



MAKRAND

Understanding Śabda Tradition

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The Universality of Sacred Art



Excerpt from: *Sacred Art in East and West*. Republished in *The Essential Titus Burckhardt*.

Titus Burckhardt

When historians of art apply the term “sacred” to any and every work that has a religious subject, they overlook the fact that art is essentially form. An art cannot be called sacred solely because its subjects derive from spiritual truths; its formal language must also derive from the same source. This is by no means the case with a religious art like that of the Renaissance or vBaroque periods, which, as far as style is concerned, in no way differs from the profane art of those periods; neither its subjects, which, in a wholly outward and so to speak literary manner, it takes from religion, nor the devotional feelings with which it is often permeated, nor even the nobility of soul which sometimes finds expression in it, suffice to confer on it a truly sacred character. No art merits the epithet sacred unless its very forms reflect the spiritual vision characteristic of a particular religion.

Every form “vehicles” a particular quality of being. The religious subject of a work of art can be merely superimposed on a form, in which case it lacks any relation to the formal “language” of the work, as is demonstrated by Christian art since the Renaissance. Such productions are merely profane works of art with a religious theme. On the other hand, there is no sacred art which is profane in form, for there is a rigorous analogy between form and spirit. A spiritual vision necessarily finds its expression in a particular formal language. If this language has been forgotten—with the result that a so-called sacred art draws its forms from absolutely any kind of profane art—it means that a spiritual vision of things no longer exists.

It would be meaningless to seek to excuse the protean style of a religious art, or its indefinite and ill-defined character, on the grounds of the universality of dogma or the freedom of the spirit. Granted that spirituality in itself is independent of forms, this in no way implies that it can be expressed and transmitted by any and every kind of form. Through its qualitative essence, form has a place in the sensible order analogous to that of truth in the intellectual order; this is the significance of the Greek notion of *eidōs*. Just as a mental form, such as a dogma or a doctrine, can be an adequate, albeit limited, reflection of a Divine Truth, so a sensible form can retrace a truth or a reality which transcends both the plane of sensible forms and the plane of thought.

Every sacred art is therefore founded on a science of forms, or in other words, on the symbolism inherent in forms. It must be borne in mind that a sacred symbol is not merely a conventional sign; it manifests its archetype by virtue of a certain ontological law. As Ananda Coomaraswamy has observed, a sacred symbol is, in a sense, that which it expresses. For this very reason, traditional symbolism is never devoid of beauty. In the terms of a spiritual vision of the world, the beauty of an object is nothing other than the transparency of its existential envelopes. An art worthy of the name is beautiful because it is true.

It is neither possible nor necessary that every artist or craftsman engaged in sacred art be conscious of the Divine Law inherent in forms; he will only know certain aspects of it, or certain applications that arise within the limits of the rules of his craft. These rules will enable him to paint an icon, to fashion a sacred

vessel, or to practice calligraphy in a liturgically valid manner, without it being necessary for him to know the ultimate significance of the symbols he is working with. It is tradition that transmits the sacred models and the working rules, and thereby guarantees the spiritual validity of the forms. Tradition possesses a secret power which is communicated to an entire civilization and determines even those arts and crafts whose immediate objects include nothing particularly sacred. This power creates the style of a traditional civilization. A style—something that cannot be imitated from the outside—is perpetuated without difficulty, in a quasi-organic manner, by the sole power of the spirit by which it is animated.

One of the most tenacious of modern prejudices is the one that opposes the impersonal and objective rules of an art for fear that they might stifle creative genius. In reality, there is no traditional work—one governed by immutable principles—which does not give sensible expression to creative joy in the soul; modern individualism, on the other hand, has produced, apart from a few works of genius which are nevertheless spiritually barren, all the ugliness—the endless and hopeless ugliness—of the forms that fill the “ordinary life” of our time.

One of the fundamental conditions of happiness is to know that everything one does has an eternal meaning; but who at the present time can still conceive of a civilization in which all its vital aspects are developed “in the likeness of Heaven”? In a theocentric society, the humblest activity participates in this heavenly benediction.

The ultimate objective of sacred art is not to evoke feelings or communicate impressions; it is a symbol, and as such it employs simple and primordial means. It cannot in any case be anything more than allusive, its real object being ineffable. It is of angelic origin, because its models reflect supra-formal realities. By recapitulating the creation—the “Divine art”—in parables, it demonstrates the symbolical nature of the world, and so liberates the human spirit from its attachment to crude and ephemeral “facts”.

The angelic origin of art is explicitly formulated by the Hindu tradition. According to the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, every work of art in the world is achieved by imitation of the art of the *devas*, “whether it be an elephant in terracotta, a bronze object, an article of clothing, a gold ornament, or a mule-cart”. The Christian legends that attribute an angelic origin to certain miraculous images, exemplify the same idea. (In the terminology of the monotheistic religions the *devas* correspond to angels, in so far as the latter represent divine aspects.)

The *devas* are nothing more nor less than particular functions of the Universal Spirit, permanent expressions of the Will of God. According to a doctrine common to all traditional civilizations, sacred art must imitate Divine Art, but it must be clearly understood that this in no way implies that the finished Divine creation, the world such as we see it, should be copied, for such would be pure pretension. A literal “naturalism” is foreign to sacred art. What must be copied is the manner in which the Divine Spirit works (According to St Thomas Aquinas, “Art is the imitation of Nature in her manner of operation”, *Summa Theologica*, 1.117. 1.). Its laws must be transposed into the restricted domain in which man works as man, that is to say, into craftsmanship.

In no traditional doctrine does the idea of the Divine Art play so fundamental a part as in Hindu doctrine. For *Māyā* is not only the mysterious Divine Power that causes the world to appear to exist outside of Divine Reality, and as such is the source of all duality and all illusion; but *Māyā*, in her positive aspect, is also the Divine Art that produces every form. In principle, *Māyā* is nothing other than the possibility of the Infinite

to limit Itself, and so to become the object of Its own “vision”, without Its infinity being thereby limited. In this way, God both manifests, and does not manifest, Himself in the world. He both expresses Himself and remains silent.

Just as, by virtue of its *Māyā*, the Absolute objectivizes certain aspects of Itself, or certain possibilities contained in Itself and determines them by a distinctive vision, so the artist realizes in his work certain aspects of himself. He projects them, as it were, outside his undifferentiated being. And to the extent that his objectivization reflects the secret depths of his being, it will take on a purely symbolical character, while at the same time the artist will become more and more conscious of the abyss dividing the form, reflector of his essence, from what that essence really is in its timeless plenitude. The traditional artist knows: this form is myself, nevertheless I am infinitely more than it, for its Essence remains the pure Knower, the Witness which no form can grasp; but he also knows that it is God who expresses Himself through his work, so that the work, in its turn transcends the weak and fallible ego of the man.

Herein lies the analogy between Divine Art and human art: namely in the realization of oneself by objectivization. If this objectivization is to have spiritual significance, and not be merely a vague introversion, its means of expression must spring from an essential vision. In other words, it must not be the “ego”, root of illusion and ignorance of oneself, which arbitrarily chooses those means; they must be derived from tradition, from the formal and “objective” revelation of the supreme Being, who is the “Self” of all beings.

Likewise from the Christian point of view, God is “artist” in the most exalted sense of the word, because He created man “in His own image” (Genesis: 1,27). Moreover, since the image comprises not only a likeness to its model, but also a quasi-absolute unlikeness, it cannot but become corrupted. The divine reflection in man was troubled by the fall of Adam; the mirror was tarnished; and yet man could not be completely cast aside; for while the creature is subject to its own limitations, Divine Plenitude is not subject to limitation of any kind. This amounts to saying that the said limitations cannot in any real sense be opposed to Divine Plenitude, which manifests Itself as limitless Love, the very limitlessness of which demands that God, “pronouncing” Himself as Eternal Word, should descend into this world, and, as it were, assume the perishable outlines of the image—human nature—and so to restore to it its original beauty. In Christianity, the divine image *par excellence* is the human form of the Christ. Christian art has thus but one purpose: the transfiguration of man, and of the world that depends on man, by their participation in the Christ.

What the Christian view of things grasps by means of a sort of loving concentration on the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ, is transposed, in the Islamic perspective, into the universal and the impersonal. In Islam, the Divine Art—and according to the Koran God is “artist” (*musawwir*)—is in the first place the manifestation of the Divine Unity in the beauty and regularity of the cosmos. Unity is reflected in the harmony of the multiple, in order, and in equilibrium; beauty has all these aspects within itself.

To arrive at Unity from the starting-point of the beauty of the world—this is wisdom. For this reason, Islamic thought necessarily links art to wisdom; in the eyes of a Muslim, art is essentially founded on wisdom, or “science”, this science being simply the formulation of wisdom in temporal terms. The purpose of art is to enable the human ambience—the world in so far as it is fashioned by man—to participate in the order that most directly

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manifests Divine Unity. Art clarifies the world; it helps the spirit to detach itself from the disturbing multitude of things, so that it may rise up towards Infinite Unity.

Transposing the notion of “Divine Art” to Buddhism—which avoids the personification of the Absolute—it applies to the miraculous, and mentally inexhaustible, beauty of the Buddha. Whereas no doctrine concerned with God can escape, in its formulation, from the illusory character of mental processes, which attribute their own limits to the limitless and their own conjectural forms to the formless, the beauty of the Buddha radiates a state of being which is not limited by any mental process. This beauty is reflected in the beauty of the lotus; it is perpetuated ritually in the painted or sculpted image of the Buddha.

According to the Taoist view of things, be Divine Art is essentially the art of transformation: the whole of nature is ceaselessly being transformed, always in accordance with the laws of the cycle; its contrasts revolve around a single center which eludes apprehension. Nevertheless any one who understands this circular movement is thereby enabled to recognize the center which is its essence. The purpose of art is to conform to this cosmic rhythm. The most simple formula states that mastery in art consists in the capacity to trace a perfect circle in a single stroke, and thereby to identify oneself implicitly with its center, without the center itself being explicitly expressed.

All these fundamental aspects of sacred art are present, in one way or another, and in varying proportions, in each of the five great religions just mentioned, for each one essentially possesses the fullness of Divine Truth and Grace, so that each one would be capable, in principle, of manifesting every possible form of spirituality. Nevertheless, since each religion is necessarily dominated by a particular point of view which determines its spiritual “economy”, its works of art—which are necessarily collective, and not individual-will reflect, in their very style, this point of view and this spiritual “economy”. Moreover, form, by its very nature, is unable to express one thing without excluding another, because form limits what it express, and thus thereby excludes other possible expressions of its own universal archetype. This Law naturally applies at every level of formal manifestation, and not to art alone; thus the various Divine Revelations, on which the different religions are founded, are also mutually exclusive when considered in terms of their formal contours, but not in their Divine Essence, which is one. Here again the analogy between “Divine Art” and human art becomes apparent. There is no sacred art that does not depend on an aspect of metaphysics. The science of metaphysics is itself limitless, given that if object is infinite. As it is not possible to describe here all the relationships that link the different metaphysical doctrines in this domain, the reader is referred to other books which lay forth the premises on which the present essays are based. They do so by expounding, in a language accessible to the modern Western reader, the essence of the traditional doctrines of the East and of the Medieval West. We refer in particular to the writings of René Guénon (See *Crisis of the Modern*) and Frithjof Schuon. (See *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, *Spiritual Perspectives* and *Human Facts, Castes and Races*).



Twenty-One Emanations of the Goddess Tara, Credit- The Met Fifth Avenue



Translation by
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As all living beings desire to be happy always, without misery, as in the case of everyone there is observed supreme love for one's self, and as happiness alone is the cause for love, in order to gain that happiness which is one's nature and which is experienced in the state of deep sleep where there is no mind, one should know one's self. For that, the path of knowledge, the inquiry of the form "Who am I?", is the principal means.

