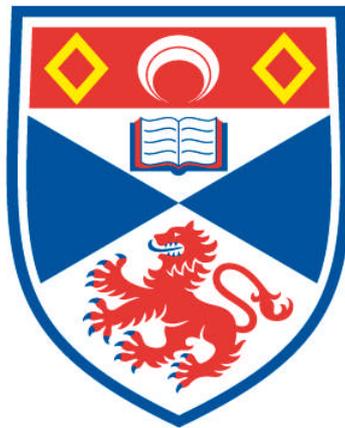


**OVERHEARING:
HINDU & CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON ARTISTRY**

Emily K. Hearn

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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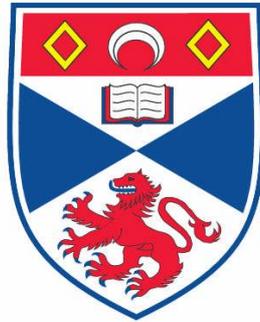
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Overhearing:
Hindu & Christian Perspectives on Artistry

Emily K. Hearn



This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD at the

University of St Andrews

St Mary's College

Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts

January 2014

~ DECLARATIONS ~

1. Candidate's declarations:

I, Emily K. Hearn, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2006, and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in July 2007; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between September 2006 and January 2014.

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~ ABSTRACT ~

This thesis is concerned with the hypothesis that an intellectual conversation between Christian and Hindu traditions on questions of aesthetic concern may not only prove mutually illuminating as such but also touch obliquely upon matters of religious and theological concern without exciting the defensive response often posed by more familiar strategies of inter-faith 'dialogue'. It seeks to establish the existence of sufficient conditions for such a conversation within the respective traditions.

The Introduction considers the relevant model of 'conversation' distinguishing it from other forms of encounter between religious traditions. It proceeds by identifying three shared concerns: freedom and constraint, aesthetic experience and religious encounters, and the relationship between the material artwork and its significance.

The first three chapters address them by examining various elements in Hindu traditions, including a detailed treatment of the *Śilpaśāstras*, a comprehensive consideration of the concept of *rasa* and its relation to religious experience, and an exploration of the role of the senses in scriptural traditions, the importance of Form and the value of the art object as a devotional aid. Finally it outlines the notion *darśan*, of seeing and being seen by a deity through a material image.

The last three chapters address them by examining the work of Christian theologians including Dorothy Sayers on Art as Idea, exploring bequeathed traditions in iconography and the music of John Tavener, and expounding Tolkien's category of 'sub-creation'. It considers the work of David Brown, Richard Viladesau, John Ruskin, Frank Burch Brown and Abraham Kuyper who span a putative spectrum of equating aesthetic and religious experience at one end and strictly demarcating between them at the other end. It explores the relationship of the physical art object with its spiritual significance in the work of Dorothy Sayers, John Carey, Rowan Williams, David Brown and Trevor Hart.

In Memoriam

Jackie Hearn
January 1948 – February 2008

Hilda Denton
May 1918 – December 2012

~ ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ~

This thesis would never have moved beyond the realms of wild imaginings were it not for the vote of confidence provided in the form of financial backing from the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the University of St Andrews which allowed me to join the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts at St Mary's College to explore my research interest, map a thesis and ultimately sculpt it into its present form. The course of any research, however, is never quite so smooth and there have been a significant number of marked undulations in the terrain of my own journey. There is no doubt that without the support of a select few I would have been left stranded.

Paul Scaringi and Mark Johnson have shared their own research journeys with me, lessened the isolation of my own research experience and most of all become good friends.

Tracy Niven, my job share partner at the University Chaplaincy for the last two years, has not only compensated for those manifold occasions when I have arrived at the office bleary-eyed and distracted, but she has done so with patience, understanding and humour.

Dr Jonathan Nixon has been an unfailing source of support. He has given me time, he has listened (and more importantly heard), he has understood, been patient and compassionate, and repeatedly reminded me to inhabit the here and now. For all of this, I am extremely grateful and feel incredibly fortunate.

The Revd. Prof. Trevor Hart has graciously filled many roles throughout the course of my research which have extended way beyond the remit of that which he subscribed to in agreeing to supervise my project. His sharp intellect and seemingly encyclopaedic mind have proved invaluable and he has borne my relative ignorance gladly. His input in shaping this thesis has been but the tip of the iceberg for he has served me equally well as minister, counsellor and friend. He has been unwavering in his patience, he has given me reassurance in abundance, and he has believed in both me and my project at times when I have severely lacked in both. Furthermore, Trevor, Rachel, Jonathan, Naomi and Deborah, have welcomed me into their home and family with open arms and have been there for me when it really mattered.

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~ KEY TEXTS ~

ABBREVIATIONS AND EDITIONS

Abbreviations as below will be used in footnotes throughout, followed by page numbers in parentheses.

Abh *Abhilaṣitārthacintāmaṇi*

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The Technique and Theory of Indian Painting." *Technical Studies in the Field of Fine Arts* III (1934-1935): 59-89.

Abhin. *Abhinavābharatī*

Subodhchandra Mukerjee, ed. *The Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata. Chapter Six - Rasādhyāyaḥ - on the Sentiments. With the Abhinavābharatī – a Commentary by Abhinavagupta.* Calcutta, 1926.

AP *Agni Purāṇa*

Translated by N. Gangadharan. Vol. 27 Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology, Series eds. G. P. Bhatt and J. L. Shastri. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 1998.

ApaPr *Aparājitapṛcchā*

L.M. Dubey, ed. *Aparājitapṛcchā: A Critical Study.* Allahabad: Laksmi Publications, 1987.

BG *Bhagavad Gītā*

Translated by Juan Mascaro. London: Penguin, 1962.

BP *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

Translated by G. V. Tagare. Vol. 11 Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology Series, Series eds. G. P. Bhatt and J. L. Shastri. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Ltd, 2007.

CofN *Citralakṣaṇa of Nagnajit*

B.N. Goswamy, and A. L. Dahmen-Dallapiccola, eds. *An Early Document of Indian Art: The 'Citralakṣaṇa of Nagnajit'.* Manohar, 1976.

Daśarūpa *Daśarūpa*

Dhanamjaya. *The Daśarūpa: A Treatise on Hindu Dramaturgy.* Translated by George C. O. Haas Columbia University Indo-Iranian Series. Vol. 7. New York, 1912.

DL *Dhvanyāloka*
DL.loc *Dhvanyāloka-locana*

J. Moussaieff Masson, and M.V. Patwardhan. "The *Dhvanyāloka* and the *Dhvanyālokalocana*: A Translation of the Fourth Uddyota, Pt. 1." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 97, no. 3 (1977): 285-304.

J. Moussaieff Masson and M.V. Patwardhan. "The *Dhvanyāloka* and the *Dhvanyālokalocana*: A Translation of the Fourth Uddyota, Pt 2." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 97, no. 4 (1977): 423-440.

Mahābhārata Mahābhārata

Mahābhārata Critical Edition with Pratika Index. Poona, India: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1923-1972.

MP *Matsya Purāṇa*

Vasudeva S. Agrawala, *Matsya Purāṇa, A Study: An Exposition of the Ancient Purāṇa Vidya*. Ramnagar: All-India Kashiraj Trust, 1963.

NS *Nāṭyaśāstra*

Nāṭyaśāstra ascribed to Bharata-Muni: A Treatise on Ancient Hindu Dramaturgy and Histrionics. Translated by Manomohan Ghosh. 4 vols. Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies. Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office. Reprint, 2007.

RV *Ṛg Veda*

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty., ed. *The Rig Veda: An Anthology*. London: Penguin Books, 1981.

SD *Sāhitya –Darpaṇa*

Sāhitya –Darpaṇa or Mirror of Composition of Viśvanátha. Translated by J.R Ballantyne and Pramadá Dása Mitra. 2nd ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1994.

SS *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra*

Sudarshan Kumar Sharma, ed., *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra of Bhojadeva (Paramara Ruler of Dhara): An Ancient Treatise on Architecture: An Introduction, Sanskrit Text, English Translation and Notes*, 2 vols., Parimal Sanskrit Series 91. Delhi: Parimal Publications, 2007.

- SK* *Sāṅkhya Kārikā*
- John Davies, ed. *Hindū Philosophy, the Sāṅkhya Kārikā of Iśwara Kṛishṇa: An Exposition of the System of Kapila with an Appendix on the Nyāya and Vaiśeshika Systems*. London: Trübner and co., Ludgate Hill, 1881.
- SR* *Śilparatna*
- A.K. Bhattacharya, ed., *Citralakṣaṇa: A Treatise on Indian Painting*. Calcutta, Saraswat Library, 1974.
- SP* *Śilpa Prakāśa*
- Śilpa Prakāśa*. Translated by Alice Boner and Sadāśiva Rath Śarmā. Leiden: E.J Brill, 1966.
- Suk* *Sukranīti*
- Lallanji Gopal, "The 'Śukranīti' - a Nineteenth Century Text." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 25, no. 1/3 (1962): 524-556.
- Suk¹* *Sukranīti*
- Translated by Benoy Kumar Sarkar. *Sukranīti or Sukrāchāryya's System of Morals*, Vol. XIII The Sacred Books of the Hindus, ed. Major B. D. Basu. Allahabad: Sudhindranatha Vasu, 1914.
- VP* *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*
- Parul Dave Mukherji, ed., *The Citrasūtra of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2001.
- VP¹* *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*
- Stella Kramrisch, ed., *The Viṣṇudharmottaram (Part III): A Treatise on Indian Painting and Image Making*. Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1924.
- VP²* *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*
- Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, ed., 'Viṣṇudharmottara, Chapter XLI' *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 52, no. 1 (1932): 13-21.
- VSU* *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*
- Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad: The Essence of Form in Sacred Art*. Translated by Alice Boner, Sadasiva Rath Sarma and Bettina Bäumer. 3rd rev ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Ltd, 1996.

~ A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND PRONUNCIATION ~

Indic languages do not distinguish between upper and lower case letters, however capital letters are used in this thesis to indicate proper nouns, titles of scriptures/books and where English convention denotes the use of a capital letter, ie. the start of a sentence. All anglicised Sanskrit will be italicised and retain the appropriate diacritics, but only capitalised as per the convention outlined above. Citations will retain the formatting of the original source which means that in those instances anglicised Sanskrit will not always be italicised, capitalised or rendered identically to my own formatting throughout this thesis. Indian names have diacritics applied where relevant and are not italicised.

To assist the reader in pronunciation, the following guidance may be helpful:

Ś, ś, ṣ are pronounced 'sh'

Ṛ, ṛ are pronounced 'ri'

ā is pronounced 'aa' (a line above a vowel extends the length)

In place of the Gregorian calendar attributions of BC and AD, this thesis uses BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era) throughout.

~ INTRODUCTION ~

‘By a creative conversation of traditions, one can gain new insights [...] One tradition does not have to be rejected, to accept another. Nor need one just artificially graft parts of one tradition on to another in a way which is untrue to both. There can be genuine interchange, as each stresses aspects the other has under emphasized.’¹

Local communities are becoming increasingly religiously diverse and perceptions of people of faiths other than our own are often unhelpfully skewed by negative media portrayals which can serve to breed a degree of suspicion. When stereotypes remain unchallenged, and over time mutate, this can result in a guarded retreat at the cost of a deepened faith perspective. Furthermore, if Christians are to take seriously Jesus’ exhortation to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ then it is a religious imperative to seek fresh and creative forms of interfaith conversation.² A report commissioned by the Hindu Christian Forum UK entitled ‘Bridges and Barriers to Hindu Christian Dialogue’, which was born from a ‘listening exercise’ intended to inform the future of constructive Hindu-Christian dialogue, incorporated suggestions from both Christian and Hindu representatives of the potential ‘value of “visual symbols” and “traditions of image making”’ for worthwhile dialogue.³ This thesis seeks to test the hypothesis that an encounter between Christian and Hindu traditions on questions of aesthetic concern might not only be a feasible, but also a fruitful mode of engagement which can play host to conversational exchange at multiple points and in often unexpected ways. It is

¹ Keith Ward, *A Vision to Pursue: Beyond the Crisis in Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 213.

² Cf. Mark 12:31

³ Jessica Frazier, ed., *Bridges and Barriers to Hindu Christian Relations, A Report by the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies commissioned by the Hindu Christian Forum, UK* (Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies: Oxford, 2011), 9.

shaped by an openness to the possibility of reciprocal illumination through points of convergence and divergence alike. 'Relationships must be able to exist regardless of disagreements and different perspectives, drawing benefits from that diversity rather than resisting it.'⁴ Urban Dialogues is a public arts initiative hosted by the Three Faiths Forum which seeks to bridge cultural divides by bringing artists from both faith and non-religious backgrounds together in a practical setting which culminates in an annual exhibition showcasing their work. Last year academics from Kings Cultural Institute were invited to work alongside artists to explore how the academy might inform artistic practice and in turn how art might inspire new forms of thinking about faith.⁵ My own project is concerned with the theoretical underpinning to such an exchange between Hindu and Christian traditions of artistry. More traditional forms of interfaith encounter have taken many shapes over the course of the last one hundred years or so, as has the theological debate surrounding it, which makes it important from the outset to set the parameters for what follows.

It seems helpful, at least in the first instance, to set about a process of negative identification by eliminating the kinds of project that this one is not. Familiar names in the field of Christian-Hindu encounter are those of Bede Griffiths and Henri Le Saux (later known as Abhishiktananda), who grew to notoriety through their respective attempts to join their Christian faith with certain mystical elements of Hindu philosophy and in both cases this led to establishing ashrams in India dedicated to the same.⁶ Theirs were journeys of physical transplantation to India and the assimilation of strands from both traditions into their own faith. There are others, including Aleaz and Appasamy, who are Indian by birth and have sought to discover and subsequently expound an

⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁵ *Three Faiths Forum, 3FF Urban Dialogues and Collaborations with Kings College London*, <http://www.3ff.org.uk/arts/collaborations-2013.php> accessed on 3 August 2014.

⁶ Abhishiktananda, *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point*, Revd ed. (Delhi: ISPCK, 1976); Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West* (London: Fount, 1983).

indigenous Indian Christian theology using the Indian context and the Hindu religious and philosophical traditions as a starting point.⁷ Whilst both of these broad categories of Christian-Hindu encounter have been influential in the formation of my own research interests, neither reflect the nature of what I am proposing here.

Martin Forward, a Methodist minister with a keen interest in interfaith ‘dialogue’, argues that we are ‘becoming inter-religious people’ by virtue of the fact that we live in contexts which are increasingly coloured by diverse religious influences.⁸ This theme is taken up by Schmidt-Leukel in what he calls ‘Multireligious Identity’⁹ which builds on the idea that everyone can claim a number of different identities at once (‘British’, ‘Daughter’ etc.) and expands to consider the possibility that the same might be possible of religious identity thus allowing for a ‘hyphenated religious identity.’¹⁰ Berthrong expounds a similar idea under the rubric of ‘Multiple Religious Participation’¹¹ although he advocates a rootedness in the Christian tradition which is in turn receptive to the influence of other religious ideas resulting, perhaps, in that which is termed by Wilfred Cantwell Smith as ‘Christian, plus.’¹² Whilst much scholarly work has been dedicated to the defence of syncretism, my own concern here is not dedicated to proposing a conjunction of Hindu and Christian traditions, either with or without the hyphen, but there are nevertheless important elements to be drawn out here. In light of ‘the

⁷ For an excellent overview of the broad context of Indian Christian theology see Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1991). For a more detailed exposé of these writers’ individual contributions see K. P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought through Advaita Vedanta* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996); K. P. Aleaz, *An Indian Jesus from Śaṅkara’s Thought* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1997); A. J. Appasamy, *Christianity as Bhakti Marga* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society for India, 1930).

⁸ Martin Forward, *Inter-Religious Dialogue: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 119.

⁹ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Transformation by Integration: How Inter-Faith Encounter Changes Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 46-47.

¹⁰ In an interview Julius Lipner, an acclaimed Hindu scholar, referred to himself as a ‘Hindu-Catholic’ following which his interviewer Martin Forward coined the phrase ‘hyphenated religious identity.’ See Forward, *Inter-Religious Dialogue: A Short Introduction*, 119.

¹¹ John H. Berthrong, *The Divine Deli: Religious Identity in the North American Cultural Mosaic* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 35.

¹² Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 125.

perspectival nature of all our knowing,¹³ this thesis recognises that it is impossible to suppose we can ever entirely transcend the particularity of our individual set of givens (nationality, race etc.) and that any attempt to surrender religious identity in order to engage with another religious perspective is not only unrealistic but unhelpful to any interfaith encounter.

The field of interfaith theology has largely centred on the notion of ‘dialogue.’ As this term has expanded to encompass a diverse range of approaches, however, it requires some ‘semantic tidying up’ in order for it to remain a useful category.¹⁴ Hart outlines ‘[a] dialogue generally has some clearly specified goal or outcome [...] and very often is directed specifically towards establishing increased levels of shared agreement around core issues.’¹⁵ Christian theologies of interfaith dialogue have too often been directed towards a missiological goal in which the anticipated shared agreement is a prelude to conversion to Christ and thus ‘dialogue’ constitutes an end in itself.¹⁶ This idea is stated by Forward in a slightly different form when he distinguishes between ‘*di*-logue’ and ‘*dia*-logue’ where ‘*di*’ stems from the Greek root meaning ‘two’ and ‘*dia*’ as a preposition meaning ‘through.’¹⁷ Thus ‘*dia*-logue,’ he argues, ‘signifies worldviews being argued *through* to significant and potentially transformative conclusions’ and, he continues, ‘involves a much more consequential encounter.’¹⁸ This is Forward’s chosen framework for what he subsequently goes on to unpack and it displays the hallmarks of that which is outlined above, namely that it is directed towards a specified goal and it is an end in itself – ‘transformative conclusion.’ Also of importance to draw out is that ‘*dia*-logue’ so defined is *entered into* argumentatively thus rendering it highly likely

¹³ Trevor A. Hart, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 63. Original italics.

¹⁴ Eric J. Sharpe, "The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue," in *Truth and Dialogue: The Relationship between World Religions*, ed. John Hick (London: Sheldon Press, 1974), 91.

¹⁵ Trevor Hart, *Between the Image and the Word: Theological Engagements with Imagination, Language and Literature* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013), 110-11.

¹⁶ David Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative* (London: SCM Press, 1988), 46.

¹⁷ Forward, *Inter-Religious Dialogue: A Short Introduction*, 12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Original italics.

that defence mechanisms will be jolted into life and inevitably shape the nature, and influence the course, of any subsequent encounter. The nature of my own thesis is nearer to Forward's rejected definition of '*di*-logue' which he elaborates 'could mean *two* people conversing about a worldview; maybe amicably, maybe not; maybe with results, maybe not.'¹⁹ This type of exchange centres on conversation and entails 'a form of personal vulnerability in the face of otherness' which, Hart argues, is close to the heart of Christian identity.²⁰ Importantly it does not preclude argument, but it does not enter into a conversation argumentatively: 'Argument may be necessary' but '[a]rgument is not synonymous with conversation.'²¹ Here Michael Oakeshott's account of conversation is helpful:

In a conversation the participants are not engaged in an inquiry or a debate; there is no 'truth' to be discovered, no proposition to be proved, no conclusion sought. They are not concerned to inform, to persuade, or to refute one another, and therefore the cogency of their utterances does not depend upon their all speaking in the same idiom; they may differ without disagreeing. [...] [A] conversation may have passages of argument and a speaker is not forbidden to be demonstrative.²²

Dialogue and conversation overlap in Ian Markham's theology of engagement in which he recognises that conversation will, at times, entail argument, but he proposes that whilst engagement as a model does involve a commitment (as its name suggests) it 'does not commit us in advance to the precise form of engagement involved, but leaves it to develop as appropriate.'²³ Markham builds on the comparative theology of Keith Ward²⁴ and George Newlands' theology of generosity²⁵ in outlining a theology built on

¹⁹ Ibid. Original italics.

²⁰ Hart, *Between the Image and the Word*, 111.

²¹ David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1987), 23.

²² Michael Oakeshott, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), 489.

²³ Ian Markham, *A Theology of Engagement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 11.

²⁴ Keith Ward's comparative theology is based on an understanding that religious interaction is a necessary and vital part of theology. He advocates that theology is a 'pluralistic discipline' in which 'people of differing beliefs can co-operate, discuss, argue and converse.' Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 45. For overview see 3-49.

²⁵ George Newlands, *Generosity and the Christian Future* (London: SPCK, 1997).

the basic premise that engagement across traditions is possible within a form of critical realism and on the assumption that ‘all traditions are in the business of making sense of the complexity of the world.’²⁶ His approach also relies on the pre-condition that ‘it is possible to describe the world in better or worse ways.’²⁷ Markham argues that Christian history demonstrates how an engaged theology ‘ready and willing to learn from non-Christian sources’ has influenced the Church’s self-understanding and doctrinal formulations.²⁸ Central to his model of engagement is Markham’s conviction that ‘it is an encounter that subsequently shapes the theology itself,’ which means that he too rejects Lochhead’s proposal of dialogue as an end in itself. Markham reads Lochhead’s concept of dialogue as focussing on the attitude before dialogue which, as we have already noted above, involves a pre-conceived mission focus. Instead Markham situates his theology of engagement nearer to Leonard Swidler’s conception of dialogue. Swidler states: ‘[w]e enter into dialogue [...] primarily so that we can learn, change and grow, not so that we can force change on the other.’²⁹ This is central to Markham’s model, which anticipates both ‘reciprocal illumination’ and ‘transformation of [...] current theological understanding.’³⁰ Markham distinguishes his own interpretation of engagement from those outlined by Stanley Hauerwas, who presents an account in which the church possesses clear interpretive strategies for understanding itself *prior* to engagement, and Michael Banner who defines his own Christian tradition by situating it in relation to that of secular theorists. Markham argues that both of these treat engagement as ‘location’ in which, in the former at least, engagement amounts to judgement.³¹ Markham’s model of engagement posits that ‘engagement with non-Christian sources can and should actually shape the church’s interpretive categories for

²⁶ Markham, *A Theology of Engagement*, 15, 17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁹ Leonard Swidler, *After the Absolute: The Dialogical Future of Religious Reflections* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 3, cited in Markham, *A Theology of Engagement*, 12.

³⁰ Markham, *A Theology of Engagement*, 9, 12.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 13-15.

understanding itself.’³² For my own purposes Markham’s view would benefit from a degree of tempering here for whilst I think it is unhelpful to constrain the possibilities of ‘engagement,’ it seems almost impossible to enter any such encounter without some grasp, however limited, of the contours of one’s current faith tradition and associated interpretive strategies.

Markham outlines three types of engagement: assimilation, resistance and overhearing. Assimilation and resistance can self evidently be situated at opposite ends of a putative spectrum. Markham defines assimilation as the largely uncritical ‘*constructive use of a category or, more often, a set of categories, from a non-Christian source*’ and resistance as ‘*when a theologian decides that a certain approach, albeit tempting for various cultural reasons, should be rejected as incompatible with Christian revelation.*’³³ Most relevant for my own purposes here however is Markham’s third category ‘overhearing’ which he defines as ‘*when a theologian finds significant illumination from the arguments and positions of theologians within another religious tradition.*’³⁴ This is often a subtle form of engagement arising from observation, participation and conversation which can involve, as outlined above, both questioning and argument. Whilst examples of this kind of engagement are difficult to demonstrate, Markham nevertheless posits that it is promoted by the Christian conviction that God’s Holy Spirit is at work everywhere and across all cultures. On this, he cites D’Costa:

The doctrine of the Spirit [...] allows Christians to be aware of God’s self disclosure within the world’s religions, and through this process of learning, enrich its own self-understanding. Without listening to this testimony, Christians cease to be faithful to their own calling as Christians, in being inattentive to God.³⁵

³² Ibid., 13.

³³ Ibid., 49. Original italics.

³⁴ Ibid. Original italics.

³⁵ Gavin D’Costa, "Christ, the Trinity, and Religious Plurality," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralist Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 23, cited in Markham, *A Theology of Engagement*, 61.

The model of engagement proposed in this thesis builds on the understanding of ‘*dialogue*’ as two traditions conversing about a worldview and allows for the possibility that this might entail an element of questioning as well as argument, although pivotally this is to be distinguished from entering into engagement argumentatively. It affords observation a key role alongside Markham’s category of ‘overhearing,’ but embraces this from within a context of rootedness in a tradition whilst being open to the possibility of shared insight and a transformation of theological perspective and interpretive strategies. ‘[I]n [conversation] different universes of discourse meet, acknowledge each other and enjoy an oblique relationship which neither requires nor forecasts their being assimilated to one another.’³⁶ This inevitably ‘entail[s] a form of personal vulnerability in the face of otherness’ which comes with a degree of risk.³⁷ This degree of risk is considerably heightened when the topic over which any encounter is focussed concerns central theological doctrines and creedal formulae, particularly where this involves the sensitive topic of salvation. Too often encounters between faith traditions are entered into unequally and one or other can feel obliged, or is pressured, to keep ‘the party line,’ which impedes constructive debate, leading them ‘to be staged and carefully structured rather than open-ended and spontaneous.’³⁸ There are a number of commendable pieces of scholarly research focussing on Christian/Hindu encounter which are centred on critical aspects of doctrinal importance.³⁹ Whilst these have contributed much to a scholarly understanding of the interface between the two traditions, in the words of Ben Quash, these kinds of exchange can ‘immediately put people right up against the things that divide them [...It] puts all the problems into the foreground and heightens the sense that you have got insuperable barriers when you to

³⁶ Oakeshott, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," 490.

³⁷ Hart, *Between the Image and the Word*, 111, 115.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

³⁹ Cf. Francis X. Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries between Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Kathleen Healy, *Christ as Common Ground: A Study of Christianity and Hinduism* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1990).

talk to one another.⁴⁰ With this in mind, this thesis takes a more oblique approach, and focuses instead on the area of aesthetics which certainly enjoys a close relationship with matters of theological and doctrinal importance in both traditions, meaning that discussions surrounding aesthetics interplay with key theological themes held in common by both traditions. But questions of aesthetics, as such, are less religiously sensitised than matters of religious doctrine; a point endorsed by Quash who extols the natural suitability of the arts, in and of themselves, to function in the service of interfaith conversation.

The arts don't lecture you, don't harangue you, they invite you into a perspective, they may want to commend it, they might want to awaken your sympathy for it, but in a way they're stimulating possibilities and imaginative alternatives and asking questions [...] you can find unexpectedly that you can be friends with somebody in exploring without agreeing with them. The arts create a much less threatening and more open-ended way of meeting and generating friendship across difference.⁴¹

The expectation is thus that, as well as granting mutually illuminating perspectives on aesthetic issues as such, engaging in conversation on aesthetic themes might allow matters of theological importance to be engaged indirectly, and without arousing the otherwise obligatory defensive postures of 'dialogue' between traditions. The purpose of this thesis is to examine relevant materials in order to test the grounds for this expectation, establishing the existence of sufficient conditions to make conversation a worthwhile and potentially fruitful project.

This dialogue between Christian and Hindu [...] has an essential precondition, a willingness and a readiness to listen to the other as other. We may not listen in order to prepare our next words of approach, proclamation or attack [...] Far from expecting to despise or belittle what we hear we will be set to appreciate. To listen means therefore far more than simply to stop talking; it demands a silence in oneself in order to understand the non-Christian brother as he understands himself.⁴²

⁴⁰ Three Faiths Forum, *3FF Urban Dialogues and Collaborations with Kings College London*, <http://www.3ff.org.uk/arts/collaborations-2013.php> [1:16] accessed on 3 August 2014.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, [7:04].

⁴² C. Murray Rogers cited in Sharpe, "The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue," 83-4.

This project is shaped by an openness and a willingness to take the risk to engage in gentle conversation and in doing so set aside, as far as possible, any preconceptions which might impede the exchange and be receptive to the possibility of finding points of contact, as well as opportunities for growth, at multiple and perhaps unexpected points along the way.

This thesis will proceed by allowing each voice – Hindu and Christian – to speak in its own terms, rather than being shaped by the concerns of the other. It will attend to three key aesthetic concerns each selected for their shared relevance and particular importance, albeit in different forms, in both traditions. Furthermore, these themes play host to a range of perspectives as evidenced by the choice of traditions and theologies represented within each chapter and the diversity of interpretation of each theme broadens the scope for creative conversation. First, the nature of artistic freedom, and the extent to which artistic creativity is understood to be constrained by its participation in social realities and traditions of practice of one sort or another. This draws particularly from the ways in which the notion of ‘creativity’ has pervaded Western aesthetics and called for a re-appraisal of what is to be understood by ‘creatureliness’.⁴³ This is complemented by a detailed study of the Hindu texts dedicated to artistry, the *Śilpaśāstras*, and finds in the debate surrounding the extent to which the dictates are to be adhered to, familiar points to those involved in the relationship between freedom and tradition in the Christian context. Second, the relationship between aesthetic experience and experiences of a distinctly religious sort. Debate surrounding the nature of this relationship has recently been brought to the fore in Christian theology particularly through the work of David Brown and in the Hindu context the complex notion of *rasa* or aesthetic emotion also brings together the aesthetic and the religious. Third, the

⁴³ See Trevor Hart, *Making Good: Creation, Creativity and Artistry* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2014), esp. 1-9.

relationship between material and non-material aspects of art and the significance attaching to the material in particular. This aesthetic concern raises metaphysical and theological questions which are pertinent to both traditions. In Christian theology the rediscovery of incarnational christology, and a new attention to the importance of the category of sacrament both evince a deepened appreciation of the importance of material reality.⁴⁴ In Hindu thought, meanwhile, the familiar thought is that matter is illusory by comparison with the spiritual realm. But consideration of these themes finds such variations playing out contrary to expectations and thus lends itself to conversational possibilities in hitherto unexpected ways. We begin with Hindu traditions, and with the question of artistic freedom.

⁴⁴ Geoffrey Rowell, ed. *The Gestures of God: Explorations in Sacramentality*, (London, New York: Continuum, 2004).

