

**Paul Kennedy**

I'm Paul Kennedy and this is *Ideas*.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish" — this quotation from the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament is at the nub of tonight's program, a starting point for the first of a two-part series.

Many Canadian artists have had 'visions,' mystical moments which led to important innovations in the making of their art. The painter Lawren Harris called his "the logic of ecstasy."

He spent almost 40 years making 'non-objective,' abstract canvasses, squiggles of brightly coloured geometry — paintings rarely exhibited now. They're invisible to most Canadians. Looking at them, it's as if Lawren Harris, honoured member of The Group of Seven, never made those cherished paintings of our northern landscape.

So, where did these impressions come from?

Wilderness can be a state of mind. And Harris may have drawn his inspiration from the rivers of the imagination, the streams of consciousness known to First Nations people. A landscape filled with spirits. He may have painted exactly what he actually saw there. His 'abstractions' may, in fact, be the shadows cast by the spirit world.

Tonight, the host of *Tapestry*, Don Hill, invites you on a journey into the dreamland of "Visions & Voices," a journey from rock paintings made before memory begins to the abstract art of our time.

**Don Hill**

**W**e're surrounded by magic, invisible forces. This broadcast, for instance: where is my voice coming from? But if you turn off the technology, the receiver, where does the story go?

Sound effects: Interior of bush plane

**Don Hill**

I'm flying.

The summer of 2000: I was invited north of latitude 55 to a remote rock art location in northern Saskatchewan. "The Indian paintings are ancient,"

my host, Cliff Speer, promised. The pictographs, as they're known to archaeology, are prominent along a rock face that's part of the Churchill River system. "They're hard to get to and rarely seen," he said.

With a canoe lashed to the side of our Beaver, a legendary bush plane, we literally flew off into the wild blue yonder — rivers, lakes, lots and lots of blue — clipping along a few hundred feet over the tops of trees and barefaced rock that makes up the Cambrian Shield. An hour or so later, the plane descended upon Hickson Lake, a location held sacred by some Woodland Cree and known to the few natives who still remember as a 'place of power.'

I've been joined by a few other paddlers. There are nine of us in all.

**Bonnie Hamilton**

I'm Bonnie Hamilton. I'm from the La Ronge area. I was raised in the Lower Foster area, and I've always been interested in coming here.

**Don Hill**

Bonnie is a First Nations Woodland Cree. She's also a storyteller in the oral tradition. Her impressions speak to the spirit of the land.

**Bonnie Hamilton**

I always feel in awe when I see paintings or artifacts done by people long ago, because I feel that they are threads to our past. In Cree, rocks are animate, rocks are alive, and so rocks give off an energy. It also makes me very grateful. I'm always astounded at what they've done. And it's a thought-provoking area...

**Don Hill**

The repetitive beat — paddle in, paddle out — is trance-like, and it would be easy to lapse into a meditation were it not for the pull of the vista beckoning on the horizon. Paddle, paddle, paddle over more open water. Then we veer off into a channel. On the left flank, a cliff-face rises straight up from the water. The right shore, not as vertical, yet equally spectacular, looks like a natural cathedral setting. Yes, the whole place has a 'churchy' feel to it. Hardly a sound, other than the wind, an occasional squawk from a distant raven.

“There they are, on the left,” my companion points, breaking the silence.

Sketched in a red ochre, 2 to 3 feet above the waterline are simple, childlike depictions of animals, people, the sun and perhaps the moon. Faded by time and weather, some of the pictographs aren't much to look at, but to someone in the know, these are images of the spirit.

### **Tim Jones**

My name's Tim Jones. A number of possible explanations have been posited for the creation of the rock art of the Canadian Shield.

### **Don Hill**

Tim is the executive director of the Saskatchewan Archaeological Society. He's also the author of several technical papers on rock art.

### **Tim Jones**

The most likely origin or reason for the creation of the paintings has to do with spirituality and the use or the creation of the paintings by shamans, people with special skills, special insights and using medicine in the broad sense of the word.

### **Don Hill**

Over a quarter-mile stretch are dozens of pictographs, most of them congregated along gallery-like faces of rock. The majority must have been painted from a canoe because they're only accessible by water. There are images on the ledges higher up, but only a handful.

All of the paintings are in red ochre. They could be hundreds, perhaps a thousand years old or more. Their true age, Tim tells me, has been disguised by a thin film of mineral deposits, which coat and protect the images during spring runoff. It's not even clear what the pictographs are all about, although Bonnie Hamilton recognizes some universal theme.

### **Bonnie Hamilton**

It was a man changing into an animal. I don't know how to translate the Cree word, but it's Bawaganak, and I thought that it was his helper. They come to you in your dreams and help you and give you strength. That's what I felt those were. And there's two of them on the rocks that I found, but they were far apart, and they look pretty neat. If you were much

more powerful, like a medicine man, you could send your dreamspeaker to do battle for you, like, let's say, against another medicine man or against somebody who was not nice to you in some way. It's something sort of unsaid.

### **Tim Jones**

Basically, you've got art that's standing up literally in space. It's not buried. You can't excavate it. You've got very big problems with dating and so on. But it's out there. And what do you do with it? How do you reconstruct what happened when that particular set of paintings or that set of carvings was made.

### **Don Hill**

Tim Jones is careful not to label the rock art with a specific interpretation. He has to be. Within the academic discipline of archaeology, the profession has only grudgingly acknowledged pictographs as a marker to the divine, and they continue to be a source of controversy.

### **Tim Jones**

A lot of the world's rock art in the past has been explained away as 'hunting magic,' sympathetic magic. It's an old notion that comes actually from Europe from some of the first studies of the cave art, when it was discovered late in the last century. That was one of the main hypotheses that developed, and it's really stuck around for a long time, and it shouldn't have.

### **Bonnie Hamilton**

I have not tried interpreting them in any way. I really look at them in awe. And I think of what reality could have been for them at that time and what my reality is now. But there's a few that are still carried through, like the theme of the Thunderbird, women, men, animals. Those themes carry on throughout our lives, and so it's sort of a thread to the past, but it's also a curiosity

### **Tim Jones**

Some of the animals they're depicting are real animals, if you can call a stick figure of a moose a real animal. But others are definitely not something that you would see unless under certain special circumstances.

### **Don Hill**

South African archeologists David Lewis-Williams and Thomas Dowson first proposed that aboriginal rock art found in locations around the world were made by shamans in an altered state of consciousness. Writing their dreams upon the rock marked the outcome of their vision quest.

Kevin Callahan is a graduate student at the University of Minnesota. His Masters thesis was on shamanism and Native American pictographs and petroglyphs. Pictographs are found painted over the rock, and petroglyphs carved into it. I called him up at his home in Minneapolis-St. Paul.

### **Kevin Callahan**

It was very important for someone who was on a vision quest to remember the dream, because it was a gift from the other world, and it was part of the power. So when you were gaining power by going on a vision quest and gaining information, you had to remember it. As everybody knows, when you wake up from a dream, you tend to forget it unless you write it down. So there's some indication that the petroglyphs were quickly pecked out in order to remember both what was in the vision and also the spot where it was gained and where that power came from so that, if you were going to go back to that spot to have a contact with the other world or spirit world, that you could go back to the spot where you had that vision.

### **Don Hill**

If it's true that the images are depictions of what the shaman actually saw during trance, then much of it looks like 'entoptic' imagery.

### **Dave Whitley**

'Entoptic' is a Greek word, and basically it means 'within or behind the eye.'

### **Don Hill**

Dave Whitley is a professor of archeology at UCLA. He's the leading authority on California rock art.

### **Dave Whitley**

And it refers to the fact that, in certain circumstances, our optical system and our brain will generate imagery internal to itself, will interpret those as being things we're seeing. But we're not really seeing them in the outside world. They're in our brain.

### **Don Hill**

Entoptic images are geometric shapes: zigzags, wavy lines, visual dits and dots and crosshatches, like a grid for a game of X's and O's. They're part of the brain's underlying architecture for sight.

### **Dave Whitley**

Now, the circumstances under which those are generated commonly would include a trance, an altered state of consciousness or a hallucination, a blow to the head, a migraine headache perhaps. We can generate them if we stare at a bright light and close our eyes and then press our eyelids. We will see those geometric patterns.

### **Maureen Korp**

The other thing that truly is universal are the existence of phosphenes or photisms.

### **Don Hill**

Maureen Korp teaches art history and religious studies at Carleton University. Dr. Korp has visited rock art sites around the world.

