

Chapter Three

OUTSIDERS/INSIDERS

The work of the buddhas is never wasted.

LU



JSor

Nonconformity is not Rebellion

In your last e-mail, you asked how I feel about singer/songwriter Patti Smith's post-*Horses* work. It may come as no surprise that I feel differently about Patti now than I did back in the '70s. To be sure, I've not checked her more recent releases, but have read reviews along the way, which indicate that she continues to write from the same psychological perspective. New works, yes, but essentially variations on the same concept and point of view, a point of view I shared for many years.

In fact, I was still attached to that point of view when I wrote the *Horses* piece in 1975 [for *Gig* magazine]. You may recall that my best friend Tim Buckley had died only a few months before (on June 29, 1975), and at that time I was not far removed from the views, perspectives, values and visions of Smith, Rimbaud, Artaud, Burroughs, Jim Morrison, Joplin, Hendrix, and others throughout much of Western history who have often regarded themselves as "outsiders," rebels, social aliens, contemptuous of bourgeois standards, values and socio-political norms.

Since that time, I have come to see Patti Smith as representative of the archetypal social outcast, the intoxicated misfit, the angry nonconformist, but *not as a true outsider*. I now see her (and others who are psychologically related to her) as extensions of the very society they presume to reject. Their stringent nonconformity is a reaction to mainstream middleclass stability and hypocrisy, and, as such, is directly linked to it and determined by it. They are part and parcel of mainstream society, albeit as psychologically damaged artists who embody the same psychological fragmentation, misery and confusion inherent in the society itself. They focus in on the hypocrisies, madness, greed, and viciousness of the society and thus *expose and promulgate* society's atrocious physical and psychological violence, while at the same time misinterpreting their own struggles in certain specific and dramatically misguided ways.

The violence of the imagery in the works of Smith, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Genet, Burroughs, Artaud and the others is misperceived as religious rebellion and liberation through aesthetics. It is neither religion, rebellion, nor liberation.

I ask you, is plunging into phantasmagoric dreams and hallucinogenic fantasies clarity? Or is it intoxication mistaken for revelation? The splitting and fragmentation of the psyche passes for psychological and religious mergence of opposites. Is it truly a synthesis of opposites, a mergence with the All? Or is it a violent escape into prerational chaos, a plunge into the fragmented conflicts and imagistic over-stimulation of an unconscious mind at war with itself, a descent into darkness, madness, nonconsciousness, psycho-sexual infantilism, and self-destructive neurosis.

At one point in the Smith piece I sent you, I wrote, "As the ascension occurs, and as the soul is freed and whirled into the plane of phantasmagoric experience, the environment also alters. . . . In each instance, isolation, inner disorientation, violent acts and terrifying dependence are transformed into unity, inner integration, self-fulfillment, sexual-spiritual ecstasy, and an overwhelming sense of power.

Opposites synthesize.”

Well, it's true that I used to think that way, but no more. I no longer think of descent into the unconscious as *ascension* into consciousness; of violent psychic stimulation as *liberation* into clarity; of intoxicated oblivion as bliss; of imagined phantasmagoric projections as divine revelations; of infantile psychological dependence as integration and fulfillment.

It's a temporary escape from pain, yes. Awakening into consciousness, no. A momentary sense of power born of sexual or chemical intoxication, yes. A sense of strength emerging out of unity with nature and the cosmos, no. Orgasmic prerational exhilaration, yes. The serenity of unity-consciousness, no. The comfort of numbness, blindness and escape from unbearable social responsibilities, yes. The union with God, with the All, no. The loss of reason and the sinking into the darkness of silent seas, surrounded by self-generated hallucinogenic visions, yes. The transcendence of reason and the ascension into clarity, light, awareness, love, serenity and compassion, no.

The consciousness Patti and the others are talking about is lower consciousness, neurosis, pain, conflict, confusion, irrationality. It is prerational and somatic, not transrational and awakened. It is narcissistic, nervous, undisciplined, disordered, spectacularly entertaining — and utterly representative of the very society Patti and the others reject. We are a violent, sensual, selfish, immature culture, driven by pleasure, pain, fear, the desire for security and escape, the egoic lust for sex, power, profit, prestige — and Patti Smith and other artists on the same wavelength feed those needs, for which, of course, they are well rewarded: they become pop stars and icons. They mirror society perfectly. They are not outsiders, but *insiders who reflect the despised but dominant culture*. They are not psycho-spiritual rebels. They are reactionary non-conformists who mirror society's most pathogenic qualities.