~ CHAPTER ONE ~

CREATIVITY, FREEDOM AND RESTRAINT IN HINDU TRADITIONS

§1.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the extent to which the Hindu artist is able to indulge his creative freedom and how far he is restricted by the prescriptions contained within Hindu texts on artistry. Firstly, it will consider the ancient roots of Hindu craftsmanship both through the archaeological legacy of one of the oldest Hindu civilisations as well as through religious mythologies which reveal craft's divine benefactor. It will look at the religious obligation to create where dictated by heritage and engage in a close analysis of the prescriptive content, including inconsistencies therein, of a selection of Hindu texts on artistry. Finally it will turn to a critical appraisal of the suggestion that such texts function merely as instructive manuals beyond which the artist is at liberty to improvise creatively: this will be accomplished through a detailed reading of an important essay on the subject by John Mosteller.

§1.2 The Roots and Religious Significance of Hindu Craftsmanship

The earliest known origins of the Hindu tradition are thought to be located in the Indus Valley Civilisation, which extended from modern day north east Afghanistan to Pakistan and north west India.¹ Remains unearthed at the site reveal a highly skilled people and Coomaraswamy argues that the Vedic Aesthetic was dominated by the

¹ For a detailed consideration of the archaeological discoveries at the site and their use as devotional aids, see p.110ff.

appreciation of skill.² It was an artisan civilisation with many archaeological treasures from the area being both intricate and elaborate, as well as religious in significance,³ and it left a lasting legacy in the form of a distinctive red and black pottery which is still in evidence in parts of Western India.⁴ Coomaraswamy's *The Indian Craftsman* distinguishes between three types of craftsman, all of which extend back as far as this early civilisation: the village craftsman, the guild associated craftsman and the craftsmen who served as feudal servants of the king.⁵ In addition, Jaitly notes that it was common practice for objects to be made for the specific purpose of bartering for services.⁶ Firstly, the work and skills of the village craftsmen, such as the blacksmith and the carpenter, enabled the village community to maintain self-sufficiency in that the majority of their work involved the maintenance and repair of agricultural tools. In place of monetary remuneration for work carried out, craft items were often exchanged for a small piece of land for use by the wider village.⁷ Secondly, the craft guilds were largely hereditary organisations although some members were permitted to join by paying a joining fee, and membership offered a form of social security whereby each craftsman displayed a mutual concern for his fellow workers ensuring, amongst other things, that none of them were allowed to starve through lack of work. A close link existed between caste and guild with the result that members who transgressed guild legislature could, in extreme circumstances, be stripped of caste affiliation whilst others, such as those found guilty of violating guild rules regarding working hours, might be issued with a fine which in turn, formed the major part of the guild income.

² Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva: Essays on Indian Art and Culture* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1924; reprint, 1985), 18.

³ George Varghese K., "Globalisation Traumas and New Social Imaginary: Visvakarma Community of Kerala," *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 45 (2003): 4797.

⁴ Jaya Jaitly, *Viśvakarmā's Children: Stories of India's Craftspeople* (New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences, 2001), 21.

⁵ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Craftsman*, 2nd revised ed. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1909; reprint, 1989), 1-36. For an alternative schema focussed on an area of South India, see Carla M. Sinopoli, "The Organization of Craft Production at Vijayanagara, South India," *American Anthropologist, New Series* 90, no. 3 (1988).

⁶ Jaitly, *Viśvakarmā's Children: Stories of India's Craftspeople*, 26.

⁷ Cf. Vijaya Ramaswamy, "Vishvakarma Craftsmen in Early Medieval Peninsular India," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47, no. 4 (2004): 554.

Interestingly, any spiritual merit gained by the craftsman as a result of his work passed over to the patron once payment had been received. Lannoy notes the relationship between the artist, the patron and society was sacrificial in type and serves to represent the Vedic altar symbolising the sacrifice of primeval man:

Like the sacrificial offering (e.g. an animal or harvest produce), the work of art was invested with magical potency and merit by its makers and this was transferred to the patron as the society's elected representatives, thereby leading to the acquisition of spiritual value by the community. In this sense the artist's role was one of fundamental solidarity, ensuring the restoration to the society of its lost unity.⁸

Finally, royal association protected the interests of the feudal craftsman. Indeed, Vincent Smith notes '[a]rtisans were regarded as being in a special manner devoted to the royal service, and capital punishment was inflicted on any person who impaired the efficiency of a craftsman by causing the loss of a hand or an eye.'⁹ Patrons regularly requested portraits be made of themselves thus keeping the artist in work,¹⁰ but there are also examples of king's themselves being practicing artists.¹¹

A key consideration in understanding the skills of the Indian craftsman is of the training he undertakes. Although the *Śilpaśāstras*, the handbooks of artistic practice, suggest that a successful composition is entirely dependent on the artist's keen adherence to their stipulations, due consideration must be given to the apprenticeship method of skill development. The technical skills required of the artists are accrued through living and working with a master artist. According to Coomaraswamy, 'in the workshop, technique is learnt from the beginning, and in relation to real things and real problems and

⁸ Richard Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree: A Study of Indian Culture and Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 17.

⁹ Vincent Smith cited in Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Craftsman*, 15.

¹⁰ Ramaswamy, "Vishwakarma Craftsmen in Early Medieval Peninsular India," 573.

¹¹ Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Craftsman*, 18-19.

primarily by service [and] personal attendance on the master.’¹² Samuel Parker offers a particularly interesting insight into how the master’s wisdom and mastery of skills are, at least in part, inextricably bound up with his person, meaning that acts of service towards him, like touching his feet and eating his leftovers, are likely to reap the novice artist significant gain with regard to advancing his artistic abilities.¹³ Technical skills are taught through applied learning which means that the apprentice must take responsibility for the preparation of paint and the construction of brushes for the master’s use. Finally, Kramrisch records, each apprentice is required to undergo an initiation rite in order to demonstrate his mastery of the craft, though in the sense that apprenticeship is marked by a spirit of shared learning, the apprentice’s learning is always undergoing development.¹⁴

Being born into a craftsman’s caste inevitably secured apprenticeship opportunities, whether from father to son, uncle to nephew or elder to younger sibling. Most craftsman castes claim their descent from Viśvakarma whom the *Mahābhārata* labels ‘Lord of the arts, the carpenter of the gods, the fashioner of all ornaments, who formed the celestial chariots of the deities on whose craft men subsist, and whom, a great and immortal god, they continually worship.’¹⁵ There are two myths which are particularly informative about Viśvakarma: the first can be found in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* and reveals that, having been ejected from the celestial realms by the curses of *āpsaras* (nymphs), Viśvakarma was born a *brahmin*, became an elite architect and subsequently illegitimately fathered nine sons by a low caste *śūdra* woman.¹⁶ All his sons became

¹² Coomaraswamy cited in Samuel J. Parker, "Artistic Practice and Education in India: A Historical Overview," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 21, no. 4 (1987): 124.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Barbara Stoler Miller, ed., *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1983), 62.

¹⁵ *Mahābhārata* 1.2592. For discussion surrounding the iconography of Viśvakarma, see K. "Globalisation Traumas and New Social Imaginary: Visvakarma Community of Kerala."

¹⁶ It is paraphrased here from the account recorded by Miller, ed., *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*, 61.

craftsmen and, for a time, were experts in their respective fields.¹⁷ However, three of his sons fell into disrepute and were branded unholy: one stole gold from a Brahmin, a second disobeyed a *brahmin* and a third, a painter by trade, produced a defective painting at odds with the artistic canon. Their morally defective behaviour and shoddy craftsmanship hardly constitute a glowing commendation for their trade and all this in addition to Viśvakarma’s double pronged denigration of status: from deity to Brahmin and then from *brahmin* to *śūdra*. So, if Viśvakarma is upheld as the divine ideal towards which craftsmen and artists are encouraged to aspire then in a very real sense they are striving towards, at first appearances, a tainted lower caste existence. It is important, however, to set this in the context of an ordered religious class system in which each person should fulfil their occupational duties according to the *varṇa* or class to which they belong.¹⁸ Only through each person executing their own *varṇa-dharma* (religious obligations based on class and stage of life) is the universe maintained in a state of cosmic harmony. Conversely when a person transgresses the bounds of their occupational heritage, they risk upsetting *ṛta* or cosmic order. When set in this context, the Hindu craftsman who works to master the skills of his trade according to his class is displaying a religious fervour which should not be overshadowed by his low caste occupation. Next we turn to consider the content of the comprehensive Hindu manuals for artistry, known as the *Śilpaśāstras*, in order to facilitate a critical appraisal of the extent to which they function as rigidly prescriptive and how far, if at all, they allow for creative improvisation.

§1.3 Śilpaśāstras – Hindu Manuals for Artistry

Academics only began seriously to engage with the *Śilpaśāstras* (manuals for artistry, including architecture and craft) and the *Citrasūtras* or ‘manuals for painting’ in the

¹⁷ His sons included a garland maker, a blacksmith, a potter, a metal worker, conch-shell carver, a weaver an architect (like his father) a painter and a goldsmith.

¹⁸ See RV 10.90, (29-32), *Puruṣa-Sūkta* (The Hymn of Man).

mid-twentieth century as they came to light. The first texts of this kind date from the Gupta rule, spanning the fifth to the seventh centuries CE, and they would appear to have continued being written up to the sixteenth century.

Regarding the Guptas, Anand states: '[p]hilosophy had now been reconciled to life and the popular view had been evolved that by treating the universe through art and literature, man was only communicating with God.'¹⁹ The first extant Indian paintings—the Ajanta cave murals—date from this period and whilst they have suffered considerable damage from the inhospitable climate they display remarkably advanced technical skills. Although the Ajanta murals are Buddhist in content, there are other sites of specific Hindu interest; arguably the most spectacular example of Hindu Gupta art is the rock cut shrine at Udayagiri (c.401-2CE) featuring Viṣṇu in the form of Varāha, the Cosmic Boar and in the later Chalukyan rule of Southern India, the sculptures of the *Vaiṣṇava* halls at Badami which are thought to have been dedicated in 578CE.²⁰

The practical information pertaining to the technicalities of constructing an image as well as the critical apparatus by which they must be judged is found in the texts known as the *Śilpaśāstras* and the *Citrasūtras*. There are northern and southern recensions of the texts, but both traditions are widely understood to have been written by poets or philosophers, and in at least one instance by a King, rather than by practicing artists themselves. Whilst there is significant agreement between the texts there are also disagreements and advancements likely to be attributable to the passing of time and a greater understanding of materials. Let us introduce the texts this discussion will draw from before elaborating on their content.

¹⁹ Mulk Raj Anand, *The Hindu View of Art* (London: George, Allen & Unwin, 1933), 114.

²⁰ Roy C. Craven, *Indian Art: A Concise History*, Revised ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 116-7, 135-6.

§1.3.1 Introducing Key Texts

The two earliest texts are the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* and the *Citralakṣaṇa* of *Nagnajit* which are widely thought to be contemporaneous with their origins rooted in the Gupta period. The *Viṣṇudharmottara*, an appendage to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, is a northern text and has been translated variously over the course of the twentieth century.²¹ Conversely, however, the *Citralakṣaṇa* only survives in its original form in Tibetan and has undergone a two-stage translation from Tibetan to German and then to English.²² The author of the original German translation writes in his introduction that ‘the work deals with painting exclusively,’²³ a claim which is subsequently contested by Goswamy and Dahmen-Dallapiccola in their translation, where they note that no explicit reference is made to the preparation of painting paraphernalia such as brushes, pigments or groundwork such as is found in other painting manuals.²⁴ A subsequent north Indian text which shares a close affinity to the tradition of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* is the *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra* of the eleventh century; as a lengthy treatise it boasts many topics principle amongst which is architecture, but it is also concerned with

²¹ Initial interest in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* can be traced to 1912 with its publication in Bombay by Pandit Madhusudana and Madhavaprasad Sarma, eds., *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa (Third Khanda)* (Bombay: Venkatesvara Press, 1912). It remained relatively unknown until its first translation into English by Stella Kramrisch, ed., *The Vishṇudharmottaram (Part III) a Treatise on Indian Painting* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1924). She subsequently revised and republished the text - Stella Kramrisch, ed., *The Vishṇudharmottaram (Part III) a Treatise on Indian Painting: A Treatise on Indian Painting and Image Making*, 2nd rev. and enl. ed. (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1928). In 1932 Coomaraswamy published a revised version of Chapter 41 — Ānanda K. Coomaraswamy, "Viṣṇudharmottara, Chapter XLI," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 52, no. 1 (1932). Subsequent translations include that by Priyabala Shah, *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa, III Khaṇḍa, Vol. I (Text, Critical Notes)*, Gaekwad Oriental Series, No. Cxxx (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1958); Priyabala Shah, *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa, III Khaṇḍa, Vol. II (Introduction, Appendices, Index)*, Gaekwad Oriental Series, No. CXXXVII (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1961); C. Sivaramamurti, *The Chitrasūtra of the Vishnudharmottara* (New Delhi: Kanak Publications, 1978). The most authoritative critical version of the text is that by Parul Dave Mukerji, which has gained wide respect in contemporary scholarship and is used as the primary text for this discussion—Parul Dave Mukherji, ed., *The Citrasūtra of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2001).

²² B.N. Goswamy and A.L. Dahmen-Dallapiccola, eds., *An Early Document of Indian Art: The 'Citralakṣaṇa of Nagnajit'* (Manohar: 1976).

²³ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, xi.

painting and the arts more broadly.²⁵ The earliest extant south Indian text on painting is the third *prakaraṇa* of the *Abhilaṣitārthacintāmaṇi* or the ‘Wishing well of all desirable information,’ which is almost identical to the third *viṃśati* of the *Mānasollasā*.²⁶ They have both been attributed to King Someśvaradeva in the twelfth century CE and both texts concur that painting is one of the twenty *upabhogas* or enjoyments of life. A later southern text which is dependent on the *Mānasollasā* before it, is the *Citralakṣaṇa* of the *Śilparatna*.²⁷ The *Citralakṣaṇa* forms chapter 46 of the *Śilparatna*, which is authored by Srī Kumāra and attributed to the sixteenth century.

§1.3.2 Textual Content

Now to a consideration of the content of the *citra* texts and for ease of comprehension it is executed thematically. What follows, then, is a broad overview of the material rather than, as may be found in other works, a comprehensive and detailed analysis, for that is not required for our purposes here. Therefore it is important to recognise at the outset that in treating the texts in this way, technical inconsistencies between them will be largely overlooked in favour of obtaining a general understanding of the key aspects of the creative process as outlined collectively by both northern and southern recensions of the *śilpa* texts. With this in mind then, it is worthwhile noting that it is only within the last century that most of the *śilpa* texts have come to light and that scholarship surrounding them is ongoing. A number of the texts have been damaged with the result that in parts the texts are indecipherable and thus translations as well as conjectures on

²⁵ SS 71-82, (355-431). The *Aparājitapṛcchā*, composed later than the *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra*, concerns the same school of architecture although its section on painting is not comprehensive. L. M. Dubey, ed., *Aparājitapṛcchā: A Critical Study* (Allahabad: Laksmi Publications, 1987).

²⁶ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The Technique and Theory of Indian Painting," *Technical Studies in the Field of Fine Arts* III (1934-1935).

²⁷ Several attempts have been made at translating the text with varying degrees of success. The first translation solely included book one and was by G. Sastri, ed., *The Silparatna by Sri Kumara, Part I*, Trivandrum Sanskrit Series (Baroda: 1922). He was followed closely by A. K. Coomaraswamy, "Citralaksana (Silparatna Ch. 46)," in *Sir Asutosh Memorial Volume*, ed. Yogindra-Natha Samaddar (Patna: J.N. Samaddar, 1926-1928). The most recent translation which will be relied upon for the purposes of this discussion is that by Asok K. Bhattacharya, ed., *Citralakṣaṇa: A Treatise on Indian Painting* (Calcutta: Saraswat Library, 1974).

their content rely on multiple manuscripts together with a detailed study of scholarly work in the field.²⁸

It is helpful at this point to outline the specifics of the terminology found in the *Śilpaśāstras*. Three key terms are introduced in the opening paragraph of the *Citrakṣaṇa* of the *Śilparatna* and all three share the same etymological root.²⁹ Firstly, although the Sanskrit term ‘*citra*’ is commonly used to refer to painting, in the *Śilparatna* it denotes sculpture in the round. By this it is understood that *citra* or sculpture resembles the *whole* of the person or object it is intended to replicate or construct. Secondly, the related term ‘*citrārdha*’ refers to half a sculpture, meaning a relief, such as those intricate carvings found adorning temples.³⁰ Thirdly, and most relevant to our discussion, is ‘*citrābhāsa*’ which is defined by Goswamy and Dallapiccola as ‘what representation is written (i.e. depicted with brush etc.) on high or low walls or Pata (canvas).’³¹ In his commentary on this passage Bhattacharya renders the exact definition of *citrābhāsa* (painting) as specifically an *ābhāsa*, or semblance, of *citra* (sculpture).³² However, not only is this definition of painting as *citrābhāsa*, meaning literally ‘painting as a likeness of a sculpture,’ at odds with a passage elsewhere in the *Śilparatna* which endorses visualisation techniques in the production of a painting,³³ it also contrasts with Bhattacharya’s reading of the *Mānasollasā* in which he suggests that it promotes the idea of painting from a mental image rather than directly from nature or a model.³⁴

²⁸ For example, in the case of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* see Mukherji, ed., *Viṣṇudharmottara*, xxiv-xxxī.

²⁹ *SR* I.46.3-5, (41).

³⁰ The term *ardhacitra* is also used as it is translated in the *SR* I.46.1, (41).

³¹ Goswamy and Dahmen-Dallapiccola, eds., *Citrakṣaṇa of Nagnajit*, x.

³² Bhattacharya, ed., *Citrakṣaṇa*, 60.

³³ *SR* I.46.37b-40, (45).

³⁴ Asok K. Bhattacharya, *Technique of Indian Painting: A Study Chiefly Made on the Basis of Śilpi Texts* (Calcutta: Saraswat Library, 1976), 101. Regarding the role of visualisation in the creative process see p.28, 102 and 105f.

Despite the etymological diversity of the root word ‘*citra*’, many *citrasūtra* sections of key texts, such as the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* and the *Citralakṣaṇa* of the *Śilparatna*, are concerned solely with painting rather than with sculpture and this is evident in their references to the paraphernalia associated with painting. There is no doubt as to the superiority of painting amongst the arts in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*: ‘Painting is the most excellent of all arts and grants *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*. The house which has a painting is considered auspicious... Painting is the best of all the arts.’³⁵ This is not simply the bias of a text limited to painting since the *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra*, a text primarily on architecture, similarly extols its virtues: ‘painting (*Citraṁ*) verily is the foremost (*mukhaṁ*) of all the arts or crafts a favourite one of the Universe.’³⁶ However, it would be a mistake to conclude that painting stands completely apart from other kinds of art, for elsewhere we find exhortations for the interdependence of the arts, particularly between *nāṭya* (dance) and *citra*, whereby stipulations for the practice of art build upon previous teachings concerning dance:

As in dance, so in painting, the imitation of the three worlds is prescribed. Those eye [and eyebrow] expressions, moods, primary and secondary limbs and hand (gestures) mentioned earlier in the (section on) dance, O Best of kings, are the very ones to be known in painting (for) painting is considered to be parallel to dance. Now listen [to me for] I shall teach you [the rules of proportion, which were not mentioned in [my treatment of] dance].³⁷

When trying to pinpoint the link between the two art forms, Stella Kramrisch identifies the key concept as ‘movement’ which ‘asserts itself in purity through dancing, [and] guides the hand of the artist, who knows how to paint figures, as if breathing, the wind as blowing, the fire blazing, and the streamers fluttering. The moving force, the vital breath, the life movement, (*chetanā*), that is what is expected to be seen in the work of the painter, to make it alive with rhythm and expression.’³⁸ The extent to which this

³⁵ *VP* III.43.38-39, (255).

³⁶ *SS* II.71, (355).

³⁷ *VP* III.35.5c-7, (3-5).

³⁸ Kramrisch, ed., *Viṣṇudharmottaram*, 8.

fluidity of expression finds its explanation in the *citra* texts may be dictated by the degree to which the text's authors were trained in art. As already noted, scholarship reveals that most of the *citra* texts were written not by practicing artists, rather by those non-professionals (including poets and philosophers) employed by courts or patrons for the purpose of versifying such texts.

For a clear treatment of the material it is helpful to organise it under three headings: 'Preparation' which considers the rituals required of the artist prior to engaging in painting as well as the practical preparation of tools, pigments and base materials. 'Process' which navigates the route through the creative venture from initial sketching to final outlining and 'Product' which looks at the final work including its form, merits and demerits and suitable locations for installation.

§1.3.2.i Preparation

Obviously without an artist there can be no painting and as such a great deal rests, as Chakrabarti suggests, on the 'mind behind the application of the technique.'³⁹ It is hardly surprising therefore that most of the *śilpa* texts contain some prescription for the artist's preparation. For example, the *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra* states that only on days of lunar significance should the artist, having fasted and made appropriate offerings of perfume and flowers to the relevant deity, begin his task.⁴⁰ We see a similar requirement in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, which adds that the artist should also be dressed in white and facing the east.⁴¹ Interestingly, in his treatment of the *citra* texts, Shukla places a further requirement on the artist and claims that he should not only be considered an expert in his craft but also be 'fully drunk in the nectar of divine

³⁹ Jayanta Chakrabarti, *Techniques in Indian Mural Painting* (Calcutta: K.P Bagchi & Co., 1980), 7.

⁴⁰ *SS* II.72.3, (360).

⁴¹ *VP* III.40.11-14b, (133).

intuition.⁴² Shukla does not elaborate in any detail how this divine intuition might be cultivated but it seems likely that it results from the absorption of the rules contained within the *citra* texts. It is with a certain degree of irony that it is possible to interpret the intoxication arising from divine intuition as suggestive that through it the *citra* texts might lose their controlling influence. Elsewhere in the *Viṣṇudharmottara* it states a suitable working environment ‘should be spotlessly plastered [...] spacious, free of insects, bright, very pleasant and secluded.’⁴³

Just like any other workman, the painter also requires the use of tools and predictably these include an array of brushes. The terms *tūlikā*⁴⁴ and *lekhanī*⁴⁵ are both used to denote brushes and the preparation of both was elaborate and required the maker to pay close attention to the appropriate materials necessary for each brush.⁴⁶ The *Samarāṅgaṇa* identifies four different kinds of brush fibres—ear hair of an ox, bark fibre, the shags of a donkey and the fibres from various trees—followed by the shapes each one should take based upon the different shapes of trees—the banyan, pippala, plaksa and Udumbara trees.⁴⁷ Although perhaps the most detailed text regarding brushes, the *Samarāṅgaṇa* is not the only text that issues instructions regarding brushes. Containing a similar amount of detail the *Śilparatna* acknowledges three brushes—flat, medium and fine—made from the ears of a calf, the belly of a goat and the tail of a muskrat or grass tips respectively and should be tied together using a thread or *lac*.⁴⁸ The *Abhilaṣitārthacintāmaṇi* is less detailed on the matter and outlines three kinds of brushes—course, medium and fine—all of which are to be made from the hair of a

⁴² D. N. Shukla, *Hindu Canons of Painting, or, Citralakṣaṇam: With an Outline History of Indian Painting Including Literary Evidence*, Bhartiya Vastu Sastra Series, vol. 9, part 3 (Lucknow: Vastu-Vangamaya-Prakasan-sala, 1957), 87.

⁴³ VP III. 41.14, (163).

⁴⁴ *Abh* I,3,154, (62).

⁴⁵ *Abh* I,3,155, (62).

⁴⁶ Cf. Bhattacharya, *Technique of Indian Painting*, 47-51; Chakrabarti, *Techniques in Indian Mural Painting*, 69-72.

⁴⁷ SS II.73.12-22, (367-8).

⁴⁸ SR I.46.53-58a, (47).

calf's ear, attached to the end of a reed and tied with a *lac*.⁴⁹ The *Śilparatna* is more specific regarding the brush handle: 'The stick of a brush should be of six yavas in length. Make the one-eighth part of both of its ends either eight sides or round, and then place a very hard and barley corn shaped iron peg of half-an-aṅgula height at its front end.'⁵⁰

The *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra* introduces the eight limbs of painting, which, it states, constitute 'the collective feature illustration of the art of painting' and continues to suggest that 'emulating the norm this very way, one attains to concentration or fascination and becomes accomplished in the art of paintings.'⁵¹ The eight stages in the production of a meritorious painting are described in more detail by the *Mānasollasā* where the *Samarāṅgaṇa* solely lists them.⁵² Only two of the limbs are concerned with preparation, with the remaining six focussing on the process of composition. The first is identified as 'crayon preparation'⁵³ and there are various terms used in the *citra* texts to refer to the crayon itself including *vartikā*, *kiṭṭa-varti* and *kiṭṭa-lekhanī*.⁵⁴ The *Viṣṇudharmottara* is the only one of the *citra* texts which omits any account of crayon preparation; however, the *Abhilaṣitārthacintāmaṇi*⁵⁵ and the *Śilparatna*,⁵⁶ both southern texts, include instructions regarding this process: the former advocates grinding lampblack with boiled rice to the length of one's middle finger, whilst the latter suggests a mixture of brick dust and dried cowdung.

⁴⁹ *Abh* 1,3,154-157, (62).

⁵⁰ *SR* I.46.53-58a, (47).

⁵¹ *SS* II.71, (358).

⁵² *SS* II.71, (357-8).

⁵³ Whilst the edition of the *Samarāṅgaṇa* used for this discussion translates *vartikā* as 'paintbrush,' Shukla writes that according to the *Mānasollasā*, *vartikā* is understood to be a 'colour stump.' As such, and in keeping with scholarship surrounding the topic, this discussion will maintain the definition of *vartikā* as 'crayon.' *SS* II.71, (357); Shukla, *Hindu Canons of Painting*, 34.

⁵⁴ Coomaraswamy, "The Technique and Theory of Indian Painting," 60.

⁵⁵ *Abh* I.3.153, (62).

⁵⁶ *SR* I.46.35b-37a, (45).

Each text identifies its own list of primary colours: the *Mānasollasā* and the *Śilparatna* use the term *suddha varṇa* which literally means ‘pure’ or ‘unmixed’ and the *Viṣṇudharmottara* uses *mūla varṇa* meaning ‘primary’ or ‘basic’ colours. The *Viṣṇudharmottara* actually contains two different lists of primary colours. The first, in chapter 27 states ‘...there are five principal colours, viz. white (*śveta*), red (*rakta*), yellow (*pīta*), black (*kṛishṇa*) and green (*harit*),’⁵⁷ whilst in chapter 40, ‘the five basic colours (*mūlaraṅga*) are said to be white, yellow, red, blue and black.’⁵⁸ The latter account is also in agreement with the later *Abhilaṣitārthacintāmaṇi*, although Coomaraswamy notes that blue and black are often merged.⁵⁹ Different again is the list in the *Śilparatna*: ‘White, yellow, red and black are the pure colours and same is śyāma.’⁶⁰ It is also interesting to note that this text also identifies three gradations of red, each procured from different sources.⁶¹ Another text worth mentioning and which is in agreement with the *Śilparatna*, is the *Agni Purāṇa*.⁶² These two texts, with the exception of black and white, contain lists which are consistent with the primary colours of the modern day.

Whilst forming a core palette, the *Viṣṇudharmottara* recognises ‘other [colours] are in hundreds. By combining the primary colour [...] using one’s imagination [...] and discretion one could make hundred, even thousand-fold colours.’⁶³ There were reasonably early references to secondary colours, but it is the later *citra* texts which expound in any detail the scope of the secondary colour range.⁶⁴ The production of colours beyond the primary spectrum demands a precise skill of the artist since, as the

⁵⁷ *VP* I.27.7-8, (26).

⁵⁸ *VP* III.40.16, (135). It is interesting to note that this list of primary colours is also to be found, verbatim, in the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, a text dated to between the second century BCE and the fifth century CE.

⁵⁹ Coomaraswamy, "The Technique and Theory of Indian Painting," 78.

⁶⁰ *SR* I.46.26, (44). Bhattacharya outlines some disagreement over the colour ‘śyāma’, Coomaraswamy takes it to be blue, but to others, it is dark green.

⁶¹ *SR* I.46.118b, (55).

⁶² *AP* 30.18b-20a, (80).

⁶³ *VP* III.40.16-17, (135).

⁶⁴ *Abh* I.3.167-177, (63-64); *SR* I.46.135-144, (57-58). For a detailed treatment of secondary and tertiary colours as listed in the *Kāśyapaśilpa*, see Bhattacharya, *Technique of Indian Painting*, 75-77.

Abhilaṣitārthacintāmaṇi states, colours should be ‘mixed in such proportion as not to spoil the colour.’⁶⁵ However, this artistic flair for colours extends beyond a mere eye for colour, as the artist was also responsible for the physical production of colour pigments using the earth’s own minerals. The artist’s task therefore, was both technical and creative. Whilst the *citrasūtras* contain ‘recipes’ pertaining to the production of colour pigments, it is important to recognise that this did not negate the need for skill, since the artist worked at his craft to become an expert craftsman with a highly developed sense of the intricacies of colour production.⁶⁶ For instance, in the case of the colour ‘lampblack’ which, as its name suggests, is ‘born of the wick of the lamp,’⁶⁷ the skilled artist would possess a sense of how long a lamp should be left to burn before harvesting the pigment and again, the green pigment gathered from a mixture of pulverised stone and the ‘gum of elephant apple’⁶⁸ would require a knowledge of proportions. That is to say that the ‘recipes’ in the *citrasūtras* should not be taken as fixed prescriptions of the colour pigments, rather they required the skilled interpretation of the master artist. Some of the texts also contain instructions regarding the production of metallic colours, for instance, ‘before grinding gold should be turned into thin and soft leaves and those leaves again be very minutely fragmented, and mixed up with a small quantity of sand and clean water, and then ground in the chasm of a mortar.’⁶⁹ Whilst this illustrates the vast range of colour possibilities available to artists, it was common practice to refrain from using certain colours until the effect and stability of them had been established, for

⁶⁵ *Abh* I.3.145, (61).