### **Maureen Korp**

And those are those little squiggles and the lines and the dots and things that you find in a hypnagogic state, which is where your brain is as you're about to fall off to sleep. Your eyes are closed, and you're seeing these little, bright splotches. Sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes. Or if you're not wearing contact lenses, you could do this right now: close your eyes, and press very lightly on the eyelid, and you'll see exactly what I'm talking about. Those squiggles show up everywhere. They show up on pottery, they show up in embroidery, they show up on the walls of Lascaux. The question is, what do they mean? But the form itself, that's the human being making it.

### **Dean Radin**

I think it's quite clear, if you look at indigenous drawings and just ancient drawings, going back to caveman days, a lot of it is imagery which simply, naturally seems to flow out of the brain in altered states. So it is not surprising to me that some images — certain swirls, certain boxes and so on — are considered archetypal, because they're actually as

archetypal as you can get. They're coming out of the neural structure of the body itself.

### **Don Hill**

Dean Radin, author of **The Conscious Universe**. You'll be hearing more from Dr. Radin and Dr. Korp later in the series.

Our canoes slip silently past each pictograph, from panel to panel, until we come alongside a large crack in the rock, a geophysical fault, which frames an arch in the cliff face. It's like a small grotto but large enough to shelter one canoe. Yet I am not alone here. From the inside looking out, a pictograph outlines a solo paddler in another vessel, the bow pointing out from the rock toward the channel, as if heading out of a portal. Dave Whitley...

### **Dave Whitley**

Native Americans actually are quite specific about the cracks. Quite simply, they're the doors to the supernatural. When the shaman went into a trance, it was said the cracks would open up, and he would walk in. One of the results is, we do sometimes find offerings that are probably prehistoric in age that were left in these cracks. The cracks were essentially the doorway. You leave an offering in that crack, and it's like leaving a present on the doorstep of the spirit that's inside.

### **Don Hill**

Everyone left an offering along the ledge, our canoes hugging the cliff face on the waterline. Cliff Speer laid out a pouch of tobacco. I set aside three stones, purple amethysts from northern Ontario. One of them slipped out of my hand, fell into the depths. The loud splash kind of startled me.

The sound here has a tightness to it. The water lapping between the canoe and the wall of the rock gives off an odd 'splooshing' sound — a peculiar echo.

Repetitive sounds, prolonged rounds of drumming and chanting are known to induce trance. The flicker and dance of shadows from a fire. Deep breathing too. It's said the rock paintings will speak to those who 'listen,' reveal its secrets to those who can 'see.'

In the second stage of trance, cartoon-like figures appear, animated in some instances, pulsating as if alive.

"The third stage is somatic," says Kevin Callahan. "Your body stretches out of shape as you start to fly around or dig deep into the ground. You can morph. Extra fingers or toes show up. You might even turn into an animal, like a wolf or bear, feel your whole body change. And it all seems very real," Kevin said.

Here, along the channel near Hickson Lake in northern Saskatchewan, several of the pictographs remind me of the 'shapeshifters' Kevin described. Bonnie Hamilton...

### **Bonnie Hamilton**

I felt it was a person coming out of the animal and changing back to a person. I don't think of it as a shapeshifter. I think of it more on a mental plane, not physically changing but mentally changing. I think by having *upawogon* you have the power to be able to move but using your brain. That's what I tend to think.

### **Don Hill**

Over the years, I've visited several 'rock art' locations, recorded my travels on film and video. The remarkable thing about pictographs and petroglyphs is how similar they look around the world. The entoptic imagery appears to jump between cultures, even when distance and chronology have deemed it impossible for civilizations to have had contact with each other. It's like some kind of strong magic has been invoked. The same visions arise, and the same story remains to be seen again and again.

Modern science verifies this. Medical research has determined all human beings have common experiences in altered states of consciousness. The content of the dream-like states may differ, but the process of human perception in trance is the same.

Kevin Callahan is expert on the rock art of Minnesota.

### **Kevin Callahan**

I think human beings are, generally speaking, wired similarly in terms of our neurology. The experiments that have been done by the medical community indicate that there are some common patterns to

what we all perceive as we go through the stages into deeper altered states of consciousness.

Some people, however, are better at going into altered states than others, and those people tended to become shamans.

If you ask people around you that you know what experiences they've had with things like encounters with unexplained phenomena, frequently those things can be explained through the medical model. But most people who actually experience them believe they're real, because their senses tell them that what they're experiencing is real. I can't really be disparaging in any way of people who believe that the experiences that they've had are real.

There's a lot of research on this that indicates that sometimes people firmly believe something to be true which an independent observer watching them would indicate is not true. For example, in the Middle Ages, witches believed that they flew on broomsticks, and that was a result of atropine which was ingested through the skin, and there were people standing right over them who watched them throughout the whole process, and they could not convince them that they had not gone flying on a broomstick, even though they had been standing over them from the beginning of the process of entering altered states until they came out of it. It's two views of the same experience: one from the outside and one from the inside.

#### **Don Hill**

Tim Jones...

#### **Tim Jones**

In the rock art of Texas, for example, and southern California, there's some unbelievable polychromatic art that archaeologists have shown is really directly connected to taking of substances that cause hallucinations. What the people are depicting there are actual visions or things that they're seeing in real life, so to speak, really colorful things that you're seeing right before your eyes.

#### **Don Hill**

Are these rock art depictions are what the shaman actually saw?

#### **Kevin Callahan**

The depictions could be of things that were seen during altered states of consciousness. The most common instructions would follow something like this: they'd say, "You should go out to the vision quest site and stay awake for about four days." During that time period, you would smoke tobacco, fast and pray and so forth.

The medical studies that have been done with college students have indicated that, after four days after intense concentration and staying awake, that they would see things like people that weren't really there. They'd see the room break up into tiny little particles and start shimmering. So the instructions for the vision quest pretty much parallel what medical doctors have found when they've had subjects go through sleep deprivation.

#### **Don Hill**

It also sounds like a pathology.

#### **Kevin Callahan**

It isn't a pathology. What it is is, the altered state of consciousness is like a waking dream. In your brain stem, it's like a light switch that goes on and off, and if you can toggle that so that you're conscious while you're dreaming, you have the equivalent of a hallucination or a waking dream.

This has been used by other modern artists. For example, Salvador Dali is an example of someone who would have an assistant wake him up when he went into rapid-eye-movement sleep or the period of sleep when you're dreaming. And when he would wake up, he'd be having a waking dream. He'd be hallucinating. And then he used those images in his artwork.

#### **Don Hill**

Kevin Callahan.

We need to stay awake to dream, to remember, to become aware of the shadows of the spirit.

Before the advent of photography, the visual arts were preoccupied with making faithful depictions of the landscape. They called it 'representational art.' Realism captured by a simple snapshot liberated painters to look elsewhere. And by the late 19<sup>th</sup>

century, the canon of Western art was beginning to look quite different. Things began to blur. Impressions became paramount. Stimulants, like laudanum and absinthe, were the potions of choice, and some of the artwork began to reflect those choices.

The unconscious was new territory. Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung staked claims on the real estate once held exclusively by religion. The fathers of psychiatry and modern psychology spoke to the artists of their day, presented them with a challenge to go into the 'mindscape' and capture it to canvas and musical score.

It was a small book, well under a hundred pages. But when **Concerning the Spiritual in Art** was published in 1912, it caused a sensation, a revolution in art. Representational painting was dead. Long live 'non-objective' art. That message was delivered by Wassily Kandinsky, an aristocrat of Russian heritage who made his mark in Munich, one of the great centres for cultural pursuits before the First World War.

Kandinsky's paintings are world famous. They're abstract, the art historians assure us, non-objective. But to my eye, the geometric shapes, lines, even some of the colours, bear a stunning resemblance to rock art.

Did Kandinsky paint what he actually saw? And what did he really mean by the title of his manifesto, **Concerning the Spiritual in Art**? I've only read the book in English translation. It was originally published in German as **Über das Geistige in der Kunst**. The word *geistige* casts several shadows. It can literally mean 'ghost' or 'spirit,' as getting into the spirit of things. *Das geistige* can also mean 'the unknown.'

Sharyn Udall is an art historian. She's expert in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century art and teaches at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

### Sharyn Udall

'Spiritual' is the translator's word here. We know that Kandinsky's book, for example, had several different titles in translation, and it depends on what your emphasis might be. I don't think he meant it so much as 'spiritual' in the context of religious, which is what

we modern-day Americans and maybe Canadians want to connect, but that rather the realm of mind and imagination is divorced from physical, touchable, positivist reality that we're talking about here.

But I do think that Kandinsky believed that there was an important spiritual underpinning possible in art and that an artist who wanted to could access some of that information. In fact, he talked about the coming age in art when the spiritual could be made visible and that this is the real task of the artist, to try to make visible that which might be only partially perceived now or invisible and that this was the untouched realm that artists could have access to. He thought, through such stimuli as vibrations or colour, which was a very important element for Kandinsky, that an artist could transfer or translate emotion into visual form.

