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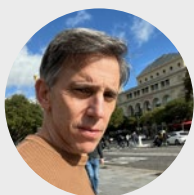
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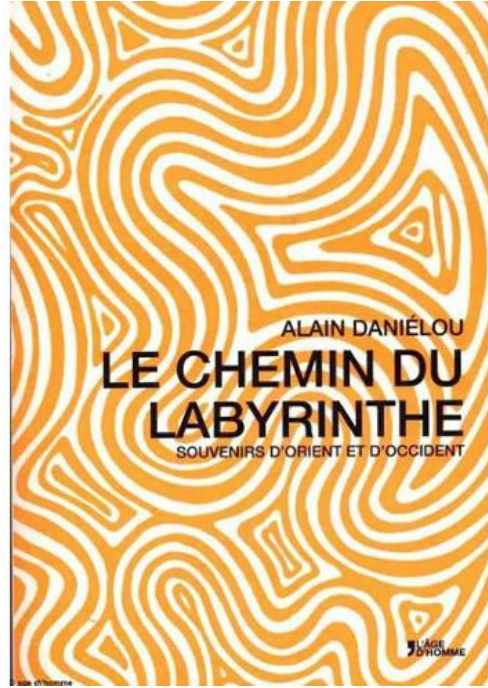


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THE FREEDOM OF BEING *IN-RELATION*: ALAIN DANIÉLOU THROUGH THE VEIL OF TIME

This essay is a modified version of the introduction to the new Italian edition of Alain Daniélou's *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*. Ever since the publication of the first edition in 1981, these "memoirs" of Alain Daniélou have been taken mainly as a personal account of his life or as a testimony on a "bygone India" - outstripped by modernization and scholarship. Adrián Navigante shows that the scope of *Le chemin du labyrinthe* is much broader than its reception so far. If the reader takes the figure of the labyrinth seriously and follows the traces left by Daniélou, this seeming autobiography becomes a courageous intellectual adventure going far beyond India, in which thought is not detached from life, spirituality is not devoid of eroticism, and creativity is not opposed to knowledge but complementary to it.



Front cover of the third edition of Alain Daniélou's *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe* (L'Age d'Homme, 2015).

Human Adventure and Divine Play

Contrary to what readers may assume, Alain Daniélou's *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe* [*The Way to the Labyrinth*] is not mere autobiography. Throughout the book, Alain Daniélou shows that subjectivity can be the mark of something broader and more significant. The text is an invitation to travel along a spirally coiled path in which different cultures, individual and collective myths, erotic and artistic encounters, religious and philosophical teachings lead him from the inherited constraints of his own milieu to a singular form of freedom. Not the freedom of absolute being, but the freedom of *being in relation* – with all the richness and beauty but also the risks and setbacks that relations sometimes imply. This is the figure of the Labyrinth. Daniélou invites us to follow the traces of his own path, face the paradoxes left behind and rethink, in a time of hypocrit-

ical conformism and world-wide constraints of all kinds, the possibility of our own freedom. Some of those paradoxes are challenging: A 'Hindu' born in Brittany whose deity of preference (Shiva) is not limited to the Indian subcontinent; an admirer of traditional Brahmanism who elevates Dravidian culture over the Vedic heritage; an anti-racist thinker who doesn't hesitate to use the term 'race' when referring to ethnic or cultural groups in order to rescue their intrinsic value; a radical anti-colonialist who does not hide his taste for royal kingdoms; a denouncer of injustices who despises socialist thinking and rejects democracy; a passionate defender of 'tradition' (against the 'myth of progress') who is interested in modern science; a virulent anti-Christian who has an esteem for Jesus Christ; a Dionysian acolyte prone to nature religion who proclaims a Platonic conviction in the reality of mathematical struc-

tures. Precisely in facing such paradoxes, the reader may discover that the leading thread cutting across such tensions and polarities is the search for an unprejudiced point of view of reality.

It takes some effort, and surely a certain amount of courage, to enter Daniélou's labyrinth. Readers are hardly familiar with such a territory. In our global culture, plurality degenerates into shallow fragmentation and compulsive unification seems the only criterion of consistency. Consumer society and its increasingly digitalized market are clear examples of the first trend, religious and political fundamentalisms stand for the second. Artists who sacrifice aesthetic production to cultural industry and scholars who reduce the world to their special fields do not escape the reductive polarization that ends up evacuating complex thinking processes (where paradoxes arise). An honest reading of Daniélou's account implies leaving aside those prejudices to plunge into the narrative of a life in which many other voices are disclosed: voices of friends and enemies, but also of distant landscapes, forest spirits, Indian gods, and European ancestors. Daniélou's narrative is at the same time the consolidation of a destiny, and since destiny surpasses by far the insignificance of a merely biological existence, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe* can be taken as a message going far beyond Daniélou himself and the limitations of his own time.

"I have given myself completely to the present moment, throwing myself in the widest range

of activities", writes Daniélou in the prologue, "yet it seems clear to me now that destiny was waiting for me at every turn"¹. For the individual, destiny is veiled by time. Yet, the labyrinth *of a whole life* contains (and in turn discloses) relations that are mysteriously concealed in the foldings of contingency. There is no translucent gaze through the veil of time; no human being can penetrate its depths. The task would be to create figures of displacement which may turn out to be instances of integration. The freedom of being *in relation* is a freedom *in becoming*.

At the beginning of his account, Daniélou writes that the spiral of life grants us moments in which very special (so far hidden) connections become possible. Time is intensified by active memories, chronology loses its monotonous density, our lives acquire another tinge. The dead return to us, the gods awaken and descend, desire wells up from the depths, old values are reenacted. Daniélou's world is a bygone world, and yet it speaks to us. We enter other dimensions, time succession becomes relative, a much more complex logic prevails. Toward the end of Chapter 19, he declares that, in the face of a multiple and ungraspable reality, the task consists in understanding and realizing one's own place in creation². Many people tend to deny that complexity and take refuge in dogmatisms of any sort: a hypostatized spiritual tradition, a scientific truth turned into ideology, or a political idea attached to gregarious instincts. Some people, however, choose to deal with that complexity and work

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on a confluence of different but interconnected perspectives. The task is not to fix a certain form of knowledge, but to go through its twists and turns.

Daniélou's testimony is profoundly subjective, but precisely because of that, it is no mere account of his individual life. Ultimately, it can be seen as a conscious effort to bring the human adventure to a point of confluence (in thinking and experience) with the divine play. Subjectivity has always been a mystery when we go beyond the banal sphere of the arbitrary and whimsical. Those who judge Daniélou by 'objective standards' are as wrong as those who take his personal testimony 'literally' and reduce the mystery of subjectivity to the banality of 'an individual project'.

Itineraries and Passages

In his book *Labyrinth-Studien*, Karl Kerényi refers to the main problem in dealing with a figure like the labyrinth: the interpreter is faced with a problem that cannot be solved scientifically; it must be experienced and incorporated – rather like a poetic text³. The texture of Daniélou's narration combines family history, travel experiences, memorable encounters, intellectual challenges, religious experiences, and philosophical intimations on specific situations as well as on fundamental questions of human life. This progression is not fortuitous. At the beginning of the book, we experience an individual talking about his immediate context (Brittany, France); toward the end, we are immersed in an elaborate worldview from which many aspects of Western culture (bourgeois education, religious dogmatism, political corruption, utopian idealism, colonizing anti-racism, etc.) are severely criticized and a counter-model is presented, not as a unity but as a vast array of complementary perspectives cleverly extracted from classical Indian philosophy. This passage from the individual and simple to

the general and complex should not confuse us. At no moment does Daniélou portray himself as a guru, a prophet, or luminary of any kind. Quite on the contrary: his reflections intend to show possible ways of coming to terms with life. This is a typical human problem. Daniélou's purpose is therefore far from that of divinizing human beings (i.e. placing them at the center of the labyrinth) or attaining spiritual enlightenment (since that would imply stepping out of the labyrinth). In Daniélou's view, humans must be de-centered and re-integrated into another – broader – field of relations. The divine is not One but manifold, since it is open to experience⁴. The dignified place of humans in the universe coincides with a humble reduction of their ambitions.

Throughout Daniélou's book, we will have access to some of the labyrinth's paths and the manifold directions they disclose. By means of such a movement, Daniélou's narrative inevitably triggers a reflection in the reader about life's situations and choices – since, as readers, we are also engaged in the relations displayed throughout the book. We may mention three examples (among many others). The first example concerns the experience of the sacred. Daniélou has a significant experience as a child in a wood of Brittany, where he senses a divine presence. This presence will reappear and consolidate itself during his long sojourn in India (where he was reeducated and initiated into a living tradition) and further after his return to the West (where he attempted to retrieve the lost thread of such power in the ancient traditions of Europe). It is on the basis of that strongly religious and deeply embodied connection that Daniélou attempts to establish a link between the Celtic god Cernunnos, the Hindu deity Shiva and a Greco-Thracian version of Dionysus – all three of them forces of nature essentially connected to sexual power. The second example refers to the attitude toward 'the other'. On the occasion of his

Daniélou's testimony is profoundly subjective, but precisely because of that, it is no mere account of his individual life. Ultimately, it can be seen as a conscious effort to bring the human adventure to a point of confluence with the divine play.

first voyage to Algeria⁵, the young Daniélou plunges into the inner life of foreign cultures without any pretension of explaining them by translating such experiences into the theoretical vocabulary of the West. His notes on Arabic music from that early period anticipate in many ways both the titanic work he carried out on Indian classical music during his long stay in India as well as the ambitious project at the International Institute of Comparative Music Studies in Berlin, upon his return to Europe, to show the value of traditional music throughout the world. The third example relates to his critique of Eurocentrism. Daniélou's account of one of his first visits to India contains a critique of what today would be termed (sometimes equivocally) 'white power'. This will be a recurrent topic in the book with different variations and a certain escalation as the narration progresses. It begins anecdotally, in Chapter 5, when Daniélou refers to the Indians traveling like cattle (from Peshawar to Calcutta) in a third-class carriage, while Europeans occupied the luxurious first-class compartments; it goes on with a denunciation of British lords in north Calcutta whose hunting targets included indigenous groups along the Bhagirathi River⁶. As the narration progresses, Daniélou broadens the scope of his critique and thematizes the oppression suffered by ancient Dravidian populations at the hands of Indo-Aryan groups – related to Vedic culture – to finally put forward a general theory, in Chapter 19, of the predatory nature of Aryan populations: Achaeans, Dorians, Celts, Germans, Russians, etc., all of them ultimately destined to self-destruction after their own

force of expansion has reached a territorial limit⁷.

Each one of Daniélou's reflections is related to concrete experiences (from the most ordinary to the most significant ones) in which he takes a certain position. The three examples mentioned above may become quite challenging for the reader, since they refer to problems that are at the center of our cultural agenda today: the existential crisis due to the isolation of human beings in an increasingly nihilistic setting, their inability to understand and deal with differences, and the question of domination and oppression (especially in the name of civilization or progress). Do we have a real connection with the sacred apart from the worn-out dogmas handed down to us and the poor surrogates of consumer society? When we deal with another culture, why do we tend to immediately impose our own categories and simplify the matter instead of learning from it? Does the affirmation of an identity necessarily imply a violent delimitation of "the other"? These are some of the questions triggered by Daniélou's account, and the reason why taking *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe* as a mere autobiography does not do justice to the book.

The above-mentioned examples show that behind some of Daniélou's critical remarks there is a subtle consideration of a problem that far surpasses the immediate account we read. The reader of *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe* will surely enjoy the entertaining dimension of Daniélou's narrative: his conflict-laden relations with avant-garde artists in Paris, his experience with Rabindranath Tagore in

Shantiniketan, his encounter with Iranian native warriors in the desert of Baluchistan, etc. However, this aspect does not exhaust the potential of its content. It is also possible to gain access to deeper layers of the text, where the narrative becomes a cartography of less personal – and more significant – relations. Those layers become clearly manifest and even dominant in Chapter 8, where Daniélou refers to his life in India⁸. At that point, the external voyage ceases and another movement begins, that of a reeducation and a transformation, and a qualitative expansion of relations. Daniélou's 'passage to India' is also the possibility of a bridge to a Europe prior to the 'exile of the gods'. This movement intends to retrieve all possible lessons of wisdom related to a 'religion of Nature'⁹, the religion of the chthonic gods who did not suffer the ravages of internal dissection – unlike the Olympic ones. It is also a potential opening to many other cultures of our present time which still preserve that link to the sacred.

Indic-Italic Mythologies

Many creative thinkers are controversial to the point of being marginalized by the cultural consensus of their time, and Alain Daniélou is no exception. In *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, the reader will find many interesting entrance doors to his thought, not only to his musicological work, which is unanimously recognized even today, but also to his views on Indian society, history, philosophy, and religion, which were progressively contested with the development of South Asian scholarship and impossible to reconcile with the Neo-Vedantic trend that was increasingly adapted to the spiritual needs of the modern West. In Chapter 16, Daniélou himself defines the passage from the well delimited field of musicology to a broader approach to Indian culture as "an arduous task"¹⁰, since he knows very well that, in his case, the difference of attitudes, methods and

contents with regard to mainstream scholarship is considerable. From a scholarly point of view, the affirmation that the Pashupati seal of the Indus Valley civilization (which dates back to the third millennium BCE) represents the Hindu god Shiva of the classical and medieval period (from the middle Upanishads and the epics to the Mahapuranas), or the thesis that Dravidian populations were cast out of their territories by Aryan invaders in the second millennium BCE, or the hypothesis of an esoteric Shaivite substrate circulating not only among errant ascetics on the margins of society but also among Hindu orthodox scholars abiding by Dharmashastric rules may be seen more as the product of imagination than of scientific work.

In reading *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, the reader will see that Daniélou makes a drastic distinction between the mechanisms of knowledge legitimation in Western scholarship and in the traditional Hindu milieu of Benares, where he spent sixteen years of his life. In Western scholarship, the validity of knowledge depends on objectivity criteria, mainly of the type of research on written sources; in the traditional Hindu milieu, knowledge results from oral teachings and their multi-perspectivist dynamics. Such a modality of knowledge transmission, which is not focused on objectifying and delimiting contents from a purportedly neutral position, must necessarily include thinking and discursive patterns shoved aside or rejected by science. One of the central questions of this dispute relates to mythology. For Daniélou, myth is not a fictional narrative but a codified testimony of interaction between humans and other levels of being; artistic expression is not an arbitrary act of a single subject but a sacred activity extending to a whole community; intellectual history is not only configured through textual analysis but through iconographical production, ritual, musical and dance performance as well as through non-human agency



Alain Daniélou at the Labyrinth
(photo by Jacques Cloarec, 1989, archive of the Alain Daniélou Foundation).

