

The Powers of the Arts

Tools for Directing Life

Robert L. Peck

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The actual power of the Arts has been severely weakened as it has become entertainment or the vehicle for a message rather than the instrument for transformation. Plato described the Arts as food for the soul while gymnastics was food for the body. In the ancient world, the soul was deemed to live in the heart, which was not in the chest, but deep in the bowels or loins (such as in girding up the loins). The Arts were described as opening and then stimulating the heart, loins, or guts.

The early Greek theater used masks to identify a persona or what was in the heart of a player. The heart directed individuals in fulfilling and then projecting to the audience what was placed in the heart. Proverbs expresses the nature of the heart and its power quite succinctly, starting with: a man is what he feels in his heart, and that which is in the heart chooses the path to be taken, but an inner power chooses the steps.¹ The Arts can then be defined as activating the heart, placing a love in the heart, and then directing the manifesting of that love.²

The Greeks called this transformational aspect of the Arts, *Techne*, which included the transference of what was in the artist's heart into the manifesting of that vision or desire. *Techne* also had the less understood requirement of the appreciation of the final form of the initial vision or desire. This creation, transference, or expression of a feeling or insight was widely known as a self-directed madness in the ancient world and was described as releasing the soul from the yoke of custom and convention.³ Plato described the process as requiring four separate inner powers described as: awakening and dedicating (*Apollo*), releasing the mind from social conditioning (*Dionysus*), opening of the heart to special inspiration (*Muses*), then activating the soul as it responded to the inner power of Love (*Eros*).⁴

The actual power of the Arts has been severely weakened as it has become entertainment or the vehicle for a message rather than the instrument for transformation. This has resulted in another form of madness described by Plato which debilitates the individual to conform to the outer world and its rulers rather than the inner creative realm. The ancient world was well aware of the bondage of individuals to the attractions and, of course, the fears of the outer world and developed methods to break this seeking of outer pleasure by finding far greater inner pleasures.

These methods have been largely suppressed while descriptions of them were destroyed in the West and distorted in the East.⁵ There are, however, still two remaining physical reactions of the body that can serve to awaken the body to the power of the Muses or the Arts. These are gut-oriented crying and laughter which produce the flooding of tears. Unfortunately, the muscles and direct control of the muscles used to gird, churn, embroil or enflame the belly are largely undeveloped because of the enforced physical posture and continual tensioning of the body to

¹ *Proverbs*, 23:7, 16:9

² See Chapters 9-10 in R. L. Peck et al. *Directing Life*. Lebanon, CT: Personal Development Center, 2006.

³ Phaedrus, paragraph 268-270

⁴ *ibid.*, also *Directing Life*, Chapter 7

⁵ *ibid.* Chapters 15-16

prevent leakage from the lower openings of the body. In fact, the perineal muscles start to atrophy as one ages,⁶ resulting in increased incontinence as well as the loss of the ability to gird the loins to experience more in life.

The methods of awakening the heart (*Apollo*), and the freeing of the self from attachment to the outer world (*Dionysus*) are commonly used by children as they sob or laugh in order to face new experiences or demands. It is quite likely that the ancient physiologists copied and modified the physical responses of these two strange body reactions to attain direct control over the heart. These methods were used by early groups now labeled as deviant religious or sexual cults.

One outcome of duplicating the various aspects of the inner movement of the lower belly was the sense of euphoria and vitality which may have either resulted from or served to generate singing, dancing and drama. A close study of children playing certainly demonstrates how children will use all of these inner activities to release themselves from the adult world and open to the inner universal and mystical worlds. These worlds are largely closed to adults who cannot forget the self (through *Dionysus*) but are readily found in the imaginary play of children as they find the creative power of the Arts (*Muses*), the discovery of the eternal self (*Aphrodite*) and the hidden power (*Eros*) to attain the goal of the game or what is desired. Children also apply these same steps in countering the innumerable frustrations and pains of life and quickly adapt to a rapidly changing world in a way that most adults cannot even comprehend.

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⁶ *ibid.* Chapter 13