

TRANSCULTURAL DIALOGUES

ISSUE 12 • JANUARY 2023

WINTER SOLSTICE

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INTELLECTUAL
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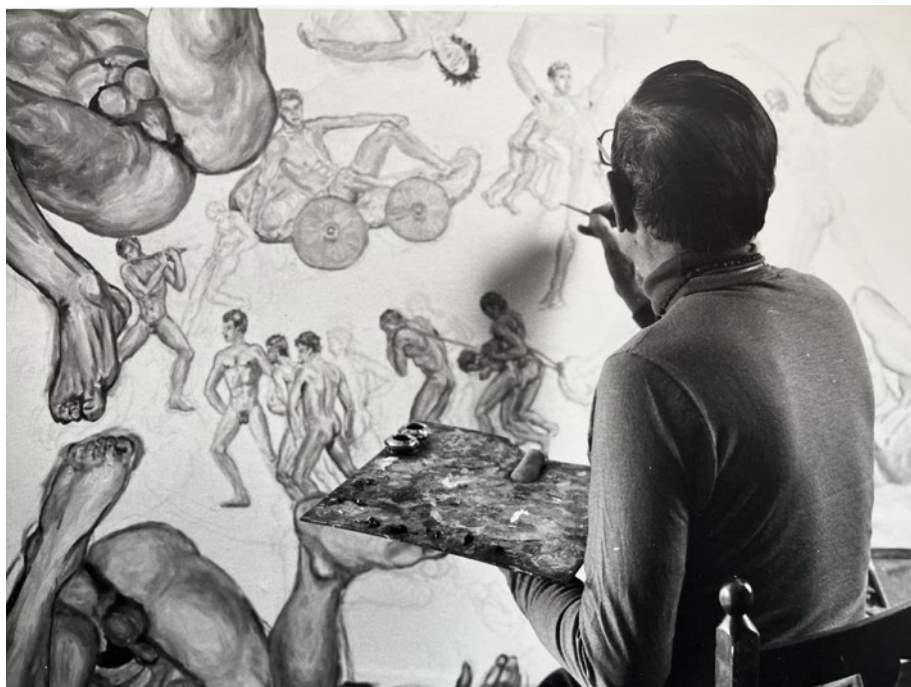


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THE THREADS OF *EROS*: ALAIN DANIÉLOU'S 'IMPURE' METAPHYSICS

The question of Eros in Alain Daniélou's thought has often been either rejected or banalized. From the point of view of a disembodied spirituality, it appears as a dangerous deviation from the goals to be pursued if human beings wish to accomplish their highest goal. From a modern and secular point of view, it is the result of a merely hedonistic motivation that does not go beyond the life of any individual. In this essay, Adrián Navigante tries to show quite another dimension of the question: Daniélou's conception of Eros is closely related to his project of a new humanism and his conviction that there is a form of transcendence implying integration rather than separation, and enhancement rather than denial of life. In this sense, it is the main component of an *ars vivendi* (art of living) supported by creative and subtly elaborated insights on human beings and their relation to different reality planes of existence.



Alain Daniélou at Zagarolo around 1979 working on his erotic paintings.
Photo by Jacques Cloarec.

Metaphysics: Which 'Reality' behind?

If one succeeds in grasping Plato's effort to accomplish philosophy as an *ars vivendi* at the time of the Old Academy (IV century BCE), the difference between his conception of the 'scholar' [*scholáchês*] as the head of a human group following a path of self-knowledge and socio-cosmic integration appears as an irretrievably lost ideal compared with the present conception of 'scholarship', in which the notions of arts and life, cosmos and wisdom, are irrevocably cast aside on behalf of an increasingly rigid conception of knowledge. Plato's idea of an 'academy' had little to do with the kind of specialized training received at universities today, which in some cases turns out to be more detrimental than beneficial for the expansion of the human spirit. Even where progress has been made over the last centuries in terms of what the collective memory has

managed to accumulate through specialized research, there is no doubt that the repercussion of the resulting institutional Ozymandias on the individual's life-path reveals an ostensible blind spot if the motto 'development of mankind' is to be taken seriously. Human sciences have been, for quite some time now, eroded by parameters of objectivity alien to the humanist notion of 'proper studies'¹. That is perhaps the reason why an anti-Platonic author like Georg Lukács declared, in the Nietzschean days of his youth, that the critical essay should not be a scientific piece but a form of art², or a Marxist like Antonio Gramsci (also on the opposite side of the Platonic spectrum) opposed the dominant view of philosophy as the property of a certain category of specialists by coining the expression 'spontaneous philosophy of ordinary people'³, or a radical existentialist like Emile Cioran bid philosophy farewell

without any hope of replacing it with any other – better or worse – strategy of spiritual consolation⁴, as had been the case with authors like Blaise Pascal and Søren Kierkegaard.

Endogamic closing, exogamic dissolution and existential evacuation can be read as signs of a general crisis. Whenever human intelligence is challenged in such a way, attempts at renovation are a kind of natural reaction, but nothing is clear enough as to which direction should be taken. The problem is that, once philosophy as a discipline of integration is either reduced to abstruse terminology or irreversibly dismissed, intellectual endeavors are likely to be put out of joint or turned upside down – or both. The question whether people need philosophy in order to live is misleading, since philosophy as an *ars vivendi* is in no way detached from an existential articulation capable of enriching human life: we simply *don't have any choice*, at least if we want our lives to be worth living. In other words: *ars vivendi* does not tolerate an estrangement of thinking from the organic threads of life-experience, nor does it accept the degradation of human nature in automatisms of any kind. It is therefore clear that replacing the alienating straitjacket of specialized discourse by a jargon of dilettantes is no guarantee of a return to a life-changing program for the benefit of mankind. Intellectual history is furnished with creative examples of vulgarization but also full of parasitic appropriations leading to cultural stagnation. The Platonic art of living, injected as it was with a powerful movement of thinking capable

of leading humans beyond their own physical and mental determinations, did not seek abstract essences or ultimate principles – as many people think. Its boomerang-like movement permeated every sphere of social life with the extraction of a power coming from outside and located (*après coup*) as a point of excess among humans. This power was called *idea*; its excessive character is known as *metaphysics*.

The word *metaphysics* is a shining example of a conceptual pandora-box that may serve to illustrate the present crisis and disorientation – that is, the impossibility for most humans to come up with an art of living. There are many kinds of metaphysicians: conscious and unconscious, explicit and implicit, refined and vulgar, scientific and esoteric, arrogant and humble, paradoxical, inverted and perverted ones, wildly experimental and purely conceptual, psychologically or cosmologically biased. If metaphysicians are (despite modernity and secularization) almost *everywhere*, can metaphysics be located at all? Strictly speaking, the discipline does not have to do with nature [*physis*], or with the soul [*psyché*], or with human conduct [*éthos*], since it has the distinctive quality of *transcendence*. However, it must be re-linked to each one of those levels if it doesn't want to end up as a meta-referential *caput mortuum*. Can it be said to be a theory of what 'lies beyond' nature, the soul and human behavior? And if so, should it be taken in the sense of a condition of possibility, a principle or a real substrate underlying the sphere of such experiences?

For authors like Mircea Eliade and Alain Daniélou, the Western idea of *humanitas* needs to be reconsidered as a provincialist construction and therefore re-situated within a broader context, in which non-European cultures play an essential role.

Can it be said to be simply an impulse to 'go beyond' the established state of affairs i.e. the taken-for-granted perspective to shape reality? And if so, is such transgression noble or rather disgraceful? Does it feed transpersonal and altruistic purposes or ego-centered and even narcissistic impulses? Is it related to a burning thirst for knowledge or to an unsurpassable fear of death? Perhaps it is both: impulse and reflection. Perhaps it cuts through and along all those motifs, aspects, symptoms, and factors without being capable of choosing the best and isolating the worst of them. Metaphysics, if it aims at concretion, cannot be declared. It is rather something to be *composed*.

There is a vulgar conception of 'empirical reality' contained in the modern trend called positivism, where the concrete, material, three-dimensional and well-delimited aspect of an object is turned into an ontological maxim to build an entire conception of the world. For positivists nature is ultimately a set of dead objects, whereas subjectivity appears as a misleading power to be reeducated toward a more perfected vivisection of reality. In the same way, there is a vulgar notion of metaphysics, in which the spontaneous impulse of exacerbated and uncritical truth-seekers obliterates every effort to come to terms with the intricate texture of human experience. Vulgar metaphysicians will bluntly sever 'being' from 'becoming', and 'unity' from 'multiplicity'; they will fully adopt the first two and reject the other two altogether. Such an unnuanced way of parting the waters does have consequences on a moral, political and gnoseological level, for example when it comes to drawing a distinction between truth and falsehood, good and evil, identity and difference, or purity and impurity. Life – human, social, cosmic life – implies movement, tension, multiplicity, and change. It does not fit into rigid schemes or homogeneous constructions, nor can it be deprived of contingency and indeterminacy, because both

contribute to creating and enhancing relations. Refined metaphysics seeks a criterion of consistency that may hold through the whole spectrum of discontinuities (with its tensions, conflicts, and paradoxes); vulgar metaphysics, on the contrary, tries to impose a transcendent superordinate, forcing the whole world of relations into a reductive grid. Its results don't do justice to the classical idea of *humanitas*, the aim of which was to foster the spiritual evolution of mankind. Among other things, *humanitas* is an ancient pedagogic idea, Platonic in its origins, which was recaptured in the Italian Renaissance by figures like Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola and came to a somewhat unhappy denouement in XIX century Germany with the battle of philologists. The fact that thinkers like Erwin Rohde and Friedrich Nietzsche were cornered into the institutional margins whereas somebody like Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf moved to the center shows a rather clear picture of the deteriorating process. The situation became much worse in the 1930s, when an idealist like Werner Jaeger wrote his monumental *Paideia* – still clinging to hopes of renewal that might in a way counteract the impact of National Socialism.

For authors like Mircea Eliade and Alain Daniélou, the Western idea of *humanitas* needs to be reconsidered as a provincialist construction and therefore re-situated within a broader context, in which non-European cultures play an essential role. The expression 'new humanism'⁵ is in this sense an expansion of horizon through a de-centering of referents. The aim of these authors is to transform not merely a way of thinking but a whole spectrum of relations as well as fundamental attitudes and modes of being. Such a process must be necessarily hybrid in character because a change of referents and its corresponding transmutation of values imply operating on different levels and with different elements – sometimes extracted from incommensurable contexts. Mircea



The Labyrinth of Crete, a significant motif in Alain Daniélou's later work.
Source: Hermann Kern, *Labyrinthe*, München 1999.

Eliade's hermeneutics of the sacred (in which he challenges both objectivity and temporality), his notion of primitive ontology (where classical metaphysics is purposely combined with 'primitive thinking') and his variegated style (he wrote not only academic papers but also essays, novels and diaries) bear witness to the ambition of his project – and the price to be paid for it⁶. Alain Daniélou, for his part, operates with a notion of Shaivism through which he intends to link not only Brahmanical orthodoxy with Tantric (mainstream and vernacular) elements, but also fragments of pre-Vedic culture with central motifs of late medieval Puranic literature and Tamil folk-religions.

This may sound wild and unreflected at first sight, especially if one applies scholarly criteria when reading his work, but for him it was the natural result of an insider's experience in a Shaiva *sampradāya*, and since the insider had Western roots, it was necessary to inflect those roots according to the tenor of his South-Asian experience. In other words: Daniélou tried to see ancient European (Mycenean and Greek, Etruscan and Roman) paganism – and subsequently extra Indo-European animist traditions in Africa and South America as well as some aspects of (post-)modern Western counterculture – from a Shiva-centered perspective, that is, through an open-ended maṇḍalic grid of

transgressive but at the same time multi-leveled and well-articulated relations reconnecting humans with a much broader and mysterious reality. Such an attempt calls for skepticism and tenacious resistance both from specialists and from dilettantes, since it is too specific for commonplace-lovers and too general for the masters of detail, not to speak of spiritual fundamentalists who postulate a set of fundamental truths in the name of secret knowledge, initiatic chains and spiritual enlightenment – usually under the rubric ‘Tradition’ – to reject all the rest, thus avoiding even a minimal effort to grasp the intricacies of what Daniélou calls ‘the human adventure’.

Sexus as Nexus: Dimensions of Eros

The figure of the labyrinth is not absent in Mircea Eliade’s work⁷, but it is Alain Daniélou who made it the central motif of his whole work. In *Hindu Polytheism* (1964), the image of the labyrinth provides the best of Daniélou’s responses to the question of metaphysics as a possibility of human experience: *Brahman*, the unknowable, lies beyond the limits of perception, “it begins where understanding fails, yet it can be approached from many sides [...]. It is only through the multiplicity of approaches that we can draw a sort of outline of what transcendent reality may be”⁸. The ‘many sides’ can be outlined as *traces*, and it is by following those traces that human beings compose their lives, embedded as they are in a much broader and never-fully-understood (natural and cosmic) environment. This idea is specified in *Shiva and Dionysus* (1979), where Daniélou, resorting to a passage of one of the earliest Upaniṣads, declares the following: “The gods don’t like to see humans attaining knowledge [...], that is the reason why the path [...] is twisted [*vakra*]”⁹. Knowledge of the radically transcendent *brahman* is like reaching the center of the Labyrinth, which is why it is impossible to achieve while we live as individuals on earth,

no matter how broad our expansion of perception and knowledge may be. In other words: to reach the unknowable would mean to bring our mysterious pilgrimage of life to an end, to close the very earthly and cosmic window that we *are*, and with it all possibilities of interaction with the multiplicity of (visible and invisible) beings composing Life. The center of the Labyrinth is not only beyond human reach, but also beyond all other non-human agents we may encounter – whatever the local composition where the encounter takes place. The center of the labyrinth is the reverse-side of Life, the impossible confluence of all traces shaping the manifold – human and non-human – worlds. This does not mean that humans are excluded from all possibility of knowing. Quite the contrary, for Daniélou the articulation of Life is primarily a learning process. It consists in dealing – in a progressively differentiated way – with the many-layered reality of multiple entities and their dynamic interconnectedness. The more aware we participate in it, the closer we come to the divine sphere – which is also a sphere of multiple relations, only with a much more concentrated intensity. Divine life is for Daniélou analogous to the transcendent reality of *brahman* but with one main difference: it can *take place*, that is, it is susceptible to being articulated within a sphere of world immanence. It has to do with seizing, yoking, and harnessing a flow of energy stemming from the highest of concentric circles composing the maṇḍala of Life. That is why the figure of the labyrinth is essentially related not only to the esoteric and mysterious, but also to the erotic. Here we reach an essential point. The flowing of erotic energy creates strong bonds, inconceivable relations, and paradoxical correspondences, but above all it brings the whole labyrinth back to a primordial figure of ecstatic dance, as if the very center were to be disclosed inside *and* outside each dweller who follows the traces¹⁰.

For Daniélou the twisted path of knowledge

is inscribed in our body. This means that everything we can ascribe to knowledge in terms of *meta*-physics (symbolic depth, subtle powers, ontological principles, etc.) is impossible to detach from the physical and organic sphere¹¹. In *Shiva and Dionysus* this connection becomes clear when Daniélou refers to Gaṇeśa as symbol of the twisted path and at the same time as gate-keeper. In the *Gaṇapatyatharvaśīrṣa*, Gaṇeśa is characterized as *gaṇānām patiḥ*¹², that is, “the lord of the multitudes”. In

coiled serpent-goddess is the anus. There we find the center of Gaṇeśa, the keeper of the gate to the mysteries and servant of the goddess. Beyond, we find the labyrinth of the entrails, those tortuous paths leading toward the vital organs which are oracularly interpreted during a sacrifice [...] The male organ, penetrating directly to the zone of the coiled energy [*kuṇḍalinī*], may cause its sudden awakening, thus provoking certain states of illumination as well as the perception of transcendent real-

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that expression, the word *gaṇa* refers both to the troops of Shiva [*śivasya gaṇāḥ*] and to the category of being with a separate existence (since one of its meanings is “number”). Gaṇeśa is therefore the origin or source of multiplicity and at the same time an embodied root-level of Nature’s most primordial powers¹³. The word *vakra* (“twisted”) is used when the text refers to the God’s bent or twisted trunk. The elephant trunk, a phallic symbol, stands for the reality of the self [*ātman*]. Being the limit point between manifestation and non-manifestation, it is considered evasive and ungraspable. At the same time, it appears both as a point of minimal consistency [*bindu*] and a primordial opening, like a gaping mouth [*mukha*], an entrance or a passage [*dvāra*]¹⁴. All this is contained in the Sanskrit expression *vakramātmamukham*¹⁵. It is in a related sense that Daniélou refers to Gaṇeśa as the gate-keeper of the root-chakra [*mūlādhāra*], adding an explicitly sexual reference to the question of the labyrinth: “In the human body, the narrow gate leading to the

ities”¹⁶. Here Daniélou’s straightforwardness equates that of some Tantras in which there is no symbolic meaning on the textual level but a concrete and un-sublimated one – since the ‘symbols’ are the organs performing the ritual or the substances used in it. What he describes, however, is not simply anal sex but a ritual procedure in which that kind of intercourse is aimed at potentiating, harnessing, and channeling the energy flowing through the three lower chakras: *mūlādhāra*, *svādiṣṭhāna* and *maṇipūra*¹⁷. Transcendence is thus reached by a form of embodied meta-physics, in which the body is ultimately an energy tissue with its own – complex – economy of ecstasy. We are of course far from the ecumenical agenda of a disembodied spirituality (like that of universal Neo-Vedanta), for which any reference to bodies, organs and fluids are either metaphors of pneumatic instances or projections of a sick mind. Even if the Tantric economy of ecstasy cannot be equated with a hedonistic pursuit of sexual plenitude¹⁸, there is a junction-point



A female member of a Tantric circle being oiled and massaged after a bath and before a ritual. Source: Philip Rawson, *Tantra: The Indian Cult of Ecstasy*, London 1973.

between the two, which in a way discloses the nexus between the erotic and the mystical as well as its own inherent detour – the human all-too-human oscillation between perversion and magic.

