

REALITY CHEX

BY R. LOUIS RICHARDS

The comedian Robin Williams once titled an album *Reality, What a Concept*. The "concept of reality," hopelessly oxymoronic in itself, is perhaps best left alone. An ancient Chinese proverb says, "The wise do not discuss truth." To say what is real is to automatically miss the point. It would be perhaps the purest practice of folly to try (apologies to religious fundamentalists).

However, we may perhaps gain some advantage in recognizing some things that are not real. So much that affects us in our day to day lives has absolutely no real substance. And worse, too often we treat what is essentially nothingness as if it were the highest quality. It is not our personal thoughts, dreams and ideas I'm speaking of here. To my reckoning, these are a real part of our lives and are as real as our vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch. The key is, they can be known for what they are as real by experience. But I wasn't going to discuss the real stuff, was I?

The unrealities I'm referring to here are the ones that have it within the power we've assigned them to degrade the quality of our experience and make us act in ways that are, frankly, insane. They are what we call conventions. One of the conventions is that we need the conventions simply to operate on our complicated world. Though they are but sheer ideological inventions they have become the driving motives of our modern world. I believe for most of us, most of the time, they are the only window through which we see.

It is yet to be determined if our world's complexity is manageable by, or is in fact result of our social conventions. The more complex our culture has become the more blind and senseless to Nature, and the more troublesome the actual results of our worldview. I think few could argue that our global health is not in serious question at the moment. This has not been the result of too many people believing that the Sun circles the flat Earth. We have traded away, through these past few thousand years, thousands of diverse but sustainable human cultures. We have gained in the exchange what is fast becoming one homogenous, trinket trading, world eating, monster culture.

Of the noticeably accelerating collapse of the biota and our runaway climatic changes, a Christian fundamentalist might say, "I told you so, for it is written..." It's all black and white, right there in Revelations, right? Well, I can't argue with that. Saint John the Divine related what was obviously a pretty disturbing dream. But, if your "truth" is defined by a single book or any particular collection of "scripture," you might as well abandon the present reading now. The devil is obviously making me do this. I'll avoid mentioning Islam in this context, the Salman Rushdie syndrome might be going around.

Many politicians will be no less fervent in their defenses of authoritative doctrines. Here, it will usually be might that determines what may be seen as reality. These types too will usually find it necessary to enforce limits on thought, almost always in the name of stability. In any units of dominion of greater proportions than those of anarchy, whether they be religious or political, stability becomes increasingly more important the higher up the hierarchy one gets. For the masses walking the surface, stability requires only that they keep an eye toward those on high lest they come down upon them when toppled.

If the official premise of jurisdiction is "freedom," this word will likely become the mantra for mass hypnosis. Freedom is defined as "...exemption or liberation from the control of some other person or some arbitrary power..." If we intend freedom for ourselves, cutting free from the domination of an "other person" would be much more clear-cut than from that of an "arbitrary power." As for the powers in and of our culture, arbitrary indeed seems to be the proper word.

"Step on a crack, break your mother's back; step on a line, break your mother's spine." A child playing this game is inclined to maintain touch with the greater reality. But how about "step across a border, have your papers in order." The endless chain of arbitrary powers entailed in this little game should quickly dispel us of any notions of freedom. We are ready to bow to every idea that says our humanity is secondary to any and all ideas of order.

