



What Makes A Vision Meaningful?

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“I connect the psychedelic dimension to the dimension of inspiration and dream.”

— Terence McKenna

What is a Vision?

We’re interested in what causes change, but we should ask the question carefully. We’re interested in change generally and the presumption that one thing causes it may be too limiting. That is, change may result from many things acting together, and these things may not be coordinated, intentional, or related. Let’s be careful not to ask the wrong question.

Before pursuing a meaningful vision let’s simply consider a vision. What is a vision? Is it something we can agree on? Here are some ways we can describe a vision.

A vision can be something we’ve experienced or saw such as an image or a picture. An image can also be something we remember and put together from memory which may not have happened at any one time, such as an insight. Insights can be assembled after the fact from collected experiences and contemplation.

The first kind of vision is something that strikes us as full of meaning or portent. In my experience,

these visions are fairly laden with mystery and other emotions. In these visions we feel transported or transplanted, whole and in our usual selves. We are witnesses or accessories, sometimes we are actors but usually not. In these visions we tend to be bystanders.

The second kind of vision has more of a history. It is usually something that we've thought about for some time and it may have lacked clarity initially and we have gained clarity by thinking about it. It's fair to say that there is a spectrum here, and that a meaningful and fully-formed image will linger and, over time, grow in meaning and it's details will evolve.

Just as we don't want to limit a vision to a one-time impact or event, we also should not limit a vision to something that's static or finished. I have had visions from 40 years ago that are still evolving. They are not finished "becoming" and I'm still working on them.



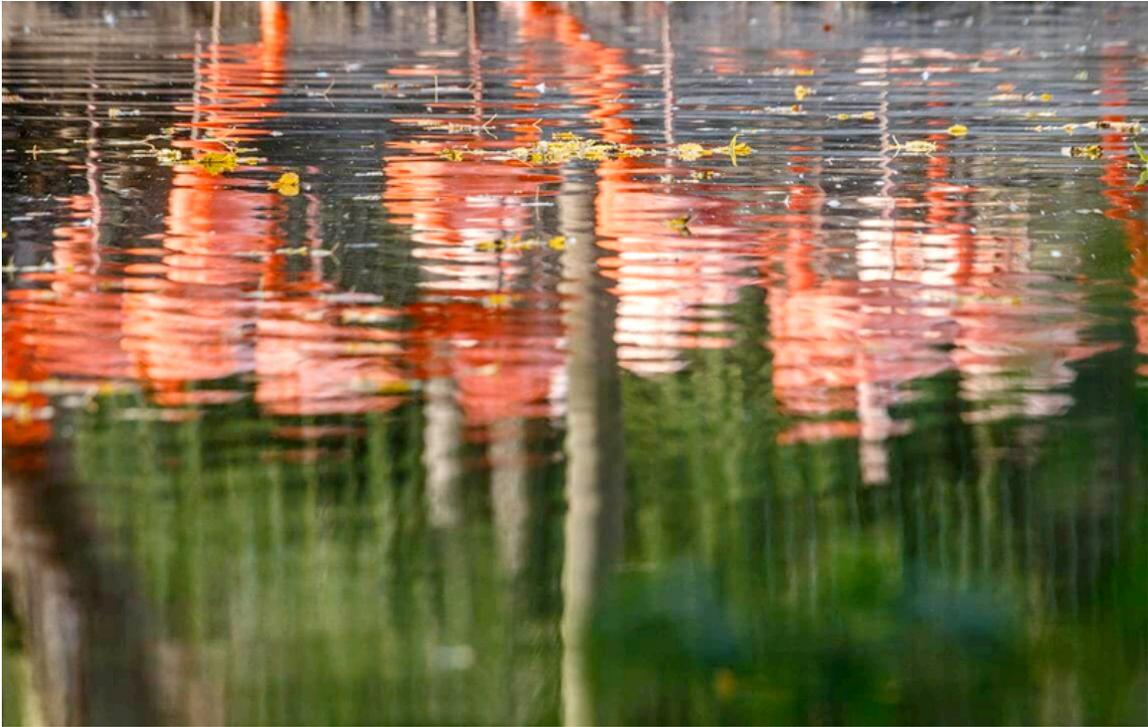
Impact

Visions are things that feel seared into memory. Most of mine were the result of some premeditated effort to address a meaningful issue. That is to say, while the vision feels spontaneous it really isn't, it's been called forth, triggered, conjured, or evoked. This is not the case with some dreams which seem to have come unbidden, but that may be shortsighted. Dreams are always bidden in some sense because they emerge from incubated experience. One may simply be unaware of how that experience has added up.