(revelations of gods, irruptions of demons, or interventions of mythic beings). This is what he learned in traditional Hindu milieus. All the instances of interaction Daniélou refers to, which require different intellectual procedures as well as artistic and religious performances, contribute to the ultimately unfathomable rhythm of being, and his scansion embraces all levels. In the last chapter of the book, he refers to himself as a hard worker who cannot bear to be idle: “Once I have mastered a subject or a technique, I feel no desire to exploit it or turn it to my advantage, and immediately I want to go on to something new”¹¹. This permanent shift of domains, normally regarded as loss of focus

or lack of solidity, turns out to be an effective antidote against the alienation of both blinkered specialists (well-established in clearly delimited research domains) and dogmatic preachers (excessively prone to metaphysically revealed truths). It is at this point that the main paradox of *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe* becomes prominent: when Daniélou says that his task is to bear witness to the true message of India for the West, he does not mean that he bears the truth of that message. In fact, what is called ‘truth’ cannot be reduced to a metaphysical principle (too abstract to deserve that name) or to an empirical fact (too raw without the corresponding interpretation). It is, quite

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the contrary, *a complex existential procedure*. Daniélou did not extract any literal truth from India to be mechanically applied to the West (as is the case of vulgar metaphysicians and pseudo-gurus). He has made the lesson of India his own existential truth and developed it further, with a controversially creative spirit, in every one of the contexts that destiny unfolded to him. His existential procedure has therefore cultural effects, and it is the construction of a myth that matters – once again, not in the sense of a fictional story, but rather of a living truth that fills the person's existence with meaning and permeates his/her whole field of relations. The architectural structure of his myth is the Labyrinth, but he is not the mythmaker. He is rather a channel or a link in the transmission of that message. Daniélou follows traces before him and leaves traces behind him; he varies the different figures to (re-)chart the labyrinth according to his time. This is the main procedure in his narrative.

We can give two examples of Daniélou's procedure, which show how playful his own passion for knowledge has always been and how important paradoxes are in his own dynamics of thinking. The first example concerns his relationship with the god Shiva. In Chapter 8, Daniélou recounts his life in the traditional milieu of Benares, where he stayed between 1937 and 1953¹². In the back of the palace where he lived with his partner, Raymond Burnier, he found a sanctuary devoted to Shiva and hired a Brahmin to perform the corresponding rites. Soon afterward he met the local

Shaivite devotees and scholars, with whom he embarked on assiduous studies and practices (including Indian classical music) to end up being initiated by order of one of the most important spiritual leaders of northern India, Swami Karpatri. He opened his palace's doors to Shaivite ascetics who would regularly stay at his place. He took lessons with a left-hand path Tantric practitioner and got progressively imbued in the religious atmosphere of Shiva's luminous city, Kashi, far away from Western habits of thought. For some people these are exotic experiences and maybe cultural achievements; for Daniélou, the whole story was mainly an increasing connection with the divine. The divine, as he says in Chapter 21, paraphrasing the first verses of the *Īśa-Upaniṣad*, "dwells everywhere"¹³, and he himself became its abode. When Daniélou speaks about Shiva, he refers to the Lord of all creatures – not only humans but also animals and trees. His god is no abstract metaphysical principle. The minimal degree of manifestation, symbolized by the lingam, refers to the most intense concentration of life – hence Daniélou's insistence on the link between eroticism and divine energy. Such affirmation of the forces of Nature permeating and transcending the human person leads him beyond his immediate context, back to his early experience of the sacred in Brittany. It pierces the veil of time: "Here was the god I had intuitively sought in my childhood"¹⁴, he writes, once again sensing the emergence of destiny in the weaves of contingency. Daniélou's pre-Aryan Shiva, which he encountered in Benares, turns out to

be the Proto-Celtic god Cernunnos coming back to him in a later period of his life, but this is not all. After his return to Europe, Daniélou found in the figure of the Dionysus another variation of that Protean spout of life and overflowing energy embodied in Cernunnos and Shiva, an energy prior to any moral restraint, religious norm, economic calculation, or social mechanism. The main theses of books like *Deification of Eroticism, Shiva and Dionysus* or *The Phallus* are certainly the result of research, but mainly they are a cross-cultural and analogical elaboration of his own experience of the divine. This aspect explains the increasingly contested amplification in his work: it is ultimately Daniélou's own theistic-animist ethos and his 'return to paganism'¹⁵, confronted by the real presences of his destiny, that sets the parameters of his interpretation.

The second example of Daniélou's procedure relates to the place he chose to spend the last period of his life, the Labyrinth at Zagarolo. Having spent more than twenty years in India, imbued as he was with the different traditional and local aspects of the Asian subcontinent, it was difficult for him to readapt to Europe. As he recounts in Chapter 13, he felt particularly uncomfortable in France, and the rest of Europe didn't fulfill any expectation of his¹⁶. Italy was clearly the only country in which he felt he could live. However, the search for a concrete location in that land was not easy. Rome, which he visited in many occasions after his return to Europe, seemed to him increasingly ravaged by dishonest politicians and rapacious bourgeois; Venice, a significant episode (mainly due to his musicological activities at the Cini Foundation) to which he devotes the entire chapter 18, remained a hostile setting for him despite its cultural value. Neither Naples nor Amalfi, two places he fancied very much, could convince him to drop anchor. Instead, it was in a small and apparently insignificant town of the Roman province, Zagarolo, where

he found his place. In Chapter 13, Daniélou describes Zagarolo as a magical place "where the forces of heaven and earth meet and one feels the presence of the gods"¹⁷. For Daniélou, Zagarolo has different layers, not only as a natural setting but also as a cultural complex with an unknown story. He connects the hill of the Labyrinth (the residential area in Zagarolo where he was offered a house) and its Etruscan remains with the religious complex of the great goddess from Præneste, Fortuna Primenia, and points to two significant historical moments: the first dating back to ancient Rome under the emperor Hadrian, when the temple was enlarged and a palace was built at the foot of the hill; the second taking place during the Renaissance under Francesco Colonna, who built a palace over the ruins of the sanctuary in order to protect it. But for Daniélou the parallel does not end there. In the same way in which Hadrian gathered wise men to keep the secrets of the ancient Egyptian religion alive, Francesco Colonna gathered the first humanists seeking ancient wisdom in "his other palace located at Zagarolo"¹⁸. This connection between Palestrina and Zagarolo as sacred focal points of the Italian peninsula goes hand in hand with the centrality Daniélou ascribes to Francesco Colonna in the cultural production of the Renaissance. But who exactly is Francesco Colonna? Certainly not the Venetian Dominican priest and reputed author of the remarkable allegorical tale *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* [*Poliphilio's Strife of Love in a Dream*]. Daniélou purposely moves away from the mainstream reception of Renaissance culture. In his attempt to highlight the ancient wisdom around Præneste and reconfigure the cultural geography of the fifteenth century, Daniélou shifts the focus from Francesco Colonna of Venice (1433-1527) to Francesco Colonna of Palestrina (c.1453-1538), member of the Roman Academy of Pomponius Laetus. As in the case of his interpretation of Indian sources, Daniélou's

reading of Renaissance humanism is decidedly heterodox, but certainly not a mere invention. In the mid 1960s, Italian art critic Maurizio Calvesi published an essay in the review *Europa Letteraria* entitled 'Identificato l'autore del Polifilo', in which he identifies Francesco Colonna of Palestrina as the author of the *Hypnerotomachia*. His further research would lead to a book published in 1980, *Il Sogno di Polifilio Prenestino*¹⁹. In that book, Calvesi intends to reverse a dominant trend dating back to the Venetian man of letters Apostolo Zeno, who – as early as in 1512 – attributed the authorship of the *Hypnerotomachia* to Francesco Colonna the Dominican monk. Maurizio Calvesi contends that the new Virgil and Cicero, praised in an epigram of the XV century presumably written by the Bolognese aristocrat Raffaele Zovensoni, is in fact Francesco Colonna of Palestrina.

Daniélou's shift of focus from Venice to Præneste is closely related to his readings of Maurizio Calvesi through the mediation of the Italian art historian Emanuela Krezulesco Quaranta, whose book *Les Jardins du Songe* (1976) inspired not only Daniélou's variation of the Zagarolo myth in *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe* but also one of his most significant tales of the labyrinth (published in 1991), *Le Jardin des Songes*, in which we see the same humanist circle at work for a restitution of a civilization that has lost its course. Daniélou also plays with the idea that in the humanist activities of Latium there circulated a form of ancient wisdom transmitted within esoteric Etruscan circles of Tusculum which probably go back to the times of the Trojan war. In clear analogy to the Puranic literature of India, his narration fuses historical facts with mythological themes. This intentional twist of register does not intend to contort facts in the name of fiction but to account for paradoxical levels of reality and experience that demand a different approach – where the delimitation of 'fact' and 'fiction' does not hold. This is also the main subject of

Daniélou's *Les contes du Labyrinthe*, a book that Daniélou refused to define as fictional work²⁰.

Through the Veil of Time and Toward a New Light

There are few authors as difficult to classify as Alain Daniélou. This difficulty goes hand in hand with the readers' creation of pre-texts to justify their own approach to his thought. A man without academic credentials, he cultivated a principle of uncertainty about the location of his own activities and thoughts: musician, painter, dancer, writer, translator, Indologist, philosopher, Shaivite initiate, etc. To highlight the paradoxical even more, Daniélou was a playful and subversive author who nevertheless expressed reactionary ideas that shocked forward-looking intellectuals. Most of the problems of the modern West are for him the result of maladjusted *petit bourgeois* (among whom he counts figures from Theodor Adorno to Jean-Paul Sartre) who spent their lives daydreaming instead of learning. In his eyes, the caste system in India deserves to be examined in depth instead of being portrayed as an abomination by people who ignore that culture. Quite on the contrary, egalitarianism is for him a selective and hypocritical ideology contributing to the expansion of colonial power. The modern forms of Hinduism that have conquered the West, epitomized by well-known authors such as Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Shivananda and Ramana Maharshi, have no value whatsoever – or rather, they have a negative value. Their doctrines appear to him as a generalization of one single system (Vedanta) to the detriment of a non-dogmatic philosophical perspectivism (that of classical Hinduism). In addition, the presence of different elements of Western – scientific or esoteric – doctrines in some of their conceptions render them even less reliable as a real alternative to the Western cultural production. When it comes to criticizing Gandhi and Nehru for the 'Western-



One of Alain Daniélou's water-colours depicting the terrace of the Labyrinth's main house (photo by Giorgio Pace, 2022).

ization' of India, Daniélou combines historical and political arguments with very personal – and therefore intellectually sterile – attacks. He mistrusts esoteric authors and milieus, which leads him to become excessively (and unfairly) judgmental with authors like Mircea Eliade, artists like Nicolas Roerich or humanist circles like Eranos at Ascona. Apart from that inflexible attitude, he fails to recognize that there is as much (Western and modern) 'esoteric invention' in René Guénon (to whom he pays homage) as in Madame Blavatsky (whom he rejects altogether). These remarks intend to say that, in the pages of Daniélou's account of his life, we are not spared the subjectivity of the author in the narrowest and most outspoken sense of the word.

Those instances are nevertheless part of the richness and sincerity of Daniélou's own account, and the reader is compelled to find inroads to ideological turning points. Because he does not stoop to please the right-minded, he forces the reader to pick up and reshape the traces of his labyrinth – as if he himself were asking the reader to perfect his own attempt. *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe* is no mere accumulation of anecdotes, reflections, and judgements. Its guiding thread is the testimony of an adventurous journey leading to the reeducation of a person and his reconnection with Life. The opening epigraph (attributed to Aristotle) reads: "the rightness of the path you have chosen will be measured by your happiness"²¹. This is not (only) a warning against excessive intellectu-

alism, inflexible dogmatism and illusory (or delusional) utopianism, but the expression of an outright conviction: humans are happy if they get the best out of life – which is not always possible, since humans, regardless of the objective circumstances, are masters of self-boycott. This eudemonistic maxim anticipates the link between the contingencies of the individual's adventures and the deep structures of his fate. It is displayed (with the manifold tensions contained in a human life) throughout the book, but radically transformed in the closing remark: "The only fear I have is that I might not have given enough before I pass"²².

Daniélou's subtle feeling of apprehension in affirming an accomplished life can be seen as the recognition that happiness has a reverse side – without which it implodes into an empty hedonism. The reverse-side of 'receiving from life' consists in 'sharing and giving', that is, in de-centering oneself. In this way, the individual

passes from the limited expansion of a limited self to the cosmic threads of an ever-expanding labyrinth, where relations of another kind may arise – and even blossom. No wonder that Daniélou's rather irreverent translation of the first verses of *Īśa-Upaniṣad* does not focus on the supreme Ruler of the world but on the distribution of beings in it, and what that logic implies: "In a world where everything changes, where nothing is permanent, the divine dwells everywhere: in flowers, birds, animals, forest vegetation and human beings. Enjoy fully what the gods leave for you and never covet what belongs to others"²³. The freedom of being is paradoxical, because it is freedom *in becoming*, that is, *in permanent relation* and never free from contingency. And the divine is also part of it. This is perhaps the most original aspect of the – both Pagan and polytheistic – message that the readers of *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe* should pick up and re-think in the light (or rather shadows) of the present time. •

1 Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, Lausanne 2015, p. 10. All quotations are taken from the French version of 2015 (the third expanded edition of the text), and all translations are mine.

2 Cf. Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, p. 320.

3 Karl Kerényi. *Labyrinth-Studien: Labyrinthos als Linienreflex einer mythologischen Idee*, Zürich 1950, p. 11.

4 Daniélou's 'polytheism' is neither a mere provocation against the dominance of dual aspect monism in the Western reception of Hinduism nor a short-sighted affirmation of the theological reality of Hindu doctrines that overlooks the metaphysical radicalness of concepts like the impersonal absolute [*parabrahman*], or the Supreme reality [*anuttara*]. It is a very logical way of doing justice to every level of religious performance across the Indian Subcontinent, but even

more important: it is an antidote to the ideological operation of transforming a specific philosophical school (Advaita Vedanta) into a universal doctrine – dangerously close to the exclusivity of monotheism –, as well as an attempt to bring back the dimension of multiple experience that opens many of the religious phenomena in India to other cultures of the world (as Daniélou emphasized in his later writings).

5 Cf. Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, Chapter 4, pp. 76-77.

6 Cf. Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, pp. 90-92.

7 Cf. Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, p. 301. The theory of an 'Aryan invasion' marking the passage from the Indus-Valley civilization to Vedic culture has been contested by many authors, and Daniélou's equation of Indo-Aryan and predatory invaders is too general, homogeneous, and hyperbolic to be considered 'scientifically valid'.

The main point is not scientific validity, though. Apart from the fact that the contrary has not been proven, and that the scientific standards of the Humanities are quite different from those of natural sciences, such aspects of Daniélou's thought are relevant for an understanding of how he articulated his own position and constructed his own philosophy confronted with problems of utmost relevance such as colonialism, imperialist wars and discrimination of all types based on ethnocentric standards.

8 Cf. Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, Chapter 8 : La vie en Inde, pp. 127-158.

9 Cf. Alain Daniélou, *Shiva et Dionysos*, Paris 1979, p. 20.

10 Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, p. 260: "After ten years of successful efforts, the great musicians of South Asia had gained recognition and had already been integrated in the international music scene. That was an essential first step before passing on to the more arduous task of rendering other aspects of Indian culture accessible, such as its philosophy, its religion and its social structures".

