

KOMOTION

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word

History is not something 'back there,' something we browse through occasionally for purposes of erudition and arcane knowledge of bygone eras: history is in our flesh and bones — and in our minds. Darwin's great revolution was to show us that we are our history. The great 90s revolution of complexity and chaos shows us that history is not determined, that it is the contingent co-creation of individuals and their environments. It also shows us that every little thing matters a lot more than we thought. . . .

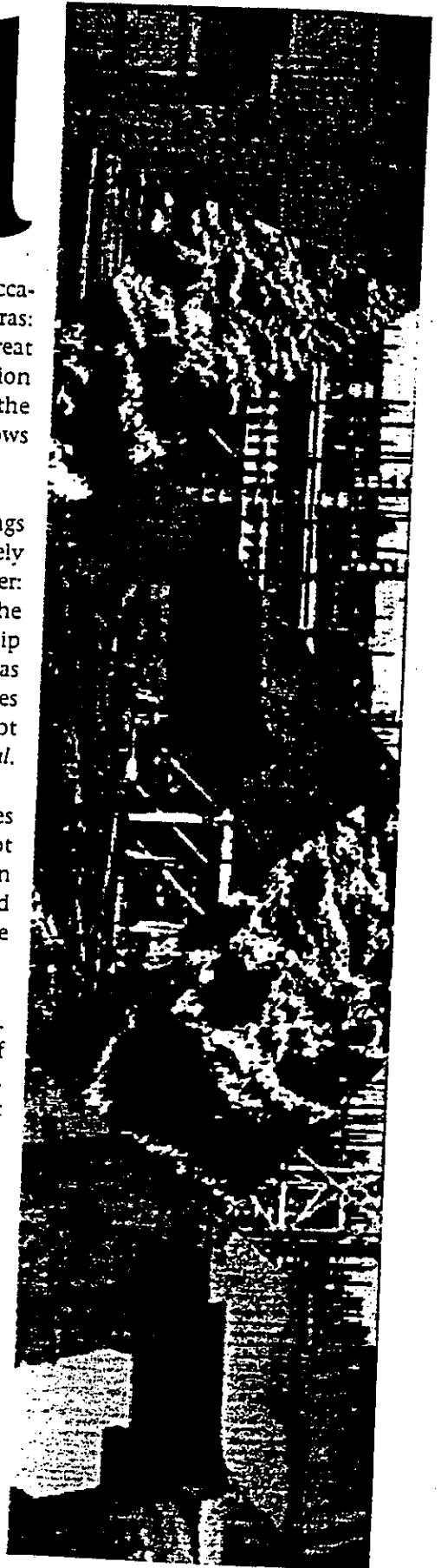
At least since the Greeks (Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle), human beings have had a fascination with order. But order also implies its opposite, namely disorder. When the Greeks came to worship order, they also banished disorder: logos and dike (justice) replaced chaos and hubris (transgression of the order). Order and disorder became separate and disjointed in a relationship of either/or, as the French philosopher Edgar Morin has shown. Order was eternal and transcendent, and disorder and chaos were terrestrial impurities in a failed embodiment of the divine 'word'. For the Greeks, order was not something we created, but a reflection of the true and the good and the *real*.

Categories sprung up to describe this eternal order, and these categories became the order itself. 'In the beginning was the Word'. They were true, not made by humans — and therefore not subject to the vagaries of human imperfection. Order and disorder found their counterparts in necessity and chance. Categories described the law-like, necessary order of things. All else was random, disorder, and chance.

It took a while for the Greek worship of reason to become institutionalized. The Greek avant-garde did not start filtering through into the daily lives of common folks until the Renaissance, when the Greeks were 'rediscovered'. The fetish for order — *rational order* — replaced the somewhat more chaotic order of the Church, with its focus on faith rather than reason.