1. Who am I?

The gross body which is composed of the seven humours (dhatus), I am not; the five cognitive sense organs, viz. the senses of hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell, which apprehend their respective objects, viz. sound, touch, colour, taste, and odour, I am not; the five cognitive sense organs, viz. the organs of speech, locomotion, grasping, excretion, and procreation, which have as their respective functions speaking, moving, grasping, excreting, and enjoying, I am not; the five vital airs, prana, etc., which perform respectively the five functions of in-breathing, etc., I am not; even the mind which thinks, I am not; the nescience too, which is endowed only with the residual impressions of objects, and in which there are no objects and no functioning's, I am not.

2. If I am none of these, then who am I?

After negating all of the above-mentioned as 'not this', 'not this', that Awareness which alone remains - that I am.

3. What is the nature of Awareness?

The nature of Awareness is existence-consciousness-bliss.

4. When will the realization of the Self be gained?

When the world which is what-is-seen has been removed, there will be realization of the Self which is the seer.

5. Will there not be realization of the Self even while the world is there (taken as real)?

There will not be.

6. Why?

The seer and the object seen are like the rope and the snake. Just as the knowledge of the rope which is the substrate will not arise unless the false knowledge of the illusory serpent goes, so the realization of the Self which is the substrate will not be gained unless the belief that the world is real is removed.

7. When will the world which is the object seen be removed?

When the mind, which is the cause of all cognition's and of all actions, becomes quiescent, the world will disappear.

8. What is the nature of the mind?

What is called 'mind' is a wondrous power residing in the Self. It causes all thoughts to arise. Apart from thoughts, there is no such thing as mind. Therefore, thought is the nature of mind. Apart from thoughts, there is no independent entity called the world. In deep sleep there are no thoughts, and there is no world. In the states of waking and dream, there are thoughts, and there is a world also. Just as the spider emits the thread (of the web) out of itself and again withdraws it into itself, likewise the mind projects the world out of itself and again resolves it into itself. When the mind comes out of the Self, the world appears. Therefore, when the world appears (to be real), the Self does not appear; and when the Self appears (shines) the world does not appear. When one persistently inquires into the nature of the mind, the mind will end leaving the Self (as the residue). What is referred to as the Self is the Atman. The mind always exists only in dependence on something gross; it cannot stay alone. It is the mind that is called the subtle body or the soul (jiva).

9. What is the path of inquiry for understanding the nature of the mind?

That which rises as 'I' in this body is the mind. If one inquires as to where in the body the thought 'I' rises first, one would discover that it rises in the heart. That is the place of the mind's origin. Even if one thinks constantly 'I 'I', one will be led to that place. Of all the thoughts that arise in the mind, the 'I' thought is the first. It is only after the rise of this that the other thoughts arise. It is after the appearance of the first personal pronoun that the second and third personal pronouns appear; without the first personal pronoun there will not be the second and third.

10. How will the mind become quiescent?

By the inquiry 'Who am I?'. The thought 'who am I?' will destroy all other thoughts, and like the stick used for stirring the burning pyre, it will itself in the end get destroyed. Then, there will arise Self-realization.

11. What is the means for constantly holding on to the thought 'Who am I'?

When other thoughts arise, one should not pursue them, but should inquire: "To whom do they arise?" It does not matter how many thoughts arise. As

each thought arises, one should inquire with diligence, "To whom has this thought arisen?". The answer that would emerge would be "To me". Thereupon if one inquires "Who am I?", the mind will go back to its source; and the thought that arose will become quiescent. With repeated practice in this manner, the mind will develop the skill to stay in its source. When the mind that is subtle goes out through the brain and the senseorgans, the gross names and forms appear; when it stays in the heart, the names and forms disappear. Not letting the mind go out, but retaining it in the Heart is what is called "inwardness" (antarmukha). Letting the mind go out of the Heart is known as "externalisation" (bahirmukha). Thus, when the mind stays in the Heart, the 'I' which is the source of all thoughts will go, and the Self which ever exists will shine. Whatever one does, one should do without the egoity "I". If one acts in that way, all will appear as of the nature of Siva (God).

12. Are there no other means for making the mind quiescent?

Other than inquiry, there are no adequate means. If through other means it is sought to control the mind, the mind will appear to be controlled, but will again go forth. Through the control of breath also, the mind will become quiescent; but it will be quiescent only so long as the breath remains controlled, and when the breath resumes the mind also will again start moving and will wander as impelled by residual impressions. The source is the same for both mind and breath. Thought, indeed, is the nature of the mind. The thought "I" is the first thought of the mind; and that is egoity. It is from that whence egoity originates that breath also originates. Therefore, when the mind becomes quiescent, the breath is controlled, and when the breath is controlled the mind becomes quiescent. But in deep sleep, although the mind becomes quiescent, the breath does not stop. This is because of the will of God, so that the body may be preserved and other people may not be under the impression that it is dead. In the state of waking and in samadhi, when the mind becomes quiescent the breath is controlled. Breath is the gross form of mind. Till the time of death, the mind keeps breath in the body; and when the body dies the mind takes the breath along with it. Therefore, the exercise of breath-control is only an aid for rendering the mind quiescent (manonigraha); it will not destroy the mind (manonasa). Like the practice of breath-control, meditation on the forms of God, repetition of mantras, restriction on food, etc., are but aids for rendering the mind quiescent. Through meditation on the forms of God and through repetition of mantras, the mind becomes one-pointed. The mind will always be wandering. Just as when a chain is given

to an elephant to hold in its trunk it will go along grasping the chain and nothing else, so also when the mind is occupied with a name or form it will grasp that alone. When the mind expands in the form of countless thoughts, each thought becomes weak; but as thoughts get resolved the mind becomes one-pointed and strong; for such a mind Self-inquiry will become easy. Of all the restrictive rules, that relating to the taking of sattvic food in moderate quantities is the best; by observing this rule, the sattvic quality of mind will increase, and that will be helpful to Self-inquiry.

13. The residual impressions (thoughts) of objects appear wending like the waves of an ocean. When will all of them get destroyed?

As the meditation on the Self rises higher and higher, the thoughts will get destroyed.

14. Is it possible for the residual impressions of objects that come from beginningless time, as it were, to be resolved, and for one to remain as the pure Self?

Without yielding to the doubt "Is it possible, or not?", one should persistently hold on to the meditation on the Self. Even if one be a great sinner, one should not worry and weep "O! I am a sinner, how can I be saved?"; one should completely renounce the thought "I am a sinner"; and concentrate keenly on meditation on the Self; then, one would surely succeed. There are not two minds - one good and the other evil; the mind is only one. It is the residual impressions that are of two kinds - auspicious and inauspicious. When the mind is under the influence of auspicious impressions it is called good; and when it is under the influence of inauspicious impressions it is regarded as evil. The mind should not be allowed to wander towards worldly objects and what concerns other people. However bad other people may be, one should bear no hatred for them. Both desire and hatred should be eschewed. All that one gives to others one gives to one's self. If this truth is understood who will not give to others? When one's self arises all arises; when one's self becomes quiescent all becomes quiescent. To the extent we behave with humility, to that extent there will result good. If the mind is rendered quiescent, one may live anywhere.

15. How long should inquiry be practised?

As long as there are impressions of objects in the mind, so long the inquiry "Who am I?" is required. As thoughts arise they should be destroyed then and there in the very place of their origin, through inquiry. If one resorts to contemplation of the Self unintermittently, until the Self is gained, that alone would do. As long as there are enemies within the fortress, they will continue to sally forth; if they are destroyed as they emerge, the fortress will fall into our hands.

16. What is the nature of the Self?

What exists in truth is the Self alone. The world, the individual soul, and God are appearances in it. Like silver in mother-of-pearl, these three appear at the same time, and disappear at the same time. The Self is that where there is absolutely no "I" thought. That is called "Silence". The Self itself is the world; the Self itself is God; all is Siva, the Self.

17. Is not everything the work of God?

Without desire, resolve, or effort, the sun rises; and in its mere presence, the sun-stone emits fire, the lotus blooms, water evaporates; people perform their various functions and then rest. Just as in the presence of the magnet the needle moves, it is by virtue of the mere presence of God that the souls governed by the three (cosmic) functions or the fivefold divine activity perform their actions and then rest, in accordance with their respective karmas. God has no resolve; no karma attaches itself to Him. That is like worldly actions not affecting the sun, or like the merits and demerits of the other four elements not affecting all pervading space.

18. Of the devotees, who is the greatest?

He who gives himself up to the Self that is God is the most excellent devotee. Giving one's self up to God means remaining constantly in the Self without giving room for the rise of any thoughts other than that of the Self. Whatever burdens are thrown on God, He bears them. Since the supreme power of God makes all things move, why should we, without submitting ourselves to it, constantly worry ourselves with thoughts as to what should be

done and how, and what should not be done and how not? We know that the train carries all loads, so after getting on it why should we carry our small luggage on our head to our discomfort, instead of putting it down in the train and feeling at ease?

19. What is non-attachment?

As thoughts arise, destroying them utterly without any residue in the very place of their origin is non-attachment. Just as the pearl-diver ties a stone to his waist, sinks to the bottom of the sea and there takes the pearls, so each one of us should be endowed with non-attachment, dive within oneself and obtain the Self-Pearl.

20. Is it not possible for God and the Guru to effect the release of a soul?

God and the Guru will only show the way to release; they will not by themselves take the soul to the state of release. In truth, God and the Guru are not different. Just as the prey which has fallen into the jaws of a tiger has no escape, so those who have come within the ambit of the Guru's gracious look will be saved by the Guru and will not get lost; yet, each one should by his own effort pursue the path shown by God or Guru and gain release. One can know oneself only with one's own eye of knowledge, and not with somebody else's. Does he who is Rama require the help of a mirror to know that he is Rama?

21. Is it necessary for one who longs for release to inquire into the nature of categories (tattvas)?

Just as one who wants to throw away garbage has no need to analyse it and see what it is, so one who wants to know the Self has no need to count the number of categories or inquire into their characteristics; what he has to do is to reject altogether the categories that hide the Self. The world should be considered like a dream.

22. Is there no difference between waking and dream?

Waking is long and a dream short; other than this there is no difference. Just as waking happenings seem real while awake. so do those in a dream while dreaming. In dream the mind takes on another body. In both waking and dream states thoughts, names and forms occur simultaneously.

23. Is it any use reading books for those who long for release?

All the texts say that in order to gain release one should render the mind quiescent; therefore their conclusive teaching is that the mind should be rendered quiescent; once this has been understood there is no need for endless reading. In order to quieten the mind one has only to inquire within oneself what one's Self is; how could this search be done in books? One should know one's Self with one's own eye of wisdom. The Self is within the five sheaths; but books are outside them. Since the Self has to be inquired into by discarding the five sheaths, it is futile to search for it in books. There will come a time when one will have to forget all that one has learned.

24. What is happiness?

Happiness is the very nature of the Self; happiness and the Self are not different. There is no happiness in any object of the world. We imagine through our ignorance that we derive happiness from objects. When the mind goes out, it experiences misery. In truth, when its desires are fulfilled, it returns to its own place and enjoys the happiness that is the Self. Similarly, in the states of sleep, samadhi and fainting, and when the object desired is obtained or the object disliked is removed, the mind becomes inward-turned, and enjoys pure Self-Happiness. Thus the mind moves without rest alternately going out of the Self and returning to it. Under the tree the shade is pleasant; out in the open the heat is scorching. A person who has been going about in the sun feels cool when he reaches the shade. Someone who keeps on going from the shade into the sun and then back into the shade is a fool. A wise man stays permanently in the shade. Similarly, the mind of the one who knows the truth does not leave Brahman. The mind of the ignorant, on the contrary, revolves in the world, feeling miserable, and for a little time returns to Brahman to experience happiness. In fact, what is called the world is only thought. When the world disappears, i.e. when there is no thought, the mind experiences happiness; and when the world appears, it goes through misery.

25. What is wisdom-insight (jnana-drsti)?

Remaining quiet is what is called wisdom-insight. To remain quiet is to resolve the mind in the Self. Telepathy, knowing past, present and future happenings and clairvoyance do not constitute wisdom-insight.