### Don Hill

Painters who had been confined to representing three-dimensional space now began to think about a fourth dimension as a possible realm for contemplation. "What might a fourth dimension look like?" visual artists asked among themselves, "How would it feel? What might it sound like?"

### Don Hill

The hotbed for music and artistic expression was Europe, in particular, France and Germany, an exciting place for a young Canadian in his early twenties to study. His name was Lawren Harris.

Lawren Harris absorbed the sights and sounds of Europe and its revolutionary ideas about visual art. In 1913, he visited New York and the Armory Show, which introduced North Americans to non-objective art. Marcel Duchamp's **Nude Descending a Staircase** was a scandal and a revelation.

And a year later, the slaughter of the First World War changed everything again. With much of Europe in ruins, Lawren Harris tumbled and fell into a deep depression following the death of his brother on the killing fields. It was 1918, and he turned to theosophy as a way out of his despair.

Theosophy is a kind of stew of the world's great religions. Its founder, Madame Blavatsky, braided principles of Eastern mysticism — Buddhist and

Hindu beliefs — with elements of Western scientific thought. The result was an attractive argument for the evolution of consciousness and the idea that spirit was ever-present and everlasting.

Theosophy had a profound influence on the leading people of the day. Artists like Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian were followers. And by the end of the 1920s, theosophy had perpetuated itself in the art world to the point where people could be talking its principles and not know it.

Lawren Harris was particularly attracted to the theosophical notion that nature is more profound than science can explain and that spirituality is present in everything — an affirmation, in many respects, of a First Nations outlook on the world.

Madame Blavatsky, the founder of the theosophical movement, once claimed that, “hidden in the vastness of the Rocky Mountains lies a secret sanctuary where ancient adepts and sages live to this day, preserving the ‘secret doctrine’ and guiding the destiny of the planet.” Lawren Harris believed this was true.

Just prior to his journey west to the Rockies on a painting expedition in 1924 and after a long flirtation, Lawren Harris officially joined the Toronto Theosophical Society. By this time, the mystical sect, whose followers in Canada were in the thousands, counted among its numbers the elite of Toronto society, business and the arts.

On one of his many trips hiking above the tree line along mountaintops, Lawren Harris fell into a trance-like state, then babbled incomprehensibly in a strange language. His sketching companion, Bertram Charles Binning — B.C. to his friends — was witness to a surreal outburst of ‘glossalalia,’ better known as speaking in tongues.

This experience, coupled with other extraordinary events, pushed Lawren Harris to reject some of the responsibilities imposed by his status as a wealthy man of privilege. And in 1934, he walked away from his marriage to Trixie, his wife of many, many years. He walked away from social convention and married his best friend’s wife. He walked away from Toronto and scandal and ran toward an indistinct call, fumbling, bumping along his way toward

enlightenment, as if it was a location, hanging on to anyone he encountered who might know of ‘the way.’

Ann Davis is a professor of art history at the University of Calgary. She’s the author of **The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting 1920-1940**.

### Ann Davis

Lawren Harris, the very famous Canadian painter and thinker, started off as a painter painting recognizable forms. However, by the mid-1930s, he started painting abstractions. He had a whole lot of trouble getting into this. So Harris tried to parse abstraction. He tried to figure out what Kandinsky and these other Europeans were doing and why they were doing it. He wrestled with this. I’d like, if I may, to read you a little bit of this wrestle. Harris had some wonderful correspondence with Emily Carr, and in a letter to Emily Carr after a 1930 trip that Harris took to Europe, he talked about the differences between European and North American art, and in specific, he talked about this problem of his not being sure about the validity of abstraction. So he wrote to Carr, “I cannot yet feel that abstract painting has greater possibilities of depth and meaning than art based on nature and natural forms. As you say, it so frequently becomes arid. But of course, it need not. I’ve seen almost no abstract things that have deep resonance that stirs and answers and satisfies the soul, however. But that doesn’t say that some painter may not produce them tomorrow or the next day. To you and me and others, the representational as representational means nothing. The spirit, everything. But we cannot get the spirit without the use of representation in some degree.”

So, what I think that Harris is saying here is, first of all, he’s not interested in trees and mountains per se. He’s interested in trees and mountains as symbolic of the spirit or, perhaps going back, symbolic of that unknown. This is in 1930. So, yes, somebody like Lawren Harris and somebody like Kandinsky did say, were saying, that what they were painting was actually things that they were seeing, not seeing with their eye outward, but seeing with their eye inward, seeing with their soul.

### Don Hill

What if Ann Davis has it only half-right? What if Lawren Harris actually painted what he saw? Not

with the mind's eye. But what actually manifested itself in his visual field. In a moment, I'll present some evidence to suggest that's exactly what happened.

In 1998, I was commissioned by CBC Television to write an outline for a show reconstructing the correspondence between the artist Emily Carr and Lawren Harris. Some of the letters were missing and were considered lost. A couple of tantalizing clues overlooked by art historians persuaded me to hit the road and follow up on a hunch. I haven't found what I'm looking for. Not yet. But I did travel just about everywhere Lawren Harris went in North America: New Hampshire, Colorado, BC and Alberta. I experienced the landscape as he might have, got a sense of what he saw and must have felt in the 'sacred places' he visited. Even sat on a bus for two days retracing his trip to Santa Fe from Chicago down the old Route 66, the road he would have taken. And I visited people, artists who knew Lawren Harris and academics who know things about his art.

The latter works of Lawren Harris, those mysterious squiggles of paint laden over with precise geometry, are rarely discussed by art historians. And they're pretty much forgotten by the public, his paintings with the Group of Seven more fondly recalled. Harris could have cared less.

#### **Gordon Smith**

If you look at his painting — I admired his art so much — he was the one, at that time, who didn't have much interest in his past, in the early days of the Group of Seven.

#### **Don Hill**

Gordon Smith is a prominent West Coast artist. He and his wife, Marion, knew Lawren Harris, enjoyed a close friendship in Vancouver until his death in 1970.

#### **Gordon Smith**

Harris always had all his antennae going. I think it was pretty daring at the time. A lot of people discount the abstract paintings of Harris, which is very sad. They were put aside. But I think some of those abstract paintings are beautiful, beautiful paintings.

#### **Don Hill**

We're thumbing through photo albums, memorabilia, art prints and catalogues. Some of the simple line

drawings Lawren Harris made in the 1940s catch my eye. They look a lot like the images I've seen painted on canyon walls and cliff faces, and a couple are dead ringers for the rock art I've seen in my travels. Then Marion Smith points to an austere, yet hauntingly beautiful, image. It's a painting by Lawren Harris, one of his last.

#### **Marion Smith**

It used to be in his living room on the easel.

#### **Gordon Smith**

I saw him painting that.

#### **Marion Smith**

He was working on that towards the end of his life.

#### **Don Hill**

It has all the markings of a theosophical 'thought form' — stark geometry — coloured with a luminous kind of ochre floating in the middle distance. And it occurred to me then and there that Harris, like a shaman in trance, must have seen this image, taken it all in whole. He painted what he saw, and I said as much to Gordon Smith, his longtime friend and a fellow artist.

#### **Gordon Smith**

I think that's the most significant statement I've heard yet. That's summarizing it. I think that's very good.

#### **Marion Smith**

Other people used to think Lawren was senile by that time.

#### **Don Hill**

Or had lost it completely.

#### **Marion Smith**

Yes. Well, one nice person we knew said we should just — whatever. We never thought that. Gordon always appreciated those paintings very much and that particular one. And we didn't know why we did.

#### **Gordon Smith**

To me, that last painting he did was one of the most beautiful paintings I've seen, that one.

#### **Arthur Erickson**

I think he was in touch with his own spirit, his spiritual side, and he spoke of these experiences with great enthusiasm.

### Don Hill

That's Arthur Erickson. As a young man, the future architect was a regular guest at the Harris home in Vancouver. So I put the same question to him: Did Harris paint what he saw? Are his latter works, his abstractions, in fact, representational works of art.

### Arthur Erickson

Yes, I think they were consciously that. I know Lawren, whenever he did a new painting and saw something and might be admiring it, either Lawren or Bess would say, "This is the result of a spiritual experience in the mountains mostly." There was always a lot of conversation about the experiences they had in the mountains, which were the exhilaration of extraordinary space and the presence of the spirit. You felt it was something that they were involved with. It was terribly important. They felt it was the most revelatory information possible.