⁶⁶ Of our considered texts, only the *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra* does not include a passage on colour. For a detailed treatment of the diverse sources of the colour palette according to the *citra* texts see Bhattacharya, *Technique of Indian Painting*, 56-71; Chakrabarti, *Techniques in Indian Mural Painting*, 37-42.

⁶⁷ *SR* I.46.47-51, (46-7).

⁶⁸ *SR* I.46.52, (46-7).

⁶⁹ *SR* I.46.124b-132a, (56). See also *VP* III.40.25-26b, (137) and *Abh* I.3.181-186, (65).

example, certain colours were inappropriate for use in wall mural paintings due to adverse reactions to the lime and other base plasters.⁷⁰

The final consideration in this preparation section concerns the ground of painting which forms the second limb of the *Samarāṅgaṇa*.⁷¹ *Bhūmidbandha* or ‘seasoning of the wall of painting’ is a pivotal part of the painting process, since the preservation of the subsequent layers depends upon the stability of its foundation. In some cases therefore, ground preparation, if properly executed, could be expected to take at least three months when following the technique for the production of lime plaster in the *Śilparatna* which requires a resting period alone of this amount of time.⁷² Both the *Viṣṇudharmottara*⁷³ and the *Samarāṅgaṇa*⁷⁴ contain detailed ‘recipes’ for a mud plaster, indeed in the first instance, the account is corroborated by a matching analysis of the base coat at the Ajanta caves.⁷⁵ Conversely, with regard to the ground preparation required for painting on board, the *Samarāṅgaṇa* instructs the application of boiled rice.⁷⁶

In summary, the *citra* texts provide expansive accounts of the preparation expected of the artist before he can commence his task and combine spiritual exercises with practical experience and theoretical knowledge. Only at such time as the artist is spiritually prepared and in possession of the appropriate equipment and colour palette may he then ‘take to the activity of figure preparation.’⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Cf. p.139. The Christian iconographer is also required to possess a detailed knowledge of colour chemistry knowing how to mix colours and the chemical reactions caused by mixing those colours created from natural pigment and any potential adverse reactions over the course of time.

⁷¹ SS II.71, (357).

⁷² SR I.46.14-25, (42-3).

⁷³ VP III.40.1-5, (129).

⁷⁴ SS II.72.24-35; 73.1-12, (362, 367).

⁷⁵ Cf. Chakrabarti, *Techniques in Indian Mural Painting*, 16; Shukla, *Hindu Canons of Painting*, 37.

⁷⁶ SS II.72.37, (364).

⁷⁷ SS II.72, (360).

1.3.2.ii Process

The remaining six of the *Samarāṅgaṇa*'s limbs are concerned with painting proper. Limbs three and four are *lekhya* (first sketching) and *rekhā-karma* (line drawing with a brush) respectively.⁷⁸ Regarding these the *Śilparatna* states 'Gods or men, animals, reptiles or birds, trees and creepers, mountains and seas, ascertaining (their form) either by hearing or by seeing or just by meditation, should be drawn in crayon in an auspicious moment, remembering them again and again, (by the artist) seated at ease and possessing a resolute mind.'⁷⁹ Here the link is forged between a mental image and that which the artist subsequently sketches. This is not an idea restricted to the *Śilparatna*, for instance in the *Abhilaṣitārthacintāmaṇi* the artist is instructed to 'contemplate [...] that criterion, and put down [...] on the wall what has thus been visualised.'⁸⁰ Furthermore, the *Viṣṇudharmottara* outlines that 'after sketching in white, then brown and finally in black paint (or chalk), the well versed (in painting) should mark out the proportions and in the same way the postures.'⁸¹ The importance of measurements may stem from the King's request to Viśvakarma to teach him the appropriate measurements of an auspicious painting in the myth at the outset of the *Citrakṣaṇa* of *Nagnajit*, which is greeted with the following response: 'When you gain from me the knowledge of the nature of the measurements and the characteristic attributes, the proportions and the forms, the ornamentation and the beauties, then will you be fully versed in all the skills and will become a universally known and masterly expert in the art of painting.'⁸² Such is the importance of a working knowledge of appropriate form and measurements that it is deemed the defining attribute of a master artist.

⁷⁸ *SS* II.71, (357-8).

⁷⁹ *SR* I.46.37b-40, (45).

⁸⁰ *Abh* I.3.158, (62).

⁸¹ *VP* III.40.3c-14b, (133). See also *Abh* I.3.187, (65).

⁸² *CofN* I.375-431, (75).

Systems and units of measurement vary according to text, with some being absolute and others relative.⁸³ For instance, the *Citralakṣaṇa* of *Nagnajit* institutes a measurement scale which increases to the power of eight: ‘An atom, the point of a hair, a nit, a louse, a barley grain and a finger grow through progressive multiplication with the number eight.’⁸⁴ On this scale of measurement it is the length of the middle finger, which Bhattacharya surmises should be taken as the measurement known as an *āṅgula* and not, as Coomaraswamy supposes, a concrete inch.⁸⁵ In turn, a *tāla* is understood to equal twelve *āṅgulas*,⁸⁶ although the *tālamāna* system of measurement is thought to pertain more widely to sculpture.⁸⁷ Another of the six types of measurement recorded in the *Mānasāra*⁸⁸ is *lambamāna* (measurement along plumb lines), which find mention in both the *Mānasollasā* and the *Śilparatna*. The *Śilparatna* divides images by three plumb lines, the *brahma-sūtra* down the centre with, on either side of it, lines known as the *vahiḥ-sūtras*.⁸⁹ Contrary to a general understanding that plumb lines solely mark vertical lines, Nardi notes that in the *Mānasollasā* several horizontal plumb lines are plotted.⁹⁰ The general function of plumb lines, she supposes, is the bestowal of symmetry; however, she elaborates that the plumb lines of the *Mānasollasā* and the *Śilparatna* should be thought of as being an aid to the reader of an image.⁹¹

Measurements for specific purposes are extensive in the *citra* texts with arguably and not surprisingly the most universally described figure being that of the human.⁹² There

⁸³ See further Isabella Nardi, *The Theory of Citrasūtras in Indian Painting: A Critical Re-Evaluation of Their Uses and Interpretations* (London: Routledge, 2006), 37-39.

⁸⁴ *CofN* III.540-543, (80). For measurement terminology see *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁵ Bhattacharya, ed., *Citralakṣaṇa*, 62.

⁸⁶ *VP* III.35.11, (5).

⁸⁷ Nardi, *The Theory of Citrasūtras in Indian Painting*, 64.

⁸⁸ *LV*.1-9; cf. *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁹ *SR* I.46.61-68, (48).

⁹⁰ Nardi, *The Theory of Citrasūtras in Indian Painting*, 78-79.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁹² Note that references cited regarding measurements given in the *citra* texts are illustrative only and not exhaustive. See *VP* III.37, (45-51), *CofN* III.528-1146, (79-108), *SR* I.46.61-112, (48-54) and *SS* II.74-75, (369-376). For an overview see Shukla, *Hindu Canons of Painting*, 48-50.

is, however, a distinction made between male and female, with five types of men⁹³ and five types of women who, when situated adjacent to a male, should reach his shoulder and ‘be represented as being of harmonious proportions and [...] chaste.’⁹⁴ To both male and female should be applied the rules according to *sthānas* or stances,⁹⁵ which are generally accepted as being nine in total,⁹⁶ with, in some texts, five frontal and four *parāvṛtta* (side or rear) views.⁹⁷ In addition, although unique to the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, there are rules dictating the process of foreshortening. Regarding foreshortening ‘there is no harmony of opinion reached by the experts in painting either in its concise or detailed form,’ and as such the *Viṣṇudharmottara* merely outlines thirteen examples as being illustrative of the concept.⁹⁸

A substantial portion of the *citra* texts is given to outlining specific measurements according to the type of subject. It is worthwhile here to present a brief overview of those subjects which receive detailed treatment. The most widely treated subject may be considered that which we have already noted, namely the human form.⁹⁹ Details under this subject heading include the fine measurements which mark the distinction between mortal and divine, hunchback and dwarf.¹⁰⁰ Elsewhere, it is written that gods should be painted as if they were sixteen year olds¹⁰¹ and with the appropriate weaponry and costume.¹⁰² The characteristics of hands and feet are also discussed: ‘both the palms should resemble the red lotus: the lines in these are deep, but not of course, crooked,’¹⁰³

⁹³ VP III.35.8, 36.1-6, (5, 27) and SS II.75, (374). For an overview see Nardi, *The Theory of Citrasūtras in Indian Painting*, 41-45.

⁹⁴ VP III.37.1-4, (6); *CofN* III.1142-1146, (107). For an overview see *Ibid.*, 56-57.

⁹⁵ For a general overview see Chakrabarti, *Techniques in Indian Mural Painting*, 98-103.

⁹⁶ VP III.37.1-4, (79-93) and SS II.79, (399-421). Regarding the *sthānas* in the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, Kramrisch states that the passage which records thirteen *sthānas* is a later interpolation, cf. Kramrisch, ed., *Viṣṇudharmottaram*, 12.

⁹⁷ See *Abh* I.3.189, (65-6), *SR* I.46.61-68, (48).

⁹⁸ VP III.39.38-51, *esp.* 39-40b, (93-97, 93).

⁹⁹ See VP III.35.12-18, 36.III.1-2, (5-7, 23); *CofN* III.705-784, 867-926, (86-89, 93-96).

¹⁰⁰ SS II.75, (372-3).

¹⁰¹ VP III.38.1-12, *esp.* 7, (59-63, 61). Cf. SS II.77, (386) – ‘situated in the primary youth.’

¹⁰² VP III.39.47-48d, (97); SS. II.77, (385-395).

¹⁰³ *CofN* III.845, (92). Cf. VP III.36.III.3-III.5, (23).

and ‘the toe nail is less than the size of the toe by a quarter.’¹⁰⁴ Facial features receive comprehensive treatment with many of the measurements being given as proportionate to others.¹⁰⁵ In the *Citralakṣaṇa* of *Nagnajit* the opening of the ear is a single digit in length, as are the tips of the ear, the ends of the eye brows and the eye sockets, and later, it details ‘how to compose the teeth, the hair and the bodily hair and the characteristic attributes of the colours which do not apply to the faces of the Gods.’¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the text does not limit its instruction to the positioning of the facial features, it also dictates that the intricacies of expression require close attention. For instance, ‘it is laid down that to express fright and crying, eyes resembling the petal of a padma lotus should be used [and] the eyes of those troubled by anger and grief should be painted resembling a cowrie shell.’¹⁰⁷

Other subjects afforded detailed consideration with regard to proportions and characteristics include idols¹⁰⁸ and various kinds of animals.¹⁰⁹ Although this broad overview of the detailed measurements reveals that the *citra* texts are greatly concerned with precision imagery, the *Viṣṇudharmottara* also asserts that this should not be to the cost of engaging with the fluidity:

People in this world, as a rule, lack [fixed] proportion because of being conditioned by time. Keeping this in mind, the proportion is determined by the wise [artist] using his own discretion, in conjunction with the [laws] of foreshortening.¹¹⁰

As such then, the artist, guided by expertise, should feel free to deviate from prescription where he feels it is suitable to do so.

¹⁰⁴ *VP* III.IV.2-IV.6, (25). Cf. *CofN* III.785-810, (89-91).

¹⁰⁵ For an overview see Nardi, *The Theory of Citrasūtras in Indian Painting*, 46-52. See also *VP* III.36.I.1-II.5, (19-21); *SS* II.74-75, (369-71, 376).

¹⁰⁶ *CofN* III. 574-704, 927-968, (82-6, 96-8).

¹⁰⁷ *CofN* III.619-656, (84). Cf. *VP*. III.37.15, (49).

¹⁰⁸ *VP* III.38.13-25, (63-7); *SS* II.76, (377-385).

¹⁰⁹ *SS* II.75, (375). See also Bhattacharya, *Technique of Indian Painting*, 141-149; Chakrabarti, *Techniques in Indian Mural Painting*, 105.

¹¹⁰ *VP* III.39.51, (97).

Next, the *Samarāṅgaṇa*'s fifth limb stipulates the application of colour or *varṇa-karma*.¹¹¹ As the 'animation' stage of a painting, Coomaraswamy states that it is during this stage that 'filling in the colour makes the picture "blossom."' ¹¹² In the *Viṣṇudharmottara* this is facilitated by the use of three types of rendering (*vartanā*): *patra*, *acchaidika* and *bindu*.¹¹³ Some scholarly disagreement exists but they can be broadly understood to refer to cross-hatching, fine lines and dotting.¹¹⁴ During this process, different brushes are used in specific ways in order to achieve the desired effect, so that in the *Abhilaṣitārthacintāmaṇi* the course brush is used for 'sweeping' the paint on, the medium brush held sideways for 'modelling' and the fine brush for 'fine drawing by the clever man.'¹¹⁵ Alongside a working knowledge of instruments, the artist should also possess an awareness of colour symbolism, such as that outlined in the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, the earliest Hindu text on music and dramaturgy. Goswamy illustrates, however, that whilst directive in nature, it must not be treated as dictatorial in content.¹¹⁶

Closely linked to the application of colour is the sixth limb *vartanā-karma* which is concerned with shading. The successful application of colour, complete with 'the special effects of depressions and protrusions' should enhance the tonal variation of a painting.¹¹⁷ 'He who is able to paint the distinction between the [apparent] depth and projection... and between a person sleeping full of consciousness and a dead person devoid of vitality is said to be an expert.'¹¹⁸ Such is the intricacy outlined in the *citra* texts that it has been compared to the science of the anatomy. So, although not directly

¹¹¹ *SS* II.71, (358).

¹¹² Coomaraswamy, "The Technique and Theory of Indian Painting," 74.

¹¹³ *VP* III.41.5-7b, (159-61).

¹¹⁴ See Bhattacharya, *Technique of Indian Painting*, 105; Shukla, *Hindu Canons of Painting*, 63. Cf. Nardi, *The Theory of Citrasūtras in Indian Painting*, 131-132.

¹¹⁵ *Abh* I.3.156-7, (62). Cf. *SS* II.73.12-22, (367-368).

¹¹⁶ He states this is especially true when trying to utilise colours in conjunction with the eight *rasas*. See B.N Goswamy, *Essence of Indian Art* (San Francisco, CA: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 1986), 30.

¹¹⁷ *SR* I.46.113, (54).

¹¹⁸ *VP* III.43.28, (251).

visible, the presence of muscles and veins must be accounted for in the painting of an image.¹¹⁹ Laufer comments that such is the precision of painting that it may have arisen from the science of physiognomy, but that this must not be taken to suggest painting is purely a sequel of physiognomy, but rather as a form in its own right.¹²⁰

The seventh and eighth limbs may be treated together since the distinction between them is somewhat blurred, but we can be assured that they are, however they are finally defined, closely related. *Lekhakarāṇa* (the seventh) and *dvika-karma* (the eighth) constitute the process of final outlining and finishing touches.¹²¹ Regarding the final limb, Coomaraswamy's¹²² definition of 'dvika,' meaning 'doing anything twice,' is corroborated by the twofold process of final outlining, with a first line in ochre and a final one in lampblack.¹²³ Bhattacharya suggests that 'mediocre' painters would often be satisfied with a single final outline and that only the master artists would finish with a second.¹²⁴

Having identified all eight of the *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra*'s limbs it seems important to stress that they outline an elaborate process and that their presentation here is merely indicative of content. With the final limb complete, all that remains is an analysis of the 'product.'

1.3.2.iii Product

Several of the *citra* texts incorporate some kind of classification system for paintings.

The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* identifies four types of painting: *satya*, *daiśika* (in some

¹¹⁹ *CofN* III.845-866, (93).

¹²⁰ Goswamy and Dahmen-Dallapiccola, eds., *Citralakṣaṇa of Nagnajit*, 33.

¹²¹ Cf. Bhattacharya, *Technique of Indian Painting*, 107-111; Chakrabarti, *Techniques in Indian Mural Painting*, 90-93.

¹²² Coomaraswamy, "Viṣṇudharmottara, Chapter XLI," 17.

¹²³ *SR* I.46.58b-60, 115, (47, 55).

¹²⁴ Bhattacharya, *Technique of Indian Painting*, 111.

translations *vaiṇika*), *nāgara* and *miśra*.¹²⁵ Although the topic of much scholarly debate, Mukherji translates them as ‘Naturalistic’, ‘Provincial’ or ‘Local’, ‘Urban’ or ‘Professional’ and ‘Mixed’ respectively. These somewhat oblique categories may be otherwise defined on the basis of the distinguishing features of each type, as realistic, symmetrical, three-dimensional and a combination of all three. The *Mānasollasā* and the *Abhilaṣitārthacintāmaṇi* outline five types of painting.¹²⁶ These are *viddha* (exact copy), *aviddha* (mere resemblance), *bhāva* (type which expresses the nine emotions), *rasa-citra* (tincture painting) and *dhūli-citra* (powder painting). The *Śilparatna*, although following in the tradition of the *Abhilaṣitārthacintāmaṇi*, restricts itself to three types: *rasa-citra*, *dhūli-citra* and *citra*.¹²⁷ The former two are identical categories to the *Śilparatna* and the third, ‘*citra*,’ is the equivalent of the *Viṣṇudharmottara*’s ‘*satya*’ and the *Abhilaṣitārthacintāmaṇi*’s ‘*viddha*’ and ‘shows the resemblance (of a figure) as truly as the reflection on a mirror.’¹²⁸

The texts of the northern tradition, the *Viṣṇudharmottara* and the *Samarāṅgaṇa*, provide further instructions on both the demerits and the merits of painting as well as directions regarding advantageous sites of installation. The *Viṣṇudharmottara*, arguably the most comprehensive text, identifies eight demerits including ‘lines that are either [too] weak [thin] or [too] thick..., lack of variety ..., oversized eyes, lips and cheeks ... inconsistency... and deviation from [the rules of] proportion.’¹²⁹ It is further apparent that the production of imperfect idols is fraught with potential disaster, where a bloated belly may cause famine and epidemics¹³⁰ and an upward gaze brings death.¹³¹ However, both texts endorse the potential of these works accomplished in accordance with the

¹²⁵ VP III.41.2a-5, (159).

¹²⁶ *Abh* I.3.939-943, (66).

¹²⁷ *SR* I.46.145-148a, (58).

¹²⁸ *Ibid*.

¹²⁹ VP III.41.7c-8, (161) & 43.17b-18, (247).

¹³⁰ *SS* II.78, (395-398, 397).

¹³¹ VP III.38.14, (63).

laws of *citra*, of which the *Samarāṅgaṇa* states are ‘endowed with loveliness.’¹³² Indeed further to the *Viṣṇudharmottara*’s list of the eight merits of painting,¹³³ it states that the best of paintings can ‘[spread] purity and [bring] about incomparable joy.’¹³⁴ Perhaps the greatest accolade for painting is that contained in the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, which suggests that, properly executed, it ‘grants *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*.’¹³⁵ Also noteworthy, but treated in greater detail in the next chapter, is the mention of *rasas* or sentiments, of which there are nine, in both the *Viṣṇudharmottara* and the *Samarāṅgaṇa*.¹³⁶ Whilst temples may display any of the nine *rasas*, the home is restricted to displaying only those representative of the erotic, the comic and the tranquil sentiments.¹³⁷ Furthermore, in extension to Vatsyayana’s exhortation in the *Kāma-sūtra* that every cultured man has a drawing board in his house,¹³⁸ there is a strict prohibition on self-portraits being painted in one’s own house.¹³⁹

In summary, the *citra* texts comprise a comprehensive body of literature concerning painting, including its mythological origins, the preparation to be undertaken, the process of execution and the final product as well as an overview of the merits, demerits and suitable sites of installation.

§1.4 Freedom and Prescription in Hindu Traditions

The discovery and subsequent English translations of the *Śilpaśāstras* gave rise to a major shift in the Western evaluation of Indian arts and crafts. Where previously it had been largely dismissed on the grounds of its disparate style in comparison to classical

¹³² *SS* II.78, (395-398, **396**).

¹³³ *VP* III.41.9, (161) & 43.19, (247).

¹³⁴ *VP* III.43.25, (249).

¹³⁵ *VP* III.43.38, (255). Flood defines them thus: ‘the goals of worldly responsibility (*dharma*), worldly success and profit (*artha*), and erotic and aesthetic pleasure (*kāma*).’ Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 17.

¹³⁶ *VP* III.43.1-10, (241-243); *SS* II.82, (431-432). Brief reference to *rasa* may also be found at *SR* I.46.7b-13, (42).

¹³⁷ *VP* III.43.11, (245).

¹³⁸ Shukla, *Hindu Canons of Painting*, 24.

¹³⁹ *VP* III.43.17ab, (247).

conventions, the discovery of the proportional canons invited a reappraisal of Indian art whereupon it was accused of being constricted by the rigidity of *śāstric* law. Indeed, as we have seen, the *Śilpaśāstras*, taken at face value, appear to outline bleak consequences for the artist and his wider community should there be any shortcomings in his work; judgements rendered easier to comprehend when set in the context of religious obligation according to *varna-dharma* in which cosmic harmony is at stake. If, as it would seem, the artist is called to a strict observance of the rules, the scope for creative freedom, or ‘artistic license,’ is severely limited or even completely quashed and it is our present concern to critically appraise the extent to which the Indian artist is *constrained* by the proportional dictates and practical methodologies of the *Śilpaśāstras* and what freedom, if any, he is afforded in his creative exploits.

John Mosteller’s *Study of Hindu Iconometry in Historical Perspective* provides a helpful focus for reckoning with this question.¹⁴⁰ Mosteller is keen to assert that proportion is absolutely central to the success or failure of the Indian image. Where previous scholarship has failed, he suggests, is in its neglect satisfactorily to observe living practices which he believes reveal a certain continuity of tradition. He also draws attention to the way in which key Indologists have shaped the contemporary study of Indian aesthetics and seeks critically to engage with, and to some extent, recast their theories. Mosteller introduces his discussion by identifying ‘two separate realms of inquiry’ in the domain of artistry, namely those of ‘proportional theory’ and ‘artistic practice.’¹⁴¹ In due course, we shall consider whether Mosteller in fact omits the inclusion of a vital third realm, that of the spiritual component, without which, the whole *raison d’être* of Indian art is arguably lost. Western emphasis has tended towards the theoretical, a bias doubtless endorsed not only by the amount of scholarly effort

¹⁴⁰ John F. Mosteller, "The Study of Indian Iconometry in Historical Perspective," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108, no. 1 (1988).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 100.

poured into translating the *Śilpaśāstras* but also, perhaps more deeply rooted, as a response to the creative autonomy promulgated by Romanticism. According to Mosteller, the impact of Romanticism suggested that ‘the actual use of rigorous proportional systems retards the creative instincts of the artist and is symptomatic of periods of aesthetic decline.’¹⁴² Mosteller situates his discussion in the context of the period following the discovery of the *Śilpaśāstras* when the West shifts from a complete denigration of Indian art as ‘ruleless’ to its condemnation for being too heavily dictated by Indian rules which stood in contrast to Western understandings of ‘fine art’.

Mosteller’s subsequent critical overview of scholarly engagement with the *Śilpaśāstras* identifies two types of approach which he labels ‘polemic’ and ‘apologetic’ and which, to facilitate our discussion may be situated on a putative spectrum of degrees of adherence to prescribed rules. At one end are those for whom all art must strictly conform, and at the other, those for whom the rules are largely inconsequential. Positioned to the stricter side of the halfway point on the spectrum is Mosteller’s ‘polemic’ category. Characteristic of the polemicists is the belief that the rules and stipulations of the proportional canons provide a ‘necessary support’ in the successful production of the Indian image and advocates of this view include Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and E.B. Havell.¹⁴³ Mosteller’s second label, ‘apologetic’, sits closer to the liberal end of the spectrum and in contrast to the polemicists, the apologists prefer to argue that the canons exist merely to ensure a certain level of artistic competency.¹⁴⁴ Abanindranath Tagore and Phanindranath Bose are identified as representatives of this viewpoint.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.: 102.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

An initial criticism of Mosteller's work might be that he fails to take adequate account of the various different contexts from which his representative cohort of writers approach the question in hand. It seems fair to label Mosteller himself as an Indian art theorist with an interest in how canonical injunctions are attested to in historical artwork. However, Coomaraswamy and Havell, Mosteller's 'polemicists', represent an ethnographic approach, informed by their interpretation of the *Śilpaśāstras* available to them, namely the *Sukranîti* and the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*. Different again, is the approach of Abanindranath Tagore, who writes from the informed perspective of a working knowledge of artistic practices. Although perhaps overly simplified their approaches may be categorised respectively as reading back into, interpreting whilst sitting alongside and a perspective of lived experience. It seems fair to suggest that these different contexts are relevant to the interpretation of their respective approaches to the prescriptions of the *Śilpaśāstras*.

According to Mosteller the 'polemic' approach is characterised by the view that the texts are a 'necessary support' to the production of the very best art but no more than this. *Śāstric* rules must underpin all art and as such, the Indian artist is permitted little scope for creative freedom fuelled by meditation, visualisation and imagination.¹⁴⁵ In his bid to qualify his category he draws heavily from the work of Coomaraswamy and Havell, but seems to overstate their claims in a bid to serve his own interests. Mosteller labels the *Śilpaśāstras* as 'necessary support[s]' to the production of art, but fails to elaborate what this might mean in practice. It is a phrase which does not appear to find its origin in either the work of Coomaraswamy or Havell, with the closest counterpart perhaps being Coomaraswamy's claim that the texts function as a 'rule of thumb.'¹⁴⁶ Even this, though, would seem to suggest something less prescriptive than that which

¹⁴⁵ Cf. p.22, 102, 105f.

¹⁴⁶ A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* (Camden: Essex House Press, 1908), 153.

Mosteller intends. Contrary to that which Mosteller seems to be arguing for (and perhaps why he neglects to mention it), Coomaraswamy states ‘only a few of the measurements given are used in the case of smaller images’ although he concedes their use ‘was always absolutely essential’ in the construction of ‘colossal images’ produced in cramped conditions such as inside rock caves, but this is a practical point rather than a blanket stipulation.¹⁴⁷

Mosteller also fails to tease out the implications of Coomaraswamy’s statement that ‘the canon then, is of use as a rule of thumb, relieving him of some part of the technical difficulties, leaving him free to concentrate his thought more singly on the message or burden of his work.’¹⁴⁸ The suggestion here is that the rules of proportion serve primarily as a guide to alleviate some of the ‘technical difficulties’ associated with the creative process rather than being of critical importance to its success. Central to the piece *should* be the ‘message or burden,’ which, for its successful fruition, relies on the artist’s meditation. The *Sukranitsara* states quite clearly that the purpose for which the image is intended will be attained in ‘no other way’ than through this meditation, the corollary of which being that guarded adherence to the *Śilpāśāstras* does not necessarily guarantee success.¹⁴⁹

Coomaraswamy states that ‘there is a tendency, not altogether unreasonable, to regard [the texts] as purely mechanical devices, reliance upon which is a fetter upon free artistic expression, and characterises the decline rather than the flower of a great tradition, but’ he continues, ‘it is the abuse not the use of canons of proportion that does this.’¹⁵⁰ This statement deserves some unpacking: Coomaraswamy suggests that the criticism is ‘not unreasonable’ (for whatever reasons) but denies that the texts function

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Cited in Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

as ‘dot-to-dot’ formulae which rob the artist of his creative contribution. Coomaraswamy denies that the prescriptive dictates of the *Śilpaśāstras* are evidence of an historic, perhaps progressive, decline in the standards of Indian art production. To the contrary he argues that priority should be granted to the maintenance of craft traditions bequeathed by centuries of skilled hereditary craftsmen over and above strict observance and rigid adherence to the *Śilpaśāstras*. Their true value, he maintains, lay in using them as a general guide or ‘rule of thumb.’

One excerpt from Tagore’s text encompasses that which Mosteller believes to represent the ‘apologetic’ approach to the canons. In it he states that the Indian artist should ‘not take these aesthetic canons and form-analyses of our art treatises, with all the rigours of their standards and their demonstrations, as representing absolute and inviolable laws, nor deprive their art-endeavours of the sustaining breath of freedom, by confining themselves and their works within the limits [of] Shastric demonstrations.’¹⁵¹ Tagore, on whose writings the bulk of Mosteller’s argument is based, argues that the canons are of limited use beyond their use for training student artists how to execute basic techniques and develop the key skills required of an artist. He states, only ‘the novice in Art submits to the restraint of *śāstric* injunctions, while the master finds himself emancipated from the tyranny of standards, proportions and measures, of light, shade, perspective and anatomy.’¹⁵² These are strong words and Tagore leaves no room for uncertainty regarding his views that the texts function as practical manuals upon which beginners must rely, but beyond which the accomplished aspire. Face value aside however, it is worth teasing out the implications of Tagore’s statement here. Since it is not unreasonable to assume that all artists are, at some point, considered to be novices (that is, in receipt of some form of tutelage), we can deduce that those artists who

¹⁵¹ Abanindranath Tagore, *Some Notes on Indian Artistic Anatomy* (Calcutta: The Indian Society of Oriental Art, 1961), 1.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 2.

succeed in their pursuit of mastery will in the earlier days of their careers have been exposed to the texts and the stipulations therein.¹⁵³ Now despite Tagore's explanation of the master as one who has been 'emancipated' from the rules, the very fact that he was once 'tethered' by them raises the question how far they are likely to have been 'left behind.' Mosteller completely overlooks any possibility that Tagore's master artist, having been nurtured in the tradition of the texts, is likely to have taken the rules into himself to such an extent that internalised habit will always ensure some degree of adherence to them. How one goes about measuring the lasting effects of art instruction is difficult to determine, but the important point here is the likelihood that intensive art instruction incorporating foundation skills, techniques and conventions is likely to leave a latent impression.