26. What is the relation between desirelessness and wisdom?

Desirelessness is wisdom. The two are not different; they are the same. Desirelessness is refraining from turning the mind towards any object. Wisdom means the appearance of no object. In other words, not seeking what is other than the Self is detachment or desirelessness; not leaving the Self is wisdom.

27. What is the difference between inquiry and meditation?

Inquiry consists in retaining the mind in the Self. Meditation consists in thinking that one's self is Brahman, existence-consciousness-bliss.

28. What is release?

Inquiring into the nature of one's self that is in bondage, and realising one's true nature is release.



Democritus in Meditation by Salvator Rosa, 1662; Credit- The Met Fifth Avenue



Excerpt from: *Image-Music-Text*
Essays selected and translated by
Stephen Heath

Roland Barthes

Some fifteen years ago now a certain idea of contemporary myth was put forward. That idea, which at its outset was really very little developed, nevertheless contained a number of theoretical articulations:

1. Myth, close to what Durkheimian sociology calls a 'collective representation', can be read in the anonymous utterances of the press, advertising, mass consumer goods; it is something socially determined, a 'reflection'.

2. This reflection, however, in accordance with a famous image used by Marx, is inverted: myth consists in overturning culture into nature or, at least, the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical into the 'natural'. What is nothing but a product of class division and its moral, cultural and aesthetic consequences is presented (stated) as being a 'matter of course'; under the effect of mythical inversion, the quite contingent foundations of the utterance become Common Sense, Right Reason, the Norm, General Opinion, in short the doxa (which is the secular figure of the Origin).

3. Contemporary myth is discontinuous. It is no longer expressed in long fixed narratives but only in 'discourse'; at most, it is a phraseology, a corpus of phrases (of stereotypes); myth disappears, but leaving - so much the more insidious - the mythical.

4. As a type of speech (which was after all the meaning of muthos), contemporary myth falls within the province of a semiology; the latter enables the mythical inversion to be 'righted' by breaking up the message into two semantic systems: a connoted system whose signified is ideological (and thus 'straight', 'non-inverted' or, to be clearer - and accepting a moral language - cynical) and a denoted system (the apparent literalness of image, object, sentence) whose function is to naturalize the class proposition by lending it the guarantee of the most 'innocent' of natures, that of language - millennial, maternal, scholastic, etc.

Thus appeared, thus at least appeared to me, myth today. Has anything changed? Not French society, at any rate not at this level, mythical history having a time-scale different to that of political history. Nor the myths, nor even the analysis: in our society the mythical still abounds, just as anonymous and slippery, fragmented and garrulous, available both for ideological criticism and semiological dismantling. No, what has changed these fifteen years is the science of reading under whose gaze myth, like an animal long since captured and held in observation, does nevertheless become a different object.

A science of the signifier (even if still in process of development), that is, has taken its place in the work of the period and its purpose is less the analysis of the sign than its dislocation. With regard to myth, and though this is a work that is yet to be carried through, the new semiology - or the new mythology - can no longer, will no longer be able to, separate so easily the signifier from the signified, the ideological from the phraseological. It is not that the distinction is false or without its use but rather that it too has become in some sort mythical: any student can and does denounce the bourgeois or petit-bourgeois character of such and such a form (of life, of thought, of consumption). In other words, a mythological doxa has been created: denunciation, demystification (or demythification), has itself become discourse, stock of phrases, catechistic declaration; in the face of which, the science of the signifier can only shift its place and stop (provisionally) further on - no longer at the (analytic) dissociation of the sign but at its very hesitation: it is no



Excerpt from: *The Summons of Love*

Mari Ruti

One of the best ways to understand what it means to feel connected to the "truth" of our being might be through a distinction that the famous British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott draws between our "true" and "false" self. The true self, according to Winnicott, possesses an existential suppleness that allows it to approach the practice of living—what I have portrayed as an ongoing process of becoming—with a measure of resourcefulness. The false self, in contrast, is a defensive structure that relates to the world in stiff and largely artificial ways. While this distinction might lead us to assume that the true self represents some sort of an innate core of selfhood that becomes corrupted by the false self, the matter is actually a lot more complicated. First of all, the true self is not a compilation of fixed attributes that would somehow, once and for all, determine who we are, but rather what guarantees our continuous aptitude for inner renewal. And, second, the false self is less an enemy of the true self than a protective shield against external trauma.

Winnicott explains that our inner agility is

Change the Object Itself: Mythology Today

longer the myths which need to be unmasked (the doxa now takes care of that), it is the sign itself which must be shaken; the problem is not to reveal the (latent) meaning of an utterance, of a trait, of a narrative, but to fissure the very representation of meaning, is not to change or purify the symbols but to challenge the symbolic itself. In this, (mythological) semiology finds itself a little in the same

situation as psychoanalysis before it: the latter began necessarily by drawing up lists of symbols (a tooth falling out is the subject castrated and so on) but its concern today, much more than with such a lexicon (which, without being false, is no longer of interest to it - though of enormous interest to those who dabble in the psychoanalytic vulgate), is with the interrogation of the very dialectic of the signifier; similarly, semiology, which started by establishing a mythological lexicon, is today confronted with a task that is of a more syntactical order (what are the articulations, the displacements, which make up the mythological tissue of a mass consumer society?). In an initial moment, the aim was the destruction of the (ideological) signified; in a second, it is that of the destruction of the sign: 'mythoclasm' is succeeded by a 'semiocasm' which is much more far reaching and pitched at a different level.

The historical field of action is thus widened: no longer the (narrow) sphere of French society but far beyond that, historically and geographically, the whole of Western civilization (Graeco-Judaeo-Islamo-Christian), unified under the one theology (Essence, monotheism) and identified by the regime of meaning it practices - from Plato to France-Dimanche.

The science of the signifier brings contemporary

threatened whenever we feel assaulted by the outside world—whenever we feel traumatized either by our intimate relationships or by a wounding social context. Predictably enough, our usual response to such situations is to set up psychological barriers to protect ourselves against being violated. Such defensive barriers over time congeal into false self presentations that make us feel reassuringly self-contained even as they gradually deprive us of our existential elasticity; we feel impermeable, and sometimes even invincible, without necessarily being aware of the ways in which we have relinquished our claim on a full-bodied life. As our true self slips into hiding behind the false one, we become more and more unyielding, more and more uncompromising, often alienating the people we most care about. Yet, ironically enough, the ultimate goal of the false self is to safeguard the continued viability of the true self in the face of external challenges. In this paradoxical fashion, the false self, though itself utterly incapable of emotional complexity, sustains our latent capacity for such complexity by ensuring that our true self does not get exploited to the point of total suffocation.

The purpose of the false self, then, is to assemble an impenetrable wall between the true self and the world so as to defend the dignity of the true self. In practice this means that we form an outer layer of personality—a "thick skin" or a "hardened shell"—that appears almost inanimate. We allow the part of ourselves that we present to the world to die, or at least to become so unresponsive as to give the impression of callous disregard for its surroundings. Our true self can in fact become so thoroughly masked by the defensive postures of the false self that others can no longer detect it at all. Instead, they

mythology a second rectification (or a second enlargement). Taken aslant by language, the world is written through and through; signs, endlessly deferring their foundations, transforming their signifieds into new signifiers, infinitely citing one another, nowhere come to a halt: writing is generalized. If the alienation of society still demands the demystification of languages (and notably the language of myths), the direction this combat must take is not, is no longer, that of critical decipherment but that of evaluation. Faced with all the writings of the world, with the skein of different forms of discourse (didactic, aesthetic, informative, political, etc.), it is a question of estimating levels of reification, degrees of phraseological density. Will we be able to render precise a notion which seems to me essential, that of the compactness of a language? Languages are more or less thick; certain amongst them, the most social, the most mythical, present an unshakeable homogeneity (there is a real force of meaning, a war of meanings): woven with habits and repetitions, with stereotypes, obligatory final clauses and key-words, each constitutes an idiolect, or more

exactly a sociolect (a notion to which twenty years ago I gave the name of writing¹). Thus, rather than myths, it is sociolects which must today be distinguished and described; which means that mythologies would be succeeded by an idiolectology - more formal and thereby, I believe, more penetrating - whose operational concepts would no longer be sign, signifier, signified and connotation but citation, reference, stereotype. In this way, thick languages (such as the discourse of myth) could be taken up in the line of a trans-writing of which the text (that we still refer to as 'literary'), the antidote of myth, would be the extreme pole or rather the region - airy, light, spaced, open, uncentred, noble and free - where writing spreads itself against the idiolect, at its limit and fighting it. Myth, indeed, must be included in a general theory of language, of writing, of the signifier, and this theory, resting on the formulations of ethnology, psychoanalysis, semiology and ideological analysis must widen its object so as to take in the sentence or, better, to take in sentences (the plural of the sentence). What I mean by this is that the mythical is present everywhere sentences are turned, stories told (in all senses of the two expressions): from inner speech to conversation, from newspaper article to political sermon, from novel (if there still are any) to advertising image - all utterances which could be brought together under the Lacanian concept of the imaginary.

This is no more than a programme, perhaps only an 'inclination'. I believe, however, that even if the new semiology - concerned in particular recently with the literary text - has not applied itself further to the myths of our time since the last of the texts in Mythologies where I sketched out an initial semiotic approach to social language, it is at least conscious of its task: no longer simply to upend (or right) the mythical message, to stand it back on its feet, with denotation at the bottom and connotation at the top, nature on the surface and class interest deep down, but rather to change the object itself, to produce a new object, point of departure for a new science, to move - with all due allowance for difference in importance (obviously) and according to Althusser's scheme - from Feuerbach to Marx, from the young Marx to the mature Marx.

relate to the false self, imagining this to be who we really "are." Indeed, because the false self functions effectively enough on many levels of daily life, it can sometimes deceive even the most intimate of companions. However, it fails to convince others in situations that presuppose a versatility of being. This is because it has lost its capacity to be at ease with itself; it has lost the openness to the adventure of loving and relating that allows us to maintain an adroit sense of self.

The tragedy of the false self, therefore, is that even if its solid armor of self-reliance manages to shelter the deeper layers of our being from injury, this armor simultaneously keeps us from forming a meaningful connection to the outside world. Sadly, the desperate exertions of the false self can make us feel even more false: shallow and devoid of purpose. Because the false self—sometimes for very good reasons—experiences the world as inherently hostile or impinging, it can become so fixated on sheer survival that we end up feeling that we have been drained of every drop of our humanity.

Sometimes we may even become so inundated by fear that we find it impossible to relax our restless hypervigilance even when we are not confronted by any immediate danger; we may remain on the defensive simply because we have learned to anticipate, as



Of Anger!

ANGER IS DESIRE of revenge, joined with grief, for that he, or some of his, is, or seems to be, neglected.

The object of anger is always some particular or individual thing. In anger there is also pleasure proceeding from the imagination of revenge to come. To neglect, is to esteem little or nothing; and of three kinds: 1 Contempt, 2 Crossing, 3 Contumely.

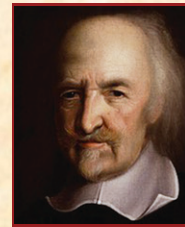
- Contempt, is when a man thinks another of little worth in comparison to himself.
- Crossing, is the hinderance of another man's will without design to profit himself.
- Contumely, is the disgracing of another for his own pastime.

The common opinions concerning anger are therefore such as follow. They are easily angry, that think they are neglected. That think they excel others; as the rich with the poor; the noble with the obscure, &c. And such as think they deserve well. And such as grieve to be hindered, opposed, or not assisted; and therefore sick men, poor men, lovers, and generally all that desire and attain not, are angry with those that, standing by, are not moved by their wants. And such as having expected good, find evil.