### Don Hill

That Lawren Harris was in contact with forces larger than himself is hinted at again and again in his journals. This bit of critical writing published in an art magazine jumped out at me: "Art is the beginning of vision," Harris wrote in his book review of **Cosmic Consciousness**, now considered a classic of arcane literature. "There is a logic of ecstasy, and this higher logic is the only one worthy of consideration," Harris advised. "Art is the beginning of vision into the realm of higher life."

### Don Hill

It's probable that rock art marks the recollection of the shaman's journey through states of consciousness, not just dreams, not just death.

The recordings are of a lucid jaunt through waking states where one is never certain if they're the centre of their own experience: encounters with 'aha!' moments, cartoonish, surreal, amplified, sometimes overpowering and life-changing.

So, what is one to make of modern compositions that depict entoptic imagery, stuff that appears to be a facsimile of rock art?

Maureen Korp lectures widely on the history of religion and art history. Her recent book, **Sacred Art of the Earth**, is based upon a questionnaire completed by over a hundred artists.

### Maureen Korp

They were having dreams, visions, paranormal experiences, which I asked about in my questionnaire. They were more than willing to tell about them, and they were, as the analysis showed, much more likely to be influenced by the information they obtained through these extraordinary means than through any life crisis or life event. In other words, they weren't about to go chopping off their ears and jumping off bridges because they were artists. They were driven by their visions to map them in some way for others. They spoke of themselves as 'mediums,' and they meant it.

Then I took those descriptions of paranormal experiences, and many of them were rather familiar things. We've all had instances of ESP. While we're thinking about somebody, the phone rings. Isn't that marvellous. And I put them into categories. Some of them were unusual. Out-of-body experiences are not everyday things.

I had a leftover group that I didn't know what to do with, and they were of a sort with intensification of colour, generally of colour, sometimes of line, sometimes of object, but there was an intensification of visual perception.

### Don Hill

Amplified to almost cartoonish-looking and very thick lines and intense, in some cases, pulsating colours?

### Maureen Korp

All of that, all of that.

So here I had this little group. I had gotten my categories by checking with a psychologist to find out what the approved definitions were, and this group wasn't in there. So I called him up, and I said, "Bruce, I've got this little category — about six or seven of these left over — and I don't know what to do with them, and here's what they sound like..." And I read the written descriptions out to him. He said, "Oh, that's called ecstasy." I said "Come again." He said, "Ecstasy: it's a paranormal category." I took a deep breath, and I said, "Bruce, if I am walking along the street, and the light hits a leaf in a

particular sort of way, and I happen to catch it, and it gives my day a little lift — in fact, I might stare at it for a while and get really into just delighting in the way that leaf is looking and the light is hitting it, and I might even start to think about writing a poem about that, since I am a poet — that is called ‘ecstasy’?” He said, “Yes, it’s a paranormal category.” I said, “I can’t believe this. This is guaranteed event in my life a couple of times a week.”

### **Landon Mackenzie**

The only thing you need as a painter, in terms of a technology or technique, is the ability to make those transformations. It’s really the transformations between parts of the painting, learning to recognize what it is so that the process is yes, no, okay, that’s it, no, that’s not it, okay, get rid of that, okay, okay, yeah, I’m getting somewhere, I’m getting somewhere, I’m getting somewhere. So it’s not exactly hard science.

### **Don Hill**

This is Landon Mackenzie. She lives in Vancouver and teaches at the Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design. Her large canvasses are collected in major galleries around the world.

### **Landon Mackenzie**

If you have Lawren Harris in the desert, pretending that he’s actually painting the mountain that’s in front of him — because a lot of artists from that era were kind of geared up to paint observationally — of course, they leave it the minute they enter the realm of the wet, sticky stuff. So when you talk about representational space versus abstract space, you could argue that all work is abstract, even if it looks representational. You could argue that all representational painting is abstract, or you could argue the opposite, that all abstract painting is representational, because basically it’s the service of a colour, a mark and a shape to allude to another idea. Then people bring their completion. So in one part of the painting, there may be this blue and gold blob. Now, I don’t know exactly what that is, but I’ve kept it because I can’t name it, but I can recognize it.

### **Don Hill**

Landon Mackenzie’s art is concerned with mythmaking and how stories rooted in a sense of place — the landscape — appear, disappear and yet somehow can be accounted for over time. Some of

her ideas remind me of David Hockney’s work, and I tell her about one piece of his I particularly like: a photo montage.

It’s a single scene that’s been photographed over a period of a few years. The angle is the same. So is the subject matter: a person in a fixed pose. Yet the image I’m looking at is a mosaic, a composite of all the photographs taken. They’ve been ripped up, mixed up and reassembled like an interlocking jigsaw puzzle. It’s a clever statement. Multiples of an image taken at different times assemble into a frozen, unique moment — an aesthetic I understand in the here and now. And while the depiction of the person initially draws my attention, it’s the details around the principal subject that tell a bigger story. It’s like seeing all of this person’s time all at once. Kind of like the feeling I have when visiting a rock art site: the timeless sense of being in a place that’s been witness to many, many people. I can feel their presence there. Maureen Korp...

### **Maureen Korp**

I asked one question that was a key question in the survey. I asked whether the artist had had experience in a particular place, a sense of ancient times or powers. The response rate was astounding. Seventy-nine per cent of the artists had had those experiences. And because it was an open-ended questionnaire and there was plenty of space for them to write, they wrote, and they wrote, and they wrote, and they wrote. They wrote things about how these experiences had taught them that there was no such thing as heaven or hell, that life continued. One artist put it memorably: “Nature doesn’t waste energy.”

That’s how I discovered that what I had been taught in school as ‘artistic vision’ — meaning the artist has a good idea, goes to the studio and does something about it — was erroneous, that artistic vision actually was visual. It was something the artist could see and attempted to find a way to map for other people so that the viewer or the participant in the environment, if that person would take the time to look and to look long enough — to trace the lines, to trace the colours, to walk the steps — that you move into the mentality of the person who made that event. And at that point, you’re replicating some of that information, and you begin to trade a story line, if you will, back and forth. That is remarkable, but it happens across time, and it happens across culture. And now I

understand why it is that people go to places and know things that they shouldn't be able to know just from reading the guidebook.

### **Don Hill**

"Cultures around the globe," says Olga Luchakova, a professor of psychology and religion, "have regarded certain places, mostly mountains, as sacred." And rock art tends to show up around many of these locales. This marks them as a 'power spot.'

Dr. Luchakova and her colleague Igor Kungurtsev earned their degrees in St. Petersburg, Russia, and have travelled extensively, studying mystical traditions and how different regions of the earth affect people's state of mind and their spiritual practices. "In Slavic pagan sorcery, the whole body was used as a refined instrument for perceiving the energy of the earth, trees, rocks and streams," Dr. Kungurtsev said. In other words, the planet, all of creation, communicates to those who can hear and reveals itself to those who can see.

Dean Radin, author of **The Conscious Universe**...

### **Dean Radin**

A case can be made that indigenous peoples and shamans of old were the scientists of their days and, simply through virtue of their own body and their own perception, were able to identify that some spots were different than others and different in certain ways. There are all kinds of different places you can be, but these places that later were called 'sacred spots' or 'power spots' were probably felt to produce the kinds of altered states of consciousness that the shaman wanted to produce.

### **Don Hill**

I'm not certain if there are any contemporary rock art locations. I haven't seen any. It's as if the shamans went underground, while we, in the dominant culture, buried ourselves in materialism.

Where did the dreams go? The rock seems silent now. And yet it beckons. That's why I travelled to northern Saskatchewan by bush plane and canoe: to be in the presence of the shaman's pictographs.

What if rock art is a kind of El Dorado, its secrets hidden in plain view for all to see? And for those who can see, they begin to see once more. For those who can hear, the story reveals itself.

All human beings have the capacity to experience trance states. And because our brains are pretty much the same as they've been for many millennia, is it possible to get into the state of mind of shamans long ago, experience their world, hear the story, see it once more? Dave Whitley...

### **Dave Whitley**

When Native American commentary tells us time and time again that rock art sites were vision quest sites, that they portrayed the visionary imagery that they saw in their supernatural experiences, I must believe that. I think it's extremely ethnocentric not to.

But the other bit of controversy concerns the idea whether or not we can reconstruct aspects of the minds of prehistoric people. And frankly, my profession, archaeology, has long felt that the prehistoric mind is entirely inaccessible. I think they're wrong. The mountains agree!

Sound effect: Loud boom

### **Don Hill**

It was an auspicious moment. Dr. Whitley and I, startled by the loud boom, wondered what else the mountains on the edge of the Mojave Desert might have to say.



**Paul Kennedy**

I'm Paul Kennedy and this is *Ideas*.