11 Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, Chapter 20, p. 321.

12 Cf. Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, pp. 127-158.

13 Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, p. 329.

14 Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, Chapter 8, p. 143.

15 Cf. the section in Chapter 21 entitled "Return to

Paganism" (*Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, pp. 343-344). The ideas that are succinctly expressed in those paragraphs reappear in other books, mainly in *Shiva et Dionysos*, where Daniélou's paganism is developed into a program for the future.

16 Cf. Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, pp. 215-217.

17 Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, p. 226.

18 Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, p. 228.

19 Maurizio Calvesi, *Il sogno di Polifilio Prenestino*, Roma 1980. The book expands some central ideas on the subject that the author had already expressed in a previous article published in 1965.

20 "I have merely tried to consider history on a level different from that of appearances, and I am convinced that such vision corresponds to an invisible but ever-present reality" (Alain Daniélou, *Les contes du Labyrinthe*, p. 9).

21 In the form quoted by Daniélou, this passage is not found in the whole Aristotelian corpus, but that should not surprise the reader, since Daniélou often quoted by heart or resorted to indirect sources without much attention to philologically relevant distinctions – especially in dealing with Western material. The psychoanalytic sources quoted in his last publication, *Le Phallus* (1993), are a clear example of this aspect.

22 Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, p.325.

23 Alain Daniélou, *Le Chemin du Labyrinthe*, p. 329.



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THE QUESTION OF 'ANIMISM' IN ALAIN DANIÉLOU

In this essay, Amanda Viana de Sousa approaches a central question in Daniélou's work: animism. Through a historical reconstruction and a systematic analysis of this concept, she shows, in the first part of the essay, the radical change of connotation in the use of this term. The emergence of the new connotation is due both to the influence of the new anthropology (with its progressive critique of ethnocentric models) and to the increasing awareness of other modes of being (mainly in indigenous cultures) across the globe. The second part of the essay is a detailed analysis of a new understanding of animism in Daniélou's thought, which in some ways is related to the radical transformation of that term between the end of the XX century and today.



Alain Daniélou performing a pūjā at Rewa Kothi around 1940
(archive of the Alain Daniélou Foundation).

An Introductory Note on the Term 'Animism'

What does Daniélou understand by 'animism'? What is the role of this concept within the framework of his work and thought? In order to answer these questions, it is first necessary to consider the origin and meaning of the concept of 'animism' in the context of anthropology.

Etymologically, the word 'animism' has its origin in the Latin word *anima*, which refers to breath, soul, life¹. In philosophical and religious usage, the word *anima* refers to what distinguishes a living being from a non-living one. Anthropological usage has kept the etymological meaning to some extent, but it has also modified and expanded it with nuances and

new layers.

If we take a retrospective look at the concept of 'animism', we notice that it was first introduced in the XIX century to convey the belief of 'savages' (a pejorative term used for indigenous people) in 'souls' or 'spirits' (both terms referring to 'animated nature'). As such, the notion of animism came to be considered the elementary substrate of all religions. But at the same time, the term was associated with a defective type of reasoning and placed at the lowest level of civilization in human history². This evolutionist view was further developed by stigmatizing the cognitive processes of 'savages' in their relation to nature, and also by assuming that animism is a superstitious practice inferior

to science, whereas science is the best modality of relation between human beings and nature³. Even attempts of that period that opposed the evolutionist view proved to be problematic. Such attempts did not consider animism as an underdeveloped mode of (primitive) thinking, but rather as a synthetic and pre-logical mode of being, based on affections and mystical participation with the environment, thus defining and judging the life experience of indigenous peoples according to Western standards of logical thinking⁴. Even critique of the postulate concerning animism as the most elementary form of religion⁵ was judged problematic at that time: on the one hand it ascribed to animism the status of a complex cognitive process, while on the other, it confined it to the framework of an underdeveloped form of rationality⁶.

The XX century witnessed a revolutionary attempt to remove this concept away from the idea of a religious foundation with normative implications and define it as an ontology that describes a certain way of being in the world⁷. This implies a broader interpretation of the notion of person, its scope being subjectivity and relations encompassing both humans and other-than-humans (plants, animals, minerals etc.). Consequently, the expanded modality of interpersonal socialization propounded by animism includes a community far wider than humans. This new perspective of animism is drastically demarcated from the old one. In its worldview living beings know how to behave respectfully and properly towards all *potential* persons – “only *some of whom* are human”⁸. In other words, the ‘new animism’ does not take any being (whether human or other-than-

human) ontologically for granted. Rather, it describes the process of relating in the best possible way with all beings, some of whom may become ‘persons’, according to the situation⁹.

In this conceptual context the idea of ‘animism’ is also an ontological opposite to ‘naturalism’ (that is, a world-configuration inaugurated with XVII rationalism and consolidated by Western industrialism in the XIX century, in which ‘nature’ is reduced to a domain of ‘soul-less things’). The animist world-configuration presupposes a continuity of interiority (which accounts for subjectivity) and a discontinuity in physicality between humans and non-humans. This means that both humans and non-humans (plants, animals, and also invisible beings) have the status of ‘subjects’ and can never be reduced to ‘things’ (as is the case in ‘naturalism’)¹⁰. Both humans and non-humans perceive the world by physical means¹¹, and since each embodiment is different, a physical discontinuity is established, essentially through their affective openness to the environment. In other words, the behavior, dispositions and capacities of a being are defined by its affective (embodied) constitution, not by the perspective it has, but the perspective it *is*¹². One can clearly see the importance of the notion of ‘perspective’ in this new understanding of animism. The term shows that ‘nature’ as perceived by humans is not the only form of world-disclosure, and that ‘culture’ is not the exclusive property of humans¹³. Further, ‘nature’ is not precisely what Western science has defined in terms of objectivity. The ideology that emerged from that epistemic exclusivism has proved to be destructive when it comes to relating humans

The ‘new animism’ does not take any being, whether human or other-than-human, ontologically for granted.

to nature, mainly because of the hierarchical division between ‘culture’ (high = work of the spirit and exclusively human) and ‘nature’ (low = lacking in spirit and therefore at the disposal of humans). Such a division allows all sorts of vertical schemes of domination and destruction in the name of ‘exploitation of resources’ for the sake of cultural progress.

An attempt has also been made to describe ‘animism’ as a ‘relational epistemology’: a cognitive, perceptual and social ‘relatedness’ between ‘persons’, not all of which are ‘human’. In this sense, certain persons are essentially connected with the specificities of a certain milieu¹⁴. This relational epistemology displays a mode of socialization between humans and non-humans based on a relationship of mutual dependence, significantly underlining an accurate and selective attention in the face of special incidents¹⁵. Because the new understanding of animism is so nuanced and has so many variants, we should perhaps speak about ‘animisms’ (using the plural) and avoid Western categories, such as ‘soul’, ‘spirit’, ‘subject’¹⁶.

Animism in Alain Daniélou

After these introductory remarks on the concept of animism, it is time to turn our attention to Alain Daniélou. In dealing with his approach, some relevant questions emerge from the contents exposed so far: What does Alain Daniélou understand by ‘animism’? Does he think of animism as the root of all religions? Does he consider it an ontology or an epistemology? Does his animist conception have evolutionist traits? Does he use animism, as we have seen in the case of the new scholarly approaches, as a critical examination of worldviews deemed ethnocentric or culturally biased?

In my analysis of Daniélou’s concept of animism, I rely mainly on two of his books:

*Yoga: The Method of Re-Integration*¹⁷ and *Shiva and Dionysus*¹⁸. In these books, Daniélou’s theses on animism are clearly expressed, and can be summarized thus:

1. Animism is the foundation of all religions.
2. Animism is a conceptual tool against urban religions.
3. Animism is the most genuine expression of a ‘religion of Nature’.
4. Animism is a kind of relational ontology and epistemology.
5. Animism is the source of a religious phenomenon that he calls ‘Shaivism’.

I will devote the rest of this essay to an elucidation of Daniélou’s theses.

Animism is the foundation of all religions

In his book *Yoga: The Method of Re-Integration*, Daniélou presents animism in a certain way in agreement with the classical or old anthropological definition dating back to the XIX century. Animism appears as a worldview in which subjectivity is ascribed to the realm of nature¹⁹. In consonance with the old approach to animism (by XIX century anthropology), Daniélou believes that animism is the foundation of all religions. In his view, the religious practices of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus are at root animistic, because they ultimately show a way of coping with a hidden and mysterious field. This mysterious field is ‘Nature’ in its non-objectifiable modality²⁰. As opposed to the old approach to animism, Daniélou however regards it neither as an inferior stage in the development of religion nor as a naive, irrational or primitive attitude to the world. Animism removes the human being as the center of attention and does not take ‘nature’ for granted. Animism is the source of all religions because all religions reveal - implicitly or explicitly - manifold levels of non-human subjectivity and the human’s need

for relation and negotiation with them²¹. In this sense, Daniélou claims that only some religions have remained faithful to their animistic foundations and have refused to reduce them by a restricted use of human reason. Such religions show not only an antidote to human alienation from nature but also the vital importance of a respectful exchange between humans and non-humans.

Animism as a Conceptual Tool against Urban Religions

In *Shiva and Dionysus*, Daniélou makes a fundamental distinction between a *religion of nature* and a *religion of the city*. In the frame of this distinction, he suggests that animism advocates an inner continuity between humans and non-humans. With this specific understanding of animism, Daniélou explains why a religion of nature includes non-human agency in the field of relations – which is not the case with urban religions²².

Urban religion is characterized by a dominant anthropocentrism – its clearest example being monotheistic religions. It operates using logical categories of human reason and derives three basic ideas: 1. The idea of a single God, source of all truth, who is pure intellect. 2. The peculiarity of the human species as made in God's image, which is essentially related to being endowed with reason. 3. The devaluation of nature as something devoid of reason, incomplete, finite and objectifiable. For Daniélou, these basic ideas that characterize monotheistic creeds are rational speculations supporting ideological constructions, since they reduce 'nature' to a mere field of objects at the service of human 'culture'²³. As a result of this, urban religion disregards the complexity and relationality of all other living species, and it advocates the idea of a supernatural being, which inevitably leads to the alienation of humans from their 'natural environment'. It is the tran-

scendence or the *supernatural* (that is, what is beyond or above 'nature') that must be sought and emulated rather than nature as a field of immanent relations. A further consequence of this position is that human alienation ends up being considered a privilege of the spirit and nature is condemned as something imperfect. On the diametrically opposite pole we find the 'true God' and His absolute supremacy. This domination mechanism implies not only the exercise of human power over non-humans but also the affirmation of the moral superiority of humans – transmitted by means of specific dogmas elevated to universal laws²⁴.

Daniélou uses the concept of animism to unmask the ideological character of the religions of the city. In this sense, the term 'animism' appears as 1. A worldview that recognizes the special position of non-humans as living beings endowed with intelligence, language, intentionality, etc. 2. A political instrument that underlines the interdependence and interrelation of all beings in a cosmic framework. 3. An anti-theological weapon against the devaluation and the objectivation of nature taking place in so-called 'mainstream religions'. 4. The ground of all religions, though not as the lowest stratum in a process of evolution. On the contrary, animism appears as the most perfect expression of a 'religion of Nature'.

In Daniélou's expression 'religion of nature', two terms are combined and are worthy of attention, since they have become controversial concepts today: 'nature' and 'religion'. Both terms are Western categories indicating a special relationship between humans and non-humans – a relationship quite alien to other cultures all over the globe in which such terms do not exist. Despite this semantic difficulty, Daniélou's use of the expression aims at re-situating the notion of 'supernatural' within a field of immanence, as if he wanted to retrieve the hidden and mysterious dimension



Samaúma, a powerful sacred tree for the indigenous people of the Amazonian rainforest
(photo by Amanda Viana, 2022).

of nature that monotheistic religions and later scientific reductionism have progressively excluded from the field of human experience²⁵. He also describes a certain experience of nature in non-European cultures, in opposition to the alienating practice of urban religion.

Animism as the Most Genuine Expression of a 'Religion of Nature'

In Alain Daniélou's thought, the religion of nature does not imply a connection with a transcendent God, but rather the development of an attitude in which the human subject opens itself to the possibility of communication and interaction with the ambivalent forces of nature. This attitude is mainly expressed on the level of perception. Both non-human beings and human animists are in a permanent negotiation with both the visible and the hidden levels of their environment – none of which

is the object of abstract cognitive processes. Both non-human beings and human animists have not only an awareness of the invisible landscape of their environment (spirits, forces, gods, etc.), but they also notice and heed what is necessary for their survival and can sense natural disasters beforehand. They never violate the cosmic order, because they are instinctively aware that no action is without consequence²⁶.

The animistic foundation of this form of religion demands a constant attention to the sacred and ambivalent character of nature. For Daniélou, nature is 'sacred' because it can neither be fully grasped by the human intellect nor reduced to anything objectifiable (material resources, scientific objects, experimental field of modern technologies, etc.). It is also 'ambivalent', because no moral principle regulating human conduct can be projected onto it to account for its sometimes baffling complexity.

Within that context, non-human agency is an expression of the divine and in no way outside the realm of subjectivity. The animist mode of living is an authentic and unquestionable religious experience *per se*, in which the intersubjective relation between humans and non-humans plays a central role. Alienation from nature (as in the case of the religions of the city) is not only a disconnection from life but also a profanation of the sacred, a desecration of the divine, and ultimately a threat and a great danger for the human species²⁷. Daniélou's conception of animism is no sentimental plea for a utopian re-connection with nature (of the type that we can see in New-Age movements today), but rather an exhortation to 'modern man'²⁸ to re-discover his own place in a world that is simultaneously dynamic and manifold, beautiful and cruel²⁹.

Animism as a Relational Ontology and Epistemology

The permanent and necessary negotiation between humans and non-humans presupposes a specific form of interconnection. In Daniélou's approach to animism, the inner continuity between humans and non-humans displays their mutual dependence. This aspect comes very close to what post-modern anthropology terms 'relational ontology'. In *Shiva and Dionysus*, Daniélou writes: "The mineral, vegetable, animal and human world as well as the subtle world of spirits and gods exist one through all the others, and each one for all the others"³⁰. These words show that Daniélou advocates the vision of a cosmic architecture or a dynamic and coherent whole, where human beings cannot arbitrarily impose their will upon others. Daniélou defines their role as a humble and active participation in the divine harmony. Human beings should contribute to the preservation of a socio-cosmic order in which they have no special privilege³¹. In this regard, he writes: "When humanity as a whole becomes a

threat to other species, the gods instill madness in them, which leads to their destruction in order to preserve the natural balance"³². In other words, when man reduces the mystery of life to his instrumental reason, he becomes the enemy of "the gods and creation"³³. Daniélou is convinced that only a religion of Nature (which he terms 'Shaivite-Dionysian') can lead to an harmonious interaction between humans and non-humans, and the animistic attitude is the basis for such a type of dynamics:

"Neither purely moral nor just ritualistic, but ecstatic and close to nature, this [Shaivite-Dionysian] religion tries to find the points of contact between the different levels of being and to seek their harmonious interaction – something which allows everyone to realize themselves on the physical, intellectual, and spiritual level and to entirely play their own role in the universal symphony of the manifest world"³⁴.