All these powers are related to the earth, the primal (fluid, magmatic or chthonic) configuration of which can be reached when the opening to the root-chakra effects the transformation of elements – the passage from *mūlādhāra* to *svādhiṣṭhāna*¹⁹ – and the revelation of its mysteries²⁰. In *Shiva and Dionysus*, Daniélou emphasizes the importance of discovering and realizing links between the different levels of being²¹. Shaivism as a religion of Nature is about broadening the scope of relations and contributing to render them

as harmonious as possible, and the first stage lies in the body, its sensations, and the environment²². Empowering the (energy-)body by means of an erotic opening and perceiving the environment as a field of forces instead of a set of dead objects are closely related. This very concrete prescription, which builds the basis of a reeducation program for mankind, has *metaphysical* assumptions – which will nevertheless challenge *in themselves* the idea of a disembodied spirituality, so often wielded against Daniélou's *ars vivendi*. In *Shaivism and the Primordial Tradition*, he speaks of the aim of a religion of Nature: “to perceive the divine in its own work and integrate oneself into that sphere”²³. This definition is not so simple as it seems. The divine cannot be grasped without

the senses, and human integration in its sphere implies an expansion of perception, a transformation of energy level, and mainly the ability to communicate with non-human agency – a trans-human, animistic-related form of *inter-subjectivity*. In other words, the primordial tradition to which Daniélou refers, despite his references to René Guénon, has little to do with the radical metaphysical monism of the latter, in which notions like *puruṣa* and *brahman* impose themselves upon the whole spectrum of *māyā-śakti* and *prakṛti*. The primordial sphere is for Daniélou the mystery of Nature, and tradition is what human beings can codify out of their individual and collective confrontation with that mystery. From the most powerful nexuses re-connecting human beings with the forces of Nature, Eros has, in the philosophy of Daniélou, the first place, even when he mentions – not without a certain caution – two other possible ways for his contemporaries: entheogen-induced ecstatic experiences and certain techniques of Yoga²⁴. The erotic dimension of human experience is not merely ruled by a biologically driven instinct and its correlative psychological determinants; it adds a differential and transcendent quality to the psycho-physiological pandemonium of sexuality, and it can lead to spiritual fulfillment.

The Step (not) beyond: On Tears, Fears and Tension

Metaphysics implies a step beyond the empirical sphere through which human beings encounter an instance of (personal or imper-

sonal, form-related of formless) transcendence. The general assumption is that the configuration of reality according to sense perception is an absolute parameter, and that there is a form of experience fully detached from the senses and from everything related to them. The main question to be asked before jumping to conclusions is: what does the term ‘empirical’ refer to? The Greek word *empeiria* means ‘experience’, so we can say that the empirical sphere is the result of a cultural configuration delimiting what is valid in terms of experiential reality. Observation of different cultures suffices to realize that the value ascribed to ‘experience’ (and therefore the place where the limits of the ‘empirical’ are set as well as the rigidity or plasticity of its threshold zones) varies enormously according to the type of world configuration characterizing the life of the group. The distinction between the empirical and the metaphysical is not the same among modern European Catholics, Indian Brahmins, West-African Vodun practitioners and Indigenous peoples of Amazonia. Even within a culture, there are different attitudes and sensibilities at work which influence the dynamics of such delimitations. Only within Indian culture, the metaphysics of Advaita Vedānta differs considerably from that of Śākta Tantra or Śaiva Siddhānta. The universalization of the former – to the detriment of other approaches – can be seen as a big step toward a vulgarization of metaphysics. Daniélou succinctly mentions this problem in *Śaivism and the Primordial Tradition* when he says that the hypertrophy of *uttara mīmāṃsa* (as a result of Shankara’s predom-

Shaivism as a religion of Nature is about broadening the scope of relations and contributing to render them as harmonious as possible, and the first stage lies in the body, its sensations, and the environment.

inance in modern Hinduism) practically led to the elimination of the other *darśanas*, and that its triumph in the West progressively clouded the most concrete (and refined) forms of Indian thinking²⁵. Empiricism is far from being an absolute parameter. It is a flexible term – certainly to be questioned if the dominant perspective configuring it happens to be challenged by context and circumstances.

Alain Daniélou's divinization of Eros can be read as a counter-movement against an increasing vulgarization of metaphysics, against *the step beyond* that leaves the manifold levels of human experience behind and secludes the spirit in a purely abstract realm²⁶. The consequence of such a metaphysical attitude is a disregard for the world, beginning with one's own body and continuing with everything related to the material aspects of Nature (as in the advaitic homologation of *māyā* with ontological inconsistency). Daniélou, on the contrary, locates the origin of erotic attraction in the cosmogonic act of world-disclosure: "When the first tendency toward creation appears in the neutral, inert, and non-polarized substrate beyond movement, space and number, it has already the aspect of a current or tension between two opposite poles. This dual instance is the essence of every physical or mental existence and can be represented as a male and a female principle penetrating every aspect of life"²⁷. It becomes evident that divine reality is not located in the radical transcendent and inert substrate²⁸ but in the original and cosmogonic tension essentially related to the world-shaping power. This is not so

much Tantric philosophy as early Upaniṣadic thought. In one of the cosmogonic passages of the *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, it is said that *ātman* desired a complementary opposite [*dvitīyam aicchat*], became as a result "a woman and a man closely embraced" [*strī-pumāṁsau sampariṣvaktau*] and "came together (in sexual union) with his feminine counterpart" [*tāṁ samabhavat*]²⁹. This sequence does not depict a fall or degradation process from an original principle, but a disclosure of cosmic intensity and plenitude. In the concentric circles of the 'maṇḍala of Life', the tension of opposites is kept at its highest intensity through a conflation or coupling [*sambhava*, *maithuna*] of male and female energies. That is why Daniélou rejects the advaitic distinction between a self-sufficient or purely spiritual bliss [*svābhāvikananda*] and any instance of everyday or object-related happiness [*laukikananda*, *viṣayānanda*]³⁰. Eros is a primordial and transgressive force which embodies the mystery of Life. It leads beyond every instance of differentiated world-experience; however, the differential step leading beyond our limits is not a radical detachment but an intensification and enhanced relation. It is a state of "beatitude and delight, not of silence and death"³¹.

In his book *The Tears of Eros*, Georges Bataille explores the transgressive force of sexuality and its scope in the life of human beings. Like Daniélou, Bataille emphasizes the essential link between sexuality and the sacred. Unlike Daniélou, he sees a "diabolical aspect" of eroticism, which distinguishes it from mere sexual activity: "diabolical means the coincidence of

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death with eroticism”³². Erotic rapture, incessantly present in Daniélou’s work, is not in a relation of tendential opposition to, but of paradoxical coincidence with death. Bataille writes in this respect: “Death is associated with tears, whereas sexual desire is sometimes related to laughter. But laughter is not the contrary of tears, as it seems. The object of laughter and the object of tears have to do with some sort of violence”³³. The violence he refers to is extreme; it interrupts the ordinary course of things, tearing human beings out of their social framework (dominated by rationality and calculation) and opening the door to an experience of ontological continuity (characterized by a prodigious effervescence of life)³⁴. In Bataille’s thought, continuity means absence of limits, even those of the individual (which is why it has ontological significance). Transgression, experienced in such a radical form, brings human beings in contact with death. This contact is not speculative or metaphorical but rather an ecstatic depersonalization and dissolution. Death is for Bataille no *nihil privativum*, but the horror of a *tōhū wā-bōhū* inscribed in the human flesh itself. Eroticism is therefore related to radical loss³⁵ and transpersonal ravage. If sensuous delight [*volupté*] appears as the summit of life, it is at the same time delirium and limitless horror³⁶. The main paradox is that, from a phylogenetic perspective, Bataille sees eroticism as essentially related with the fear of death³⁷. In order to escape that fear, rationality offers a civilized life and the illusion of protection and safety, but it cannot placate for long the increasing pulsation of horror. Human beings plunge into the ecstatic excess of Eros in the hope of exorcizing that feeling, and what Eros brings back from that apotropaic trip is ultimately no plenitude, but its own tears, the literal realization of that fear.

“The two aspects [male and female] of Being are separated”, writes Daniélou in *Shaivism and the Primordial Tradition*, “so that the spark

of sensuous delight [*volupté*] can appear between them”³⁸. If the rhythm of being in the manifested world of multiplicity consists in a dynamics of creation and destruction – killing and being killed, eating and being eaten³⁹ –, the sexual act fuses the two instances and reintegrates the seemingly perpetual discontinuity. It brings the tension to its summit and restitutes a fullness of being despite the constitutive finitude of the participants. This restitution is the embodied realization of a transcendent reality: “The union of the phallus and the female organ is the symbol of divine reality as well as of the cosmic and physical reality [...]. Accomplished like a rite, it is the most effective means of participating in the divine work”⁴⁰. It should be noted that, in the context of Daniélou’s reflection, the symbol is not something to be intellectually decoded, but something to *embody and realize* in the accomplishment of a ritual act. This act becomes a passage to another level of being: “[It] is maybe the highest and most direct experience that we may have of the beatitude and the limitless rapture which is the nature of the divine”⁴¹. For Daniélou the climax of the sexual union is conveyed in the Sanskrit term *ānanda*, which – contrary to the one-sided spiritualization of the term in the modern reception of Advaita Vedānta⁴² – could be rendered as “sensuous delight” or “erotic rapture”. In the Brāhmaṇas and early Upaniṣads, the term appears many times in the sense given by Daniélou⁴³, with the difference that orgasmic thrill (as a mystical moment) is not severed from the procreative act⁴⁴, as in the case of Daniélou: “Sensuous delight [*volupté*] [...] [is] the experience of an instant of joy during which we forget everything: reason, interest, egoism, duty. [...]. Procreation has nothing to do with this sacred aspect of love”⁴⁵. This emphasis on erotic-spiritual realization lays stress on the power of Eros not only as an experience of transgressive intensity between individuals but also as a fundamental instance

of relation surpassing human parameters. The cosmic threads of Eros are in perpetual tension, intensified in union to avoid ontological disaggregation, and simultaneously redistributed to avoid full implosion. The world is thus disclosed – and preserved – as a living tissue of interrelated beings, in which humans are – due to their erotic dimension – capable of having an *embodied* intuition of transcendence⁴⁶. In Daniélou's conception of Eros, there is no diabolical element or malediction of any kind, but a form of pleromatic *aisthesis* that does not call for tears of any kind. Precisely because the fullness is in this case related to an expanded and intensified form of perception, the transcendence it implies is no radical instance of discontinuity with regard to the world. It impregnates every layer of human experience and revitalizes it. It does not require leaving the body but transforming the objectified and dissected version of it (which is the product of an alienated attitude to oneself and to others) in an energetic body-soul-spirit complex. The world is not disfigured and dissolved, but transfigured and recomposed.

Strongholds of purity, bridge of impurity

Radical metaphysics, which reduces the spectrum of phenomena, contingency and interrelations to a determining instance detached from them, is not only spiritualist. There are also materialist versions of it. In his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud questions his former model of libidinal economy based on the pleasure principle as regulator of psychic processes. The pleasure principle was thought to regulate tensions emerging in the psyche that might lead to displeasure (discomfort, suffering, pain), either by reducing them or by transforming them into pleasurable sensations. This is not only a problem of energy quantity, but also of the quality of the energy concerning, as Freud says, “the darkest and most inaccessible domain of psychic life”⁴⁷.

The history of subjectivity is one of divisions or fragmentations as a result of the mechanism of repression. The conscious part tries to cope with the enormous task of assimilating tensions, but in such a context pleasure and displeasure are not clearly distinguishable, since the ego itself carries a great deal of unprocessed contents⁴⁸. For Freud this is not only visible in traumatic neuroses. The observation of non-traumatic self-aggression instances in infantile behavior leads him to the notion of “compulsion to repetition” [*Wiederholungszwang*]. The puzzling fact of this compulsive mechanism is that the repetition is essentially linked with an experience of *displeasure*. Do we unconsciously tend to destruction? And if so, in which way is that fundamental tendency compatible with the so-called survival instinct? The living organism, says Freud, is like “a small bubble of irritable substance” which tries to cope with stimuli from outside, but the problem is that the outside has two asymmetric dimensions: the outer world in space and time, in the face of which a conscious mechanism of protection may be quite effective, and the inner world from which the most challenging stimuli arise – a burst of invasive energy that ignores the parameters of space and time. Here lies the conspicuous asymmetry: the dark powers of the inner world, which for Freud are fundamentally connected with sexuality, are too strong and unbound for any conscious assimilation. But what is the purpose of those (destructive) unconscious drives? Freud's question is neither biological nor psychological, but metaphysical. His suspicion is that the notion of drive is *ultimately* not related to the preservation of the living organism – although its accomplishment is indirect, that is, it passes through preservation strategies. In other words: if unconscious impulses are by nature ‘regressive’ (in the sense that they always introduce a tension that resists the ‘progress’ of consciousness), this regression does not



Ritual scene of ass-kissing (XII century) at the Saint-Pierre-et-Saint-Paul de Troyes Cathedral.
Source: Jean-Dominique Lajoux, *Art profane et religion Populaire au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1985.

take place in order to preserve something, but to achieve an earlier state. Since every form of life returns sooner or later to an inorganic state, Freud's conclusion is that "the purpose of all life is death"⁴⁹, and he explains this by means of a materialist mythology: "Once upon a time, the properties of life were awakened in inanimate matter by the effect of a power that defies conjecture. Perhaps it was a prototype of what took place later, when consciousness was formed from a certain stratum of living matter. The tension that arose at that moment in the inanimate stuff strove after a balance, and that resulted in the instinctual tendency to return to a lifeless state"⁵⁰. If the ultimate goal of life is to reach death and the preservation instinct is only a partial deviation from this

goal, its function is to serve the death drive, and this becomes evident in its inner dynamics of *displeasure* and destruction. In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud had already expressed the constitutive character of sexual perversions in human subjectivity. In the context of his elaborations on the death drive, such primary processes (in which the polymorphous sexuality of origins is inscribed) appear as a sign of an inverted metaphysics in which death is the ultimate transcendence.