Voices — for some, they can be a revelation, a calling. Moses heard voices several times. The prophets Elijah and Isaiah did too. They heard the voice of God, an authority that informs many of the books of the Old Testament. It seems voices have always been with us. Teresa of Avila, among other mystics, put her saintly enthusiasms down to taking dictation. And modern-day channellers, seers and psychics claim to be in touch with divine sources that speak directly to them.

Don Hill is the host of *Tapestry* on CBC Radio One, and tonight, in the final installment of this two-part series, he investigates the muses that speak from the outside and in. "Visions and Voices," Part 2, by Don Hill.

**Don Hill**

I hear voices. You heard me say that, didn't you? You heard my voice distinctly, as if I'm talking to you, directly to you and only you. That's what radio does well. It creates a sense of intimacy. It's like magic. I send, you receive, and we think nothing of it.

Now, imagine if this was over a hundred years ago. No radio. Not even a crystal set to pick up signals. Yet here I am, talking to you. What would you make of my voice then?

I hear voices. When I read quietly to myself, mostly it's my own voice I hear. But a sentence in quotation marks silences the 'me' that's talking in my head. And a stranger's voice comes to mind. I can hear that person, that character, that voice.

It also happens when I write, except in reverse — an occupational hazard, I'm told. "Sometimes he won't shut up," an exasperated author said of one of her fictional creations. It's as if the character takes on a life of its own.

Voices in the head, a muse, inspiration telling me what to do — sometimes it scares the hell out of me.

Eddie Ensley hears voices, sees things too. He's Cherokee, a Native American and a deacon candidate in the Roman Catholic Church. He holds a

graduate degree in theology.

**Eddie Ensley**

At an earlier age, say, the 14th century, visions were seen as widespread. We have thousands of accounts of them in ordinary people. Your name didn't have to begin with 'saint.'

**Don Hill**

Eddie Ensley has written several books over the 40 years he's studied mystical experience. His latest is called **Visions: The Soul's Path to the Sacred**. His first, in print since the 1970s, is **Sounds of Wonder: Speaking in Tongues in the Catholic Tradition**.

**Eddie Ensley**

All of us are touched by wonder. All of us are touched by awe. In fact, one Lutheran minister with a Ph.D. in theology from Harvard and a sociologist, Milo Brecht, did a survey of average parishioners in Protestant and Catholic churches in Minnesota and found that 30 per cent have had, at some time in their life, dramatic prophetic dreams, hearing the voice of God. A *Wall Street Journal* poll said that 40 per cent of Americans believe that God speaks to them weekly. So, we're speaking of something that's quite widespread.

**Don Hill**

The National Opinion Research Centre at the University of Chicago also found that, of the 3,000 Americans surveyed in the late 1990s, people from across the social spectrum, more than 40 per cent believed they had been contacted by a deceased loved one, and close to 70 per cent reported moments of extrasensory perception.

**Eddie Ensley**

Most of us have one major experience of the mystical in our lives. About 5 per cent are frequent experiencers. That's a lot of people. In fact, that's more people than play golf well. That's a lot more people than play the piano well. And it's not a particularly elite group of people.

**Don Hill**

Voices — they're everywhere and nowhere in particular.

I'm going to skip around a bit, go non-linear. There's a reason for this, and it will become apparent by the end of the program.

In 1995, I lived in Vancouver, and the 'Wet Coast,' being kind of 'out there,' I was introduced to notions about divination and the spirit. I was on a quest. I was looking for answers to a mystery. I had been haunted by a sense of presence in the Rocky Mountains, and I thought the house I was living in had a ghost in it.

Ann McNeil, a Tibetan Buddhist nun I know in Vancouver, recommended a psychic. "Sara's top notch, really knows her stuff," she said. An oracle. How can you tell? I thought. It's not as if there's a Consumer Reports on the reliability of soothsayers and seers. But I was game. There was nothing to lose. Although I felt kind of embarrassed for visiting.

Sara — why do most psychics only go by their first name? Sara's place of business was in her home, a modest walk-up apartment in Kitsilano, a trendy part of Vancouver.

### **Sara Geary**

This ability has developed over time to the point where I can remove myself, my personality self and emotional, mental self, from the scene and allow somebody else to talk through me. Now, I'm aware that there's a debate as to whether this is my subconscious. I can't explain how it works. I just know that it does work.

### **Don Hill**

What Sara is talking about is channelling, tuning into voices, spirits who take over, speak through her. Yikes! I thought, here I am cavorting with the New Age crowd. Well, not quite. More like the Middle Ages. Medieval in this case. Sara's principle guide is a Tibetan monk from the 6th century, a guy called Masia.

### **Sara Geary**

Okay, so, take a little bit of time.

### **Don Hill**

Sara is going into trance now, a kind of waking dream.

### **Sara Geary** (channelling)

Good afternoon to you. It's a pleasure to be here with you.

### **Don Hill**

I kept my questions neutral, didn't load them with any information which Sara might turn around and impress me with. Simple queries like, Is anyone trying to contact me?

### **Sara Geary** (channelling)

Well, I would put it to you, Mr. Don, that who is trying to contact you is yourself! The other realities that you exist in, within the present time, are wishing to connect and be manifested through this plane so that the challenges, the endeavors that you chose to incorporate within your soul journey will be overcome or will be assisted by this process.

### **Don Hill**

At the time, this advice sounded like gobbledy-gook. But in hindsight, Sara's Masia was oddly prophetic. "I will be talking to you again, Mr. Don," the guide intoned before signing off, and it kind of spooked me. Listening to this recording years later — a shock of recognition — some predictions make sense now. But that's jumping ahead of my story.

### **Joe Fisher**

'Mediumship' was the name the Victorian called this. And, of course, this whole practice can be traced back to the biblical prophets. They would go into trance and write down the word of God, which has become our Bible.

### **Don Hill**

This is Joe Fisher, a former journalist with The Toronto Sun. He's authored a book about mediums and channelling: **The Siren Call of the Hungry Ghosts**, written out of a personal experience with supernatural voices.

### **Joe Fisher**

Now, what's the difference, I ask myself, between the biblical prophets and their cataleptic utterances being put down as the Bible and what many channellers are doing today? Not too much, I would suggest. Of course, it can also be traced back to the Greek oracles and shamanism. Shamans all over the world, in different cultures, would go into trance and diagnose people who had ailments, mental and physical. Shamans are still doing that. And the

Christian Church will hold up talking in tongues, when people are seized via trance and then they will start uttering different languages. This is all in the same mix.

### **Don Hill**

...Joe Fisher.

The Old Testament is riddled with voices — for instance, “And the Lord said unto Moses...” — the idea of the Lord being a voice that can be heard, clearly audible to some people. It’s a call that’s heard again and again.

### **Gillian Gill**

My name is Gillian Gill. A few years ago, I wrote a biography of Mary Baker Eddy, the founder and discoverer of Christian Science...

### **Don Hill**

I’m on the phone with Gillian Gill at her home in Massachusetts.

Christian Science had its genesis in the 19th century. The Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses were also founded around the same time in the United States, all by religious prophets. And all of the prophets claimed they were instructed by voices, voices they attributed to a divine source.

### **Gillian Gill**

When Mrs. Eddy was eight years old, she heard a voice calling her. She was in a room by herself. Her mother was in another room. She heard a voice calling, she says, distinctly by name, three times in an ascending scale. And she went in to her mother and said, “Mother you called me.”

And her mother said, “No I didn’t. What do you mean?” So, she goes out and this happens again a number of times. And Mrs. Baker said, ‘No, I didn’t call.’ And she then, that evening, read to Mary the tale of the young Samuel, the story from 1 Samuel where Samuel is lying in the temple, and he hears the voice of the Lord, and he’s told by the prophet Eli to respond and say, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant hearith.” And Mary’s mother says to her, “Mary, when you hear the voice again, say ‘Speak, Lord, for thy servant hearith.’” And Mary Baker Eddy remembers that, “The voice came, and I was afraid, and I did not answer. Afterwards, I wept and prayed that God would forgive me, resolving to do next time

as my mother had bidden me. When the call came again, I did answer in the words of Samuel.” So, you can hear that she is quite sure that she is hearing the voice with her ears, but it has sort of musical frequency. It is repeated, and it is her name, and it is a female voice. She thinks it is her mother. This makes it an exceptionally interesting example of someone receiving a kind of authority from God and that the voice of God is a female voice.

### **Don Hill**

Florence Nightingale heard voices. She was 16. Sitting under the giant cedars, the Cedars of Lebanon, a sacred grove in Hampshire, England, she heard an unmistakable command. “February the ninth, 1837,” Florence Nightingale dutifully recorded in her diary, “I heard the voice of God calling me to His service.”