Apart from the ontological aspect and ethical consequences of animism, Daniélou refers to what in contemporary anthropology is called 'relational epistemology'. As mentioned above, animists have an expanded perception that reaches the subtlest levels of reality, a special kind of intuitive knowledge enabling them to identify subjectivity in mountains, springs, rivers and forests, and to engage in a relationship with them³⁵. The result of this is a careful and empathic respect for the subjectivity of non-humans and a vehement opposition to "the appropriation, possession and exploitation of the earth, which destroys the natural order and postulates man as the lord of creation"³⁶.

We may therefore say that Daniélou's understanding of animism entails an onto-epistemological interdependence between humans and non-humans, from which emerges a clear hostility against every form of 'institutional alienation' – regardless of its being monotheistic or secular.

Animism as Source of the Religious Phenomenon called 'Shaivism'

For Daniélou the greatest expression of a religion of Nature is Shaivism³⁷. In this respect, he writes: "Shaivism is that great religion that emerged from the animistic conception and the long religious experience of prehistoric man, about which we otherwise have only a few rare archaeological signs and references"³⁸.

Shaivism is, in its very roots, animistic, because its field of experience is nurtured by an archaic, unpredictable and powerful force³⁹. In its practical dimension, it is closely connected with the forest and the mountains,⁴⁰ it opposes the anthropocentrism of urban societies,⁴¹ it postulates an interdependence between the different levels of being (or the multiplicity of life forms),⁴² and it does not accept any dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural, nor does it postulate an ontological separation between humans and non-humans⁴³.

Daniélou resorts to Puranic sources to validate his own view of the god Shiva⁴⁴. In some of the Mahapuranas, Shiva is closely connected with a power of expansion and dispersion, i.e. he is characterized as the principle of life and death: "Shiva is the force of expansion in the world and is thus the energetic source of existence and principle of life, but also, since expansion ends in complete dispersion, the principle of dissolution and death. Everywhere and in everything, whatever causes life and death reveals Shiva's nature and is his 'sign'"⁴⁵.

Shiva acts – in a broader sense – as a cruel god, and his cruelty teaches us fundamental aspects of life. One of these aspects is the concrete

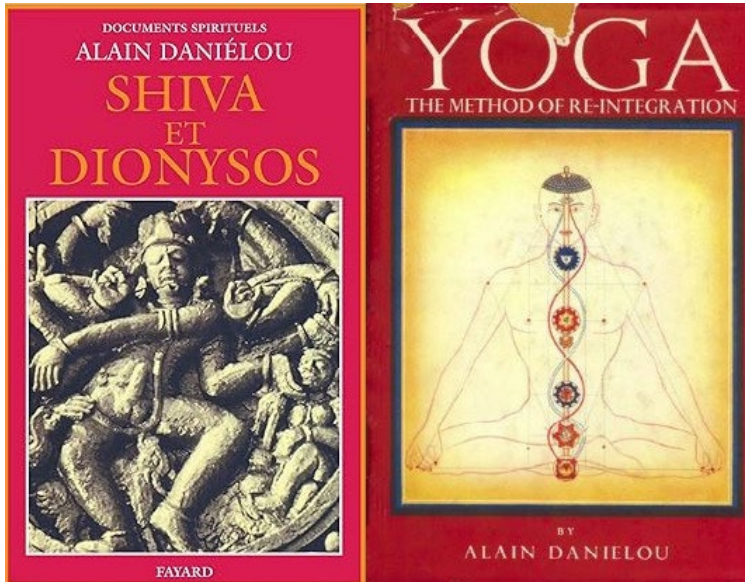
awareness that no living being can survive without destroying and devouring other forms of life⁴⁶. At the same time, Shaivism not only expresses but also upholds a living continuum entailing humans and non-humans. In Daniélou's words:

"Shaivism [...] is the sum of human experience since immemorial time. Its non-dogmatic traits allow people to find their own way. [...] Its ecological aspect (as one would say today) regards humans as part of a whole in which trees, animals, people, and spirits are related to one another and should live in mutual respect [...]. It is completely opposed to the destruction of nature and its different species [...]. It does not separate intellect from body, spirit from matter, but it sees the universe as a living continuum"⁴⁷.

Shiva incarnates the totality of Life and permeates the manifested reality. For Daniélou all natural phenomena, living beings, and intrinsic qualities of human life (for example its physical, emotional and cognitive faculties) are part of Shiva's body and can serve as a way of reaching the divine⁴⁸. But since Shiva is a 'dangerous god', he grants access to a form of knowledge that can only have its source in an unpredictable experience⁴⁹. For this reason, Daniélou advocates specific religious practices related to Shaivism that may serve in accepting and even embracing the ambivalent character of life, thus leading to a deeper understanding of the cosmos⁵⁰.

Another special aspect of Daniélou's conception of animism is, as already mentioned, the continuity he postulates between humans and non-humans on the level of their percep-

**For Daniélou the greatest expression
of a religion of Nature is Shaivism.**



Front cover of Alain Daniélou's *Shiva et Dionysos* (Paris 1979) and *Yoga: The Method of Re-Integration* (London 1949).

tive faculties. A peculiar feature of this is that perception does not appear as a lower faculty, but quite the opposite, as something endowed with a kind of noetic power – a power that enables a profound understanding of reality even before analytic processes are carried out. This aspect goes hand in hand with an affirmation of the body⁵¹.

Daniélou criticizes religious practices that reject the body and isolate the soul as an exclusively privileged channel to reach the divine. He categorically claims that religious practices based solely on spiritual experience devoid of every instance of embodiment lock themselves up in abstractions and alienate themselves from the true interactive field of forces that is *Nature*. Even when the body appears as a consistent starting point for the experience of the divine⁵², in itself it does not guarantee anything. For

Daniélou *physical* awareness of the divine presupposes a re-education of sensation and perception⁵³. Within the field of Shaivism, there are methods – a certain number of Yogic and Tantric practices – that lead to the expansion of perception by breaking the barrier of human reason⁵⁴. It is in this way that the connection of humans with subtler levels of being becomes possible,⁵⁵ as well a *religious socialization* of humans with non-humans. Daniélou was convinced that some methods and techniques practiced in Shaivism may contribute to the development of an animistic attitude towards the world⁵⁶. In this sense, Shaivism appears as a way of integrating every aspect of manifest reality (including its chthonic or tamasic powers) to make human experience broader, richer, and more intensive. But most of all, it leads to an enhanced responsibility of humans in their way of dealing with nature⁵⁷. •

- 1 Cf. Julius Gould und William L. Kolb (Hg.): *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, New York, 1965.
- 2 Tylor, Edward, 1913 (1871). *Primitive Culture I*, London: John Murray, p. 426-7. Cf. Graham Harvey. *Animism. Respecting the Living World*. London: C. Hurst & Co., 2005, p. 6-9.
- 3 Frazer, James G., 1983 (1860). *The Golden Bough*, London: Macmillan, p. 146-147. Cf. Graham Harvey, 2005, p. 5.
- 4 Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. *La mentalité primitive*, Paris 1922, p.76-80, 84, 86, 87-88, 121.
- 5 In this model, animism does not attain the status of a religion, since it is not a system of convictions and practices.
- 6 Émile Durkheim. *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris 1912, p. 125.
- 7 Graham Harvey 2005, p. 20. Cf. Graham Harvey. "Animism rather than Shamanism: new approaches to what shamans do (for other animists)". In: Schmidt, Bettina and Huskinson, Lucy eds. *Spirit Possession and Trance: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Continuum Advances in Religious Studies (7). London: Continuum, 2010, pp. 14–34, here p. 4-5. Jenny Nerlich. „Neue Betrachtungen eines evolutionistischen Begriffes“. Open Edition Journals: *Zeitschrift für junge Religionswissenschaft*. 15/2020, p. 7.
- 8 Graham Harvey, 2005, p. xvii.
- 9 Cf. Graham Harvey, 2005, p. 18.
- 10 Cf. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. *The relative native*. Chicago: Hau, 2015, p. 245. Cf. Viveiros de Castro. "Die kosmologischen Pronomina und der indianische Perspektivismus." *Société Suisse des Americanistes* 61, 1997, p. 99-114; p. 103.
- 11 Cf. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Perspektiventauch: Die Verwandlung von Objekten zu Subjekten in indianischen Ontologien". In: *Animismus. Revisionen der Moderne*, hrsg. Irene Albers und Anselm Franke, Zürich: Diaphanes, 2012, pp. 73-93; here p. 83-84.
- 12 Cf. Viveiros de Castro, 2015, p. 257; Viveiros de Castro, 1997, p. 107.
- 13 In the development of the conception of animism, one should not forget the nuance introduced by perspectivism: while in animistic systems *cum* perspectivism humans and non-humans see themselves and their equals as 'humans' and other species as 'non-humans', in animistic systems *sine* perspectivism both humans and non-humans see themselves and the other species as 'humans'. Cf. Philippe Descola. *Par-delà nature et culture*. Paris: Gallimard, 2005, p. 249 and Nerlich, 2020, p. 10.
- 14 Cf. Nurit Bird-David. "Animismus revisited: Personenkonzept, Umwelt und relationale Epistemologie". In: *Animismus. Revision der Moderne*, hrgs. Irene Albers und Anselm Franke, Zürich: Diaphanes, 2012, pp. 19-47, here p. 23.
- 15 Cf. Bird-David, 2012, p. 43-46.
- 16 Cf. Bird-David 2012, p. 23 and p. 33.
- 17 The first edition of *Yoga: The Method of Re-Integration* was published in 1949. The book was republished in English with the title *Yoga: Mastering the Secrets of Matter and the Universe*. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1991.
- 18 This book was published for the first time in French: *Shiva et Dionysos* (Paris: Fayard, 1979). The first English translation kept the title of the original: *Shiva and Dionysus* (London and The Hague: East-West Publication, 1982). Subsequently, English-speaking publishers opted for a somewhat different title: *Gods of Love and Ecstasy. The Traditions of Shiva and Dionysus* (New York: Inner Tradition, 1992). In 2020 a critical edition was published in German: Alain Daniélou. *Shiva und Dionysos. Die Religion der Natur und des Eros*. Aus dem Französischen übersetzt von Rolf Kühn, überarbeitet von Sarah Eichner und herausgegeben von Adrián Navigante. Dresden: Text und Dialog, 2020.
- 19 Cf. Daniélou, 1991, p. 8.
- 20 Cf. Daniélou, 1991, p. 8.
- 21 Cf. Daniélou, 1991, p. 8 and p. 9.
- 22 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 57-58.
- 23 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 58-59.
- 24 Cf. Navigante, Einleitung. In: Alain Daniélou. *Shiva und Dionysos. Die Religion der Natur und des Eros*, 2020, p. 16-17. Some historical consequences of the monotheistic worldview are violent evangelization, holy wars, colonialism, dogmatic imperialism, a patriarchal persecution of the erotic, the witch trials, and the massive destruction of nature ensuing from the idea of a

radical transcendent God.

25 Cf. Daniélou, 1991, p. 8: "Modern religions have reached an extremely simplified concept of the supernatural by seeking to reduce everything to a single personified being, a single god resembling somewhat the chief of a tribe".

26 Cf. Daniélou, 1991, p. 8. Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 74.

27 Cf. Navigante, 2020, p. 16-17.

28 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 74.

29 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 56 und p. 74-75.

30 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 55 (my translation).

31 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 52 and p. 56.

32 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 51 (my translation).

33 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 58 (my translation).

34 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 49 (my translation).

35 Cf. Daniélou, 1991, p. 8, p. 10 and p. 11.

36 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 74 (my translation).

37 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 55 and p. 60. Cf. Daniélou, 2006, p. 43: "Shaivism is a religion of nature which tries to perceive the divine in its work and to integrate itself into it" (Alain Daniélou, "Le renouveau shivaïte du troisième au dixième siècle", in: *Shivaïsme et tradition primordiale*, Paris 2006 [first edition 2003], pp. 37-67, quotation p. 43). Cf. Navigante, 2020, p. 23.

38 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 82 (my translation).

39 Cf. Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 60. Cf. also Navigante, 2020, p. 24-25.

40 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 60, p. 200.

41 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 60.

42 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 55.

43 Cf. Daniélou, 1991, p. 9 and p. 10.

44 Cf. Daniélou, 1991, p. 14: "Apart from the Purânas, which are histories, the basic aspects of Shaivite philosophy, rites, and symbols are found in numerous other works known as Âgamas and Tantras".

45 Cf. Daniélou, 1991, p. 15.

46 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 131, p. 132, p. 196, p. 240, p. 241, p. 242, p. 248 and p. 250. Cf. also Daniélou, 1991, p. 8, p. 9, p. 14 and p. 15.

47 Alain Daniélou, *Brief an Michael*. Auty, Dezember 7, 1997, Archiv. Alain Daniélou, Zagarolo, Italien (Cf. Navigante, 2020, p. 42).

48 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 56.

49 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 60.

50 Cf. Daniélou, 2020, p. 63.

51 Cf. Daniélou, 1991, p. 2, p. 7, p. 8 and p. 9.

52 Cf. Daniélou, 1991, p. 7: "The pleasure of taste, smell, touch, sight, hearing, and sex can, on the other hand, lead to the perception of divine harmony through beings and things. We are very close to the Divine in our moments of enjoyment, love, and contemplation of beauty. If we wish to go still further and perceive the inner harmony that presides over form, it suffices to go beyond the senses. It is in our own body, at the very source of enjoyment and not of thought, that we can attain the creative principle of the world. Corporal, not mental, techniques allow us a foretaste, at the very bottom of our being, of that Absolute of which we are merely fragmentary manifestations, since "the space inside the jar is not by its nature distinct from the immensity of space."

53 Cf. Daniélou, 1991, p. 8, p. 10, p. 12 and p. 24."

54 Cf. Daniélou, 1991, p. 12 and 15.

55 Cf. Daniélou, 1991, p. 9 and p. 16.

56 Cf. Daniélou, 1991, p. 9: "According to the chronology of the Purânas (ancient chronicles), it was towards the sixth millennium before our era that he who among the gods presides over life and death revealed to mankind the means to pass beyond the limitations of sensory perception and to know by direct and extra-sensorial experience the subtle nature of the natural apparent world and its transcendental aspects, which are the gods and spirits. The technique of this experience is called yoga ('the bond'), of which our word 'religion' is a translation."

57 Cf. Navigante, 2020, p. 24.



Gioia Lussana

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WHERE BEAUTY BLOSSOMS*

In this essay, Gioia Lussana approaches the relationship between aesthetic experience [*rasāsvāda*] and religious experience [*brahmāsvāda*] in the context of the medieval non-dual Śaivism of Kaśmīr. Focusing on the *Abhinavabhāratī*, Abhinavagupta's commentary to the *Naṭyaśāstra*, as well as on Raffaele Torella's recent studies on that text, Gioia Lussana explores the modalities and intricacies of the perception of beauty – even as part of everyday life experience which, in the inclusive view of non-dual Tantrism, also hosts the potential to generate beauty.