Those that men are angry with, are: such as mock, deride, or jest at them. And such as shew any kind of contumely towards them. And such as despise those things which we spend most labour and study upon; and the more, by how much we seem the less advanced therein. And our friends, rather than those that are not our friends. And such as have honoured us, if they continue not. And such as require not our courtesy. And such as follow contrary courses, if they be our inferiors. And our friends, if they have said or done us evil, or not good. And such as give not ear to our entreaty. And such as are joyful or calm in our distress. And such as troubling us, are not themselves troubled. And such as willingly hear or see our disgraces. And such as neglect us in the presence of our competitors, of those we admire, of those we would have admire us, of those we reverence, and of those that reverence us. And such as should help us, and neglect it. And such as are in jest, when we are in earnest. And such as forget us, or our names.

An orator therefore must so frame his judge or auditor by his oration, as to make him apt to anger: and then make his adversary appear such as men use to be angry withal.

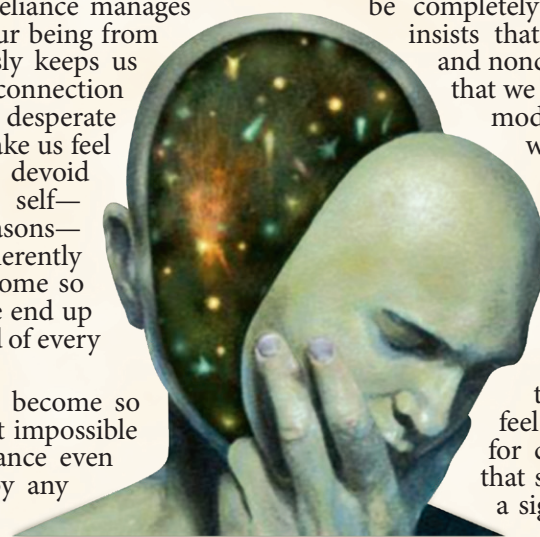
Excerpt from: *The Whole Art of Rhetoric*



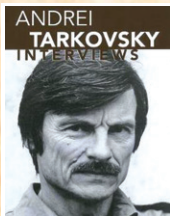
Thomas Hobbes

well as to brace ourselves against, trauma.

One of the most insidious components of trauma is that it makes it difficult for us to meet the world as a generous space of possibility. It damages not only the present (the moment when it is first inflicted), but also the future, in the sense that it robs us of our capacity for what Winnicott calls "creative living." However, Winnicott specifies that our aptitude for creative living can never be entirely destroyed—that although it can be compromised, it cannot ever be completely extinguished. Winnicott in fact insists that the distinction between creative and noncreative living is not categorical, but that we tend to vacillate between these two modalities. In other words, even when we fail to live creatively, we retain the intuition that we might be able to do so at some future point. As Winnicott observes, "In a tantalizing way many individuals have experienced just enough of creative living to recognize that for most of their time they are living uncreatively." Interestingly, then, the very fact that we often feel disconnected from our capacity for creative living—that we are aware that something is amiss in our lives—is a sign that we are still psychologically alive, that some untamed or unbroken part of us is still crying for recognition.



The True Self



Excerpt from: *Andrei Tarkovsky Interviews*

Velia Iacovino

It isn't always possible to establish a contact with others through words. Sometimes, one creates a direct bond, beyond language, emotional and wholly irrational, through which it is possible to communicate solely with a glance, a smile, with a slight movement of the hand. Something similar to this occurred with Andrei Tarkovsky, perhaps the most important Russian director of our time, when I interviewed him in Rome for *MassMedia*. It was a captivating and unforgettable moment. Small, slight, he looked around and moved with his somewhat Tatar features contracted into a scowl. He asked me to show him the magazine. He leafed through *MassMedia* pausing to read one or two of the headlines. Then he recomposed himself. He smiled, and his Asiatic eyes finally stopped sending out imperceptible sparks of discomfort. "I'm ready," he said, after a silent pause, in his somewhat comical Italian. And turning to an interpreter friend, he began to answer my questions.

Question: *Mr. Tarkovsky, in your opinion, is film passing through a difficult moment, as difficult as the passing from silent to sound film?*

Tarkovsky: Of course. I'd say that film is passing through a moment that is far more difficult and critical than the one that marked the beginning of sound in film. A moment that I don't quite know how to deal with. And this has not happened because of the use of new technologies, but strictly because of economic pressures and motivations. The fact is that in truth, film is now in the hands of big producers. American producers. And these producers are primarily interested in getting videocassettes out into the market. They want to realize ever higher profits, instead of trying to satisfy the tastes of that large segment of the public which has become more intelligent, and, as a consequence, more demanding. We're talking about big business here. That's the story. We're talking about a mechanism that will be very difficult to dismantle or slow down, even in the name of artistic quality.

Q: *Do you think there is such a thing as a national cinematic language? Or is it true instead that a Swiss director has the same cinematic language and the same technique as a Canadian or Soviet director?*

T: If cinema is an art, it naturally has a national language. Art cannot keep from being national. In short, Russian cinema is Russian, and Italian cinema is Italian.

Q: *In 1976, you directed Hamlet on stage, and achieved enormous success. Is directing for the stage very different than directing for film?*

T: Theater and cinema are two different art forms. Two different professions. To realize a theatrical show, for example, you need to have a theater at your disposal, in which you can train the company and prepare your actors. But this, it seems, is not always possible. However, apart from the difference in the location where the action takes place, that which you can do in theater you cannot do in cinema. And vice versa. I think, however, that all art forms, even if they are different, are in the end equivalent. They have the same worth and weight and have the same effect on reality.

Q: *Do you think cinema has eclipsed theater?*

T: No, I don't believe so. They are two things, as I've already said, that are completely different.

Q: *What changes when instead of shooting a film for the big screen you shoot it for television?*

T: When you make a film, you have to be constantly aware whether you are making it for the big screen or for television. Because the spectators' mode of perception will change completely, depending on whether they are immersed in the dark, crowded hall, or home, alone, with their remote control, amidst an infinity of possible distractions. Furthermore, going to the cinema is an act of volition. Watching a film on television isn't always that. Often you suffer or endure the image on television, an image which acts subliminally, even changing people's tastes.

Q: *Don't you believe that seeing too many films as can happen with many television spectators can cause a dangerous flight into fantasy?*

T: Television certainly has a strong influence on the psychology of those who watch it. I'm convinced that it can also modify taste. But I don't think it can seduce or alter spectators to a point where they lose touch with reality.

Q: *In what way is the medium of television transforming the public's tastes?*

T: Since the public started watching television consistently, it goes to the cinema with a different spirit. It no longer goes to the cinema just to be distracted or for entertainment. It goes to see something that it is worth seeing, something completely new.

Q: *What has television taken from cinema? And what has it given?*

T: Television hasn't taken anything from cinema. On the contrary, I believe that television has a greater influence on film than film does on television, in that it stimulates cinema to seek higher quality. In addition, television is a means of information we truly can't do without. It has become indispensable, even if the enormous quantity of news it broadcasts is often superficial and only serves to confuse people.

Q: *In the past, you've stated that cinema is a means of ideological education for the masses. Do you still believe this?*

T: Certainly. I haven't changed my opinion. Rather, I'd like to add that all art forms, and not just cinema, should have as their aim to shape the organic man of the future.

Q: *Your cinema has been defined "a poetic cinema." Do you agree?*

T: Critics say that I'm a poet. Every art form can be poetry. All the greatest musicians, writers, and painters are also great poets.

Q: *In your opinion, is poetry the expression of beauty for beauty's sake? Or is it a means to confront and alter reality?*

T: Poetry doesn't alter reality. It creates it.

Q: *Mr. Tarkovsky, do you believe that it's easier for art to exist without power, or for power to exist without art?*

T: Art is not made out of power. Art is made by artists.

Q: *What is, for you, the specific power of film?*

T: Unlike all the other art forms, film is able to seize and render the passage of time, to stop it, almost to possess it in infinity. I'd say that film is the sculpting of time.

Q: *For Fellini, cinema was "a mirror, a window, a way to continue dreaming, to look inside yourself." What is cinema for you? What does it represent?*

T: I don't agree with Fellini. Cinema is not a way to continue dreaming. Nor is it an art through which we try to mirror reality as it is, or to deform it and reflect a grotesque image. For me, cinema is simply an original way to create a new universe, a fascinating world that we show to others so they can discover all its hidden wonders.

Q: *Is it fair to say, "this is a film by Tarkovsky"? Or is it also obligatory that we speak of the actors, the screenwriters, the cameramen, and the others?*



Scene of the film *Nostalghia* (1983), shot in the Church of San Vittorino submerged in water.

T: Of course, it's not only the director or the actors who work on a film. A film doesn't belong 100 percent to the director. Nor does it belong to the actors. It belongs to all those who contributed to its production.

Q: *Can you tell us why the release of Andrei Roublev was delayed so long in the Soviet Union?*

T: I don't know the reasons. And I ignore them. I only know that initially they decided to screen the film at the Cannes Film Festival and that, instead,

they suddenly changed their minds. The film was detained. Evidently something happened, something I really can't explain.

Q: *In your opinion, is there a difference between directing in the USSR and directing in the West?*

T: There were people who had scared me about this. They told me it was very difficult to work in the West. But I didn't find a great difference. Actually, I think it's the opposite. Certainly, here, it's like running a race against yourself every day, when you make a film and you immediately think of the money involved. This, I have to say, didn't happen in the USSR.

Q: *Is it fair to represent the figure of Andrei Roublev as a metaphor for the artist who assumes the responsibility of opening the eyes of the public, of those who neither hear nor speak, who are represented in the figure of the deaf-mute?*

T: In this film the artist is only the spokesperson of the masses. He expresses the ideas of the masses, those ideas that the masses frequently perceive, in a confused manner, and are not able to organize or express.

Q: *In your films, the camera often pauses on water, on fire, on snow, on horses. Why? Are these elements perhaps used symbolically?*

T: No, they're not symbols. They are manifestations of that nature in which we live.

Q: *Then what meaning has the water that runs down the icon at the end of Andrei Roublev?*

T: It's difficult for me to explain. In this case I used water because it is a vital, living substance, that continually changes form, that moves. It's a very cinematographic element. And through this I tried to express an idea of the passage of time. Of the movement of time.

Q: *Some say that your film Solaris was significantly changed when it was dubbed into Italian.*

T: In its Italian version, my film was essentially destroyed. The montage was changed. It was the work of Dacia Maraini. I don't know what part Pasolini might have had in it. But it was an authentic act of barbarism. Among many things, they speak in dialect in this film. It's monstrous. A disaster.

Q: *Where do you place Nostalghia in the arc of your career?*

T: *Nostalghia* was a very important film for me. I was able to fully express myself. And I have to say that I received confirmation that cinema is a great art form, capable of representing even the imperceptible states of the soul.

Q: *Recently you said that the greatest things that man can do are born in silence and solitude. A film is born in quite another manner. Does this mean that in cinema, it's impossible to do great things?*

T: A film is also born in silence and solitude. It begins to take form in that moment when its author first thinks about it.

Q: *Which Italian directors do you prefer?*

T: Antonioni, Fellini, Olmi. The Taviani brothers. And others. They are all full of life. Bellocchio...

Q: *What sort of atmosphere did you find at the Cannes Film Festival this year?*

Editorial

Aesthetics and Culture

The void between the normative and material existence has many times remained elusive in the intellectual progress of mankind. The normative constituting a spiritual phenomenon renders a symbolic meaning that glues social life into its ethical constitution. While the material practices of social life are determined by the conflicts and contradictions of everyday existence, the abyss between normative and practical life is integrated into habits of the symbolic practices that are either customary or habituated necessities. Within these poles of normativity and materiality is the constitution of self and of one's being. Refining human sensibilities, therefore, involves both signifying the values that are central to cultivation of these sensibilities, and simultaneously carrying out an empirical investigation and, if required, a critique of established social practices. In that background we discover the role of aesthetics in constituting a culture of social constitution.