### **Gillian Gill**

It’s clear that she felt that God was calling her. The question is, what was He asking her to do? And she went through this long period, more than ten years, of feeling that she had failed God because she had not responded to those voices. And when the Crimean War comes through and she is able to go out and actually do the kind of hands-on, practical nursing work with sick and dying men, this was the realization of her divine mission, she felt. So, there’s a very, very clear relationship in her mind and in her actions between the calls and the way that she shaped her life.

### **Don Hill**

...Gillian Gill.

Spirit transmissions, mesmerism, ‘voices from afar’ were all the rage in the late 19th century. ‘Thought transference’ was the technical term for hearing voices, and it was of particular interest to The Society for Psychical Research. Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, the writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle were among the elite membership of the British organization. Philosopher William James was its president in 1884 and later helped to found the ASPR, the American Society for Psychical Research, the next year.

To launch the ASPR, the society figured that telepathy was a reasonable candidate for its first investigation. Despite interesting leads, strange

anomalies and even odder characters who presented themselves for scientific research, the society came up with nothing conclusive. And over a century later, science remains either mystified or utterly dismissive of telepathic communication.

Spiritualism, the belief in discarnate phantoms communicating with the here and now, has been with us for a long while. Channelling is the current enthusiasm, the sound of spirits speaking through mediums in trance.

Last fall, I attended a channelling seance at the Addeso Centre, a New Age parlor two floors off Toronto's Yonge Street. Joe Fisher, the author of a book on channelling, was invited to interview an entity conjured by a medium. I tagged along with Joe. I was curious why the former journalist would take an interest in this stuff. "I fell in love with Philip," he began. Philip was his channelled lover, a woman of Greek origin, long dead, a spirit that deceived him, he said — a story that Joe tells best in his book about the whole incident. I wanted to know more about what he calls 'hungry ghosts.'

#### Joe Fisher

The Buddhists have the word *prahta*, which means 'hungry ghost.' And a hungry ghost in their tradition is an entity that is lost between this world and the next. **The Tibetan Book of the Dead** warns about entities. I might add that a hungry ghost or a *prahta* is a being seen by the Buddhists as a being with a very scrawny, narrow neck but capacious stomach. These beings can never get enough. They can never be filled. They can never be satisfied. And that is why they are seizing onto channellers who do have this door open to the next world. They are speaking through them, and they are trying forever to fill themselves up with the energy and emotions of the living. They can never do this, but that's why they're called 'hungry ghosts.' They're always hungry.

#### Don Hill

Participants at the channelling session I attended at the Addeso Centre were predominantly middle class, middle aged, female and white. The medium, 50ish and comfortable, channelled a farmer from the 18th century. At least, that's what she led us to think. Her spirit-guide spouted truisms. It all seemed silly, low-rent psychology. Anyone might recognize it as the things one ought to have learned in kindergarten.

I couldn't record the proceedings, but I was allowed a question. So I asked the 'entity,' "Do you know when you are?" The question confused the channel. "How does the 'entity' navigate forever," I asked again? The medium countered my question with a question whether I believed in spirit communication. I said it wouldn't be sensible to believe in anything, given the evidence provided that evening. This created a bit of a stir in the room. People were getting ticked off. One fellow, one of the few men, jabbed his finger in my chest and angrily declared me trouble. I thought it prudent to leave.

Channelling is indeed troublesome. But beyond my experience at the Addeso Centre, I still don't know what to make of these voices. Others share in my discomfort. And channelling has been set off on a siding by the scientific establishment.

Still there are exceptions. A case in point: Madame Blavatsky, the founder of theosophy in the late 19th century, regularly communed with her 'mahatma' spirit-guides. A collection of her channelled scribbles were collated and published in 1923 as **The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett**.

Many years later, a young electrical engineering student at MIT read the book. His name was Elmer Green. Today, Dr. Elmer Green is emeritus at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas. Over his long career, he pioneered the use of biofeedback, an effective tool for managing stress. He's a highly-regarded clinician.

But, back to the Mahatma Letters: Madam Blavatsky's guide, a channelled spirit-guide, described an elaborate scene in a monastery in old Tibet, a country that was strictly off-limits to Westerners. Remember, it's the 19th century. Travel to exotic places wasn't as easy as it is today. And it would have been next to impossible for Madame Blavatsky, a middle-aged woman, to physically travel to Tibet. She just wouldn't have been allowed in.

Blavatsky's spirit-guide described in precise detail how energies were manifested by Buddhist monks as they meditated upon their own image reflected in a polished metal plate. The spirit-guide also made a curious reference to magnets, a bar magnet suspended over the meditator's head. Zappy effects

too. And from the sound of the description, it read like sparks of electrical energy. The young Elmer Green recognized, in this elaborate description, what looked to be a scientific experiment, an electrical engineering experiment he could do in a laboratory. And years later, Dr. Green assembled a replica of what Madame Blavatsky's spirit-guide described. It's the 1980s, almost a century after Blavatsky's prophesy. The experiment worked.

What other scientific experiments lurk in the Mahatma letters? Dean Radin is the author of **The Conscious Universe...**

#### **Dean Radin**

When the theosophists first started to use clairvoyance to study the deep structure of matter, of course, at the time, they didn't know anything about quarks or about sub-atomic — they just barely knew about atomic structure at the time. And so a century later when people look back on what they drew, it turns out that there are very close correspondences between what the clairvoyants said that they saw — and, of course, there are no microscopes even today they can see that structure — but it is very close to what we think actually exists at that level. That suggests that clairvoyance, in general, not only is a real phenomena — of course, there's a lot of other evidence for it — but that the limits of what it can see go down from the extreme micro-scale to probably the extreme macro-scale. And we don't know where those limits are.

#### **Don Hill**

Madame Blavatsky was a controversial medium. Her reputation is still smeared by allegations of fraud. However, her investigators have also been accused of deception.

Madame Blavatsky was very much for the scientific investigation of human perception. She was well-read, well-informed about the science of the late 19th century. And she was highly critical of Darwin's Theory of Evolution. Madame Blavatsky believed it didn't go far enough. It didn't account for the evolution of consciousness, the evolution of the spirit.

#### **Stan Krippner**

I think that science can certainly investigate these phenomena, and I think that, in the past, scientists

have been too quick to label all of this pathological and illusional.

#### **Don Hill**

Stan Krippner is a professor of psychology at the Saybrook Institute in San Francisco.

#### **Stan Krippner**

I would not use the word 'delusional' because these people are operating within a certain frame of reference, and whether these spirits are products of the imagination or whether they are contacting entities or agencies from another dimension of reality is not really a topic that I'm particularly interested in. What I'm interested in is how these rituals, how these ceremonies, how the contact with these assumed and alleged spirits help make a person's life better, how they empower a person, especially, by the way, for women.

#### **Don Hill**

**T**he island of Trinidad, home of 'pan' — steel-drum music — and Carnival. But I'm in a church, and this is the ritual beat and moan of the Shouters, the Spiritual Baptist faith of the Caribbean.

#### **Everard Van Hanigan**

My name is Everard Van Hanigan. I came from a spiritual background of Baptist, people which is in the Baptist faith. We pray, and when we pray, sometimes the spirit is so strong that it's like you're summoning spirits.

#### **Don Hill**

Leader Everard is my host at St. Theresa's, an ordinary building in a neighbourhood of modest homes. whitewashed brick, the entrance to the church open to the elements. From the street, you can see the congregation: people on their feet, stomping. And I hear an ambient murmur, a kind of muttering under the breath.

#### **Everard Van Hanigan**

During praying and certain beats of spiritual behaviors — you will see it — somebody change. They will speak in tongues. They will speak African. They will speak Hindi. They will speak Chinese. It depends on the spirit that is with that person at the time.

**Don Hill**

The Shouter Spiritual Baptists recently celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the lifting of a ban prohibiting the practice of their religion in Trinidad and Tobago. Authorities on the Caribbean islands were fearful of the Shouters, suspected they were able to hex and cast spells. The faith, in their view, was akin to voodoo disguised by a thin veil of Christianity. Of particular concern was the ritual of speaking in tongues.

**Everard Van Hanigan**

Something actually takes you over. You're awake, but it is not of your will. It's like God's will of doing what God wants you to do, saying of things that He wants you to say. This spirit shows you things. Your eyesight becomes greater. The power of your eyesight becomes greater. What your normal eye would not see, at that time, you become so powerful that you can see things around people. You will see other things around people that you know that is not there, but you are the only one that is seeing it — what you call 'roaming spirits,' spirits that roam. Spirits walk between you. Spirits are there with each and every one of us. They stand next to you. This is something that a lot of people may not believe, but it happens.