Tagore gives credence to his argument by drawing an analogy with the path of the religious devotee who in the earlier days of his religious pursuit relies on the structure of temple worship, the guidance of gurus and devoted study of the sacred texts before he finally comes to a personal inner realisation of the divine which he seeks, stripped of all the religious garb and ceremonies. He states, '[h]e who realizes (*sic*) Dharma (the Law of Righteousness) attains freedom, but the seeker after Dharma has at first to feel the grappling bonds of scriptures and religious, (*sic*) laws.'¹⁵⁴ Mosteller neglects this convincing point, even when Tagore unpacks it, and chooses instead to criticise Tagore's reference to *śāstric* injunction regarding images intended for worship conforming to prescription: 'Images should conform to prescribed types when they are to be contemplated in the spirit of worship [...] Does that not imply that the artist is to adhere to *śāstric* formulae only when producing images intended for worship and that

¹⁵³ Cf. p.138. The Christian iconographer having assimilated the dictates of the iconographic manuals is able to paint from the mind.

¹⁵⁴ Tagore, *Some Notes on Indian Artistic Anatomy*, 2.

he is free, in all other cases, to follow his own art instinct?’¹⁵⁵ Mosteller accuses Tagore of manipulating the texts to meet his own requirements, but in conjunction with Tagore’s earlier analogy between image making and the religious pursuit, his observation regarding temple images conforming to *śāstric* law seems logical. Whether the birth of the *Śilpaśāstras* is attributable to a decline in artistic standards or otherwise, it is surely to be expected that some form of quality control be exercised. For if, in the early days of religious devotion, a seeker feeds heavily from these images, it is self-evident that images should follow convention in order to direct pilgrims on the right path, rather than allowing exposure to more, shall we say, ‘experimental,’ devotional art. Whilst the latter may become helpful in developing one’s religious devotion at some point, the focus must nevertheless lie on nurturing the devotee in the ways of long held traditions. Whether the corollary of Tagore’s point regarding temple images and *śāstric* prescription is that all other images are entirely without any obligation to follow the dictates of the text is questionable, however, I maintain that Tagore’s acknowledgement of the role of the texts in the formative period of an artist’s development is a significant factor which Mosteller overlooks.

Mosteller is unduly harsh on Tagore, stating that his is a view of the artist as a ‘free spirit’ whose work is ‘something utterly irrational,’ citing Panofsky to make his claim, and ultimately concluding that Tagore is ironically espousing a typically Western Romantic view of art.¹⁵⁶ As already noted, Tagore does give some credence to the proportional canons, if only at basic level, but even without being able to determine how much formal artistic *śāstric* training is retained, Mosteller’s appraisal of Tagore’s argument as representing the artist as ‘free spirit’ seems exaggerated. According to Mosteller, Tagore represents a viewpoint which is in ‘clear opposition’ to that

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵⁶ Mosteller, "The Study of Indian Iconometry in Historical Perspective," 108. Cf. p.130ff.

represented by Coomaraswamy, but I suggest this is too bold a claim and that another scholar, Phanindranath Bose, whom Mosteller only fleetingly mentions, is a better example of the approach he is trying to present.

Of the ancient Indian artists, Bose states they ‘had their ideas and they tried to give shape and form to those ideas. They allowed their brush or chisel *full liberty* and tried to develop their own workmanship.’¹⁵⁷ What Bose outlines here is the idea that these arts and crafts people were free to create, model and sculpt as they saw fit, according to their own ideas and without any regard for canonical stipulation or patron’s requirements. In reality of course, since it was generally the latter who provided the artist’s main source of income, there would doubtless have been some degree of modification to the artist’s own ideas in accordance with the patron’s request. Nevertheless Bose continues ‘these artists were not, fortunately, bound by any fetters (*sic*) of rules they were the creators of models and rules, which other inferior artists are to follow.’¹⁵⁸ Interestingly, however, whilst Bose is advocating an approach to art which transcends rules, what he is suggesting here is that these same artists (working outside *śastric* injunction) are tasked with ‘build[ing] up their own tradition[s] for posterity.’¹⁵⁹ Presumably since Bose sees no issue in this type of living tradition, which breathes and takes on its own life as it inspires and informs the next generation of craftsmen, it is solely in the written tradition that he sees the demise of truly great Indian art.

Indeed, in true contrast to Coomaraswamy, who dismisses the accusation that the *śilpa* canons mark the decline of a tradition, Bose remarks that this is precisely the case and that the texts came to fruition in order to guide the work of ‘common artists.’¹⁶⁰ With the

¹⁵⁷ Phanindra Nath Bose, *Principles of Indian Śilpaśāstra with the Text of Mayaśāstra*, The Punjab Oriental (Sanskrit) Series, No. XI (Lahore: The Punjab Sanskrit Book Depot, 1926), 4. My italics.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

general view of the texts being that it was virtually impossible to instil real artistic genius in a person, the least that could be attempted through the canons was instruction on the perfect execution of form.¹⁶¹ However, the institution of the canon gave birth to the expectation of strict conformation and ‘the result was the crippling (*sic*) of the high standard of art and sculpture [...] the artists were bound down so to say and could not give full play to their talent.’¹⁶² The outcome, Bose identifies, was such that in the Post-Gupta period ‘beauty [had] been sacrificed to the altar of form and outward decoration.’¹⁶³ For Bose however, this was not the final word and, like Tagore, he recognised that true artistic genius (and this alone) could surpass the rules and dictates of the canons and ‘impart beauty and grace.’¹⁶⁴ Whilst the texts can give direction regarding the outward form and appearance of an image, they cannot, even when rigidly adhered to, manifest grace and beauty, for this ability rests with the artistic genius possessed of ‘freedom’ and ‘latitude’ alone.¹⁶⁵

The distinction between the approaches taken by Tagore and Bose may finally be slight, but it is perhaps most evident in their respective understandings of the canon and the authority with which it is endowed. Whilst Bose interprets the compilation of the *Śilpaśāstras* as marking a significant decline in the standards of art production, Tagore, though arguing that the greatest artists operate outside canonical stipulation, recognises that the texts do serve a positive role in providing a rounded art instruction. Tagore’s somewhat poetic statement, ‘till we find the strength to fly we cling to our nest and its confines,’ endorses an appropriately nurturing view of the texts, where Bose seems to

¹⁶¹ For more detail on the construction of the Divine Ideal and associated visualisation techniques, cf. p.104f.

¹⁶² Bose, *Principles of Indian Śilpaśāstra with the Text of Mayaśāstra*, 7.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

despair of their very existence and clings to the hope that exceptionally gifted artists can potentially achieve beauty and grace by embracing creative freedom.¹⁶⁶

Tagore and Bose are in agreement that in all likelihood the texts were written in response to a perceived need, the most commonly suggested as we have noted is a decline in the overall standards of Indian art. Reasons for this aside, Tagore brings an artist's understanding to bear on the issue and helpfully reminds us of the physical process of art creation, an aspect which can be easily overlooked in scholarly debate, but furthermore that it is highly unlikely that the texts were written as a result of abstract philosophising rather more likely to be grounded in artistic practice. Tagore implores:

[...let] us not forget that it is the artist and his creations that come first and then the lawgiver and his codes of art. Art is not for the justification of the Shilpa Shastra but the Shastra is for the elucidation of Art. It is the concrete form which is evolved first, and then comes its analyses and its commentaries, its standards and its proportions – codified in the form of Shastras.¹⁶⁷

Earlier it was noted that Mosteller identifies two lines of enquiry in the treatment of Indian art, namely 'proportional theory' and 'artistic practice,' and we posited that he omitted serious consideration of a third category of equal, if not greater, importance, that of the spiritual involvement in the physical process. As Chapter Three focuses on a broader treatment of the relationship between spirit and matter, discussion here is confined to Mosteller's chosen cohort. Mosteller's limited consideration of the spiritual and devotional role in the creative process is evidenced by his narrow treatment of Havell. Mosteller is quick to criticise Havell's argument that the Indian artist 'chose to depict a purified transcendental body formed by the practice of Dhyana or *Yoga*,'

¹⁶⁶ Tagore, *Some Notes on Indian Artistic Anatomy*, 1.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-2. A Christian theologian, David Brown, makes a similar statement regarding how religious justification proceeds, rather than precedes, the adoption of artistic practices, see p.141f.

stating that he does not make clear how the proportional canons relate to this process.¹⁶⁸ This is a valid point, but only in the context of Mosteller's argument which is concerned with elevating the proportional canons to a position of supreme importance in the construction of Indian art. I suspect that Mosteller's argument is unhelpfully skewed and as such neglects to acknowledge the real aim of Indian art, namely the depiction of the divine. Havell declares the 'true aim of the artist is not to extract beauty from nature, but to reveal the life within life, the Noumenon within Phenomenon, the Reality within Unreality and the Soul within matter'¹⁶⁹ and elsewhere that 'every artistic convection (*sic*) is justified if it is used artistically and expresses the idea which the artist wishes to convey.'¹⁷⁰ Thus, contrary to Mosteller's project which starts from the texts and asks how the physical practice can be understood in light of them, the path of understanding the arts in their proper context would be better approached from the ultimate aim of depicting the divine, making the question of how the canons may facilitate this of secondary importance though there will always be those who argue otherwise.

Tagore claims that 'the realms of joy [...] are the final goal of all art.'¹⁷¹ The ability of the creative arts, either their creation or their apprehension, to achieve this end requires a discussion in its own right and will be treated at length in the next chapter, however, there is an important point to tease out here. For, if the artist is seeking to make manifest an expression of the divine which he has discovered within himself through yogic discipline, as exhorted by the *Sukranîti*, then this inevitably forces us to reappraise how the artist reveres canonical prescription. It could, of course, be the case that the authors of the *Śilpaśāstras* have themselves succeeded in painting an image which has touched 'the realms of joy' and as such, qualified them to record their successful 'formulae' in the form of the *Śilpaśāstras* for generations of artists to come.

¹⁶⁸ Mosteller, "The Study of Indian Iconometry in Historical Perspective," 103.

¹⁶⁹ E. B Havell, *The Ideals of Indian Art* (London: John Murray, 1911; reprint, 1920), 24.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁷¹ Tagore, *Some Notes on Indian Artistic Anatomy*, 2-3.

Whilst this is the view that scholars such as Bose advocate, the question must be raised as to the spiritual worth of the image constructed in this fashion, since in theory this is more correctly a reliance on some form of spiritual encounter-by-proxy, for it is not the artist himself who has mastered yogic discipline, rather he is assuming perfect reproduction of canonical dictates will assure him the spiritual realisation he desires without the effort of his own yogic discipline.

Finally, the question remains to what extent, if at all, the artist is free to create outside canonical prescription. Whether we are ultimately in agreement with Mosteller's 'apologetic' and 'polemic' labels or not, the fact remains that scholars have diversely interpreted the influence of the *Śilpaśāstras* on the production of Indian art throughout history, and that all too often these interpretations have been unhelpfully influenced by the dominant views of the western world.¹⁷² In practice it will always be easier to assess the correlation of the *Śilpaśāstras* with concrete examples of art, but the same cannot be said for evaluating the spiritual discipline employed by the artist through mere visual apprehension. Whilst Mosteller wants to stress an absolute, unwavering reliance on the proportional canons as the ideal form towards which Indian artists should aspire, I suggest that he grossly overstates their value and in turn underplays the spiritual current which cuts through the length and breadth of Hindu culture. Where Coomaraswamy acknowledges the texts as acting as a 'rule of thumb' it is Havell who brings to the fore the philosophical aim of the artist as seeking to reveal the 'Noumenon within the Phenomenon' although he falls short of adequately explaining the relationship between adherence to the texts and this kind of divine expression. In contrast, Tagore prefers to think of the *Śilpaśāstras* as introductory manuals which, upon achieving a suitable level of proficiency, can be disregarded and only then will the artist move towards attaining

¹⁷² Cf. p.42. This accusation is played out in Mosteller's accusation that Tagore epitomises a Western Romantic view.

the real aim of art. More extreme still, Bose argues that the texts mark a decline in Indian art which resulted in the loss of beauty and grace and was replaced by a concentration on outward form as second best.

In reality, on Mosteller's putative spectrum the Indian artist, operating since the advent of the *Śilpaśāstras*, probably lies midway between his two categories. That the canons have been attributed to a certain time in history suggests that they were written in response to some need, whether that be one of the ruling priests (likely to be amongst the literate minority) or of the artists themselves. It has been shown that the *Śilpaśāstras* are extensive and at times often contradictory, most likely influenced by geographical factors. In the hands of western scholars the inclination has been to treat them as highly prescriptive and thus restrictive documents in marked contrast with the dominant Western Romantic tradition with its exaltation of the artist as creative genius.¹⁷³ We have considered a number of differing viewpoints, but I suggest that the most convincing of these recognises the texts as encyclopaedic accounts of the technicalities associated with mastering a range of often complex artistic techniques. They are not however, I suppose, intended to displace the role of apprenticeship to a master under whose guidance the novice artist received a rich inheritance of a living tradition. It is vital, however, that the spiritual and devotional element of creativity is not underplayed. This is implored by Coomaraswamy, Tagore and Bose alike in their own ways and to differing extents, but each seek to present a fully integrated view of artistic creativity which Mosteller lacks. By virtue of being born into a worker caste, the Indian artist inherited a tradition which was at once a mixture of spiritual vocation and practical obligation. The painting manuals provide detailed accounts of the time honoured ways certain effects were achieved, with which equipment and according to set colour

¹⁷³ For a western Christian account of artistic genius and creative originality see the discussion of Sayers' work, p.133ff.

chemistry; but in reality, artists of successive generations were called to breathe life anew into these bequeathed traditions. It was the patrons, poets and philosophers who penned these scripts, but it is the practicing artists like Tagore who must be taken heed of if we are ever to understand the applied worth of these texts.

In this chapter we have explored the vocational obligation of the craftsman and the high standard of Hindu craftsmanship in evidence since the earliest known origins of the Hindu tradition. We have identified a number of ancient Hindu texts concerned with artistry of all forms and engaged in a critical analysis of the extensive Hindu manuals for painting in particular. Finally we have heard a number of voices contributing to a discussion on the extent to which the Hindu artist is able to indulge his creative freedom and how far he is restricted by the content of the *Śilpaśāstras*. On first appearances the extensive content of the *Śilpaśāstras* would seem to suggest that there is little scope for artistic freedom within Hindu artistic traditions and yet in critically engaging with some key thinkers as employed by Mosteller we have discovered that they are treated variously by different Hindu scholars and artists alike. In chapter four we will hear from a number of Christian voices who similarly vary on their degrees of adherence, or reliance, on a range of ‘givens’ in the form of material and received traditions of one sort or another. The more liberal Hindu stance adopted by Bose who argues that the composition of the texts marked a decline in general art standards and that ‘beauty and grace’ does not stem from rigid reliance on the *Śilpaśāstras*, but rather is born from the ‘freedom’ of artistic genius alone finds a prime conversation partner in the Romantic ideal of the artist as creative genius. Like Mosteller, and to a certain degree Coomaraswamy, who gives greater credence to the value and practical application of the canonical dictates, we find conversation partners in the form of the Christian visual iconographic tradition and the Eastern Orthodox tradition which inspires John Tavener. The spiritual element which is overlooked by Mosteller, but stressed by Coomaraswamy

and Tagore is precisely the focus for Tavener and Christian iconographers whose primary concern is to ensure the continuity of the sacred tradition. The 'half way' stance adopted by Tagore who recognises the *Śilpaśāstras* as training manuals on which the novice relies and beyond which the accomplished aspire resonates with the Christian idea of taking that which is given, both in the form of materials and artistic traditions, and augmenting it as Trevor Hart expounds using Tolkien's category of 'sub-creation'. In the next chapter we will consider the relationship of aesthetic experience and religious encounter as encapsulated in the complex Hindu notion of *rasa*.

~ CHAPTER 2 ~

RELIGIOUS AND AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE IN HINDU THOUGHT

§2.1 Introduction

No treatment of the Indian arts would be complete without serious engagement with the complex notion of *rasa* or aesthetic emotion. From around the tenth century CE *rasa* has been likened to certain kinds of religious or spiritual encounters, with some even going as far as to suggest the two experiences may be identical rather than simply analogous. These sorts of comparisons are of particular interest for our discussion here as similar ambiguities exist, as we shall see, within strands of the Christian tradition. Whilst the concept described in literary form can be dated as early as the second century BCE, it is possible that an awareness and working practice of it may have been in evidence prior to this, transmitted through oral tradition. Despite its ancient roots, however, serious systematic study of *rasa* did not begin to emerge until the beginning of the twentieth century when the relevant texts started being translated into English, although now, a century later, there remains considerable scope for critical interpretation of the idea. This chapter will be divided into two sections. Section one will form a broad introduction to the concept of *rasa* paying particular attention to the influential work of the tenth-century scholar Abhinavagupta and offering a detailed analysis of his treatment of the concept. The second section will constitute a focussed treatment on the precise nature of *rasa* in relation to the highest spiritual aspiration of the religious devotee.

§2.1.1 Charting the Territory

Rasa is a broad aesthetic category which has been applied to a variety of art forms to differing degrees. Whilst there have been few noteworthy and sustained attempts at analysing the application of *rasa* theory to the visual arts, that *rasa* is applied to the realm of painting is evident in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* and the *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra* which both contain sections on painting.¹ The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, generally dated between the fifth and seventh centuries CE, acknowledges all eight of the *rasas* expounded by Bharata and adds a ninth. It takes a general understanding of the basics of *rasa* theory for granted but elaborates specifically upon how *rasa* should be portrayed in painting.² The later *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra*, although primarily concerned with architecture, is noteworthy in its treatment of the concept, in that it associates each of the *rasas* with distinct mental conditions and physical reactions.³ Furthermore King Bhoja, believed to be the author of the text, adds two new *rasas*, the first ‘*prema*’ or ‘love’ and the second is unfortunately indecipherable due to an imperfection in the original text.

In light of the extensive nature and wide application of the concept it is impossible to extol a single theory of *rasa*.⁴ Where Bharata, the earliest writer on the theory, laid the foundations that many later writers have accepted, they have in their turn reformulated and advanced the theory. The outcome in certain instances has unfortunately been a gross over-simplification of the complex and comprehensive theory. What follows here, therefore, is an attempt at a careful disentangling of the strands which have been woven together over the centuries arguably at the cost of an accurate portrayal of *rasa*. As such

¹ Two notable attempts to apply *rasa* theory to the visual arts in recent years deserve special mention, see Goswamy, *Essence of Indian Art*; Nardi, *The Theory of Citrasūtras in Indian Painting*.

² *VP* III.43.1-10, (241-243).

³ *SS* 82.1-13.

⁴ Few writers on the subject acknowledge the diverse approaches taken to the subject and in my reading, Herman Tiekens is the sole exponent who acknowledges the need to clarify to which theory any conclusions drawn belong. See Herman Tiekens, "On the Use of *Rasa* in Studies of Sanskrit Drama," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 43 (2000): 119.

the following outline constitutes the ‘bare bones’ of *rasa* theory grounded in the *Nāṭya Śāstra* and, where beneficial, gesturing towards subsequent developments for further clarification.⁵ In the interests of avoiding oversimplification, discussion here will draw from the diverse accounts of the theory, but attention will be focussed on the comprehensive treatment of the theory by the tenth century Kashmiri *Śaivite*, Abhinavagupta, to whom most subsequent Indian aesthetics can be traced. Indeed, it was he who, building upon the foundations of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka before him, established and sought to develop the link between religious and aesthetic experience.

§2.1.2 Etymology

Rasa defies easy definition being something which is ‘intuitively realised rather than sensibly perceived.’⁶ Wulff ascribes it ‘multiple levels of significance’ and refers to the over thirty definitions of the term listed in Āpte’s popular Sanskrit dictionary.⁷ Thampi suggests that it combines the broad meanings of ‘artistic’ as used to refer to a work’s production and ‘aesthetic’ as concerned with perception and appreciation.⁸ *Rasa*⁹ has been rendered variously in translation, with Coomaraswamy labelling it as the equivalent of ‘Beauty’ or ‘Aesthetic Emotion’¹⁰ and, alongside others, Hiriyanna interprets it to mean ‘taste’ or ‘savour.’¹¹ Key texts on Hindu dramaturgy and poetics

⁵ Two major texts on the subject which are widely drawn from in expounding the *rasa* theory, and therefore used here, are Dhanaṃjaya, *The Daśarūpa: A Treatise on Hindu Dramaturgy*, trans. George C. O. Haas, Columbia University Indo-Iranian Series. Vol. 7. (New York: 1912) and Viśvanātha, *The Sāhitya–Darpaṇa or Mirror of Composition of Viśvanātha* trans. J.R Ballantyne and Pramadā Dāsa Mitra, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1994), with the former being concerned with dramaturgy and the latter, poetry.

⁶ Anand, *The Hindu View of Art*, 148.

⁷ Donna M. Wulff, "Religion in New Mode: The Convergence of the Aesthetic and the Religious in Medieval India," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54, no. 4 (1986): 674.

⁸ G B Mohan Thampi, "'Rasa' as Aesthetic Experience," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24, no. 1 (1965): 75.

⁹ In order to preserve as far as possible the original connotation of the Sanskrit terminology, following initial translation the Sanskrit will be used throughout this discussion.

¹⁰ Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, 30.

¹¹ M. Hiriyanna, *Art Experience*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1997), 38.

also translate it as Sentiment.¹² The term itself pre-dates its use in specific texts on artistry and can be found in the *R̥g Veda* taking its literal meaning of ‘liquid’ or ‘that which flows’ specifically relating to the intoxicating juice of the soma plant.¹³ In the *Nāṭya Śāstra* Bharata claims to take his usage of the term *rasa* from the *Atharva Veda* where it is used to refer to the sap of grain, but more specifically to the taste of it.¹⁴ In the *Bhagavad Gītā* Viṣṇu himself becomes the Soma plant and in doing so, we are told, becomes ‘the very sap (*rasa*) of life.’¹⁵ From the earlier usage of the term to denote a physical property, here *rasa* acquires metaphysical significance and its use in the *Upaniṣads* reflects the broader shift in religious emphases from concrete ritual to esoteric speculation. In his commentary on the *Upaniṣads*, Śankara asserts ‘*Rasa* is here used to mean such bliss as is innate in oneself and manifests itself... even in the absence of external aids to happiness. It emphasises that the bliss is non-material, i.e. intrinsic, spiritual, or subjective.’¹⁶ As such, the *Upaniṣadic rasa* refers to the essence of all things – that essence which is identical to the Supreme Reality, Brahman. In her relatively recent book on the subject, Susan Schwartz stresses this high accolade by definitively labelling *rasa* as ‘an experience of divine identity.’¹⁷ The accuracy of such bold claims will be disputed in due course, but suffice to say at this juncture, she is by no means the sole exponent of such a view amongst the voices of modern scholarship.

¹² Bharatamuni, *The Nāṭya-Śāstra of Bharatamuni*, trans. A Board of Scholars, 2nd rev ed., Raga Nrtya Series No.2 (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 2000; reprint, 2006); Dhanamjaya, *The Daśarūpa: A Treatise on Hindu Dramaturgy*; Viśvanātha, *The Sāhitya–Darpaṇa or Mirror of Composition of Viśvanātha*. All subsequent references to these texts will be from these translations unless otherwise indicated.

¹³ S.S Barlingay, *A Modern Introduction to Indian Aesthetic Theory* (New Delhi: D.K Printworld (P) Ltd, 2007), 85.

¹⁴ Edwin Gerow, *Indian Poetics* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1977), 245.

¹⁵ *Bhagavad Gītā* 15.13 cited in R.C Zaehner, ed., *The Bhagavad Gita* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 365.

¹⁶ Cited in Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe, *Approaches to Acting: Past and Present* (London: New York: Continuum, 2001), 102.

¹⁷ Susan Schwartz, *Rasa: Performing the Divine in India* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2004), 96.

Although at its peak abstract in nature, its usage does not lose earlier connotations of flavour and taste. Thus, for instance, the *Tattirīya Upaniṣad* reports that ‘having tasted *rasa*, the soul is full of bliss.’¹⁸ Associated terms include *rasavant*¹⁹ denoting a work of art which possesses *rasa*, *rasika* as the term identifying the spectator or artistic connoisseur and *rasâvādana*²⁰ being the context and act through which *rasa* is conveyed. Also related and regarding the work of art itself, the terms *rasili* and *nīrasa* pertain to that which possesses *rasa* and that which is devoid of *rasa* respectively. Wulff suggests ‘no criticism of a work of art is considered so devastating as the allegation that it is devoid of *rasa*.’²¹

§2.1.3 Scriptural Origins

There have been four major exponents of the theory of *rasa* with the earliest being Bharata or Bharatamuni in the *Nāṭya Śāstra* which is thought to have been composed between the second century BCE and the fifth century CE. His text was primarily concerned with drama, music and dance and is widely considered to be the foundational work on the theory of *rasa*. Of central significance to an understanding of the *Nāṭya Śāstra*'s relevance is Bharata's labelling of it as a fifth *Veda*, but more importantly as a universal *Veda* which is applicable and accessible to all the *varnas*.²² It is worth stressing here that the *Vedas* fall into the category of *śruti* or that which is ‘revealed’ and revelation used here is not limited to the auditory ability of the recipient but rather gestures towards the spiritual capacity of the hearer to hear. Bharata's *Nāṭya Śāstra* outlined the basic constituents of *rasa* as a notion, but subsequent centuries saw the reformulation, adaptation and development of it. The outcome was a wealth of varied,

¹⁸ *Tattirīya Upaniṣad* 2.7 cited in Radhakamal Mukerjee, "Rasas' as Springs of Art in Indian Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24, no. 1 (1965): 94.

¹⁹ Also rendered *rasavat*.

²⁰ It is pertinent to note here Coomaraswamy's clarification regarding the terms *rasa* and *rasâvādana* in that he states that it is essentially a false distinction since they are one and the same experience. See Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, 35f.

²¹ Wulff, "Religion in New Mode: The Convergence of the Aesthetic and the Religious in Medieval India," 674.

²² Cf. *NS* 1.12, (3). *Varṇa* literally means ‘colour’ but mostly used to refer to caste.

complex and highly sophisticated material. In recent studies, however, this complexity and sophistication has, on occasion, been lost sight of by an approach which has diluted and simplified matters in the interests of ease of comprehension.²³ Even Coomaraswamy, a scholar widely celebrated for his vast contribution to the study of Oriental aesthetics, presents a partial and uncritical version of *rasa*, though this may have been due to an over-reliance on one particular source (the *Daśarūpa* of Dhanamjaya composed in the tenth century) rather than a conscious neglect of complexity.²⁴ Key texts, which would have enabled Coomaraswamy to elaborate further on his treatment of *rasa*, remained either un-translated or unavailable in critical editions until well into the twentieth century.²⁵ Following the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, in the ninth century, Anandavardhana applied Bharata's theory to poetry in the *Dhvanyāloka* where he introduced the concept of *dhvani* or 'suggestion' as a linguistic tool. This was subsequently followed by commentaries on the *Nāṭya Śāstra* and the *Dhvanyāloka*, the *Abhinavābharaṇī* and the *Dhvanyāloka Locana*, both by Abhinavagupta, in the tenth and eleventh centuries respectively.²⁶ Both works pertain to poetry and Abhinavagupta's primary concern seems to have been to fuse Bharata's *rasa* theory with Anandavardhana's theory of *dhvani*. Later, Rūpa Gosvāmin, a sixteenth century Bengali

²³ See for instance the introduction in Goswamy, *Essence of Indian Art*, 17-30.

²⁴ Given the high esteem with which Coomaraswamy is held in all matters of Indian aesthetics it is especially strange that he has so little to say regarding the concept of *rasa*. Aside from sketching a broad outline of *rasa* and identifying some significant markers in gaining a general grasp of the concept (30-37), perhaps his most interesting comment has to be that where he equates *rasa* with 'Beauty' (38-45). In this, as far as my current research extends, his treatment of *rasa* is peculiar, however, initial impressions suggest that this may not be a considered judgement since he neglects to offer much by way of an elaboration on the implications of the specific sense in which he is using the term. In fairness, however, he also includes a definition of 'aesthetic emotion' although his whole treatment of the concept is somewhat lacking. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, 30-45.

²⁵ 'The Dance of Śiva' was published in 1924 at which time the only published edition of the *Nāṭya Śāstra* that Coomaraswamy could have had access to is a critical edition in transliterated Sanskrit published in France in 1898, the use of which would be contingent on Coomaraswamy having a command of Sanskrit or the assistance of a Sanskritist. (Bharatamuni, *Bharatiya-Natya-Castram: Traité De Bharata Sur Le Théâtre*, Annales De L'université De Lyon (Paris: E. Leroux, 1898).) The first translation and critical edition of the *Daśarūpa*, however, was that by George C.O. Haas in 1912 and since no other published translation was available prior to Coomaraswamy's 1924 publication it does not seem too presumptuous to identify this translation as the one which he would have used. See Dhanamjaya, *The Daśarūpa: A Treatise on Hindu Dramaturgy*.

²⁶ J. Moussaieff Masson and M.V. Patwardhan, "The *Dhvanyāloka* and the *Dhvanyālokalocana*: A Translation of the Fourth Uddyota, Pt 2.," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 97, no. 4 (1977); J. Moussaieff Masson and M.V. Patwardhan, "The *Dhvanyāloka* and the *Dhvanyālokalocana*: A Translation of the Fourth Uddyota, Pt. 1.," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 97, no. 3 (1977).

Caitanyite, expounded his own understanding of the concept which placed its emphasis on *bhakti rasa* thus extolling the devotional worth of the spiritual pursuit.²⁷ Whilst comparisons have been drawn between aspects of Abhinavagupta's and Gosvāmin's accounts, important distinctions remain and as such in an acknowledgement that Abhinavagupta's stance builds on the early foundations laid by Bharata this discussion defers to his authority.²⁸

§2.1.4 Abhinavagupta

Abhinavagupta, described by Pandey as a 'rational mystic,'²⁹ retains his place as an authority on *rasa* to the present day, not least because, according to Masson and Patwardhan, there are 'virtually no important ideas in later poetics that do not derive from [him].'³⁰ In his commentary on the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, the *Abhinavābharatī*, Abhinavagupta considers the work of the seventh century author of the *Kāvya-darsa*, Daṇḍin, as well as presenting and engaging with the work of three writers whose texts are otherwise lost to us. These are the ninth-century scholars Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa and Śāṅkuka, as well as the tenth-century author of the *Sahrdaya Darpaṇa*, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, on whose thesis Abhinavagupta leans heavily. Abhinavagupta draws from these sources in such a way as to strengthen his overall thesis by extracting and discarding themes from their work in order that '[r]asa [may be] purified of previous mistakes.'³¹ Writers on Indian aesthetics seem to accept Raniero Gnoli's translation and commentary on the *Abhinavābharatī* as an authority which warrants its close consideration here, together

²⁷ Cf. David L. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānugā Bhakti Sādhanā* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 30-39.