* This essay is the revised version of a chapter of the book *Lo yoga della bellezza. Spunti per una riformulazione contemporanea dello yoga del Kashmir* (Om Edizioni 2021), the fruit of a grant received in 2019 from the Alain Daniélou Foundation (FAD). It is dedicated to Raffaele Torella, mentor and inspirer of my work.



VI century Naṭarāja relief at the Badami Cave temples (courtesy Laura Giuliano).

*“L’Amour est descendu par amour
dans ce monde sous forme de beauté”
(Simone Weil, Cahiers)*

Abhinavagupta, in a crucial passage of the first chapter of his *Abhinavabhāratī*,¹ refers to the various possibilities of cognitive activity [*pratyaya*] in the human being. The first form of knowledge of reality is the ordinary sort [*laukika*] that distinguishes the limitedness of *saṃsāric* experience. In it, the individual is almost a hostage to objective reality, to which he reacts with a predatory attitude, to exorcise, through domination, his own dependence from it and to impose, overbearingly, his own egoic identity. Such a procedure, prevalent in daily life, leaves no place for beauty which, to be evoked, requires a free space between the

knower-subject and the known object.

This space emerges in the second possibility of knowing the world, that of the enjoyer of art (*homo aestheticus*), which occurs through *rasa*, aesthetic emotion. Indeed, beauty can burst forth only in the crucible of an interactive space between subject and object, the space of freedom rather than of need or control. Then egoic coercion ceases to impose itself on this or that object and – by virtue of what the great Kaśmīri master denominates ‘the universalisation of experience’ [*sādhāraṇībhāva*] – beauty can be enjoyed gratuitously, like a flower that blossoms spontaneously in the midst of an ownerless garden.

Then there is the perceptive and cognitive

quality typical of yogic experience [*yogi-pratyakṣa*],² a heightened degree of cognition, which also provides a space of contemplation between itself and the object, as also an unfiltered view of what one wishes to know. Abhinavagupta examines two different levels of this cognitive mode. The *yogin* of a lower level is no longer at the mercy of his own ego like the ordinary man; but his knowledge lacks beauty however, which, to reveal itself requires not only an immediate and direct perception of reality – generally speaking, the distinguishing mark of yogic perception – but a further element missing at this level: a spark of empathy by the subject toward the object of his knowledge. This is not within the reach of this *yogin*, because he is too ‘detached’ for his heart to beat fervidly in unison with life. The *siddhi*, or supernormal abilities that he has acquired through yogic discipline, act as a screen for the inner affective coloration that triggers and illuminates the immediacy of beauty.

Using the classification recognised by the Kāśmīri schools, this kind of *yogin* belongs to the coarse level of techniques [*sthūla-dhyāna* or *āṇava-upāya*]. Through the various means of yoga he has developed powers (such, for example, that of reading others’ minds)³ which somehow makes his perception ‘opaque’, because it remains uninvolved and unactivated in what it perceives. Such a *yogin*’s mastery of the elements of the real in actual fact involve a sort of indifference [*tāṭasthyā*] towards all things. In him there is no trace either of the attachment that distinguishes the ordinary man, or of that special empathy freed from the egoic components typical of aesthetic experience. This means that the flame of vibrant

energy, always a priority in the non-dual Śaivite context, is not alight within his heart. This lower kind of *yogin* is *tāṭastha*, unconcerned, like ‘the one who stands on the bank of a river and lazily observes its flow’, without throbbing to the rhythm of existence.

In the context of this work, Abhinavagupta also considers the *para-yogin* or *yogin* of a superior level, equally unable to pick beauty since he is too distant from human passions and wholly identified, not with human events in this case, but with the Absolute itself. If, however, we interpret coherently the thought of the great Kāśmīri master in the light of the spiritual view that emerges in all his work and in non-dual speculation as a whole, we could argue that the high-profile *yogin* cannot pick it because he actually embodies the supreme form of beauty. The highest expression of yoga, often characterised as *para-dhyāna*, *śāmbhava upāya* or even *anupāya* (wholly spontaneous yoga, beyond all technique), actually coincides with that condition of intimate bliss [*svānanda*] intrinsic in *brahmāsvāda*, tasting the Absolute. It represents the maximum achievement of non-duality, as Abhinavagupta states elsewhere, as for example in the *Locana*, his commentary on the work of Ānandavardhana⁴. Here, aesthetic tasting [*rasāsvāda*] is explicitly described as a mere drop of that overflowing bliss that is the savouring of the Absolute [*brahmāsvāda*]. Here, the adept, in the ecstasy of experience, recognises himself as identical to Śiva, the ‘supremely beautiful’⁵. No longer coloured [*uparāga-sūnya*] by outside influence, but nonetheless trembling and bewitched by the Absolute in an ardent embrace that includes everything. In a word, it can be said that, considering the Absolute

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(Śiva) as Beauty itself, the aesthete perceives beauty wherever the *para-yogin* becomes it⁶.

In the dimension of *brahmāsvāda*, this space of separation and energetic tension between subject and object that marked *rasāsvāda* (and generated the perception of beauty) is replaced – in this interpretation – by what we may call a *pulsating integration between subject and object* which amalgamate in mutual intensity, without ever losing that live spark that is *spanda*, which in Śaivite transmission moves life and awareness. The two poles, like those of a generator (i.e. the human and the divine), never disappear, but mutually energise each other like tongues of a single flame. In the integrated condition of *brahmāsvāda* they are, on one side the *yogin* / *bhakta* and, on the other, the God, to whom the adept is always alert in an impetus of fervent devotion. Within this inscrutable relationship is released the glow of a live connection.

The *para-yogin*, whose ego has divested its arrogant rapacity toward the real, then experiences a paradoxical ‘ardent neutrality’, similar to *rasāsvāda*, but enormously enhanced by the mutual increase of the two poles of experience. We could compare this otherworldly state [*alaukika*] to what R. Torella defines as a kind of “*hyper-saundarya*”, a ‘super-beauty’, an experience that is highly unifying and vital at the same time, in which the subject contemplates itself in the object of that awareness that is Śiva himself and the God contemplates himself in him. This aesthetic experience thus constitutes an effective training, marked moreover by its own self-sufficiency, in the irruption of spiritual beauty, its direct extension, albeit autonomous and not automatic in its regard. In

this situation, any form of fruition may become an occasion of awakening and, as such, a reverberation of the Absolute which, on its side, is solely pure, conscious bliss.

Through a kind of alchemic transmutation, not only pleasure, but even the pain of life – as well as life’s own routine – can be transformed into an experience of savouring. *Samśāra* is transformed into *nirvāṇa*, or rather, the fictive barrier between them falls away. Yoga becomes life, savoured in all its luminous beauty, even in what appears negative, painful, obscure.

Going on to the non-dual conclusion of these considerations, ordinary, aesthetic and religious perception are in any ultimate analysis equally expressions of the divine (meaning ‘supreme beauty’). I have personally been able to establish directly to what extent all this is true in present-day Kaśmīri yoga.

A contemporary Indologist, M. Hulin, points out that daily life itself may present sudden and unexpected irruptions in this spiritual bliss which, by approximation, we may call beauty⁷. Hulin observes that even in everyday life glimpses of a mysterious or mystical dimension are spontaneously accessible – and sometimes even gape open – often triggered by the most banal situations, without any precise or apparent cause. Happiness (and with it the expansive quality of beauty) sometimes irrupts in a self-explanatory and self-sufficient way, even under *saṃsāric* conditions, suddenly eclipsing all the limitations of ego and space-time that structure our ordinary existence in the world. This happiness offers itself through an ecstatic emotion, as sudden as lightning that lightens the night sky, without any explicable

Yoga becomes life, savoured in all its luminous beauty, even in what appears negative, painful, obscure.



Apsarā in loving attitude - Adinath Temple, Khajuraho
(photo Raymond Burnier, archive of the Alain Daniélou Foundation).

relationship to the eventually apparent irrelevance of the situation that triggered it.

Kaśmīri masters exclude, from a theoretical point of view, any perception of beauty in the bustle of ordinary existence, since it always requires a discreet degree of revival of the attention fostered by a space of contemplation. But in the substance of non-dual speculation, even daily existence is not ultimately substantially different from absolute reality so that flashes of savage beauty can also be suddenly revealed there too. Kaśmīri Śaivism, while considering *rasāsvāda* and *brahmāsvāda* as two privileged conditions of knowledge as

compared to customary somnolent perception, never undervalues the living experience of so-called ordinary reality, because whatever exists is merely the free expression of Śiva's dance and every situation contains the potential of awakening, like that of a flower that grows spontaneously even outside the pot or garden.

In line with these considerations, Abhinavagupta affirms⁸ that even what we call 'things' [*bhāva*] are alive: they 'feel', they share with human beings the potential of awakening. It is actually they that 'move' men's actions. Things possess a determining capacity, an intelligent

creativity and can bring about different states of mind in man. According to the non-dual view, there is thus an actual real reciprocity in the relations between the human being and the world of objects, as equally ‘animated’ as the subject they serve. It is the very will to possess things – typical, as we have seen, of the despotic attitude of ordinary man – that precludes perception of the souls of all things. The heart of things is profound and alive, because it contains within it the spark of the divine, which is everywhere, albeit dormant, shielded, by the density of the objects themselves⁹. In Abhinavagupta’s concept, things are merely more humble and less intrusive than their observers and users, but they are equally proactive and desirous of interacting with the iridescent game that is life in its every expression. Not only in the human being, but also in things, moves *spanda*, the vibration of consciousness, whether one is aware of it or not. In the contemporary reformulation of Kaśmīri yoga we are constantly invited to listen to ‘the heart-beat’ by carefully exploring whatever seem inert in the body, but which reveals unexpectedly and whenever it chooses its own hidden vitality.

Continuing with my revaluation of the world of objects in the non-dual Śaivism of tradition, during my recent study-visit to contemporary Kaśmīr and from my talks with Pranāthji, the master whom I have had the fortune to encounter, I learned of the central role in the living transmission of Kaśmīri yoga played by ‘contemplation in action’. ‘Things’, like daily activities, whether dense or multiform, while actually veiling the luminosity of awareness,

nonetheless hold that same light within them. In the end, they seem to have been planted there to render the mystery of existence more various, constantly inviting and challenging us to reawaken. The transforming encounter with objective reality may thus even disregard strictly ritual time. The world of objects then appears worthy of respect, care, attention, and of being listened to. Things are no longer just things, but presences prompting an inner dynamism. This correspondence with things spontaneously triggers ‘the posture’, i.e. that vibrant inner disposition, yoga’s beating heart in a wider sense, that is also life lived to the full, apart from specific ritual practice.

The unhurried prompting of a non-appropriate relationship between oneself and the world simplifies the field of perception, allowing only the essential to emerge in all its brilliance. Attention awakens and feeds the exchange between oneself and things. Its mutual intensity renders this exchange fervid and fruitful.

Things are capable of opening wide their universal nature, also seen as evident by Marcus Aurelius¹⁰, heir of the Stoics, at the outset of Western mystical philosophy. In his ‘physical’ contemplation of the world of nature, Marcus Aurelius speaks of ‘indifference towards indifferent things’, not because they lack interest for the observer or for their indifference in itself. In actual fact, they involve the subject in a reciprocal complicity, but are independent of man’s will and thus go far beyond his limited understanding. Things must be ‘left free’ from personal involvement, free to unfold their own universal nature (*sub specie*

**Transformation of the gaze leads to a ‘loving
consensus’ with things which, from an ephemeral
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Yoginī - Hirapur Temple, Orissa (photo Gioia Lussana).

aeternitatis). Their ‘indifference’ with regard to anthropocentric usefulness thus reveals to the sage an infinite interest, revealing love, beauty and admiration. Such things are then transfigured and open the horizon to an infinitely greater will that even includes their observer himself. Transformation of the gaze leads to a ‘loving consensus’ with things which, from an ephemeral present, rise to become the vehicle of eternity. This is how the ordinariness of the natural world opens to become an aesthetics ‘of daily things’, in which everything reveals its authentic beauty¹¹.

The great mystics, like the ‘mystics of daily life’ have never undervalued relations with things, sometimes the minor things of daily life, discovering in them a silent support for

innerness. E. Hilsum,¹² a natural mystic, in his penetrating diary prior to his deportation and death at Auschwitz in 1943, describes the possibility of experiencing amorous rapture for Spring, or of befriending Winter, or a city, or a countryside. She describes, for example, special feelings towards a plant, the copper beech tree of his childhood, the feeling of enchantment and nostalgia for that element of nature. I can personally recall a pregnant daily exchange with a rose bush, during a long meditational retreat, and in every month of May I rediscover that same inspiration of dialogue with the roses of my garden. Silence sometimes favours the perception of the vastness that encompasses us, of which we are merely a part. A breath that breathes us, a thought that thinks us.

Thus we can affirm that the spontaneous spiritual awakening envisaged by Kaśmīri yoga is something to which everyone is already intrinsically predisposed. It comes however like an uncalled for and sudden grace, but it is evoked and mysteriously prepared by constant training of attention, ‘gracious’ and participant in our daily relations with things. We can find the same kind of grace in aesthetic experience or in strictly defined yogic gesture. It may be perceived as something fragile, which a single moment’s distraction may sweep away, but it is rooted in the deepness of being.

Grace is revealed as a privilege of *homo aristocraticus*, by which we mean not exactly the *rājānaka* or ‘man belonging to court nobility’ – a category to which Abhinavagupta and the other Trika masters belonged – but the *sahṛdaya* or one who ‘has a heartfelt connection’ with existence. In this tradition, the higher *yogin* or *homo religiosus* has an empathic heart that beats in syntony and recognizes oneself in every manifestation of reality. He is the *adhikārin*,¹³ he who has proper skill in action; he is the *siddhimān*,¹⁴ who knows how to savour the generative quality of *rasa*. Aristocrats are *qui rationem artis intelligunt*, as Gnoli says, quoting Quintilian. *Rasika* or *sahṛdaya* are they who – we may say literally – ‘share their heart’ with things, because they discern the underlying vitality of everything.

On the other hand, nobility or greatness of soul in the Stoic and Platonic Western tradition, which we later find in Marcus Aurelius, is that vigilance [*prosoché*] that becomes ‘cosmic awareness’, detached from narrow individual vision and turned to a universal momentum for good. This attitude of the early Western philosophers gave rise in the 3rd century C.E. to the spiritual practice of the first monks for whom attention becomes that ‘guarding of the heart’ that reveals in each his divine vocation. According to non-dual Tantrism, attention

plays the same prime role, but *saṃsāra* is not different from the liberated condition. In both, everywhere, Śiva shines and dances. He who is One says, “I’d like be many” [*bahu syām*], as told by one of the most ancient Upaniṣads (*Chāndogya* 6.2.3). Again, it is Śiva in the *Svacchanda-tantra* who is called *Bahurūpa* (of the many forms) for his versatility in being all things.

