

Conversations with Orland Bishop

Course Two: Love Made Visible

Study Notes & Discussion/Practice Suggestions

<https://charleseisenstein.org/orland-course-two>

Unit 1: The Power of the Word

Orland begins this session by discussing the connection between memory and ceremony. “Memory of anything is sacred to the human being,’ he says. He isn’t referring to cherished memories that we hold precious, but rather anything from the past that impressed itself upon us as memory which we then bring into a present act. In so doing, one establishes conditions for the creation of something new. The conditions are unprecedented, because they include a memory.

What is a human being? Orland offers a view: we are reality’s way of revealing itself to itself. Of course, other animals, and even plants, record and transmit memory, but humans hold that capacity to an extraordinary degree through symbolic culture and the power of story. Our ability of cognition is what allows us to generate new qualities within nature.

In the first unit Orland makes a distinction between creativity and innovation. As he is using the latter term here, it refers to what happens when we “see the world as finished.” If nothing truly new can come into being, then all we can do is shift around the preexisting building blocks. Even worse, we become oriented to extracting novelty from the world rather than adding to it.

Embedded in Orland’s discourse here is a kind of formula for creativity: Source plus Self equals art. We bring in from their source in nature all the geometries, rhythms, and structural patterns that become culture (engineering, art, technology). That process is what he means by the ceremonial order.

Obviously, something is wrong with the human creation called society. What needs to happen for the human creative force to fulfill its potential? Orland gives a most arresting answer: Rediscover the power of the word, which he identifies as “the capacity to give the human being access to the laws of creation.” It encompasses all the arts and sciences; it is what brings the source of creativity into the human realm. Unmoored from beauty, truth, and love, it becomes an evil power, as we can see by so many of its works.

In the second segment we explore the power of the word in more depth. I offer a broad conception of what “prophecy” is, which Orland narrows to draw out an important distinction between true prophecy, which draws on primordial qualities of truth, love, and beauty, and the use of the word to manipulate unconscious agreements. I give the example of “The More Beautiful World our Hearts Know is Possible” as a kind of prophetic phrase, and Orland points out that its truth depends on the perception of that

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future as a being, not a thing. Because beauty is a process, a function of a relationship. This is precisely the kind of perception necessary to restore the power of the word. Orland notes that to see beauty is to forget, or at least forgive, the past. That release also releases us to create a future not captive to the past.

There are so many ways we could work with this material. I will offer just one, inspired by Orland and my mutual friend, Gigi Coyle. She uses the acronym W.A.I.T. – “Why am I talking?” – which she applies to Council training. She asks people to pause before they speak to become clear on what motivates their speaking. There might be multiple motives, such as:

- Getting attention
- Establishing dominance
- Displaying submission to get off the hook
- Signaling in-group membership
- Appearing to be smart
- Displaying conformity
- Starting conflict from which you might benefit
- Making peace
- Persuading someone
- Getting approval
- Making someone feel good about themselves
- Deflecting intimacy
- Inviting intimacy
- Impressing someone
- Serving the needs of the group
- Serving a larger mission
- Signaling your political correctness
- Marking off intellectual territory
- Displaying an identity

I’m sure you can think of many more. Perhaps a few of these are especially relevant to you. The practice of W.A.I.T. is not to shame yourself into changing the way you speak. The recovery of the power of the word is not started with a promise or a resolution.

W.A.I.T. does not mean that you resolve to stop doing those things. It is simply to bring awareness to what was unconscious, trusting that the new consciousness itself launches a process of change. It is an example of the principle of attentiveness that Orland speaks of later. So, please be calmly unashamed of what you notice. Over time, practicing W.A.I.T. will magnify the power of your words. Why? Because they will no longer serve multiple, conflicting goals. They will be in coherence with the higher purpose of speech.

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Unit 2: Bridging Worlds

I think many people resonate with “the tension of carrying a dream for the world that no one believes in” that Orland describes. It is the tension between what we know is possible, and the world as we find it. The enormity of the gap between these two worlds sometimes engenders despair. Sometimes we might not want to abide in this world. Thus, Orland says, “There’s a kind of, of sacrifice in life when the sacred becomes so accessible, that it surpasses your ability to do anything with the current reality.”