²⁸ Wulff, "Religion in New Mode: The Convergence of the Aesthetic and the Religious in Medieval India," 681ff.

²⁹ K. C. Pandey, "A Bird's-Eye View of Indian Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24, no. 1, Oriental Aesthetics (1965): 69.

³⁰ J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta's Philosophy of Aesthetics* (Poona: 1969), vi.

³¹ Raniero Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, 3rd ed., Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies (Varanasi, India: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1985), 52.

with a combined reading of Raghavan's 'The Number of *Rasas*'³² and Masson and Patwardhan's '*Śāntarasa* and Abhinavagupta's Philosophy of Aesthetics'³³ which have much to say on Abhinavagupta's treatment of the ninth *rasa* '*śānta*,' often referred to as the highest *rasa*. The clarity of each of these writers' overviews compensates for Abhinavagupta's complex sentence constructions, often cluttered with clauses; however discrepancies easily arise, so grappling with the text, aided by translators' footnotes, is a worthwhile task. An important point to keep in mind in constructing an overview which draws from early Western commentaries on the texts is the tendency towards bias, nevertheless they still have much to contribute to an understanding of *rasa* which warrants their consideration here.

One element of Abhinavagupta's contribution to the study of Indian aesthetics which goes largely unaddressed is the impact of his religious and philosophical background on his aesthetic ideology. As a key exponent and early figure of Kashmiri *Śaivism* (also known as *Śaiva-Advaita*), which flourished in the eighth century CE, Abhinavagupta's views on the nature of reality, the self, the Supreme Being and the relation of them to each other potentially reveal a great deal of the philosophy behind his aesthetic thinking. Not only does his branch of Kashmiri *Śaivism* teach that the sum total of reality can be found reflected in the self or *ātman*, but that the route to accessing it is through disciplined introversion. What is informative and worth keeping in mind as we assess the relationship between the aesthetic experience of *rasa* and the highest religious ideal, is the school's acknowledgment of a 'bodily awakening' or *samaveśa* which is a 'contemplative experience of unity consciousness, in which the entire universe is experienced as identical with the self.'³⁴ The important element here is that

³² V. Raghavan, *The Number of Rasas*, 3rd ed. (Madras, India: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1975).

³³ Masson and Patwardhan, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta's Philosophy of Aesthetics*.

³⁴ Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 2nd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 271.

this is a spiritual awakening which takes place whilst the spiritual seeker inhabits their physical frame through sensory experience. Indeed, Abhinavagupta refers to the ‘highest *Śakti* herself that is ever playing at the edge of my senses.’³⁵ The capacity for such a ‘tasting’ of divine consciousness is significant for our discussion here, so an awareness of Abhinavagupta’s philosophical milieu pays dividends in the quest for an understanding of the relationship between the aesthetic and the religious.

§2.1.5 The Number of *Rasas*³⁶

It is common to refer to ‘the *rasa* experience’ in the singular, for indeed, an experience of *rasa* is always a unified and unique encounter; however, most texts on the subject enumerate multiple *rasas* which may be interpreted as the different ‘hues’ or ‘colourings’ of the one anticipated outcome. The *Nāṭya Śāstra* identifies eight *rasas*, a classification which finds widespread agreement:³⁷ *śṛṅgāra* (erotic), *hāsyā* (comic), *karuṇā* (tragic), *raudra* (wrathful), *vīra* (heroic), *bhayānaka* (terrible), *bībhātsa* (disgusting) and *adbhuta* (marvellous). It is thought that the inclusion of a ninth, namely *śānta rasa* or the *rasa* of tranquillity, was a later interpolation in the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, although Rangacharya suggests that this is not at odds with Bharata’s initial theory since his overall thesis was that the *rasas* led those who were receptive to an experience of calm.³⁸ However, according to Raghvan, those scholars who reject *śānta* itself as a *rasa* are often those concerned with drama, citing perceived loyalty to Bharata in doing so. Abhinavagupta labelled *śānta* as the ultimate *rasa* in each of his three main works, namely his lost commentary on Bhaṭṭa Tauta’s *Kāvya-kautuka*, his commentary on Ānandavardhana’s *Dhvanyāloka* – the *Locana* and in his commentary on the *Nāṭya*

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ It is of note that the title of this subsection is the title attributed to Raghavan’s selected translation of Abhinavagupta’s *Abhinavābharaṇī* which will be considered in greater detail in due course. See Raghavan, *The Number of Rasas*.

³⁷ For a short response to the issues surrounding how many *rasas* there are, see Hiriyan, *Art Experience*, 69-72.

³⁸ Adya Rangacharya, *Introduction to Bharata’s Nāṭyaśāstra* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1966; reprint, 2005), 81.

Śāstra, the *Abhinavābharaṇī*. Certainly, in the portions of the *Abhinavābharaṇī* reproduced by both Masson and Patwardhan and Raghvan, *śānta* is attributed the central role of root³⁹ or source⁴⁰ of all the *rasas*. Mohan Thampi elaborates thus: ‘all feelings in aesthetic experience emerge out of the *śānta* and are in the end submerged in it,’⁴¹ thus we can assume that whatever peculiarities distinguish each of the *rasas* from one another, *śānta* will always be held in common.⁴² *Śānta* is commonly translated as being the *rasa* of tranquillity, although Masson and Patwardhan describe it more precisely as ‘the imaginative experience of tranquillity,’⁴³ and in doing so distinguish it, perhaps, from the absolute tranquillity attained by the self when it finds its identity in the divine Brahman. Nevertheless, it is easy to understand why the quality of this aesthetic experience of tranquillity has led some to associate it with that of the ultimate attainment of *mokṣa* or release from the endless cycle of rebirth, not least because Abhinavagupta makes suggestive claims such as drama possessing the ability to ‘[create] mental repose’⁴⁴ as well as his bolder claims that such an experience ‘is similar to the tasting [...] of the supreme Brahman.’⁴⁵

Of the *rasas*, Coomaraswamy asserts ‘the “nine *rasas*” are no more than the various colourings of one experience, and are arbitrary terms of rhetoric used only for convenience in classification.’⁴⁶ Bharata ascribes each *rasa* both a colour⁴⁷ and a deity.⁴⁸ As Goswamy indicates in his treatment of *rasa*, though, the delineation of colour and deity is to be understood as a general iconographical rule and should not be allowed to limit an interpretation of an artistic context thus denigrating the complex intermingling

³⁹ Masson and Patwardhan, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta’s Philosophy of Aesthetics*, 139.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁴¹ Thampi, “‘Rasa’ as Aesthetic Experience,” 79.

⁴² Masson and Patwardhan, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta’s Philosophy of Aesthetics*, 141.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, iii.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁵ Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, 48.

⁴⁶ Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, 32.

⁴⁷ *NS* 6.42-43, (108).

⁴⁸ *NS* 6.44-45, (108).

of emotions which lead to a *rasa* experience.⁴⁹ A further noteworthy point here is that whilst the ultimate aesthetic experience is without doubt a pleasurable encounter, this does not mean that such experiences are confined to artistic portrayals of joy and happy times for, as the *Daśarūpa* asserts: '[Whether one take] a subject that is delightful or disgusting, exalted or lowly, cruel or kindly, obscure [...] or adapted [...] there is no [subject] that cannot succeed in conveying Sentiment among mankind.'⁵⁰

§2.1.6 Bhāvas

Most serious scholarly considerations of *rasa* theory refer to a single verse (or more properly, *sutra*) in the *Nāṭya Śāstra*⁵¹—‘*vibhāvānubhāvavyabhicārisaṃyogād rasaniṣpattiḥ*’—which can be translated thus: ‘[*Rasa*] is produced (*rasa-niṣpattiḥ*) from a combination (*saṃyoga*) of Determinants (*vibhāva*), Consequents (*anubhāva*) and Complementary Psychological States (*vyabhicāri-bhāva*).’⁵² It is perhaps worth drawing attention to the fact that Bharata neglects to include the permanent enduring emotions or *sthāyi bhāvas* in his ‘recipe’ for *rasa*. However, Abhinavagupta works on the premise outlined by Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa that their existence is implicit within the *sutra* given the manner in which Bharata speaks about them elsewhere, and as such they will be treated in detail here.⁵³ It is, then, through a combination of these various *bhāvas* that *rasa* may be experienced.⁵⁴ *Bhāva* is usually translated simply as ‘emotion’ in the ordinary everyday sense as distinct from *rasa* which must be understood as a peculiar aesthetic emotion.

⁴⁹ Goswamy, *Essence of Indian Art*, 30.

⁵⁰ *Daśarūpa* IV.90, (148).

⁵¹ It is quoted almost exactly in the *Daśarūpa* III.36, (92).

⁵² *NS* 6.31, (105-6)

⁵³ Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, 25.

⁵⁴ Bharata stresses at some length that the *bhāvas* precede *rasa* experience rather than vice versa although he does stress that they function together: ‘*There is no Rasa devoid of bhāva nor bhāva devoid of Rasa.*’ *NS* 6.32-38, (106-7).

The Determinants (*vibhāvas*) and the Consequents (*anubhāvas*) are both material realities embodying or manifesting immaterial states. The Determinants⁵⁵ provide the emotive context or mindset within which a *rasa* may be experienced. For instance Determinants of the *vīra* or heroic *rasa* include *parākrama* (valour) and *pratāpa* (aggressiveness).⁵⁶ Coomaraswamy elaborates that the Determinants function by a ‘self-identification with the imagined situation.’⁵⁷ Determinants may be further classified into two categories which are translated by Nardi⁵⁸ as objective (*ālambana vibhāvas*) and stimulative (*uddipana vibhāvas*) and by Goswamy⁵⁹ as substantial and excitant. The *ālambana vibhāvas* are the ‘material and indispensable ingredient’ towards which emotions are directed, for instance, remaining with the *vīra* example, the hero or the heroine⁶⁰ and the *uddipana vibhāvas* are the elements which evoke the emotions for instance weaponry and a battlefield.⁶¹ In a drama, for example, Determinants include the concrete representations of feelings and moods through objects, characters, elements of action and plot and other conventional indicators.

Bharata describes the Consequents as ‘the specific and conventional means of registering emotional states, in particular gestures and glances.’⁶² From this it can be determined that the Consequents consist in bodily manifestations of appropriate emotional responses to such contexts including involuntary physical reactions (*sāttvika bhāvas*, such as perspiration, weeping and trembling), words and bodily gestures. Although not explicitly included in the *rasasutra*, Bharata suggests elsewhere that the *sāttvika bhāvas* play a role in creating the perfect conditions for a *rasa* experience to occur. The *sāttvika bhāvas* are involuntary bodily reactions and described by

⁵⁵ *SD* III.62, (55-6). Viśvanātha refers to them as Excitants.

⁵⁶ *NS* 6.67-68, (115).

⁵⁷ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 2004), 52.

⁵⁸ Nardi, *The Theory of Citrasūtras in Indian Painting*, 144.

⁵⁹ Goswamy, *Essence of Indian Art*, 22.

⁶⁰ *SD* III.63, (56).

⁶¹ *SD* III.160-161, (94).

⁶² *NS* cited in Goswamy, 22.

Coomaraswamy as being ‘emotional states originating in the inner nature.’⁶³ There are eight of them and these are *stambha* (paralysis), *sveda* (perspiration), *romāñca* (horripilation), *svarasāda* (feebleness in the voice), *vepathu* (trembling), *vaivarṇya* (change of colour), *aśru* (shedding tears) and *pralaya* (loss of sense).⁶⁴ Summarily then, the Determinants and the Consequents are the embodied manifestations of emotions.

The final type of embodied manifestations of emotions incorporated in the *rasasutra* are the *vyabhicāribhāvas* also referred to as the transitory or complementary mental states. There are thirty-three in total, including *ālasya* (lethargy), *harsa* (joy) and *svapna* (dreaming),⁶⁵ and, as their name suggests, these are passing emotions which do not last. They are closely related to the ‘ultimate’ category of emotions, known as the *sthāyi bhāvas* which, given its literal meaning of ‘standing’ and in the absence of further definition by Bharata, has led to an understanding of *sthāyi bhāvas* as enduring emotional states.⁶⁶ According to one account, the ‘Transitory States are those that especially accompany the Permanent State in cooperation, emerging from it and [again] being submerged in it, like the waves in the ocean.’⁶⁷ It is important, however, to recognise, at very least, the theoretical distinction between the two types which lies primarily in the degree of intensity they incur. There are eight *sthāyi bhāvas* and these are *rati* (love), *hāsa* (laughter), *śoka* (sorrow), *krodha* (fury), *utsāha* (enthusiasm), *bhaya* (terror), *jugupsā* (disgust) and *vismaya* (astonishment).⁶⁸ For Bharata it is the Permanent Psychological States which are the key to *rasa*, but those can only be savoured through the actor’s manifestation of transitory states in the combination of

⁶³ Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, 31.

⁶⁴ NS 6.22, (103).

⁶⁵ NS 6.18-21, (102).

⁶⁶ Barlingay, *A Modern Introduction to Indian Aesthetic Theory*, 130.

⁶⁷ *Daśarūpa* 4.8, (109).

⁶⁸ NS 6.17, (102).

Determinants and Consequents.⁶⁹ Hence, he writes ‘...the cultured people taste the Durable Psychological States while they see them represented by an expression of the various Psychological States with words, gestures and the *Sattva* and derive pleasure and satisfaction.’⁷⁰ Therefore *rasa* is not an emotion represented, but an emotional response to the representation of other emotions.

On the strength of Bharata’s claim we can deduce that the permanent psychological states and the *rasas* are very closely related, but the precise nature of this relationship has dominated debate for centuries and remains contested. On occasion Bharata speaks in such a way as to suggest their identification.⁷¹ Elsewhere though he treats them as distinct and complementary, *rasa* being the peculiar delight or pleasure derived from *savouring* the permanent psychological states. Thus he insists ‘the Sentiments arise from the Psychological States and not the Psychological States from the Sentiments.’⁷² For Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa, whom we access through the writing of Abhinavagupta, *rasa* can be understood as one of the permanent human emotions which, as a result of a combination of the Determinants, Consequents and Transients, becomes intensified. For him, then, *rasa* is an intensified permanent emotion which, in the absence of interaction with other emotions, would remain a permanent state.⁷³

Writing later, Śaṅkuka rejected Lollaṭa’s account of *rasa* as intensified emotion for several reasons, from the textual observation that if his theory were correct Bharata’s original text would likely have listed the permanent emotional states first before identifying the *rasas* rather than vice versa, to the more conceptually interesting

⁶⁹ Both the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* and the *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra* take for granted a pre-existing knowledge of the *rasa* theory and its component emotions, therefore no such comparative proclamation naming the *sthāyi bhāvas* as the key to *rasa* exist in either of these texts. See Nardi, *The Theory of Citrasūtras in Indian Painting*, 146-149.

⁷⁰ *NS* 6.31, (105-6).

⁷¹ *NS* 6.32-33, (106). ‘Hence these Durable Psychological States in a drama are called Sentiments.’

⁷² *NS* 6.32-33, (106).

⁷³ Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, 26.

argument that since intensity admits of degrees, *rasa* too would require a sliding scale of intensity. In its place Śaṅkuka proposes a theory of reproduction centred on *rasa* as the *imitation* of permanent enduring emotions. Abhinavagupta elaborates on this view: ‘*Rasa* is simply a permanent state of mind, and more precisely, the reproduction (*anukaraṇa*) of the permanent state of mind proper to the person reproduced [...] and just because it is a reproduction, it is called by a different word, that is *Rasa*.’⁷⁴ In this way of thinking, the permanent emotion is perceived as being present in the reproducing actor and inferentially experienced by the spectator. Abhinavagupta gives over a whole section of the *Abhinavābharaṭī* to the task of identifying which mode of perception gives way to a *rasa* experience, the complexities of which do not need outlining here; suffice to say, Abhinavagupta concludes that this perception is of a ‘non-ordinary’ kind. The truth of this is two-fold, firstly, *rasa* is a state which is peculiar to the aesthetic context (lasting only as long as the mimetic presentation) and secondly, it is not a perception of ordinary cognition, it is *alaukika* or ‘other-worldly.’ Thus, Abhinavagupta retains the distinction between the permanent enduring emotions and *rasa*, pointing out that if they were the same, *rasa* would exist in everyday life whereas it is a pleasure peculiar to the treatment of the emotions in the aesthetic context.⁷⁵ But the relationship is complex and ambiguous.

§2.1.7 The Mechanics of a *Rasa* Experience

Whilst Bharata’s *rasasutra* defines *rasas* as being ‘born’ from a combination of Determinants, Consequents and Transients alongside the physical reactions and enduring emotions he mentions elsewhere, he fails to address the precise interaction of these required to produce *rasa*.⁷⁶ In many scholarly accounts of *rasa* the failure to

⁷⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 79-80.

⁷⁶ Whilst Bharata’s *rasasutra* in 6.32 identifies that it is the *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyabhicāribhāvas* which combine to create the aesthetic experience, there appears to be a later contradictory verse (7.6)

acknowledge this gap results in confusion regarding the basic elements of *rasa* theory. Bharata's only gesture towards the complex mingling of emotions is in his use of analogy:

Just as [the] connoisseur of cooked food (*bhakta*) while eating food which has been prepared from various spices and other articles taste it, so the learned people taste in their heart (*manas*) the Durable Psychological States [*sthāyi bhāvas*]... when they are represented by an expression of the Psychological States with Gestures. Hence these Durable Psychological States [...] are called Sentiments [*Rasa*].⁷⁷

Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, writing in the early part of the tenth century and about whom we only know what Abhinavagupta records, was the first seriously to consider the Sanskrit term 'niṣpattih,' often translated as 'birth' and deployed in Bharata's *rasasutra* to signify the arousal of *rasa*. A large part of Abhinavagupta's work in the portion of the *Abhinavābharatī* translated by Gnoli is concerned with securing an adequate term to refer to the manner by which *rasa* is generated.⁷⁸ Abhinavagupta starts his critique of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's work by citing the latter's claim that '*rasa* is neither perceived (*prati*), nor produced (*utpad*), nor manifested (*abhivyaj*).'⁷⁹ It is easy to get embroiled in the subsequent minutiae of Abhinavagupta's semantics, but to do so is unnecessary here, since ultimately his purpose in endorsing Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's claim is simply to insist that *rasa* is a non-ordinary form of cognition. Donna Wulff stresses this point when she clarifies that although Abhinavagupta speaks of 'tasting' as the relevant manner of perception, this is to be understood as signifying an extra-ordinary type of cognition.⁸⁰

which states that it is the forty nine *bhāvas*, consisting of eight *sthāyi bhāvas*, thirty three *vyabhicāribhāvas* and eight *sāttvika bhāvas*, which combine to manifest *rasa*.

⁷⁷ NS 6.32-33, (106).

⁷⁸ Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁸⁰ Wulff, "Religion in New Mode: The Convergence of the Aesthetic and the Religious in Medieval India," 677.

Very few writers on the subject seem able concisely to convey the broad mechanics of the *rasa* experience, so it is helpful to consider this here. Abhinavagupta speaks of ‘minds [...] being varied by beginningless latent impressions,’⁸¹ and *rasa* can be understood to arise from the activation of one or more of these latent impressions (*vāsanās*). They are ‘beginningless’ because they have accumulated through successive lives and they are understood to include every possible type of emotion. Elsewhere, Abhinavagupta is specific about the presence of the ‘nine forms of consciousness’ which correlate with the nine *rasas* he enumerates. He states: ‘no living creature exists without the latent impression of these sentiments. All we can say is that some of them predominate in some people and others in others, and that in some people they originate from the usual causes and in others from causes different from the habitual.’⁸² This type of understanding is not peculiar to Abhinavagupta’s aesthetic theory; indeed, he establishes an understanding of these latent impressions by citing the following passage from the *Śākuntala*:

Seeing moving sights, and hearing soft sounds, even a man who is happy is filled with strange longing. Surely it is because he vaguely remembers, though he is not fully conscious, affections formed in an earlier life that are fixed inside him through the latent impressions they leave behind.⁸³

With regard to the aesthetic context, however, in the event of a perfect combination of the *bhāvas* in an artistic presentation as described above, one or more of these latent emotions or *sthāyi bhāvas* is activated and, being aesthetically transformed through the artistic medium, causes the sympathetic spectator to ‘[lose] ego consciousness in identification with [the] mental states represented’ and consequently affords them a transcendental experience, namely that of *rasa*.⁸⁴ For the duration of the aesthetic experience, the ego is transcended and the spectator has ‘come into direct contact with

⁸¹ Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, 58.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 74.

⁸³ Cited in Masson and Patwardhan, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta’s Philosophy of Aesthetics*, 57.

⁸⁴ Wulff, "Religion in New Mode: The Convergence of the Aesthetic and the Religious in Medieval India," 676.

the deepest recesses of [their] unconscious where the memory of a primeval unity between man and the universe is still strong.⁸⁵ Even more poignantly for our purposes, Masson and Patwardhan translate Abhinavagupta as positing that ‘inadvertently [...] we have arrived at the same inner terrain as that occupied by the mystic though our aim was very different from his.’⁸⁶ Such claims will count as pivotal in due course when we turn to consider the precise relationship between certain types of aesthetic and religious experiences.⁸⁷

§2.1.8 *Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*

Abhinavagupta takes as the crux of his thesis that ‘*rasa* is revealed by a special power assumed by words in poetry and drama, the power of revelation as distinguished from the power of denotation – consisting of the act of generalising the determinants, consequents and transients [...] *rasa*, revealed by this power, is then enjoyed (*bhuj*) with a kind of enjoyment (*bhoga*), different from direct experience [and] memory.’⁸⁸

Here, when Abhinavagupta speaks of ‘generalising’ the Determinants etc., he is referring to the process of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*, also known as ‘universalisation.’ This notion was first introduced by Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, subsequently expounded by Abhinavagupta and remains a key feature of Indian aesthetics to the present day. As Abhinavagupta employs the term it signifies the ability to transcend the ego in a move towards self-identification with the performed subject. The revelation resultant from such an act of generalising ‘has the faculty of suppressing the thick layer of mental stupor (*moha*) occupying our own consciousness.’⁸⁹ The successful suppression of the

⁸⁵ Masson and Patwardhan, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta’s Philosophy of Aesthetics*, vii.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Cf. p.76ff, §2.2 ‘*Rasa*: Aesthetic and/or Religious’.

⁸⁸ Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, 45.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

ego elevates one to the 'plane of collective human experience'⁹⁰ and, as Patankar explains, the 'subsumption of particular human beings under a common universal explains the possibility of communication between them.'⁹¹ Writing later than Abhinavagupta in the fourteenth century, Viśvanátha in the *Sāhitya Darpaṇa* states that in this universal state 'there is felt a [community], and not an [exclusiveness]' in such a manner that, in Viśvanátha's context, the reader (viewer) is made common with the character portrayed in the work.⁹² However, in his article appraising the modern relevance of the rasa theory, Patankar notes that although the process of universalisation is key to the aesthetic experience, the spectator must also retain a certain clear sense of self, since it is the memory of his own past experiences which, at very least, kick starts this aesthetic experience.⁹³

Elsewhere in his deliberations, Patankar makes the observation that *Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* can be understood in two ways. The first, he states, is to interpret it as being a one way process whereby the spectator moves from the 'particular' to the 'universal' which subsumes it. The second, which Patankar attributes to Abhinavagupta, is to make sense of it as a two-way process in which the spectator moves from the 'particular' to the 'universal,' but then returns to the 'particular' again, but, and this is an important qualification, the second 'particular' is not identical with the first. If Mathur's reading is correct, then the relevant difference can be attributed to the moral edification of the spectator who, having transcended their everyday existence for a time has attained a new awareness of life and its problems.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Thampi, "'Rasa' as Aesthetic Experience," 78.

⁹¹ R.B Patankar, "Does The "Rasa" Theory Have Any Modern Relevance?," *Philosophy East and West* 30, no. 3 (1980): 294.

⁹² *SD* III.43, (47). Original formatting.

⁹³ Patankar, "Does The "Rasa" Theory Have Any Modern Relevance?," 297.

⁹⁴ Dinesh C. Mathur, "Abhinavagupta and Dewey on Art and Its Relation to Morality: Comparisons and Evaluations," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 42, no. 2 (1981): 227.

It is in the aesthetic account of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* that the most apparent similarity between aesthetic and religious experience can be found. In the aesthetic context, the experience of *rasa* depends on the ability of both the actor and the spectator imaginatively to transcend the ego. Similarly, in Abhinavagupta's worldview, 'the spiritual goal of human beings is to overcome the misconception that one has a distinct individual being and to recognise one's identity (and the identity of the whole world) with Śiva, one's true Self.'⁹⁵ In both instances, the spectator or devotee to a greater or lesser degree overcomes the bond of the ego and enters, at least for a time, the plane of collective human experience.

§2.1.9 Sahrdaya: Who Experiences Rasa?

Contrary to Abhinavagupta's predecessor, Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa, who argued that *rasa* was present in both the historically represented character and in the actor,⁹⁶ Abhinavagupta is clear in his own mind that the actor is only the 'vessel' and as such 'is necessary and useful only in the beginning.'⁹⁷ Whilst his position precludes the actor from experiencing *rasa*, for the spectator, the possibility of an aesthetic experience is 'virtually ever present and potentially realisable' though not all who are confronted by the physical art object or presentation, nor even experience the *sthāyi bhāva* of any given *rasa*, can be assured a *rasa* experience.⁹⁸ Even those fortunate enough to experience *rasa* will not necessarily find themselves catapulted into it by the same component nor experience the same intensity of emotion. Suffice to say that the ancient texts all agree that a *rasa* experience cannot be engineered and, though sought after, its occurrence is as unexpected as the floor giving way.

⁹⁵ Kathleen Marie Higgins, "An Alchemy of Emotion: Rasa and Aesthetic Breakthroughs," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 1 (2007): 49.

⁹⁶ Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, 26.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, xxxvi.

⁹⁸ Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, 51.

This is not to suggest that the incidence of *rasa* is completely random, since, as has been noted above, the process of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* alone places certain pre-requisites on such an experience. Primarily these are the accumulation of memory traces, both conscious and unconscious, together with the shedding of egoistic attachment and the assumption of an ‘impersonal contemplative attitude.’⁹⁹ Those ancient texts which elaborate on *rasa* refer to the person who achieves this state as ‘*sahrdaya*’ or ‘qualified’ meaning one ‘whose heart possesses a spotless power of intuition (*pratibhāna*).’¹⁰⁰ Masson and Patwardhan make an interesting statement regarding these ‘qualified’ people in stating that their ability to intuit the dominant emotion in an artistic portrayal comes from ‘mirror of their hearts [being] polished through the constant recitation and study of poetry.’¹⁰¹ Their position here should not be taken to suggest that the highest aesthetic experiences are reserved for the literate elite rather than being the *sui generis* encounters that Abhinavagupta seems to portray. Rather, whilst it was not unusual for a master guru and his student to study texts together as well as learning texts orally, aesthetic experiences cannot be gained through study alone. Indeed, Coomaraswamy states: ‘it is possible for a man to devote a whole life time to the study of art, without having once experienced aesthetic emotion.’¹⁰²

Both the *Sāhitya Darpaṇa* and the *Daśarūpa* agree that there are barriers which preclude an aesthetic experience. In the former those without imagination are likened to the woodwork of the theatre¹⁰³ and in the latter such an experience is said to be dependent on the *rasika*’s ‘*capacity for being pleased and his attitude*.’¹⁰⁴ Coomaraswamy’s treatment of *rasa* specifically in the domain of the visual arts

⁹⁹ Pravas Jivan Chaudhury, "The Theory of Rasa," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 11, no. 2, Special Issue on Oriental Art and Aesthetics (1952): 148.

¹⁰⁰ Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, 53.

¹⁰¹ Masson and Patwardhan, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta’s Philosophy of Aesthetics*, 6.

¹⁰² Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, 33.

¹⁰³ *SD* III.39b, (45).

¹⁰⁴ *Daśarūpa* IV.47, (126). Original italics.

highlights the *rasika*'s ability creatively to compensate for artistic imperfection. He quotes Sukracharya, who states that 'the defects of images are constantly destroyed by the power of the virtue of the worshipper who has his heart always set on God,' before identifying two kinds of artistic tolerance employed by a spectator and potential *rasika*.¹⁰⁵ The first he identifies is 'uncritical' whereby the spectator is too easily satisfied by a work in which form and content do not unite, and the second is 'creative' in which the spectator's own imagination rectifies a work's imperfections.

Abhinavagupta also elaborates at some length on the constant danger of obstacles. He specifically outlines seven obstacles to the realisation of *rasa*, a selection of which are worth noting here. Firstly, he proposes that if that which the viewer is presented with is lacking in verisimilitude, his consciousness will not find sanctuary in it and in suggestion as to how this pitfall may be avoided, Abhinavagupta states that it is necessary to present famous characters in order to cement credibility. Similarly, another of his identified obstacles which seems to have close connections with the last is that of the presence of doubt. Where the spectator is unable clearly to determine the combination of Determinants, Consequents and Transients, there is the danger that determining the specific permanent emotions could result in confusion and thus fall short of a *rasa* experience. Another obstacle is born from either the actor or the spectator's pre-occupation with their own emotions which Abhinavagupta refers to as 'being at the mercy of our own sensations.'¹⁰⁶ His reasoning for identifying self-awareness as impeding a *rasa* experience are that anyone focussing on a personal emotion cannot allow their consciousness to rest on anything else and, he continues, the way to guard against this is by paying particular attention to ensuring the correct environment is created by close adherence to the guidelines outlined in the *Nāṭya*

¹⁰⁵ Cited in Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, 34.