The awakening of the *kuṇḍalinī*, a highly important *topos* in yogic practice generally speaking as in today’s Kaśmīr, always occurs spontaneously, albeit prepared by two different paths: one, using vital breath, is known as *prāṇa-kuṇḍalinī*, or else training the strengthening of awareness, known as *cit-kuṇḍalinī*. But what launches the profound reawakening of vital energy – which in Kaśmīr coincides with awareness itself – in either of the two paths indifferently is conscious presence in the ordinary activities of everyday life. In every experience, without distinction, is *saṃvit-rūpa āveśa*; meaning that each experience is imbued in that single awareness that takes different forms. Thus, there is no demarcation between what is ‘spiritual’ and what is ‘ordinary’. It is merely a question of removing the obstacles that veil the living and conscious light from which all things existing are made.

At the base of this, crucial importance in applied yoga is played by the so-called *krāma-mudrā* or *bhairavī-mudrā* that has many similarities with it. It is an inner disposition firmly anchored in a bodily centre and, at the same time, projected in an activity performed outside. This is an integrated and extremely advanced psycho-physical condition of non-dual yoga, to which Lakshmanjoo in his yoga teaching attributes great importance; even today it is still practised by the community that flourishes around the ashram he founded at Ishber Village. Having eliminated the fictitious barrier that separates the so-called inner world from the so-called outer, there remains only the vital connec-

tion between the two ‘worlds’: a diffused and all-pervasive awareness.

An example of this aptitude ‘straddling two worlds’ is found in the *Vijñānabhairava-tantra* (śl.51), which proposes the procedure for maintaining the attention of the inner *dvādaśānta* (any inner spot of the body) and, with the mind focused on that centre, devoting oneself to any activity of daily life with the same concentration [*yathā tathā yatra tatra*]. Thus, attention remains present, but simultaneously on both sides. Inner awareness acts, as it were, as a support for bodily dynamism externally, with a reciprocity that feeds both. In the words of Lakshmanjoo¹⁵ *bhairavī-mudrā* combines with the *cakita-mudrā*, the attitude of wonder, since dwelling between two worlds makes everything appear new, vivified, reawakened. *Antar-lakṣyo bahir-dṛṣṭiḥ* is as Abhinavagupta describes the *bhairavī-mudrā*: “turned inward but looking outward”¹⁶.

A yoga that strongly revalues ordinary experience, recognising in the latter the seeds of beauty and liberty that germinate fully in aesthetic and in truly spiritual experience, naturally lead to a *non-yoga*, i.e. a *yoga that includes everything*, a condition that Abhinavagupta indicates as *anupāya*: an experience of pure awareness all around, surpassing any kind of practice, rooting itself in the distinct sensation of being alive and in the awareness of being so.

Personally, I have been able to verify, during my visit to Śrīnagar, to what extent this position is within the reach at least on principle, of every sincere practitioner and constitutes the natural and integrated destination of the yogic path. The sole fundamental element in yoga practice is training attention [*avadhāna*] to ever-deeper levels. And since awakening coincides with the authentic nature of reality, it is plausible that it may also reveal itself spontaneously through a simple act of recognition, an *insight* that irrupts without warning during our daily routine¹⁷.

The awakened condition may be described as *svānanda* (fulfilled happiness), a characteristic of the practitioner who reaches a high degree of qualification [*adhikāra*] or *para-yogin*¹⁸. It may equally be described as *camatkāra*, a psycho-physical aptitude characteristic of both *rasāsvāda* and *brahmāsvāda*. *Camatkāra* is that experience of the whole being that illuminates with awareness whatever appears inanimate [*jāḍa*]. *Camatkāra* is *ajāḍyam*, awareness of the luminous nature of all things that exist, that vivacity of the heart that makes whatever lives even more lively, that light of presence that throbs like the emotions, like life itself. *Para-yoga* is truly this amazing intensity.

The *para-yogin* consciously enjoys all this and knows how to discern the inexhaustible afflatus in every thought, in every word, in every *āsana*. •

1 Cf. R. Torella, *Beauty*, in V. Eltschinger *et al.* (eds.), *Burlesque of the Philosophers: Indian and Buddhist Studies in Memory of Helmut Krasser*, Hamburg Buddhist Studies Series, Projekt Verlag, Bochum-Freiburg 2023, pp. 763-87.

2 R. Torella, Observations on *yogipratyakṣa*, in “*Saṁskṛta-sādhutā: Goodness of Sanskrit. Studies in Honour of Professor Ashok N. Aklujkar*. Edited by Chikafumi Watanabe, Michele Desmarais, and Yoshichika Honda, D. K. Printworld, New Delhi, India, 2012.”

3 Cf. R. Torella, “Beauty” and R. Gnoli, 1968: 82.

4 *Locana on Dhvanyāloka* III. 44. Quoted in R. Torella, “Beauty”.

5 Utpaladeva in *Śivastotrāvalī* XVIII. 21b defines Śiva precisely as *atisundara*, ‘the supremely beautiful’. Quoted in R. Torella, “Beauty”.

6 This condition of pure non-dual awareness goes in the same direction that R. K. C. Forman (*Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*, pp.109-127; State University of New York Press, Albany 1999), on the subject of mystical experience, designates as *knowledge by identity*, an epistemological structure in which being and knowing coincide.

7 Cf. M. Hulin, *La mystique sauvage : aux antipodes de l'esprit*, Presses universitaires de France, 1993. The author notes that Sanskrit has no term corresponding precisely to the adjective ‘beautiful’... *Śubha, sundara, kalyāṇa* include, according to the case, nuances such as ‘shininess’, ‘purity’, ‘good omen’, etc.

Cf. also D.H.H. Ingalls “Words for Beauty in Classical Sanskrit” in *Indological Studies in honor of W. Norman Brown*, American Oriental Society, vol.47. New Haven, Connecticut 1962.

8 R. Torella in the introduction to *The Īśvarapratyabhijñāṅkārikā of Utpaladeva with the Author's Vṛtti. Introduction, Critical Edition and Annotated Translation*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 2002. 2nd revised edition. 2021 (pp. XIV et seq.) quotes passages of Somānanda's *Śivadr̥ṣṭi* (III 18ab) in which it is explicitly affirmed that the non-duality

of Śiva, present and real in all phenomenal reality, is a direct manifestation of himself. The *ekaśivatā* is the sole essence of all things existing that also shine equally in his light. Things, animated by will and awareness (V, 4 – V 16, 37), are consequently not passive, but alive. Even though made of him, they have however their own specific autonomy.

9 v. *Spanda-kārikā* 5: “nor does insentience exist” [*na cāsti mūḍhabhāvo'pi*].

10 Cf. P. Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, Éditions Albin Michel, 2005: 119 et seq..

11 Ibid (132 et seq.). Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* III, 2.

12 E. Hillesum, *An interrupted life: the diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-43*, Washington, D.C., Washington Square 1985: 105.

13 *Abhinavabhārati* I, p. 280, R. Gnoli (1968: 63).

14 *Abhinavabhārati* I, p. 279. Ibid (57).

15 Swami Lakshmanjoo, *The Manual for Self-Realization. 112 Meditations of the Vijnana Bhairava Tantra*, ed. by J. Hughes, Kashmir Shaiva Institute (*Ishwar Ashram Trust*), New Delhi 2016: 153.

16 *Tantrāloka* 5. 80.

17 As affirmed admirably by Utpaladeva (*Śivastotrāvalī* 18.13): “*Dwelling in the midst of the sea of supreme ambrosia, with my mind immersed solely in the worship of You, may I attend to all the common occupations of man, savouring the ineffable in every thing* (trad. R.Torella, IPK p. XXXVI).

18 As Abhinavagupta explains in *Tantrāloka* (cap.2) – and as, even today it is recognised in Kaśmīr (as explained to me by Pranāthji) – the hierarchy of yoga levels starts from the highest, the spontaneous means and non-means [*anupāya*], descending progressively to the means that use techniques [*sāmbhava-upāya*, cap.3, *śākta-upāya*, cap.4, *āṇava-upāya*, cap.5]. From a theoretical point of view, this ‘hierchical inversion’ gives everyone the possibility of instantaneous liberation.



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LUCE IRIGARAY AND THE SOMATIC TURN, A FEMININE FORM OF LIBERATION: THE INFLUENCE OF TANTRA ON WESTERN FEMINIST THEORY

Belgian philosopher, psychoanalyst and linguist Luce Irigaray has received both praise and critique over the years: she has been called one of the most important voices in the quest for female subjectivity, as well as a gender essentialist. In this article, Tova Olsson explores the profound influence of Yoga and Tantra on her writing, particularly in her interpretation of masculinity, femininity, and polarity, showcasing how these embodied practices have distinctly shaped her work.

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Ārdhanārīśvara, shared by Tova Olosson (copyright free image).

“What I have learned from yoga – beyond or on this side of my Western culture – are things about existence that are both very simple and very subtle” (Irigaray 2002:50)

Introduction: Feminist Theory and Feminine Practice

Philosopher, psychoanalyst, and linguist Luce Irigaray has been celebrated as a heroine and a visionary, as the voice of sexual difference and her uniquely female subjectivity. She has also been criticized for over-simplifying and enhancing heteronormative binary structures (seemingly suggesting that the difference between men and women matters more than all other forms of social differences) and for essentialising woman as a structural concept (Moi 1999; Stone 2006). The focus of this article is something slightly less talked about, namely

Irigaray as a practitioner of Yoga and Tantra¹. Its purpose is to examine how Irigaray’s physical practice and her embodied understanding of the mentioned traditions have influenced how she relates to and expresses femininity, masculinity, and polarity, bringing Tantric concepts into the world of feminist theory. Morny Joy has problematized this side of Irigaray’s authorship, arguing that:

“In order to comprehend fully the complexity and significance of Irigaray’s work, I believe these dimensions of her religious and spiritual orientation have to be addressed [...] it becomes apparent that the more spiritual Irigaray becomes, as with her adaptation of eastern religious practices, particular yoga and meditation, the more conservative are her views (Joy 2006: 4)”.

Joy believes that the late Irigaray can be criticized for being both spiritually apologetic, orientalist and essentialist and compares Irigaray's use of the word 'spirituality' with how "new age practitioners" use it (Joy 2006: 124-125). Joy further believes that Irigaray's later texts, such as *I Love to You* (1996) and *Between East and West* (2002) run the risk of "simply reinforcing rather than reforming the existing polarities between women and men" (Joy 2006: 140)².

Advancing the argument, this article suggest that Irigaray partakes in what might be referred to as the 'material' turn within academia and the 'somatic' or 'embodied' turn within contemporary (female-dominated) spirituality³. Within the bounds of academia, the turn emphasizes the materiality and every-day lived experience of religion⁴. Within contemporary spirituality, the turn enhances matter and body as well as the intelligence and storytelling of the living flesh and bones. It works as a pushback against 'spiritual bypassing' and intellectual transcendence, against the patriarchal longing to dispose of the body with its constant needs for maintenance and its constant expressions of desire and aversion⁵. The body acts as a reminder of failure, old age, death, and decay, making Buddhist practitioners as well as adherents of classical and ascetic forms of Yoga throughout the ages declare: *sarvam duḥkham*: all is suffering⁶. In contrast, many practitioners of contemporary Yoga and Tantra outside India are moving away from an ascetic view of the body and instead use what they call 'somatic practices' (the word soma meaning 'body' in Greek and

'nectar' in Sanskrit) including free movement. These practitioners frequently use terms such as 'integration' and 'embodied consciousness' when explaining the importance of not neglecting the physical, but trusting its ability to give valuable information to whomever can get the 'felt sense of it'. This notion of integration between the immanent and the transcendent, between spirit and matter mirrors (sometimes purposely) the philosophies of classical Indian Tantra (White 2000; Samuel 2008)⁷. It is not uncommon within these strands of contemporary spirituality to reference this integration as a 'feminine' form of awakening, a notion which Irigaray's writings seem to echo.

Evidently, I am not the first to notice that there is something irrefutably 'Tantric' about the way Irigaray expresses her thoughts and experiences. In her *Goddess Durga and Sacred Female Power* (2010), Laura Amazzone uses Irigaray's voice to express "the need for us to deconstruct everything in the patriarchal world in order to experience our female consciousness" (Amazzone 2010: xiii). Amazzone further states that:

"Irigaray's theories of male and female sexual differences (which are considered so potent and essential to Tantric rituals), might give key insights into how sexuality and biology impact our consciousness and self-expression within this world (Amazzone 2010: 36)".

She also writes that "parallels between Tantra and Irigaray's philosophies are intriguing – especially the ideas of woman and man as divine" (Amazzone 2010: 37). Likewise, in her *Traveller in Space* (2002) June Campbell refers to Irigaray's concepts when examining gender identity and the role of the female practitioner

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South Asian *mūrti* [Tib. *yab-yum*], shared by Tova Olsson (copyright free image).

within patriarchal institutions, particularly Tibetan (Tantric) Buddhism, asking the question if “after patriarchy any religion, as we now know them, could possibly survive in a recognizable form?” (Campbell 2002: 19). Though Irigaray’s tremendous impressions on the field of feminist theory should not be reduced to how she has been interpreted by the above-mentioned scholars, they indicate that female scholars who are also practitioners of Yoga and/or Tantra share an interest in her theories, perhaps because her theories mirror her (and their) embodied experience.

Irigaray’s ‘Tantric’ Understanding of Female Liberation

Rosi Braidotti (2019) has called Irigaray’s approach one of replacing sight with touch, of no longer resting in the visual experience of the world, of being the observer, or the witness as the ‘masculine’ spiritual traditions would have it⁸. Irigaray instead (much like classical Indian forms of Tantra and indeed many contemporary Western forms of Tantra) proclaims touch the highest of the senses, because you can’t touch another without experiencing the touch yourself⁹. She writes: “Touch is a more subjective, intersubjective sense; it is somewhere

between active and passive; it escapes the possessive, mechanical and warlike economy” (Irigaray 1994: 21). Touch is physical and affective, it demands closeness instead of separation, placing it in stark contrast to the concept of liberation [*kaivalya*] in the classical Yoga of Patañjali (grounded in the philosophical system of Sāṃkhya) which translates to ‘autonomy’ or even ‘aloneness’ where the ability to separate the ‘seer’ from that which is seen enables freedom from suffering (Stoler Miller 1998). To Irigaray the goal is something quite different. Her spirituality, her Yoga, is one of embodiment, of entering into relationship with flesh, earth, creative life. To her, renouncing desire is a question of refining, to be able to *turn to* with greater sensitivity, rather than to turn away from¹⁰. She writes:

“Spiritual progress is therefore not separated off from the body nor from desire, but these are gradually educated to renounce what harms them. To be sure, it is not a matter of renouncing for the sake of renouncing, but of renouncing what impedes access to bliss in this life (Irigaray 2002:9) ”.