And so we love them and romanticize their need and their pain. They skip out to the fringes of our own unconsciousness, and live our dreams and fantasies to the hilt.

We cheer them on as they journey further and further into the depths of our culturally shared misery and madness. We watch in fascination and glee as they twist and writhe and dance in Artaud's flames for us, staggering full-tilt boogie into the chaos of the communal mind, finally losing themselves in darkness, insanity, egotism and self-destruction. We applaud and whistle and cheer when they die on stage, the grand gesture. These are our heroes, ill, violent, tormented, disoriented, brutal. They represent all that we fear and yearn for, all that we have suppressed in our own psyches, all that we dream but dare not do. They do it for us. We buy their recordings, read their poems, watch them die their bloody deaths, then get bored, and shift our attention to the next young thing who steps into the spotlight and performs exactly the same dance.

See what I mean?

To my present way of thinking, these are not outsiders at all. They are crippled extensions of a sick, barbarically violent, lower-consciousness mainstream culture. The real outsiders live elsewhere, often in the mountains, like the ancient Chinese poet, Han Shan (*circa* 700-780 AD). Buddha, Lao Tzu, Jesus, Socrates, Krishnamurti, Osho — these and their colleagues down the centuries are the true outsiders. That is another story.

JSor Outsiders and Authenticity: The Journey Toward Serenity

It seems to me that genuine outsiders wage their inner struggles in an entirely different way. They may *initially* be victims of fragmentation, social conditioning and all the rage and pain that goes with being told lies from the very day of one's birth. To grow both psychologically and spiritually, a kind of struggle takes place, often as a necessity. That struggle transpires with the effort to make conscious that which is unconscious. The struggle involves self-examination, a dismantling of rage, fear, angst, a facing of one's self and one's demons directly and truthfully, a coming to terms with one's inner divisions, conflicts, pains, miseries.

The goal is to become one's *authentic self* (by overcoming conditioning); to become sensitive and conscious (rather than insensitive and merely intoxicated); to ascend into greater awareness (not descend into unconscious oblivion and phantasmagoric dreams); to utilize reason as a *steppingstone* toward the transcendence of reason (not the obliteration of reason); to grow in terms of a universal human individuality that embraces all sentient beings in compassion, understanding, awareness, love — in other words, to move upward on the spectrum of consciousness from unconsciousness and darkness, through socialized conditioning, beyond social programming, into personal authenticity and the unfolding of transpersonal spiritual realization.

It is interesting how we rarely acknowledge the real outsiders with the kind of respect and appreciation and awe that we give to the mad poets and dreamers and musicians. Indeed, we very often *kill* authentic outsiders if we can, which in its way is the ultimate recognition society can give them. Society instinctively recognizes the true outsiders, and instinctively tries to destroy them. They tried to kill Buddha many times. They poisoned Socrates. They crucified Jesus. In our own time they poisoned Osho. It goes on and on.

Those who would help us *see through* the psychological conditionings with which society enslaves us are dangerous to priests, politicians, businessmen and the military. They do not writhe in pain as sensationally tormented, non-conformist extensions of social madness, giving society validation precisely by fighting a losing battle against it. They help us *see through* social morality (which is egregiously immoral), fear-based greed, competition and its moral corruption, ruthless aggression, insatiable desire. They expose the lies that divide us inwardly as individuals and outwardly as nation-states fighting other nation-states. They help us wipe out conflicts that are inherent results of egotism, politics and organized religions (all of which belief systems, gods, saviors, scriptures and rituals have utterly failed to transform fear into love).

These Higher Consciousness folks are in my opinion the true outsiders, the true rebels, the true guides out of the maze of conflict, violence, greed, madness, misery, confusion, on-going barbarism and apparently unending sorrow. These seers, sages and mystics who lead us upward psychologically and spiritually, gently guiding us out of separate and separating egotism into harmony with nature and the cosmos, are the true outsiders. By slashing at the roots of society's conditioned values, and by teaching us how to discover our own freedom, individuality, and authentic unity with the All, these men and women perform a priceless service for humankind and the earth and all beings on it. They lead us up from darkness and chaos, into the light of consciousness, psychological freedom, and spiritual wholeness.

They help us discover and realize our own unity-consciousness, which is an inherent dimension of the human psyche, albeit fulfilled in only a few so far. Those few point the way for all of us — and there will come a time when all of us can and will realize the same level of consciousness that the awakened ones have realized again and again. It is an inherently evolutionary developmental psycho-spiritual process.