¹⁰⁶ Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, 62, 67.

Śāstra. If these guidelines are well executed thus allowing a state of generality to be formed, Abhinavagupta states ‘even an unaesthetic person (*sahṛdaya*) reaches limpidity of heart and becomes ‘possessed of heart.’¹⁰⁷

§2.1.10 The *Rasa* Experience

The true nature of the *rasa* experience is a hotly debated topic and certainly not a new one. Abhinavagupta addressed it in the *Abhinavābharaṇī* and even his words were not the final word on the issue, although a summary of his conclusions are worth restating here. He is at pains to note that contrary to Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa’s early suggestion, *rasa* is different to the permanent emotion and furthermore that it exists only as long as the gustation itself.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, he states that the very reason that Bharata’s initial treatises omitted mention of the permanent enduring emotions in his *rasasutra* was to avoid such difficulties.¹⁰⁹ Abhinavagupta also refutes Śaṅkuka’s claim that *rasa* is simply a permanent emotion brought to attention by a very specific combination of Determinants, Consequents and Transients for, he states, if this were so *rasa* would arise from ordinary everyday life experiences, whereas *rasa* is specifically of a non-ordinary nature.¹¹⁰ Whilst he is prepared to admit that the permanent emotion may arise from the combined effect of the Determinants, Consequents and Transients, he insists that *rasa* is not of this nature.¹¹¹ Further, Abhinavagupta asserts that the successful functioning of the Determinants, Consequents and Transients is always reliant on the spectator’s ability to discern from ordinary life experience ‘other people’s mental processes,’ in order that they may be able to distinguish the Determinants, Consequents

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 67. A parallel could be drawn with the popular suggestion to ‘close your eyes, and imagine...’ which invites the willing participant to block out anything which might otherwise distract and enter a state of generality.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 35.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 36.

and Transients.¹¹² Although Abhinavagupta makes clear links here with both inference and memory this must not be allowed to jumble his aesthetic theory in which he clearly states that *rasa* differs from memory, inference and indeed, any ordinary state of self-consciousness. Abhinavagupta is keen to distinguish between the combination of the Determinants, Consequents and the Transients and the *rasa* experience and does so thus: ‘what is produced by the combination (*samyoga*) of the Determinants, etc. is the tasting (*rasana*); and the *Rasa* is the non-ordinary reality, which is the matter of this tasting.’¹¹³

In modern times Coomaraswamy is clear about the role each of the emotions should play if *rasa* is to arise in a spectator. He suggests that for a *rasa* experience to be induced one of the ‘permanent’ or *sthāyi bhāvas* should become the ‘master-motif to which all the other expressions of emotion are subordinate.’¹¹⁴ He goes on to quote from the *Daśarūpa*, ‘the extended development of a transient emotion tends to the absence of *rasa*’ which Coomaraswamy defines as the work becoming sentimental.¹¹⁵ Of such art Coomaraswamy states: ‘Pretty art which emphasizes passing feelings and personal emotion is neither beautiful nor true: it tells us of meeting again in heaven it confuses time and eternity, loveliness and beauty, partiality and love.’¹¹⁶

The quandary, however, remains: What is the nature of a *rasa* experience? Here, Barlingay is helpful: ‘*Rasa* is not a thing in itself, formed previous to the act of consciousness by which it is perceived, but the consciousness itself (and therefore, the perception) which, freed from external interference and from all practical desires,

¹¹² Ibid., 79.

¹¹³ Ibid., 86.

¹¹⁴ Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, 31.

¹¹⁵ *Daśarūpa* IV.45, (125); Ibid., 32.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

becomes *rasa* or aesthetic consciousness.’¹¹⁷ So, this *rasa* experience is *alaukika* or ‘other worldly.’¹¹⁸ Abhinavagupta affirms the word for awe or wonder as *camatkāra* which he understands to identify both the state of consciousness and the sense experience of *rasa*. It is the state in which the *bhāvas* have combined to create the *sthāyi bhāva* or enduring emotion thus elevating the *rasika*’s consciousness to a realm beyond the material world of sensory perception. The *Sāhitya Darpaṇa* outlines a negative definition stating that *rasa* is not an objective entity, nor a product and furthermore that it is not eternal ‘as it does not reside in the perception previous to that of the Excitants and [...] at the time when it is not perceived, it does not exist.’¹¹⁹ Coomaraswamy is far from reticent when it comes to elaborating on the nature of this aesthetic experience:

The level of pure aesthetic experience is indeed that of the pure angelic understanding, proper to the Motionless Heaven [...] The vision is our very Being [...] and like our Being, beyond our individually limited grasp (*grahaṇa*) or conception (*samkalpa*).¹²⁰

Elsewhere, Coomaraswamy pitches his understanding of the aesthetic experience firmly within his view of *satya* (Reality) as being where the intelligible and the sensible come together.¹²¹ That is to say, for him, the ‘*ānanda*’ or ‘delight’ of the divine *saccidānanda* may be located in the physical presence of a material object such that the art object can become a ‘well-spring of delight.’¹²²

Coomaraswamy’s eagerness to identify aesthetic experience with a divine encounter is based on more cautious statements in ancient texts on the subject. Abhinavagupta suggests simply that aesthetic experience is ‘similar to the tasting [...] of the supreme

¹¹⁷ Barlingay, *A Modern Introduction to Indian Aesthetic Theory*, 103.

¹¹⁸ *SD* III.56, (52-3). *Alaukika* is used interchangeably with *lokōttara*.

¹¹⁹ *SD* III.51-53, (50-51).

¹²⁰ Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, 50.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 47.

*Brahman.*¹²³ Yet even this is a weighty claim which invites further discussion regarding the nature of the relationship between *rasa* and religious experience: are they merely similar or could they be identical?

§2.2 *Rasa*: Aesthetic and/or Religious?

‘Inadvertently says Abhinavagupta, we have arrived at the same inner terrain as that occupied by the mystic though our aim was very different from his.’¹²⁴ If Masson and Patwardhan’s reading of Abhinavagupta here is to be taken as accurate, it seems that even the author of the very claim we are investigating is uncertain of the ‘holy ground’ we now inhabit. Before Abhinavagupta, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka was the first to propose a link between *rasāvada*, or the ‘tasting’ of aesthetic experience, and *brahmāsvāda*, or the ‘tasting’ of ultimate Reality, though it is fair to say that it was Abhinavagupta who popularised the treatment of *rasa* as ‘akin to the tasting of the supreme Brahman.’ Thus, from the tenth century onwards it became relatively commonplace to find direct associations made between the aesthetic and the religious, with Viśvanātha in the fourteenth century claiming *rasa* as ‘akin, as the uterine brother, to the ecstatic contemplator’s perception of God.’ Subsequent scholarly treatments of these works have not always preserved the ambiguity implicit in such claims and have had a tendency to overstate the relationship. Mukerjee, for instance, claims ‘Indian art throws open the vistas of direct vision of the non-dual, transcendent reality, inducing a profound joy and exaltation of the soul.’¹²⁵ But perhaps most notable is that claim made by Coomaraswamy, a scholar widely respected in the field of Indian aesthetics and for the most part, considered an authority on the subject, who asserts ‘the arts are not for our instruction, but for our delight, and this delight is something more than pleasure, it is the godlike ecstasy of liberation from the restless activity of the mind and the senses

¹²³ Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, 48.

¹²⁴ Masson and Patwardhan, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta’s Philosophy of Aesthetics*, viii. Original paraphrase.

¹²⁵ Mukerjee, "Rasas' as Springs of Art in Indian Aesthetics," 96.

which are the veils of all reality, transparent only when we are at peace with ourselves.¹²⁶ Admittedly, he maintains that this experience is ‘godlike’ but there can be no doubting his suggestion that aesthetic experience pertains to the highest echelons of religious experience.

Most scholars exercise more caution than those cited above, but it is common to read accounts which suggest that that which is ‘tasted’ in the aesthetic context is the same as in the religious, namely ‘the transcendental experience of beatitude or bliss (called *ānanda*)’¹²⁷ or the ‘taste of the impersonal identification that, sustained, would be liberation itself.’¹²⁸ It is this latter remark which best illustrates the extent to which most writers interpret talk of aesthetic experience being ‘akin’ to the tasting of the supreme Brahman, in that it concurs that that which is ‘tasted’ is of the same essence in both instances, but what distinguishes them is the length of the tasting. Contrary to a divine ‘tasting’, *rasa* is ‘fleeting,’¹²⁹ although a ‘common consciousness is attained’ it is not an identical encounter because it is ‘limited.’¹³⁰ At this point the primary distinction can be made that ‘*rasa* is transient [where] *mokṣa* endures.’¹³¹

There are few extant works which offer a sustained reflection on the nature of the relationship between *rasāvada* and *brahmāsvāda*, yet Masson and Patwardhan’s *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta’s Philosophy of Aesthetics* provides, together with a

¹²⁶ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Gopala Kristnayya Duggirala, eds., *The Mirror of Gesture: Being the Abhinaya Darpaṇa of Nandikeśvara*, 6 ed. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2003), 9.

¹²⁷ Kapila Vatsyayan, "The Indian Arts: Their Ideational Background and Principles of Form," in *Rūpa Pratirūpa. Alice Boner Commemoration Volume*, ed. Bettina Bäumer (New Delhi: Biblia Impex Private Ltd, 1982), 39.

¹²⁸ Higgins, "An Alchemy of Emotion: Rasa and Aesthetic Breakthroughs," 50.

¹²⁹ Schwartz, *Rasa: Performing the Divine in India*, 14.

¹³⁰ Pandey, "A Bird's-Eye View of Indian Aesthetics," 68. It is of interest here to note that whilst Pandey speaks of a *rasa* experience being, comparatively limited, Masson and Patwardhan state that ‘Abhinava insists that *rasa* is not *niyantrita* [or] “limited” in its scope.’ See J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan, *Aesthetic Rapture*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute, 1970), 19 n.130.

¹³¹ Higgins, "An Alchemy of Emotion: Rasa and Aesthetic Breakthroughs," 50.

translated portion of the *Abhinavābharaṇī*, an overview of similarities and differences as they see them.¹³² For now, we shall consider their differences, which are comparably few.¹³³ First, Masson and Patwardhan observe that whereas a mystical experience dramatically alters one's life, a dramatic experience (even a profound one) is simply satisfying.¹³⁴ Second, the bliss generated by mystical experience is of a different quality (most writers reserve the term 'ānanda' for this alone, using other terms – eg. *vinoda* 'entertainment' – in the aesthetic context). Third, the aesthetic lacks the moral seriousness associated with mystical experience, and may be indulged in out of mere curiosity. Fourth, by comparison aesthetic experience remains entangled with the world of the senses (the Determinants, Consequents etc.) whereas in mystical experience the senses are transcended and left behind. Fifth, aesthetic experience involves a degree of detachment from what is being contemplated whereas mystical experience demands full participation. In light of such differences between the aesthetic and the mystical it is difficult to treat them as experiences of the same sort. It is, however, worthwhile noting that in their identification of these differences, they cite Abhinavagupta's stance, on more than one occasion, as being an exception. For instance, while most writers reserve 'ānanda' for references to the religious ideal, Abhinavagupta specifically uses it to describe the aesthetic and as such, it seems impossible to claim a definitive answer to the 'rasa as aesthetic or religious?' debate.

¹³² I am aware that Gerow and Aklujkar published a scathing review of this volume in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. In it they make many valid points, mostly pertaining to issues of translation, however given that their critical points do not impinge on our use of the text here and since, by their own admission, they were seeking to bring the work to the fore of scholarly interest once again, its use here is warranted. See Edwin Gerow and Ashok Aklujkar, "Review of "*Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta's Philosophy of Aesthetics* by J. L. Masson and M.V. Patwardhan," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92, no. 1 (1972).

¹³³ Masson and Patwardhan, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta's Philosophy of Aesthetics*, 163-164.

¹³⁴ Yet elsewhere Masson and Patwardhan suggested that it would not be unexpected for the *rasika* to seek out such an experience again on a more permanent basis, with the insinuation that this would be a spiritual rather than aesthetic pursuit. *Ibid.*, vii.

It is important to keep in mind that Abhinavagupta himself was in no doubt that, whilst the two experiences—the aesthetic and the religious—could inform one another, the distinction should be maintained. He states,

Aesthetic experience [...] is different from the perception of love etc., that arises because of ordinary valid means of cognition such as direct perception, inference, textual authority, simile and others. It is also (an experience) different from the indifferent knowledge of another person's thoughts that arises from direct vision in a Yogin, and from the experience that consists of a single mass of the bliss of one's own self that belongs to the highest Yogin and which, being pure, is devoid of contact with any object of the senses. The reason why aesthetic experience differs from all of the above, is because of the absence of beauty caused respectively by the appearance of distractions such as the desire to acquire the absence of active participation, the absence of clarity and being at the mercy of the object.¹³⁵

In spite of Abhinavagupta's concern to make clear the differences between the two experiences, that he draws the comparison with religious experiences at all suggests that there are similarities, certain of which are particularly striking. Returning to Masson and Patwardhan's list, they include: First, both sorts of experience are *alaukika* or *lokôttara* meaning other-worldly or transcendent, elevating us to a higher realm. Wulff notes that 'its transcendent quality is due in large measure to the freedom from worldly desires and pre-occupations.'¹³⁶ Second, both require special preparation or training before they can be enjoyed. Those whom Abhinavagupta accredits as '*sahrdaya*' (referring to the sensitive spectator) are so inclined as a direct result of the 'mirror of their hearts [having been] polished through constant recitation and study of poetry.'¹³⁷ It is interesting, however, to note that although Abhinavagupta acknowledges a certain amount of preparation be undertaken in anticipation of an aesthetic experience, Wulff suggests, based on a *sutra* from the *Dhvanyāloka Locana*, that Abhinavagupta 'emphasises the contrast between the effortless attainment of *rasa* by *sahrdayas* and the strenuous

¹³⁵ Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, 21.

¹³⁶ Wulff, "Religion in New Mode: The Convergence of the Aesthetic and the Religious in Medieval India," 678.

¹³⁷ J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan, *Aesthetic Rapture*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute, 1970), 6.

exertions of *yogis*' and furthermore, that his sympathies lay with the former.¹³⁸ Third, both involve the removal of obstacles to knowledge rather than the production of something 'new.'¹³⁹ For the mystic *vidya* or right knowledge penetrates the veil of *maya* or illusion; the *rasika* surmounts the distortions and limitations of personal emotional responses. Fourth, the distance between subject and object disappears, for at the highest moment of aesthetic pleasure, called *vigalitavedyāntara*, 'the object of knowledge has dissolved.'¹⁴⁰ Simultaneously, the self is temporarily forgotten and the distinction between aesthetic and mystical experience blurs once again for, Gnoli comments, in religious experience 'Brahman [...] is nothing but the overcoming of the knots of "I" and "mine."¹⁴¹ Whilst the line between the two states can be difficult to distinguish, Gnoli's distinction labels religious experience as 'perfect fullness' where the bond with the ego is 'already completely undone' and the aesthetic experience as being that in which 'the process of undoing has only just begun.'¹⁴² Fifth, relatedly, the experience is one of total immersion in which we lose sight of time and space and are not conscious of our surroundings.¹⁴³ Sixth, the experience ends with a sense of deflation as we return to mundane reality (though the ideal for the mystic is *mokṣa* in which the self realises its union with the Ultimate Brahman and blows out of existence).

In weighing up the similarities against the differences, there can be no doubt that the similarities outweigh the differences. Add to this statements regarding the aesthetic experience from Abhinavagupta himself, and the waters are no less muddy: 'it is identical with the consciousness of the realisation of the highest bliss. It takes its effect through the process of generalisation in poetry and drama. It makes such a heart (i.e. the

¹³⁸ Wulff, "Religion in New Mode: The Convergence of the Aesthetic and the Religious in Medieval India," 679.

¹³⁹ Cf. p.133, Sayers' account that a work of art always involves the creation of something new.

¹⁴⁰ Wulff, "Religion in New Mode: The Convergence of the Aesthetic and the Religious in Medieval India," 677. Cf. Masson and Patwardhan, *Aesthetic Rapture Vol. 2*, 70, n.388.

¹⁴¹ Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, xxiv.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, xxv.

¹⁴³ Masson and Patwardhan, *Aesthetic Rapture Vol. 2*, 19, n.130.

heart of the sensitive spectator or reader) the receptacle of an other-worldly bliss by inducing a peculiar kind of introspection.’¹⁴⁴ It seems here that Abhinavagupta is endorsing our earlier conjecture that that which is ‘tasted’ is of a common substance.

There is little doubt that in Indian thought there are no definitive boundaries to demarcate that which properly belongs to the realm of the aesthetic and that belonging to the religious. But in allowing ‘grey’ areas between the two encounters, the problem becomes much less stark and furthermore allows for cross-fertilisation between the two. It is worthwhile to remember that religious life in India is all pervading and the divide between sacred and secular is camouflaged, if indeed it is present at all. Here, Wulff is helpful, in that she challenges the ‘often unreflective compartmentalization of experience into the largely separate domains of the religious and the aesthetic.’¹⁴⁵ She goes on to address three aspects of the relationship between the two kinds of experience which she believes, on occasion, to have been overstated. Firstly, she notes that although scholarship has labelled one experience ‘*rasavada*’ and the other ‘*brahmāsvāda*,’ the same aesthetic verb for ‘tasting’ is attributed to both. Furthermore, she acknowledges a certain degree of cross-fertilisation in observing the aesthetic qualities of religious experience and the transcendent qualities of aesthetic experience. Secondly, she recognises the commonly drawn distinction that the *rasa* experience relies on a medium, where the religious does not, but claims this is an overstatement since it is only at the highest levels of religious experience that mediums have no place. The distinction then is more properly one between *brahmāsvāda* and every other kind of experience which, she claims, places aesthetic experiences on ‘the same footing as most religious experiences in being potentially preparatory for the ultimate

¹⁴⁴ Masson and Patwardhan, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta’s Philosophy of Aesthetics*, 142.

¹⁴⁵ Wulff, "Religion in New Mode: The Convergence of the Aesthetic and the Religious in Medieval India," 679.

realisation.’¹⁴⁶ Thirdly, and finally, she argues the contrast posited between the real and sustained religious encounter with the transient aesthetic experience is too sharp. Her point is that outside the final realisation of *mokṣa*, both yogic experience and *tāntric* meditation are essentially transient for it is not the experiences which are ‘real’ rather it is their source, namely Brahman or *paramasiva*, their ultimate ground.¹⁴⁷ What we can tentatively conclude from Wulff’s cautious re-statement of some of the common distinctions is that there is scope for greater fluidity between the aesthetic and the religious which is not inconsistent with religious life in India. Therefore, with its original context in mind, it becomes conceivable that a western reading of the text may tend to overstate the apparent link between aesthetic and religious.

Masson and Patwardhan point towards an alternative way to understand the relationship between the two kinds of experience. Regarding the aesthetic experience of *rasa* they observe that ‘such an experience cannot but make us impatient with the ordinary turmoil of emotions that is our inner life’ and whilst they acknowledge that Abhinavagupta never makes an explicit claim they continue ‘one cannot help feeling that he expects the reader to search out now these experiences on a more permanent basis.’¹⁴⁸ Pandey is not as cautious on the subject and argues ‘Abhinavagupta denies antagonism between sensuous joy and spiritual bliss [and] recognises the former to be a means to the latter.’¹⁴⁹ It would seem, then, that there is a sense in which the aesthetic experience of *rasa* may be understood as in some way preparatory to a sustained mystical realisation of the divine union.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.: 680.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Masson and Patwardhan, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta’s Philosophy of Aesthetics*, vii.

¹⁴⁹ Cited in Mathur, "Abhinavagupta and Dewey on Art and Its Relation to Morality: Comparisons and Evaluations," 226.

In light of all this, whilst the links between the two sorts of experience are clearly worthy of attention, Coomaraswamy's suggestion that 'Religion and Art are... names for one and the same experience' seems excessive.¹⁵⁰ Whilst there are clear similarities between certain types of aesthetic and religious experience, especially in the language used to talk about them, there are also differences and Abhinavagupta is clear they are distinct experiences. It is imperative to recognise that the original cultural setting which played host to the exposition of the *rasa* theory, knew no distinction between aesthetic and religious, so although modern western readers might revere Abhinavagupta as a great inter-disciplinarian, in his own country and time his approach was truly holistic. With all this in mind, it seems appropriate to interpret the relationship between *rasāvada* and *brahmāsvāda* as being one of analogy not identity. 'The realisation of *rasa* is important, yet finally rather a pale foretaste of that final tasting of Brahman.'¹⁵¹

In this chapter we have sketched the contours of the complex Hindu notion of *rasa* paying close attention to the influential scholarly contribution of Abhinavagupta before engaging in a focussed treatment of the precise nature of *rasa* and specifically its relationship to the highest religious aspiration of the Hindu. In Chapter Five we see how certain strands of Christian thought place similar emphasis on the value of 'analogous experiences' in the domain of aesthetic experience and religious encounter.¹⁵² Contrary to *rasa* which is limited to the aesthetic context, David Brown's theology draws upon the category of sacrament to suggest that great swathes of human experience may open out into a religious encounter. Particularly resonant of the ambiguity of interpretation of *rasa* as potentially identical to religious experience is the account expounded by Richard Viladesau, drawing from Rudolf Otto, who appears to vacillate between aesthetic and religious experiences as identical or merely analogous. Frank Burch

¹⁵⁰ Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, 35-36.

¹⁵¹ Gerald James Larson, "The Aesthetic (*Rasāvada*) and the Religious (*Brahmāsvāda*) in Abhinavagupta's Kashmir Śaivism," *Philosophy East and West* 26, no. 4 (1976): 378.

¹⁵² See p.156ff.

Brown argues for the natural suitability of the arts in the service of religion and this would certainly seem to be the case in Hindu culture and society which suffused with vibrancy and colour, as well as utilising the arts specifically in the form of dance, drama, painting and sculpture, to name but a few, as intricately intertwined with religious life. Next we will consider the ways in which Hindu artistic traditions seek to reconcile the physical creation, presence and apprehension of art with the philosophical and spiritual aims of the Hindu pursuit.

~ CHAPTER 3 ~

SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL ASPECTS OF THE ARTWORK IN HINDU TRADITIONS

§3.1 Introduction

‘Artists tend not to take philosophical speculations about their art very seriously, being more preoccupied with the material artistic manifestation. Spiritual people tend to underestimate the value of sensual and hence artistic experience which seems to detract them from their primary goal.’¹

What makes something a work of art has long been hotly contested. Whether, as some have suggested, the answer lies in the artist’s intention or the viewer’s response, both alternatives implicitly suggest that there is more to the work of art than meets the eye. In the work of masters and amateurs alike there is a very real sense that the artist’s vision is often augmented by some form of transcendental insight and which in turn, allows us, the viewer, to see the subject of his work anew, whether that be a landscape, a nude or even an abstract. Whilst a work may resemble its model, it is usually more than a photographic likeness or a bland palette of colour, as both the artist’s and the viewer’s perception combine with the physicality of the object – its texture and its hues – and imbue it with added value. This is more than the scientific reception of sensory data, this is the arts’ unique translation. In this way, the arts have the capacity to draw us beyond the corporeal towards the realm of the spiritual.

Here ‘spirit’ or ‘spiritual’ is not to be confused with the now popular ascription of the term to denote a particular deity or a general sense of the divine, rather it is used in its

¹ Bettina Bäumer, "The Divine Artist," *Gandhian Perspectives* VIII, no. 1 (1994): 79.

broader and more general sense, which encompasses any non-material phenomena. Whilst the artist's task inevitably involves the re-arrangement of matter, the exploration of potentiality in the moulding of material and the concrete realisation of them, lived experience as well as the employment of the mind and the senses are also an inescapable aspect of any creative venture.

In reality, the creative process is far more spiritually and emotionally intense as well as physically laborious than any 'paint by numbers' kit has led many an 8 year old child to suppose on the creation of their first masterpiece. It is unavoidably a sensual task. Whether it be one of repulsion or excitement incurred by the all-pervading aroma of oil paint, a childlike fascination with the tactility of raw materials or the eye for a stunning composition, the creative process is saturated with the fruits of the senses. The most obvious example of this spiritual aspect in the Hindu aesthetic tradition is the concept of 'rasa' or 'aesthetic emotion' but such is its massive contribution to the Hindu understanding of the arts that it is treated separately, allowing this chapter to cover the broader relationship of the material and the spiritual.² What is particularly striking across diverse Hindu traditions is how integral art, and by association sensory perception, is to them: 'In [the] Indian context, art and religion are inseparable.'³ From the vibrant colour of the religious festival of Holi which sees Hindus gather annually around the world (including in this University town) for the purpose of showering each other with rainbow coloured powders to mark the coming of spring to a vast array of statues of all sizes depicting gods of the Hindu pantheon and a colour symbolism which extends well beyond the confines of the temple. The western demarcation between sacred and secular is not as evident, if at all, in Hindu religious culture in which everyday life, including hereditary occupation, is saturated with religious significance.

² See previous chapter for detailed treatment of *rasa*, p.51ff.

³ Baidyanath Saraswati, "The Art of Formless Form Ennobling the Life of Man," in *Foundations of Indian Art*, ed. R. Nagaswamy (Chennai: Tamil Arts Academy, 2002), 263.

This chapter is specifically concerned with ways in which Hindu artistic traditions seek to reconcile the physical creation, presence and apprehension of art with the philosophical and spiritual aims of the Hindu pursuit and how, according to those traditions, the material and spiritual elements in art are inextricably bound to one another. Firstly, an introductory overview of three textual traditions, representative of different philosophical schools, demonstrates how the Hindu sects afford diverse values to the role of the senses in the interpretation of the physical. Secondly, the chapter explores Hindu myths pertaining to the origins of painting and considers the significance for identifying the relationship between the divine artist and the human painter. Thirdly, it considers the Hindu suggestion that the true value of any art work is measured by the precision of its form and the extent to which it is held to conform to the Divine Ideal. Fourthly, we turn to an appreciation of how the physical art object bridges the material/spiritual divide by acting as a devotional aid. Fifth and finally, the chapter considers how the art object functions as a ‘two-way’ lens through which deity and devotee are granted a visual exchange in *Darśan*.

§3.2 The Role of the Senses in Hindu Textual Traditions

The Sanskrit term ‘*darśana*,’ stemming from the root *drs* meaning ‘to see,’ translates literally as ‘notions of seeing.’ Its nearest English equivalent is ‘philosophy,’ although Grimes suggests that the term is far reaching, incorporating ‘conceptual knowledge and perceptual observation, critical exposition and intuitional experience, logical enquiry and spiritual insight, concrete and abstract and gross and subtle.’⁴ The Indian *darśanas* or philosophical schools are broadly concerned with the nature of God, the material world and man’s relationship with both. Each major scriptural period does not

⁴ John A. Grimes, "Darśana," in *The Hindu World*, ed. Sushil Mittal (New York, London: Routledge, 2004), 531.

necessarily espouse a single philosophical system but may give rise to a number of philosophical schools within it, for instance within the context of devotional schools which each extol a different deity, but each scriptural era can broadly be seen as marking a significant shift in Hindu philosophical thought. Their respective philosophical outlooks define the paths of man's spiritual pursuit and although in most cases not immediately relevant to the domain of the arts, they identify key concerns that form the philosophical milieu within which the Hindu arts have been situated and in terms of which alone they may properly be understood. Their key concerns include the relationship between spirit and matter, the potentiality for both ontological and epistemological newness, the compatibility of the creative arts with their respective spiritual pursuits and the value of sensory perception. What follows is an overview of three scriptural traditions (*darśanas*) each selected for their clear respective stances on the role of the senses in the religious life, the essentially negative and yet ambiguous attitude of the *Upaniṣads*, the promotion of yogic techniques in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the exaltation of sensory experience in the *Tāntras*.

§3.2.1 The *Upaniṣads* and *Advaita Vedānta*

Building on the poetry of the *Vedas*, the spiritual ideals propounded in the Vedic *Upaniṣads* have provided the basis for philosophical speculation over the centuries but the implications of these teachings for the treatment of art are significant. Although the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* identifies the arts (amongst others) as part of the breath of the Supreme,⁵ in one *Yoga Upaniṣad* sense experience came to be viewed with a deep suspicion and as serving solely to bind the self to the material world.⁶ Thus sensory experiences need to be surmounted in order to attain the realisation of the unity of the

⁵ *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* II.4.10, (37). Eknath Easwaran, ed., *The Upanishads* (London: Penguin Arkana, 1987).

⁶ *Amṛtabindu Upaniṣad* I.1-4, (243). (Ibid.)

ātman or self with the Ultimate *Brahman*.⁷ This, it was taught, could not be nurtured through a fixation on the material world (such as in the form of creative artistry) but only by intuition which allows the Hindu to transcend ignorance and the veil of *māyā* (illusion) which leads humans falsely to apprehend multiplicity where there is, the Vedic *Upaniṣads* teach, only unity.⁸ Thus the senses need to be brought under the control of the mind as the reins control the horses in the parable of the charioteer in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*.⁹ The skill of material craftsmanship and the mistrust of the senses, which together characterise the aesthetic of the early *Āryan* culture, are not as incompatible as first appearances may seem. Rather, in endorsing the mythical allocation of Viśvakarma as the divine ancestor of craftsmen¹⁰ (or as the ‘group soul of the individual craftsmen of all times and all places’)¹¹ it is still possible to locate the *Upaniṣadic* essence of *ātman* and Brahman in the relationship of the divine Viśvakarma and the Self of the craftsman, specifically through the association of internally derived artistic inspiration, upon which Indian artists are taught to rely, and its origins in Viśvakarma. Thus ‘beauty, rhythm, proportion [and] idea have an absolute existence on an ideal plane, where all who seek may find.’¹²

According to Alice Boner’s reading of the later *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad* and its positive affirmation of the qualities of art, the author Pippalāda turns the general *Upaniṣadic* mistrust of the senses on its head by interpreting it in a positive manner.¹³ He does this, we are told, by building on his understanding of *Prāṇa* (energy) and *Rayi* (matter), which he first introduced in the *Praśna Upaniṣad* and which is suggestive of the later

⁷ The *Ātma Upaniṣad* 1.1-3, (241-2), distinguishes between the three selves – the outer, the inner and the Supreme. (Ibid.)