The remarkable aspect of aesthetics is hidden in its appeal to the human unconscious subtly suggesting and shaping one's imagination and desires. The unconscious, that many times one is oblivious to in everyday living, renders the key to one's self-making, thereby inadvertently shaping one's opinions, behavior, prejudices, instincts, and even intuitions. Many times, the hard reality of existential world may not stimulate mind to envision its inner meaning. On the contrary it may consume human imagination and, therefore, intuitive potential to take a flight from its tight grip. Aesthetics and art, on the contrary, awaken and help envision more than what is available in terms of hard reality. The decorative aspect of aesthetics permeates into social culture propounding a sense of civilization through its moral and material expressions. The culture thus produced from fine tastes involves nurturing the characteristics for a sensitive and just society.

Through Makrand, we draw attention towards cultivation of human sensibilities through development of aesthetics that approach art beyond its utilitarian purpose of entertainment or image making. For us, the important question is the making of art and its meaning while transcending the subjectivities and psychological image constructions. Art and aesthetics, in this sense, have an epistemic value, offering food to one's imagination. It is not a semblance of reality that consumes empiricism into a sensuous display deposing humanity into its own construction. Instead, we strive to uncover the basic nature of man to take flight into the unknown skies that enables an embodiment of the abstract beautiful into its new meanings while demolishing self-absorbed cementing into human narcissism. This, we believe, has the potential to open the human mind to discover self-meaning inspired by the objective reality of self-making. Such liberated space offers a reverberation of human emotions into its highest ideal of discovering the essence of the Truth. In Sikh lexicon, this cultural ideal is expressed in the idea of Panth or spiritual path that we strive to rediscover in mankind's creative potential.

Amandeep Singh

T: Some dreadful things happened at Cannes this year. I simply made a film about nostalgia, about melancholy. And it was a bitter pill for me to swallow when Bondarchuk, the Soviet member of the jury, didn't accept my film. Everyone liked it except for him. I'm very offended and I'm surprised that the Soviet leaders permitted such an opinion to prevail on such a patriotic film.

Q: *Which is the film for which you feel the greatest affection?*

T: I love all of my films. I don't know how to answer. Perhaps I feel closest to *Nostalghia*. It's the last. In it I find myself.

Q: *What emotions can best be represented through film?*

T: You can express all emotions through film. It's an art form, like all the others. It depends on the intentions of the director.

Q: *Does it still make sense to make film in black and white?*

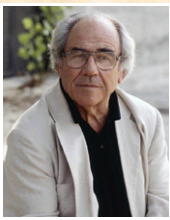
T: Without a doubt. Black and white film is able to better represent the essence of reality, to express intrinsic meaning. This doesn't happen with color. I'd say that film in color is more common, more vulgar.

Q: *What are your plans for the future? Can you give us a few peeks?*

T: Donatella Baglivo has just finished a television special on my work as a director. It's not exactly a film. It's more of how *Nostalghia* was made. It's interesting and very original. For my part I'm planning to stage "Boris Godunov" at Covent Garden in London, and to make a film version of *Hamlet*. But for the moment I'm waiting for my country to send me permission for this work sojourn. I'm also waiting for them to send my son and his grandmother. I should be abroad for three years.

"He who has tasted the sweetness of solitude and tranquillity, is free from fear and free from sin, while he tastes the sweetness of drinking in the law."

The Dhammapada



Excerpt from: *The Consumer Society*

Jean Baudrillard

The machine was the emblem of industrial society. The gadget is the emblem of post-industrial society. No rigorous definition of the gadget exists. If, however, we agree to define the object of consumption by the relative disappearance of its objective function (as an implement) and a corresponding increase in its sign function, and if we accept that the object of consumption is characterized by a kind of *functional uselessness* (what is consumed is precisely something other than the 'useful'), then the *gadget is indeed the truth of the object in consumer society*. Hence, *anything can become a gadget* and everything potentially is one. The gadget might be said, then, to be defined by its potential uselessness and its ludic combinatorial value (But it is not a toy, as the toy has a symbolic for the child. However, a 'new look' toy, a fashionable toy becomes a gadget once again simply by dint of such modishness). So both sew-on badges, which have had their hour of glory, and the 'Venusik', a perfectly 'pure' and useless cylinder of polished metal (its only possible use being as a paperweight, the function reserved for all absolutely useless objects!), are gadgets. 'Lovers of formal beauty and potential uselessness, the fabulous "Venusik" has arrived!'

But the typewriter which can write in 13 different character sets, depending on whether you are writing to your bank manager or your lawyer, a very important client or an old friend, is also a gadget - for where is 'objective' uselessness to begin? As are the inexpensive home-made trinkets and also the IBM dictation machine: 'Imagine a little machine (12cm X 15cm) you can have with you everywhere - in the office, at weekends and on your travels. You hold it in one hand and, with a flick of the thumb, whisper your decisions, dictate your directives, hail your victories. Everything you say is committed to its memory ... Whether you are in Rome, Tokyo or New York, your secretary will not miss a single one of your syllables.' What could be more useful? What could be more useless? When technology is consigned to mental practices of a magical type or to modish social practices, then the technical object itself becomes a mere gadget again.

In a car, are the chrome, the two-speed windscreen wipers and the electric windows gadgets? Yes and no: they do have some utility in terms of social prestige. The contemptuous connotation of the term comes quite simply from a *moral* perspective on the instrumental usefulness of objects: some are said to have a use, others not. By what criteria? There is no object, even the most marginal and decorative, that does not have some use, if only because, in having no use, it becomes once again a mark of distinction (The pure *gadget*, defined as something totally useless to anyone at all, would be an absurdity). Conversely, there is no object which does not, in a sense, serve no precise purpose (or which cannot, in other words, serve a purpose other than its intended one). There is no way out of this, except to define a

The Gadget and the Ludic

gadget as something which is explicitly intended for secondary functions. Thus, not only the chrome, but also the 'cockpit' and the whole car are gadgets if they are part of a logic of fashion and prestige or part of a fetishistic logic. And the systematics of objects means that this is the dominant tendency for all objects today.

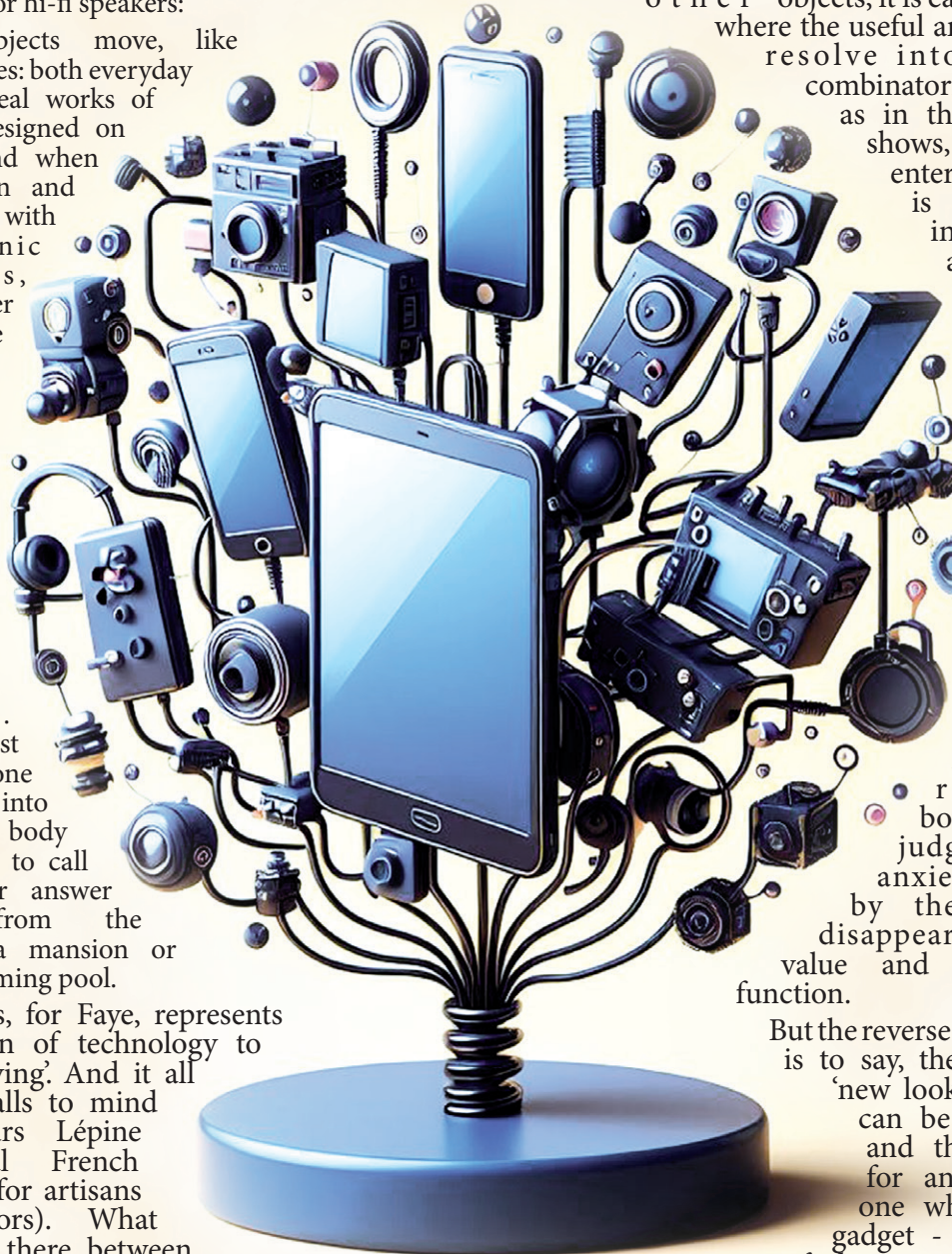
The world of the pseudo-environment and the pseudo-object is one in which all 'functional' 'creators' revel. Take Andre Faye, 'technician of the art of living', who creates Louis XVI furniture, the stylish doors of which open to reveal the smooth, brilliant surface of a turntable or hi-fi speakers:

His objects move, like Calder's mobiles: both everyday objects and real works of art can be designed on this basis. And when set in motion and coordinate d with chromophonic projections, they come ever closer to the *total spectacle* to which he aspires ... Cybernetic furniture, desks with variable geometry a n d orientation, a calligraphic Teletype machine ... At long last a telephone fully built into the human body to enable you to call New York or answer Honolulu from the grounds of a mansion or beside a swimming pool.

All this, for Faye, represents 'a subjugation of technology to the art of living'. And it all irresistibly calls to mind the Concours Lépine (An annual French competition for artisans and inventors). What difference is there between the videophone desk and the cold-water based heating system devised by some illustrious inventor? Yet, there is a difference. It is that the good old artisanal brainwave was a curious excrement, the mildly unhinged poetry of a heroic technology. The gadget, by contrast, is part of a systematic logic which lays hold of the

whole of daily life in the spectacular mode, and, as a consequence, casts a suspicion of artificiality, fakery and uselessness over the whole environment of objects, and, by extension, over the whole environment of human and social relations. In its broadest sense, the gadget attempts to move beyond the generalized crisis of *purpose [finalite]* and usefulness in *the ludic mode*. But it does not - and cannot - attain the symbolic freedom the toy has for the child. It is impoverished, a fashion effect, a kind of artificial accelerator of f other objects; it is caught in a circuit where the useful and the symbolic resolve into a kind of combinatorial uselessness, as in those 'total' light shows, where the entertainment itself is a gimmick or, in other words, a social p s e u d o - event - a game with out players. The pejorative resonance the terms 'gadgets', 'gadgetry', a n d 'gimmickry' h a v e acquired t o d a y (a mere gadget, 'just gimmickry') n o d o u b t r e f l e c t s both a moral judgement and the anxiety generated by the generalized disappearance of use-value and the symbolic function.

