

Nebula

BOSTON AFTER DARK*AMERICLUB VOL.1 NUMBER 2 DECEMBER • FIFTY CENTS

THE FINAL BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON, 1973-2001 A.D.

FORCES OF TIME. THE PUBLICITOCRATS - THE SECOND TIME TO BUILD THE NEW

RELATION BETWEEN THE FORCES OF TIME - WILL CONVINCE EACH SIDE THE OTHER IS EVIL. CAUSING THE ULTIMATE PAROXYSM OF THE EARTH, WHICH WILL IN TURN BEGIN

THE STRUGGLE WILL BE BETWEEN THE REALITY ADDICTS AND THE AGGRESSIVELY INNOCENT ONES - THE DUALISTIC DWELL IN THE ETERNITY OF THE OMEGA POINT AND CHRIST WILL DESCEND FROM HYPARXIS FOR THE

TO PRODUCE THE WORLD NOOSPHERE. WHEN THE NOOSPHERE IS COMPLETE THE EARTH WILL



HOMAGE TO ST. JOHN, VISIONARY OF THE PATMOS PENAL COLONY, 96 A.D.

Laffoley: Visions Rendered



Paul Laffoley and Karen Craig

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Like toy images blown by Tantric winds, sailboats rode the sunlit bay that our cottage overlooked at Fair Harbor, Fire Island as my architect brother, Edward, visiting in the summer of 1969, first mentioned Paul Laffoley, a young (then twenty-nine) Boston painter with whom he had done some designing of fun houses of both the amusement park and whimsical residence types. "When Paul tells them he is a visionary painter, they think he means starry-eyed genius," Edward said, "and when he explains that no, he really has visions, and his paintings are evocative renderings of visions, they flip."

A few months later, when I was in my native Massachusetts for Thanksgiving, Edward, who had a key, took me to Paul's studio on Bromfield Street in Boston, sans the artist, and I was struck by what Laffoley had done to a Playboy centerfold in a life-size painting called **Dee Dee Dracula**, which

happened to be the only work visible among shelves and shelves of paintings. Following my introduction to Laffoley, in February 1971, I saw most of the paintings on the shelves and others elsewhere, including **The Flowers of Evil**, under which I slept in the artist's apartment, blissfully ignorant of the inverted pentacle at its center.

After months of contemplating Laffoley's work, listening to him talk, and replaying tapes of our conversations, I sympathize with the person who wrote in **The Boston Review of the Arts** (September 10, 1970): "It is much easier to kiss the tires of a moving bus than write an article about Paul Laffoley's ideas on art and the cosmos." I sympathize but I disagree. The difficulty is not in Laffoley's ideas. He is omnivorously literate, absorbing and making his own what he calls "information" from a vast and ever-expanding range of sources. But homework in Jung, Blake, the Eastern



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By Kieran Dugan



Mind Physics

mythologies, astrology, numerology, Ouspensky, Fuller, Eliade, Hesse, Teilhard de Chardin, on *ad infinitum*, ultimately, or theoretically, solves that problem. And Laffoley's articulatory ability, unusual in a visual artist, is no small help.

Time-Oriented Art

The difficulty is in explaining visionary art in general to an audience — art establishment as well as public — that has, in the main, been conditioned to thinking of art only as time-oriented. (In this series of articles on what he called "the new 'visionary' art in California" last summer in *Rolling Stone*, Thomas Albright avoided the difficulty by describing the West Coast phenomenon in terms of that very conditioning.) In the time-oriented view there is no reality other than a horizontal, non-reversible sequence of events, each flowing from the one before it, giving rise to the one following, and itself inconceivable at any other point

in history. In that view, art is a sequence of styles, and critics explain, for example how abstract led into hard-edge Pop, making possible the acceptance of Op, etc. The occurrence of each style is treated essentially as an historical and environmental phenomenon, having to do with causes and effects in a certain material, cultural milieu.

The problem really begins with a pervasive Western misunderstanding of mysticism itself. Evelyn Underhill, for example, explains the passage from initial ecstasy through the dark night of the soul to the unitive life in a horizontal way that the mystic himself would not recognize as his own experience. It is no wonder that a public influenced by such descriptions has tended, if not to discount them, at least to view visions as unfathomable, ineffable miracles that happen outside the scope of human nature to an elite — and that cannot be translated by that elite into terms that will evoke

for other human beings the force structure of what they have experienced.

