

Voices of Dixon: Robert “Ra” Paulette

From the book
Voices of Dixon:
Oral Histories from the Embudo Valley
Interviews and Editing by Harvey Frauenglass
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Interviewed September 22, 2003

Looking at Families and Finding My Place

I see myself in a lot of the people who have come to this area. Especially the people about my age: 57—vanguard baby-boomer. I see it in their personal histories. I, too, was a kind of black sheep of my family, the person that didn’t quite fit in and wasn’t going to stick around the neighborhood. I was brought up in northern Indiana, the oldest of four, three boys and a girl. It was a farming community close to La Porte, close to South Bend Indiana, about 70 miles from Chicago. Dad was a little fish in search of a small pond where he could be a big fish. He found La Porte and he was very successful, for a while, and I grew up being the rich kid on the block. That didn’t mean much to me because I envied most of my friends; their families seemed much more warm than mine. My mother and father fought terribly for 30 some years until I convinced my mother to get a

divorce. But then I supported my dad for the rest of his life and actually made some good connections with him later on in life.

I didn’t stay in school, didn’t stay in the area, went off to seek my fortune in the world. I was in the Navy for 4 years, got out of the Navy, lived in cities, lived in cities in California; ended up in a very rural area in Tennessee and that gave me a chance to get back to my roots, the natural world. I was in a wonderful place with a pond and no electricity or running water---idyllic! Then after 3 or 4 years I came out to New Mexico, looking up an old girlfriend. That was in 1977. The first thing that struck me was that it was like Tennessee—lots of poor people and strong, extended families. And along with a lot of people who have come to New Mexico, I appreciate the cultural ethos of strong family connections.

I moved in with the old girlfriend but not as boyfriend and girlfriend but as brother and sister. Within a few months of being there, I became part of the extended family of Manuel and Eva Martinez of Arroyo Seco, Des Montes Rim. I helped around the farm and fed the animals and watered the animals. The doors of their house were just opened to me, with refrigerator rights. I saw this area through their perspective of people working together. The water fights kept me from idealizing too much. Neighbors on irrigation ditches had been fighting for years, sometimes they never got over it. But the family structure where people took care of each other and helped each other was just so beautiful and I still see that as the cultural strength of this area...the family.

My old girlfriend was gay and it may not have been a very good strategy for me to fall in love with her. But I was just taking life as it came, working hard with no particular ambitions. I fitted into the Hispanic community and I fitted into this extended lesbian community in Taos back in ’77, the only guy in a group of 23 or 24 very close women friends. Then I looked up another girlfriend who was working in Embudo. She has now married, we are neighbors; her husband is a very good friend of mine. Through all that emotional trauma of picking people who weren’t suited to me,

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people who were in love with other people, I finally decided to pick somebody who was suited for me, doing the same kind of work I was doing. I met Paula, who became my wife, while we were both working at El Mirador.

Caring for the Crazy, Wonderful People at El Mirador

When I came down from Taos I got a job working with retarded adults at Santa Maria el Mirador in the village of Alcalde, a few miles down the Rio Grande from Embudo. El Mirador was founded by an old priest as a shelter for retarded people who didn't have strong family connections. His small group, mostly men, ranged from teenagers to adults in their 40's and 50's. When the priest passed away, Mark Johnson from Santa Fe became director. Though he was more high-powered than the priest, El Mirador was still a very organic, informal place. We were the intermediaries when the clients had to deal with the rest of the world. Later on it was restructured and we became residential teachers teaching life skills. It was being a friend, a parent, and teacher all rolled up into one.

There was a coffee shop out on the highway near the Embudo Post Office. Roger Chilton from Dixon was the cook. Every morning in the winter of 1985, six or seven of us from Dixon who worked at El Mirador would get together to drink hot coffee, sit by the stove, and talk about our clients. We were the hard-core, inner-core of what was then this wild and crazy group of retarded folk who needed to be taken care of. Basically, we talked about how to make their lives happier. I learned a lot about patience and my own nurturing energies.

