

**Transcription Excerpt - Santa Barbara Mythic Roundtable by Willi Paul
Granada Books, Santa Barbara, CA. 1/22/15**

I wanted to meet Willi. I've followed him for a number of years online watching him post all of these different interviews he does with people. So I always, I loved the way he weaves stories and he talked to people about storytelling and what they do. So the transition movement, the permaculture movement, and other movements. And now he's talking about this mythology. I could fit into this.

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Danny Deardorff is a fantastic mythologist, a great collaborator with the community. And so I've had the privilege of seeing Danny Deardorff speak and listening to his myths. I have a personal frustration with him – that they're so meaty, they're so juicy, they're so much for us longing within them and yet we're on this edge, this transition for something new, and how many generations and hundreds of years it takes to create a new mythology is daunting. And how do we participate in theater as well – I am an advocate for that.

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Hi. I'm Sharon, and I'm interested in personal transformation. And mythology is a wonderful way to help that along, I believe. And I've always been a fan of CJ Jung, and James Hillman who loved to talk about myth and I saw the poster. So that's what got me in.

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I've chosen some stuff from my own work. These are symbols of archetypes, and I would like to know which archetypes are that go with the symbols. We'll discuss them.

Yeah. Sure. So it's a factory belching smoke, it's also an AK-47 I guess.

For me that's the warrior, as a traditional warrior.

Yeah, that's mechanized war, and this is mechanical clockwork civilization.

The machine gun seems to be a highly prevalent symbol. And I feel the theory behind it. Like you walk out a door now at Burlingame or Santa Barbara and get a good shot. There's no boundary there, there's no buffer. And that's a big fear. Now I'm calling that fear an archetype.

It seems to me, yeah, the mechanical distance I think too. It's the dark side of the technological innovation. You know, there's a lot of light. There's a lot of, you know, oh, we're doing so much better. But this is the dark side. This is polluting what is natural and what is, you know, what we would originally get into. It's Icarus. It's, you know, the closer we fly to the sun, you know, the more at risk you are to burn out.

Okay. I like that. Who else can help me with these archetypes?

It's a power.

It's the system.

It's like a restraining.

So it keeps people.

Yeah, and I guess, both of these symbols, as you're speaking I'm hearing a separation of culture, a culture of separation, that these are both symbols that signify that we've been in a period of separation from our roots, from our, you know, resources and our true relation with earth and with each other. So those were both symbols as well. It seemed to both be speaking of destruction rather than creating, being stuck in heaven.

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I'm one of those people who believe that in order to appeal the lights of people you have to go through the darkness because there's this vicarious obsession with dark for some reason. So like if you don't play the dark side first then you don't get anyone's attention. And then if you play to the dark side and you get their attention then you can put the light in at the end. So you can like sort of, it's like the CS Lewis thing. Like, you know, he created the *Children in the Wardrobe* so that he could impart God, you know, at a time when God was, and magic, were very much in conflict. But if you have the darkness and all the wonder of the wardrobe then you wouldn't have to get all the magic through.

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Like the compost represents stewardship. That's the image that you chose of stewardship, which is totally relevant. I don't know if it's iconic for me, but it's, but maybe it will become so. And I just think it's a great experiment to start broadening the kind of poetry of what permaculture is.

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Can you write stories? I mean can we get a story? Can I get a myth? We haven't really distinguished those two things much.

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Where I think where if I was in that transition I think we tell stories to draw people in, but as a culture we've been, that mythology needs to grow out of that story for us and move forward with it. That's kind of my take.

Right. And what I'm saying here ultimately is that these permaculture concepts, values, symbols, are a catalyst towards this new myth. And in my opinion we need to do this quickly.

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I think a part of what you're pointing to now that I'm seeing those images a little bit, and the compost and the well, it looks like until those are actually a part of our physical reality I think it's going to be difficult to have a convincing myth emerge from them. I do think it's worth putting it out there as imagery, like visualization, but I think myth generally is coming from, it's like it's mythic, it's mystical, it comes from an actual experience, not from an imagined, because how are you going to relate to it? It's a soulful, it's a very deep, soulful, so that when you hear a story you pull, you're, it pulls, it naturally pulls you into the meaning, a relationship with the meaning because you have a way of relating to it. That's why listening to Danny tell the old myths, it had a very beautiful effect for me, but didn't necessarily always go all the way down because I'm not living in the cultures that would breathe and move and work with those very symbols every day, you know, so it's a challenge.

I would just like to add that the Internet, to me, is a huge generator, a regenerator, can be a savior tool, or whatever you want to call it. So I'm always pushing to get this in digital, get it into the web, drop it down and turn it off, discuss it here, you know, this thing I have to catalyze, but it's digital first perhaps, and then experiential second.