The new 'rational' slant on order was accompanied by the gradual dethronement of the Church and God to make way for the humanist 'Man'. This enthronement of Man was liberating in one sense, because it led to a deep appreciation for the powers and potentials of the individual. It led to democratic ideals. But it was problematic in another sense: Great Men needed Great Followers to make their Great Ideas into Reality. Historically Democracy, like Socialism and Communism, has paid lip-service to the power of the proletariat, but somehow always left the reigns of power in the hands of those who knew best for us.

Let's look at what happened in music. Around 1800, musicians stopped improvising. Before 1800 (a rough cut-off date) musical pieces consisted of loosely outlined chord progressions and melodies with which the musicians



who created the categories. In the case of music, it's the musicians who, willy-nilly, developed a certain style, whether bebop or bluegrass, and then mixed it all up again to get Hip-Hop Jazz or Western Swing. In order to make sense of this evolutionary process, definitions of what something *is* have to make room for examples of what something is *like*. There is a shift from attempting to pinpoint the 'essence' of something (like the endless debates about what is and is not 'jazz', for instance) to describing its relationships in space and time: from transcendental categories to traditions and experiences.

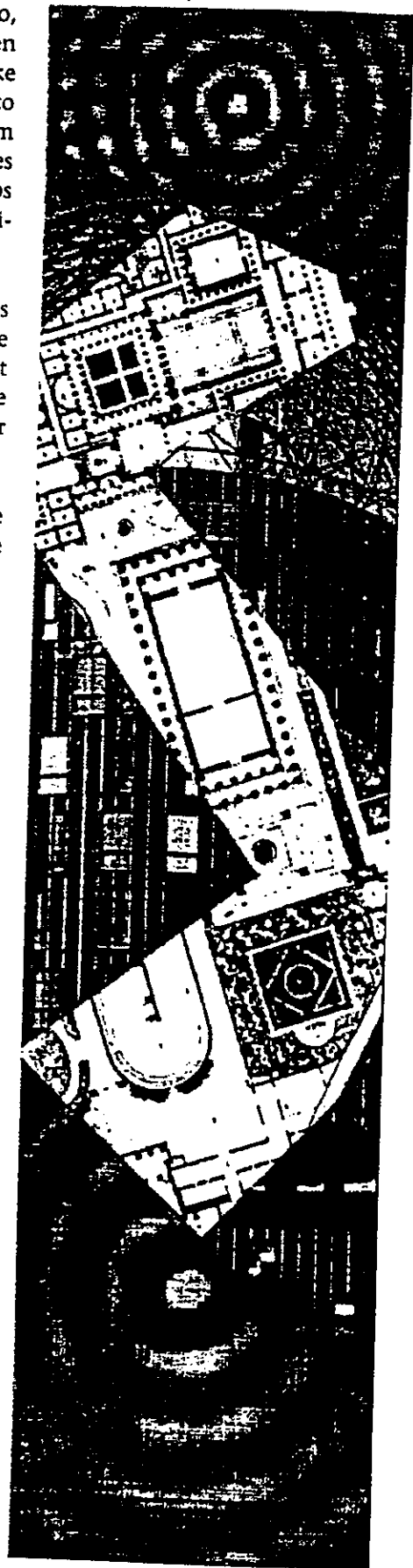
Sometimes musicians and artists develop a proprietary interest in categories — in *their* Order, *their* definition of what something *is*. But they're also the ones who blow up the old orders and create new ones. They won't take just anybody's orders. And that's a whole different kind of power — a power the people who are supposedly in power sorely envy. It's a power to create, rather than a power over others. It's also a different kind of order.

Musicians — and other artists — tend to relish what some of the corporate leaders, and even the deconstructionists, as we shall see later, do not: the relationship between order and disorder is not either/or, it is both/and. Disorder is not, as the Greeks supposed, something to be avoided at all costs. Disorder generates order which generates disorder, and so on in a *recursive* or mutually interactive process. You've got to break down those categories to come up with something new. And that also means breaking down the order created by those who benefit from the categories that define and organize the order.