That was my first winter in Embudo. I was staying in a trailer over at Tom Watson's. You get over to Tom's place by a cable across the Rio Grande. In February it got down to 26 below zero. That was the last of the cold weather that I remember. I was in two sleeping bags in this little trailer and the stove was dysfunctional. So first thing in the morning I would get my clothes on and get over the river and go straight to the coffee shop to warm up. It was a great

social gathering there.

The Sheriff of El Mirador

In this group of people from Dixon, each person had something different to offer. I became the sheriff. Fairview House, one of the dorms, was notorious for having a couple of wild guys. They were 6 feet tall and weighed 200 pounds and they had the self-control of children. So if they were having a bad day or were just emotionally upset, you would have an abusive child. But I would just not allow anyone to abuse anyone else. My authority was physical authority, though these men were bigger and taller than me. But I was a dancer, I was an athlete, I had coordination, quickness, balance... things these guys didn't have. But it did require very interesting emotional changes for me. Things could happen out of the blue.

In one case this fellow picked up a knife in the kitchen and was going to stab another guy, and he was real big. I grabbed his arm and brought him down to the ground in the kitchen. Yet I had to ease him down because he wasn't in good shape. It gave me an opportunity to play two roles. Without being angry you can't get the adrenaline to get you into the full-blown physicality you need for the physical necessities of the situation. Then I had to swiftly change to get this into a different realm of compassion. Because I was the “Dad”. None of them were afraid of me. This was my authority and my legitimacy. I would jump on these folks when called for. These guys trusted me; I trusted myself and the other people who worked there knew what my relationship was with these guys. You couldn't do this now because the people in charge don't trust their employees. Then I had the backing of the people.

These guys were all over me all the time. When I wasn't being the sheriff I was the “mark”. They were hitting me up all the time. There was this one fellow, from a very fine family in Santa Fe, and he had wonderful self-esteem. But when he was having a bad day, he was just insufferable. We would get in these extravagant fights. It wasn't really fights. I hate the idea of smothering somebody with your

power. I would give them the power to resist. I would be working out my own frustrations because up until that moment these guys would be driving me nuts. Now I’m getting angry....we’d have this blowup. We would have this transition of a violent beginning and we would always end up like old warriors. This guy would be very proud that he was battling me. And then that type of discipline became very ineffectual and I couldn’t do it any more because this guy loved it. But that emotional flip....so interesting...going in with all that anger and as soon as you are into the action of it, change the emotional framework to one of nurturing and love. Also reassuring everybody around that it’s OK. It was such a powerful experience for me. It’s hard to say how much I learned about myself and I’m forever indebted to those guys.

“I win all fights”

I wouldn’t allow shouting. My rule was “I win all fights. You guys get in a fight, I will jump in, I will be the victor”. This one fellow had a real anger problem. He needed to yell, he needed to struggle. I would be encouraging in the process. I would say, let it out, let it go...so I would turn from discipliner to scream therapist. Those type of emotional challenges sometimes happened in public. We were coming out of the old Fairview Grocery Store in Española next to what is now Walgreens. While they were in shopping, one of the guys, who looks quite “normal” to the casual eye, was taunting a second guy who has “blow-ups” out of the blue. The second guy says, “Can I have my gum? Can I have my gum?” The first guy says, “Fuck you!” then grabs the bag and goes out to the parking lot. The other guy just “blows” and runs out and jumps on the first guy, who throws the groceries up in the air. I grab the second guy. The other is screaming bloody murder. I grab him from behind. He tries to kick me. I have to bring him down in the parking lot. Then we pick up our stuff, get in the van and go back to El Mirador. Later I heard “one of the El Mirador guys attacked this old gentleman in the parking lot”. That was no “old gentleman”. The attacker and the “old

gentleman” were the two El Mirador guys.