Of course, materialist metaphysics is no metaphysics at all for its rivals. In his ambitious book *Metaphysics of Sex*, Julius Evola regards the Freudian hypothesis of a death-drive as a merely biological (and therefore irrelevant) explanation of a phenomenon that deserves a

much deeper approach⁵¹. The purified metaphysics of Eros that Evola attempts to delineate must also dispense with a specific phenomenology of the abnormal and the pathological, since such cases reveal for him the underlying substratum of so-called ‘normal sexuality’, which cannot be grasped by means of a profane approach. Evola strives to fully redress Freud’s materialistic subversion, turning the complex dynamics of love and aggression, pleasure and destruction, Eros and Thanatos, into a potential means of ecstatic transcendence⁵². But his ambition does not end there: he also rejects the conjunction of eroticism and ecstatic mysticism – in Christian saints like the Carmelite Mary Magdalene de’Pazzi or Margaret Mary Alacoque – as an impure and suspicious phenomenon which “does not have much to do with true spirituality”⁵³. Orgiastic promiscuity, which Georges Bataille saw as a deeply transformative *katábasis*, is for him merely an intermediate phenomenon: it dissolves the limits of individuality in erotic excess, but it remains still too close to the type of union whose purpose is procreation⁵⁴. A *real* metaphysics of Eros should begin with the conviction that human desire does not have its roots in the reproductive instinct, and that sexual attraction cannot be explained through psychological theories. The main fact of Eros, sexual attraction, is for Evola a mystery that can only be grasped if one focuses on the strictly metaphysical value of polar attraction (that is, a value to be found beyond both physical and psychological parameters) and the tendency toward the union of the opposites⁵⁵. This radical position forces Evola to go even beyond the cosmogonic level of Eros (which is central in Daniélou’s divinization of eroticism) and cleanse the motif of immortality of any ‘telluric’ or ‘feminine’ aspect that might be attached to it⁵⁶. From that perspective, the *liquida voluptas* surpasses the biological, psychological and daimonic-telluric domains to the point that any direct associa-

tion with them would fail to do justice to the metaphysical significance of it: “the revelation of the fulgurating and destructive One”⁵⁷. Led by the conviction that androgynous fullness – as undisputable alpha and omega of the erotic experience – is situated in the non-place of the transcendent One, Evola rejects not only any instance of erotic empowerment related to different forms of ritual performance but also homosexual love as a deviated and fictitious attempt at such completion⁵⁸. The key to his metaphysics of sexuality is conveyed by means of a passage from the *Bṛhadarāṇyaka-Upaniṣad*, certainly quite different from the ones selected by Daniélou, and with a particular translation: “Not for the sake of the wife (in herself) is the wife desired by the man, but for the sake of the Self (the principle of ‘pure light, pure immortality’)”⁵⁹. Even if the passage does not refer to erotic love [*kāma*] or passionate attachment [*raga*] but rather to being fond of [*priya*]⁶⁰, Evola’s idea is clear enough: the root of desire is not in the object, but in the transcendent source from which both subject and object (as finite manifestations of life) arise, and that is the ultimate goal of erotic union. A purified metaphysics of Eros intends to re-conduct that power even beyond its cosmogonic origins, where it finally implodes.

In a radical materialist metaphysics, the scope of sensuous delight (in Daniélou’s sense of *volupté*, i.e. *ānanda*) does not reach any pleromatic *aisthesis*; on the contrary it is reduced to an experience of lack and blind compulsion revealing that we – beings of desire – are a contingent deviation on the road to an inorganic and lifeless outcome. Its fundamental opposite, spiritual metaphysics, strives to render embodied experience with its contingent parameters and its plurality of beings fully impotent, degraded, or illusory in the face of a superior *spiritus rector* determining the ultimate goals of human behavior. It shifts the transcendent character of erotic rapture to the

reverse-side of its experiential arena – out of which the erotic threads of sensuous delight appear devoid of any ontological value. Alain Daniélou's divinization of eroticism may seem contradictory at first sight: what is the transcendence of Eros if it implies participation in a greater reality (called 'divine') which is mainly distinguished from ours in terms of intensity and not in terms of drastic ontological pairs like reality and illusion, principle and manifestation or truth and falsehood? We could say that his figure of transcendence is the spiral, in which there is no vertical architecture to account for relations among beings, but an expansive field. In this sense, his conception of the 'supernatural' is not topographical, but mainly energetic. Supernatural beings are relations we can have in different frequencies of intensity, and one of the parameters to bridge over the different frequency-levels is erotic rapture. In fact, the orgasmic culmination, irrespective of the form through which it is achieved⁶¹, is the most concrete and accessible energetic embodiment of the union of cosmic principles. Through specific techniques dealing with sexual energy, this intensity can be expanded to the whole of the energy-body, establishing thus a relation with the invisible and most inaccessible dimensions of Nature. This is even clearer in the case of what Daniélou calls sacred pharmacopoeia, the experiences of which – if properly

controlled and framed in a sacred space – "lead to a contact with subtle beings and to the development of certain [special] faculties"⁶², like that of shamans. It becomes clear that the type of metaphysics purported by Daniélou tends to an immanent deployment and distribution of a multi-layered configuration of (human, non-human and trans-individual) energy. This energy breaks the boundaries of individuality and dislocates the field of experience from its rigid framework – not to remain aloof, but to return to Nature and disclose its unknown spheres. Even if unseen and mainly ignored (both by materialists and spiritualists), such spheres have an undeniable influence on our individual and collective behavior, so dealing with them means building bridges and enhancing the energy of the cosmic threads. There is a potential *ars vivendi* to be extracted from such a philosophy, the relevance of which (in our present context of global and ecological crisis) becomes more and more conspicuous. After all, worn-out metaphysical models (not only religious and spiritual but also secular) preserve an undeniable complicity with the ethnocentric and anthropocentric bent that is literally wiping out the diversity of the animated and living universe. Perhaps it is time to rescue Eros from its double imprisonment in the noetic and hyletic vaults of (proto-) history. •

1 “Man in his totality comprises the measurable as well as the unmeasured aspects of his being, and no account of him can be complete which does not comprehend the results of scientific measurement and relate it intelligibly to that which is unmeasured. But though incomplete, an account of man exclusively in terms of his unmeasured characteristics can be of highest utility [...]. In order to be able to say something significant about man, one does not need to have had a special training” (Aldous Huxley, *Proper Studies*, London 1927, p. VIII).

2 Cf. Georg Lukács, *Die Seele und die Formen*, Berlin 1911, p. 4.

3 Cf. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere, volume secondo. Quaderni 6-11 (1930-1933)*, Torino 2001, p. 1375.

4 Cf. Emile Cioran, *Sur les cimes du désespoir* [1932], in : *Œuvres*, Paris 1995, especially p. 17.

5 Cf. Mircea Eliade, *The Quest. History and Meaning in Religion*, 1969, pp. 1-11, and Alain Daniélou, *Shiva et Dionysos*, Paris 1979, p. 294 It should be noted that the question of a ‘new humanism’ in Eliade is neither reducible to his political flirt with Romanian fascism or comparable to the totalitarian notion of a ‘new man’, however strong the mystical overtones of its ideological militancy of youth might be (cf. Michel Gardaz, *Mircea Eliade et le « nouvel homme » à la chemise verte*, in: *Numen*, Vol. 59, N°1 (2012), pp. 68-92).

6 In order to emphasize the hybrid character of Eliade’s work, it suffices to consider his book *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (1969), which contains a program to retrieve the religious ground of humanity by means of the study of non-European cultures, “both oriental and primitive” (Mircea Eliade, *Ibidem*, p. 3). Eliade’s conceptual pair (oriental/primitive) should draw our attention: oriental cultures like Brahmanism and Buddhism can hardly be equated with indigenous folk-groups like the ones characterizing Australian and Amazonian traditions. However, Eliade attempts an ontological synthesis by means of his ‘morphology of the sacred’. Thus, the field of so-called hierophanies imposes itself – as a kind of synthetic necessity – before any social structure or dynamics involving specific practices and relations.

7 Cf. Mircea Eliade, *L’épreuve du labyrinthe*.

Entretiens avec Claude-Henri Roquet, Paris 1978.

8 Alain Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, New York 1964, p. 5.

9 Alain Daniélou, *Shiva et Dionysos*, p. 155. His words paraphrase the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 1.4.10. which reads *tasmadeṣāṃ [devānām] tanna priyam yad etanmanusyā vidyuh [aham brahmāsmi]*: “to those [gods] it is not pleasing that humans should know this [: I am Brahman]”.

10 For a consideration of the choreographic function of the labyrinth and patterns of ecstatic dance in ancient times, cf. Hermann Kern, *Labyrinthe. Erscheinungsformen und Deutungen. 5000 Jahre Gegenwart eines Urbildes*, München 1999, p. 19

11 It is also (though not exclusively) in this sense that we should understand Daniélou’s verdict on Shaivism as “essentially a religion of Nature” (Alain Daniélou, *Shiva et Dionysos*, p. 20).

12 The passages from this Upaniṣad are taken from Alain Daniélou’s essay *The Meaning of Gaṇapati*, in: *The Adyar Library Bulletin*, Vol. XVIII, 1954, in this case p. 4. Part of this essay was edited and republished, together with some manuscript variants, in: *Transcultural Dialogues, Issue 04, Spring Equinox 2020*, pp. 18-26.

13 An indication of this is that, in the same Upaniṣad, the salutation to Gaṇeśa contains the bija mantra corresponding to the root-chakra [*mūlādhāra*]: *oṃ laṃ namaste gaṇapataye* (Daniélou, *The Meaning of Gaṇapati*, *Ibidem*, p. 3).

14 Cf. the expression *brahmadvāramukham* in the description of the *mūlādhāra* cakra contained in *Srī Pūrṇānanda’s Śaṭcakranirūpana*, Verse 10 (*Tantrik Texts, Vol. II: Shāṭcakranirūpana and Pādūkāpanchaka*, edited by Tārānātha Vidyāratna, p. 18).

15 Daniélou, *The Meaning of Gaṇapati*, *Ibidem*, p. 7.

16 Alain Daniélou, *Shiva et Dionysos*, pp. 155-156.

17 Cf. Daniélou’s considerations on prostatic orgasm and its relationship with initiatic rituals in: *Yoga, Kāma: le corps est un temple*, Paris 2005, pp. 190-191.

18 The hedonistic dimension is not at all absent in Alain Daniélou, but his own divinization of eroticism, the most basic levels of which may attract the sexually obsessed, is not at all detached from a thorough reflection on the power of Eros and its

individual, social and cosmic economy. Daniélou's heightened awareness of the multi-layered threads of Eros makes it impossible to reduce his Shaivite-Dionysian philosophy – as some of his detractors have tried to do – to a projection of perverse phantasies or an apology of sexual debauchery.

19 In the Bhūmikā-Sūkta of *Atharvaveda* (12.8.1.), the earth is referred to as ocean-born [*ārṇava*] and immersed in the primordial waters [*salilamagna*], precisely the inverted logic of the passage from the earth-chakra [*mūlādhāra*] to the water-chakra [*svādhiṣṭhāna*]. Daniélou's interest in the fourth Veda is in this sense not at all anecdotal, since he saw a connection of aspects between the archaic practices of the forest ascetics and some elements of early Śākta Tantra – of the type he refers to with regard to Sāmkhya and Yoga: the individual experience displays a reversal of the cosmogonic process.

20 Only a reformed Hindu agenda (and its heritage in the West) can deny the importance of the root-chakra for any operation related to Kuṇḍalinī Yoga. Even classical texts like the *Ṣaṭcakranirūpana* contain clear references to that aspect, like the following remark in Kalicharana's commentary: *raktapadmāntaropari ṣaṭśaktīnām sthitiriti bodhyām* ["the six śaktis should be regarded as situated upon the red lotus-leaf"]. Here the red lotus-leaf is the opening of the root-chakra, and the śaktis are forces of Nature personified as ambivalent female deities/demons who accompany the adept (with their concomitant transformations) in his progressive piercing of the chakras. These forces usually appear distributed in the different chakras according to their dominant element in each case, which can lead to the erroneous conclusion that they do not emanate from the earth but from some other subtle location. This primacy of mūlādhāra in different registers of the Tantric practice is confirmed in contemporary treatises on the subject, for example in *Shyāmākānta Dvivedī's Bhāratiya Śakti-Sādhana* (Vāraṇasī 2007, especially p. 101), where *kula kriyā* is explicitly related to the primacy of *prthivītattva* and the energy stemming from *mūlādhāra*.

21 Cf. Alain Daniélou, *Shiva et Dionysos*, p. 11.

22 Daniélou's focus on an intensified and expanded *aisthesis* can be found in some contem-

porary thinkers with a remarkable elaboration and strong ecological bent, notably in David Abram: "The 'real world' in which we find ourselves [...] is not a sheer 'object', not a fixed and finished 'datum' from which all subjects and subjective qualities could be pared away, but is rather an intertwined matrix of sensations and perceptions, a collective field of experience lived through from many different angles" (David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, New York 2017, p. 39).

23 Alain Daniélou, *Shivaïsme et tradition primordiale*, Paris 2007, p. 43.

24 Cf. Alain Daniélou, *Shiva et Dionysos*, p. 293.

25 Cf. Alain Daniélou, *Shivaïsme et tradition primordiale*, p. 59.

26 The isolation of the *ātman* in a sphere of purely introspective apperception can be compared to an absolute reduction of consciousness in a subtractive being, as one may read in one passage of Śaṅkarācārya's introduction to his *Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya* when he writes *aparokṣatvācca pratyagātma praśiddheḥ* ["one's own self is well known to exist out of immediate presentation"]. The immediate character referred to in the passage is purely apperceptive, which means that it does not coincide with any of the conscious instances that fall within the empirical domain of one's own self, but in opposition to a modern Western concept of pure apperception (as purely synthetic transcendental unity, cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 132, Hamburg 1998, p. 178), it is furnished with an eminent ontological status.

27 Alain Daniélou, *La civilisation des différences*, Paris 2003, p. 81.

28 "According to the Shaivite texts, Shiva, the male principle, if devoid of the 'i' which is the *śakti* or power of the female principle, is merely *śava* (corpse), that is, the return to the neutral state conveyed by the non-manifested substrate" (Alain Daniélou, *Ibidem*).

29 *Brhadāranyaka-Upaniṣad* 1.4.3. Daniélou quotes this Upaniṣad in different texts, such as *Shiva et Dionysos*, *Shivaïsme et tradition primordiale* and *L'érotisme divinisé*, notably also in *Hindu Polytheism*, whose philosophical section is built on a textual basis of the early and middle Upaniṣads.

30 Cf. Govind Chandra Pande, *Life and Thought of*

Śaṅkarācārya, Delhi 1994, pp. 202-203.

31 Alain Daniélou, *L'érotisme divinisé*, Monaco 2002, p. 51. In *Shiva and Dionysus*, Daniélou points to the importance of *samarāsa*, that is, identification with the divine through sensation (cf. Alain Daniélou, *Shiva et Dionysos*, p. 200).

32 Georges Bataille, *Les larmes d'Eros*, Paris 1961, p. 11.

33 Georges Bataille, *Ibidem*, p. 21.

34 In his *Theory of Religion*, Bataille defines the sacred as the “prodigious effervescence of life” [*bouillonnement prodigieux de la vie*] (cf. Georges Bataille, *Théorie de la religion*, Paris 1973, p. 71), which leaves no doubt of the importance that the sacred character of eroticism has for him. This is the reason why he considered mankind's progressive attempts to ‘frame’ or ‘civilize’ eroticism as a deceptive amputation of the sacred (cf. *Les larmes d'Eros*, p. 52).

35 Cf. Georges Bataille, *Ibidem*, p. 34.

36 Cf. Georges Bataille, *Ibidem*, p. 8.

37 “The apparently hairy Neanderthal had knowledge of death, and out of this knowledge arose eroticism, which opposes the sexual life of humans to that of animals” (Georges Bataille, *Ibidem*, p. 20).

38 Alain Daniélou, *Shivaïsme et tradition primordiale*, p. 83.

39 “The creator is a cruel god who wanted a world in which nothing can survive without destroying life, without killing other living beings. No being can subsist without eating other forms of life, whether plants or animals. This is a fundamental aspect of the nature of created being” (Alain Daniélou, *Shiva et Dionysos*, p. 207). In the same passage Daniélou quotes *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 1.4.6: *etāvadva idaṁ sarvaṁ annaṁ caivānnādaśca* [“All this (world) is but food and eater of food”].

40 Alain Daniélou, *La civilisation des différences*, p. 87. In this passage, “accomplished like a rite” means with full awareness of its transindividual character and importance. The integration of ritual performance and sexuality in Tantra is barely dealt with by Daniélou, only fragmentarily (as in *Shiva and Dionysus*), allusively or between the lines (as in *The Way to the Labyrinth*), in spite

of affirmations like the following: “the Tantric path, which makes the most diverse sacred rites out of sexual acts, is the truly mystical path through which we can apprehend the nature of the divine and come closer to the gods” (Alain Daniélou, *Yoga, Kāma: le corps est un temple*, p. 145). His references to the Tantric tradition are instead mainly cosmo-anthropological: he focuses on mantras, yantras and chakras rather than on the relationship between ritual and sexuality, cf. *Le secret des Tantra*, in: Alain Daniélou, *Shivaïsme et tradition primordiale*, pp. 139-152, and *Notes sur le Tantra*, in: *Yoga, Kāma: le corps est un temple*, pp. 119-120.

41 Alain Daniélou, *Ibidem*, p. 42.

42 It is clear that the term *ānanda*, already in *Śaṅkarācārya*, cannot be experienced in the sense of worldly pleasure – however intensified, trans-individual or cosmically related it may be (cf. Wilhelm Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought*, Albany 1991, p. 255). This drastic division is enhanced and simplified in the reception of his thought. In the famous post-Śaṅkara formula *saccidānanda* (referring to the nature of brahman), for example, the term *ānanda* means clearly ‘spiritual bliss’ in the sense of a self-sufficient, a-cosmic, non-related ontological fullness.