And there are so many obstacles to permaculture now. It's a big far way in big government and big regulations that if permaculture doesn't grow that fast there's going to be a fight. Let's talk about transition. One of the myths I wrote talks about using this gas station as a training site for permaculture transition values. So I mean do we have any different gas stations in this country? Interesting. We're coming up with instant corporations and the people who make the guns here. Transition is all about getting local, getting off the grid, and that's just one of the images I did for a piece I wrote. It's a garden, a backyard garden, make your own food, kind of simple stuff, but it's not happening on (00:34:29). You know? The transition.

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Okay. I think there's some change coming that did take that look but we'll read about it later. I'd like to talk about something that's really special to me and that's alchemy. So that's weird, huh? Here's a guy who's saying that alchemy is really important.

We see as alchemy something way back when.

No, no, alchemy, to me, is brand new. It's transformational. It has nothing to do with goals. It has to do with dirt and sea and compost. That's my alchemy, in a sense, that's one of them. So here's – the alchemy's identified. And one of them is genomic, ... and then this is permaculture alchemy. This is sheep mulching, creating soil. Interesting, huh?

Quite a transformation.

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So who can speak to their favorite brand of alchemy? Or form of alchemy? How do you use it?

I think in relationships is probably the one that I get most awestruck by, you know, when you have a conversation where you could see it going all the way down this tube, you know, you have two opposing energies and you just have two different intentions, and somewhere in there there's a consciousness that comes in to one person, maybe. And offers something that allows another person to just unlock a little bit and then join them. And before you know it perhaps you started to spiral together and find each other together. I think that's really one of the most powerful alchemies that we could put our focus on now.

Another thing I wanted to say is that this alchemy thing, in relationship, several of us here were at a workshop recently at a kind of a social technology called dynamic governed social theory?, a bunch of names for it, and practicing it since then it's been actually alchemical, where we, you know, start with an issue in applying this a group can work through this issue and come up with this totally beautiful, new, you know, reality out of it.

There's a lot of common sense here. All right. The last subject area, if you will, is nature. So these are a few images I pulled for you about nature. Now one of them is kind of change driven; graphs, and one of them is greed driven. But in terms of nature and a bunch of pipes and dirty water, et cetera, for flacking. So what do you think? Is this how you would depict nature today? What would you use for a symbol?

Yeah, and that's what this is. And I think this is our relationship with nature where I think humanity has always wanted to control nature, and now with, you know, enough time, enough centuries have gone by, the technology as far as like, okay, yeah, we're getting there. And it goes back to the whole Icarus idea that I, you know, mentioned. I think that, you know, we have to watch ourselves in our arrogance try to obtain nature, the reality at stake, and ...

I mean symbols are also site specific.

Yeah, and within creating you can create a harmony of energy of plants that co-exist together.

So if you want to talk about alchemy, there's more than some parts of it that changes the nature of the different components as to why is this into a greater whole.

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Okay, guys, here is the big finale. I want you to turn your programs over for me. And lo and behold you'll see artifact image. Okay. I was hoping somebody would. Now what I'm about to do is run through a myth lab exercise. Now, a myth lab, to me, starts with an artifact. I want to generate mythic characteristics and themes by using this image. And then add some standards to the story telling elements like narrative or characters and plot. And see how far we can take this image. Okay, so on this lab is an opportunity to write a new myth in a collective way. That's the goal here. And we're going to start here. So it's always important to me to talk about the past and what this was, or what the sort of grounding is, and then we could take off. So this is a former bathhouse that was utilized by the oil barons by UCSB. So this was a real place that had a roof and a fire and alcohol and all the good things you do with that house. Well, there are other things to do too, but now it's been layered and layered upon with graffiti. So who can speak to the power of the graffiti? Any ideas about what that graffiti might mean as a symbol?

The chaos in the transition phase.

I see an organized chaos.

I kind of like the front, middle, back kind of story that we've seen of the buildings, of the current, and as well, and I don't even know how I'm going to tell this story, but you know, something about the trees falling and the next layer, you know the fall of nature, in relationship, I mean, there's three kinds of it in the building, and then behind it is this very healthy, beautiful tree, like it was taking a look through time toward where we want to go.

Wildflowers.

Wildflowers, yeah.

Yeah.

The wildflowers is a symbol.

And the tree is a symbol of permaculture.

Right. And then the door going into the cave too. So you've got that whole above and below thing going on that's pretty traditional.

Its heaven and hell maybe, you know?

I think the artwork is actually pretty good. And I think that the people that did it consider themselves artists. And that they wanted to express themselves in a big way. And didn't have any other, they didn't have any other outlet. And I know that we call graffiti, that name means to us something that has been defaced and we don't want it there, it's a bad thing, but I think to the people that did this I think they were expressing themselves artistically.