A Supportive Community

Española is a tremendously supportive community and they really understand the difficulties that a special person like that can have. They have had a retarded person in the family, or known someone who did. When we would take our clients out, there was lots of interaction. People weren’t scared, there was no pulling back. Other suburban communities wouldn’t have that reaction. I was really impressed with Española. And that was a basic part of my job, taking those guys out into the world.

Sometimes we would go to church. I’d be sitting in the middle and have my two most rowdy guys sitting next to me so I could grab them. People loved to see the guys. We’d sit in front and my guys would take communion. The man or woman with the chalice would really hold on tight because they wouldn’t know what one of the guys might do. Sipping wasn’t part of the repertory at El Mirador; our clients were not sippers. They would more likely try to hold on to the chalice and drink. We went to the church in Alcalde. The priest had a real casual grace in conducting the ceremony. I was really impressed by the response of the Hispanic congregation and the whole community to these people with problems.

Then the management of El Mirador changed. The people who ran the show gave no support to the people who were actually doing the work. They made it really difficult for them. I worked there for about four or five years. After about a year I situated myself right where I wanted, which was about a 24-hour shift on the weekends. I would work 24 hours straight and get \$110. I lived in a rough wood house down along the river for \$25 rent. I was renting from Brad Park, the brother-in-law of John Moore, one of the Dixon people I worked with. I was making it. It was about a year after that that I started working on the Heart Chamber in the backcountry across the river. This was my first cave.

Why I Create Caves

I have a history of going into my extended back yard and exploring it very thoroughly and if I find a beautiful place I make a spot for myself. When I was in Des Montes in 1980, I went to El Salto to the 10,050 foot level and made a cabin up there on what I thought was Forest Service land but what turned out to be land-grant land. I worked two years with simple hand tools building a modest but cute little cabin that was sunken into the ground, kind of hidden, with dead aspens on the top. It was on Spanish land grant by about 20 feet. It was an indefinite boundary on the map. I was aiming for public land. The rancher calls me up, the grant president, and he's all huffy. "Are you the one who was cutting down trees up there?"

I say, "No, I was very careful. That is me. I'll take you up to show you your cabin." He went up on a horse. He was charmed by it. He could see how carefully I built it. Of all the things I've done ...the care is just obvious. I'm just up there for the purpose of glorifying and being thankful for being there. And the dangers when you are by yourself, using an ax, care has to be part of everything you do.

When I first went back up there, the cabin from the outside looked great. From the inside, well, it sunk into the ground. You can't build into the ground up in the mountains as it is so damp, unless you do something with insulation and water. The moisture did come in. I had just finished it, and it was discovered by some young kids who made it into their clubhouse. Their parents were part of the land grant. It looked like they tried to keep it together. It had finally gotten trashed but they had tried. Someone had made a list of rules and put it up. I was pretty impressed. Housekeeping rules basically. A couple of years later I went up there and the worst thing was that a couple of young aspens that I had tried to save were cut down for firewood. Anyway, now it's sunk into the ground and it's gone out of the folklore.

Making a Private Place

I went up to Los Jurriss , where I did the Heart Chamber, because the material was so workable. I wanted to make a secret place for myself, a private place, a hermitage. And yes, I had been going through another heartbreak, my last heartbreak. It took two and I could see the problem: it was myself. I won't allow that to happen again. There's where I am a different person. The Heart Chamber was an adventure. It was an intimate connection to the outdoors. When I am alone in the natural world, it is me and the Universe. And when it's just you and the universe it's hard to be lonely. It isn't the type of loneliness that you get into with other people. It's outside of a relationship with people. I've always sought that out, even as a little kid, I would find secret places and just go off and be alone. As a child, it was for the adventure of it. But I needed that feeling that life is that huge thing and my troubles and even joys with fellow human beings are only a part of it.