Visionary Art

In contrast, Carl Jung, bringing Eastern wisdom to the Western psychology, appropriately described the visionary experience not as a horizontal sequence of events in time but as a vertical incursion into the collective unconscious wherein reside the changeless myths, dreams, and basic mandalic structure to which all mankind has potential access. Jung's archetypal domain is the changeless Now where William Blake found "ever Existent Images" that are available to "the Imaginative Eye of Everyone according to the situation he holds."

Echoing Blake, Paul Laffoley has pointed out that through the practice of such disciplines as Tantric Yoga the visionary artist is able to control his approaches to and returns from visions sufficiently to render their force structure in such a way that those who view his art



The Kali-Yuga

can respond to it each at his or her own level. Thus, to quote Laffoley, "the quality of visionary art is dependent upon a mutuality, a relationship between the mystical level of the artist (granted a commensurate technical talent) and that of his audience." If the intuition necessary for all art criticism or appreciation is not accompanied by sufficient mystical participation in the audience, the visionary artist will be rejected.

The probability of rejection is growing less. As Kathleen Raine points out in her recent book on William Blake, visionary reality is "more credible in our century" than it was in Blake's. The rapid changes in world culture through technology, particularly since the explosion of the first atomic bomb, have created a stress that accelerates the escape from a space-time orientation into a transcendental sensibility. But the motivation is more than the fear that Alvin Toffler concentrates exclusively on. There is joy, among other sentiments, in the movements, from the Beatniks through Hippies to present Freak and alternative culture groups, that have in recent history been, in Laffoley's words, "based on principles that are transcendental rather than environmental." There is the

expectancy of a world utopia inspired by the writings of such thinkers as Marcuse, Skinner, and Fuller; the mixed but undeniable contribution of drugs to the development of a transcendental sensibility, an awareness of what it is to live outside of space and time; and there is the movement of biology — if one accepts the view of Teilhard de Chardin — toward a new stage in evolution unimaginable in traditional terms, the formation of a humanity unified mystically in one vast new entity, as the cells of a single human body are unified in the entity experienced as the ego. Beyond that evolutionary stage, is according to Teilhard, the ultimate, apocalyptic "Omega point." Laffoley relates to Teilhard's evolutionary theory the idea that there is in progress "a change from material physics to mind physics as postulated by psychical research and as implied in the link between that research and the unified field theory of Albert Einstein." (He points out that Einstein wrote the preface to the book on mental radio that Upton Sinclair published in the 1930's.)

The current vogue for nostalgia is, Laffoley believes, deceptive. "The nostalgia is not above events, because a large

proportion of the people who are displaying nostalgia for the 1920's and succeeding decades were either not alive in those years or not old enough to appreciate what was happening." What is actually going on, in his opinion, is a wistfulness for the very concept of history itself. As people sense more and more that they are living in an eternal moment, they become homesick, as it were, for a culture that had absolute faith in history as a set of non-reversible events.

The growing receptivity for the transcendental is matched the the increasing ubiquity of visionary art. Witness Kiesler, Soleri, Goff, Fuller, and the Biomorphic and Archigram schools in architecture; Jordan Belson and Harry Smith in film; and, in painting, Deborah Remington, Peter Max, Irene Rice Pereira, Mati (who did the cover for *Morning of the Magicians* and who does the Grateful Dead's album covers), the fantasy schools of Vienna and Montreal, the aforementioned "new expressionists" in the San Francisco area — and Paul Laffoley, the visionary artist with whom I happen to be best acquainted.

One Visionary Artist

Since childhood Paul Laffoley has been practising Hatha Yoga — for keeping the physical apparatus tuned and in control — in emulation of his



The Omega Point

father, a Cambridge banking executive who was deeper than anyone knew, except perhaps his friend and confidant Leonard Troland, the late, extraordinary, as yet unsung Harvard professor of optics and parapsychologists. After graduating from Brown University, in 1962, Laffoley served apprenticeships under sculptor Mirko Basadella at Harvard and architect Frederick J. Kiesler in New York City. He fancied himself a Pop artist for several years, until he realized that his true work from the beginning had been essentially Tantric and that, while prevalent kitsch imagery in a culture is ideal ground for the expression of the visionary sensibility, "improper use of the kitsch art process leads to nothingness and not to the void of the Tao." In 1967 he began doing systematically what he had already been doing instinctively: practising Tantric Yoga and using simple forms (the only kind that can be handled in a mysticism linked to art), including kitsch images, as the subject of inner visualization.