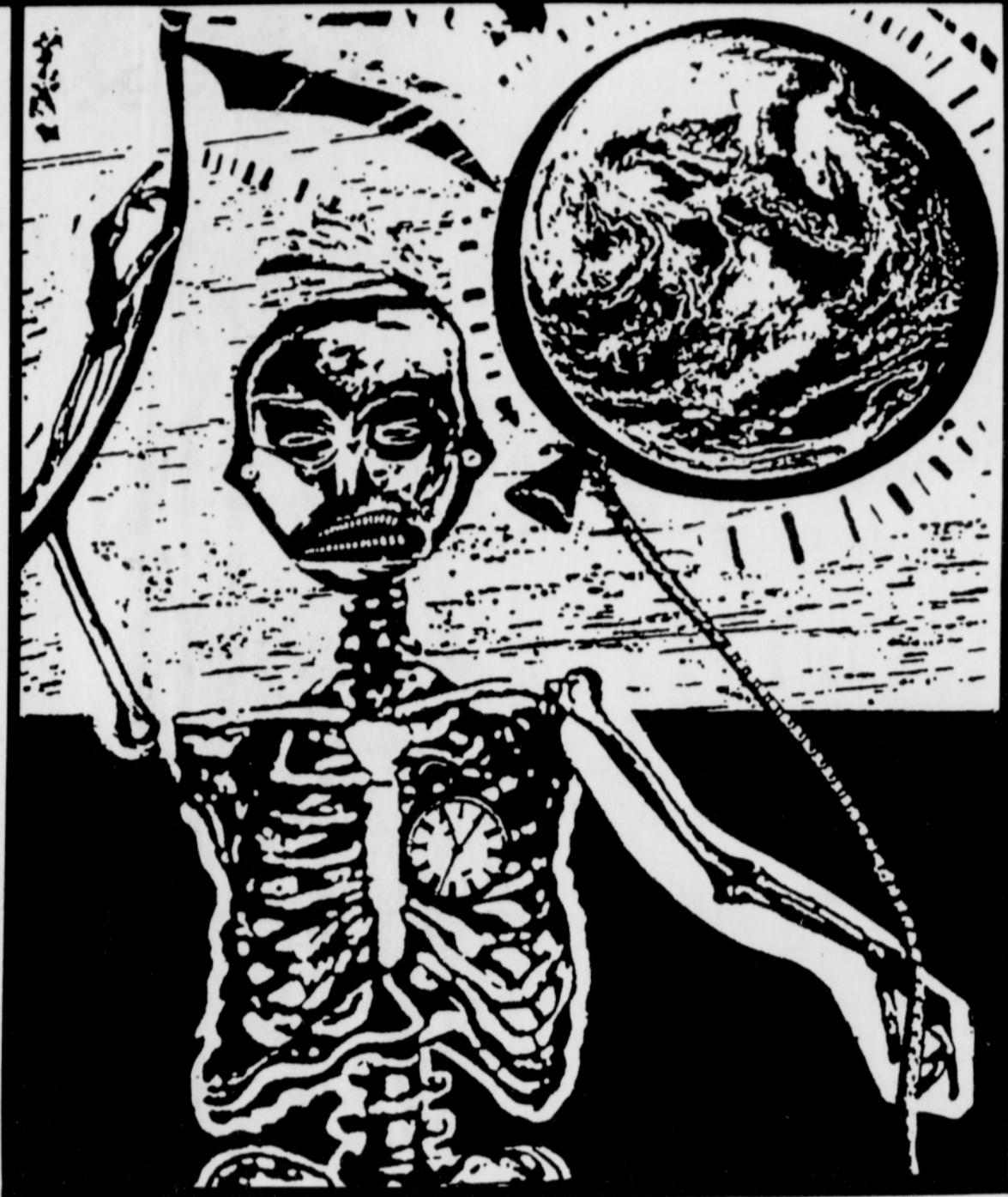
The child endures no such insult, at least until its Spirit has at least been necessarily smashed. This is a little surprise that modern culture saves for us all. It is pushed upon us, hopefully, before things get too far out of hand. Only the audacious child would dare to truthfully comment on the emperor's attire. Ultimately, we are each commanded to buy stock in some version of unreality. That, or into the cage with us, our first stop enroute to the eternal burn.

By practicing denial and living out multiple contradictions, we maintain the old facades. It seems our younger generations always make the same complaint about the world of their elders. They denounce the phoniness they clearly see in every era. In the '50s, the Beats puffed reefer and shattered lies, igniting inquiries into philosophy, while outside a cold war was blowing. In the '60s we inadvertently practiced psychedelic shamanism, hallucinating Technicolor visions of our ideals made real. We lived a momentary reversion, going back beyond thousands of years of the empire culture and its weaving of conceptual snares. It was then, in the '70s, almost suddenly, that I seemed to lose touch with my own youthful light. Communications seemed to have broken down. Where had the young vital Spirit gone?

Nowhere. In its fearful response, the culture of control mustered all its forces to shout down the clear youthful vision. Society, in order to survive its close call of the '60s, defamed psychedelia and outlawed it. The streets were flooded with C.I.A. Brand heroin and cocaine. It looked like all we had realized by our effort and idealism was a wilted flower. The conventional wisdom machine has been cranked up to max. Whether or not this will work out in the long run remains to be known. For now, it seems enough that appearances be maintained.

The message is, we must believe that clear young visions will not, and cannot, ever succeed. Spirit broken, we will always fail and give into the old games. The penalties for truth are that great. So, fellow boomers, now we're older and we "...just don't understand this new generation." Success! With the orchestrated slaughter of Iraq we at long last put the "Vietnam syndrome" safely away.