Vietnam for me was not a traumatic experience; fortunately, I was on a flagship, a floating hotel for an admiral. I saw things from afar; I was basically at war with the Navy. It was obvious to me that we weren't there for the sake of the Vietnamese people and I was crammed on a ship with 100's of people and I've never felt so lonely. There is something about the loneliness of being crammed in with lots of people that you have nothing in common with. And the world that the military creates that is very gray.... a very gray world, very masculine. Now, not as masculine, so it's different. When I got out I felt the freedom. It was 1969 when all the hippies were about. I probably felt closer to the hippies than anybody else, but I didn't feel any of their angst. I have been communal. All those political people were feeling constricted and I was feeling so free. Maybe I was in a vast jail yard, but it was so vast.

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The cave was a personal adventure. I had come to New Mexico as a laborer and since I was born the rich kid on the block and I'd been a part, vicariously, of the people in charge, I thought real work was where it was at. I love the simple things and I threw myself into physical labor and I became the most wanted man among my neighbors. They wanted me to work. All their sons were juvenile delinquents or wearing ties and selling real estate in Taos. I spent time hiding from my neighbors. I was in my 30's at that time. There weren't any men to do the work. If they caught me, I had to work. But I didn't really want to be working all the time.

Response to the Cave

This was the first time I felt a purpose. In Buddhism there is a hiniyana and a mahayana. I was pretty much of a hiniyana. Trying to be a better person, trying to keep my heart open was very self-centered. But all of a sudden I did something with my hands and my imagination that had a big effect on people. I thought what else am I supposed to do with my hands and my imagination. It got me very curious about the response of people. What are they responding to? I **have** always been very interested in human emotionality. I've been focused on my own. So this offering response, people leaving all those things, items, and what they wrote in the guest log, this was a psychological response, an emotional response, that I had stumbled upon. What I did had elicited that emotional response. Now, years later, many caves later, I know exactly what I want, exactly what I want to target.

If I build a cave on private property, the owner may have a specific idea he or she wants to develop, although they usually develop it after the cave is built. But with the public lands project, I am the one using the cave, using it to elicit a certain response. I am making it an hour hike after a three or four hour jeep ride so it will be completely quiet. I know what to expect, I have a model. This will be my last big project. This is for the Forest Service. I have all these ideas that I've never gotten to do and I'd like to do them on this big

project.

I am a total hermit. I'm the friendly hermit. I love people. But I have actually gotten worse in my older age. More personal, one on one. Here we are two selves, two reference points in space and time. We are actually talking together. We can make a connection; that is so much different than if a third person were here. No matter how like minded, whether it be our wives, or a bro, when there are more than two people, there is a different dynamic there that I am so sensitive to. I want to live my life one on one with my fellow human beings. I've gotten totally ruthless in my way. Someday I'm going to have a giant party. I'm going to invite all these people. Why would anybody show up. People understand, they can feel my connectedness. I've been allowed to be who I am, a reclusive sort.

The Wilderness Shrine

For this project that I'm presenting to the supervisor of the Santa Fe National Forest, I have a physical model of a cave I have dug to show what I want to do. I'm not interested in structure of any kind, no framework, no tradition. What I have to offer are new starting points. And this idea of a wilderness shrine is one of those starting points.

I went to the District Office in Española to meet the supervisor. I didn't know what to expect. The people in the office didn't expect him. When he walked in unexpectedly I got a chance to see how the people responded. I just saw right away how sophisticated he is with people. It was a respectful connection. He was very commanding with people yet he had a ponytail as long as mine. I was kind of in awe. We went back in the back office. He had his recreational director with him and we talked for about an hour. He was giving me some hardball questions. And then we went out to the cave I call Mike's Cave, near Rancho de San Juan, the Tree Cave, and I let them go in first and look around for a minute or so before I came in. They totally got it. They totally understood the emotionality I was going for. It's what happens inside these caves.

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It’s a room with a central column. Digging it out was like digging out a large doughnut. Except the hole is the column. And the column becomes the trunk of the tree. I carve up the trunk and I carve out the leaves and branches over the top of the room and over the sides of the room and so it forms the negative space beside a large tree. Very stylized tree. It’s very powerful. It’s all encompassing. It has that effect of being a little too much. You can’t take it all in. And since the aesthetic comes from my emotional, nurturing side, it is a little too much; it’s like being hugged by a favored relative, an aunt. They understood. They got it. We didn’t say much after that. It put perspective on all the other stuff, the practical stuff: how’s that going to work, how’s this going to work.