43 Examples abound. Suffice it to mention two of them. The first one is found in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 10.5.2.10: *tau hṛdayasyākāśaṁ pratyavetya mithunībhavatastau yadā mithunasyāntam* [“the two (Indra and Indrāṇī, that is, the male and female principles) descend into the space of the heart and engage in sexual union”]; the second in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 2.4.11.: *evaṁ sarveṣāmānandānāmupastha ekāyanam* [“the sexual organ is the convergence of all forms of delight”].

44 The *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad* is explicit in this respect: *prajātiramṛtamānanda ityupasthe* [“procreation and immortality correspond to delight in the sexual organ”].

45 Alain Daniélou, *Yoga, Kāma: le corps est un temple*, p. 139. Bataille shares this radical distinction between sexual act in the sense of procreation and erotic pleasure (cf. *supra*, note 36).

46 Cf. Daniélou's use of the term *samarāsa* (cf. *supra*, note 31).

47 Sigmund Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920), in: *Studienausgabe, Band III: Psychologie des Unbewußten*, Frankfurt 2001, pp. 213-272, quote p. 217.

48 In fact, Freud indicates that the opposition between conscious and unconscious is not to be equated with that between ego and repressed contents: “Much in the ego is surely unconscious, already what we might call the core of the ego” (Sigmund Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, Studienausgabe Bd III, p. 229).

49 Sigmund Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, *Ibidem*, p. 248.

50 Sigmund Freud, *Ibidem*.

51 Julius Evola, *Metafisica del Sesso*, Roma 2006, pp. 110-111. Evola focuses on the opposition between vital drive and death drive (cf. Evola, *Ibidem*, p. 111, footnote 47) without considering the fundamental asymmetry introduced by the compulsion to repetition in the psychosomatic dynamics and the metaphysical dimension of Freud’s reflection – in spite of Freud’s materialist and scientific attitude. This is quite understandable, since Evola operates with a prescriptive concept of metaphysics that excludes materialist variants altogether.

52 “An algolagnia that is not compulsory experienced by perverts but consciously used by perfectly normal beings to intensify and expand, in a transcendent and eventually ecstatic sense, the possibilities contained in the current experience of sex” (Julius Evola, *Ibidem*, p. 115).

53 Julius Evola, *Ibidem*, p. 117.

54 Julius Evola, *Ibidem*, p. 130. In Evola’s perspective, the ritual institutions of so-called ‘archaic societies’ are degraded or clouded forms of a primordial tradition. Their cosmic-pantheistic character is closely related to an experience of the feminine divine (and its ambivalent Eros), which is to be distinguished from the highest,

solar and masculine *Weltanschauung* in which he places his purified metaphysics of Eros.

55 Julius Evola, *Ibidem*, pp. 42-43.

56 Hence his critique of Ludwig Klages’ reflections on the liberation of the soul “not from the body, as man wrongly imagined, but *from the spirit*” (Ludwig Klages, *Vom Kosmogonischen Eros*, Jena 1941, p. 67, cf. Julius Evola, *Metafisica del Sesso*, p. 73) and even of Diotima’s analogy of the divine act of conjunction between man and woman with the act of begetting (Plato, *Symposium*, 206c: *andrós kai gynaikòs synousía tókou estin [...] theíon to pragma*, cf. Julius Evola, *Metafisica del Sesso*, pp. 74-75).

57 Cf. Julius Evola, *Ibidem*, p. 89.

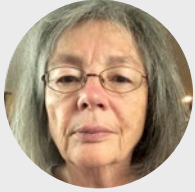
58 Cf. Julius Evola, *Ibidem*, pp. 90-91.

59 “Non per la donna [in sé] la donna è desiderata dall’uomo, bensì per l’âtma [pel principio ‘tutto luce, tutto immortalità’]” (Julius Evola, *Ibidem*, p. 69, footnote 6).

60 The original text (*Brhadarāṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 2.4.5.) reads *na vā are jāyāyai kāmāya jāyā priyā bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya jāyā priyā bhavati*. The passage enumerates many other instances of attachment, not only to a wife but also to a husband, to sons, to wealth, to being a brahman or a kṣatriya, to the worlds, the gods and other beings. The idea behind it is most probably that one is fond of something because it is similar to what has been experienced before, and none of the instances mentioned in the passage is previous to experience of the Self [*ātman*].

61 Daniélou regards all variants of enhanced sensuousness as valid to achieve the type of transcendence related to Eros, including group sex, fellatio, and masturbation (cf. Alain Daniélou, *Yoga, Kāma: le corps est un temple*, p. 152).

62 Alain Daniélou, *Yoga, Kāma: le corps est un temple*, p. 123.



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THE INVISIBLE TEACHER AND HIS DISCIPLES: C. G. JUNG'S AND HENRY CORBIN'S APPROACHES TO "THE GREEN ONE"

Corbin met Jung at Ascona in 1949. In 1953 he published a long, insightful review of Jung's *Answer to Job*. Yet, for all the respect, if not devotion, that Corbin expressed to Jung, and for all the sympathy that Jung showed Corbin, their relationship was never an easy one. Is there any textual ground that might allow us to see deeper, and more insightfully, into their differences and commonalities? Daniela Boccassini proposes to focus on the figure of al-Khidr, "the green and greening one," as invisible teacher, as the awakener of both soul and text to their forgotten identity: a basic gnostic theme. A comparative reading of Jung's and Corbin's approaches to this figure may help us find their meeting place, at the confluence of the two seas.



Khidr giving cups of the water of immortality to the inhabitants of Paradise. *Falnamah (Book of Divination)*, ca. 1610-30. Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, MSS 979 Folio 2b. (Public domain)

Introductory remark

In attempting to reconstruct, and reassess, Corbin's and Jung's relationship to the figure, or the archetype, of the invisible teacher, I will begin by recalling Corbin's approach to the Avicennian initiatory tale, a narrative intended to foster introversion as self-recognition, on the basis of Corbin's hermeneutics of *ta'will*.

I will then proceed to outline the stages of the journey that unfolds, once the encounter with the "invisible teacher" has taken place. After touching on the circumstances of Jung's and Corbin's first meeting at Eranos and its relevance to the theme at hand, I will equally briefly trace Jung's own "night-sea journey" (or tale of initiation) through his encounter with his own "invisible teacher."

Finally, in essaying to gauge Corbin's and Jung's legacies for our time, I will sketch what I see as a possible direction where the archetype of the "invisible teacher" and its avatars, Sophia first and foremost, may be prompting us to move today.

Corbin and the cosmic dramaturgy of the soul

In the early 1950s the commemorations of Avicenna's millennial prompted Corbin to present, translate and analyse three minor texts by Ibn Sina, which Corbin deemed of the greatest importance however. According to him, what these short recitals, or tales of initiation, revealed to the reader was the humble human adventure underpinning Avicenna's

exalted philosophical and scientific oeuvre. And this was what truly mattered in Corbin's eyes: because, a thousand years later the philosopher's grand written achievements "would be in danger of no longer being but paper covered with ink"¹ if severed from the author's secret "mode of presence", and this irrespective of how glorious certain inks may look, on some of the pages that hand down Avicenna's works.

In his introduction, Corbin was more or less covertly urging his readers to the need of awakening (as in "prendre conscience") to the soul, *their own* soul, and to the soul's *experience* as an event of cosmic import—one where the timeless occurrence of an outer and inner mirroring brings consciousness into contact with the unplumbed depths of a fully human, or perhaps more-than-human (in his parlance, Sophianic), way of relating to the world. If Avicenna's tales are still worth reading today it is because, rather than piling up abstract and more or less outmoded theories on an impersonal, objectifying knowledge *of* the world, they show instead the pathway to a transpersonal, interconnected knowing *with* the world.

Having studied, through the 1930s and '40s, Suhrawardī's tales of initiation, Corbin was asking himself how steeped in an "Avicennian" atmosphere Suhrawardī's tales might have been, "when lo ", one of Avicenna's tales turned up on his desk as he was studying at the library in Istanbul, due to a wrong call number. Corbin took this as a call to action.² He approached Avicenna's short narratives in the same way he had Suhrawardī's, that is to say through his commitment to phenomenology as

an existential choice, and to hermeneutics as its attendant discipline. Let me recall in a few words what this means.

At the time of his solitude in Istanbul during WW II (1939-45), Corbin found himself "alone-with-the-alone, in the company of his invisible shaykh". At the end of that six-year-long retreat, he realized that a different metaphysics had sprouted within him: "I had become an *Ishrāqī*".³ Suhrawardī's scriptural legacy had *come alive* through meeting him, its modern reader, in the re-enactment of an inner dialogue between teacher and disciple; a dialogue that had to be personally experienced, in order for it to *be* in the first place, and so to become meaningful. This is the type of approach that propitiates what Corbin considers the foundational *Urerfharung*: primordial soul-experience. By finding his way into the hidden, individualized aliveness of the text-as-teacher, Corbin had in turn been transformed, so that he had now become reborn as the witness of the aliveness of the text, and of his own partnership with it:

It is by showing up, by an act of presence, that [the reader] allows that which is hidden under the phenomenal appearance to become manifest. This act of presence consists in opening, in hatching the future hidden in the so-called outdated past.⁴

This is definitely not what an academic typically does, but what would befall us, what would the world come to look like, if we tried to follow that scent, that quest for the energy that is invisibly lodged in the text—an energy that, like a musical score, awaits *our* performance for its self-realization to produce ensoulment

**Suhrawardī's scriptural legacy came alive through
meeting Corbin, its modern reader, in the re-enactment
of an inner dialogue between teacher and disciple.**

as meaning?

Only the sacramental recollection of that energy can (re)generate self-knowledge. This also means that if the text as enunciation, as embodiment in time and space is guarded by the figure of the Prophet-as-Scribe, then someone else, a different power, presides over that scriptural body, guarding its potentiality to come alive through the renewal of its meaning: this is a greening power, a watery principle of transcendence-as-immanence and immanence-as-transcendence. This is Khidr, “the Green One”, epiphanizing as “the tenuous thread” of “the esoteric, the unusual” concealed in the text, and in every form. “I am—he says of himself—he who stands at the confluence of the two seas, the one who plunges into the river of the *Where*, the one who drinks from the source of the source. I am *the guide of the fish* in the sea of divinity”.⁵ I shall return to this matter of fish momentarily.

This is where the Angel, the Perfect Nature, dovetails with Khidr, the Invisible Teacher who, in the *barzakh* of the Land of Yuh, reveals to his disciples the co-arising of opposites as the central mystery of a drama which is repeatedly inscribed in every act of cosmic physiology. Here is where angelomorphosis and individuation stand together, on that same invisible island at the confluence of the two seas.

And this is what Corbin calls “angelic pedagogy,” meaning that the practice of the *ta’wil* of text and soul in the dimension of *imaginatio vera* is not something we produce by projecting our ego-centered desires in psychic space. It is rather a practice intended to propitiate the manifestation of an archetype, endowed with its own energy, as it comes to meet us on our way.⁶ There is, in other words, an indissoluble link between our *modus intelligendi* and our *modus essendi*.⁷ Hence only by entering in resonance with the text’s hidden energy, with the Khidr of the text, we can become in turn the

text’s and Khidr’s humble performers.

Advocating a solitary, autonomous, unmediated relationship to the invisible dimension of interiority (the *bātin*, the esoteric) as a return pathway to the sacred and the consecrated, Corbin was better placed than most to see how, in the desacralized church that modern society *unknowingly* is, humanity has deified itself, thereby imposing its totalitarian demands on the rest of the living world. If the time of reckoning was and is inevitable, and fast approaching, Corbin’s goal was to offer his fellow human beings the recollection of what they had forgotten: a different, transformational relationship to their own selfhood and hence, to the world.

Corbin meets Khidr

Corbin references Khidr, the Invisible Teacher, numerous times, but most notably in his commentary to the edition of Suhrawardī’s mystical tales,⁸ in his study of Ibn ‘Arabi’s “imagination créatrice”,⁹ and in his commentary to the excerpts from ‘Abdol-Karīm Gīlī’s *Book of the Perfect Man*.¹⁰ I am drastically simplifying here, but I think it is fair to say that Corbin thought of himself as partaking of that same lineage of “presential” approach to Khidr these authors had practiced. This is perhaps why he never showed any interest in trying to elaborate on the figure of Khidr from a historical, mythological or typological perspective: Massignon had already done that.¹¹ He never showed any interest in an in-depth hermeneutical reading of Sura 18 either: Jung had already done that, as we will see momentarily.¹²

What mattered to Corbin was that Khidr “reveals himself as the repository of an inspired divine science, superior to the law”,¹³ and within the Islamic tradition that meant identifying Khidr’s closeness to the Imam, so much so that Sura 18 became one of the scriptural foundations of shī’ism. But through and

beyond that, what really mattered to Corbin was that Khidr was the “initiator to the mystic Truth which emancipates one from literal religion”¹⁴—that is to say, from the incarnationist approach to the *letter* of any and all dogmas, religious or otherwise. In a presential relationship to Khidr as an ever-living vibration, then, the question to be asked is not “Who was Khidr”, but rather “What does it mean to *be* Khidr’s disciple? To what act of self-awareness does the fact of recognizing oneself as Khidr’s disciple correspond?”¹⁵

To answer this question, Corbin follows closely Suhrawardī’s “Narration of the Purple Angel”,¹⁶ where the wayfarer does not even meet Khidr, or if he does, he does not (yet) recognize him—a demonstration in itself of Khidr’s skilful psychagogic means. The pleading “I” is only told by “the Wise” that if he really wishes to reach the Spring of Life, he will have to “put on Khidr’s sandals” and enter the Darkness. If he is a true pilgrim, his journey will take him to the Spring of Life, no matter what path he follows. And once he emerges transformed from the waters of that Spring, if he is Khidr, he will attain deliverance, by walking easily through the Mountain of Qaf.

The wayfarer’s quest, in other words, is not a journey to Khidr as an outward manifestation of wisdom. Even the Wise will soon disappear, leaving the wayfarer to his own devices. By being summoned to wear Khidr’s sandals, the novice is rather urged “to attain to the Khidr of [his] being, for it is in this inner depth, in this ‘prophet of your being’ that springs the Water of Life”.¹⁷ There are two aspects to this inward challenge. The first concerns the individual in relation to the teacher: “To have him as a master and initiator is to be obliged to *be* what he himself is. Khidr is the master of all those who are masterless, because he shows all those whose master he is how to be what he himself is: ... [i.e.] the esoteric truth which ...

frees us from the literal religion”.¹⁸ The second aspect concerns Khidr’s univocal relationship to each one of his disciples, and of those disciples among themselves: “Khidr is the master of all these, because he shows each one how to attain the spiritual state which he himself has attained” and at the same time “he exemplifies himself as many times as he has disciples, as his role is to reveal each disciple to himself”.¹⁹

Now let us examine the seemingly outward aspects of the journey. Impelled to look for the Spring of Life concealed in the Land of Darkness, the wayfarer asks the Wise what that region of gloom should alert him to, once he attains it. Here is the answer, according to Suhrawardī:

The Darkness of which one becomes aware. For you *are* in Darkness. But are unaware of it. When the wayfarer who takes this path sees *himself* as being in Darkness, that’s when he understands that he has been all along in Night, and that never yet Day light has reached his eyes ...The seeker of the Spring of Life in Darkness goes through all kinds of bewilderments and afflictions. But if he is worthy of finding that Source, eventually after Darkness he will behold the Light.²⁰

The Source of Life wherein the seeker must immerse himself so as to behold the Light and *become* Khidr will be found when the symbolic dimension of darkness is achieved within. And that immaterial darkness has two faces: outwardly, it is the darkness of the ego-centered illusion in which all human beings are unknowingly plunged. But if through an act of conscious self-mirroring, one succeeds in seeing oneself projected and lost in that gross dimension of darkness, then access to the inner, moon-lit subtle darkness of darkness is gained: and that is where the Spring of Life awaits the seeker. The journey from one kind of darkness to the other is as long as it is strenuous; it



Henry Corbin and C. G. Jung at Eranos, August 1950.
© Association des Amis de Stella et Henry Corbin.

calls for the death of one's outer, ego-centered consciousness, so that rebirth *as Khidr* in the Waters of Life may take place.