**Stan Krippner**

I see this in such parts of the world as Brazil, where millions of people are members of African-Brazilian religions, one of the cornerstones of which is spirit possession, where people have been trained — and this is not only the mediums, this is the common, ordinary people — who have been trained to allow the spirits to come in and possess them. Now, here we have many large and socially significant religions in which the replacement of one's personal identity is a part of their religious service. And this is a technology of the sacred.

**Tanty Viola**

My name is Reverend Viola Meaford Antoine. I'm the mother and the founder of St. Theresa's Spiritual Baptist Church.

**Don Hill**

Why are dreams so important to Spiritual Baptists?

**Tanty Viola**

The word of God says, "Where there is no dreams and vision, the people perish." It was through a dream that God told Joseph to take his wife Mary and come from Egypt because Pharaoh is looking to kill Jesus. And many other things we have only come through dreams, but you have to be very careful with dreams because, if you're not grounded in the word of God, you might get dreams that are not pertaining to God, and sometimes it look alike.

**Don Hill**

Tanty Viola speaks for several wisdom traditions that use dreams as a guide to daily living. But it's only a guide, she cautions, and thinking otherwise can get you into trouble, doubly so if you have a professional reputation at stake. It's an area of scientific inquiry where even angels fear to tread.

I'm in the neuroscience laboratory of Michael Persinger at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario. This is where the new maps of consciousness are being drawn. The young scientists here are 'neurocartographers.' Write that expression down because you're going to be hearing it in the next few years. Dr. Persinger investigates claims for the paranormal. They're clues to the riddle of consciousness, he says.

This is Sean Harribance, the renowned psychic from Trinidad. He's giving a demonstration of his clairvoyant abilities in the lab. I'm with a group of people circled around the psychic.

**Sean Harribance**

A-h-h-h! This Buddhist priest with a stick behind you.

**Don Hill**

A Buddhist priest?

**Sean Harribance**

Um-hum, with a big staff behind you. He's shaved. No hair on his head. He don't want you to drive to Toronto.

**Don Hill**

This session was recorded in the summer of 2000. Earlier that spring, Dr. Persinger invited me to join the lab as an associate researcher, and I've been participating in several ongoing experiments. This is one of them. Listening now, I can't help think this might be Masia doing the talking. You'll recall Sara's spirit-guide earlier in the program.

**Sean Harribance**

You like to listen to songs, music. But he worried about you. Why you worried about him for?

**Don Hill**

Sean Harribance claims he's in touch with angels. They speak to him. And he's looking over my shoulder now, his eyes skyward. It's kind of weird.

**Sean Harribance**

He said you were married once, it didn't work out, and you're married, and you have to work on it. So you're worried about that. There's a woman in California going to grab you away from your wife, so be careful. And when you like a woman, you leap and then you look!

**Don Hill**

I giggle nervously. The details aren't dead accurate. But this is getting too close. You see, I know of a woman from the West Coast. Let's just say, she likes me a lot. Nothing has happened, okay?

**Sean Harribance**

Anyone in California? California could be calling you, I don't know. But I get a vision of her. She is attractive. She is bright. Is she a friend or something?

**Don Hill**

Sean Harribance is in his early sixties. He's a large, personable man of West Indian parentage. He favours patterned shirts that can be worn tail out. Something about his eyes — they're quite striking. Now, this may sound cliched, but he seems to look through you.

**Sean Harribance**

When I look at a person, things begin to come in, like something else take over. And they speak through me, and it makes sense, so it's not me doing it.

**Don Hill**

If I was to use the New Age vernacular, it sounds like you're channelling information.

**Sean Harribance**

When I look at a house and I look at the sky and I look at the trees, they're vibrating. Maybe I'm in

spiritual enlightenment. We just have names for it. And I go back to the Bible: Judge them from their work.

**Dr. Michael Persinger**

His experiences suggest something more than a cold reading. A cold reading is simply the experience associated with human interaction by looking at people's faces. People's faces certainly do reveal their thoughts — at least grossly — and certainly their feelings at the time, as any parent will tell you about a young child.

**Don Hill**

Dr. Michael Persinger is the director of the Neuroscience Research Group at Laurentian University.

**Dr. Michael Persinger**

However, there's more than cold reading to Mr. Harribance's capacity, and perhaps we can call it even talent. If Mr. Harribance doesn't even see the person but only has a picture, his accuracy is remarkable with respect to the emotive and other details, suggesting that there's something captured even in a photograph, in that piece of space and time, for which he has some degree of access. And that may seem difficult to comprehend, but yet when we are putting information on a piece of photographic emulsion, what we're seeing is what our perceptual system has trained us to see. We really don't know what else is in those silver grains that can be extracted and interpreted by the appropriate brain structured in the appropriate manner.

**Don Hill**

I'm reminded of a 'first contact' story told in anthropology circles about an African shaman who was shown a newspaper photograph of a large city at a distance, something the shaman had never seen before. All he saw was the pixels. The cityscape was transparent, as if invisible to the shaman's point-of-view.

**Sean Harribance**

I'm in touch with something. That's why I'm telling people, the speakers, the knowledge is there. We just have names for things. You go back to the heart. I'm in touch. Call it 'God.' Call it whatever. I know I'm in touch with something. And they take over.

**Dr. Michael Persinger**

I think it's important to realize that the vast majority of stimuli that are in our environment, around us every second, every day that we're alive, that amount of information is rarely processed by our brain. Basically, our brain is a giant insulator. Consciousness is a kind of insulator. So think of it this way: The electromagnetic spectrum that's out there is manifested across a wide range of frequencies, but we are only privy to a very narrow band, and that's only because we have eyes and heat sensors that we can transform that electromagnetism. The rest of these signals, containing an infinite amount of information, we do not have access to this information because we have no obvious sensors, because our brains cannot interpret it.

But suppose your brain is constructed differently, like Sean Harribance's. That means you potentially could discern stimuli that are around us all the time, but you could make sense out of it. Now, once you've detected it however, the labels that you give to it will be a function of your culture. So, when Mr. Harribance says that he sees angels around you or he knows information about you that the average person would not know but only you know, that indicates that he's obtaining information from the environment around you or through you, but that he may be giving labels, the only labels he has, which reflect his religious tradition.

**Sean Harribance**

I can feel something out there. I think psychic things — parapsychology, the church, religion — have a common foundation. And God is like the desert; we, like a grain of sand. If you really meditate and go under your heart, in the stomach area, I am not myself. I am somebody else.

**Don Hill**

You suggested Sean Harribance's brain is different. How so?

**Dr. Michael Persinger**

In order to discern unusual phenomena — to pick up what's in the environment that everyone could potentially detect — to do this, one has to have a different structured brain. That is, the material and the synapses within the brain are organized

differently. Or for a brief period of time, for many people, there are electrical changes that allow you to have that simulation for a brief amount of time, a brief insight into this experience. But for individuals like Harribance, their brains must be structured permanently in a different manner than ours.

What we found in our research is that this man does have a different structured brain. Both neuropsychologically, electrically and even in terms of chemically, he seems to be quite different.

**Don Hill**

It's as if Sean Harribance experiences the world as an ongoing waking dream, and I asked Dr. Persinger about the Sean's state of mind. Could he somehow be dreaming while awake?

**Dr. Michael Persinger**

Our data suggest that at least his right hemisphere may be engaged in what we would call an altered state probably most of the time.

**Sean Harribance**

I know I'm in touch with big mind, higher consciousness — call it what you want. I'm in touch with something. I know.

**Dr. Michael Persinger**

So for very long periods of time, perhaps hours a day — not all the time, but hours a day — his right hemisphere may be in the dream state. But he's not aware of it. It's only when he begins to engage in his readings, which clearly takes time for him to get into the state. He has to meditate, which is another way of saying intercollating or allowing the left and right hemisphere to be matched, only during these conditions that he then has access to it. So I would say, yes, he's probably in a dream-like state — at least, his right hemisphere is — for the majority of the day and certainly the night.

**Don Hill**

Sean Harribance may be a 'visual listener.' His central nervous system extracts information differently from the immediate environment, and his brain processes it differently. This may account for his childlike nature. He blurts out information, says whatever pops into his head, and sometimes it's

embarrassing, crude. He's like the Howard Stern of the psychic world.

### **Sean Harribance**

Now, why I good with sex life and emotion and love life and health, it because your thoughts, thoughts are energies.

### **Dean Radin**

There's some evidence that clairvoyance would describe things that today we might call 'auras,' as something like an electromagnetic field that surrounds living systems generally. But not just living systems. All things apparently have some kind of field structure around it.

### **Don Hill**

This is Dean Radin. He's the author of **The Conscious Universe**.