The recreation director, Mike Frazier, said “I had been thinking, why should we do something like this? Now that I’ve seen it I’m thinking, why shouldn’t we do something like this?”

And Gilbert the Forest Supervisor, he was just smiling. He said, “Let me digest it.” He seems to take things in and really gets involved in things in a personal way. That’s what I’m looking for. Personal involvement. That is my strategy in cutting through bureaucratic issues.

Later on this month I should hear. Out near the Jemez Mountains. That’ll give us a chance to walk out in the natural environment. I’ve got two target communities in mind. The local community will be a tricky target; you can’t outright exclude anyone. The other target is land managers. This could be a tool for the Forest Service, a tool for their own personnel issues in the service and also the contentious things that they find themselves being mediators for—resource development and conservation issues. They are right in the middle of it. Why not have a venue that provides emotional energy? If it were used in an interesting, creative way, it could set the stage for a different type of negotiation.

A shrine for a tree. A tree of human understanding. Which is very self-reflective. I plan to use a lot of mirrors which is a reflection of light which is something I’ve wanted to do for years but I haven’t

had the resources to do whatever I wanted.

Sculpture As Dance

I consider myself a dancer. The physical labor that I do, the process of digging these caves, the work I do, is a dance. It’s a very simple dance. The parameters of it are very small and it’s a dance that is utilitarian and is associated with getting something done. I always put a little bit extra into it, which is what dance is. It’s movement with consciousness.

I developed a physical therapy for myself which includes a type of dance, and includes a large punching bag...the bottom line is the therapeutic aspect of it...it loosens me up...the dynamic of relaxation and tension. I am fascinated by the physicality of it...that’s the whole ball of wax...the point of tension and the feel of relaxation. It’s not only in the physical realm but also in the mental realm.

When you are writing a book, when you are in the thick of it, you have to be relaxed, you have to be loose but there, present; your focus has to be sharp and direct so there is a sharp focus, but the environment surrounding that, that is sustaining that sharp focus, is a sense of relaxation and openness. And it comes to you and what you do with it. Putting it down in just the right words. Making these mindfully small decisions. It’s holding myself in an open and relaxed way but yet making all these tiny little decisions and these decisions have to be done with authority. Tiny little decisions; I like that, I don’t like that. You see this in craftsmen, like watching Bob Cornelius work with his tools. He is very flowing, but he is precise. When he is doing something, he is focused; yet his emotional field that surrounds that is loose and flowing. And that dichotomy, the juxtaposition of those two things is very important. I’m always aware of when I am moving around the earth. I’d like to bring it into writing but I haven’t been able to do it. By the time the word gets to the page it’s like a tight fist. There is resistance there. But in the dance, I found new starting points. I am very much up on physical

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culture, I'm interested in it. I'll read about it. I'll read sports magazines. And there are some things I do with shaking the body, some things I do with my approach that I have never heard of before.

My second lifetime of self expression has to do with a dance performance which has to do with male strength and male confrontation and the release of anger energy and I will call it the dance of war and the dance of honor. I realize that the dance of dynamic relaxation is a practice for this other dance, which is a kind of extravagant performance for three groups of dancers. It's an oral tradition, an oral mental tradition. I'm waiting for the wherewithal to finish. The dance of dynamic relaxation: that's my own personal approach to physicality. The other one is a performance--- I call it the dance of war on the field of honor.

I've gone through a lot of details concerning it. I should go and write it down. It's a very complicated issue in some respects in terms of how to pull something like this off, because it could be a complete disaster. I've made sketches and notes of it. I've spent so many hours thinking of it, there are only a few areas that I haven't worked out. In fact, those areas I might not work out until I do it. I need martial arts people and musicians. It's going to be completely orchestrated musically.

