Electrical Kites and Fire in the Head
By Deborah Middleton

Wonders! Wonders! Wonders! Ladies and Gentlemen, I bring you Wonders! In our modern age, Ladies and Gentlemen, who amongst us does not quest for creativity, imagination, spontaneity - to light up our lives, to alleviate our boredom, to bring relief from tension, trauma and toothache! The creative act, the creative thought, the creative idea that will win the boss's heart.

The world, my children, is changing fast. A blink, and already the latest i-pod is outdated. What good is knowledge to us now? What good the answers they schooled us in[1]. All flows, all changes. All becomes defunct. Are we not, fellow-questors, at an age when more than ever before, we need the tools, the techniques, the touchstones to bring us the gifts of our own imaginations, the hard-won, highly cherished ability to adapt, to respond, to spontaneously combust and spark forth the new, the new, the ever-new!!!!!

My friends in faith, I bring you: Electrical Kites And Fire In The Head!

In the days of gas-light, coal-smoke, candle-flicker, Benjamin Franklin and P.B. Shelley speculated upon the invention of electrical kites by means of which we may draw down the lightning from heaven![2] Now, Shelley, who balanced precarious on an insulated stool, charged with the excitement of his very own electrical machine from which the electricity crackled, Shelley, whose long, wild hair stood on end, did, after all write some very good poems.
In answer to the question of how we become creative, how we get inspired, how we make sparks in the imagination - isn't Shelley's idea worth considering? Long-tailed kites to catch the power of Heaven? It's got to be worth a try.

'And Katterfelto with his hair on end' - as immortalized by the poet, Cowper[3] - Katterfelto was a charlatan, a mountebank (meaning *one who climbs on a bench*). He bamboozled the incredulous with his genius for leger-demain and high-voltage jiggery-pokery. Making a living out of electrical machines 'with which he sets the whole world in order'[4] and electrified cats (not electrocuted, mind you). Katterfelto was also highly creative (if only with facts, and the uses to which cats can be put). And, like Shelley, his hair stood on end.

Hair on end. Fire in the head. In one of the loveliest poems ever written, W.B. Yeats' sad creative Aengus tells us 'I went out to the hazel wood, because a fire was in my head'.[5] Now, in Ireland hazel is the 'poet's tree' because of its supposed effects upon inspiration and its role in magically accessing other realms. Could this be the fire of creativity sending Aengus to the hazel wood? In the poem, Aengus cuts a hazel wand to make a fishing rod, and in Druidic Ireland, the hazel wands brought poetic inspiration. So perhaps it is no surprise when the fish he catches transforms into a 'glimmering girl with apple blossom in her hair who called me by my name and ran and faded through the brightening air'.[6] Ireland's own version of the Muse is the Aisling, a dream-vision in the form of a girl in the form of a poem. With fire in the head, his connection to the lightninged skies intact, Aengus drops his stringed berry into the pool and now he is a conduit between the upper world and the underworld. Strung between the heights and the depths, earthed, connected, his vision-poem glimmers into sight. But then alas she 'ran and faded through the brightening air', setting him off on an immortal quest 'through hollow lands and hilly lands' to once again find her.[7]

How do we draw down the lightning to fill our heads with fire? How do we draw forth the fire that is in us; how do we spark up our own electrical connections and make rain in the desert? Or quieten our demons so that the slow, small sparkings and cracklings can be heard, so that the little flames can be blown, inspired, brought to full fire, wild-fire, forest-fire. How do we not lose the glimmering girl who comes to us, when once we take our fiery

heads to the hazel grove, and carefully string a berry and let down the fishing rod into the mysterious pool and catch the tremulous trout with its rainbowed silver sides?

Some little kite of brown paper and string must be sailed into the sky. You may want to try this first on a fine but gusty day when the sky is blue and your enthusiasms are running high. You may wish to paint a scary dragon on your kite, put a brave face on it, and you will have to hold tight, hold sensitive, decipher every subtle tug on the kite-strings and the heart-strings. Later, perhaps, you will have the temerity to take your trusty kite into the thunder storm and draw down the forces which will fire you, the visions which will make your own hair stand on end. The electricity without will spark connections with the electricity within, which even now surges silent in the tunnels of your nervous system, in the mind's deeper caves. There are visions in you, waiting for the whirl of power to start up the old cine projector in the heart, waiting to be revealed by the sudden flash of electric light. Make the kite.