But the reverse is also true. That is to say, the combinatorial 'new look' of the gadget can be opposed by - and this is the case for any object, even one which is itself a gadget - *the exaltedness of the new*. The period of newness is, in a sense, the sublime period of the object and may, in certain cases, attain the intensity, if not the quality, of the emotion of love. This phase is one of a symbolic discourse, in which fashion and reference to others have no part. It is in this mode of intense relation that the child experiences his objects and toys. And it is not the



The Barter



Writer and editor

Harjot Kaur

How many times have I told you to feed the oxen the grains from old harvests and not the latest one?" bellowed a well-built man in his mid-twenties, planting a rough smack on a younger man's ears. "You are a lazy hag, and need another round of spanking it seems". The younger man hurried over to the oxen's shed. The drooping lids of dusky skies made it hard for him to see what lay in front of the ruminant, but he swiftly raked up the content of the cemented pit, and dumped it back into the room where the family stored its grains and pulses. He re-filled the pit with fodder and grass, thinking it to be a better choice than old grains, and pleased with his alacrity, returned half panting to where the other man sat. Rubbing off sweat and grime off his forehead with the sleeve of his threadbare shirt, the younger man shrieked supporting a smug smile, "Er.....go and see now brother". The younger man settled back on the mat to resume eating the half sludge mix of a watery porridge, when suddenly he felt a sharp blow on the rear of his head. The porridge erupted from his mouth and smudged the leg of the charpoy that lay close to where he sat.

"Don't you know, dunce, that the oxen plow and thresh all day long, and that grass and fodder will make them hungry before noon hits. You need a greater spanking, the one that I give you is never enough for a moron like you. Let me call father," yelled the elder fellow.

The younger one burst into a petrified stutter, "Na, Veer! Have the rest of my porridge, and the ten cobbled stones I won yesterday, and also I will give you the jaggery I get at the time of Punni's muklawa. Pray, don't call upon father." Saying this, and not waiting for an answer, the young man rushed to the oxen's sheds. He peered into the places of the shed, gazed at the different pits, and scrutinized all corners of the family's grain storage area. He did not find the grains of the old harvest. The darkness of the wintery night, the chilled air, an un-satiated hunger, and fear of brutal beatings growled at him like a song of banshees, and his steps hastened in the direction of his friend's home.

Billa, his friend, lived next door and was busy moving the bamboo cots from the verandah to one of the rooms of his mud-threshed home. His gait had a command of mastery at doing this chore and his mien of a soldier's son gave him a princely stature which awed many. The young man blew a mild whistle at Billa. Billa, although a bit startled, kept steady with the chore at hand and after moving all the cots inside and re-tying his head cover, came to attend to the whistler. "What do you want at this time of the night?" he demanded. Blurting out his need amidst sighs and groans of fear and resentment, the young man asked for a couple pails of old grain for his family's oxen - there was a sense of earnestness in his voice, an invitation to get enslaved for the rest of his life



only if his immediate imploring could be addressed. Billa looked deeply into the fluttering eyes that sparkled at him and then turned his glance at his family's grain heaps puddled into over-sized jute bags. His family's agrarian ancestry had garnered repute and awe in the village. His father was the Sarpanch of the village. Billa was the eldest son in his family, and had come to enjoy a glowing reputation owing to his tact and prudence at helping his father deal with myriad problems that the villagers brought to them. He enjoyed a venerable standing in his peers and his friendship meant nothing less than a high seat in the worldly paradise for the young men of the dreamy little village. His days were overworked and nights, off late, had begun to follow suit. Ah, the banes of rustic life!

Billa considered the situation and harked, "I have kept these two sacks for the potter's son," silently signaling at a silhouette figure lying wrapped up in a scraggy blanket in the verandah of his house. "He got me six earthen pots and gadwis yesterday". The young man pondered, and begged in a mendicant's voice- "I will cut chaff for you for two days in exchange of the two sacks, please give these to me, vadday veer". He reached out to Billa's hands and earnestly held them, patting them gently, kissing them hungrily, and touching them with his forehead repeatedly.

Billa looked at the potter's son and at the young man, at the young man and at the potter's son, at the two sacks and the huge chaff cutter machine that lay in the corner of his family's animal shed. The day break was to come in a few hours and he had not slept for more than a couple hours since the past few nights. He blurted, "All right, come in two hours and cut this heap, and after you have done so, take these two sacks home."

The young man was elated and heaved a sigh of deep relief. He dared not go home without the grains, lest his elder brother rebuke him again for not filling the pits for the oxen in preparation for the next day's plowing and threshing. He trembled at the idea of his father, for the umpteenth time, calling him useless and smothering him with painful name calling loud harangue at the least and lashing the oxen's whip at his sun-roasted back at the worst. He asked Billa, "Can I lie next to the potter's son

least of the charms, later, of a new car, book, gadget or item of clothing that they plunge us back into absolute childhood. This is the opposite logic to that of consumption.

The gadget is defined in fact by the way we act with it, which is not utilitarian or symbolic in character, but **ludic**. It is the ludic which increasingly governs our relations to objects, persons, culture, leisure and, at times, work, and also politics. It is the ludic which is becoming the dominant tone of our daily habits, to the extent indeed that everything - objects, goods, relationships, services - is becoming gadgetry or gimmickry. The ludic represents a very particular type of investment: it is not economic (useless objects) and not symbolic (the gadget/object has no soul), but consists in a play with combinations, a combinatorial modulation: a play on the technical variants or potentialities of the object - in innovation a *playing with the rules of play*, in destruction a playing with life and death as the ultimate combination. Here, our domestic gadgets link up once again with slot machines, *tirlipots* and the other cultural radio games, the quiz machine in the drugstore, the car dashboard and the whole range of 'serious' technical apparatus which makes up the modern 'ambience' of work from the telephone to the computer all those things we play with more or less consciously, fascinated as we are by the operation of machines, by childlike discovery and manipulation, by vague or passionate curiosity for the 'play' of mechanisms, the play of colours, the play of variants: this is the very soul of passionate play [*le jeu-passion*], but diffuse and generalized and hence less cogent, emptied of its pathos and become mere *curiosity* - something between indifference and fascination, which might be defined by its opposition to *passion*. Passion may be understood as a concrete relation to a *total person* or to some object taken as a person. It implies total investment and assumes an intense symbolic value. Whereas ludic curiosity is merely interest - albeit violent interest - in the *play of elements*.

Take the pinball machine. The player becomes absorbed in the machine's noise, jolts and flashing lights. He is playing with electricity. As he presses the controls, he has a sense of unleashing impulses and currents through a world of multi-coloured wires as complex as a nervous system. There is in his play an effect of magical participation in science. To grasp this, one has only to observe the crowd which gathers around the repair man in a cafe when he opens up the machine. No one understands the connections and circuits, but everyone accepts this strange world as an incontrovertible datum. There is nothing here of the relation of rider to horse, worker to tools or art-lover to work of art. The relation of man to object is strictly magical, which is to say that it is bewitched and manipulatory.

This ludic activity may give the appearance of being a passion. But it never is. It is consumption - in this case, abstract manipulation of lights, 'flippers' and electrical reaction times, in other cases, the abstract manipulation of marks of prestige in the variants of fashion. Consumption is combinatorial investment: it is exclusive of passion.

in his blanket and sleep here for the next couple hours?" Billa bobbed his head in affirmation.

The young man could not sleep. The stench of the potter's son's unbathed skin and muddled clothes and the mouldy smell of his blanket kept him awake; so did the fear of his brother and father finding about his absence from home as well as the possibility of him oversleeping such that the potter's son takes away the two sacks before he wakes up. After tossing and turning a few times, he got up and approached the chaff cutter with a delirious gait. His body ached due to lack of rest as well as the meager, midget of the porridge he had had. He had never worked the machine and was petrified of the appearance of the two circular sharp blades that looked to him like the two swords of Durga - ready to behead and decapitate under the canopy of darkness. He looked to the sky and mustering a flimsy courage laid his trembling hand at the handle of the chaff cutter. The machine did not squeak and the young man sighed in peace. He loaded the chara into the tray feeding the chaff cutter and applied a hesitantly compulsive force to rotate it in a circular motion. The crunchy sound of the blade chopping away at the soft surface of the leaves and the wisps of smells that emanate from green leaves elated his imagination. The sound of chopped fodder falling gently into the lap of a spread out jute bag and the musical breeze of the rotating wheel's sound lightened up his spirit.

"Have you ever worked on a chaff cutter, Mahrum?" It is way harder than pulling water from the village well. It is challenging to work with a machine and you need to be nimble with loading the green strands and pushing them with one hand, while rotating the wheel with the other. It requires so much skill and agility". His imagination soared upwards, engaging in a dialog with a sturdy muscular boy of his age who prided himself with being the fastest one to pull water from the village well. And he imagined awe on Mahrum's face, a reverence for him. He soared even higher into the sky. "My brother learnt, almost intuitively, the way to operate the chaff cutter. He cuts fodder like lightning and"

A pathetic shriek diffused into the breath of the little village. The strands of dawn's slivered beams trembled upon meeting a red patch of grass.



Excerpt from: *Grafts Writings on Plants*

Michael Marder

Let's begin with the common understanding of friendship. We call "friends" those of our peers who have interests and hobbies akin to ours, with whom we spend a portion of our spare time, attend cultural and social events, share a laugh or a moment of sadness. We can sneer, as Aristotle does in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, at the instrumental motivations of people who initiate friendships as a means to some external end and brag that they've "got friends in high places." Even more so today, the prevalent practice of networking tinges all social interactions with utility-maximizing objectives. One thing is nonetheless clear: a friend is someone who stands out from the undifferentiated mass of humanity (as well as from the semi-undifferentiated background of a social network), is individuated, and, in important respects, considered to be similar to ourselves. And what about the vast majority of people who are not our friends? Modern liberalism teaches us to treat them with universal apathy and neutrality, so long as they are not perceived as a threat; other worldviews may deem whoever is not presently a friend to be a potential friend or, conversely, an enemy.

Taking as an axiom the assertion that friendship hinges on similarity, the more we identify with a creature, the greater the likelihood that we would befriend it. A non-human animal can be a friend, or a companion, provided that we recognize and respond to each other's emotions, share time together (for instance, walking in a park), and so forth. The freedom and reciprocity of the animal's response is somewhat dubious, and such doubts are significant, assuming that friendship is a freely chosen arrangement, as the very English word friend intimates through its association with free (both derive from the proto-Indo-European root *pri-*, "to love"). Wild, undomesticated, and therefore freer animals spend but a fleeting moment with us, mostly gazing with curiosity, assessing whether we are threatening, a potential source of food, or simply irrelevant. When unprovoked, they tend to turn their backs and treat us as good old liberals do, leading us to the deduction that they do not wish to be our friends. But then, again, there is no freedom in instrumentally acquired human friendships, where necessity dictates the terms of a relationship, either. Is it so preposterous to think that the friends we use as means to a goal are our pets, or that we are theirs, depending on the way the imbalance of power plays itself out?

More interesting though is the question of whether

Vegetal Friendship

a plant or a god could be a friend. Can we have friends in places so low that they partly dwell in the soil? Or so high—higher than high—that their abode is above this world? Such a possibility seems to undermine what we took to be the basis of friendship, namely similarity in a way of acting or living that permits friends to share their interests and time. How does one spend time with an eternal, atemporal being, like (a) god? Or with a creature whose time-scale and response is drastically different from and typically much slower than that of human consciousness?

Imagine that you sit for hours on end under a tree you like (say, an olive tree). In doing so, you do not necessarily participate in the temporality of that tree, unless, through a deliberately honed practice of meditation, you alter your own consciousness, your own perception of time and slow it down enough to approximate that of the plant you are with. Be this as it may, friendship demands a minimum of synchronicity among friends who are "on the same page" if not in terms of their interests, then at least in terms of the structure of their experience of time and place. Formulated otherwise, friendship is willingness to share a world (which is not the same thing as the environment or the universe) across unavoidable differences in perspective between the I and the other.

Despite some promising leads, we would hit an impasse, insofar as the thinking of vegetal friendship (and friendship as such) is concerned, should we continue treating the parties to this relation as monolithic. It is advisable to consult a lineage that extends from Sigmund Freud to Carl Schmitt and Jacques Derrida, all of whom, in one way or another, expose the myth of



True Friendship Painted by Ibibo Bridge

the subject's inner psychic unity. Before addressing the issues involved in associations with external others, we should ask: Am I necessarily my own friend? Could I be an enemy to myself, harming or undercutting myself, if only unconsciously?