If Suhrawardī's psychagogy of the soul sounds very much like an alchemical opus—or like a process of individuation—it is because that's what it is. We do not know when Corbin started to develop an interest in Jung's works and read his books, but likely upon his return from Istanbul, at the suggestion of Massignon. Yet one thing is certain. In 1948 Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn had invited him to attend the Eranos conference. By the time Corbin made his acquaintance with Casa Gabriella and its distinguished guests, he had read most of what Jung had published. When they first shook hands, in Ascona, Corbin knew what Jung could not have fathomed: namely, that Jung had before

him one of the very few among his readers who could understand what he meant, because he, Corbin, was likely the only one who could see where Jung was coming from, and more importantly, where Jung, or Jung's daimon, was headed.

Corbin meets Jung

At his first Eranos Conference, in August 1949, Corbin lectured on "The initiatory tale and hermeticism in Iran".²¹ With this address, he wished to introduce his audience, Jung especially, to Suhrawardī's two short texts: "L'archange empourpré" (The reddening archangel) and "Le récit de l'exil occidental" (The tale of the occidental exile). He argued that, through and beyond their obvious ties to Sura 18, these tales, of an Avicennian emanationist feel, re-enacted

the ancient Hermetic literature of initiation, rich in alchemical, transmutative undertones, with reverberations of the Mazdean theme of the Angel as celestial double. Jung may have known nothing of Suhrawardī's mystical writings, but he had discussed the alchemical underpinnings of Sura 18 in an impromptu lecture on "rebirth" he had delivered, ten years earlier, from the same Eranos podium from which Corbin was now speaking.²²

Building on Jung's insights, Corbin was now suggesting parallels with the Mithraic and Zoroastrian traditions, and, even more cogently, he was highlighting affinities with two excerpts from the *Ghāyat al-Hakīm* or *Picatrix*, an 8th-century authoritative and widespread manual of hermetic theurgy. One of these excerpts tells how Hermes, upon descending into the world of Darkness, meets there his Perfect Nature, and receives instructions on how to achieve liberation through self-awareness.²³ The other excerpt teases out the figure of the Perfect Nature: Angel or higher Self, this invisible and ever-present being is none other than "the spiritual entity of the philosopher, conjoined to his star, who rules him and opens for him the doors of Wisdom".²⁴

Corbin's main concern rested with the Ismaili-hermetic-alchemical "hierogamy of the soul and the Angel".²⁵ It is this *coniunctio* of the Masculine and the Feminine, of the light of Day and the shadows of Night that produces rebirth: conscious existence in a state of *dual-itude* wherein the Angel/Perfect Nature/individualized Noūs stands in a relationship to the soul that mirrors the relationship that Hermes entertains with Poimandres, the alchemist with the stone. Even though Khidr was only hinted at, it is clear that Corbin had understood how the Khidr archetype, "the Noūs, the Angel, or the Perfect Nature kindles in the conscious soul a succession of images (or the stages of a mythical journey) wherein the

soul (like Hermes who had put his torchlight under a glass) contemplates the archetypal form which was there from the very beginning".²⁶ This process reaches its climax when the soul immerses itself in the waters of the Source of Life, the alchemical *aqua permanens*, and *becomes* Khidr: it is reborn and awakens to the Khidr of itself. Thus, Corbin declares, Suhrawardī's treatise "identifies a crucial synchronism between the transmutation of the Stone and the angelomorphosis or deification of the human being, the reciprocity of the mystery of the Anthropos and of the alchemical mystery".²⁷ This is why Corbin could state, however cryptically, that "each Angel is Christ in relation to every individual existence".²⁸ It is Khidr who presides over each and every one of the individualized theophanies of the Sophianic wisdom of Self-knowledge, and this is the only and true rebirth *in novam infantiam* that each individual can aspire to, by generating it inwardly, through strenuous, life-long dedication and toil.

We will likely never know what Jung thought of Corbin's passionate advocating for the Angel; we can reckon he feared an excess of mystic enthusiasm, in this young man's wildly imaginative language. However this may be, it is a fact that Jung never took a special interest in the Islamic world—neither after traveling to Africa, nor after listening to Massignon's lectures, and not even after meeting Corbin and receiving from him his books on shi'ite gnosis. Even though those books were devoutly autographed, they remained unopened. And yet: it was Jung who urged Corbin to study the Islamic beginnings of the alchemical tradition, and unquestionably Sura 18 left a deep impression upon him. In the 1939 impromptu lecture at Eranos which I have already recalled, Jung had presented Khidr as a symbol of the Self, and Moses' ordeal at his hands as a process of individuation. But that was just the tip of the iceberg. Let us turn to Jung then, and see how

things played out for him.

Jung and the avatars of the Self

Jung's first mention of Khidr occurs in his 1912 book *Psychology of the Unconscious* (*Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*), where he outlines the archetype of the "pairs of friends", such as the Dioscuri, Dhulqarneim [Alexander the Great] and Khidr, or Khidr and Moses, Khidr and Elijah, but also St. John the Baptist and Jesus, then Jesus and Peter, for the purpose of highlighting that "the gods, or figures like Khidr ..., are our immortal part which continues intangibly to exist <1912: which, though incomprehensible, dwells among us somewhere>".²⁹ In the revised edition of the book, which appeared

for "the place where the two seas meet", at first were blind to the signal of the leaping fish. That which ego-centred consciousness disdains (as does Moses, the mind), or downplays (as does Joshua his servant, the body), is thus the most important thing, flickering at the liminal edge of our attention.

All in all, in his 1939/1950 commentary on Sura 18 Jung keeps Khidr at a distance: he is a symbol of the Self, as demonstrated by his connection to the fish and to the alchemists' *prima materia*. Everything appears sober and at arm's length here.

Yet there is another side to Jung's engagement with Khidr. Even though he never discussed

Building on C. G. Jung's insights, Corbin suggested parallels of Islamic mysticism with the Mithraic and Zoroastrian traditions, and, even more cogently, he highlighted affinities with two excerpts from the *Ghāyat al-Hakīm* or *Picatrix*, an 8th-century authoritative and widespread manual of hermetic theurgy.

in 1952 augmented with many of the insights Jung had gained along the way, Khidr becomes unequivocally tied to the Self, and alchemically substantiated in that respect. "This is our immortality, the link through which man feels inextinguishably one with the continuity of all life",³⁰ he adds to the 1912 sentence just quoted. In the 1939 impromptu lecture which he never turned into a fully fleshed-out essay, but which he would nonetheless republish in 1950, he stated: "This other being is the other person in ourselves—that larger personality maturing within us".³¹

In other words: the birth of the Self is a "psychic fact" whose real nature is typically overlooked by our ego-centred consciousness, in the same way that Moses and his servant, while searching

this other side in his writings, he did as much as adumbrate it in his conversations with trusted confidants, and he summarized it in his late so-called autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. This other side, then, is the hidden one, which complements the outer one in the same way that the almost invisible warp in weaving complements the weft: without it, neither weft nor weaving would come to the loom. And what is more, Jung's secret human adventure seems to follow, as faithfully as unknowingly, Avicenna's long papered-over vestiges, such as decades later Corbin had unearthed and retraced them. Whether we choose to approach Jung's private recital of initiation through a renewed "acte de présence" as Corbin did in the case of Avicen-



Philemon, Jung's guide in his visionary experiences. Jung's *Liber novus*; *Liber secundus*, page 154. Reproduced by permission © 2009 Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung, Zürich. First published by W.W. Norton & Co.

na's visionary tales—that is our call, the call for our times.

Jung's descent into the World of Darkness occurred shortly after the publication of *Wandlungen* and his breakup with Freud—at a time, that is, when Jung, having retreated from the deprived figure of the visible teacher, was left with no choice but to turn within for guidance. This took the form of an experiment in visioning, recorded first, in an impromptu manner, in *The Black Books*, and then partially transcribed and re-lived through verbal and visual amplifications in *The Red Book*. None of this was ever published during Jung's lifetime. But now that both *The Black Books* and *The Red Book* are in print, what we witness in reading them first-hand is a drama of death and renewal, that unfolds in an otherworldly dimension, inhabited by a multitude of figures “ris[ing] out of the unconscious”. One of them stands out: “he developed out of the Elijah figure [of the wise old prophet]. I called him

Philemon. Philemon was a pagan and brought with him an Egypto-Hellenistic atmosphere with a gnostic coloration”. “Psychologically—Jung comments—Philemon represented superior insight” in the specific sense of “a force that was not myself”; and he adds: “to me he was what the Indians call a guru ... whom I had nilly-willy to recognize as my psychagogue”. Years later, a cultivated Indian told him to his surprise that whilst most people have living gurus, “there are always some who have a spirit for teacher”—and evidently that had been Jung's case.³²

Among the later pages of *The Black Books* which Jung never managed to transcribe in *The Red Book*, one is of special relevance to my purpose. It is dated May 20, 1917. On that page, Jung's “I” asks his soul to ask Philemon: “who he is and what he is to me”. Then he would also like to know who is “Phánēs”, “the luminous one” who was born to him sometime before. What follows is a dialogue between the soul and

Philemon, Jung acting as the silent witness, the humble note-taker. Let us hear what Philemon has to say:

This man would like to know who I am. Did I not tell him who I was and who I am? I did not say who I will be. I will be Phánēs. I will dissolve myself in his splendor when this man dies. I do not die, I am already Phánēs, not a man but a flame of God. I am more earthy than earth. I am subterranean, I grew upward, I grew through this man. I overcame him. I am his work, what he has lived. He is not I. He belongs to earth. / Phánēs is the eternal fire, the encompassing blaze, that will become invisible and visible, the eternal dawning. / I am Chider [Khidr], entering youth in old age. When my work is complete, I will have become the seed of the beginning. / This man is my work, which I have built from star seed. Yes, he plunged from the indeterminate and supplied the occasion for form. He formed me, I formed him. He kissed the earth, and I, the sun. ... I am the master.³³

One would be hard-pressed to find a more explicitly visionary dramaturgy of the partnership that obtains between Khidr and his disciples—both in terms of the “work of darkness” necessary for the human psyche to be able to host the birth of the new god, Phánēs, and in terms of the Gnostic-Hermetic worldview that sustains, literally inspires, the unfolding of this partnership.

In the second part of the dialogue, Philemon-Khidr addresses the soul, who in her blindness fails to see the relationship that binds her to each and all of these figures, even as she is their sole connector. Prompted by Philemon, the soul eventually asks: “What was I? What will become of me?” And he: “You are my daughter from the beginning. We are united in the Pleroma, in the eternal non-existent mother, which is your mother and mine. / You

are my mother, my sister, my wife. I produced this man from you, and I will become my son and my son’s son”.³⁴

In this dramaturgy Jung translates into human language—the language of his soul and ours—the articulations of descent into the Region of Darkness as *he* experienced it. Visionary events such as these are precisely the kind of individualized experiences that we find lacking in the dialogues of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, of Avicenna and Suhrawardī, and of so many of the medieval alchemical treatises. Here we see how Soul is brought to remember who she is: Philemon-Khidr’s eternal daughter. I will return to the soul’s relationship to Khidr at the end.

Here I must add that in the fall of 1917 another figure emerged, in relation to Philemon: that was Ka, whom Philemon understood as his inseparable shadow, the “son of darkness”.³⁵ Their confrontation on Jung’s pages is gripping. Ka and Philemon-Khidr are inseparable in the same way that the letter and the spirit, the exoteric and the esoteric, the embodied and the volatile are. “Ka was he who made everything real, but who also obscured the halcyon spirit, Meaning, or replaced it with beauty, the “eternal reflection”.³⁶

When Phánēs, the child-god of light, first manifested, Jung made various paintings of him. In one of them, he is represented as a theophany, appearing through darkness. Two towering figures appear at the sides of the central “I” raising his grail, so as to form the columns of the arch within which the scene is inscribed: they are Philemon to the right, and Ka to the left. Philemon holds in his hands the text of the Seven Sermons, Ka that which he loves to build: “a house, a palace, a dwelling or a tomb, a lodging for eternity”.³⁷

And yet, on 14 February 1918, Philemon will brush off all of Ka’s reasons for building

temples and altars to Phánēs:

Consider, Ka: he is a new God—something new is truly new, although you grasp it ineptly. It happened as you thought a thousand times, and it happened differently for the thousand and first time. You must build millions of temples, one for each man, to capture this God. ... I fear that your temple is dedicated to you.³⁸

Philemons, and Jung's vision of a new religion where worship only happens in the temple of each individual's heart, comes very close to Corbin's own understanding of the religious experience. And Phánēs, as Philemon predicted, declared himself the next epiphany of Philemon-Khidr. It would mark Philemon's victory over his own shadow. Indeed the rebirth of the human being could now be seen as the Grail of the God.

Considering all this, I do not think it preposterous to say that Jung not only was initiated by Khidr and had become one of his disciples. He also inwardly experienced how Khidr might well be the prophet for the Aeon awaiting humanity, once the time of Ka's shadow wanes.

Jung too, just like Corbin, remained committed to the more-than-human task of finding the language that would allow Khidr's message to be heard within the Western world, through and beyond the shadows of secularized religion. Jung's life-task, his striving to attain to the Khidr of himself, lay in finding a language for individuation that would adapt to the needs of our psychotic rationalism.

Perhaps here we can hear an echo of Ka's concretizing ambitions, yet if we take into account Jung's distrust of the world he lived in, we come to see a different picture: "Our myth [Christianity] has become mute, and gives no answer. The fault lies not in it as it is set down in the Scriptures, but solely in us, who have not developed it further, who, rather, have

suppressed any such attempts".³⁹ I have no doubt that when Corbin read these lines, in 1962, he recognized in them the signature of one of Khidr's true disciples.

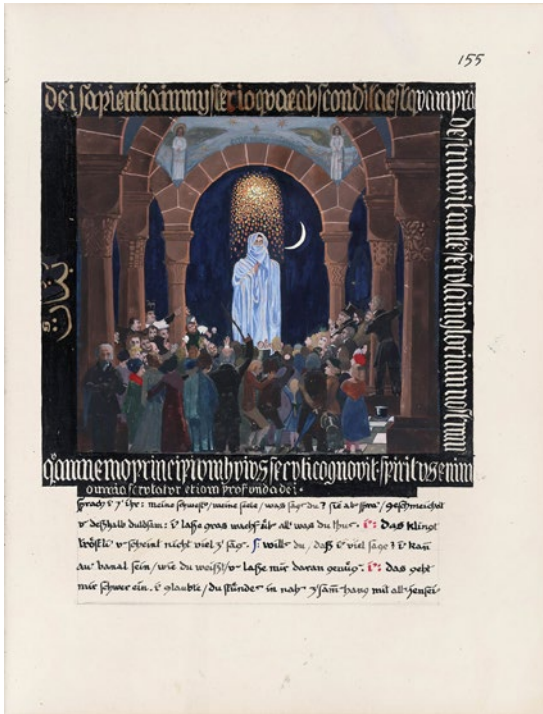
Al-Khidr's progeny: yesterday, today, tomorrow

As Corbin noted repeatedly: "The panic aroused by Latin Avicennism among the orthodox believers of the West might perhaps be defined as the fear of having to recognize the individual ministry of Khidr"—and of having to come to terms with the countless ways in which that ministry could manifest, so that each individual may attain "the Khidr of his own being".⁴⁰

That individual ministry certainly marked, each in their own way, Corbin in his encounter with *ishraqī* gnosis, and Jung in his "confrontation with the unconscious". As disciples of Khidr, both Jung and Corbin were deeply engaged in announcing to their contemporaries that the time of institutionalized monotheisms was coming to an end. Humanity had been called to an altogether different form of religiosity, which as far as they could tell had been present all along as the esoteric, invisible companion of the exoteric institutions. Any truly new way would have to invest the individuals in their relationship to the human, the other-than-human and the more-than-human dimensions of existence. Here, their language reached as far as their inner eyes could see. It is for us to heed what they tried to make out and pointed toward.

So how can all this translate in our time, and how may we consciously contribute to the unfolding of the process, in a Khidr-inspired fashion?

I'd like to turn to Jung once more. Towards the end of his long *Red Book* enterprise, as he was transcribing his encounter with Phile-



Sophia or *Sapientia Dei*. Jung's *Liber novus*; *Liber secundus*, page 155. Reproduced by permission © 2009 Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung, Zürich. First published by W.W. Norton & Co.

mon-Khidr and the strange ways that his “I” had been led, through apparent nonsense, to *see from within* his master’s incomprehensible yet deeply transformative teachings, Jung exclaimed: “I venerate your deceptive mantle, you father of all lights and of all ghostlights [aller lichter und irrlichter]”.⁴¹ Right after, on the back of that same page, Jung painted a portrait of the “Father of Prophets, Beloved Philemon”.