This search for access to bliss in this very life seems to echo some of the Tantric siddhas (‘perfected ones’)¹¹. But although liberation while alive [*jīvanmukti*] is a well-known Tantric goal, Irigaray seems to be after something more gender-specific, because to her, the awakening of a woman is thoroughly different from that of a man; it is an awakening that calls for engagement, embodiment, and relationship¹². She writes:

“The awakening of consciousness for woman,

is situated at a spiritually higher level: not only to not destroy the life on the other, but to respect his or her spiritual life and, often, to awaken the other to a spiritual life that he or she does not yet know [...] It is a question of *physiological* identity, and a question of *relational* identity as well. Born of woman, her mother [...] the little girl possesses from the beginning, within herself, the secret of human being and of the relation between human beings. The little girl is born with familiarity to the self, to the natural world, to the other. She intuitively knows the origin of life. She knows that the source of life is in her, that she need not construct it outside of herself [...] Woman also remains in greater harmony with the cosmos (Irigaray 2002: 89, 85, my cursives) ”.

Irigaray further states that “God in the masculine is further away from micro- and macro-cosmic nature than a feminine divinity” (Irigaray 2002: 86), echoing the *śākta tantra* traditions where *Devī* (“goddess”) or *Śakti* (“power” or “creative capacity”) is understood as the creator and very fabric of the world (Tigunait 1998; McDaniel 2004). Irigaray’s use of the concept ‘Woman’ and ‘Man’ could be criticized for denying plural femininities/masculinities and diverse sexual expressions (White 2019). Instead, they seem to present essentialist categories, archetypes moving as individuals, participating in predictable forms. Seeing this, one could argue that Irigaray encourages what she set out to problematize – the limitations that concepts and lingual structures provide and further, as Joy claims, that she has adapted the viewpoint and vocabulary of holistic spirituality. This becomes

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especially relevant when Irigaray refers to an idealized matriarchal past, mirroring countless established (and proclaimed feminist) teachers of contemporary Yoga and Tantra¹³. Irigaray writes:

“We must not forget that in the time of women’s law, the divine and the human were not separate. That means religion was not a distinct domain. What was human was divine and became divine. Moreover, the divine was always related to nature [...] In a patriarchal regime, religion is expressed through rites of sacrifice and atonement. In women’s history, religion is entangled with cultivation of the earth, of the body, of life, of peace [...] patriarchy stripped women of divinity, taking it over in places where men are amongst themselves, and often suspecting women’s religion of devilry (Irigaray 1994: 10-11) ”.

Perhaps Irigaray’s writing is best regarded as a performance of narrative mimesis, where she creates a story about women that she believes will have an expanding effect on them, rather than producing a text meaning to proclaim a historical reality¹⁴. But regardless of how one chooses to read Irigaray, her vision is one of embodied spirituality, of earthly enlightenment, professing that “Hell appears to be a result of a culture that has annihilated happiness on earth by sending love, including divine love, into a time and place beyond our relationships here and now” (Irigaray 1994: 112). The emphasis on the ‘here and now’ is everywhere present in the milieus of contemporary spirituality, echoing through book titles like Ram Dass’ *Be Here Now* (1978) and Eckhart Tolle’s *The Power*

of Now (1997). What this article proposes is, not only that Irigaray has been influenced by this discourse, but that her practices have provided her with a type of embodied knowledge that, at least to her, is undeniably ‘feminine’.

Irigaray’s ‘Tantric’ Understanding of Polarity

Irigaray enhances the need for respect for female ‘virginity’, which she understands as woman’s independence, her right to her own body and sexuality (Irigaray 1994: 74-75)¹⁵. Yet she doesn’t seem to believe in separatism, the point of view that women need to come together in exclusively female settings in order to develop subjectivity (a perspective that is quite common within the ‘women circles’ of contemporary spirituality). On the contrary, the further along she moves in her authorship (and possibly in her own practice of Yoga and Tantra), the more she seems to think through the concepts of polarity, rhythm, and attraction. Alison Stone seeks the roots of Irigaray’s nature-philosophy in Goethe and his thoughts on polarity and intensification (Stone 2006: 92). I propose the Tantric doctrine of *spanda* (vibration/rhythm) as a possible influence, especially in regard to its discourse on expansion/contraction (Dyczkowski 1987). Stone writes:

“For Irigaray then, all natural phenomena have poles, which are placed in their polar relations to each other by the complementary rhythms at which they suck in fluids (expand) and expel fluids (contract). In so far as this rhythmic bipolarity inherent in all natural processes and phenomena makes

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them 'sexuate', this is because this bipolarity approximates in structure to human sexual difference. The way each pole depends upon its other and yet follows its unique rhythm parallels the situation of the two human sexes, which differ fundamentally yet also depend upon one another within the overall process of human life, which regenerates itself through sexual reproduction (Stone 2006: 90-91)".

Irigaray suggests that out of all life-forms, humans are most able to express their bipolarity, making her worldview a hierarchical and anthropocentric one. Moreover, she tends to present her theories rather than as thought propositions, as conclusions based on absolute experience, which places her in stark contrast to the self-reflexivity so characteristic of post-modern feminist theorists like Rosi Braidotti, who appear to take a rather non-dualistic as well as non-anthropocentric stance (Braidotti 2011, 2013). The voice of Irigaray is a commanding one, undeviating, perhaps because, as this article suggests, it is rooted in her own lived, embodied experience. In contemporary spirituality, especially in so-called 'neo-Tantric' milieus, the concept of polarity is often used to describe notions of erotic tension or attraction between male and female practitioners, whether generated for spiritual uses or simply to improve one's relationship and love life. The idea here is basically that 'opposites attract', meaning that the difference between the partners in a relationship assures its vitality, often resulting in the encouragement of women to strengthen their 'femininity' and men to strengthen their 'masculinity' (Olsson 2023).

Now, Irigaray's theory of sexual difference can be interpreted to say something similar, though it originally was not intended to be understood as synonymous to sex difference (the biological difference between males and females) but instead would point towards "an *interpretation* of sex difference which is embodied

in language" (Stone 2007: 120). The female subjectivity that the early Irigaray envisioned was still unheard of and was not in opposition to the masculine view of itself (leaving women to embody what the male self-perceived he lacked). In discussing this theory of Irigaray's, Braidotti wrote that the former had striven to:

"Voice and embody in her texts women's own and yet unexplored 'feminine', as distinct from the kind of 'feminine' that is simply annexed to the logocentric economy as 'the second sex' [...]; the fact that 'the feminine' is the blind spot of all textual and theoretical processes means that women's voices are buried underneath someone else's, man's own words. There is therefore a direct equivalence between the process of metaphorization of 'the feminine' and the phenomenon of the historical oppression of women [...] The 'feminine' she is after is a *woman-defined-feminine*, and, as such, it is still a blank; *it is not yet there* (Braidotti 2011: 94, my cursives)".

But again, the further Irigaray moves into the domain of Yoga and Tantra, the more her view on sexual difference and polarity seem to take on the distinctive linguistic flavour of those same traditions. In *The Way of Love* (2002), she writes:

"The human in what it is *objectively ever since its beginning* is two, two who are different [...] In order to carry out the destiny of humanity, the man-human and the woman-human *each have to fulfil what they are and at the same time realize the unity that they constitute*. The unity that they form, from the beginning, as human species is of course only a first reality which to initiate human becoming. What the ultimate unity will be, we cannot anticipate: it will depend upon the cultivation of one's Being by each one and upon the cultivation of the relation between the two. This end cannot be dependent upon only one being and it escapes representation (...) *The difference between man*

and woman already exists, and it cannot be compared to a creation of our understanding. We have to take care about thinking it and cultivating it, to be sure, but starting from where it exists (Irigaray 2002b: 105-106, my cursives) ”.

The difference between ‘man’ and ‘woman,’ in Irigaray’s view, cannot be compared to a creation of our understanding (meaning, we cannot construct it, nor have we yet fully understood it), but it “already exists [...] objectively ever since its beginning” (meaning, it is essential or inherent). Reading Irigaray’s ideas about fulfilment and unity brings to mind the Tantric iconographical and mythological form of *Ardhanārīśvara* – the ‘half-woman lord’, where Śiva and Śakti share the same midline, forming an androgynous figure. The inner manifestation of this epicene (is it both or neither?) is sometimes described as the end goal of Tantra¹⁶. Perhaps, this is what Irigaray refers to as “the final blossoming” which “cannot be attained through this simple complimentary” (Irigaray 2002b: 139). As the afore mentioned quote shows, Irigaray’s notion of essential difference does not boil down to the same simplified logics of ‘opposites attract’ as does contemporary ‘neo-Tantra.’ Instead, she writes that:

“The masculine and the feminine are in no case the inverse or the opposite of each other. They are different. This difference that holds between them is perhaps the most unthinkable of differences - difference itself [...] The exclusion of such a difference from thinking ends in making the two parts between which it exists and the relation between them fall again into a simple naturalness. To be man or to be woman would represent a natural identity to overcome culturally, while fulfilling the task linked to what is called a ‘biological destiny’: reproduction” (Irigaray 2002b: 106, 108-109) ”.

The difference that Irigaray is after is thus neither a question of opposites, nor of othering. No, the “blossoming”, she states:

“Depends upon two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. Here again, our culture has favoured verticality, the relation to the Idea allegedly at the summit of approximate reproductions, the relation to the Father, to the leader, to the celestial Wholly-Other (Irigaray 2002b: 144-145) ”.

Here, Irigaray, seems once again to be referring to divinized, or archetypal, human beings, whose ‘blossoming’ or perhaps liberation, depend on a reintegration (not least psychologically) of the Mother, of the Goddess, and of the immanent, what she refers to as the ‘horizontal’. This wording is not unique to Irigaray, but is used both within the study of religion, where it is described that a (striving for) vertical transcendence has given way to a horizontal one (Streib/Klein 2016) and within circles of contemporary spirituality, where it is talked about as the ‘return of the goddess’ (Whitmont 1999) or ‘rise of the feminine’ (Kempton 2013)¹⁷. Once more, this points towards Irigaray’s creation of theory as part of the ‘material’ or ‘somatic’ turn, which might simultaneously be described as a turning towards ‘earlier’ forms of feminism¹⁸.

The ‘Tantric’ Return to Second Wave Feminism

Perhaps Irigaray’s writing, as some of the more gender-normative teachings of ‘neo-Tantra’, answer to a longing for ground-stability, security and predictability. But it could also be understood as a return to second wave feminism; focusing on specificity and difference as opposed to equality, linked, as Campbell suggests, to “an upsurge in interest in marginal movements concerned with such things as spirituality and ecology” (Campbell 2002: 16)¹⁹. Second wave feminism has been criticized, for



Woman practicing yoga āsanās: tree-Position, shared by Tova Olsson (copyright free image).

example by Julia Kristeva, who points out that “the second wave feminists, by focusing on the specificity of the female subject [...] failed to acknowledge the multiplicity of background, experience and need to be found amongst women themselves” (Kristeva 1990: 201). In the same way, Irigaray can be criticized for forgetting about her own geographical, cultural, racial, sexual, educational, and linguistic background as she weaves her theoretical tapestry. In *To Be Two* (2000) Irigaray writes:

“My experience as a woman demonstrates, as does my analysis of the language of women and men, that women almost always privilege the relationship between subjects, the relationship with the other gender, the relation-

ship between two [...]; instead of the feminine universe’s relationship between two, man prefers a relationship between the one and the many, between the I-masculine subject and others: people, society, understood as *them* and not *you* (Irigaray 2000: 7, original cursives) ”.

Beyond covering Irigaray’s thought on women and relationality, this quote encapsulates what stands as the foundation for her theory, namely her own ‘experience as a woman’. Maybe what should be added to this is her experience as a practitioner of Yoga and Tantra, which as this article argues, has significantly coloured her perspective.

Conclusion: Irigaray Exemplifying the 'Somatic' Turn

Though Luce Irigaray's oeuvre cannot be reduced to the few texts treated in this article, it argues that her theoretical development over time coincides with her increased interest in spiritual practices like Yoga and Tantra. And that her development, in turn, corresponds with a 'material' or 'somatic' turn within the academic world, as well as the world of contemporary spirituality. This has been exemplified by Irigaray's use of terms like 'masculinity', 'femininity', 'polarity' and her description of a distinctly feminine form of liberation, char-

acterized by relationality and worldly engagement. Throughout this article, therefore, I have suggested that Irigaray should be regarded as a practitioner, expressing in the world of feminist theory what is at the same time being voiced within contemporary spirituality.

Eventually, the pendulum will swing again, inviting a new theoretical take on an old perspective. But for now, the somatic turn seems evident, as practitioners (many of them female) are voicing their embodied experience, in Yoga studios and Tantric retreats, as well as within the world of academia, suggesting that our time is one of engaged enlightenment. •

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1 Though the concepts of both 'Yoga' and 'Tantra' are notoriously difficult to define, since they include a multitude of traditions which have changed over time, some useful definitions of 'Yoga' can be found in Foxen and Kuberry (2021, 3-9), while some useful definitions of 'Tantra' can be found in Brooks (1990: 55-72) and

Padoux (2017: 7). The boundaries between Yoga and Tantra have historically not been clearly outlined, neither are they in contemporary spirituality (for example, a Yogic practice might have Tantric elements, such as *mantras* or deities, or Tantric concepts, such as *kuṇḍalīnī* and *cakra*, incorporated into it).

2 Lynne Huffer (2011), on the other hand, has argued that we need to take Irigaray seriously when she writes that her position has never changed and that it is a mistake to believe otherwise. See also Roberts (2015) and Lehtinen (2014), the later claiming that "the debate on Luce Irigaray's essentialism and the dismissal of her thought as heterosexist have obscured her work as a manifestation of open and dynamic feminine being with great generative potential" (Lehtinen 2014: 1).

3 Also described as 'holistic spirituality' or 'New Age spirituality' and generally characterized as "de-institutionalized religion" (Sutcliffe and Gilhus 2013: 9) or forms of "lived religion" (McGuire 2008). For more on the high representation of women in contemporary spirituality, see Woodhead (2016).

4 See, for example, Pintchman, and Dempsey (2015).

5 Wouter J. Hanegraaff (2003) has termed it a "a turn to life" and Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas (2005) "the subjective turn" or "the turn to the self." The turn has been described as a rejection of "mind-matter" and "subject-object" dichotomies (Moberg 2016) and as a reaction against immaterial abstraction, Derrida's constructivism and Foucault's discourse analysis (Bräunlein 2016).

6 'Classical' Yoga refers here to the Yoga of Patañjali, see White (2014). See also comment below.

7 The concept 'classical' can be viewed as problematic. So can the prefix 'neo-' 'as it assumes the existence of a singular, solid tradition of 'Tantra,' from which 'neo-Tantra' differs – as Richard King argues with reference to the term "neo-Hinduism" (King 1999: 107). When I use the description/delineation 'classical' in this text, it refers to nondual Śaiva Tantra or Trika Śaivism, which has also been named Kashmir Śaivism (although this term has been criticized for not taking into account that the tradition in question was not geographically limited to the area of Kashmir). For more on Kashmir Śaivism, see Dyzkowski (1987) and Muller Ortega (1989). In writing that they are sometimes purposely mirrored, I mean that many of the teachers of 'somatic' or 'embodied' forms of Yoga are influenced by Tantric philosophy, especially as it has been taught in the Siddha Yoga organization, founded by Swami Muktananda and carried forward by teachers such as Sally Kempton. For more on Siddha Yoga, see Williamson (2010), Kripal (2017).