### **Dean Radin**

So if we were to try to think of how we cast that in today's terms, we would probably say that, yes, all living things have electromagnetic fields. Most structures of some type have fields around them. And depending on your favourite flavour of physical theory, everything can be described in terms of fields. So possibly in some altered states of consciousness, it is possible to directly perceive those fields.

### **Dr. Michael Persinger**

The question of, what is he actually seeing when he labels the phenomenon as an 'angel'? — that's an interesting question. And on the basis of what he says and how he perceives it, it may very well be that what he sees as an 'angel' or describes as such may be a secondary or tertiary feature of the person themselves in the sense that we know there's tremendous energies emitted from the normal human body. If you look at the infrared outline of an individual, you can see this clearly. Your boundary actually goes out three to four times your typical body width. But he may be actually seeing some aspect of the person that he attributes to this type of entity.

### **Dean Radin**

The likelihood is that fields around living systems in particular are not in a sense generated. They're there all the time, and they change as dynamically as probably our thoughts change. Of course, in a trivial sense, we're just talking about things like brainwaves. Of course, they do radiate out. They're not very strong, but they're there. But we're probably talking about other fields as well. There are many different currents running in the body all the time that can create a variety of fields. Most of the time, we're in relatively ordinary states of awareness, and so the fields probably aren't all that unusual. But every so often unusual things happen. People go into unusual mental states, and it's very probable, I think, that the fields that surround us also change. So somebody who is sensitive to that can simply tell by looking at you where you are not only physically but probably mentally as well.

### **Don Hill**

Michael Persinger's research conducted at his unassuming laboratory at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario, is gaining currency in the scientific world.

Using a machine, Dr. Persinger stimulates the human brain with subtle, pulsed electromagnetic fields. That's EMF, for short. Four out of five subjects typically enter into a dreamlike world, a state of mind where they feel as if they're in communion with a power greater than themselves. They see things, hear voices. Sean Harribance was stimulated with EMF.

### **Dr. Michael Persinger**

The question is, can we imitate or facilitate his altered state by applying experimental fields? The answer is, yes, we can. We found we could enhance it, and we could also interfere with it. But the point is, from our perspective, this is the first time this has been experimentally shown that you can actually change the accuracy and characteristic of these readings by applying known magnetic fields with characteristics that influence complex but known brain physiology.

### **Sean Harribance**

My gift come from when I'm watching that statue. That show up in my laboratory. When he were pulsing my energy, I saw Christ and Mother Mary and apostles very clear.

**Dr. Michael Persinger**

One of the reasons that religious icons enter into psi phenomena so frequently may have to do with the nature of the right hemisphere again, because the right hemisphere is the mediator of psi experiences. It's also involved with space and deep meaning and emotion. It's also the source of the sense of presence, and the sense of presence is basically the feeling — and everyone has that capacity — of a sentient entity, a thinking entity that is beside you. The poets call it the 'muse,' and very often it may have all kinds of positive or negative features. But because the right hemisphere is tied to the sense of presence and the sense of presence is historically tied to religious experiences and religious visitations, that's probably one of the reasons that most cultures pair psi phenomena with the individual's religious beliefs. So it shouldn't surprise you that Mr. Harribance, being a Christian, would access Christ or Mary. Other individuals from other cultures may access Allah or some other religious icon or even a specific guide, which is typical of some of the native cultures and some of the African and Eastern cultures. That's simply a mode by which they access that space. It's not unique or defining it. It's simply the mode by which they access it.

**Stan Krippner**

My feeling is that some 30,000 years ago, which is as far back as we can date shamanism...

**Don Hill**

Stan Krippner is a professor of psychology at the Saybrook Institute in San Francisco.

**Stan Krippner**

...there were people who had biological propensities that made them capable of dream recall, storytelling coupled with very keen observation of the environment. In other words, the shaman does go into imaginary worlds, but the shaman also fully lives in the consensual world, in the world of the here and the now. And when somebody with these sensitivities emerged in a tribe, the tribe knew how to protect that person and that would be to the tribe's benefit.

Now, 30,000 years later, somebody comes up with similar biological propensities, but they do not have a supportive community. They see auras around

people. They tell stories about their dreams. They have glimpses into the future. And their families say, "I wouldn't mention that to anybody. People will think you are crazy." So eventually they just learn to shut up. Maybe as adults they can find a group that supports them, and then they might become a medium or a sensitive. Some of them find an extremely supportive group, and like Sean Harribance of Trinidad, they become renowned in religious circles, even in scientific circles, as participants in research and can make quite a contribution to their society. But I think that these are the exceptions. I really think that, in the Western world today, most of the people with these sensitivities lose the sensitivity, repress the sensitivity or actually are branded as mentally ill, and many of them actually are driven to mental illness because of the rejection. I think it's a pity, but I've seen this happen.

**Don Hill**

There's a tie that binds Sean Harribance to Mary Baker Eddy, Florence Nightingale, Eddie Ensley, Saint Teresa, Joseph Smith of the Mormons and Elizabeth G. White, founder of the Seventh Day Adventists. All of these people were called by a discarnate voice. They also suffered breakdowns of one sort or another, either in their physical or mental health — breakdowns which altered their perception of events around them forever after.

**Dr. Michael Persinger**

All behaviour is generated by brain activity. And, of course, that's in large part discerned or determined by the subtle structure. If you've had a small or appropriate brain injury or an experience of hypoxia or perhaps some dietary peculiarity just enough to produce these small changes, certain kinds of changes produce these unusual abilities: psi abilities, mystical experience. In fact, if you look historically at Christ or Mohammed, Buddha, almost any leader, even the more recent ones from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, you will see that they share many of the experiences of the contemporary limbic patient, without the seizures. That doesn't necessarily mean what they have experienced is all unreal or hallucinatory. What we're saying is that there are certain kinds of small structures, structural changes within the brain that allow these individuals to have access to knowledge or perhaps to synthesize knowledge that's novel but, at the same time, extraordinarily profound.

**Don Hill**

Where do these voices, the visions, come from? I started out with an idea that science could help locate the headwaters of the divine. The source might be right hemispheric epilepsy. And modern-day forensic medicine suspects that some of the lives of the saints can be explained in this way. But they can't be explained away.

This is the venerable Jetsun Dhampa Kalka Rinpoche. He's a Buddhist high lama.

Tibetan Buddhism acknowledges the existence of clairvoyance and telepathy. The Dalai Lama, for instance, consults with a state oracle. If you saw the movie **Kundun**, you'll recall, there's a scene where the Oracle writhes and whispers, translates between the dimensions, reports what he hears in the spiritual realm to the assembled monks. In the movie, as in real life, the oracle has undergone rigorous training, so the supernatural voices are heeded by the Dalai Lama. Still the information isn't totally reliable. There are errors of interpretation, errors of perception because we're human.

The next voice you'll hear is Jhampa Shaneman, the Rinpoche's translator.

**Jetsun Dhampa Kalka Rinpoche** (through Jhampa Shaneman)

It is said in Buddhism that there are people with pure perception and people with impure perception. So it is possible for some people to navigate time, but if their perceptions are not pure, they would be interpreting the experiences they have due to the bias from their delusion. Whereas we would feel that an individual who had what was called 'non-defiled abilities,' that individual sees things exactly as they will, does not discriminate or taint them by their own predisposition or their particular traits of personality. That individual, for example, we would consider to be the fully enlightened Buddha, who directly perceives things without any adulteration to those phenomena and can completely navigate time, past, present & future, with full knowingness. That is the enlightened being.

**Don Hill**

I've thought about the Rinpoche's teaching carefully. What I think he's telling me is that it's next to

impossible to know the future. Why? Because anything that's truly new, a novel experience, would be transparent to the average person. For instance — and I've mentioned this before — what if I told you that an unidentified flying object had landed in the space where you are now — let's say, the room or the car — and it didn't quite square with what you think a UFO ought to be? Could you see it?

Voices and visions — they exist, but seldom can we understand fully what they're telling us, and when we do, it's often too late. The Rinpoche offered a final suggestion: acknowledge the voices, yes, the visions too. But don't be distracted by them. Get on with living this life. Focus on the present time. He's right, I thought. A preoccupation with the future comes at the expense of the present. And besides, I already know the future. There's going to be an eternity to commune with the dead.

**Paul Kennedy**

Tonight on *Ideas*, you've listened to Part 2 of "Visions & Voices" by Don Hill. The program series was produced with the assistance of Lynda Shorten. Technical assistance provided by Dave Field. Our e-mail address is [ideas@cbc.ca](mailto:ideas@cbc.ca). The Executive Producer of *Ideas* is Richard Handler, and I'm Paul Kennedy.

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