While carrying on with the transcription of his text, on the facing page Jung painted an even larger image, which bears no obvious relationship to either the text, or the facing portrait of Philemon. A larger-than-life-size feminine figure with veiled face stands in the center of a temple, where, according to Jung’s own later exegesis, she is restored “to the Christian church, not as an icon but as the altar itself”.⁴² Emerging from darkness, *she* is the light that illumines the scene. A multitude of people

dressed in early-20th century clothes crowd beneath and around her, rapturous. Her light garment, her mantle actually, has the color of the moon waxing at her side, and a shower of golden sunlight rains upon her. The Biblical quotes in Gothic script that encircle the scene identify her as *Dei sapientia*.

Had Corbin been shown this image, he would have exclaimed: “Why! here is the Holy Ghost in feminine form, whom the Medieval Western Avicennians called Madonna Intelligenza, or the Great Mother Sophia”. But what he would have said, upon deciphering the two solitary syllables of Arabic script on the left-hand side of that image? They compose the word “banat”, i.e. “daughters”, in the plural (the singular being “bent”), and point in the direction of Philemon, across the spine of the book. Why daughters in the plural, and whose daughters anyway? Could this feminine figure be understood as Philemon’s progeny, in the process

of being unveiled? Could this be a singular representation of Philemon's many daughters, encompassed within the scriptural tradition of Sophia? I have no definite answers to offer. Yet the Arabic script, which only appears on this page of *The Red Book*, seem to strengthen the connection between Philemon and Khidr. Following Corbin's understanding of Khidr as "the Greening One", we might understand Khidr-Philemon as the *sapientia Dei*, which is now in the process of manifesting in its age-old form, as the anima of each and every one of Khidr's disciples. Now the esoteric epiphany of unity in the *plurality of life* may be accomplished, thus rebalancing the exoteric drive toward the suppression of plurality into so-called unanimity, as preached by the "prophets of revelation".

This would also amount to saying that for a vision of sacredness to be restored to this world, our inner eye ought to turn to the feminine. Indeed, Corbin devoted himself to tracing the relationship between "the Perfect Nature of the mystic and the archetypal Angel of humanity". A paragraph from *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* is worth rereading here:

The epiphanic forms and the names of this Guide can be many; the Guide [Jung would have said "the master"] is always recognizable. It may be ... any figure individualizing the relation of the soul to the Active Intelligence. In every case this figure represents the heavenly counterpart of the soul.⁴³

I believe that tracing the connection between the progenitor of the prophets' "greening power" and the feminine epiphany of the divine, the creative, as an individualizing force, may well be our call, at this time. Sophia's archetype is at work anyway, and quite possibly in its irate, rather than compassionate form. But in order to see her, we need to train ourselves, and the place to begin is within us, through a *ta'wil* of the soul as world, and the world as soul.

There is perhaps one example I can offer of this transmutative ability to behold the living world, so that its radical aliveness, its intrinsic "birthing, or germinating, power" may become visible. What I'd like to show you is a case of what Élémière Zolla called "secret truths exposed in plain view", something like the alchemists' *prima materia*. Perhaps not coincidentally, it is a painting that our so-called civilization has, in the digital age, exploited, defaced and vilified like no other, thus turning it into the icon of *its own* unbridled penchant for prostitution. We think we know what its author intended to do in painting it, but depending on how we look at it, the tables may suddenly turn on us.

So here it is. On a small wooden panel, the peaceful, self-aware image of a female figure rises against the backdrop of an utterly visionary landscape. Is it really the portrait of an "actual" woman in an "actual" outdoor space that we are called to behold? A jewel unto herself, Mona Lisa seems endowed with transcendent omnivoyance: a Christ-like, more-than-human, kind of vision. The more I behold her, the more I become convinced that she is Leonardo's mirror-image, but not just because of her outward facial features. Mona Lisa is Leonardo's double in a much subtler way: she is his guardian angel, his celestial twin, his divine anima. She is the feminine manifestation of his fully individuated self, and thereby she is also the imaginal epiphany of the eternal Sophia and, concurrently, of Mother Nature.

At this point into the journey of our species on earth, the anima is She who can propitiate for us, in us, and through us the aliveness of the cosmos; the one, the only one, who can and will teach us to remember who we are, as individuals and as a species—if and when we become willing to take the thread she is offering into our hands and thus walk all the way back to Khidr: to the sacred, labyrinthine heart of all existence.⁴⁴

At the end of his life, Jung became fond of “a fine old story about a student who came to a rabbi and said, ‘In the olden days there were men who saw the face of God. Why don’t they any more?’ The rabbi replied, ‘Because nowadays no one can stoop so low’.” And he added: “One must stoop a little in order to fetch water from the stream.”⁴⁵ I believe what he really meant to say was “from the Fountain of Life in the Region of Darkness” where Khidr lives.

Just like Jung, Corbin also took full measure of the lowness, and the loneliness, of that

stooping. It is up to us whether we choose to “wear Khidr’s sandals” and stoop, or perhaps more brutally, at this point in time, descend to the dregs of our collective selves. One thing is certain: we need to awaken to the Region of Darkness, whose density, for all of our so-called progress, has never been so eerie, so bloody, and so deep.

Yet both Jung and Corbin knew that “Light is manifest in the darkness, and—as Hölderlin had already said in his visionary hymn “Patmos”—out of danger the rescue comes”.⁴⁶ •

¹ H. Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, tr. Willard Trask. Princeton 1990 (1st ed. 1960), p. 5.

² H. Corbin, *Avicenna*, p. xx.

³ *Cahier de l’Herne* Henry Corbin, dirigé par Christian Jambet. Paris 1981, pp. 45-46.

⁴ *Cahier de l’Herne*, p. 27.

⁵ H. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi’ite Iran*, tr. N. Pearson. Princeton 1989, p. 157.

⁶ On *ta’wil* see Henry Corbin, *Avicenna*, p. 28-35.

⁷ *Cahier de l’Herne*, p. 26.

⁸ Sohravardī, *L’archange empourpré. Quinze traités et récits mystiques traduits du persan et de l’arabe, présentés et annotés par Henry Corbin*. Paris 1976.

⁹ H. Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabī*, tr. R. Mannheim, with a preface by Harold Bloom. Princeton 1997 (1st French ed. 1958; 1st English translation 1969).

¹⁰ H. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, pp. 148-59.

¹¹ Louis Massignon, “Élie et son rôle transhistorique, Khadiriya en Islam. In *Études carmélitaines* 35 (1955), pp. 269-89.

¹² C. G. Jung, “On Rebirth.” (1940/1950). In *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. CW 9.1. Princeton 1968, pp. 113-50.

¹³ Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 55.

¹⁴ Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 57.

¹⁵ Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 59.

¹⁶ Sohravardī, *L’archange empourpré*, pp. 193-220.

¹⁷ Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 61.

¹⁸ Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 60.

¹⁹ Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, pp. 60-61.

²⁰ Sohravardī, *L’archange empourpré*, p. 212.

²¹ “Le Récit d’initiation et l’hermétisme en Iran (recherche angéologique)”. *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, XVII/1949, Zurich 1950, pp. 127-187; republished in *L’homme et son ange. Initiation et chevalerie spirituelle*, Paris 1983, pp. 7-80.

²² Cf. the already mentioned “On Rebirth,” now in CW 9.1.

²³ Henry Corbin, *L’homme et son ange*, pp. 52-53.

²⁴ Henry Corbin, *L’homme et son ange*, p. 54.

²⁵ Henry Corbin, *L’homme et son ange*, p. 58.

²⁶ Henry Corbin, *L’homme et son ange*, p. 54.

²⁷ Henry Corbin, *L’homme et son ange*, p. 37.

²⁸ Henry Corbin, *L’homme et son ange*, p. 67.

²⁹ C. G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* (1912/1952). CW 5, Princeton 1974, § 296. I am quoting from the first English translation of *Wandlungen: Psychology of the Unconscious. A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido*, tr. B. Hinkle. New York 1917, p. 227.

³⁰ C. G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, CW 5,

§296.

31 C. G. Jung, "On Rebirth." CW 9.1, §235.

32 C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffé. New York 1989, pp. 182-84.

33 C. G. Jung, *The Black Books. 1913-32. Notebooks of Transformation*, ed. Sonu Shamdasani. Tr. M. Liebscher, J. Peck, and S. Shamdasani. New York 2020. Vols. 6 (Jan 30, 1916 – May 21, 1917), pp. 195-96.

34 C. G. Jung, *The Black Books*, vol. 6, pp. 198-99.

35 C. G. Jung, *The Black Books*, vol. 7, p. 166. The wooden statuette of Ka (Ephaistos/Loki) sculpted by Jung is reproduced in *The Art of C. G. Jung*. Edited by the Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung, Ulrich Hoerni, Thomas Fischer, and Bettina Kaufmann. New York 2019, cat. 49, p. 119.

36 C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 183.

37 C. G. Jung, *The Black Books*, vol. 7, p. 174. Jung's painting is reproduced in *The Art of C. G. Jung*,

2019, cat. 53, p. 125.

38 C. G. Jung, *The Black Books*, vol. 7, pp. 174-75.

39 C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 332.

40 Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 62.

41 *The Red Book. Liber Novus*. Edited by S. Shamdasani. Preface by U. Hoerni. Tr. M. Kyburz, J. Peck, and S. Shamdasani. New York 2009, p. 153 of the *Second Book*, and 317.

42 C. G. Jung, *The Psychological Aspects of the Kore*. CW 9.1 §380.

43 Henry Corbin, *Avicenna*, p. 21.

44 I have already commented on Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* along these same interpretative lines in "Beyond Narcissism: Mirroring, Mandalas, and Feminine Self-Remembering." *Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche* 12 (2018), pp. 26-51.

45 C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 355.

46 C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (1955/1970). CW 14, § 258.



Alain Daniélou

ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

In this essay, first published in *The Journal of the Madras Music Academy* (Vol. XXVII, 1957), Alain Daniélou deals with different aspects of ethnomusicological research (focused on Indian music) and the complexity of contact between cultures. At the time of its publication, ethnomusicology was a discipline in *statu nascendi* with intrinsic problems not only of methodology, but also of conception. Daniélou's text shows not only a critical attitude toward ethnomusicology's ethnocentric bent at that time, but also toward an unprofessional fascination with the foreign which obliterates one's own cultural values. His essay focuses on the need to differentiate and preserve the values of each culture in order to foster mutual enrichment.



Alain Daniélou playing the vīṇā at the Labyrinth, Zagorolo, in 1981. Photo by Jacques Cloarec.

Intercultural Contact

Some time ago Mr. Nicolas *Nabokov*, in a short talk given under the auspices of the Music Academy, reminded us that contact between different cultures can only be an enrichment if it means, for each one, a better understanding of the points where it differs from other cultures. New contacts can then lead towards the development of individual characteristics, rather than towards a cultural compromise. Thus, contact with another culture is useful mainly when it leads to a better appreciation of our own and to an exaltation in each case of the particular pattern of life which is a civilisation and which expresses itself in all human activities in religion, social behaviour and customs, literature, art, music, all that which in a country has been developed through lengthy centuries of relative seclusion, and which has thus grown as the natural expression of the particular genius of a particular people or nation.

Learning another Civilisation

We cannot easily leave aside the pattern of the civilisation in which we are born. It has become an essential part of ourselves. We can learn a new culture as we learn a new language, provided we are well-grounded in our own. This is why people who have lived from childhood midway between two cultures face a very serious problem of development and tend to live in a sort of cultural vacuum which we can observe in their homes, their manners, their interests. We are all born with individual and group characteristics and however attracted we may be by a culture other than our own, however efficiently we may adapt ourselves to the civilisation and manners of another country or race, we can almost always observe that in the highest creations of the mind, the higher levels of genius can only be reached within the drama of what is natural to us, within the limitations of our mother tongue, within the frame of a particular and definite

civilisation or culture.

Knowledge is not Imitation

Most musicians in the West play Spanish or Italian or Russian music and often play it very well; but, even in what is a mere interpretation, we feel there is a more subtle and perfect understanding when Toscanini directs a Verdi opera or Karajan a Schubert symphony or when a real Spaniard plays Falla or Albeniz. And we have no trace of doubt that if a Norwegian tries to compose a Spanish dance, it will remain an outward and inadequate imitation of what any street composer can do in Spain effortlessly. The same applies in India to Karnatic and Hindustani or even Bengali music. I am not at all convinced that a South Indian musician who learns North Indian ragas and styles of singing, however well he does it, is doing any service to Karnatic or Hindustani music and, maybe, not to music altogether. At the same time, mutual ignorance and lack of appreciation is certainly damaging and is a handicap to any healthy development and even harmful to the preservation of ancient forms of music. This is because there are things that we must know and not do. If we refuse to know we paralyse our development and what we have is bound to degenerate, but if we try to experiment with everything we learn, if we try to imitate what others do, we are sure to lose our personality and to degrade whatever is our own.

We are usually not sufficiently aware of the characteristics of our own genius because it seems to us the most natural thing, while we are full of admiration for those characteristics in others that are strange to us, so that many of us spend our lives trying to do that for which we are least gifted.

I remember once meeting a stranger in Paris and, after talking for half an hour, he told me: "Since you come from Brittany...". I said: "How do you know I come from Brittany?" He

answered: "Oh! That is not difficult. We have been talking together for half an hour and you managed not to say yes or no to any of my questions. Only people from Brittany can do that". Well, I was not aware of this characteristic, but I do sometimes feel that if, instead of trying to acquire the sceptical and flippant outlook of the French or the analytical mode of thought of the Hindu, I had tried to develop the poetic ambiguousness of my own people I might have been an outstanding Celtic poet, instead of a very average Frenchman and an amateur Hindu.

All this, however, is intended only as an excuse for the subject I am supposed to talk to you about, which is ethnomusicology, that is, the study of music envisaged as part of the culture of a particular human group, race, or nation.

Ethnomusicology

Ethnomusicology has only been recognised as an important subject in a few Western Universities and it is still, in many ways, a science in its infancy, although modern technology and equipment have given it considerable means to develop rapidly.

A characteristic of the technical development of the last fifty years has been to alter in many ways our methods of study and this has led to a sort of general reconsideration of almost all the postulates which were considered established facts in the last century.

The famous pianist Franz Listz, when he was already one of the famous performers of Europe, decided that he really knew too little of the technique of his instrument. He therefore discarded all he knew and started again to study from the beginning.

The Modern Outlook

The same outlook is noticeable in almost all branches of learning in our time. Everything

that was considered as established fact is questioned again and all studies are restarted from their fundamentals. In fact this is the very criterion of modern sciences, the very characteristic of the modern outlook in all spheres of human thought. We question the validity of our thinking machine, of the language through which we express our thought, of the religions which try to justify our modern way of life. We question the most elementary laws of physics and mathematics, so that guiding minds of our age express themselves in terms of non-Euclidian physics, non-Aristotelian semantics and other sublime abstractions.

But you may ask what this has to do with music. Ethnomusicology is the study of primitive music, and the classical musical art of a developed culture is not a playground for ethnologists and anthropologists. It deals with higher values of culture which need be approached from a different point of view.

This, I am afraid is not quite justified in the case of music. If we do not want all the systems of music of the world to vanish in a complete musical mix-up, we have to reconsider carefully and consolidate the real foundations of the various systems and entirely revise the approximate and inaccurate theories that may have been sufficient a century ago, but do not meet the challenge of our age.

It is wrong to believe that Ethnomusicology means the study of tribal or primitive music and that the established systems of art-music are too lofty to be probed into with the help of modern measuring instruments. In fact, the

technical study of the particularities of musical systems as they are – and not as musicians believe they are – is an enormous asset for disentangling the pure, the essential aspects of a particular system of music from accretions due to outside imports and influences. The music of Europe would be much healthier if its theorists were more aware of its origin, its possibilities in the musical systems of other parts of the world. In India, at least four entirely distinct learned systems of music have existed from very ancient times, these were known to the Sanskrit writers as the four *matas*, yet there seems to be growing confusion as to what are the essential elements of each of these musical systems and the means of preserving their individual characters, the purity of their style, the quality of their expression.

While taking into account the written theory of music, whether Eastern or Western, Ethnomusicology remains very shy of the statements of musicians or of old-fashioned musicologists; it refuses to acknowledge many of their classifications, much of their often over-simplified or over-complicated theories. In India if we really want to understand the fundamental differences between existing systems and to find out which of the ancient texts really referred to what sort of music, we have to start our observations on the basis of the actual performance of the remnants of the ancient music as they are found today. And, when we have established the characteristics of each system of each school of music, as they may still exist today, we may be able to understand what was meant by the classifications of the ancient

It is wrong to believe that Ethnomusicology means the study of tribal or primitive music and that the established systems of art-music are too lofty to be probed into with the help of modern measuring instruments.

writers instead of interpreting them to suit our own views on musical history or the styles of music we are pleased to call classical.

