope to liberate society without first making an effort to liberate yourself. Stop believing that you are different. Your belief in your own personal difference only makes it possible for others to play on your anxieties. Now you sense there is a crisis in the air. You feel confused and uncertain. You thought you would be able to avoid this moment by your belief in high art. But even those who worship high art are uncertain at the moment of their death.

Now that you are dead what value is your art style to you or what value is your anti-style? Did you die in style? Were you shot down by a machine gun in a crowded museum while the critics and curators and dealers screamed, "My God! An artist has been killed!"? Or did you just die one dreary morning in your bed unable to pull it together to get up one more time for another day at the studio? Or maybe in that first moment of death you said, "You must be in the wrong place. You must be looking for Liberace's office." While a voice boomed back, "No sir, your wife picked it out for you. She says those folks in the New York art scene will sure get an eyeful when you show up in this number." Or did you think, "Finally it's going to happen. Those folks out there are going to see the meaning of what I have been doing."? You thought it was your turn to become immortal.

The artist looks around and sees an art world beset by trauma and insecurity and now, more than anything else, the artist sees himself. But he's still pushing the same old myth. "A man in my business sure pays one hell of a lot of dues. Of course, I realize there are other fellows in the race for immortality and they all think they're mighty strong candidates, too." Then raising his hands to each side of his face, fingers spread wide apart, Ö la Jolson, he bellows, "They're all such powerful formidable folks, just hearing their names makes me shake in my shoes. Don't talk about those fellows any more. Can't you see it makes me uncommonly nervous?" There is nothing secret about his strategy. Mailing lists are carefully cultivated over the years and have been computerized. "You are looking at a man who's not straining at all. Nosiree, not at all." A conversation with him can be lighthearted, gay, frivolous or as deadly serious as the subject may demand. Furthermore, the artist's demeanor remains that of the courteous, well-practiced politician putting his best foot forward.

Now you just can't ever believe it will happen, can you? You can't quite see it, can you? Don't believe you'll ever die.

The artist replies, "Well, now, that's not the important thing here. The important thing is your attitude, how you go about things, to maintain your sincerity and integrity." The art world just might have had it all. It came on like a bantam weight who had a shot at the title, with a little bob here and a bit of a weave there, strutting and swaggering and rocking back and forth, cutting and slashing, making them laugh, making them shout, making them mad, making them believe art knew more than everybody thought it did. Maybe — just maybe — the art world could have had it all, but now, of course, it can't.

But the fact is that the artist's fault was always within himself and not in his stars. The fault was there because he chose something far less than what he might have had. He chose to ignore brutally the basic human rights of minorities so as to enhance himself in the eyes of an elite majority. He was able for years to bathe lavishly in the fame and fortune of his choice. He believed he had chosen well, that the lights would stay on forever.

Even at the moment of your death, your projections indicate the way you see things is still colored only by your own attitudes. Now these projections appear as five poisons or confused emotions; ignorance which deliberately ignores the limitless all-pervading space in which everything exists as it really is.

Now that you are dead, now that you have no style, now that you have no form, remember what you practiced during life. Remember you believed you were right. Art was just for art's sake. Remember how you felt only good art mattered. Only knowing the right people mattered or saying the right things or being seen in the right places. Well, who can see you now? You thought it would never end. You thought, because you felt right, you would always be right. You never believed a time would come when art didn't matter, when the distinction between high art and low art would become so confused that even its great masters would become blind as a bat. All those positions that you took for a higher, more exclusive art seem to fade into a cloud of neurotic passion. The poison was pride resulting from possessing a favored position. Now take its antidote which is wisdom of equality and equanimity. You died from a lack of spirit, from a lack of purpose. But it wasn't your fault. How were you to know that money and art would kill one another? How were you to know that art commerce would become more important than art itself? You see, the body felt well-fed so it couldn't figure out that the mind was dying. Turning the experience of art into a dog fight for scraps of attention which would be turned into no more than a traveler's check.

But still you cannot die. So even though your body is cut into pieces you will recover. Since you are a mental body you're really a natural form of emptiness so there is no need to fear. Look closely at the nature of what makes you afraid and you will see emptiness which has no nature whatsoever. All of those steps the art world has been afraid to take for fear of its own destruction, look closely at them and you will see emptiness. Nothing there to see, nothing to feel, nothing to be afraid of. Even if you fall down, cease to be an artist, you will not hurt. So give up fear and terror. Do not create any feeling of passion or aggression. The mind in a state of death has no support. It is light and mobile and whatever thought arises in it, good or bad, is very powerful.

From now on the body you had in your past life will grow fainter and your future body will become clearer. The art style you have given up will no longer matter. At this time it is very important to take great care to close the entrance of the womb. One does not want to create a new art style out of an old one.

At this time projections of men and women making love will appear. When you see them do not enter in between them. There will be projections of males and females in sexual union. If you enter the womb at this moment through the power of passion and aggression, you will be born as a worse artist than you were in your past life.