Some Indians have a name for gold that means "the yellow metal that makes the white man crazy." Our social conven-



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tion of money is surely the finest example of our diving headlong into unreal spaces. It unquestionably contains the most virulent pathology of any convention we might be able to mention here. In fact, I would say that most of contemporary culture's other constructs have arisen in the service of this, our unofficial deity. More than anything else in our culture, money "makes the world go round." It is the prime mover. All natural functions have become secondary to economy. Few of us eat, sleep or breed without it.

The simple pleasures have become the things we save up for. Work is for credit measured in the monetary unit. Our whole lives are given over to what someone has agreed to call worth. He who pays the piper calls the tune. We've come to the point where those who call the tunes can order us to dance or to kill. This so-called reality is being manipulated by the few who have become the masters of this illusion. If you think you are free, walk the planet without a supply of wampum close at hand. This stuff is not real but the belief is that by having it we can own the Earth or stars. Another clever convention that can give us even the right to starve our anonymous brothers and sisters, elders and children.

Because money represents real work, it is seen as work itself. We have condemned future generations to perpetually work for moneys that will never be minted. Moneys tallied only in ledgers and signifying only debt, yet another of our splendid conventions. Rivers that are not yet rain or snow are already diverted from their parched beds. Forests not yet sprouted are as good as cut. Revolutions not yet organized are infiltrated with spies, attacked by mercenaries and subverted by disinformation. Yes indeed, by these tacit agreements we can even now own the future should we care to indulge in the conventions. I ask, is not this "conventional wisdom" really "certifiable insanity?"

Terrance McKenna once said, "When I'm in crisis, I go back in my memory to the last sane moment I can remember. And then I say, 'What did I believe then? I'll believe that now.'" Individually we may find our sane moment in early childhood, though left so far behind memory may fail us. For a pattern of

collective health we do have living and recorded models of sane cultures as they were when still nearly untouched by the pathology of modern convention. Some were nomadic, some agrarian, some hunters. All were Nature centered. What complexity we find in these often reflected their mainly experiential understandings of the natural intricacies of the local and cosmic ecologies in which they existed as an integral part. So, upon this Earth, out of its diversity and within our living moment we may just find the experience of our true identities, our gender relevance and our Spiritual being.

Can our vampire cultures be transcended? We haven't much initial choice, starting out as we do in our little infant bodies. But could there be just a chance that we can modify our culture in such a way that at some point in our "coming of age" process we might be granted the opportunity to cut loose just a little and try to actualize what Socrates meant by "know thyself?" Couldn't we devise a culture that would allow us the space and time and give some direction toward a personal development of our natural selves?

I think it would be healthy to encourage each and every evolving new human to develop a practical ability to free herself/himself of the weight of the culture's collective conventions. This should be done while we still have within us most of our inborn capacity and predisposition to learn. The absence of any such established processes shows an incredible fear and lack of faith on the part of our incumbent cultures (some of which, in my estimation, are so perverse in their lust for control as to even require the ritual mutilation of their infants' genitals). They can, it seems, only set us on life's path with this prime dictate: "Within our guidelines, be ye defined."

To the priesthoods and hierarchies: I submit the request that you abandon your pretensions. Understand you will find no salvation in perpetuating your hoaxes either on us or yourselves. If karma exists you are undoubtedly forging the strongest bonds. If your beliefs and concepts can produce realities, the helms you imagine will be your own. The idea of owning the keys to Spirit is the greatest of pretensions.

Your exercise of faith, such as it is, has become a theft of our holistic human potential. We do need initiation, but an initiation into our own experiential truth not a diversion into traps that capture our souls and suck them dry for institutional powers. See that your brand of faith betrays your own ignorance. Release yourselves from the grip of convention. Amend your lives by dedicating your efforts to your — and our — individual discoveries of all the sacred realities. Strive to let us all see creation as it is, not for what it's worth in terms of money or power. Teach us from the earliest age about our original innocence.

The only thing I know for sure is I know nothing for sure. I wrote down those words in 1969 in the middle of an acid trip. They seemed profoundly important to me at that moment and I wanted to see what they said when I again would see the world from my usual level of consciousness. Well, in time I feel I have come to know something for sure, though it is something to which our words and conventions can have very little relation. Its effects reside in my bad attitude. No apologies! So I guess all I can do is play the same old saw over and over again. If not us, who? If not now, when?

I promise all lovers of truth I will not quit. When I tire I will rest. When I fall I will try again to stand. When I reach an impasse I will lean into it or go over the top in the light of day. Wherever you are, look inside yourself. We each carry all the power there is. It exists as the common reality, having little to do with we've been told.

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