History of Musicology

Ethnomusicology is, in Europe, considered a relatively new science, hardly yet established.

Its acknowledged originator was Alexander John Ellis who was born in 1814 and whose essay *On the Musical Scales of Various Nations* contained a first attempt to study Arabian and Indian scales. He was assisted in his measuring by Alfred James Hipkins (1826-1903).

The German von Hornbostel gave to Ethnomusicology many of its methods, and his co-worker Kurt Sachs brought the science to America. Jaap Kunst in Holland and Schaeffner in France have done considerable work on this subject in recent years.

It would however be wrong to believe that the idea of studying music as a human phenomenon is altogether new. It appears that many of the earliest Sanskrit writers on music approached the art in a true musicological spirit and the very title of a work like the *Brihaddest* expresses the intention of its author Matanga to study the various songs of men just as they are found among the various peoples of the land.

Methods and Instruments

Measuring instruments

For an objective study of music we need several things, the first one is convenient measuring-instruments and methods for the analysis of intervals, whether simultaneous or successive, and also easy instruments to reproduce and play-back conveniently the intervals measured so as to ascertain, with the help of the musicians themselves, whether the intervals measured were really those intended and

not accidental.

Notation

Then we need an adequate system of notation to record our observations accurately and in detail not merely in the form of arithmetic figures, but also in a musical score that can be studied and played musically and in which ornamental subtleties can be conveniently expressed.

Recordings

We need recordings as permanent evidence of our observations, and also to make sure that we are not tendentious in our measures and do not interpret music to bring it back to a pattern known to us.

Recordings are also the safest basis for the notation and measure of intervals, since the musician need not be disturbed in his play at the time of recording; and we can also later repeat exactly the same passage any number of times, which is essential for any accurate analysis and notation.

Words and Translation

In the case of songs, we need also an exact transliteration of the text as it is sung – this is often quite distinct from the original written text – with its accents and long syllables and, if the language is not familiar, an accurate translation of the meaning of each word.

From the historical and technical point of view, a study of the instruments is also important. A good photograph of the instrument being played and details of its tuning, strings, manufacture, and ways of playing are usually most useful.

The Musicological Document

The preparation of a perfect musicological document is an elaborate process. Different musicologists follow distinct methods. I shall

give you some idea of the way I proceed myself.

The performers and instruments must be carefully selected and brought to a convenient recording place. I personally prefer as far as possible to work in a sound-proof studio since this allows a better study of sound quality and a better balance of voices and instruments.

The music must then be rehearsed sufficiently so that the musicians are in the proper mood and sing or play with proper feeling. This is very important since most musicians take a little time to get into a raga, and the intervals they use at the beginning are very approximate. It is only when they are caught by the mood of the raga that the intervals become precise and can be measured. Most musicians believe that they can demonstrate without preparation this or that interval, sing the 22 *śrutis* in succession, etc. This, according to my experience, is never more than a vague approximation. Accuracy in music is always linked with emotion and so long as the feeling is not there the accuracy remains doubtful. For ordinary recording, it is important to record a full piece with its prelude, beginning and end, but for musicological studies a few slices of a longer performance usually give the best results.

The recording equipment should preferably be a professional tape machine allowing proper editing. Amateur tape recorders can however be used for fieldwork and are sufficient for making notations, if not for making discs. Many amateur machines use only half of the tape and record something else on the other half. This is most inconvenient and necessitates duplication on a full-size tape to make editing work possible.

Notation

Once the record is made, the notation is a complex task. The intervals and their variations have to be carefully measured and a series of

playbacks and attempts made at reproducing the exact intervals on a suitable musical instrument in collaboration with the musicians to determine whether the intervals used are really those the musicians were aiming at or whether they have occasionally gone slightly – or noticeably – out of tune. This procedure is essential since all musicians go occasionally out of tune and we must be careful not to mistake such accidents as parts of the system. We have to know what the musician wants to sing or play and this is not always what he actually does. If we attempted to find out the scale of Western music by measuring the intervals sung by some Italian singers during an average opera performance we would be sure to get the most astounding results. This mistake is very commonly made in the study of so-called primitive music and leads to absurd conclusions. Another difficult problem is the exact notation of grace notes or ornaments, as well as of the indirect attack of notes. This requires patience and care but the results are most rewarding, since it is in the subtle elaboration of ornaments and the approach to notes that the original character of a musical system and its connections with other systems can be most safely established. It is in that particular field of notation that diagrams can be made regarding intonation and vocal and instrumental technique, showing the particular characteristics of a musical system and its possible connections with other systems. I have not yet had the time to do systematic work on Karnatic music although I have already done a good deal of recording and notation of it, but I know it is one of the richest fields in the world as regards the originality and variety of musical ornamentation. Grace notes have to be studied as a completely separate subject. The intervals used in *vibrato*, in *appoggiatura*, in gliding to a note from above or below, in turning around it, or linking it to a sometimes quite distant note, are different in their nature from those of



Music shop in Benares, India. Photo by Alexander Reshnya. Source: [Shutterstock](#)

scales. And this is why they constitute an independent contribution to musical expression. If they are played artificially with the ordinary notes of the scale they lose all character and meaning. This is why the modern interpretation of early Western music makes it appear often so absurdly ornate.

The study of music with the help of modern facilities will allow us to bring much fresh air and new material to musical theories that have become stale and are mostly built up of unverified statements repeated indefinitely and made to suit conventional ideas as to what the history of a particular system should be.

South Indian Music

We are faced in South India with a most ancient and original system, which very probably has links with some of the oldest branches

of European music and definite affinities with some musical elements still found in North Africa, particularly Tunisia, where it may well be that something has remained of an ancient, - should we say Carthaginian, - culture, which once flourished there.

I believe that only when we make a technical study of Karnatic music, quite independently of the claims of some of its exponents, shall we be able gradually to find its proper place in the general history of Indian music as well as of world music and its dependence on or independence from the various systems expounded in the numerous and often contradictory layers of Sanskrit musical theory.

Folk and Classical Music

In this study it is most important to make a parallel analysis of the art music of the cities



Group of musicians in Benares around 1950. Photo by Alain Daniélou.

– or classical music as it is now somewhat wrongly called, – and the music of different ethnic groups broadly classified as folk music, though much of it represents remnants of other branches of ancient art music.

Musical Geography

The geography of music in India is as interesting as it is bewildering. We often meet side by side in the same locality musical systems which seem altogether different in origin and form and it is only when we study them and classify them adequately that we are able to have a true picture of the origin and place of the different music forms found in India today. Until then most of what we say for or against

a particular musical system remains without much proof. There is in the town of Banaras a caste of milkmen said to be the descendants of an ancient tribe, all of whose songs are built on a scale of 12 semitones which is otherwise completely unknown to the music of North India. I am sure we could find such instances almost anywhere in this country.

Representation of Intervals

There are several ways of measuring and classifying musical intervals.

Representation by ratios is the only logical one, allowing us to understand the harmonic relationship of intervals, but it does not permit a rapid appreciation of relative size, or meas-

urements. This is why other systems have been evolved. The oldest one was invented by the Chinese and is based on the decreasing powers of 3. It is not very convenient. Among the others the savarts – so called from the French physicist who advocated the system – are equal intervals based on the difference in the logarithms of the numbers forming the ratio and dividing the octave into 301 equal intervals (O. 301 being the logarithm of 2). This system is now sometimes replaced by the milli-octave or more commonly by cents which divide the octave into 1200 equal intervals. I personally always use savarts not because the inventor was French but merely because it allows direct use of logarithm tables which is most convenient if one is to do much work on subtle differences of intervals.

We hear many strong statements regarding scales and intervals. We are told that there are natural intervals and others considered artificial. This is probably true and comes from our ability to grasp some intervals as more meaningful than others, to perceive some types of ratios more clearly than others. We should not however believe that these are established and permanent facts. Such theories are at the most a guess. Indian music is theoretically based on the same type of division of the octave as is Western music. Yet both often utilise in practice noticeably distinct intervals. The fact that the tempered scale which is based on roots tends in some countries to replace proportional or harmonic scales does not necessarily imply that we are abandoning a good type of scale for a bad one, but raises the question as to if we can grasp that a series of proportional ratios corresponds to expressive values, why we cannot grasp roots in the same way. True musicology must stay very shy of any theory and avoid carefully any form of number mysticism. We shall soon enough find that most people in practice follow a division of the octave quite distinct from the one they claim to be using.

The Classification of Instruments

The development and characteristics of musical instruments, just like vocal technique, are very important elements for the study of ethnomusicology.

Many theories have been put forward to explain the origin and development of the different forms of musical instrument. We should be rather suspicious of such theories since we have no means whatever of knowing how primitive man may have behaved many thousand years ago. Kurt Sachs believes that instrumental music came from magic rituals and vocal music from the need to call to one another. Here in India we believed that it came ready-made from certain deities. Such matters, being impossible to verify, do not come within the purview of science.

Instruments are difficult to classify because of their variety. The Chinese used to divide instruments according to the material they are made of, into *kin* (metal), *che* (stone), *t'u* (earthenware), *ko* (skin), *hiên* (strings), *p'o* (gourd), *chu* (bambu) and *mh* (wood). This was not accepted by Western musicologists because their instruments are usually made of several materials. The Indian classification has been for many centuries the most logical and convenient one. It was established probably long before the *Nāṭya Śāstra* was compiled and recognizes *ghana* (gongs, cymbals, etc.), *avanaddha* (drums), *tata* (strings) and *suśira* (wind instruments).

The first reasonable classification of instruments adopted in Europe in the 19th century seems to have been the Indian one and modern classifications are not noticeably different.

The classification proposed by the Belgian Victor Mahillon (who died in 1924) is auto-phones, membranophones, chordophones and aerophones: that is instruments whose material itself produces the sound without being

stretched in any way, the autophones being now usually called idiophones; the instruments in which the sound is produced by a stretched skin or membrane are membranophones; those in which the sound-producing element is a string are chordophones; and aerophones are those in which the air vibrates.

We see easily that, in spite of these complicated names, this latest discovery of Western musicology nearly follows the ancient Indian division.

The Technique of Voice Vibration

The technique of voice production is an important element for the differentiation of musical families.

Sir Stuart Wilson gave us a most interesting and amusing account of some aspects of voice production in the West. His most qualified and beautiful demonstration was particularly interesting for us because it may help us to understand a fundamental difference of purpose between the European and the Indian singer.

Western singing is a form of chanting. It is basically an exalted way of reciting a poem, of carrying words and their meaning above the waves of the orchestra. The melodic line is the chanted flow of the sentence. The accents become the long, powerful and moving sustained notes. It is true that there is such a thing as Italian vocalisation or *bel-canto*, but this remains an occasional ornamentation of the spoken song.

In the purely modal form of music the voice is

an instrument. It develops a raga exactly as a vina or a flute would do. In the higher forms of modal music, a musician can make almost exactly the same musical development on one poem as on another. The form of the raga, the ornamentation of the song, the position of the voice are quite independent of the words. In fact I have often noted that some of the most beautiful *khyāls* of Northern India are built on meaningless syllables or on one or two old short verses whose meaning is not clear to the singer. This is why the gestures and expressions of the Indian singer follow the melodic form of the raga in the North, the rhythmic pattern in the South, but in no case the meaning of the words.

This naturally leads to a very different approach to singing and much of vocal technique is evolved according to the relative proportion of the three elements - the words, theme and rhythm, the ancient Dhatu, Matu and Tala - which are the guiding factors grouping the other elements that come into action in shaping of the voice. The extreme sensitiveness to rhythm of the Tamilian leads him to sustain a note by a repetitive rhythmical resounding of an allegedly single note, bringing into action the lowest part of the larynx which works a little as does the palm of the left hand in the sustained sound of the *mṛdaṅga*. This leads to a form of *gamaka*, very surprising at first to ears trained to purely melodic patterns of ornamentation. You can therefore observe what could be a division of vocal technique into the flute-voice where the ornament is purely melodic, the drum-voice where the nature of the orna-

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ment is essentially rhythmical, the vina-voice which is halfway between. But we also have in those parts of India, influenced by Sino-Tibetan music, the single cry where each note is dealt with as a separate entity, and we also know the chanting or speaking voice similar to that of Western countries.

This rough division may give you an idea of how an ethnomusicological survey and study of such basic things as voice production, instrumental technique, besides form, style and ornamentation of the music, may give us useful information for the building of a reasonable and sound theory of the history of Indian music and help us discover the original contribution of the different parts of India as well as its links with the music of other countries.

Ethnomusicology should play in music the part that archaeology plays in history. It gives us the positive documents through which we can verify and implement the data received from written or oral tradition.

The Problem of Notation

In this connection it may be necessary to stress the importance of an adequate system of notation.

Nowhere is there an entirely satisfactory notation system, and the purpose of notation is not always clearly understood. To learn a song from notation is not the best way to learn it, and some musicians, therefore, feel that any system is good enough provided it is simple and easy to print.

The work of the musicologist is however impossible if an adequate system of notation is not available. And the more elaborate and detailed the notation, the better his work.

Much of the work done on folk music in Europe in the last century and much of the work done even at present is practically useless as an

instrument for Ethnomusicology, that is the classification of musical families. We cannot draw any valid conclusions from a notation in 12 semitones which entirely obliterates the microtones (the *śrutis*) not only in the main theme but, and this is even more deplorable, in the ornaments.

In India where the use of microtonal intervals is so varied, so subtle, so beautiful, no one will be able to talk sense about them until an adequate system for the analysis and notation of *śrutis* and for the division of *mātrās* is not only made available but brought into common use.

India has probably the oldest system of notation in the world. Greek notation, Arabic notation and later the Western Solfa system were most probably derived from Indian notation.

In the past four centuries Europe has developed a much better and more convenient system of notation than any previously used. All the recent attempts at increasing the range and possibilities of Indian notation are imitated from the Western system. The two best-known attempts at introducing some feature of Western notation in the Indian system are those of Vishnu Digambar and V. N. Bhatkande.

These however remain rather inadequate as compared to the Western staff. The best system I have come across so far is that used by Mrs. Vidya of Madras in her collection of classical Kritis. This brings modern Indian notation to a stage closely resembling the systems used in Europe at the end of the Middle Ages. Such notation systems fall however very short of the requirements of Ethnomusicology. I do not see why Indian musicians should not take the lead and, accepting all the additions made to notation in Europe in the past four centuries, now carry this further by meeting all the requirements of Indian music and thus give a welcome lead to the notation systems used in



Cover of the Unesco Collection volume *Suryanarayana playing the South Indian Vina*, edited by Alain Daniélou in collaboration with Jacques Cloarec, published in 1974.

other countries. This obviously cannot be done until the Indian system is first brought up to date and standardized.

Need for Development of Ethnomusicology

In every country, musical theory is based on the implied assertion that the prevalent musical system is natural, superior, more ancient, etc. It is very difficult therefore to explain one form of music to people used to another form in terms of accepted musical theory. If I dared to repeat to you one tenth of what I have to listen to from Western or even North Indian musicians about Karnatic music you would turn me out of this place as a miscreant, a savage, an imperialist,

or whatever. But I must say for the sake of fairness, that I have often had to listen in Madras to long discourses as to all the alleged inferiorities of Western or North Indian music based usually on some misunderstanding of musical terms. Such an outlook is harmful to everybody. Either people imitate and that is wrong, or they deprecate and that is worse. We have to find some common ground for cultural development and understanding.

This is where Ethnomusicology can be our best platform, because it deals with facts only and can allow us to build up the basic material for musical studies irrespective of age-worn theories, while dealing with age-old music and, with its help, we can come to some posi-

tive conclusions regarding the history of the musical system in this vast land and in the ancient literature that reflects this history. We can also analyse impartially the nature of the different features used to build each particular system, and thus find out what are its essential elements and possibly the direction in which a particular system of music can develop while keeping in line with its original genius.

Practical Steps

But how can one proceed practically? How can one develop in India a good Ethnomusicology laboratory which requires recording facilities, trained personnel, collection of documents, sound-measuring equipment, etc.? It is not for me to make suggestions on such matters. I can only hope that the Music Academy may be able

to play a role in this, as in other branches of musical study, a pioneering role and that the new Academies established by the government will become aware of the important work to be done. One thing seems to me certain: unless we are able to put into modern scientific terms all the prodigious experience and invention of India in the field of music, it will not be easy to carry that knowledge beyond India's borders, nor even to keep it alive within India itself. It is my belief that the methods of Ethnomusicology may be the instrument that will bring the world to realise the greatness of the contribution of India, past and present, in the field of music, and, at the same time, may provide the means of consolidating the purest classical values and give a new impulse to the highest forms of this most precious creation of Indian genius. •



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EMBODIED KNOWING, IMAGINATION AND NEW ANIMISM

In this essay, Adrian Harris proposes that the modernist worldview that we have inherited is deeply flawed, and that animism offers a more sustainable way of being for the present time, one which is deeply relational and embodied, one which engenders a deep respect for the other-than-human world. This embodied way of knowing is nurtured by relational imagination. The exploration of these ideas is carried out through the lens of contemporary Western animist spirituality.