All of us, after all, live out of sync with ourselves, desperately trying to create synergies between the time of the unconscious and the traditional phenomenological flux of time-consciousness. At the extreme, when we grow oblivious to ourselves or become our own worst enemies, we may lapse into a schizophrenic state that merely exacerbates these preexisting mental fissures and gaps. Seeing that things are so complex at the level of my own self-identification, to discover similarities with the other is to foreground a portion of our psychic life, of which we (and the other) approve. Internal and external asynchronicity remains in effect, these fragile bridges notwithstanding.

In plants, the distinction between self and other,

presupposed in any contemplation of friendship, is still thornier than in human subjectivity. Scientists (e.g., UC Davis's Richard Karban) study what they call "kin recognition" in plants—a biochemical detection and interpretation of certain specimens as "the same" and "the other."

Depending on the identity of their neighbors, the behavior of plants changes: the roots are more extensive and dense in proximity to "strangers" than to "relatives." While kin recognition primarily deals with something like family ties, there are also instances of compatibility or incompatibility between various species. Every gardener knows that some seedlings should never be planted next to each other (for instance, peas and fennel), whereas others are "companion plants" (for example, tomato and calendula, which actually repels tomato worms). It is also a matter of broad consensus that plants are very good at creating alliances with particular insects, whom they summon to spread their pollen (bees, butterflies, etc.) or to repel attacking herbivores. As Consuelo de Moraes, Mark Mescher, and James Tumlinson note in *Nature*: "Plants respond to insect herbivory by synthesizing and releasing complex blends of volatile compounds, which provide important host-location cues for insects that are

Food in the Vedic Tradition

Dina Simoes Guha

Food is a sacred substance. It is cosmic, spiritual and the very breath of life: *prana*. In the Upanishads, it is the divine substance: *anna*. It is both sacred and social. Vedic Man equated food with Brahman; and it was also the sacrifice of the gods. Food is the Creator and the Immolator. Food is worshipped.

The Satapatha Brahmana recalls the primordial sacrifice of Prajapati, as the consumer of the divine substance, Food there was nothing to eat; and perforce Prajapati propagated himself as Food. Soon the metabolic process of the universe, the cosmic metamorphosis, became food. It was described analogically as the spider, drawing, and weaving its web out of itself, to catch its food and consume it, only to make its web again.

Food was divine and in all things: in the earth, air, sky, water, fire. The metamorphosis continued with the evolutionary processes. All the elements were needed to produce food. When Varuna is asked by his son to explain the mystery of Brahman, he advises *tapas*, different forms of austerity. The son goes through all the acts of sacrifice, meditation, and discovers that Brahman is in all things, and in food. He sings thus, jubilantly:

O, the wonder of joy!
I am he who eats the Food of life,
I am the two in ONE,
I am the first-born of the world of truth,
born before the gods,
born in the centre of immortality.
He who gives me is my salvation.
I am the Food which eats the Eater of Food.
I have gone beyond the universe,
and the light of the sun is my light.

The dynamic process that unites god, mankind, nature and the cosmos is described in the Vedic Experience, by a term coined by the author, Dr. Raimundo Panikkar, "the anthropocosmic." It dramatises the mystical experience of Vedic man, and

the ecstasy felt for the divine substance in all things. The following hymn, the Sadamada in the Rig Veda I, 187 is full of rapture:

A Sacred Meal for Gods and Men.

1. My song shall be of Food, producer of strength, through whom the keeper of nectar smote the demon.

2. O savoury Food, Food of sweetness, you are our chosen for whom we long. Come, be our strong defender!

3. Come to us, Food our delight, bringing pleasurable refreshment.

4. Your flavours, O Food, are spread through space, high like the breezes they are scattered.

5. Those who share your sweetness with others are truly your friends, those who keep your fine taste to themselves are stiff-necked wretches.

6. On you, O Food, is fixed the great Gods' desire. Great deeds were done under your sign, the Serpent slain.

7. If you have proceeded on high to the splendour of the mountain even from there, sweet Food return for your enjoyment.

8. From waters and plants we imbibe the choicest portion. Therefore, O body, thrive, attain full stature.

9. We drink you, Soma, brew of milk and barley, there. Therefore, O body, thrive, attain full stature.

10. You herbs and wheat cakes, be wholesome and strengthening. Therefore, O body, thrive, attain full stature.

11. We sing your praises, O Food. From you we obtain as butter from a cow, our sacrificial offerings. O you, convivial feast of gods and men.

This hymn celebrates the sanctity of Food in *soma*, the then known nectar of immortality; it also summarises the entire philosophy towards the divine substance. At the same time, this sanctity pervaded man's social dimensions: it creates friendship, brotherhood, and the need to be shared with everyone. Those who hoarded it were not just selfish, but stiff-necked. The social aspects were intensified, as man was not born to

be alone or for his own immediate or extended family, nor for his community. The divine substance was for all men.

Yet the mystery of soma was said to be partaken only by those who were priests and sages, and those who sought self-realisation. The Rig Veda consists of about a hundred and twenty hymns dedicated to *soma*. Some ideologists have equated *soma* with cannabis indica or hashish, or some kind of mead, or Afghan grapes. However, the American mycolophile, R. Gordon Wasson, attempts to identify it with what he calls "the divine mushroom of immortality", the fly agaric, which he says befits the description of the Vedic mushroom, *soma*. It was possibly brought into the North-West frontiers with the waves of Aryan migration.

The soma sacrifice is now said to share an affinity with the early Iranian hoama sacrifice. The juice that was ground then from the thick stem of the *soma* mushroom produced a golden glow like the sun. It was said to create light in the consciousness of those who drank it- mixed with milk or yogurt, honey and even barley. It was obviously taken with wholewheat, unleavened bread, chappati or wheaten cake. Until now the nature of this psychotropic plant has not been established, although there are clues indicating that it is mountainous and that it grew near water.

The Genesis of Cosmic Volumes



Excerpt from: *Sacred Geometry: Philosophy and Practice*

Robert Lawlor

The perspective of volume offers yet another metaphor for the original and ever continuing creative act of the materialization of Spirit and the creation of form. The very ancient creation myth coming from Heliopolis in Egypt gives an example of this mode of envisioning. Nun, the Cosmic Ocean, represents pure, undifferentiated spirit-space, without limit or form. It is prior to any extensive, any specificity, any god. It is pure potentiality. By the seed or will of the Creator,

natural enemies of herbivores."

In light of this multifaceted evidence, the conclusion that plants too have their friends and enemies, labeled without further ado "natural," is appealing. But a nagging suspicion lingers on: Aren't the scientists, too, projecting human groupings onto the plant world? This is not to say that friendship and enmity are wholly inapplicable to the flora; what I mean, rather, is that we will not advance one iota in establishing how these concepts apply to other living beings, unless we account for their subjectivities.

I've already said that the topic of subjectivity is even thornier in plants than in humans, because the boundaries between the vegetal self and its other are incredibly porous. If a human subject is legion, then its vegetal counterpart is a legion of legions, comprised of self-replicating parts that can often subsist outside the provisional whole they comprise. Sometimes, various vegetal parts can be relatively unconcerned with one another. At other times, a hermaphroditic plant may activate the genetic mechanisms of "self-incompatibility" (SI) that block self-pollination. Most often, however, vegetal parts are highly sociable and symbiotic, participating on the same level, as nearly autonomous friends, in a community that makes up a plant or in plant communities that add up to a still greater botanical society. Mutatis mutandis, in vegetal friendship, the multiplicity that I (psychically, spiritually, physically) am reaches out to the multiplicity that a plant is—a situation that is not all that different from friendship between two or more human beings. Given the complexities of my own friendship or enmity with myself, redoubled by analogous intricacies in the constitution of my friend, there will always be counterforces that pull us apart, away from each other and from ourselves, that is to say, from the predominant tendency of the innumerable forces that make us up.

My friend, Brianne Donaldson, suggests that "vegetal friendship" can refer at the same time to friendship with vegetation and friendship marked by vegetal qualities. The inherent ambiguity of the expression she points out is extremely helpful: as soon as we contemplate the scenario of a friendship with plants, we are reminded that all friendships are vegetal, no matter who they are forged with, to the extent that they involve a resonance of multiplicities comprising the subjectivities of friends. Cicero had a premonition of this difficulty, writing in his treatise on friendship: "For the essence of friendship being that two minds become as one, how can that ever take place if the mind of each of the separate parties to it is not single and uniform, but variable, changeable, and complex?" Or, to reformulate in our terms: What is similitude between two, neither of whom is the same as her- or himself? How can friends grow together, if each undergoes metamorphoses and grows, plant-like, never being the same as before? Their growing-with, in the absence of a guaranteed common ground, is a promising avenue for thinking about and practicing vegetal friendship.

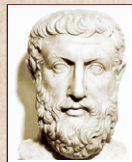
who is implicit within this Nun, the undifferentiated space is impelled to contract or coagulate itself into volume. Thus Atum, the creator, first creates himself or distinguishes himself from the undefinable Nun by volumizing, in order that creation might begin.

What form, then, might this first volume have? What indeed are the most essential volumetric forms? There are five volumes which are thought to be the most essential because they are the only volumes which have all edges and all interior angles equal. They are the tetrahedron, octahedron, cube, dodecahedron and the icosahedron, and are the expressions in volume of the triangle, the square and the pentagon, 3, 4, 5. All other regular volumes are only truncations of these five. These five solids are given the name 'Platonic' because it is assumed that Plato has these forms in mind in the *Timaeus*, the dialogue in which he outlines a cosmology through the metaphor of planar and solid geometry. In this dialogue, which is one of the most thoroughly 'Pythagorean' of his works, he establishes that the four basic elements of the world are earth, air, fire and water, and that these elements are each related to one of the solid figures. Tradition associates the cube with earth, the tetrahedron with fire, the octahedron with air and the icosahedron with water. Plato mentions 'a certain fifth composition' used by the creator in the making of the universe. Thus the dodecahedron came to be associated with the fifth element, aether (prana). Plato's fabricator of the universe created order from the primordial chaos of these elements by means of the essential forms and numbers. The ordering according to number and form on a higher plane resulted in the intended disposition of the five elements in the physical universe. The essential forms and numbers then act as the interface between the higher and lower realms. They have in themselves, and through their analogues with the elements, the power to shape the material world.

As Gordon Plummer notes in his book *The Mathematics of the Cosmic Mind*, the Hindu tradition associates the icosahedron with the Purusha. Purusha is the seed image of Brahma, the supreme creator himself, and as such this image is the map or plan of the universe. The Purusha is analogous to the Cosmic Man, the Anthropocosm of the western esoteric tradition. The icosahedron is the obvious choice for this first form, since all the other volumes arise naturally out of it.

"Even though a speech be a thousand (of words), but made up of senseless words, one word of sense is better, which if a man hears, he becomes quiet."

The Dhammapada



Parmenides
Greek Philosopher
5th Century BC

Parmenides' Poem

Fragment 1 (verses 1-32)

The mares that carry me until where my mind desires to go transported me after leaving and brought me toward the way with many voices, that belongs to the deity, that leads to all the places the man who knows; I was carried there; there in fact the wise mares brought me pulling the chariot, and maidens showed the way. The axis in the hubs emitted a squeal of the concave part, inflaming (in fact it was pressed on both sides by two well-worked circles), whenever the maidens, daughters of the Sun, accelerated the race, after leaving the houses of the Night, towards the light, removing with the hand the veils from their heads. There is the gate that divides the paths of Night and Day, and a lintel and a threshold of stone delimit it from above and below: it, erected in the ether, is closed by large shutters: of it Justice, which punishes severely, holds the keys that open and close. The maidens then persuading her with sweet words convinced her to carefully remove for them the bar of the bolt quickly from the gate: this, opening, produced a wide gap between the shutters, by turning - in mutual relationship in the concave parts of the hinges - the bronze axes fastened with nails and clasps: beyond so directly through the gate the maidens drove chariot and mares across the great road. And the benevolent goddess welcomed me, and took with her hand my right hand, and so she spoke to me: Oh young man, fellow-traveler of immortal drivers, who come to our house with the mares that take you, rejoice, because not a bad fate has sent you to follow this way (in fact it is out of the path of men), but divine will and justice. It is necessary that you learn both the solid hearth of well-rounded Truth and the opinions of mortals, in which there is no real certainty. But you will learn these things also, how should be really the appearances that pass all continuously.