To create a vision, place yourself above a landscape of some kind. To create a meaningful vision, place yourself above a meaningful landscape. The meaning of the vision that results is not really in the vision itself, but in the landscape you've visited or created. This is a somewhat intentional vision, it represents insight into a situation of importance.

It is somewhat ironic, and a little deflating, that this does not describe the creation of my most important visions. Those visions were not of premeditated landscapes, issues, memories, or events. I have engaged in this kind of premeditation and it has resulted in visions I hold to be meaningful, but the most meaningful vision hit me from out of the blue.

There may be something about the shock and surprise of such unprecedented visions that makes them both more meaningful and less predictable. They are true inspiration: ideas without precedent that represent a sea change. More likely they suggest a possibility. Rarely are they resolved. In addition to novelty and drama these most meaningful visions contain elements of forbidden emotion: fear, anger, lust, loss, and sorrow.



Creating Visions

A vision is a stamp on one's consciousness, and this metaphor reinforces the element of force that's associated with an impact. I cannot think of a meaningful vision that evolved slowly, gently, or easily. Even in those cases where I created an event or ceremony, these events or ceremonies called forth strong energies. They often were not physically demanding at the time, but in quite a few cases they were extremely physically demanding. In other cases there were simply quiet, private ceremonies I invented for myself. In some cases the memory of these ceremonies is as was intended. In other cases, the memories have grown to include subsequent actions and results.

Depending on the kind of drama you need or want, you can create gentle or vigorous situations. The visions come out of these situations. We might call them memories when they're gentle, we might call them shocks when they're not. Visions are not exactly either of these things but they can develop from them.

I have a vision of my first time jumping out of an airplane. That was planned and there are memories of the planning, but the vision is unique. I have various memories of falling from cliffs and mountains. Those situations were planned as well, though the falling wasn't. We all have memories of family events that are usually linked to an unusual statement or event. I clearly remember the last time I saw my mother's face. She was a corpse. I took a picture.

I've had visions from psychedelic experiences, life experiences, and dream experiences. Of all of these,

the dream experiences have been the most shocking and enduring.



Psychedelics

We talk about the value of psychedelics but we don't say how they deliver this value. In my experience and from talking with others it seems that the most intentionally prepared psychedelic experiences generate the most important visions. Intentional preparation is essentially a matter of ceremony. The ceremony is usually invented or extemporized, but it could be formulaic, religious, or sacramental. I've participated in all of these.

The ancient Greek kykeon ceremony, held at the temple of Demeter and the center-piece of the Eleusinian Mysteries, involved all of these elements: a year-long preparation, a preparatory spectacle, a large and orchestrated group event, social commitment, and a highly mind-altering substance. We also presume that it involved an intellectual component, some kind of doctrinal revelation, but that part has been lost.

I've spoken with my casual trippers, people taking psychedelics for exploration and entertainment. Most did not create a ceremonial context nor an intentional environment, and few to none of them have a well-formed vision as a result. There are plenty of "gee whiz" stories of other-worldly, out-of-body experiences, but these all seem to be of the "experience beyond understanding" variety.