8 As in, for example, the dualistic philosophical system/school of Sāṃkhya (Larson 2017).

9 The Sanskrit word *sparsa* (touch or contact) is also the name for consonants in classical Tantric literature. In Tantric cosmology, the consonants are associated with the descent of the word [*vāc*] into manifest matter; that is the 'lower' tattvas. This is, according to Tantric scholar André Padoux, because the lower tattvas can be 'touched' by the senses and are formed through a process of creative contraction, just as the consonants are produced through a restriction of the mouth and contact between the tongue and different parts of the mouth (Padoux 1990: 309). For more on the connection between touch and speech in Tantric traditions, see Biernacki (2007).

10 Lehtinen calls Irigaray a “philosopher of love and desire” (2014: x). She writes: “detached from the meta-physical presupposition of the hierarchical dichotomy of the soul and the body, love and desire appear as permeating all the dimensions of the subject - embodiment, affectivity, and spirituality. Understood in these ways, love and desire are prone to open us not only more fully to the actual but also to the potential in our relations to ourselves, to others, and to the world” (2014: x).

11 For more on the notion of Siddhas in Tantric tradition, see Muller-Ortega (1997).

12 For more on women, religion, and relationality, see Woodhead (2001).

13 See, for example, Kempton (2013), Dinsmore-Tuli (2014), Chinnayan (2017) and Shunya (2022).

14 “Of course, we must first remember that language is not neutral and that its rules weigh heavily on the constitution of female identity and on women’s relationship with one another” (Irigaray 1994: 27).

15 In a similar manner, the Goddess in Tantric traditions is often described as a virgin [*kumārī*] in the sense that

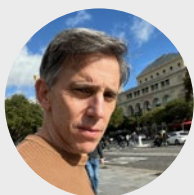
she is “completely independent, always given to play” (Lakshmanjoo 2007: 46).

16 In Kashmir Śaivism, for example, these two cosmic principles, often translated as consciousness (Śiva) and power (Śakti) are understood to form an eternal unity even as they are experienced as separate because of the creative process of moving into form and diversity (Isayeva 1995).

17 Kempton writes: “In our time, the Goddess has come roaring out of her hiding places [...] and we are beginning to recognize uniquely feminine kinds of power” (Kempton 2013: 5).

18 For a comprehensive outline of the historical developments from first to second wave feminism, see Kingsley Kent (2012: 28-38).

19 For an example of second-wave eco-feminism, see Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor, who wrote, in a similar manner to Irigaray, that: “It is women, remember, whose brains are evolutionary structured to experience sexual and spiritual illumination as one” (Sjöö and Mor 1991: 225).



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INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKSHOP *ANIMISM AND PAGANISM: A TRANSVERSAL APPROACH*

From September 29 to October 1 2023, an important workshop took place at the Labyrinth: *Animism and Paganism: A Transversal Approach*. This interaction consolidated the transcultural and ecosophical line inaugurated in 2018 in the context of the Alain Daniélou Foundation, not only owing to the intellectual quality of its participants (among others Graham Harvey, Barbara Glowczewski and Luis Eduardo Luna) but also to the broad spectrum of the discussions – a way of doing justice to the wide-ranging heritage of Alain Daniélou. Adrián Navigante's introduction to the workshop provides a general picture of his embodied and pluri-dimensional art of thinking which was both the aim of the workshop and the main motivation in the Research and Intellectual Dialogue domain.



From the left: Molly Harvey, Graham Harvey, Santiago Lopez-Pavillard, Amanda Viana, Viviana Lipuma, Barbara Glowczewski, Adrian Navigante, Andy Letcher, Luis Eduardo Luna, Linda Valle and Adrian Harris. (Courtesy Santiago Lopez-Pavillard, 2023).

The following reflections are intended to frame the presence of workshop participants both in the *genius loci* of the Labyrinth and with regard to the type of work carried out in the *Research and Intellectual Dialogue* domain at the Alain Daniélou Foundation, which from next year onward will be enhanced and expanded with the creation of the transcultural and ecosophical center *Interstices*.

The Labyrinth as framework: Alain Daniélou referred to the figure of the labyrinth as a permanent wandering along twisted paths toward a center that is never reached. In a biological sense, we can say that we will reach the center the moment we die, and that the path toward the center is fixed from the very moment when we were born. Thinking metaphysically, we would determine the multiple spaces of the labyrinth (layers, paths, cross-

roads) as retro-projections of its center, which would lead us to say: “we have already reached the center, but we just ignore it”. But there is a third way of dealing with the question of the Labyrinth, which can be related to the tradition of *śākta tantra*. In that tradition, the *cakra* that acts as framework of the practice (where the adepts perform the ritual), is neither a diagram on a piece of paper nor an imaginary center in the body, but a field of multiple (human and non-human) forces with a *subtractive center*. The subtraction is no empty place, but the highest concentration of intensity – an intensity permanently distributed across the whole energy field in different degrees, some of which pose a challenge to those who encounter them. I tend to think that it was only with the enthroning of the god Shiva at the center of the mandala that the early Tantric dynamic changed: the center progressively became a

metaphysical point, a *nunc-stans*, sometimes equated to notions like *brahman* or *śūnyatā*. Despite the affirmation that Shiva without Shakti is a corpse, liturgic and exegetic trends progressively marginalized or excluded those fluid spaces of ritual performance, encounters and transactions with the multiplicity of beings that characterized not only early *śākta tantra* but also other traditions containing similar ‘shamanic elements’ (the *Atharva Veda* is another good example of it). The mandala of *śākta tantra* is a de-centered labyrinth progressively changed out of recognition by a scholarly tendency (both in India and in the West) determined to undermine and even replace an immanent field of (chthonic) forces by a transcendent principle of (noetic) unity. Its orientations are reenacted and reshaped according to the degree of intensity with which non-humans affect humans. The thinking of Alain Daniélou, a Shaivite, has an undeniable *śākta* quality, because his “Shaivism” was neither a dogmatic article nor a research object. It was a *living philosophy*.

I am purposely using a South-Asian referent because this platform began as a space for Indo-European interactions. For my part, I have never been convinced of that delimitation (typical of the XIX century), and my research work at the archive of the Foundation has shown me that Alain Daniélou’s corpus is too heterogeneous to fit that axis, especially if one considers the writings of the last two decades of his life. It is precisely because of those writings that Indologists no longer took him seriously. The Hindu orthodoxy in the context of which he had studied for around fifteen

years was no longer the focus of his interest; he wrote instead about pre-Aryan mythology in South Asia, the animist substrate of religious traditions (in India and Europe) and the connections between Hindu and West-African deities. He emphasized a return to (pre-Christian) ‘paganism’ and a ‘religion of Nature’ as the only way of surviving the crisis of the second half of the XX century. He even engaged in correspondence with Jacques Mabbitt when the latter opened the Takiwasi Center in Peru, venturing some parallels between Yogic and shamanic practices in an essay that appeared in the first issue of the center’s publication (*Revista Takiwasi* N°1, 1992).

Many factors have led to a change in our platform. The discovery of a transcultural amplification in Danielou’s later corpus, Amanda Viana de Sousa’s engagement with Amerindian traditions of Brazil, my intellectual collaboration with a Togolese anthropologist and Vodun priest, Basile Goudabla Kligueht, and the increasing awareness that a transversal method of the type we were trying to nurture is barely compatible with the logic of ‘special fields’ and ‘epistemic (self-)referentiality’. For this reason, we decided to *get really philosophical* and recapture those marginal intuitions of Daniélou in a new context, with a new vocabulary and with different actors. What does it mean, in this context, to ‘get really philosophical’? I have never conceived philosophy as the art of thinking to the point of eliminating all presuppositions (Plato), as the science of sciences (Hegel), or as universalizable ontology – even of a differential type (Heidegger). For me the task of philosophy has continually

Alain Daniélou emphasized a return to (pre-Christian) ‘paganism’ and a ‘religion of Nature’ as the only way of surviving the crisis of the second half of the XX century.

changed throughout history, and at present it is to a great extent related to what some authors (from Miguel Abensour in 1987 to Emmanuele Coccia and Pierre Charbonnier today) referred to as the ethnological challenge or disruption of philosophy. This began with Irving Hallowell in the 1960s and ended up systematically questioning, at the beginning of this century, the very basis of Western epistemology as hermeneutical access to 'the other(s)'. Questioning that basis implies, among other things, seeing ourselves as 'the others of the others' to the point of an ego/ethno/logo-centric collapse, which would enable us to take seriously the possibility of a reversed ethnology (i. e. being ethnographically described by a Yanomami shaman as 'people of the merchandise'). At that point, the whole theater of 'high culture' with all its particularistic affectations (in the past aristocratic and wielded by men of culture, nowadays bourgeois and clumsily brandished by 'specialists') must end. We must be capable of facing a new (trans-)cultural challenge requiring a structural change, even of our 'existential register'.

There are some inspiring voices that emphatically approached the task of questioning bases and changing register: Pierre Verger, Hubert Fichte, Lluís Mallart, Lydia Cabrera, Maya Deren, Zora Neale Hurston. In reading such authors, I could follow a movement of the Human Sciences away from the reified objectivity of scientism toward a profound exploration of ignored or misunderstood modes of subjectivation. This was part of Félix Guattari's ecosophical program, a movement that necessarily ends up focusing much more on *ethos* and *aisthesis* (than on *logos* and *nous*), feeding *transversality*. In a homonymous essay of 1964, mainly focused on the therapeutic space of psychiatric institutions, Guattari made two remarks which for me are translatable into any form of interaction of ideas – presupposing, as I do, that ideas are carriers of energy and not

mere abstractions: 1. Transversality is neither related to pure verticality nor to pure horizontality, but rather to a maximal degree of communication between different levels and in different senses. 2. The consolidation of a transversal dynamics in a group implies that those who are usually confined to silence can find a mode of expression, and those who exercise discursive power are no longer fixed and unmoving in their dominant roles.

Over the last years, the domain of Research and Intellectual Dialogue has been trying to open a space for transversal interaction. This kind of interaction implies, as a first requisite, an ethos of hospitality. We want to see and get to know the human beings behind the work, and eventually the other-than-human beings accompanying them and co-creating their work. Our inclusion of Amerindian and West-African traditions in the last five years has demanded such work, as well as personal engagement on subjective processes that resituate us in the uncomfortable space of the liminal, the 'between', the interstices. It was in the context of that engagement and of our intellectual efforts to shape the institutional aspect of our work that we became acquainted, personally, virtually or through their published work, with authors such as Graham Harvey, Barbara Glowczewski, and Luis Eduardo Luna. It was out of that engagement that we continued to receive here at the Labyrinth people who contribute to the humble effort we are pursuing.

The workshop was originally thought out as an encounter with Graham Harvey on Animism and Paganism. We have been attentively following Graham's publications on animism and shamanism as well as his engagement with contemporary forms of paganism. Graham opens a creative space to reflect on 'animism' as a complex phenomenon encompassing attempts to describe the Indigenous others, heuristic tools to transform the discourse of



The participants of the workshop 'Animism and Paganism' at work
(photo by Santiago Lopez-Pavillard).

the Human Sciences, and ecological features within a specifically European phenomenon: that of the 'Pagan revival' in our time. His approach to paganism also opens a broad horizon going far beyond the question as to whether the Neo-Pagan reenactment of sacred ties with Nature among European groups can create an alliance with some forms of animism described by contemporary anthropology.

There are two very pleasant dialogical complements to Graham Harvey in this workshop. The first is Barbara Glowczewski, whom I have wanted to bring to the Labyrinth since a couple of years. Her writings are inspiring for the project we are pursuing mainly for two reasons: 1. The subjective dimension of her essays. Ethnological work is for Barbara something quite different from field work notes and objective descriptions of the culture under observation. The 'alien culture' she bears

witness to, that of the Warlpiri in Australia, became her culture and her family. She is passionately involved from the first to the last line of her books, and that involvement transcends at the same time the individual experience – including the question of 'going native' (as a scholarly curse, a spiritual blessing, a prescription against intellectual imperialism or a mere impossibility). It is the program of a process of collective subjectivation that defies the way in which Western scholars write history. 2. Her intellectual and personal relation to Felix Guattari, the philosopher from whom we took the idea of 'transversality'. It would be wrong to say that Barbara is merely an expert on Australian totemism. Her intellectual project goes much farther than that (as some of her books clearly show), and her reflection on animism adds a lot of nuances and components to what we have planned with Graham

Harvey.

The second complement to Graham Harvey in the context of this workshop is Luis Eduardo Luna, whose pioneering study on healing plants among Mestizo Curanderos in Perú, *Vegetalismo* (1986), was an inspiration to many people – including some of the participants of this workshop. We have wanted to become acquainted with Luis Eduardo for some years now, since his work, not only his book on *Vegetalismo*, his extensive knowledge of Amerindian traditions, his critique of colonization, and his collaboration with the Peruvian healer and visionary artist Pablo César Amaringo Shuña, but also his project at the Wasiwaska center in Brazil, has made a lasting impression on us.

I am also grateful to the other participants who have accepted to come to the Labyrinth in order to discuss a subject that requires a combination of transdisciplinary and deconstructive insight, since the question of “animism and paganism” has been hitherto blocked – to a great extent – by a (prejudiced) tendency to link it exclusively with the most superficial dimension of alternative movements or with a purely historical object of study with no relevance for current socio-cultural issues. In this sense, much appreciated is the contribution of an anthropologist like Santiago López-Pavillard – whose research work on the transformations of Shamanism and his ample field-experience is known to us through former exchanges in

the context of Intellectual Dialogue – and the presence of an eco-therapist like Adrian Harris – who is familiar with contemporary pagan movements and new forms of therapy defying the straitjacket of modern Western rationalism. The same token of gratitude goes to Andy Letcher, whose scholarly and experiential knowledge of British Eco-Paganism is inspiring for us, Viviana Lipuma, whose philosophical contribution to the question of ‘transversality’ is permeated by her systematic work on Felix Guattari, as well as to Linda Valle, one of the Foundation’s ex-grantees who is again back at the Labyrinth, and Molly Harvey, who has accompanied Graham on this occasion, and whose sensitive and empathic way of dealing with human suffering enriches our exploration of living subjectivities.

This workshop concludes a period in which our work appears as an extension of Alain Daniélou’s visible work – accessible both to the layman and to the specialist – with the aim of restituting its intrinsic value and its scope. It also inaugurates a period in which Daniélou’s *secret body* – that is, the animistic and pagan aspects of his living philosophy, inaccessible both to laymen and specialists – can gradually breathe the transversal air of our creative endeavors and face the real challenge of our century: not the technocratic mirage with its multiple disguises, but rather its reverse-side: the destruction of life on this earth and the precious few cultural attempts to preserve it. •

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