⁸ See *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* I.3.6-15, (88-9); *Praśna Upaniṣad* III.9, (163); *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* II.9, (220). (Ibid.)

⁹ *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* I.3.4, (88). (Ibid.)

¹⁰ See Viśvakarma myths, p.15f.

¹¹ Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Craftsman*, 47.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ VSU V.20, (91). Here Pippalāda refers to the ‘cycle of the senses’ whereby the intention to worship requires the use of the imagination, from thence comes faith, then the ‘establishment in reality’ and finally the state of worship accompanied by emotions.

Sāṃkhya concepts of *Puruśa* and *Prakṛti*. Whilst *Prāṇa* is imperceptible to the senses, ‘*Rayi* is the crystallization of this life-force into sensible elements, primordial materialization.’¹⁴ Boner herself endorses the positive function of the senses by stating that it is a ‘psychosocial fact that sense impressions through the eyes and ears have a more compelling, a more direct action on the subconscious strata of the soul than discursive arguments.’¹⁵

So whilst the *Upaniṣads* generally display a mistrust of the senses, seeing material artefacts as obstacles to the attainment of the unity of *ātman* and Brahman, the identification of Viśvakarma as the divine ancestor of craftsmanship together with Boner’s reading of the *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad* suggest that the status of the material artefact is ambiguous and can be viewed positively as an aid rather than an obstacle to religious attainment.

§3.2.2 The *Bhagavad Gītā*

The *Bhagavad Gītā* or ‘The Song of the Lord,’ comprises book six of the *Mahābhārata* and as a suspected later interpolation it can be read both as part of the grander plot or as a self-contained piece.¹⁶ It consists of a dialogue between Kṛṣṇa, who assumes the role of a charioteer, and Arjuna on the eve of battle¹⁷ during which Kṛṣṇa elaborates how he should fulfil his *dharmic* duty according to his warrior caste.¹⁸ The great theophany in chapter eleven of the *Bhagavad Gītā* reveals to Arjuna that ‘the paradoxical, “secretive”

¹⁴ Alice Boner, Sadasiva Ruth Sarma, and Bettina Baumer, eds., *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad: The Essence of Form in Sacred Art*, 3rd rev ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Ltd, 1996), 14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁶ For a comprehensive treatment of the *Mahābhārata*, see Angelika Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Lipner records that the war referred to may be that which took place in North India c.800-700CE. Julius Lipner, *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: New York, 1994), 134.

¹⁸ The strain of conscience comes into play here by realising that, in the broader context of the *Mahābhārata*, fulfilling his *kṣatriya* (warrior) duty will see him brought into battle against his own family and thus if triumphant he must witness the death of his own family.

relationship between the “one” and the “many” is to be found in Lord Kṛṣṇa.¹⁹ Thus there is reflected a shift from the lofty asceticism and high ideals of the *Upaniṣads* to the *Bhagavad Gītā* in which Kṛṣṇa unites the Beauty of the Ultimate and the Beauty of the world in himself: ‘Know thou that whatever is beautiful and good, whatever has glory and power is only a portion of my own radiance.’²⁰ And again, Kṛṣṇa states of himself ‘I am the beauty of the beautiful.’²¹

Whilst the *Bhagavad Gītā* makes no explicit reference to the arts it is possible to identify certain theoretical ‘markers’ in order to gauge how the philosophy of the *Gītā* may affect an understanding or account of them. These markers include Kṛṣṇa’s teaching on *kāma*, the doctrine of *karma* and his treatment of the senses. Kṛṣṇa’s exposition of the nature of the devotional life makes reference to the Sanskrit term *kāma* which can usually be translated as ‘desire.’²² The heritage of the term can be traced in one of the *R̥g Veda*’s accounts of creation where *kāma* plays a central function in the execution of the primordial creative sacrifice, without it, the world would simply not have been brought into existence.²³ Furthermore Dermot Killingley asserts that *kāma*’s creative function is not restricted to the dawn of time rather it provides the framework for all subsequent action and desire.²⁴ He elaborates that the process of desire, effort and loss which signifies all action (including, for our purposes, creative action), is to be found illustrated in the restoration of the exhausted *Prajāpati* following the primordial creation. The sequence manifests as *Prajāpati* desires, so acts and through effort, tires. His rejuvenation comes through the performance of the elaborate fire ritual *agnicayana*.

¹⁹ Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, 166.

²⁰ BG 10.41, (87-88). *Bhagavad Gīta*, trans. Juan Mascaro (London: Penguin, 1962).

²¹ BG 7.10, (74).

²² This is confirmed by perhaps its most well known reference, the *kāma sūtra*. *Kāma* is also recognised as one of the *puruṣārthas* or human aims in life where it takes its place alongside ‘*dharma*’ (righteousness) and ‘*artha*’ (wealth) and is generally taken to mean ‘pleasure’. To these three earthly aims is added a fourth, ‘*mokṣa*,’ the ultimate aim of the Hindu which is the release from the cycle of *saṃsāra* (the wheel of life, death and rebirth).

²³ *R̥g Veda* 10.129.4 cited in Dermot Killingley, “*Kāma*,” in *The Hindu World*, ed. Sushil Mittal (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 270.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 273.

It may be surmised therefore that *kāma* ultimately has a fracturing effect for which the only solution is repeated sacrifice which in turn creates its own problems in the form of a dependence on the material world. Thus, *kāma* is the cause of bondage.²⁵ However, Kṛṣṇa recognises that man cannot live without action²⁶ and so outlines a new path to the Ultimate by proposing the performance of action without desire. This type of action is referred to as *niṣkāma karma* or desire-less action. The true meaning of this expression stretches beyond a lack of concern for the fruits of action;²⁷ rather Kṛṣṇa's concern is the destruction of the ego. Thus, in pursuing the path of *karma yoga* advocated by Kṛṣṇa, human action becomes instrumental in the maintenance of Universal law.²⁸ Performed in the spirit of detachment, Kṛṣṇa restates the nature of sacrifice by suggesting that it can be performed as an offering to god.²⁹ According to Nikam, the ultimate meaning of detachment is 'to capture, in some measure, the joy of divine existence and its creativity and to participate in its life.'³⁰

Thus in the epics, the *māyā* veiling the phenomenal world and the subsequent mistrust of the senses in the *Upaniṣads* has been diluted to afford those seekers not prepared to embrace the renunciation of the ascetic life a valid way to pursue ultimate union. In fact, the *Gītā* claims 'the Yogi goes beyond those who only follow the path of the austere, or of wisdom, or of work.'³¹ However, it is important here to note that in its re-working of *Upaniṣadic* teaching, the *Gītā* does not entirely discard the *Upaniṣadic* wariness of the senses. Indeed *Kṛṣṇa* asserts 'the restless violence of the senses impetuously carries

²⁵ This is expanded at length in *Ibid.*, 273-279.

²⁶ 'For not even for a moment can a man be without action. Helplessly are all driven to action by the forces born of Nature.' *BG* 3.5, (56).

²⁷ Cf. 'Set thy heart upon thy work, but never on its reward.' *BG* 2.47, (52).

²⁸ N. A. Nikam, "Detachment," *Philosophy East and West* 3, no. 2 (1953): 173. Cf. '[B]e thou merely the means of my work.'" *BG* 11.33, (92).

²⁹ 'Whatever you do, or eat, or give, or offer in adoration, let it be an offering to me; and whatever you suffer, suffer it for me.' *BG* 9.27, (82).

³⁰ Nikam, "Detachment," 174-175.

³¹ *BG* 6.47, (73).

away the mind of even a wise man striving towards perfection'³² and later tells of the slippery slope presented by the senses:

When a man dwells on the pleasures of sense, attraction for them arises in him. From attraction rises desire, the lust of possession, and this leads to passion, to anger. From passion comes confusion of mind, then loss of remembrance, the forgetting of duty. From this loss comes the ruin of reason, and the ruin of reason leads man to destruction.³³

So whilst Kṛṣṇa does not entirely discredit the use of the senses, he advocates *niṣkāma karma* or 'desireless action' whereby each Hindu executes *svadharma* (duty according to their own stage of life and caste) without anticipation of reward and in the pursuit of divine union. *Svadharma* is also referred to as *varnadharma* meaning literally *dharma* or duty according to *varna* or class. Thus, in the *Gītā*, sensory perception is not entirely condemned, Kṛṣṇa continues, 'the soul that moves in the world of the senses and yet keeps the senses in harmony, free from attraction and aversion, finds rest in quietness.'³⁴

Again, therefore, the status of the material artefact is somewhat ambiguous, and despite a suspicion of the senses the *Gītā* affords a technique for overcoming their potential dangers for spiritual pursuits. It means that through a yogic contemplative discipline in the artistic process, the Indian artist can seek to pierce the thick veil of *māyā* propounded by the *Upaniṣads*. Thus, 'the crystallisation of theoretical idealism and practical theism had become perfect' and as such, Anand speaks of a renewed fervour amongst artists for their task as initiated by the yogic path presented in the *Gītā*:

The view that their work was dedicated to the ideal of their professed religion infused the artists with a sense of passionate devotion to their theme, and the method of Yoga was employed to concentrate attention on the elusive abstract conceptions of the Supreme Deity in order to translate His various qualities into concrete forms.³⁵

³² BG 2.60, (53).

³³ BG 2.62-63, (54).

³⁴ BG 2.64, (54).

³⁵ Anand, *The Hindu View of Art*, 103.

§3.2.3 The *Tāntras*

Tāntra is often confused for being simply another title for the tradition of *Śakti* or female spiritual power, but although it has much in common with *Śakti* it is inaccurate to conflate the two traditions. Although *Tāntrism* has roots in the mother goddess cult of the Indus Valley, its most influential texts are relatively late, dating between the ninth and tenth century CE. Attributing particular importance to the body, *Tāntra* is perhaps most popularly known for its sexual associations as expressed in such texts as the *Kāma Sūtra*, however, with a foundation in the orthodox Brahmanical tradition, its ultimate concern is one of spiritual union with the divine. Yoga plays an important role in the realisation of the *tāntric* goal and, whilst not strictly a *tāntric* text, Woods argues that Patañjali's *yoga sūtra* has *tāntric* sympathies, particularly in its treatment of the chakras of *kundalini yoga*.³⁶

The most obvious departure of *Tāntric* thought is its deviance from Vedic teaching and perhaps its most significant contribution as regards our theme here of 'spirit' and 'matter' are the implications of its monistic world-view. Goudriaan concisely summarises that, in *Tāntra*, the 'microcosm of the body is identified with the macrocosm of the universe and the world of the gods.'³⁷ Here, in contrast with *Advaita Vedānta*'s teaching that the material world is one of *māyā* or illusion, *Tāntra* affords the physical presence of body and matter a new worth in its understanding that all 'things' (spirit, mind and matter) are of the same substance, even though this is not always immediately perceivable. In Mishra's treatise on the *Impact of Tantra on Religion and Art*, he argues that 'every religious structure and art form [is] a replica of an unseen

³⁶ James Haughton Woods, *The Yoga-System of Patanjali or the Ancient Hindu Doctrine of Concentration of Mind*, ed. Charles Rockwell Lanman, Harvard Oriental Series (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1927).

³⁷ Teun Goudriaan, "Introduction, History and Philosophy," in *Hindu Tantrism*, ed. Sanjukta Gupta (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 8.

celestial region.’³⁸ The value of yoga comes into play when the devotee seeks to access the unseen.

An important school to consider in gaining a practical understanding of the implications of *Tāntra* for the religious arts is that of Kashmiri *Śaivism*, the philosophical home of the great *Śaivite* scholar, Abhinavagupta who we encountered earlier in the context of his contribution to an understanding of *rasa*.³⁹ He is responsible for, amongst other significant works, the *Tāntraloka* which was written around the tenth century CE. The intricacies of Abhinavagupta’s understanding of aesthetic experience in the form of *rasa* were treated in Chapter Two so it will suffice to observe here that, in its awareness that ‘the human body corresponds to, is even identical with, the universe,’ *Tāntra* does not condemn sensory experience as illusory.⁴⁰

Before considering the role of the senses themselves, it is important to acknowledge the high status *Tāntric* philosophy affords the imagination. The role of visualisation exercises opens up an entirely new realm of experience, as Gavin Flood notes: ‘The power of visualisation is the realisation of a higher level or deeper world of experience, an intensification of aesthetic experience and an intensification of the truth of the body.’⁴¹ So whilst the ‘truth of the body’ as we perceive it is precisely its physicality, visualisation exercises and directed meditation endow us with the ability to situate our ‘fleshiness’ in its proper cosmological context. Flood asserts that in *Tāntra* these mental images, whilst removed from the phenomenal in fact bring one closer to the ‘source of creation’ and as such, the ‘quality of reality is intensified.’⁴²

³⁸ T.N. Mishra, *Impact of Tantra on Religion and Art* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 1997), 97.

³⁹ Cf. p.57.

⁴⁰ Goudriaan, "Introduction, History and Philosophy," 8.

⁴¹ Gavin Flood, *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 172.

⁴² Ibid.

That said, however, all but the most accomplished devotees of *Tāntra* rely on the physical world, particularly the artistic form, to ensure that their imaginings are tradition constituted, rather than fanciful. Heinrich Zimmer's lucid account of the challenge to construct and retain a mental image of the correct proportions demonstrates the value of the concrete image for the novice yogin.⁴³ Both deity images and *yantras* (geometrical designs) provide a focus towards which the yogin may direct his concentration until such a time as he has cultivated the mental concentration to sustain the inward vision. Of this state, referred to as *samādhi* in the *Kulārṇava Tāntra*, it is said 'for one who has seen [...] the all-pervading, peaceful, blissful, and imperishable, nothing remains to be attained or known.'⁴⁴ Whilst this approach seems to stress the necessity to transcend the visual image, *Tāntra*'s central concern is the realisation of the union of opposites – spirit and matter, Brahman and the material world, and god and humanity.⁴⁵ Bäumer notes that, in scripture, the mature yogi who, having attained the higher echelons of the spiritual pursuit, is able to 'experience the joy of worshipping the Lord through all sense perceptions.'⁴⁶ One commentator takes this a step further and states 'the nectar which is distilled out of all sense experience is the unity of consciousness.'⁴⁷

In contrast, therefore, to the essentially negative (albeit ambiguous) austerities of the *Upaniṣadic* tradition and the cautious provision of yogic techniques in the *Gītā*, *Tāntra* affords a position and central role to the products of the senses and even permits them at

⁴³ Heinrich Zimmer, *Artistic Form and Yoga in the Sacred Images of India*, trans. Gerald Chapple and James B. Lawson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 53-64. Cf. For a Christian account of Art as Idea being complete prior to physical formation, see Sayers, p.205.

⁴⁴ June McDaniel, "Experience," in *Studying Hinduism: Key Concepts and Methods*, ed. Sushil Mittal (Oxon.: Routledge, 2008), 160.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Bäumer, "The Divine Artist," 84.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

the highest levels of the spiritual pursuit. Mishra concludes, '[t]he ultimate aim of life is to attain release and art is one means of attaining to this aim.'⁴⁸

§3.3 Divine and Human Artistry in Hindu Mythology

In her work on Indian art Bettina Bäumer often cites the *Śaivite Agāmic* proclamation that 'God is the original artist'⁴⁹ but seems to neglect any specific treatment of the implications of this for our understanding of the human artist and his work. What we find in two of the earliest *Śilpaśāstras*,⁵⁰ the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* and the *Citralakṣaṇa* of *Nagnajit*, are mythical accounts of the origins of painting which contextualise the relationship between divine and human artistry and furthermore the precise nature of that which is created by human hands. These two texts are widely thought to be contemporaneous and their origins lay in the Gupta period of the fifth to the seventh century CE. The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, an appendage to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, is a northern text and has been translated variously over the course of the twentieth century.⁵¹ Conversely, however, the *Citralakṣaṇa* only survives in its original form in Tibetan and has undergone a two-stage translation from Tibetan to German and then to English.⁵² The text itself reveals that it is the product of the three different schools of art, namely those of *Viśvakarman*, *Prahlada* and *Nagnajit*.⁵³ Let us treat these two texts in turn.

⁴⁸ Mishra, *Impact of Tantra on Religion and Art*, 108.

⁴⁹ Bettina Bäumer, "The Spiritual Dimension of Indian Art," in *Hindu Spirituality Postclassical and Modern*, ed. K.R. Sundararajan (London: SCM Press Ltd.), 459; Bäumer, "The Divine Artist," 80.

⁵⁰ For full discussion on the Hindu treatises on painting and artistry more broadly, see 13ff.

⁵¹ Initial interest in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* can be traced to 1912 with its publication in Bombay by Madhusudana and Sarma, eds., *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa (Third Khanda)*. It remained relatively unknown until its first translation into English by Kramrisch, ed., *Viṣṇudharmottaram*. She subsequently revised and republished the text, Kramrisch, ed., *The Viṣṇudharmottaram (Part III) a Treatise on Indian Painting: A Treatise on Indian Painting and Image Making*. In 1932 Coomaraswamy published a revised version of Chapter 41, Coomaraswamy, "*Viṣṇudharmottara, Chapter XLI*." Subsequent translations include that by Shah, *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa, III Khaṇḍa, Vol. I (Text, Critical Notes)*; Shah, *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa, III Khaṇḍa, Vol. II (Introduction, Appendices, Index)* and Sivaramamurti, *The Chitrasūtra of the Viṣṇudharmottara*. The most authoritative critical version of the text is that by Parul Dave Mukerji which has gained wide respect in contemporary scholarship. (Mukherji, ed., *Viṣṇudharmottara*.)

⁵² Goswamy and Dahmen-Dallapiccola, eds., *Citralakṣaṇa of Nagnajit*.

⁵³ See *Ibid.*, 62-63.

§3.3.1 *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāna*

The myth in the third *khaṇḍa* of the *Viṣṇudharmottara* is narrated by Mārkaṇḍeya and attributes the origin of all painting to the pundit Nārāyaṇa who, somewhat spontaneously it seems, uses mango juice to draw a beautiful woman named Urvaśī.⁵⁴ Subsequently, the painting ‘came into being’ as an *āpsara* (goddess) of such beauty the gods’ spouses, struck by a sense of their own inadequacy, disband.⁵⁵ Then we are told, the learned Nārāyaṇa inducts the god Viśvakarma in painting to his own exacting standards. The myth is also present in the first *khaṇḍa* of the *Viṣṇudharmottara* where its greater detail heightens the sense of occasion.⁵⁶ Here, another sage, Nara, joins Nārāyaṇa and together they are undertaking penance for the welfare of the world, when they are disturbed by the arrival of ten nymphs. Translations differ on opinion as to whether the nymphs succeed in distracting Nara however a restrained Nārāyaṇa retains his composure and controls his anger and desire.⁵⁷ He uses the mango juice, known for its passion inducing properties, to paint the ‘auspicious nymph with the charming limbs’⁵⁸ on his thigh whereupon the nymph ‘came into being.’⁵⁹

Mukherji makes an interesting observation in her comparison of the myth as it appears in the first and the third *khaṇḍas*. She notes that in the account found in the first *khaṇḍa* the act of penance is the state of meditation prior to the creative act whereas the implicit suggestion in the third *khaṇḍa* is that the act of painting itself constitutes Nārāyaṇa’s act of penance.⁶⁰ Mukherji posits that in light of the agreement of both accounts that the reason for the penance is for the welfare of the world, ‘it makes little sense to assume

⁵⁴ VP III.35.1-5b, (3).

⁵⁵ It is interesting to raise the question here as to the precise meaning of this statement that the painting ‘came into being.’ Is this a reference to the painting ‘coming into being’ as a painting or in the more dramatic and impressive sense of the deceased ‘coming into being’ as a living boy once again?

⁵⁶ VP 129.1-19, (8-10); VP^I (28).

⁵⁷ The extended translation of the same passage by Kramrisch does not provide this detail.

⁵⁸ Kramrisch, ed., *Viṣṇudharmottaram*, 28.

⁵⁹ VP I.129.1-15, (9).

⁶⁰ Mukherji, ed., *Viṣṇudharmottara*, 10.

that either Urvaśī [the nymph] or the [*Citrasūtra*] was created for the benefit of the worlds' as she argues is implied by the account found in the third *khaṇḍa*.⁶¹ It does seem likely that the most comprehensive account most closely reflects the intention behind the myth, but nevertheless if this mythological account is to become the prototype for all subsequent human acts of creativity, it seems important to determine the relation between the act of penance and the subsequent creative act. It seems especially relevant to note that the first *khaṇḍa* grants particular significance to the fact that Nārāyaṇa demonstrates mastery over anger and lust prior to drawing Urvaśī which suggests that the material outcome is indebted to an initial, at least, spiritual discipline. If this functions as a template for all subsequent human acts of creativity then we can surmise that spiritual discipline and the creative act are inextricably linked.

§3.3.2 Citralaksana of Nagnajit

The other popular myth pertaining to the origin of painting may be found in the *Citralakṣaṇa of Nagnajit*.⁶² It is significantly longer than those of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, but is worth considering in some detail here. The myth opens with a utopian description of earth, where the average life-span is 100,000 years, where the earth flourishes, good health prevails and where peace and harmony reign. Over this land rules a King who, 'moved by his own high-mindedness, under[takes] great ascetic effort (*tapas*) and perform[s] the most rigorous penance,' for which he is greatly blessed and as a result 'attain[s] the highest wisdom penetrating everything.'⁶³ Such is his wisdom and knowledge that his stature exceeds that of the gods to the extent, we are told, that he becomes an 'embodiment of dharma.'⁶⁴ His reputation for knowledge and power draws a grieving Brahmin priest to him who, bemoaning the premature death of his son, requests that the king restore him to life. The sympathetic king pleads on the Brahmin's

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² *CofN* 1.30-431, (63-75).

⁶³ Goswamy and Dahmen-Dallapiccola, eds., *Citralakṣaṇa of Nagnajit*, 64.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

behalf, but Yama, the god of the dead, denies his request on account of the boy's accumulated *karma* being the cause of his untimely death and as such he claims he is powerless to reverse it. Tempers run high and the king commands a rainstorm akin to 'divine weapons consecrated with magical spells that ha[ve] the power to release all penetrating wisdom' to shower upon Yama.⁶⁵ In due course, the king realises that these 'divine weapons' are in fact *pretas* or 'ghosts of the dead' who are answerable to Yama. He rises to the challenge, however, and scatters the arrow-wielding *pretas* by raising his sword. The conflict reaches its peak as Yama swings his mighty club whereupon the King draws his weapon, which bears the head of Brahma. However, seeing the potential large-scale destruction of the spat Brahma intervenes to restore the peace and resolve the issue. Brahma endorses Yama's absolution of responsibility for the boy's death, but recognises the king's willingness to sacrifice his 'inner peace with all its fruits' for the sake of the Brahmin.⁶⁶ As a gesture to mark the king's self-sacrifice Brahma bestows grace upon the king and exhorts him to 'paint handsomely a picture resembling the son of the Brahman, corresponding to his form, and with the help of colour' and interestingly, he concludes, 'this is certain to lead to your salvation.'⁶⁷ Following Brahma's instructions the King paints the boy, which he first apprehends as a vision, and once complete, Brahma enables the boy '(as he was painted) [to] rise again, and gifted him as a living person to the Brahman.'⁶⁸ With order restored, the Brahmin and his son reunited and peace prevailing, Brahma bestows on the king the accolade of having 'brought forth into the world of the living the first picture,' and gives him the name 'Nagnajit', meaning 'Conqueror of the naked' (with regard to the *pretas*). Brahma states his plea for the painting and all those created in its wake: 'May it capture the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 68.

hearts of men and always confer upon them the boons of happiness and well being. May blessings and good fortune emanate from it, and may all sins be avoided.’⁶⁹

The myth continues, however, and we are told that the king goes to Brahma and asks that he reveal to him the measurements, the distinguishing features and the rules governing painting. Interestingly, having already accredited the king with having produced the first picture, Brahma seems to claim the accolade for himself in saying ‘I am the first one to have painted (pictures) of human beings and it is I, therefore, who have taught this (painting) to men,’ before directing the king to enquire of Viśvakarma, to whom Brahma has imparted the knowledge of that which he desires to know.⁷⁰ There is arguably some scope for drawing an analogy here between that which the god Brahma creates and that which the artist paints (or more broadly creates) and in this sense God as artist, or Creator, assumes the role of the prototype for all subsequent acts of human artistry and in turn provides a significant endorsement of the latter.

There are several aspects of this myth which are worth drawing attention to in relation to their relevance for our understanding of artistry. For instance, we note from the outset that the myth places significant emphasis on the king’s piety. Similar to the sage of *Viṣṇudharmottara*’s myth,⁷¹ the king engages in ‘the most rigorous penitence’ however, the Brahmin’s request to restore his son does not meet with any hesitance on the king’s part who risks his spiritual merit to assist. This, fortunately for the king, does not go unnoticed by Brahma: ‘[O]ut of respect for the Brahman you have now destroyed your inner peace with all its fruits.’⁷² It does not seem too presumptuous to comment that the spiritual state of the king, in keeping with that of the sage in the myth of the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, may play a key role in his ability to perform the task commanded

⁶⁹ Ibid., 71.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 72.

⁷¹ Cf. *VP* 129.1-19, (8-10); *VP*^l (28).

⁷² Goswamy and Dahmen-Dallapiccola, eds., *Citralakṣaṇa of Nagnajit*, 68.

him by Brahma. In the *Viṣṇudharmottara* the sage engages in the task of painting apparently spontaneously and, whilst this is not the case in the *Citralakṣaṇa*, the king obeys Brahma's request without further instruction or delay. Are we to suppose that both the king and the sage were previously gifted in their artistic abilities or should we understand this ability to be bestowed upon them in the doing of the act itself? After all, that the taunting nymphs recognised the *āpsara*'s beauty and the Brahmin was able to behold his son both speak to a degree of artistic excellence. Furthermore, it would seem that the king is not painting from memory, hence his plea 'May it be granted to me to behold this boy of the Brahman!'⁷³ Instead, what the king engages in is an act of visualisation, not unlike that outlined in later schools of yogic philosophy such as elaborated by Coomaraswamy and Zimmer in which, through a strict yogic discipline, a yogi is able to construct a perfectly proportioned mental image, through meditation alone.⁷⁴ Through concentrated meditation, perhaps whilst chanting the divine syllable 'Om', a yogi should 'call forth inner images'; however, Zimmer stresses '[w]hat is extraordinarily difficult [...] is to retain the image's components once summed up, and to have them remain even after new ones have crowded into the same space.'⁷⁵ This is the process to which Anand refers as the 'evolution of conception before execution.'⁷⁶ Goswamy and Dahmen-Dallapiccola note that it is of particular interest that the primordial image, according to this myth, is of a Brahmin boy and not of a deity as many of the subsequent painting manuals outline.⁷⁷

Towards the latter end of the myth, we are told that the king seeks out Brahma to enquire the correct methods for undertaking the production of an image. It cannot go without mention here that in this, one of the foundational myths regarding painting in

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Cf. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, 21-23. See further, p.105.

⁷⁵ Zimmer, *Artistic Form and Yoga in the Sacred Images of India*, 58-9.

⁷⁶ Anand, *The Hindu View of Art*, 114.

⁷⁷ Goswamy and Dahmen-Dallapiccola, eds., *Citralakṣaṇa of Nagnajit*, xi.

the Hindu tradition, practice precedes theory. In all the detailed manuals containing measurements and proportions, the first recorded act of painting did not involve any prior reference to guidelines, these came later. This is a key point which must not be lost sight of following our treatment of the *Citrasutras*.⁷⁸ However, returning to the King's enquiry, we are told Brahma makes his position as the ultimate and first painter clear: 'I am the first one to have painted (pictures) of human beings and it is I, therefore, who have taught this (painting) to men.'⁷⁹ Having established this he concedes that those who conform to his example may claim the title of painter, but he includes an interesting adjunct; the paintings so produced may or *may not* have a specific purpose but both will be accepted to the category of *citra* (painting).⁸⁰ Whilst the paintings in both myths have been undertaken for the specific purpose of creating a human form, the suggestion here is that the act of painting itself may be engaged in *either* for utilitarian reasons *or*, rather more liberating, as a spontaneous activity. What is interesting to combine with this idea, in the case of the latter, is the nature of its potential relationship with spiritual activity in the sense that both mythical artists here have been devout. Whilst we can accept that a completed painting may assist a devotee in worship, how far may painting itself be considered a spiritual exercise for the artist?

Goswamy and Dahmen-Dallapiccola question whether the *Citralakṣaṇa* is in fact a treatise on painting at all, and suggest that the subsequent infusion of life is more plausible if we consider the art form to be that of sculpture not painting, resolving the specific mention of colour application by supposing the material used to be polychrome, in keeping with other early Indian sculptures.⁸¹ However, the first translator and interpreter of the *Citralakṣaṇa*, Berthold Laufer is clear that 'a picture is something real

⁷⁸ See p.16ff.

⁷⁹ Goswamy and Dahmen-Dallapiccola, eds., *Citralakṣaṇa of Nagnajit*, 72.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, xi.

and living, and that the shape represented in it can assume form and life,⁸² and furthermore, that a deity image ‘blesses alike its painter and owner.’⁸³

§3.4 Form and the Divine Ideal

Hegel criticised Indian art for its ‘bad and untrue definiteness of form’ although he recognised that it had the potential to transport the viewer beyond the concrete image.⁸⁴

For many Indian art scholars, however, including the likes of Bäumer, Boner and Coomaraswamy, the articulation of perfect form is the defining feature of all well-executed art in the Indian traditions.⁸⁵ In the words of one Indian art scholar ‘[t]he form is basic to the arts, but it has significance only in reference to the formless.’⁸⁶ The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* states: ‘Silpani, works of art of man, are an imitation of divine forms; by employing their rhythms, a metrical reconstitution is effected of the limited human personality.’⁸⁷ Saraswati draws a distinction between two, ultimately united, expressions of form. The first is the formless, ‘the unmanifest, the unborn, the unbounded, the course of the universe and its base’ and the second are those ‘forms hidden in nature [which] are opaque copies of the transcendent forms.’⁸⁸ The latter are true expressions in so far as they correspond with the Divine archetype,⁸⁹ so the naturally occurring salagrama stone is accepted as a perfect form and art works as far as

⁸² Ibid., 29.