Fragment 2 (verses 1-8)

If much I talk, you listen and accept my speech, which only ways of inquiry are thinkable: the first: that [Being] is and that it is not not-being, is the way of Persuasion (in fact it accompanies the Truth), the second: that [Being] is not and that is necessary it is not, I teach you that this is an entirely unknown way; neither in fact you could know the Non-Being (in fact it is impossible) nor you could express it.

Fragment 3

.. in fact it is the same to think and to be.

Fragment 4 (verses 1-4)

Consider how far things have a strong presence to mind: in fact [the mind] will not separate the being

either [when it appears] fully scattered everywhere in the cosmos or [when it appears] joined together.

Fragment 5 (verses 1-2)

To me it does not matter whence I will begin: in fact there I will return again.

Fragment 6 (verses 1-9)

It is necessary to say and think that Being is; nothingness is not: I order you to declare these things. In fact you'll begin from this first way of inquiry, but then from that invented by mortals who know nothing, men with two heads: the uncertainty in fact guides in their hearts the wandering mind: and they are dragged, stupid and also obtuse, astonished, confused races, for which Being and Non-Being are regarded as the same thing and not the same thing, and the walk of all things is reversible.

Fragment 7 (verses 1-6)

Certainly this thing can never be imposed, that there are things that are not: but you remove your thought from this way of inquiry nor long habit push you along this way, to direct the eye that does not look and the resounding ear and the tongue, but judge by reasoning the hard-fought proof exhibited by me.

Fragment 8 (verses 1-61)

Remains still an only speech of the way [what says] It is: on this [way] there are many signs, that Being is not-generated and undying, entire and motionless and endless; not sometimes it was nor sometimes it will be, because it is now, whole together, one, continuous: which origin in fact will you search of it? How and whence would it grow? From Non-Being I will not allow you to say or to think: in fact What Is Not is absolutely unutterable and unthinkable. What necessity would push it, if it originated from nothing, to be born after or before? So it is necessary or that it is entirely or that it is not at all. Never force of certainty will concede that from Being something arises next to it: because of this the Justice did not allow it to be born or to die loosening it from the chains, but she holds it still: choice about these things is this: is or is not; it was therefore decided, as is necessary, to abandon an unthinkable and unutterable way (in fact it is not the way of Truth), and that the other really exists.

Fragment 9 (verses 1-4)

But since all entities are named light and night and these two, according to their powers, [are applied] to these or those, everything is full at the same time of light and dark night of both in the right proportions, since, if neither the one nor the other is present, there is nothing.

Fragment 10 (verses 1-7)

You will know the nature of heaven and all the constellations in the sky and the unseen works of pure and shining torch of the sun, and from where they derived, and you will learn the wandering works of the round-shaped moon and its nature, also you will know from where was born the sky that surrounds everything and how Necessity guiding it forced it to support the extremities of the stars.

Fragment 11 (verses 1-4)

How the earth and the sun and the moon and the ether common to all and the heavenly Milk Way and the high Olympus and the hot strength of the stars were forced to be born.

Fragment 12 (verses 1-6)

In fact the lowest [celestial spheres] were filled with pure fire, the other above these [were filled] with darkness, but there infiltrates a portion of the flame; among these [spheres] is the goddess who governs everything: she rules all things, the terrible childbirth and sexual union pushing what is feminine to join what is male and again mutually what is male to join what is feminine.

Fragment 13

[the Goddess] produced with the mind Love first of all the gods...

Fragment 14

[the moon] reflected light shining by night wandering around the earth

Fragment 15

[the moon] always looking towards the rays of the sun

Fragment 16 (verses 1-4)

In fact as each man governs a mixture of organs subject to errors, so a mind governs men; in fact the same thinking thing in men, both in all and in each, is the structural substance of the organs, whose main part is the thought.

Fragment 17

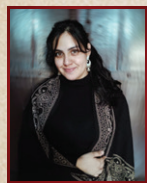
[in the uterus] on the right males, and females on the left...

Fragment 18 (verses 1-6)

When the female and the male mix together the seeds of Venus, the shaping force in the veins from different blood, if maintains a proportionate mix, forms well built bodies. If instead the forces, when the seeds are mixed, contrast between them and do not form a unit in the body formed of a mixture, terrible will torment the nascent sex because of the dual seed.

Fragment 19 (verses 1-3)

So according to the opinion these things were born and now are and then henceforth, after being grown, will die: men imposed a marked name on each of them.



Supriya Chaudhary

Yearning

I was destroyed for this world the day that I met you
You broke the barriers which no one was allowed to
seep through
The fear I had was blinded by your burning light
Once I saw you I couldn't take back my sight
Your voice perforated my depths
Your name imprinted on my breaths
On the outside things may have been at peace
The revolution inside me was off the leash
I no longer knew myself the day I gave into
The stranger living in this body is everyday a new
But I'm still bounded on the outside didn't you see
What a torture that I'm not physically free
I'm imprisonating that revolution
So bemused by your aura can't look for a solution
I have responsibilities to shoulder
Promises to keep
I have to cross oceans, have to conquer
mountains so steep
O persecutor O insouciant
How many times would I have to call for help
Why did you take away my soul and left
Moreover limited to this physical cage
This worldly body impotent to carry the rage
Is my yearning not enough for you to liberate?
Is this weight not heavy enough for me to terminate?
Almighty disregard me all you want to
Temperamental you are no easy to pursue
Atleast be merciful enough to take away all hope
Leave me Darkled, and languid-lipped
Leave me searching for you like a grope
This much beneficence sufficient for the rest of my life
till I fall apart into you.



Srishti Shreyam

Whispers

My ears wore a whisper that smelt like some ripe crops:
Dry and golden like a vast desert which tasted like a
mossy well amidst the sand dune
And looked like a wintry noon-sun trapped amidst a
tall naked tree.

The sun slept and did not wake up.
The winter froze and floated like snowy breeze.

I took off my ears, my eyes, my nose, my tongue, my
lips and wrapping them all in my mom's torn cotton
veil, went into the wooden box to sleep.

The box also smells.
Like the garbage down the road
Whispers like the crows crawling over the dead bodies.
Here I can see dark that tastes like some cold blood
and wake up at the night
At the same whine of the train that does not run any-
more slitting the city into halves ripping
my heart apart.

You,

Do you feel the wet eyelashes that kissed your fore-
head and vanished among the woods in your heart?

Tell me.
The sun must be coming.



Kajal Mukhtalif

Who am i...?

Am I flying so fast...
Or am I crawling so slow?
I know that there's something
Which I don't know...!

Am I a blossoming flower
Which doesn't glow...
Or am I a withered leaf
Which is going with the flow...!

Am I a puzzle...
Yet to be solved?
Or am I a thing...
Which the centre cannot hold...!

Which no one looks for...
Am I that shattered focus?
Or which everyone looks for...
Am I that magnum-opus?

Am I a tiny little star
Standing at the door of a moonlit night?
Or am I a human being
deprived of every human right....???

Who am I,
I might not know!
But will it make a difference
If I will know....!!!



Surkhhab Kaur

Eye

Some of my cells had to form eyes
to bless me with the gift of sight,
of vivid colors, the properties of which
I could scientifically quantify,
but the experience of it? Oh,
I could spend an eternity expressing
and convey but a fraction of the beauty.

Others fused to make my heart –
a key player in my animation
and a pesky, fickle thing that feels
so deeply, language falls short,
that we must resort to an assortment
of media and still appear to fumble
like an infant learning to walk.

Several others coalesced into my brain
the small, soft, convoluted oxygen thief
that gives me the gift of reason – the reason
that I can look around and marvel,
amazed that the same protons, neutrons
and electrons that make me, make
this laptop and the words on the screen.

Countless others classified themselves
as my liver, my lips, stomach and fingers.
Fundamentally different, yes but
working toward the singular goal
of giving me life. The collaborative work
it must take, every second of every day
with an unwavering commitment to my life!

Imagine if my eye cells rebelled,
subjugated my heart cells and coerced
them to mimic my eyes.
The betrayal as the mechanism that sustains me
stops beating and the stark insolence
toward the harmony of my being
leads to unwitting, but sure suicide.



"Just as the fire which is within the churnsticks is the cause of the other fire (which is kindled), similarly, the word which is in the mind (of the speaker) becomes the cause of the different expressive words."

Vakypadiyam of Bhartrhari



Sonjeet Kaur Sekhon
Award of Excellence (National Level in Painting)
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Beyond the material-realm where essence of simplicity and peace prevail, exists an object-an entity. When its pulse and beat comes to reverberate in my being, my paint-brushes and colours begin to self-orchestrate a play which befalls an ambience of wondrous tranquility. During such time the force of the brush articulates the artist's dedication, dexterity, and devotion towards the art. While painting this articulation, the colours start to automatically lay down while keeping the harmony between the painting's elements alive and intact. The aura of this retention testifies and reveals the creator of the art. As distinct from being a craft of artistry, the aking of a painting is akin to being a play for me, in which when I participate I feel the gushing in of the juices of a sweet ecstasy. Composed by the interplay of innumerable strokes, such painting draws in the entire fervour and energy of one's body and imbibes them into its visage. I am yet on a journey, the destination remains far...

Sonjeet Kaur Sekhon



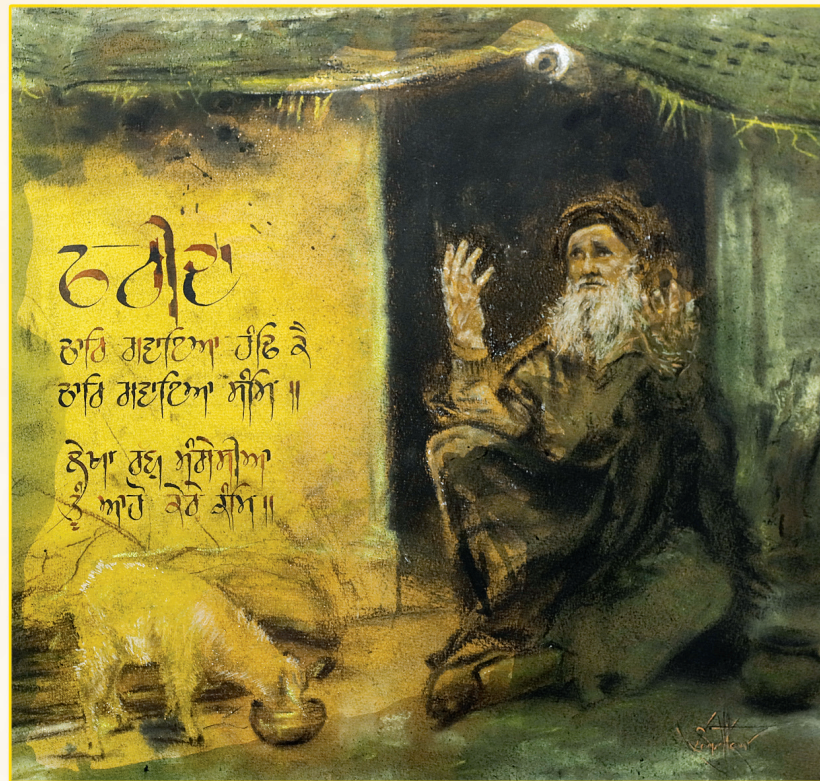
The Warmth of Relationship



Music of Brushstrokes



The Portrait of Pain



Introspection



Ecstatic



Motherhood



The Brown Horse



Wait and Hope