So now we can see, following Morin, how the triad order/disorder/organization becomes the tetragram order/disorder/organization/interaction. Order and disorder interact as we organize our experience and our world. The pair order/disorder, when coupled with interaction/organization, becomes dynamic rather than static. It is interactive, dialogical, and therefore alive, an open system in space and time rather than a closed system capturing an eternal form — the way things *have* to be. Knowledge becomes an open system and therefore never complete, with uncertainty, ignorance and wonder always lurking around — and inside — us. It follows that telling other people what they must do to comply with our perfect knowledge (do as I say, don't do as I do) might be sensibly replaced by suggesting possibilities and offering examples.

The new view of a complex universe, developed by the people I have drawn upon extensively in these pages, such as French philosopher Edgar Morin, the Italian philosopher Gianluca Bocchi and Mauro Ceruti, American philosopher James Ogilvy, cyberneticist Heinz Von Foerster, systems scientist Riane Eisler, and Nobel-prize winning Chemist Ilya Prigogine and his colleague philosopher Isabelle Stengers, has changed everything.

The simplicity of perfect order is gone. The historical and contingent nature of categories is exposed. The creative organization of thought and action is seen as playing a vital constructive role. And disorder appears in a new light, forever connected to, and interacting with, order: but this inextricable, unavoidable connection becomes a blessing and a curse.



Research has found that musicians and artists are actually attracted to disorder and complexity, and live in a constant dynamic chain of disorder, attempts at organization through interaction, creation of order, and then introducing new disorder, breaking down the old order, interacting, reorganizing, and so on. Every new order is only temporary, every new song or painting is just a step along the way, only to be followed by more. . . . And this changes the way they think about the categories of thought themselves. Order is real *and* unreal. Every organization and every interaction takes on a quality of *as if*, one embodiment of a million constraints and possibilities. But that does not make everything *simply* a play of images, of personas, a theater of the absurd, as some of the postmodernists would have us believe. Because it is *also* a real world with real consequences, and real bum notes and bounced checks. And therein lies the complexity of it all, a call to both lighten up, open up, *and* dig in.

Each collaboration potentially becomes an opportunity to improvise together and create our own order/disorder/organization/interaction. Those who attempt to impose their scores from on high, who try to force us to live in their novels, and abide by their categories, are playing a losing game. The forces of chaos are creeping up on them. They can either embrace them and let go, or vainly reject them. But unless they invite us nicely to join them in their stories for a while, and we really want to play with them, we will have to *just say no*.

We also see that as the big narratives crumble, 'little narratives' are not necessarily friendly little narratives: The loss of the Soviet metanarrative has led to much death and destruction in the former Soviet Union, not to speak of the former Yugoslavia. People begin to long for a new metanarrative to restore unity, security, and certainty — Law and Order. Fundamentalism in all its permutations is also that search for foundations, for Absolute Order. And ethnic cleansing is a way to maintain the pristine homogeneous madness of that Order, free of differences. At a very basic level, Order provides predictability, security. Disorder suggests chaos and confusion — and fear. If we believe the universe — or at least our little corner of it — is lawfully ordered, we will fear the Lawmaker, and be Good. In an Order worshipping system, any trace of difference or disagreement scares the bejesus out of people. Paradoxically, these systems cannot handle difference. They repress it, and then it eventually all explodes. We see this from families to nation-states. Either way it's fear: fear of Disorder, or fear-based security with Order. But from this new perspective, it's up to us to *create* trust, to create what Riane Eisler calls *partnership*. If we create fear, those who want to divide and rule us will rejoice, because *we will be fighting each other*. Creating trust may seem like a small step, in this problem-ridden world. In the old view you needed big causes for big effects, a world-organization to change the world, all or nothing, Utopia or Oblivion. In the new view of complexity a small step can have big effects: we just have to recognize we don't have any control over it. . . . If we create trust, we may never rule anything or anyone, but we'll probably be having far too good a time to care.

— Alfonso Montuori