Introduction

Until recently the narrative of the European Enlightenment has been a largely unchallenged story of how the world is. According to this story, only a mind can know, imagination is mere fantasy, and animism is a primitive error. But it's increasingly apparent that in many ways this is a pernicious and false perspective: There are embodied ways of knowing, imagination underpins our understanding and animism may offer a more sustainable way of being. I'm going to narrate an alternative story that weaves together embodied knowing, imagination and animism revealing a tight synergistic pattern. It's vital to tell this new story, because, as a well-known Native American proverb reminds us, "Those who tell the stories rule the world".

For Francis Bacon imagination denotes "a world of fabricated reality, enchanted glasses, self-delusion, vanity and insanity"¹. Although Sartre's understanding is much more sophisticated, he still characterises imagination as "a negation of the real".²

The term 'Animism' has a most inauspicious origin in late 19th century England. Edward Tylor invented the term to describe a 'primitive' type of religion, a childish and mistaken worldview that confused inanimate matter with living beings. By characterizing indigenous peoples as 'primitive', Tylor's animism provided "an ideological supplement for the imperial project"³.

Western philosophy has marginalized the body since Plato. It suffers from what Elizabeth Grosz describes as "a profound somatophobia"⁴ and the notion of embodied knowing would have been unthinkable for Enlightenment scholars like Bacon and Descartes.

The dominant story in the world today is what we might usefully call Modernity; it is a story of disenchantment. In 1918 Max Weber charac-

terized science as striving to describe the world through a "process of disenchantment". In the disenchanted world of Modernity, "there are no mysterious incalculable forces" and there is no longer any need to "have recourse to magical means in order to master [it]". Meaning and value must also be relinquished in such a scientific world-view: "the belief that there is such a thing as the 'meaning' of the universe" must inevitably "die out at its very roots"⁵.

A hundred years later, this powerful and deep-rooted story dominates our imagination, structuring what we perceive and believe. This story tells us how success is to be measured, defines what is of value and frames our relationships with others. But it engenders a sickness of the soul. As evolutionary psychologist Bruce Charlton writes: "It is learned objectivity that creates alienation - humans are no longer embedded in a world of social relations but become estranged, adrift in a world of indifferent things"⁶.

Maimonides was a medieval philosopher whose work has been described as a precursor of psychoanalysis. In a radical shift from the accepted notion that ignorance was the root of mental illness, Maimonides suggested that "Those whose souls are ill" suffer from a dysfunctional imagination⁷. The story of disenchantment is an expression of a dysfunctional imagination. It describes a dualistic universe without intrinsic meaning where the rational mind is the only source of understanding; where value is set by market forces and relationships are defined purely by exchange. It is increasingly clear that this story is unsustainable: As we will see, it is also profoundly mistaken.

Embodied knowing

I first became aware of the importance of embodied knowing through my spiritual practice. I realised that there is a deep "knowledge



Piles Copse, Dartmoor. Photo by Adrian Harris.

held within the tissue of our bodies”⁸. Delving deeper, I discovered many contemporary thinkers who had concluded that the mind is embodied and shaped by our experiences in the world ⁹.

The map of embodied ways of knowing is complex but we can identify some primary features. Embodied - or tacit - knowing includes subjective insights, intuitions, hunches and the “bodily sensed knowledge” that Gendlin calls the “felt sense”¹⁰. Embodied knowing is largely non-verbal, pre-reflective and experiential, which led Polanyi to conclude that “we know more than we can tell”¹¹. It’s a “knowledge in the hands”¹² that’s situated and grounded in practical activity. This kind of knowing is

familiar to indigenous peoples. For the Ojibwa “knowledge is grounded in experience, understood as a coupling of the movement of one’s awareness to the movement of aspects of the world “¹³. Embodied knowing is relational: We are not detached observers of an objective separate world, but active participants within it. As Bourdieu puts it, “[w]hat is ‘learned by the body’ is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is”¹⁴.

Embodied imagination

Embodied knowing is tightly enmeshed with imagination, and we would be unable to make sense of the world without imagery and meta-

phor¹⁵. As the philosopher Peter Strawson notes, imagination is involved in activities ranging from a “scientist seeing a pattern in phenomena which has never been seen before ... to Blake seeing eternity in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower”¹⁶. This is apparent in the work of Barbara McClintock, who won a Nobel Prize for her genetics research. Her insights emerged from a profound relationship with the plants she studied which was facilitated by embodied imagination. McClintock stressed the importance of having a “feeling for the organism” and opined that a scientist must “ensoul” whatever they were researching to reach a genuine understanding¹⁷. The plants that McClintock studied were not objects, but subjects.

McClintock explained her exceptional skill with a microscope in terms of her imaginative process: “when I look at a cell, I get down in that cell and look around”¹⁸ (Keller). This is a powerful example of what Merleau-Ponty calls “the imaginary texture of the real”¹⁹; the way in which imagination is at work in our perception of the everyday world. Imagination weaves together what is immediately presented to our sensory awareness and what lies just beyond it into the gestalt that is the world as experienced. This enables us “to shape the reality before us by regarding it and changing it in new ways, integrating possibilities with what is given”²⁰.

The disenchanted model of reason presented by Weber seeks to exclude meaning and value. Such a model is a fantasy; we understand the world through imagination and make sense of it through stories.

Places like this ancient copse on Dartmoor create a sensorium soaked with unspoken meaning. Imagination draws me beyond raw sensory experience into the presence of other-than-human persons: Knowing that presence profoundly deepens my relationship with this precious patch of land. David Abram’s descrip-

tion of his fieldwork experience offers a good example of this process:

When a magician spoke of a power or “presence” lingering in the corner of his house, I learned to notice the ray of sunlight that was then pouring through a chink in the roof, illuminating a column of drifting dust, and to realize that that column of light was indeed a power ... influencing the whole mood of the room; although I had not consciously seen it before, it had already been structuring my experience.²¹

In the case of relationships, seeing makes it so: A relationship exists simply because we have identified it. When embodied imagination brings forth an awareness that we are in a relationship with other-than-human persons, relational animism naturally emerges. Crucially, this is a question of *practice*, not belief: The question of whether animism is empirically ‘true’ is irrelevant when we’re considering the relational dimension: Seeing a relationship with another being creates it.

Animism

Evolutionary psychologist Bruce Charlton suggests that animism is “spontaneous, the ‘natural’ way of thinking for humans”²². We are born animists, but that intuitive understanding is taken from us as soon as we learn to name it. Robin Wall Kimmerer fears that “the language of animacy teeters on extinction - not just for Native peoples, but for everyone. Our toddlers speak of plants and animals as if they were people, extending to them self and intention and compassion - until we teach them not to. We quickly retrain them and make them forget. When we tell them that the tree is not a who, but an it, we make that maple an object; we put a barrier between us, absolving ourselves of moral responsibility and opening the door to exploitation”²³.

Despite the power of denial, a deep embodied knowing of the animate world remains. Under the right conditions that ancient knowing can sprout into life. Like a seed long buried in the dark that awakens to the touch of Spring, animism flowers with a little nurturing. Stephanie Gottlob – an improvisational movement artist - hadn't ever heard of animism and though she loved nature she didn't think of it as being filled with sentience. But that was before she took her work into the wild. Gottlob spent weeks living in some of the most remote parts of the world and when she began to dance in wild landscapes something unexpected happened: "all of a sudden, that entity which is alive and active starts infiltrating into the improvisation". Aspects of nature – perhaps a tree or a bird – improvise with her and this is an embodied process: "there's nature in your body and the animism you might potentially feel is going to come through sort of a *physical* relationship with nature" ²⁴. The embodied relationality of animism that Gottlob highlights is fundamental and it reveals the deep flaw in Tylor's conception of animism as an erroneous *belief* system. Tylor was looking at indigenous cultures through the distorting lens of Modernity, which is partly why scholars and practitioners increasingly talk about a 'new animism' which draws on recent ethnography and philosophy to reclaim the term. Tylor's animism is based on a dualistic, hierarchical story about a world where there are entitled humans and the rest merely provide resources for our use. In contrast, the new animism "encourages humans to see the world as a

diverse community of living persons worthy of particular kinds of respect,"²⁵. New animism challenges the dualistic ontology of Modernity which divides the world into culture and nature, subject and object, animate and inanimate. It is "relational, embodied, eco-activist and often 'naturalist' rather than metaphysical"²⁶.

Animism isn't about what is believed but how the world is experienced. It's "a condition of being alive to the world, characterized by a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness, in perception and action, to an environment that is always in flux" ²⁷. I suggest that it can best be understood as an embodied way of knowing that underpins how people live practically in the world; hunting, farming, navigating etc.

Animism is not only found in indigenous cultures; it is a living practice for some who live in contemporary Western societies. This is not another sad example of the Western appropriation of indigenous culture: Animism doesn't need to be 'imported' or copied from elsewhere because it emerges quite spontaneously from the experience of living close to the land. My PhD research studied Eco-Paganism, a nature-based spirituality that has environmental activism as a foundational practice. This earth-based spirituality emerged from an eclectic mix of Wicca, environmental activism and ecofeminism, spiced up with the folk Romanticism of the free festival movement. British Eco-Paganism first flourished with the emergence of the 'Donga Tribe' at Twyford Down in 1991. The Tribe began when two young

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The Win Tun Dragon. Photo by Debbie Pardo.

travellers set up a protest camp on the Down, which was threatened with destruction by a new motorway. Donga Tribe Eco-Paganism was earthy, characterized by spontaneous and unstructured rituals with a wild Dionysian edge. The Tribe had a strong connection to the *genius loci* and mythical stories were told of the ancient Earth energy of the Win Tun Dragon which lay slumbering in the landscape.

Although I was involved with the Twyford Down protest, my research fieldwork began much later in 2005, when I joined fellow Eco-Pagans who were living in protest camps. These camps were often set up on land that was under threat from road building and some existed for years. Living on the land for weeks at a time can catalyse an animist spiritual connection and many UK Eco-Pagans developed a deep connection to the places they

defended. For one activist it “was like being connected to a great river, the source of all life ... and years of separation between us and the Land were falling away like an old skin”²⁸. Tami and Ceilidh lived on the same woodland road protest site:

We had both awoken to the land around us and felt the calling ringing in our ears, as though we’d been asleep a very long time ... It was the same with Ed, who had had some kind of experience with the oak at Fairmile and had known, once he’d returned to his hometown, that he had to go back. Once you’d felt it, there was no mistaking it.²⁹

These contemporary animists developed a sacred relationship with the *genius loci* that was grounded in embodied knowing and imagination.



Defending the trees: living close to the land on a road protest site in 2006. Photo by Adrian Harris.

Communication with the *genius loci* is sometimes facilitated via an embodied felt sense. Zoe* describes her respectful approach to a sacred site:

Halfway up the hill, there's an old hawthorn tree. So I would always stop there as I felt she was the guardian of the outer, ring. I would have to stop there, ask her permission, and then wait for the answer. And the answer would come in a bodily sense. It's like a sense of permission in my body.³⁰

An encounter with the *genius loci* can be life-changing. Before Lauren* started visiting protest sites she was "a very logical person" but one night she had a powerful experience "that really kicked me off with this whole spirituality Earth bit".

I was one of a small group of protestors living

on a wooded parkland in Southern England. It was threatened by a road-building project and at the time of the events I'll describe, we'd been living on the site for several months. We'd built tree houses, a communal cooking space and a compost toilet. Lauren was a retired school-teacher who'd been drawn to the camp by her love of the place. Although Lauren respected the Eco-Pagan beliefs of many of those on the camp, she was resolutely secular. But one night, Lauren's rational world-view was shaken to its roots. She'd enjoyed a relaxed evening chatting with some Eco-Pagan friends, and when everyone had gone to bed she wandered down to the compost toilet, which consisted of a toilet seat on a wooden box with a makeshift curtain around it. The toilet was at the far end of the camp, half hidden amongst a small grove of trees. I'll let Lauren's words tell you what

happened next:

And as I sat there, I saw what I thought was a man. And I didn't realise it was anything at the time - I just thought it was somebody peeping at me while I was weeing, and my immediate thought was absolute annoyance and anger that somebody could look at me. When I stood up I realised that it wasn't - it was this figure, this vision of the Green Man looking at me and it was as though it was just *calling* me, and I just felt frightened - shaky. This huge figure, and I can only call it the Green Man.³¹

Lauren was very shaken and when she found that I was still awake, she asked me to come and see the "figure in the tree by the toilet". We went back there together and she now saw the figure as not frightening but protective. She said she believed the Earth is drawing people to protect Herself. I laughed, as she said in the very same breath that she wasn't spiritual!

Lauren saw the figure as a spiritual presence that was defending the land and who was bringing her a message. While it would have been upsetting if it had been a human leering at her, the fact that this was a spiritual encounter was much more disturbing. This experience inspired Lauren to become more engaged with nature-based spirituality and her sensitivity to the power of place became significantly heightened. When the protest ended, Lauren sold her house so that she could set up a woodland community.

Animism is common amongst Ecopagans and is also apparent in ecopsychology, notably in the work of David Abram and Theodore Roszak. Roszak, whose 1992 book was the first to use the term, writes that:

Ecopsychology seeks to recover the child's innately animistic quality of experience in functionally 'sane' adults. To do this, it turns to many sources, among them the

traditional healing techniques of primary people, nature mysticism..., experience of wilderness, the insights of Deep Ecology. It adapts these to the goal of creating the ecological ego.³²

Ecopsychologist Andy Fisher provides an example of how a conversation with what he calls "nonhuman others" is facilitated through an embodied felt sense:

I feel a sudden resonance, where a message unmistakably comes through, as when a Raven flew onto a nearby branch of a hemlock to tell me who is boss and whose world I should be paying attention to. Such experiences need no justification beyond themselves for meaning is transmitted in them, and I feel a clear change in my existence, in the way I sense things following them.³³

Such experiences can become part of daily life and Fisher notes that "[t]he more I am able to attune myself to the natural world the more I discover that it is correspondingly attuned to me."³⁴

It is the affective and relational quality of imagination that facilitated Lauren's meeting with the Green Man and that enabled Andy Fisher to hear Raven's message. Jungian psychotherapist James Hillman opines that spirituality and imagination are synonymous: Spirituality offers us a particular perspective on the world and it is imagination that provides the metaphorical lens to shift our view.

Animism was framed as 'a mistake' by Tylor because he suffered from a dysfunctional imagination. Spending time living alongside the other-than-human world tends to nurture our imaginative perception and thereby our animist awareness. However, very few of us have the opportunity to spend months living in a less urban, 'wilder' place. Are there practices that might help us access the "innately

animistic quality of experience” that Roszak identified as the goal of ecopsychology?

My PhD identified several practices that supported Eco-Pagans in their relationship with the other-than-human world. I call these the *embodied pathways of connection*. “There are many such pathways and I will only touch on two of them here. Perhaps the most obvious example is the power of nature connection and this has been my primary focus in the examples above. The felt sense is also significant for many, including Zoe and Fisher. The latter concludes that the felt sense is “the place where we discover the aims or intentions, the needs or claims, of the soul itself (the soul being the personification of the unconscious)”³⁵.

Conclusion

Frater opines that “[t]he colonization of imagination is a collective cultural amnesia, one in which we have forgotten what we have forgotten, a loss of not just a theoretical understanding of animistic imagination but a whole way of being and acting in the world”³⁶. His

assertion hints at the deep parallels between Francis Bacon’s distrust of imagination and Tylor’s colonialist portrayal of animism as ‘primitive’. Both are mistaken and rooted in the same dualistic ideology. But whoever controls the story, controls the world: The story of disenchantment is one story, and animism is quite another. Both engage with the world as it is, emphasizing some aspects and concealing others. It is imagination that gives both stories life and there is a choice to be made about which we take as our own. The Native American novelist N. Scott Momaday avers that we need “to imagine who and what we are with respect to the earth and sky”³⁷. Frater claims that “perceptions are not facts that point to material objects but malleable impressions, one of many ways in which we can imagine self and world”³⁸. If that’s true – and all that I’ve said here suggests that it is – then we can truly re-enchant the world. We can intentionally shift our perception from the story of disenchantment of Cartesian Modernity to an animist story of community. •

* Pseudonyms are used for these research participants.

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Design: Valentina Barsotti / [Takk.studio](https://takk.studio)

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