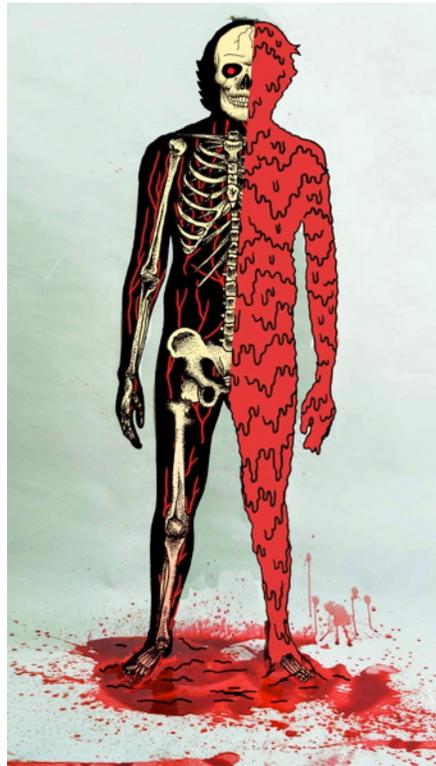
My first super-sized rock climb was the Salathé Wall on Yosemite Valley's El Capitan cliff. The route is dead vertical and we were on the wall for six days. It's an other-worldly experience and I was naturally high when I got off. To add to that, as a gift, a climber whom I didn't know offered me pure mescaline, which I took and then rode the open-deck tour bus several times around the valley. All I remember was that some girls refused to believe I'd just ascended the wall. It was a psychedelic trip but there were no memorable visions. All my visions are from being on the wall.

Ayahuasca is an entheogen that is, or should, always be accompanied by ceremony. I've been in many and I've created ceremonies for myself. There is something special about a group, the collective focus, and the shared experience. While I have had more intense visions when alone without using psychedelics, my most memorable ayahuasca experiences came from being in a group.

I think it's important to note that these visions are not strictly drug-induced. The visions relate to the ceremonies but they come from ideas, images, and experiences told to me by members of the group. There is something mind-opening about the whole situation that is not psychedelic. These are resonances of life-meaning.

I have had similar, less intense visions from working with therapy clients, accompanying them in their own trance visions to places sometimes as equally otherworldly and disembodied as any drug-induced vision. In these "visions" I was truly a bystander, but the visions were strong nonetheless. Stronger for my clients, who were not taking any sort of drug, but also strong for me.

It seems that meaningful visions require both a transcendent perspective and the addition of your own meaningful ingredient. You have to bring something to add to the pot. If you don't the pot just offers you visions of the transcendent without any way for you to place yourself in it.



Using Visions

A meaningful vision is one that comes back to us with impact. It has an energy and we might even recognize a message. In my experience, meaningful visions are unique. They cannot be expressed as an idea and they are not limited to an emotion. They all seem to have some enduring mystery, some kind of calling to something I don't know.

These visions return. They are much more accessible to me than other memories. They are easily triggered and almost seem to linger just outside of consciousness all the time.

I had a dream forty one years ago of a gorilla in a boxing ring being torn limb from limb by an unseen force. I haven't been able to get that image out of my mind ever since. I had no idea where the dream came from or what it meant. It is only within the last few months that I've even thought that the gorilla in my dreams was me. On the other hand, in the manner of much dream humor, the "gorilla my dreams" seems to resonate with "the girl's a my dreams," as a few such "girls" have been and are still tearing me apart.

This illustrates that second type of vision: the vision that becomes meaningful over time. These are visions that become prophetic once you start to realize the ideas they embody might reflect things that came to pass, ideas that are often shocking, horrific, or of an alien nature.

Were these visions of predestination, or were they visions of cautionary paths you have since chosen to explore? Do you really choose anything, or do you simply flow like water down the channels that open before you? Who are you, and are you the source of these visions or just a watcher of them?

We tend to measure our lives by our accomplishments. I am doing that less and instead finding measure in my visions. The accomplishments and visions seem to be driving each other. One without the other is not meaningful, I need to have both. The accomplishments make their own announcements, often they are material and permanently recorded. I don't find the accomplishments meaningful, it's the visions that are meaningful.

This is good, because the visions remain transcendent. I don't have to worry if my accomplishments are successful or sufficient, they're incidental, they are the steps I've left behind. It's the visions that engage me, and these visions are always with me, just out of sight but always available.



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