Little Peaks

The psychologist, Abraham Maslow, saw creativity as a minor version of what he called the 'peak experience' - trance, vision, shamanic ecstasy, the heightened consciousness that comes, paradoxically, from tapping into our unconscious depths.[8] The creative experience is not possession or trance, but a small relative of those states: a little cousin of peak experience; not Mount Fuji, but maybe Castle Hill. In our creative moments, like Aengus and the Siberian shamans who traverse the cosmos from their chilly tundra, we facilitate full-range consciousness.[9] Students of shamanism well know the frequency with which the phenomenon of fire in the head is reported; shamans are creatives par excellence. They are the technicians of consciousness, able to access the deep mythological dream seams of their

inner depths. Psychic radio operators who can finely tune their instrument to the whole range of incoming signs, outgoing signals?

Creativity is born from the management and manipulation of subjective states of consciousness.[10] Creativity requires us to read the weather in our own skies, to finely tune our apparatus, to take measurements and monitor temperature, fluxus, miasma, and ether; to test the deflogisticated muriatic acid air. Electrical kites are only the beginning; friends, we need the instruments with which to wire our psyches to the world. We need... *the silver apples of the moon, the golden apples of the sun*.

Here, Now, And The Axis Of History

For Maslow, the key to creativity, out of all of his long list of characteristics and components, the key was the ability to be present in the here and now[11]; Csikszentmihalyi tells us that we have only so much psychic energy or attention to use, only so much to give, and how we organise that attention is paramount.[12] Being here, garnering all resources in a focused presence with a specific task is the single most important attribute in attaining the creative state, in employing creative thinking, in engaging in creative activity. Presence in the now - in what Gerald Edelman calls the 'remembered present'[13] - is a semi-mystical state of bliss attained in those lovely moments when the world falls away, our focus sharpens and becomes crystal clear and writing or art or music moves through us. Paradoxically, though, that temporary attainment of heightened present moment awareness cuts across a psychological awareness without which the here and now would seed no art, no complex creative culture. The evolutionary gift that gives us creativity and art is history.[14]

The Creative Explosion[15]

At a far-distant evolutionary moment in the history of hominids (humanish things) the species, *homo sapiens,* burst onto a scene populated by the dear,

dullish Neanderthals (who had lived in their nice, near-human way, more or less unchanging for about 200,000 years). They hunted things that turned up and used simple stone tools. *Homo sapiens* (that's us) arrived in a burst of culture known as the creative explosion. All at once, or so it seems, there was a sudden emergence of art, ritual, fully modern language and paintings on the walls. Of caves. *Homo sapiens* were and are characterised by their creativity. What changed? How did we evolve out of the simple Neanderthal past into complex cave-painters? What is it that we as a species are endowed with, that our poor parents [cousins], the Neanderthals, were denied? In *homo sapiens* brains, neurology doubled back on itself in a clicking inter-connectivity of synapses and neurons, and self-awareness awoke with a puzzlement, with a memory, with a mind that could think about itself and recognise the passage of time. Out of the ever-present, came the shock and the sadness of a past, gone forever, endlessly, always going (loss, loss, loss) and the fright and the fear of an unknown future looming large like a cave lion; all teeth, all growl, all jowl.

Poor Neanderthal lived in an unceasing present and, once awake, knew nothing of the dream worlds he swam in. Like a dog with a hunting dream, he was over it at first eye-blink. *Homo sapiens* dreamt, and woke, and remembered. Over coffee and bagels they socialised their dreams and the world behind the world swam into view; researches suggest that from the very start humans were dream-goers, shamans, shape-shifters. They traversed the far reaches of consciousness - accessed by those sky-going kites and depth plunging berries - and sparked up dream-bison, spirit-deer, horned monsters of the imagination. Dream-life, trance-time, history, language, a self-seeing mind, creativity - they are born together in a historic past that we can carbon-date.