I have two large extravagant projects. The second part of that Forest Service cave is a series of small caves. I'm thinking of about twenty smaller overnight caves. One large cave and a community of smaller caves, completely isolated from one another yet within a radius or walking distance of the large cave. So I can bring in the group experience and then isolate. Twenty or twenty-five people come out as a group, do things collectively, then they all go off for the intimate experience of the solitude in their own caves. Then they come back in the morning.

It seems like the amount of land is not an issue. They were concerned about the trail that goes out from the parking lot, the mile trail that goes out to the cave. They were saying that it could be years before they would be freed up to do something like that. I didn't

expect them to do it. It would be part of my duties to do that. The trail would be part of the experience. I have very specific ideas ...I want to take people back and where I want people to rest...We are talking about 100's, maybe several thousands of acres.

The Dixon Community

People I know here in Dixon are living successful lives. By and large I can make that blanket statement. Now the financial success, the worldly success; we can take yourself. Everything around here reflects how you feel about life. You have made your world. Your world is an extension of how you feel about yourself and how you feel about others. It reflects in the way you have a place in this community. I don't see that with a lot of acquaintances; they are driven by their lives. I don't mean that my friends don't have personal problems, we are all knocking our heads against the wall. We are living self-expressive lives.

How does that reflect in the community? That's a tricky affair. There are a lot of things happening in the community. There are a lot of divisions, the cultural divisions, the Hispanic and the Anglo, and there is a tendency for misunderstandings. The truth is that the newcomers that have come here are really the cream of the crop. If you are going to have people outside of your culture come into your community and become a part of the community, these are the people you want: open minded, people who really appreciate the culture.

Digging a Community Outhouse

The library board decided that they were going to build an outhouse. They really didn't want to look too deeply into how legal it was. They needed an outhouse for the main building. They didn't want people coming over to the library all the time. So they were actually going to build a community outhouse. I found this fascinating. I suppose some people are still digging outhouses, but

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how many communities are building a public outhouse? In the meeting on the outhouse, members asked how they were going to dig the hole for the outhouse. Shel, in his infinite wisdom, said "I know the master digger. He has dug several holes for us and a well and a large cave." When they called me up and asked, I couldn't refuse. It was a hand-tool thing. They didn't really want to make it huge, with a backhoe or anything. I went there and I spent a couple of days. I wondered if this might not be the last community outhouse being built in the United States. I dug it and Clark built the house on top of it.

The outhouse is operational, in the back of the store. Because it's smarter to dig shallow holes rather than deep ones, the outhouse is on skids. When the first hole fills up, I'll dig another one, and we'll just scoot the building over. It is a public outhouse but there are only certain types of people who will use outhouses. I actually think it's the civilized way. You leave your house where the kitchen is and do your duty.

Caretaking

The other thing I am really good at is taking care of people. Eloy and Haiko, two older guys, were dying. People in the community got together and provided the support that made it possible for these people to stay at home and die at home.

Eloy was a very dynamic fellow who was greater than the sum of his parts. He was exasperating, fascinating, everything. His relationship with people was challenging. He liked to test them. He was a tester. He'd been ill for many, many years, but his force of will kept him going. But he was so big and overweight that finally his physical problems just cascaded; he got to the place where he needed round the clock care. There was a group of guys who helped; he called us the drunkards. I don't think anyone actually got drunk, but there was a good excuse; you are getting up hundreds of times a night, adjusting his mask. I was on the verge of quitting because he just kept on going, kept on going; after three months he was still

alive. He could afford to hire help, but this was a community thing. I didn't volunteer; I was asked. Nelson Rhodes, Bob Brenden (though I think he was fired by Eloy), Lou, Ed Brown... We never saw each other.

