

From the Psychedelic Summit, Santa Cruz 1992

Introduction

Ralph Abraham is a professor of mathematics. He taught here at UCSC for the past 25 years. He is a philosopher and cultural historian, known for his pioneering use of Chaos theory. Please welcome him.

Ralph Abraham

Well, it's a terrific honor to take place here in this parade of generations. Just one short story, not yet finished.

Once upon a time, 25 years ago, I was an orthodox math professor at Princeton University. One day I looked up there and there was a commotion outside and I asked one of my students precocious what was going on. And he gave me LSD.

This began a trip which went on up and down for six years. During this absence from academic mathematics I pursued a strategy of alternating trips and spiritual journeys, each one extended past the starting point of a previous one, with interludes of reading mystical literature, sacred books, and reports of previous travelers from ancient times to the Middle Ages in many different cultures. I also apprenticed myself to teachers and schools.

I found that my new inner experience made it possible to understand what I read in ways that I couldn't understand before I had these inner experiences. This hermeneutical cycle was exactly as described by these early travelers. Among these narratives a certain number of mathematicians seem to be

taking a place in the mystical tradition. And because of my training, I'm better able to understand what they had to say.

So, out of this period of what I could call illuminated, scholarship, emerged a clear picture of a continuous tradition of sacred mathematics from Pythagoras to the Renaissance. And this tradition, which included primary texts from the cultural past, came to the dead end on Easter Sunday, in the year 1600 when Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake in Rome. From that time, till now, this tradition has existed only in the collective unconsciousness.

When I came down from this trip of six years, I found myself in Santa Cruz, exactly 20 years ago. And by coincidence, as it were, that was the very starting moment of the so called chaos revolution.

Since that time, the chaos revolution has developed explosively and has turned science on it's head and penned literature and philosophy to completely new appreciation from a perspective that was lost to us 6000 years ago with the arrival of patriarchy. A major social transformation, I would say, seems to be in progress.

The connection between this social transformation, the chaos revolution, and the psychedelic revolution of the 60s has gradually began to emerge and become clear and reach the public media about two years ago, in GQ magazine.

Anyway, this is the case seen from the perspective of today. A major social transformation has actually been sprung loose in the 1960s through the resumption of an ancient tradition. Under the influence of psychedelics, other major forces and spiritual awakenings converged at that time.

Where this will go from here is an open question. Today we are at a kind of hinge point in history. Where it goes from here, I guess, is up to us.