The first fruits of his systematic use of the visionary art process were mandalic paintings called "cosmological diagrams" reproduced as posters by Pandora Productions. In 1967 Laffoley wrote, in

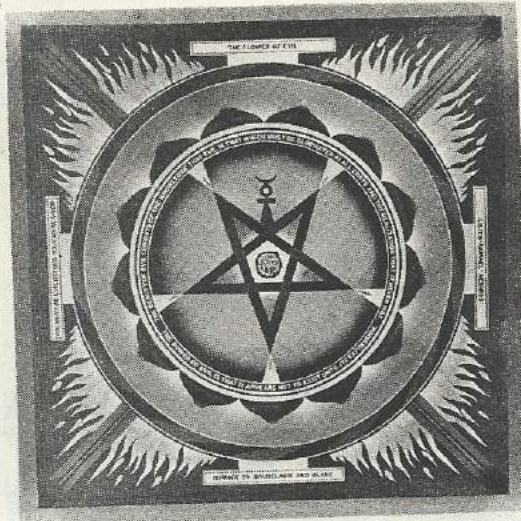
a brochure published by Pandora Productions the following year: "Eastern and Western mystics have traditionally employed diagrams to convey their experiences... a graphics that is isomorphic both in its logical structure and the emotional impact of the experience. Tibetan mandalas or the paintings of William Blake are far more convincing as conveyers of experience than the physiognomic diagrams of Robert Fludd, whose work appears far more 'diagrammatic' visually but lacks the impact of direct experience."

The Visionary Art Process

Ludwig Wittgenstein said that all art is transcendental. Paul Laffoley would agree if the word "art" is changed to "the vague artistic notion" that precedes the work of art. He believes that it is the decision as to what to do with this vague notion that determines whether the artist is ultimately, in practice, to be visionary or time-oriented, and that decision depends upon his sensibility. "In time-oriented art, which ultimately moves toward a change in the environment through a change in the concepts of thought, the notion is developed through a process external to senses of the artist, the so-called dialogue between the artist and his material. In

that process a series of aesthetic choices through time become the hallmark of the work. The visionary procedure is an attempt to clarify the vague notion by the inner visualization technique of Tantric Yoga and other such disciplines. The clarity of the initial notion varies, of course, from artist to artist, but for visionaries such as Blake the degree of intensity is relatively high to begin with."

My understanding of the inner visualization technique practised by Laffoley is this: Visions are evanescent and ineffable unless there is a language of simple forms (kitsch styles are ideal for this, in Laffoley's view) in which they can be configured and fixed. The symbols are introduced into the imagination (a word Laffoley himself usually avoids now, because of the common confusion of visions with imaginings), where they become such a familiar part of the interior landscape that they can be contemplated, played with, **absentmindedly**. I italicize because the step beyond creative imagination in the visionary art process is no-mind, and then occurs the "magic theatre" when, in Laffoley's words, "things just begin to happen," with no conscious effort or control. The forms that have consciously,



The Flower of Evil

actively introduced are now passively configured, like the elements in a kaleidoscope, not by the imagination, but by a power other than the conscious self. The kaleidoscopic pattern is then carried back into the world of the senses and rendered in the artist's studio as evocative symbol.

Laffoley describes his Tantric meditations as "a kind of negative effort, a setting of circumstances for visions to happen." When they do happen, his paintings are "envisioned as completely done" in his mind, as if "someone else had done them" and he had "received them by a telepathic process." "I can afford to take time with the craftsmanship because I am only rendering a painting which is complete in my mind."

Composition and Contents

Where the mandalic structure appears in Laffoley's work it is, as it must be, a wheel or central hub radiating spokes and having a circumferential rim, with the wheel placed in a square format and with the square reflected again near the hub. In his more figurative pieces the structure has a bisymmetrical axis and the colors are intense.

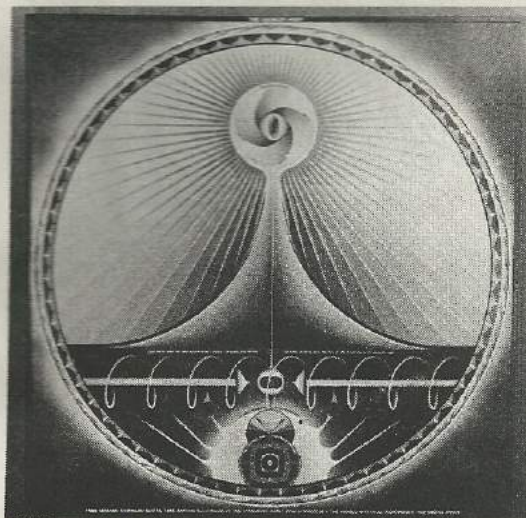
Analysed in conventional historical terms, his paintings would be described as anti-formal, minimal, or related to the new materialism. He might