Then there was Haiko. He was Dutch. He was cut off from his family. Jeannie Johnson who takes in stray dogs will extend that to people and one day she and Paula went over to Haiko's place and found him spitting up blood and so they took charge. Tiffin was brought in later. A nucleus of people who organized the community around him, in the several months in his own dying process; I spent the last night with him. He was going through a lot of stuff. He was working out a lot of angst, a lot of anger. His brother had arrived that night at midnight. They weren't close. He went to bed. Haiko was a potter, a very talented guy. He had mellowed out in the process of dying where Eloy never mellowed out.

I took care of my mother for 9 months while she was dying of cancer. It was called upon me because I didn't have any children. I was free to give up what I was doing. I'm just really good at it. I just get down to business, I support people and just allow them to do their thing. The sense of the sacred around a dying person is palatable...it becomes so obvious ...the deeper emotional framework of life...it cuts through all the guff...that's why our society wants to isolate death off to the side of things because when you have death around and you really become involved in its process...all the superficial things about life are paled in comparison...to this dying process. You know, it's the last and maybe the most fantastic thing that we experience. To be a part of that...to be there as a helper, just as a witness, is really powerful. Like taking care of the El Mirador guys...what you get back from them is just so amazing. I would suspect that when the time comes for any of us, if we want to leave the medical model of going into a hospital, if we want to be home with friends and family, there is going to be the need for round the clock availability.

Those are the things that I have to offer. When a group of people

get together to decide strategic directions and work out social mechanisms, don't call me. I'm not the guy for it; I cannot contribute to that. But if someone calls me up and says I'm feeling suicidal or something like that, I can try to help. I'm focusing my projects on humanity. The human being is our primary identity. In the 21st century the crucial issue in my mind, what faces humanity, is how to take human identity and personalize it in our minds. Human being is identity. It's personal identity. It's our relationship with people like being a husband, a wife, a friend. All these are identities. It goes into national identities. And for certain folk they look at the whole world as a huge gigantic ball just filled with 6 billion humans. What is the allness? This powerful thing that is riding this earth. This powerful thing; our purpose in the Universe? What is it that the trees need of us? How do we fit into the biology of life? We haven't defined ourselves in that way. I think this is a major concern. If we don't define what we are fairly soon, these superficial identities, being an American, for example, these are going to kill us. They set us against another counterpart. It sets us against ourselves.

Technological Changes

In my intuition, I think the self is pure possibility. It is not actually the way the rest of the biological world is. When the young fawn is dropped to the ground, it's deerness is what it is born. And by getting up and being a deer quickly it can protect itself very quickly. A human being is to me all possibility. I think that what we've got is all that we need. There is a possibility in all our individual lives, in all of our collective lives, to rearrange our emotional basis for life in such a way that all the ideas and all the intellectual strategies we would have would be changed to make that transformation possible.

Those changes are a constant and now that we are in a technological age that constant is the speeding up of change. We're not in a groove. It's very much like the Buster Keaton physical maneuver where he goes faster, faster, faster. You get the feeling

when you see a physical comedian do that that you are anticipating a fall, because you can't keep on, you can't sustain it. This is the great psychological angst that society is feeling right now because it's understood that we cannot sustain this faster, faster, faster. Sustaining means getting into a groove, sinking down into a rhythmical flow of life and the faster, faster, faster is leading to a fall. The first world is very neurotic that way. It knows we are headed for a fall with this kind of strategy. On the other hand I think the intellect, the human being, the self, we are made to last. This tool, this observational tool, we are in Antarctica now, we are all over the place, we are designed to ride out the millennium, we are looking for asteroids... We are made to last, we are made to survive. Once life gets to the place where we appreciate ourselves, senses the wonder, where it feels thankful, it feels the sense of sacredness. It's taken three billion years of evolution to get to this part of what life's about. It has the baggage of the sense of isolation. We are totally unique. We are living life behind the eyelids. We are born alone, we are going to die alone.