Now listen, dead art world, the womb entrance has not been closed. The time has come to take a body. Do not go into whatever womb entrance appears. Make a choice. Even if a womb entrance appears good, do not trust it. And even if it appears bad, do not feel dislike of it. The true profound essential secret is to enter into the supreme state of equilibrium in which there is no good or bad, acceptance or rejection, passion or aggression.

We died with you and so did everyone else who is within earshot of this voice. We died of not doing the right thing when it would have made all the difference. But we were busy being right, doing our own thing: writing about the right art, buying the right art, selling the right art, showing the right art, curating the right art. We thought it would never change, that we would never have to get involved in anything that did not reinforce our position or insure our moving forward in the art world. Even now we wish we did not have to be involved. But now it's too late. Both the body and the mind are riddled with cancer which has killed our spirit. So now we have no choice. We have to do something because we're dying and we're afraid that our death will go unnoticed. So now we are ready to take a stance. To try and end this terminal case. To get it back to where it was before. To try and get that feeling one more time. But there is no way back, my friend. There never has been and there never will be. We can't reinstate you in a position which was questionable in the first place. We can't accept your stance merely for the purpose of reinstating yourself in the good life. There has to be more to it than that. Your actions can't always be simply connected to your gaining personal power. You have to go forward alone. You have to cross this the most dangerous of roads alone. You still want someone else to do it for you. But as much as we would like to do it for you, we can't. Everyone has got to die for themselves. Everyone has to find out who they really are. We can't do it for you. But we are here by your side watching you at this moment of your great decision.

Now that you are dead and in a state of suspension, remember that we have states of suspension in life. Death happens in the living situation, too, the end of an art style, the end of a critic's importance, the end of art as a spiritual gem. There are all kinds of death experience happening to us all the time, experience of paranoia and uncertainty in everyday life. Like not being sure of our ground, not knowing quite what you are getting to, not being sure if what you have done is really worthwhile. So those who are going to die and those

who are already dead are in the same position as those who are born. Nobody is going to save us. We have to make a commitment to who we are now. There is the conflict between body and consciousness, and there is the continual experience of death and birth. If we are open and realistic enough to look at it this way, then the actual experience of death, of our own death or the death of our artistic values, will be neither a myth or an extraordinary shock because we have worked with it and become familiar with the whole process.

First, there is the uncertainty in the sense of losing contact with the solid world, the world of art, museums and commerce, whether one should continue to go on living even though we lose contact with the art world. This uncertainty is not seen in terms of leaving the body, but purely in terms of losing one's ground, destroying one's name as an artist, the possibility of stepping out from the real world of art into the unreal world of life. Physically you feel heavy when the earth element dissolves into water, and when the water dissolves into fire, you find that the circulation begins to cease functioning. Those who believe themselves to be in the real world no longer want to be in your circle. When fire dissolves into air, any feeling of warmth or growth begins to dissolve. The anger of the art world puts you out into the cold. When air dissolves into space, you lose the last feeling of contact with the physical world. The curators and critics say, "I don't know if he's making art anymore."

Finally when space or consciousness dissolves there is a sense of internal luminosity, an inner glow, when everything has become introverted, when the spirit of your art operates from the inside rather than the outside. Then you automatically take refuge in a more functional situation which is the water element. You do things which are simply necessary to stay alive, to reassure yourself that your mind is still functioning.

In the next stage the mind is not quite sure if it is functioning properly or not. Something begins to cease operating in its circulation. You are out of the circle. "He has become a political artist, no need to worry about him anymore." The only way to relate is through emotions, you try to think of someone you love or hate, something very vivid because the watery soft quality of the circulation does not work anymore, so the fiery temperature of love and hate becomes more important. Even that gradually dissolves into air, and there is the faint experience of openness. There is a tendency to lose your grip on concentrating on love or trying to remember the person you love. The whole thing seems hollow inside. You are lost. You have given up ground. You are angry with something and you try to destroy it. But at the same time the process becomes self-destructive. It turns you inward and you would like to run away from it. But then it seems too late. You are the anger itself so there is nowhere to run away.

The whole earth is turned into hot metal. The whole sky is permeated with fire. The aggression which refuses to communicate at all. It is a kind of indignation which usually comes from intense pride, the pride of feeling correct about art and culture which is reinforced by self-satisfaction begins to get into your system. It does not allow us to dance or smile or have a sense of humor. So we begin to play deaf and dumb, intelligently playing ignorant. Refusing to see what is really there because it threatens our ground. We lose our sense of humor and develop a passion for self-enrichment, but a very strange kind of suspicion comes with this kind of passion. We no longer trust or speak well of art, artists, or art movements that do not support our ground. We are never quite sure whether our own shadow is a real shadow or some other artist's strategy. We have to maintain complete absorption into the self.