be compared to Robert Ryman, who makes his paintings look as though they would disappear if all the parts were folded in, like a flower turning into bud, so that the surface of the painting is Maya, the illusion of reality, and the reality itself is a dot. Less obviously, the nineteenth century visionary Caspar David Friedrich did similar work, as in his painting **The Cross and the Cathedral in the Mountains**. Laffoley acknowledges a debt to Pop art, for contributing to his view of kitsch as timeless. "No matter what happens in art, kitsch will always be with us; and kitsch is a kind of negative route to anti-formalism." Even when he was involved in Pop, Laffoley thought of Warhol's repetitive paintings of contemporary cultural heroes and heroines as modern versions of the gods and goddesses depicted in repetition on the borders of many Tibetan mandalas.

He also acknowledges that he was influenced by the linguistic conceptualists—although he now regards them as having "ultimately revealed themselves to be time-oriented"—in his use of words in his paintings. The words are used, as they were in medieval illuminated manuscripts, as part of an interplay of image and idea that is calculated to help the viewer rise to a realm higher than that of the senses.

In a recent letter to me, Laffoley wrote: "The visionary lives on the borderline between the life of the mystic and the life of the artist. He uses techniques such as Tantric Yoga from the Eastern tradition or alchemy from the Western tradition to train and perfect his inclination toward the mystical life while using his artistic talent to attempt to bring back to the world of sense a symbolic evocative rendering of what he has experienced... Although the visionary artist exists in a state midway between the practical and unitive life, visionary art is not art for art's sake or art for some religious sake but an end in itself. Each true work of visionary art is the structural extreme of a process of disciplined intuition. To those who think that intuition is incompatible with, or useless in, the solution of the so-called practical problems of life need only be cited Einstein, who always insisted that reason was a totally inappropriate methodology for advancing the frontiers of physics.

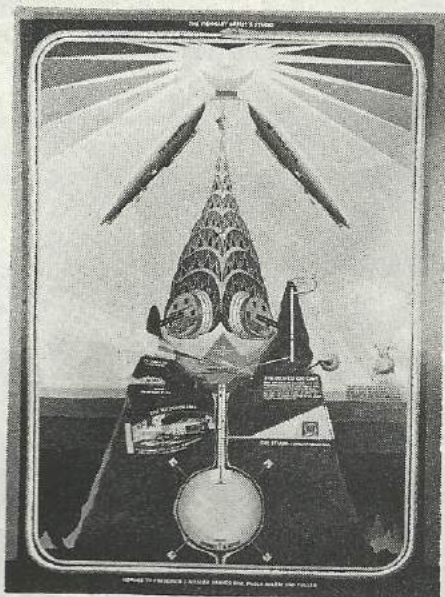
"Visionary art, the fruit of intuition for its own sake, has for its content the highest form of experience for its own sake, the mystical experience, whether considered as the ecstasy of attraction (the traditional God experience), the ecstasy of revulsion (the Satanic or evil experience), or



The Visionary Point



The Ecstasy of Revulsion



The Visionary Artist's Studio

the reverse of the mystical experience, which is the indication of an avatar occurring in history...

"To Teilhard de Chardin the Battle of Armageddon meant something other than the destruction of the world that others have predicted. For him it meant the encounter of ferocious evolutionary forces transforming the concept of consciousness into a paroxysm of personality — the Omega point of the world, where the ultimate creature, the Noosphere, will be shaped, like an earth envelope comprising all of humanity. The Noosphere means more than the collective effort of all individual con-

sciousnesses. It means a universal cellular structure, but one that will exist not in time but in eternity. The mystical experience is the essential or latent, intercellular communications system of the overall human personality that will be realized in the Noosphere. The Noosphere consists of the world's population, forwards and backwards in time, experiencing union in the mystical experience. This is the true message of the visionary... Very soon that most disbelieved sciencefiction speculations will come true. Time mechanics will make all times, past and future, available to us, as

mystics have always explicitly or implicitly said."

Laffoley concluded: "The form of the visionary experience of sensibility is the same throughout all history. The force structure of the mystical experience insures this. There are no revivals or "new expressions," but only and always the one subject matter of the visionary art, which is the revelation from time to time of aspects of structure of the world experience as a plan. The visionary sensibility as prophetic is incorrect. Teilhard was not negating St. John but completing him."

Nebula

The Cover: This month's cover includes an original creation by Paul Laffoley rendered from **The Book of Kells** (Codex Cenannensis) "The Symbol of St. John the Evangelist" (Folio 27 v) 760-820 A.D.

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