

The Transcendentalists

David Lynch and Calvin Klein Collection's Italo Zucchelli on their shared passions: creativity and Transcendental Meditation

By Matthew Schneier. Photographs by Olivia Malone
Published December 24, 2013



David Lynch.

On a winding road high in the Hollywood Hills, not far from Mulholland Drive, is a Brutalist-looking concrete structure that's equal parts manse and bunker. It's the studio of David Lynch, and appropriately for his many pursuits—he is an auteur across media, from film and television to painting, music, self-help books, and coffee roasting—it has a variety of different spaces: a screening room, a recording studio, storage for his photographs and artwork, a kitchen with an industrial-grade espresso machine. (Lynch die-hards may recognize it as the house from *Lost Highway*.)

I've come here from New York, along with fashion designer Italo Zucchelli, to discuss one of Lynch's abiding passions, Transcendental Meditation. The director established his own nonprofit, the David Lynch Center for Transcendental Meditation and World Peace, in 2005. He credits the practice with much of his

success, and he's devoted as much time to raising awareness of it as he has to virtually any of his other endeavors. His 2006 book, *Catching the Big Fish*, is dedicated to the subject.

Transcendental Meditation is an ancient practice, but its profile was raised in our era when the Beatles took it up in 1968, under the guidance of its twentieth-century guru, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. It comes with, and rules out, no religion, faith, or creed, but because of its new-wave aura, it has largely bubbled away at the fringes of culture. Lately, however, it is experiencing a new boom. "In the last year, something tipped," says Bob Roth, the affable executive director of [The David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace](#). "If one [particular] thing happened, I haven't seen it—and I've been on the front lines. But something happened, [because] I don't have enough teachers to teach all the people in New York City who want to learn."

TM has a very healthy celebrity fan base, which no doubt helps its public profile, and the foundation, which exists to provide scholarships to at-risk populations so they can learn the practice, including schoolchildren, survivors of domestic abuse, and military personnel, has taken advantage of that fact. Paul McCartney, a practitioner, performed at the foundation's first benefit concert. Hugh Jackman and Jerry Seinfeld, Transcendental Meditators both, were honored at its most recent benefit gala, in December. Mario Batali and Mehmet Oz will both speak at its upcoming conference in February; Martin Scorsese is in talks to participate as well. The list of adherents is even longer. Ellen DeGeneres does it. Oprah does it. Ray Dalio, the founder of ~~Bridgestone~~, (Bridgewater Associates) the world's largest hedge fund, does it. And in the realm of fashion, so does Zucchelli, who is celebrating his tenth year as creative director of menswear for Calvin Klein Collection.

"It" is a relatively simple practice. It consists of devoting twenty minutes twice a day to meditating, which in the Transcendental iteration means silently chanting a Sanskrit mantra. (The mantra must be given by a teacher of Transcendental Meditation, as part of an instruction that can cost upwards of \$1,000.) Devotees say that it combats stress, improves mood, and staves off illness and disease. Remarkably, science confirms much of this. The American Heart Association found in a study that Transcendental Meditation, alone among meditation practices it tested, reduces high blood pressure; other studies indicate it can improve functional capacity in patients with congestive heart failure. Over the past forty years, more than 300 studies have been published about the effects of the practice in peer-reviewed medical journals, and the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Defense have both given millions for further testing. While a quick Google search does turn up skeptics and critics—more of charlatan practitioners than of the practice itself—the tide seems to be now firmly in TM's favor.

"In 1968, meditation was a fad," says Roth. "In 2013, because of the research, Transcendental Meditation is being incorporated into the actual fabric of our culture."

There's something undeniably intriguing about the beatific bliss that Lynch and Zucchelli radiate—in the filmmaker's case, in stark contrast to his dark, often violent work. I wanted to find out more about the connection they both draw between the practice and their creative lives. Below, condensed and edited, is a transcript of that free-flowing discussion.