You cannot perceive anymore. You cannot even look at other art because once you begin to perceive, you are introducing that experience into your own system and the more experiences you introduce into your own system the more ground your previous position loses. So you see various types of eyes gazing at each other within your brain. You discover that there is a real possibility of your losing ground, losing your identity as yourself, confusing the issues of your art.

Now that you are dead you find yourself in open space. Space without even a body to relate to, such open space that you cannot have the notion of relating. Because there is nothing to be united with or by. In this mental state there is a looseness, a detached feeling. It's as though a person had a head without a body. A gigantic head floating in space.

There is basically a desolate quality, a loneliness. You begin to realize there is no art system to relate to. Physical body and intellectual mind are transformed into space. It is terrifying because there is no center to hold on to. It is extremely irritating because there is nothing to indulge in. The center of your indulgence, the art world, has been removed. You may have had a very solid, stable situation, but now you have no outlet. In order to have an intellectual understanding, you have to see what is wrong to provide the critical attitude of a logical mind. But this has not prepared you for understanding what is right. It is only openness which

extends so far that can deal with this kind of negative situation. It is powerful and nothing can stand in its way. Therefore, it is regarded as destructive. You have been told time and time again to be closed, to take a point of view, to develop an image or style, to be only interested in quality in art. To destroy openness before it destroys you. Style is equivalent to an alarm system. Like a bell that rings the sound of caution which sends out an alarm. Fundamentally you're completely locked in without any side tracks. You can't change now without appearing to be suicidal. The art world will not accept your suicide. It reminds them too much of their own impulse of giving up hope.

Then there are the feminine principles: if you try to escape in terms of pride, to fill up all the space and not allow any other possibilities or to frighten anyone by aggression, the goddesses of art will chain you down so you cannot move your feet. Then you are reduced to facing the reality that you are dead. The tendency is to panic, to think you can keep control. It is such a terrible rejection, like a rejection of love, that nobody is really willing to help a dying person's state of mind. It seems necessary that they be told they are dying. It may be difficult to take such a step, but this is the greatest opportunity of communicating trust. At last someone really cares about you, someone is not playing a game of hypocrisy: telling you that it's all great, that art is more important than life, that high art is more important than all human suffering and oppression. Now it's your life. Can you not see now the lie you accepted throughout your whole life in order to please yourself? Never mind the multitudes that have been slaughtered so that our culture could survive. Ask yourself this question now: how many lives are you willing to have taken on your behalf for one painting or sculpture, for one museum show, for one exalted criticism? Now that you are facing your own death, we are your friends, therefore, we are watching your death. We are really meeting together at this point. When you die you will have all sorts of traumatic experiences of leaving the body as well as your old memories coming back to you. Just relate to what is happening rather than trying to run away. There is nothing suspicious going on behind your back.

Now the time has come for you to seek a path. Now the sign of earth dissolving into water is present, water into fire, fire into air, air into consciousness. Do not let your thoughts wander. At this moment your state of mind is by nature pure emptiness. It does not possess any nature whatsoever. Concentrate intensely on your psychological state of mind. Visualize it as an appearance without substance of its own, like the moon in water. You are not alone in leaving the art world. It happens to everyone so do not feel desire and yearning for this artistic life. The colors and rays of light that occur cannot hurt you. You cannot die. It is simply enough to recognize them as projections of your own mind.

Do not take pleasure in the soft white light of the art world, but feel longing for the bright blue light which is the supreme quality of your own mind. Let the masculine aspect of your mind projections go before you and the feminine aspect go behind you.

Do not take pleasure in the soft smoky lights of museum openings. This is the inviting path of your neurotic veils accumulated by the violent aggression of your wanting to make it in the art world. Let your masculine mind image go before you and the feminine mind image go behind you.

Do not be drawn by the soft yellow lights of art magazines. Do not fear the bright, sharp, brilliant red light. Recognize it as wisdom, a true artist's spirit. Relax in a state of non-action.

These images do not come from anywhere, but are the primordial spacious play of your mind so see them this way. You will become overpowered by intense fear so that it becomes more difficult to recognize the state of your own mind even though it is projected out in front of you. You have a mental body of unconscious tendencies so even if you are killed and cut into pieces you cannot die. Emptiness cannot be harmed by emptiness. You can only be harmed by those things you believe in which are outside of yourself such as the art world: formalism, minimalism, conceptualism. All of those things have been dreamed up outside the natural state of your mind.

Since your mind is separated from your body, you cannot settle down. You feel angry and cold and consciousness becomes airy and you will think, "Now I am dead so what should I do?" The mental body will be in extreme pain so you will think, "Now why not find a new body?" And you will experience going everywhere looking for a body. Even if you enter your own corpse up to nine times, winter will have frozen it or summer made it rot. So cut off your yearning for a body or the lord of death will drag you by a rope tied around your neck and cut off your head and tear out your heart and pull out your entrails, lick your brains, drink your blood, eat your flesh and gnaw at your bones