Technological changes are a logical extension of our history, on the one hand, and that's why the changes that need to take place are unprecedented and that's why it's so scary and that's why it feels like it should take an evolutionary leap. But on the other hand, it is the emotional basis of life that is the problem. All these tools, all these externals aren't the issues. It's how we feel and who we are and if that were different, the thought processes, the strategies of life would be different. Our emotional basis of life is based on a survival ethic which works for the animals, but a human being is something different. If we knew that we were here to be the lovers of life because that is our niche, in the same way I was talking about community, and the things that I can do, that the human being to me is the lover of life, the appreciator of being alive, wondering at everything, and if that were part of our emotional basis of life, these other things would transform.

How do we change our emotional basis of life? It's not a direct

call to action. It's not a type of thing where you are going to pass laws, not dueling strategies. Now the change is coming from this feeling about life. That's where I think art, and self-expression and actual trickery come in. You aren't going to tell somebody how to be happy or live a fulfilled life; you are going to demonstrate it, you are going to have to; like in the way of these wilderness shrines. That's my trickery. I am tricking people into an emotional feeling through art, through the natural surroundings, through the perception of being underground, of having life underground. This is not a direct action; it's a catalytic action. In the same way who we are as individuals has been formed by this. We haven't been shaped by our parents; we have been influenced in catalytic ways. I think all people in the self-expressive arts are doing this.

The Artist's Job

I would like to be a champion in making people aware that that's what art has to do, that's the job of self-reflection. Art's job is to deepen the emotional basis for life so that the actions that come out of that basis are more harmonious, sustainable. If I'm having a very angst filled day, if nothing seems to be going right, what comes out of that is I keep it real low key. I don't want to use that as a source of action. I want to crawl under a rock; I want to go back to bed. Yet on another day when my heart is just open and everyone I meet is god and I am god, that's when I want to act. I'm not concerned with what those actions are because they are coming from the right place and we are in a world of laws and strategies and so we are always dealing with the thoughts that are just the packaging of our feelings, but we aren't getting to the root of things. One of the reasons why we are not, is because we are tied to this commercial endeavor of having the energy of our lives built on our desires, our desires for materialistic things, our materialistic fears, our self-interested fears. These are the energies that the powers that be are manipulating and keeping this whole fantastic thing going. And in doing so, they are actually energizing what I call superficial emotional basis of life. On a

personal level, you are always amazed how when you get talking to someone and you get them talking about life, who they are and how they feel, everything changes; they will open up, they will soften up, they will deepen up.

Collectively, the financial model doesn't want that to happen. You don't want people to feel deep emotionality because their materialistic concerns will go way low. And their self-interested fears will be diminished. And without that superficial fear, without those almost biological emotionalities that are right on the surface of our emotional lives, without that energy, this world of buy and sell and doing this and doing that and accomplishing this and accomplishing that falls apart. And it's not a diabolical thing because we are not looking at ourselves, because there is no self-reflection. We are becoming this fabulously rich and powerful people, but people without any self-understanding.

It's always been this way through history, in every segment of human life. Religion is a good example. There is the spectrum of deep emotional, mystical feelings of union, of compassion, of love of life, and love of everything of life. And then on the surface of things you have these god-awful power trips, power and fear. My god is red hot; your god ain't diddly squat.

How to change that is the question. Times are pressing and yet if we feel all hurried and harried, we will never come to that change because that feeling of desperate need is part of the problem. We have to go into our own emotional places, deepen and expand our own emotional places and then in very clever ways present that to the world at large. Never before have artists been so empowered, because of money. You can be a painter, a musician, a sculptor, a performance artist and you can be very famous and you can command millions of dollars. But there has to be an understanding of what it is that art really has to offer and what artists have to offer. If there were that understanding, there could be a collaboration of people who have suffered the slings and arrows of celebrity but are multi-millionaires collaborating in their own art forms in very

heartfelt ways to change people's feelings.

The movies are a good example. Every time I see a movie, the thing I ask myself about it is why was that movie made? What does the director want me to feel? What was his purpose? And 90% of the movies are made to make money...to titillate you; that superficial desire thing. And it takes a Stephen Spielberg who has enough money to make a Schindler's List. We haven't begun to collectivize the energy of creativity. We haven't begun to do that.