And I see, as I, the more I look into it, I try to create a story of just the people, like to me the focus isn't nature, but it's the artwork. And I want to know about the people who come to create this artwork. What's their story? Was there a war between, you know, I want to express this side, but I don't want that. You know, what's going on there? You know, that's what I'm really drawn to, for me, personally.

Cool. I like that.

I think graffiti comes out of feeling abandoned, or feeling neglected, so if you notice like they want to cover up all of the chaos of nature by having the last word of what their grievance is going to be and that the graffiti represents their like vying out for their ?

Interesting.

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Oh, no, I thought it was deliberate anger. I think that's what I was trying to say. I think it's very much like maybe like somebody didn't get what they wanted out of the land, so they sabotaged the land and then they put their angst in their graffiti art as not only art, but their feelings of abandonment and all the years of, that's not myth. So it's like a social outcry.

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In order to cathartically get through this, back to nature, and our chemical process of transformation, we have to work through all of this to move into that, that's the time and the evolution. And what you're saying is that we stop focusing on in the foreground with one thought. We go past that. We heal that. And then it frees us to see what can come. When there's life there's vitality. There is all of the semiology of nature and what that represents. And it brings us, in a way, ironically, back to nature. You know?

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So how can we create some sort of semiology or architect or movement around this thing? Is it possible to make, or start down the journey to a new myth?

I really feel like the oral tradition, and it's you know, I guess what I want to say is yes, and for me going back to theater, going to, you know, around the fire, oral tradition, those kind of things to me are what brings this alive; live action, in person, reading a book is not as alive for me as hearing a story told and there's a communal, again, that joint consciousness of all of five, or ten or twenty people who are present or however many are feeding that story in that moment generating new consciousness. And it's a very different experience than sitting on your own in your living room and reading a story that someone put down on paper. And so for me I would like to see this put into a theater piece, or put into some kind of rhythmic something, you know, something that draws our souls and our spirits alive again. Because otherwise it's just thinking, you know? And that to me is a myth. A myth is something that, yeah, it draws us all forward.

A myth could also be timeless. If you think about folklore, if you think about like Aesop's fables, the reason that myth exists is the story of like the cross of balance and culture that can be relatable. If you think about the symbol of the butterfly creating a myth, I wrote a story about how butterflies get their spots. And it's no true, but little children, for like years and years and years would be able to relate to it. I could see that happening, and it will cross culture and it will give people like the optimism of nature. Like it's across centuries. Whereas like a story is just meant like in part information, or a time capsule of someone's life. Or a time capsule of an event, or more for an ego rather than for an artistic representation or a possibility.

Yeah. And maybe we just become more discerning as we're taking something in to understand that this is a current cultural moray or a personal story. And this is within the same story within the same piece. This is something that's actually driving humanity. This is something that's timeless. This is something that we can elevate to that level that sings through the ages.

I just wanted to add one thing. I think that myth can change pretty quickly in reality and crisis and all that. For example, the Internet. The Internet is kind of a new myth. And we have this experience with the Internet. And we have this myth that somehow we're all really connected on the one hand. On the other hand it's disconnecting a lot of people too. You know, if there's chatter or something, and all that kind of stuff. So I think the Internet is, in a way, perhaps a new myth in itself.

Well, what is a myth? Define something by what it is not.

That's a great question. I'd say a brand or a logo may not be a myth. It could be, though.

I'll tell you, I don't think this can be inartistic because if myths are inartistic when they can't represent a cultural understanding, like a cultural time capsule, and a lot of times this starts in indigenous cultures, like the aborigines in Mexico, or the Mayans, or the Native Americans where they want to preserve some understanding that was taught to them when they saw them. But they're probably real, but they're also representing very specifically a culture rather than an anti-culture. So a myth can't be against the grain of culture.

Well, anarchism doesn't reap that though. Anarchism is decentralized authority. And a lot of myths are based on it.

The teacher wants to speak here. (Laughter) Here's a possibility that I just sort of came up with. Okay, that's good. Yeah, we're very much fellow agents. We get up and do stuff for ourselves. And we work along, if there's something new we start building crunch ups in community. So there's a nice jump there. So I'm going to suggest that after this community is working a virtual could take place. Now that could be a sharing expo where you bring things to give away, you know, in a garage sale sort of way. But as this ritual comes so does the spirituality. And that's part of what this is to me. You know, rituals from community.

Well, they do.

Yeah, we because a lot of this is spiritual, I think.

A myth is a system.

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I am working with a children's book author who is creating a new mythology based on Greek mythology when the Greek gods were children. So it's before they became Poseidon, Zeus or what have you. And I read one of the manuscripts, it's very interesting. I don't think children know that much about Greek mythology. I went out of my way to study this. You have to know quite a bit about Greek mythology.

Is it for children?

I'm trying to give them away.

This one is giving me the heebie-jeebies.

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