He goes on to speak of the process of making that burden light, so that one can sustainably hold the possibility of a sacred future. This lightening – this enlightenment – is both a spiritual and a physical process. Often there is an illness or wound that is part of this process, which requires the expulsion of any inheritance that gets in the way of the higher truth.

Next we go on to discuss this expulsion (Orland uses the term “exorcism”) of forces that have entered human beings and human life unlawfully. One implication of this is that the horrors of the human condition are not actually fundamental to the human condition forever. Humanity once had relationships to beings of protection.

How do we awaken from the paradigms that hypnotize humanity today? Orland offers a paradoxical answer: the awakening happens through sleep. We explored this in more depth in Part 1 of this course; basically, in sleep a connection is renewed to a much bigger reality than the one we are immersed in. If you pay close attention upon waking, you might notice that it takes a few seconds to accept the world again.

Then, in the middle of 2.2, we discuss the recovery of our world-creating power through the recovery of our word-nature in the form of giving meaning, which allows humans to collaborate in world-building. This, says Orland, is the “place where the world begins again.”

In 2.3, we return to the question of sleep. Orland offers some deep insights and principles of practice. How, exactly, do we narrow the gap between what we reconnect to in sleep (“fundamental agreements about life and its purpose”)? How can we ensure that, as Orland puts it, “My dream becomes deposited in my will”? However esoteric it may sound, this teaching is of utmost practical importance. We organize in sleep a world in which we are fully engaged and empowered with our purpose, but then we must live that day that our consciousness created in sleep. That requires the connecting

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of that information to the will. It requires a readiness and willingness to recognize the synchronicities and guideposts set up to direct right action through the day, so that we can fully participate in and serve the highest collective future.

For this session, let us try the practice Orland offers, which I will summarize. It is a practice to be applied on waking, either from sleep or from meditation – both of which “give cognition over to the witness level of consciousness.” He offers a series of mantras, let us call them mantras for waking. Or even put them together as a prayer:

I take responsibility for being awake,
I take interest in being awake.
I rest in my wakefulness.
I carry with me the continuation of this work that I've begun.
I present myself in availability to destiny, as it shows up in the world.
Guide me.

If you can even remember to repeat these to yourself upon waking, that is already quite an accomplishment, quite a practice of will that will strongly affect your day. Say them to yourself with sincerity and understanding, speaking truth to yourself.

To prepare for this practice, first choose one or more of these sentences. Next, envision yourself right now waking up, and say it mentally to yourself. If it feels rote or fake, go into the meaning in your mind, and when you have the meaning, say it again and mean it. The power is not so much in the words as in the intention and understanding behind them.

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Unit 3: Reality Is Not Finished

“Human beings are being initiated by knowledge.” In session 3.1 we touch on two main topics: knowledge and language. Understanding that knowledge in the sense Orland uses it here encompasses technology, the truth of his observation that our knowledge has run away from us is obvious. That which we have created to serve us has become the master, and we have forgotten the source of our power. The nature of our initiation as a civilization is to confront the results of this loss of power and restore it to ourselves.

Modern language, especially English, contributes to this loss by its implicit delusion that the world is finished. Orland calls for a restoration of the relational nature of meaning, even the relational nature of truth. We can revivify English through reverence for the listener (or reader), so that we don’t limit it to a system of arbitrary signs that imposes meaning on the world. The modern conception of language is, like technology, an imposition of power onto the world. In both cases, in the end it is we ourselves that fall victim to that power. This has long been true in the industrial age; it is all the more apparent in the digital. We create with little appreciation for the unintended consequences of our creation, which give form to the shadow motivations behind the creations at the outset. We are like the Magician’s Apprentice, loosing magic on the world without the wisdom to know what we are really doing. The negative consequences proliferate. We use even more “magic” (technology) to manage them, thinking more technology will solve the problems caused by previous technology.

In the next segment, Orland offers a specific application of the power of language channeled through reverence, as applied to conflict. It takes the form of a question, “What do you need from me to be you?” – the essence of hospitality. This section merits repeated listening. He is not advocating capitulation to the other party’s demands. Following the question to its depths, one arrives at something that you can give without depletion. Why? Because it is your purpose to do so, and the enactment of one’s purpose strengthens the life inside.