When John Berger saw the cave paintings at Chauvet, he concluded that the ability to make art seems to arise with the need to make art since cave-paintings display the greatest of skills from their earliest evidence. He said:

> Art, it would seem, is born like a foal that walk straight away. Or to put it less vividly... the talent to make art accompanies the need for that art; they arrive together.[16]

The Evolutionary Nature Of Culture[17]

Creativity has its place in evolution. We pass to our offspring both genes and cultural artefacts - songs, stories, theories, ideas, dances. Remember, "It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." The most adaptable survives. The most creative survives. The one who can best strong a berry to a thread or make a kite out of brown paper and bamboo - that one, that one survives. The littlest dreamer with her head in the clouds and her feet in a stream - that one, that one dreams a way of looking that the rest of failed to see.

Darwin's great transformation of all our lives was not a new discovery but a new perspective. He knew how to look. He saw what was already there in the theories of his grandfather Erasmus and others and put it together with something else. It was not so much knowledge as a willingness to see from a new perspective that put him ahead of the game. When he returned from his voyage on the Beagle armed with notes and drawings, Darwin went to the experts in the various fields of botany and zoology. One such was the ornithologist, Gould, who knew everything there was to know about finches, but who couldn't understand the evidence Darwin had collected. It was Darwin who saw evolution unfolding on the subtly shifting species of finches. Gould was blinded by his own expert knowledge; Darwin, we're told, didn't even know they were finches!

Being creative with how we see the world is about remaining a beginner, retaining our incredulity.[18] Darwin told us "I love fools' experiments. I am always making them". It's as if he took the advice of that old mystic Rumi to 'sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment'.[19] When we go into the mind's caves we never know what we will find there. Only a fool with a fishing rod of

string and a bent nail would risk it. Only an idiot with his hair on end would dance in the rain of an electric storm.

They say that in the Brazilian rainforest, Darwin's mind reached a 'chaos of delight'. Later, much later, he worked through the implications of all that came to him on that inspired journey out of the received knowledge of the past and into a future which could see the flux. All flows, all changes, all evolves.

Natural Selection has been taking place in my garden; the robins have built a nest in the ivy that covers the front, south-facing wall of my house. Delight at watching them fly in and out with worms in their beaks, and the great good humour of watching a chick from the first brood dancing on our window-ledge in its fledgling attempts to fly gives way to horror and dismay as one by one three dead babies land on the lawn, little prehistoric, embryonic dinosauric almosts, their unfeathered heads still see-through, their big blue eyes, closed forever. Natural selection. Three have hit the deck - a big one, a little one, and a middle-sized one. Darwin told us, it is not the big one or the little or the middle sized one who survives, but the most adaptable to change. Either that or the one that is a big cuckoo.

The creative process is a lot like the natural process, of which it is a part. Nature works by generating multitudes of possibilities, random factors facilitate variation. Natural selection ensures that the best survive.

Creative work operates in much the same way; out of numerous possibilities, a few small treasures survive. We need to be prodigious; 95 per cent of new species fail, so we can expect at least a similar percentage for new ideas, images, metaphors. If not chimps at typewriters, we at least need ourselves at whatever machinery we use for our particular form of creativity. As in nature, we also do best with random factors, wild cards thrown in for good measure to ensure novelty, to ensure that we think beyond our usual

parameters. We do well to engage in fools' experiments and try out the things that our old enemy common sense would have us believe were a waste of time. Finally, as in Nature, we need the powers of selection and development, the willingness to sift, we need the heart for burying the robin chicks that didn't make it. We need the mental machinery to select, filter, hone, prune.

With practice, we learn the fluency in which creation and selection happen simultaneously; in which our minds generate and sift numerous potentials in the flickering of a micro-moment. Connected to our heights and depths, we keep one foot on solid ground. Creatives string a balancing wire between the objective and the subjective, and keep the line taut if they are not to fall. Creative fields call for skills and techniques and bodies of knowledge of many kinds, but they also call for the ability to suspend oneself in the heightened moment, to wire oneself to the world, to be wholly present with what is, and to trust in the mind's ability to connect the incoming signs with outgoing signals.

Wonders, wonders, wonders! I bring you...

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