Every one of them points out how awakening has nothing to do with commandments, laws, rituals, dogma, belief systems, gods, saviors. It has to do with understanding and dropping all conditionings, transcending mere knowledge, and opening one's self to the energy of Existence itself.

When men (such as Krishnamurti and Osho) or women (such as Vimala Thankar and Gangaji) start talking about these things, they immediately become politically suspect, because they are talking about health and wholeness and awareness and clarity and serenity and compassion — dangerous stuff for a society that thrives on selfishness, division, conflict, fear, egregious egotism, and neurotic, power-mad aggression.

As Vimala Thankar said in *The Eloquence of Living*, "The essence of [authentic]

religion is the personal discovery of the meaning of life, the meaning of truth. Religion is related to the unconditional, total freedom that truth confers upon us. It is a revolution of the whole way of living. Religion moves us from the superficial layers of existence and encourages us to go deeper to the roots of life. It is an inward journey to the depths of our being.”

If you look at that statement closely, you can see how dangerous *authentic religion* is to the status quo — “It is a revolution *of the whole way of living.*” That’s why genuine outsiders, men and women who help us ascend to the highest levels of consciousness and the most encompassing levels of compassion, are considered dangerous. The Patti Smiths and Artauds and Rimbauds and Burroughs and Jean Genets of the world are safe insiders. They may be a colorful nuisance, but they are not dangerous. They reflect and react to the *least* conscious elements of conventional society. By way of contrast, the Buddhas and Christs and Ikkyus and Lao Tzus and Oshos are vibrant and dangerous troublemakers. *They* are the true outsiders, the ones to watch for, the authentic heroes.

From an artistic or dramatic perspective, the heart of their journey is *initially* interesting because of the inner struggle one goes through to understand and escape the chains of one's own social conditioning. The authentic, psychologically healthy self wants to emerge, to become liberated from perceptual blinders, to dissolve the pain of the resulting conflicts. Part of that is *non-conformity*, a descent into the nether worlds, perhaps through sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll (that timeless trilogy). Musicians, writers and artists from all ages have done that. The descent into psycho-spiritual disassociation feels ecstatically energizing (at least for a while) and makes for sensational art that sooner or later is welcomed and embraced by the society that recognizes itself — and finds the mirror-image pleasurable, even if the artist was denounced by his or her own generation.

But that initially angry *reaction* to social power, hypocrisy and corruption, and the descent into intoxication, stimulation, noise and dreams is only part of the journey. The *next* step is realizing that such socially determined hostility is self-deceiving,

enormously destructive, and ultimately futile (because society itself merely applauds, then continues on its way in search of new insults and outrages that both entertain and titillate). Following this recognition, the next step is forward, away from the lower, and *upward, toward Higher Consciousness*. That ascent, with its struggles and realizations and on-going liberation when one journeys higher from level to level, is where an even greater excitement appears.

The journey toward serenity is exciting in itself. It is evolution. It is growth and development. It is maturation and unfolding and flowering into the highest consciousness of which humankind is capable. It is the fullest creative realization — in selflessness, in transcendence of the ego, in mergence with the whole of existence. It is Christ consciousness, the heaven within. It is Buddha consciousness, Socratic consciousness, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Heraclitus, Ikkyu, Gurdjieff, Osho, and Krishnamurti consciousness.

All of these outsiders, and untold numbers of others who throughout history may or may not have been recognized, ascend to this same level of experience, awareness and universal being. In this kind of journey, psychological and spiritual evolution begins in confusion and conflict, which transmutes into clarity, harmony, inner and outer unity, and blisslight serenity. This is the journey true outsiders almost inevitably take. It's a profoundly exciting journey, often spectacular, and always rewarding to those who witness and appreciate it.

Obviously, there are many types and kinds, because they are all extraordinary individualists — T.E. Lawrence, Nijinsky, and Van Gogh, for example, are showcased in a book called *The Outsiders*, by Colin Wilson. And some are scholars as well as mystics, such as the brilliant Ken Wilber of today. But however they do it, and in whatever field, there is a striking similarity: they transcend the dominant paradigm and their own conditioned consciousness, and bring to us a voice speaking from a higher plane — supraconscious, universal, radiant, serene, glistening, without measure (infinite), without time (eternal).

These are the outsiders who continue to win my heart.