* * *

Style.com: David, many people today don't know this, but you have a history with Calvin Klein. You shot a series of ads for the Obsession fragrances in the late eighties and early nineties.

David Lynch: I did. It was in the height of *Twin Peaks*. I did four ads for them, and they were based on some poems. I think most of them were at this house in Los Feliz, one of seven of Frank Lloyd Wright's in L.A., the Ennis-Brown House. I love doing commercials for fashion or perfumes.

Why?

DL: They've always got a dream element to them. Also, in Europe, [clients] give the director a lot more freedom. Still, they want to sell the product, so you can't go nuts, and they're great to work with. Those are the kind I like to do.



Lynch and Zucchelli, at Lynch's Hollywood Hills studio.

Do you approach work for fashion clients in a different way from the way you approach your own work?

DL: No. It's the same thing. You're just telling a small story, a little story. The mood of it is the thing for me.

One of the things I hope we can talk about today is the creative process as it relates to Transcendental Meditation, because it's something—besides Calvin Klein—that you two have in common. Do you think that TM has something special to offer to people who work in the arts?

DL: Absolutely is the answer, but [also] for all human beings. The thing that people are really starting to realize now is that every human being has this treasure within. It's always been there—it's an eternal level. TM is a mental technique, so you dive within mind and intellect, and at the border of intellect you transcend and you experience that deepest level, that treasury. It has many names, but it doesn't matter what the name is. Quantum physics calls it the unified field; it says everything that is a thing has emerged from this field. One [other] name for it is the Self, with a capital *S*. "Know thyself"—this is the Self that they're talking about. TM is like being given a key that opens the door to that. I say it's the number-one tool of the artist.

Italo Zucchelli: David, I've been your longtime fan for all my life. What you've said about meditation, it was all very beautiful, and I've read your book many times. But what really touched me and intrigued me was the fact that you have this aesthetic based on disturbing elements—let's describe it like that. It's not peaceful. Which is what I always loved about your work. [But] how you explained, "In order to do this [unhappy work], you don't have to be unhappy." That was really for me one of the reasons I was attracted to doing this, talking about this with you.

DL: The bottom line is, the artist doesn't have to suffer to show suffering. I think artists want this edge, and they think anger and depression and angst will serve their work. In a way, it's sort of true. But I've found out that anger occupies the mind. And common sense tells you, if you're filled with anger, there's less room for creativity, and real anger is a poison to the human being and the environment. People don't like being around really angry people. So it doesn't really serve the work. Negativity is the enemy of creativity. What I say is you should *understand* anger. You should understand depression. It's like they say: You don't have to die to do a death scene.

I know that there are skeptics out there. How does Transcendental Meditation work?

DL: People say it's like Coca-Cola light—if it's so easy and effortless, it may just be a Mickey Mouse meditation. That is what they call baloney. This [TM] is a blessing. The mantra you get in TM is like a law of nature, designed for a specific purpose, and that purpose is to turn the awareness from outside, 180 degrees to within. Once you're pointed within, you will naturally and easily and effortlessly dive, because each deeper level has more happiness. Then you'll go through intellect. Each deeper level of intellect has even more happiness. And then you're going to transcend, champ, because the unbounded ocean is infinite! Unbounded happiness! You'll wish you could stay there. You'll pop out with thoughts, and you'll dive again. And it's so beautiful.

Maybe you can both describe how you take these realizations and transform them into your work, whether it's a fashion collection or a song or an album or a film.

IZ: In my case, I have to say, it has so many implications. It guided me to create, for example—and this is very important to me—a setup with my team, with the people I work with, that is happy. I have fun every day. The people who work with me work with me for twelve years, nine years, [because] we are in fun, we're here together. When you do a creative thing, it's so important, because then people will give you 100 percent. When you're working in an atmosphere that is conducive to being creative, to creating things—fashion thrives on that. I have to say, a lot of people that come to my office, the first thing they say is, "My God, this office has such a great energy!"

David, does that dovetail with your experience?