From Hospitality (What do we need from each other?) arises a sequence of agreements that can profoundly change the world. Please keep in mind that Orland is speaking from direct practical experience here. I get really frustrated with those who accuse him of spiritual bypass, because he has successfully applied this understanding to peacemaking between the Crips and the Bloods in LA, creating practices and mentorships that have brought peace to gang conflicts all over the country. So, he

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knows what he is talking about. Can you imagine how profound the change would be if the same principles were applied universally?

Session 3.3 addresses the question of freedom from the past from a totally different direction. Orland speaks of the freedom available from the initiation of the African people through the Middle Passage into slavery. Such an initiatory ordeal births soul qualities that can become a freedom to create a new future. His words are highly relevant to certain political conversations today. He urges us to look well beyond ‘equity,’ because the resolution of historical exploitation, enslavement, and genocide is not that the formerly oppressed are given an equal seat in the very society that persecuted them (and then goes on to persecute others). It would be to transform the society itself, Not to insert differently colored faces into the same roles, maintaining society as it is.

These three units have all, in one way or another, been about freedom from the past, whether it is technology taking on a life of its own, conflict, or historical socially-perpetuated trauma. Freedom from the past means the freedom to live into a future unlike the past. That requires releasing fixed ideas about another person, oneself, or the world (because these fixed ideas are the product of past experiences). Then we can sincerely ask the question, What do you need from me, to be you? (without thinking we know the answer already.) Let's work with this question. It is an orientation, a state of hospitality and service. We can hold it in relating to another person (in conflict or otherwise), or toward the world in general. (What does the most beautiful future imaginable need from me, so that it can be it?) In either case, you can feel an internal surrender in entering this question. Remember, it doesn't imply capitulating to someone's demands. It seeks to meet what they really need, not what they think they need. What do they really need? You cannot know except through sincere inquiry, communication that holds the other in reverence. I suggest actually using the question itself as a dialog launcher in a tense relationship. Let each party ask the other that question, and spend a few minutes meditating on the reply, and see where it takes you.

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Unit 4: Love and the Agreement Field

“Love is an attractor. If you are holding a future – a beautiful thing for the world -- someone will ask for it.” That is how Orland ends his statement about the “oracles at the margins”: the homeless people of Los Angeles. Enter into their territory with the right consciousness, and they will speak your thoughts back to you and give precious information about the city and its future. This exemplifies a general principle, which is that the salvation of our society, its return to wholeness, is to be found in the banished voices. Who in politics would advocate consulting homeless people as if they were oracles? The audacity of that suggestion shows the breadth of the gap we must cross.

The next two clips are about Los Angeles specifically and the function of the city in general. We bring up themes of hospitality and belonging, and discuss how to apply those to situations outside the city. The city is, ideally, the collective hosting of a possibility, which is why many people who visit cities feel a sense of tremendous possibility there. Other places can also host possibilities, but a city has a special role because there are so many of us there. But for that to happen, there must be a collective field of agreement.

This leads back to the “three agreements” that Orland mentioned in the last session. He clarifies that these are not three specific agreements (like Miguel Ruiz’s Four Agreements). They could be anything that cover important dimensions. These are defined by the three types of love conceived by the ancient Greeks: Eros, Philos, and Agape. We eventually boil them down to three agreement-domains: Yes to life (Eros), Yes to will (Philos), and Yes to the life and will in the other (Agape).

Eros encompasses that which arouses the spirit and feeds the life force. It is the love of life, that wants always to become more alive and create more life. Agreements around it are about holding that principle sacred, serving life of the body.

It is not immediately obvious how the second, Philos (Orland uses the form “Philippe”), translates into and agreement of will. Orland explains that it has to do with the superconscious choice of our family and circumstances, of our connections. It is a taking of responsibility for our choices, and the recognition of a purpose and an intelligence to the conditions of our lives.

Agape is usually understood to be universal, altruistic love. Orland relates it to the recognition that you, as well as I, have a purpose, will, and life force, and that mine and

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yours are fundamentally connected. One cannot be fulfilled by blocking the other. The agreements framed by Agape recognize this principle.

To work with these, perhaps we can attempt to translate these three agreement principles into specific agreements for our own lives. What is your agreement with life, with your will, and with the world? What unconscious agreements may you have carried that do not have the quality of love? What would a new agreement look like that were more faithful to Eros, Philos, and Agape? Actually make a little list – the work of formulating it is already a significant step. The point is not to make it a promise to yourself. It is stir the agreement to life, so that you will recognize the moment you are ready to enter it.