DL: Well, sure. I remember being at a business conference. Many businesses run their business on fear; they think fear motivates people, and they emphasize competition, and the employees feel that their job is

pretty much 24-7 in jeopardy, and they live under this fear. They take that fear home, so their wife or husband catch it, and the little kids in the house feel it. It's like introducing this poison at work that spreads to other places. And then people are more apt to get sick and not sleep well at night. It's a downward spiral. Common sense tells you that if your employees are happy, they're going to be more productive and have more ideas and go with you the extra mile. The other way, you're fueling a kind of hatred for your workplace, and sometimes employees. It's "fuck you" style.

IZ: Yes! Very Italian style! *[Laughs]*

DL: Even if you were a toilet cleaner, I say you could look at it two different ways. As a horror, or [if] you start diving within, you start getting more and more of that all-positive flowing in, you look at those urinals in a different way. And you gather your cleaning materials together, and you find great joy in purifying the environment, getting them shining and sparkling clean, and making it great. It's like sculpture. You get it shiny and clean, and you've got a great satisfaction. You could get heavily into that and find great joy in that.

When you look at works of yours that you've made, before you discovered TM and after, do they strike you as different?

DL: Not really. The thing is how I was while I was doing them, and that is a magical thing for me to think about. Looking back, I can see myself as weak, unsure, not self-assured, filled with worries and doubts. I wasn't depressed, but I was melancholy at times. And I was filled with this anger, so that I was on shaky ground. This business can kill people. You need what you can get from the transcendent to make it through.

IZ: In fashion, [too]. I know it very well.

DL: It's brutal! No one's having fun!

IZ: No. The pressure, especially at this level, the bitchiness.... You're always judged, constantly, what you do is constantly judged. Sometimes fairly, sometimes unfairly. And you transcend it, again. That's a very good place to be. It makes you live every day in a different way, and cope. Not only cope, but be inspired, even by criticism. You take something from it to inspire you.

Now we're talking about fashion. I was wondering, as we were flying from New York, how I might connect the two of you. But in reading your book, David, I noticed that a lot of the metaphors you used in discussing TM are fashion metaphors. Negativity is a suffocating rubber clown suit. Bliss is a protective flak jacket. Maybe it's accidental, but there's an interesting interplay going on between fashion and meditation there.

DL: Yes, that's very good! This idea that bliss is like a flak jacket.... I'll give you that example. One time I was meditating down at the center, when it used to be on Santa Monica, a long time ago. I had just had a meditation that opened the floodgates, and heavy-duty bliss just rolled in like waves of the ocean. And gold. I got very, very hot and vibrating, vibrating in happiness, physically vibrating. I was just in seventh heaven. The log lady from *Twin Peaks*, she and I started meditating together, and she was always worried about keeping me happy. She said, "David, David, I'm sorry, but tonight we just have to drive down and get Frankie at this playhouse." And maybe before I would have said, "Are you kidding me? I want to go home!" but [then] I said, "No problem." We get in the car and she's saying that we'll get there the fastest we can, and I say, "Don't worry about it one bit." [When we got there, I waited in the car.] I was in this dark alley in the back of this theater, alone in the car, *cooking* with bliss. If someone had come [right then] with a .45 automatic and put it to my head and said, "Jack, this is the end," I swear, I would have said, "Brother, do whatever you have to do." And they wouldn't have done it. They would have felt something. It's this kind of thing that unites us all, and if you feel it, you just know it. It's the secret to peace. Bliss *is* a flak jacket, and a suffocating rubber clown suit is what negativity makes us feel like. Imagine being inside it:

All the fumes coming off the body are trapped, and it's suffocating. That rubber stinks. If you could dissolve that puppy, it would make you feel very, very good.

So is there a right outfit for meditation?

DL: No, no. Here's the thing: There's nothing you have to change.



Italo Zucchelli.

http://www.style.com/trendsshopping/stylenotes/122313_David_Lynch_Italo_Zucchelli_Calvin_Klein