⁸³ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 20, cited in D.P. Chattopadhyaya, "Indian Art and Its History: Some Questions, Some Considerations," in *Indian Art: Forms, Concerns and Development in Historical Perspective*, ed. B.N. Goswamy (Chennai: Tamil Arts Academy, 2002), 27.

⁸⁵ See Bettina Bäumer, "Puruṣa and the Origin of Form," in *Rūpa Pratirūpa. Alice Boner Commemoration Volume*, ed. Bettina Bäumer (New Delhi: Biblia Impex Private Ltd., 1982); Alice Boner, *Principles of Composition in Hindu Sculpture: Cave Temple Period*, Indian ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publications, 1990), 7-9; Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, 5-6.

⁸⁶ Saraswati, "The Art of Formless Form Ennobling the Life of Man," 263-4.

⁸⁷ *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 6.5.27 cited in Stella Kramrisch, "Traditions of Indian Craftsman," in *Exploring India's Sacred Art, Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*, ed. Barbara Stoler Miller (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 60.

⁸⁸ Saraswati, "The Art of Formless Form Ennobling the Life of Man," 264.

⁸⁹ Cf. Plato, *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 354 (602c). There are some parallels here with Plato's notion of 'Forms' and his judgement that art is 'a copy of a copy,' but Bäumer ventures a free interpretation here and argues '[m]an is not the creator of form, he "receives" it and "imitates" the cosmic and divine forms.' Bettina Bäumer, ed., *Rūpa Pratirūpa. Alice Boner Commemoration Volume* (New Delhi: Biblia Impex Private Ltd., 1982), 32.

they conform to the prescribed canons and a visualised ideal born from strict meditation ‘on the deities who are the objects of [the artist’s] devotion.’⁹⁰ The successful artist is one who seeks to ‘[correlate] microcosm and macrocosm [through...] the use of diverse physical media to suggest or evoke the infinite.’⁹¹ It is important to note that this does not mean that only the most photographic of likenesses to the material world can boast a link to the divine Ideal, for, as Coomaraswamy asserts, ‘true knowledge of an object [cannot] be obtained by empirical observation or reflex registration.’⁹² Rather the most original expression of the Ideal, or the formless, is found in the human heart. The accomplished artist is able to construct a purely mental image or ‘*dhyānarūpa*’ in a state of deep meditation through recitation of the relevant *dhyāna mantram* describing the deity and, holding this mental construction in a state of deep concentration, he ‘proceeds to represent the mental picture in a visible and objective form, by drawing or modelling.’⁹³ This visualisation exercise is grounded in deep meditation and it is interesting to note that it is to the mental image constructed rather than the physical representation of it that the artist’s ‘prayers are addressed and the offerings are made.’⁹⁴ This mental construction is the closest expression of the Divine Ideal, with the artist’s physical work becoming something of a by-product.⁹⁵ Indeed the artefact is surplus to the artist’s requirements for his ultimate aim is the construction of the mental image which he subsequently uses as his painting model. Henceforth, the painted image exists merely in order to aid others less adept in the art of meditation, so that they may one day form their own mental image. It is important to recognise that the transmission of artistic skills is not restricted to the detailed study and internalisation of the *Śilpaśāstras* neither is it achieved in isolated meditation since the vast majority of Indian artists will,

⁹⁰ Śukrāchārya cited in Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, 21.

⁹¹ Vatsyayan, "The Indian Arts: Their Ideational Background and Principles of Form," 12.

⁹² Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, 5-6.

⁹³ Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, 22. Cf. p. 45f.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Cf. Sayers’ conception of Art as Idea, complete in itself prior to its transformation into material form, see p. 205.

at some point, have received some form of instruction from a master artist or craftsmen as indeed, in their turn, will they.⁹⁶ It seems ever likely then that artefacts produced by novices and masters alike will be used devotionally by the next generation of artists in their meditations upon their chosen deities in the same way that they would draw from scripture inherited by oral tradition. In this interplay between the spiritual process of visualising an idealised form and subsequently endeavouring to reproduce it in a corresponding physical form there exists a tension between straining towards an entirely non-material (formless) realm whilst remaining bound to form. The next section focuses in on a specific instance of how the centrality of form in Indian art is endorsed in the text of the *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*.

§3.4.1 The *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*

Alice Boner, a Swiss painter and sculptor as well as a keen Indologist, translated the *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad* from Devanagari as she believed it constituted the textual evidence she was seeking to endorse a revelatory experience she had had in the caves at Ellura, during which she gained a profound insight into the geometrical formulas underpinning the Indian Arts.⁹⁷

The *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad* is attributed to the sage Pippalāda, also the author of the *Praśna Upaniṣad*, and ‘is the profound study of fundamental principles of the origin, of

⁹⁶ Cf. p.40. Tagore asserts that the manuals for painting are useful in early art instruction.

⁹⁷ Boner charts the chronology of her research into Indian imagery in the preface to her magnum opus, Boner, *Principles of Composition*, xv-xviii. Here she reveals that her observation of geometrical and mathematical forms within Indian sculpture preceded any evidence of a technical treatise endorsing her theory. Her reticence in publishing the work was surmounted by the discovery of the *Śilpa Prakāśa* (a text detailing the construction of a temple to Devi) which she considered to be justification for her previously held assumptions regarding Indian imagery and as such, together with Sadāśiva Rath Śarmā, she subsequently translated and published the work. See *Śilpa Prakāśa*, trans. Alice Boner (Leiden: E.J Brill, 1966). She dates the *Śilpa Prakāśa* variously between the tenth and twelfth centuries and although she acknowledges its *Tāntric* overtones, she simultaneously stresses that its theories are much older. So conveniently does the text of the *Vāstusūtra* corroborate her theories of composition that one must question whether she has in fact in her eagerness, imposed upon a similarly dated *Tāntric* text the accolade of being one of the earliest texts of Indian art in a misguided attempt to validate her theories. Indeed, this was suspected by one of her reviewers. See Frederick M. Asher, "Review of *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad: The Essence of Form in Sacred Art*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104, no. 3 (1984): 599.

the how and why of form figuration and of its ultimate necessity and purpose.’⁹⁸ Boner is of the opinion that the *Vāstusūtra* seeks to reconcile the image worship evident in the earliest Hindu cultures with the sacrificial rituals and esoteric traditions of the invading *Āryans* and thus argues that the text is representative of a significantly earlier formal treatment of the Hindu arts than has previously been found.⁹⁹

Let us consider the key issues of the text through the eyes of the translator.¹⁰⁰ The central concern of the *Vāstusūtra*, Boner tells us, is ‘the language of form,’ which it considers ‘an autonomous, direct reflection of cosmic laws and expression of religious and metaphysical conceptions.’¹⁰¹ She elaborates that form here is understood as akin to the creative Word (*vāk*) of the Vedic tradition¹⁰² and that art which conform to this Ideal cosmic archetype do not simply imitate, rather they participate in ‘the essential structure of the universe.’¹⁰³ Boner’s reading of the *Vāstusūtra* is such that art production is interpreted and made sense of in the framework of the Vedic account of creation and she likens the multifarious forms produced by the hands of craftsmen to the Vedic sacrifice of *Puruṣa*, to the division of the Primeval Man, since in both cases, the forms of the many issue from the single Form.¹⁰⁴ In the sixth *Prapāṭhaka*, Boner tells us the analogy of the artist to the work of *Prajāpati* in the primeval sacrifice of *Puruṣa*

⁹⁸ Boner, Sarma, and Baumer, eds., *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*, 3.

⁹⁹ One reviewer, not shying from speaking ill of the dead, refers to Boner’s work as ‘jumbled’ and ‘shoddily compiled’ and indeed the mismatched claims of Boner’s introduction and Bhattacharya’s subsequent chapter on the position of the *Vāstusūtra* in the *Atharva Vedic* literature result in a confusing text. Wayne E. Begley, "Review of *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad: The Essence of Form in Sacred Art*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52, no. 3 (1984): 616. Bhattacharya’s treatment of the text offers a convincing argument to suggest that the text belongs to a considerably later time frame and may even be dated as late as the eighteenth century. See Boner, Sarma, and Baumer, eds., *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*, 36-37. However, on the strength of content-based evidence Bhattacharya finally attributes the *Vāstusūtra* in its present form to c.9th Century CE.

¹⁰⁰ Since Boner does not reference any of her sometimes explosive claims to the main body of the *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*, all subsequent cross-referencing to the main text is mine.

¹⁰¹ Boner, Sarma, and Baumer, eds., *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*, 5.

¹⁰² ‘Although working in a different medium it [form] has equal power of evoking a vision of ultimate Reality, of the eternal divine Law governing the universe, of penetrating into the essence and truth of Being.’ (Ibid.)

¹⁰³ Ibid., 7. Cf. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Imitation, Expression and Participation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 3, no. 11/12 (1945).

¹⁰⁴ Boner cites a verse from the *Ṛg Veda* to support her claim: ‘He became corresponding in form to every form. This all is to be looked upon as a form of him.’ *ṚV* VI.47.18, (10).

demands that the artist also undertake the same degree of discipline ‘in order to adequately fulfil his mission and vocation.’¹⁰⁵ Throughout the *Vāstusūtra* Pippalāda consistently refers to the ‘image maker’ as the ‘*Sthāpaka*,’ which can be translated as ‘the priest of Art’ (*sthāpakodgītha*). Boner argues that the occupation of the *Sthāpaka* and the priest are not dissimilar in that the *Sthāpaka*’s work should properly be punctuated by often elaborate rituals and the creative process be executed as though a sacrificial offering accompanied by the recitation of the appropriate mantras.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps most notably, however, Boner asserts that ‘the *Sthāpaka* could, no less than the *Hotā*, call forth all the thirty-three gods,’¹⁰⁷ which implies that for a while the lower caste artist here becomes elevated to the status of the *brahmin* or the priestly caste.¹⁰⁸ Elsewhere Boner recognises that ‘perhaps none of the arts is so strictly bound up with earthly contingencies as are the visual arts, working as they do with the grossest elements and most heavily governed by the physical laws of the cosmos’ and yet she argues that ‘what to moderns may appear as a severe limitation and frustrating restriction on individual expression in art, a hampering of inspiration, had a deep meaning for the ancients. They were whole and one with cosmic forces.’¹⁰⁹

Finally, Boner concludes that the *Vāstusūtra* was unlikely to have been written by practicing artists, but by scholars, since practical techniques and the art of skilled composition would most likely have been passed from master to trainee through oral tradition. It was Boner’s own study of form from a viewer’s perspective that led her to surmise that artists possessed ‘a profound knowledge of form structures which could

¹⁰⁵ Boner, Sarma, and Baumer, eds., *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*, 25.

¹⁰⁶ In the commentary of VSU II.2, the *Hotā* and the Sculptor are called to work together, in II.18 the sacrificer and the sculptor are said to proceed in the same manner and in III.9-10 it is said ‘there is no essential difference’ between the makers of altars (*śulvakāras*) and the image makers (*śilpakāras*). See III.1-5 for rituals surrounding the creative process.

¹⁰⁷ *Hotā* translates as ‘Priest’ in the *Atharva Vedic* context. See Boner, Sarma, and Baumer, eds., *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*, 18.

¹⁰⁸ It is interesting to note that in VSU V.19, (91), the *sthāpakas* are identified as being able to become *brāhmaṇas* (priests) by a combined knowledge of *Śilpa* and meditation on form.

¹⁰⁹ Boner, Sarma, and Baumer, eds., *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*, 8.

bring out the transcendence and esoteric value of images [which] is presented as the exclusive of the master sculptors.’¹¹⁰ Pippalāda refers to this knowledge as that of ‘circle and line,’ and furthermore, that ‘the one who knows this [attains the essence].’¹¹¹ However, whilst seeking to present an ‘expression of eternal law, not of individual fancy’ through adherence to the principles of form Boner stresses that the artist remains free.¹¹² The artist, after all, ‘[draws] all this inspiration and his strength from the contemplation of the divine powers, by which he himself and whole cosmos were created and sustained.’¹¹³

§3.5 The Art Object as Devotional Focus

From the earliest known origins of the Hindu tradition artefacts have provided an important focus for religious devotion. Indeed, Davis asserts that ‘the material icon – fabricated by humans and inhabited by God – was taken as a primary site of ongoing interaction and exchange between humans and God.’¹¹⁴ He continues ‘it was this interaction, involving initiatives by both parties and bringing them into a relationship that was unequal but fulfilling for both, that animated Hindu images as living, personal deities.’¹¹⁵ In what follows we shall see evidence of the ancient worship of artefacts in the earliest known origins of the Hindu tradition, explore the diverse devotional traditions which have arisen with a focus on the material artefact as the intermediary between the devotee and the divine and consider the Hindu notion of *darśan*—seeing and being seen by god through the creative image.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹¹¹ VSU I.4, (47).

¹¹² Boner, Sarma, and Baumer, eds., *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*, 33. For an in depth treatment of freedom and constraint in the Hindu tradition see Chapter 1, p.12ff.

¹¹³ Ibid., 8.

¹¹⁴ Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 29.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 29-30.

§3.5.1 Ancient Origins – The Indus Valley Civilisation

The roots of the Hindu tradition are thought to be located in the protohistoric Dravidian or Indus Valley Civilisation,¹¹⁶ thought to have flourished between 2500BCE and 1500BCE¹¹⁷ and discovered in North West India, now Pakistan, during the late nineteenth century.¹¹⁸ Extensive excavations during the early 1920s unearthed a vast and highly-developed civilisation spread over several sites, with the major cities identified as Mohenjo-daro ('Mound of the Dead') and Harappa.¹¹⁹ Artefacts uncovered are suggestive of a primitive form of the later *Āryan* practices of Hinduism and include statues indicative of the existence of phallus, mother goddess and nature cults.¹²⁰ Whilst acknowledging the grander finds of the Civilisation including the priest-king steatite statue found at Mohenjo-Daro and two stone busts at Harappa, the majority of statues found are simple and crudely formed. Steatite seals found in abundance are adorned with animal imagery, both real and mythical, including bulls, bison, rhinoceros and crocodile, as well as a unicorn and another three-headed animal, perhaps an early proto-

¹¹⁶ Named in acknowledgement of its vicinity to the River '*Sindhu*' (now Indus), it has long been referred to as the 'Indus Valley Civilisation' by historians, however, Manian identifies *Vedic* scholars who have suggested that the civilisation should be renamed the 'Indus-Saraswati civilisation' on account of geological discoveries which locate Harappan sites on the banks of the now dried up River Saraswati and furthermore, identify this river as being referred to in the texts of the *Rig Veda*. Padma Manian, "Harappans and Aryans: Old and New Perspectives of Ancient Indian History," *The History Teacher* 32, no. 1 (1998): 28.

¹¹⁷ Possible reasons for its decline are varied and range from natural events such as flooding, see H. T Lambrick, "The Indus Flood-Plain and the 'Indus' Civilisation," *The Geographical Journal* 133, no. 4 (1967), or an Aryan migration, see Edwin Bryant, *The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture: The Indo-Aryan Migration Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and from invasion to cultural transformation, see Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, 32-33. For a helpful overview see Robert L. Raikes, "The End of the Ancient Cities of the Indus," *American Anthropologist, New Series* 66, no. 2 (1964).

¹¹⁸ Workers seeking materials to lay the rails for a rail link between Karachi and Lahore made the initial discovery and did not hesitate in using the standardized good quality bricks they found. The Karachi-Lahore train reputedly still travels along a railway line made from bricks over 4000 years old.

¹¹⁹ For a detailed treatment of the Indus Civilisation, see Bridget Allchin and Raymond Allchin, *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan*, Cambridge World Archaeology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 131-225; Matthew A. Fitsimons, "The Indus Valley Civilisation," *The History Teacher* 4, no. 1 (1970). On the religion of the Indus Valley see Herbert P. Sullivan, "A Re-Examination of the Religion of the Indus Civilisation," *History of Religions* 4, no. 1 (1964).

¹²⁰ For a helpful treatment of the possible relationship between the Indo-Āryans and the Indus Valley Civilisation, see Bryant, *The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture: The Indo-Aryan Migration Debate*, 157-196. Scholars endorsing a theory of continuity include David Frawley, *Gods, Sages and Kings: Vedic Secrets of Ancient Civilisation* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Passages Press, 1991); Mortimer Wheeler, *The Cambridge History of India: Supplementary Volume, the Indus Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 83-84. There has also been speculation regarding the possibility that if the wars referred to in the pages of the *Rig Veda* refer to actual events, these may refer to altercations between various clans of *Vedic Aryans*.

type of Śiva in his epithet 'Lord of the beasts.' These seals are often accompanied by an as yet un-deciphered pictographic text.¹²¹

The absence of specific texts outlining the Dravidian and Āryan understanding of art does not mean we can suppose there was no artistry. Indeed, more recent excavations at the Harappa site reveal a collection of mud-brick buildings believed to be workshops where skilled craftsmen worked on pottery, copper and bronze work, and ornaments of semi-precious stone and marine shell.¹²² Furthermore, the evidence of workmanship in what was evidently a technologically advanced society points towards a particularly skilled workforce. The creative abilities of the Indus Valley peoples may be broadly categorised under three headings: practical, ornamental and apparently ludic. Firstly, architecturally the Indus cities conform to what would be expected of an urban commercial civilisation with elaborate drainage systems, substantial fortifications and features such as the Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro, all of which appear to be constructed to a more advanced degree than subsequent cultures.¹²³ On a more immediate level, items made for practical use include ceramics and ladles all of which indicate a high level of technical ability as well as many being decorated with, albeit simple, geometric designs.¹²⁴ Furthermore, an extensive number of seals have been unearthed (many bearing the elusive script) as well as clay imprints of them which some have suggested

¹²¹ Asko Parpola claims to have made significant advances in deciphering the text. See Asko Parpola, "The Indus Script: A Challenging Puzzle," *World Archaeology* 17, no. 3 (1986); Asko Parpola, *Deciphering the Indus Script* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Farmer et al, however controversially proffered the view that the Indus peoples were in fact illiterate. See Steve Farmer, Richard Sproat, and Michael Witzel, "The Collapse of the Indus-Script Thesis: The Myth of a Literate Harappan Civilization," *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 11, no. 2 (2004). Content to occupy the middle ground is Wheeler stressing that until a bilingual script or a longer inscription is found, decipherment will remain impossible. See Wheeler, *The Indus Civilisation*, 82. For a helpful overview of the issues see Andrew Lawler, "The Indus Script - Write or Wrong?," *Science* 306 (2004).

¹²² Jonathan M. Kenoyer, "Trade and Technology of the Indus Valley: New Insights from Harappa, Pakistan," *World Archaeology* 29, no. 2 (1997): 266.

¹²³ Benjamin Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain*, 2nd revised ed. (Middlesex, UK: Penguin, 1959), 12-14.

¹²⁴ Wheeler issues a corrective to those who overstate the uniformity of Indus craft stating that the passage of time saw a decline in technical quality and clarifies that much of the pottery was wheel-turned rather than handmade suggesting effective mass production rather than intricate craftsmanship. See Wheeler, *The Indus Civilisation*, 71.

may be trade labels.¹²⁵ Secondly, a significant number of objects for personal adornment have been discovered including headdresses,¹²⁶ bangles and beads,¹²⁷ as well as ornamental flourishes, such as peacocks and fish, added to other items.¹²⁸ Thirdly, and not so easily categorised, other discoveries serve to animate these people, endowing them with a culture rather than as a people who merely exist. Perhaps the most prevalent find were the numerous terracotta figurines as well as bronze and copper statues.¹²⁹ The most well-known bronze work is arguably the statue of the dancing girl boasting remarkable detail and found at Mohenjo-daro. Mention must also be made of the Harappan people's great skill in fashioning animal models including cattle with moveable limbs, monkeys, squirrels and bird whistles as well as toy carts.¹³⁰ The wealth of physical artefacts which stand as evidence of advanced craftsmanship also betray a strong devotional undercurrent to the life of this early Hindu culture in the form of devotional statues and images of what are believed to be early prototypes of later Hindu deities. Aside from the overtly religious artefacts, the high level of skill and care given to everyday objects demonstrates that the people of this early Hindu culture did not exhibit any significant degree of caution with regard to the physical world and its relation to the spiritual ideal portrayed in manifold material forms.

¹²⁵ Coomaraswamy remarks of these seals that they are 'remarkable in technical accomplishment and [...] aesthetic quality.' See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "A Very Ancient Indus Seal," *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts* 27, no. 160 (1929): 28. For more detail regarding clay imprints as indicative of Indus economic administration see Parpola, "The Indus Script: A Challenging Puzzle," 401f and S.C. Kak in Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 38.

¹²⁶ Cf. Kenoyer, "Trade and Technology of the Indus Valley: New Insights from Harappa, Pakistan," 274.

¹²⁷ For an extensive treatment of bead production and beads, see *Ibid.*: 266-274.

¹²⁸ Wheeler, *The Indus Civilisation*, 71-72. Regarding the later *Āryan* culture, Coomaraswamy argues that such ornamentation and decoration is indicative of some belief in some form of supernatural protection. See Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, 18.

¹²⁹ Cf. Simone Corbiau, "New Finds in the Indus Valley," *Iraq* 4, no. 1 (1937). For a religious reading of these finds see Sullivan, "A Re-Examination of the Religion of the Indus Civilisation."

¹³⁰ A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1954), 21. For a lengthier overview of Dravidian arts and crafts see Wheeler, *The Indus Civilisation*, 63-81.

§3.5.2 Devotional Cults and the Rise of *Bhakti*

India boasts a rich tradition of theism which, archaeology suggests, stems from its very origins. The role of theism within our present discussion of the implications of different traditions for an understanding of Hindu art, perhaps lies most obviously in consideration of the widespread production of popular images of the many and varied deities of the Hindu pantheon, ranging from the monkey god Hanuman to the boy deity Kṛṣṇa and from the elephant god Gaṇeśa to the fearsome goddess Kālī. Drenched in symbolism and awash with brilliant colour, they provide a focal point toward which devotion may be directed, and thus offer a widely accessible spiritual path. Devotional cults have developed around many gods of the Hindu pantheon, particularly Viṣṇu, Śiva and Devī, although the latter is linked mostly to *Śakti* or the female spiritual power widely associated with *Tāntric* philosophy, which is considered in some depth above. Central to the devotional schools, although not limited to them, is the concept and practice of *bhakti* which concretely manifests itself in temples, images, processions, feasts and popular gurus.

Etymologically, the term '*bhakti*' has two potential verb roots. The first, '*bhañj*' meaning 'to separate,' is especially relevant in the philosophy of Nārada who labels the highest love as being akin to that between separated lovers,¹³¹ but the second, '*bhaj*' meaning 'to worship' is usually favoured and is widely used in the sense of worship being directed towards a devotee's chosen deity or guru. Singh argues that broadly *bhakti* 'conveys the sense of participation and sharing.'¹³² Evidence of *bhakti* can be traced back to the Indus valley where *Śiva* linga and statues believed to represent the mother goddess have been found, as well as in the pages of the *Rg Veda* which

¹³¹ Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 229. See also Nandlal Sinha, *Bhaktisutras of Nārada* (New Delhi: Munshilal Manoharlal, 1998), 10.

¹³² R.Raj Singh, *Bhakti and Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 8.

comprises 1028 hymns to 33 gods.¹³³ Later Vedic literature contains detailed accounts of *bhakti* such as the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* which offers a fully developed *Śaiva* theology, and its *Vaiṣṇava* equivalents, the *Bhagavad Gītā*¹³⁴ and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

The extensive literature of the *Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra* tradition which extends back to the first century elaborates on the five emanations of the deity Viṣṇu – the final one of which is divine embodiment in devotional imagery or ‘image incarnation.’¹³⁵ In the *Paramasaṃhitā*, Viṣṇu stresses that ‘humans should construct the Imperishable One in human form and worship him with utmost devotion’ and continues ‘[w]orship or praise or meditation offered to the god in an image, according to the injunctions set out in the sacred treatises, is offered directly to god.’¹³⁶ The sacred texts expound on Viṣṇu’s proclamation and afford the physical image of the deity an important role in the devotee’s spiritual life. Davis acknowledges that diverse theistic schools ‘employ different metaphors and different philosophical formulations for describing the ontological status of God in the icon, but all agree that these physical objects become imbued with the special presence of God.’¹³⁷ He elaborates that they become ‘God’s entryway’ and for some devotional schools ‘[t]hey become identical with God.’¹³⁸ The *bhakti* movement underwent a renewal in the *bhakti* movements of south India in the seventh century and in the north from the thirteenth century as expressed in the passionate poetry of the Nayanars and the Alvars.¹³⁹ The pervasive spirit of *bhakti*, with

¹³³ The development of *Vaiṣṇava bhakti* from its earliest beginnings is traced by Ted J. Solomon, "Early *Vaiṣṇava* Bhakti and Its Autochthonous Heritage," *History of Religions* 10, no. 1 (1970). Whilst Miller focuses on the *bhakti* of the *Ṛg Veda*. See Jeanine Miller, "Bhakti and the *Ṛg Veda*," in *Love Divine: Studies in Bhakti and Devotional Mysticism*, ed. K. Werner (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1993).

¹³⁴ See Singh, *Bhakti and Philosophy*, 51-73.

¹³⁵ Cf. Kalyan Kumar Dasgupta, "Pāñcarātra Tradition and Brahmanical Iconography," in *Shastric Traditions in Indian Arts*, ed. Anna Libera Dallapiccola (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1989).

¹³⁶ *Paramasaṃhitā* 3.6-8 cited in Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 30.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Singh, *Bhakti and Philosophy*, 89.

its roots in ancient civilisation, continued to infuse Indian theories of aesthetics and is celebrated in the *Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu*, a classical work written by the devotional theologian Rūpa Goswāmin who expounded a theory of *rasa* which holds *bhakti* as the central *rasa* in which all others are grounded.¹⁴⁰ *Bhakti* traditions remain a prominent feature in theistic schools throughout India and in many of them the image or icon of a deity forms a key focus '[b]y rendering God physically present in a particular fixed location.'¹⁴¹

There are doubtless many long held rituals associated with the renovation and the replacement of temple images, but one documented tradition is that of *Navakalevara* or 'New Embodiment' held in Puri, Orissa.¹⁴² It focuses on the veneration of a triad of deities as embodied in statue form. The daily wear and tear of repeated devotion necessitates annual renovation (involving painting and general repairs) however once every twelve to nineteen years, as determined astrologically, the ceremony of *Navakalevara* takes place in which all three deities are replaced and their respective *brahmapadārtha* or 'life substance' is transferred to the newly constructed image in a highly secret ritual.¹⁴³ This life substance is housed in a cube shaped cavity in each statue and whilst the exact nature of the 'life substance' is shrouded in mystery, it is believed to be spiritually potent. When the new statue has been constructed a delicate ritual conducted in total darkness takes place when the blindfolded Daita charged with

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 96. See also N.P. Bhadura, "Bhakti (Devotion) as an Aesthetic Sentiment," *The Journal of Indian Philosophy* 16, no. 4 (1988).

¹⁴¹ Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 31.

¹⁴² My research has identified three sources of information regarding 'Navakalevara' from which I have drawn in my outline of the ceremony. The most substantial scholarly treatment of the ceremony and more broadly the cult of Jagannāth is that work edited by Anncharlott Eschmann, Herman Kulke, and Gaya Charan Tripathi, eds., *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978). For a detailed account of Navakalevara, see G.C. Tripathi, "Navakalevara: The Unique Ceremony of the 'Birth' and the Death of the 'Lord of the World'," in *The Cult of Jagannāth and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, ed. Anncharlotte Eschmann (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978).

¹⁴³ Tripathi, "Navakalevara: The Unique Ceremony of the 'Birth' and the Death of the 'Lord of the World'," 260-1. Cf. for debate regarding the nature and form of the life soul, see James J. Preston, "Creation of the Sacred Image: Apotheosis and Destruction in Hinduism," in *Gods of Flesh, Gods of Stone: The Embodiment of Divinity in India*, ed. Joanne Punzo Waghorne (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 17.

the responsibility of instituting the transfer takes the life soul, wrapped to prevent any apprehension of it, and secretes it in the cavity which has been prepared to house it before being sealed by a sanctified lid specially constructed by the temple Brahmins. Whatever the precise nature of the life substance at the centre of this highly charged ritual it is clear that it infuses the material form which houses it with divine presence. Even when an old statue is discarded it is still afforded burial rights as though there is a residual element of divinity contained within it.

The conjunction of spirit and matter in the Hindu tradition is nowhere more evident than here in the wealth of imagery ranging from popular calendar prints¹⁴⁴ to aniconic representations and from magnificent temple art to humble home shrines.¹⁴⁵ Regardless of context, images or representations of the divine operate as more than mere symbols or mediators of the divine, but for a time, as hosts.¹⁴⁶ That said, however, it is not a given that deities permanently reside in all images, for as Davis notes, the exchange which occurs through a manufactured image requires initiative to be taken by both the deity and the devotee in worship.¹⁴⁷ Assuming the deity has accepted the bidding of the devotee to enter an image, the image becomes 'translucent' and thus functions as a channel through which devotees are enabled to encounter the divine.¹⁴⁸ This must not be misunderstood as though the encounter were dependent on the presence of a physical icon; rather the material icon acts as an aid to concentration and one which focuses the mind. Essentially the image exists to satisfy the human need for sensory direction but

¹⁴⁴ See Robert J. Del Bonta, "Calendar Prints and Indian Traditions," in *Shastric Traditions in Indian Arts*, ed. Anna Libera Dallapiccola (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1989).

¹⁴⁵ Stephen P. Huyler, *Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999), 66-71.

¹⁴⁶ Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 29.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 29, 32.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

which ultimately acts as a conduit to spiritual encounter. In a similar vein, Eck recognises that devotion towards such images is ‘our language, not god’s necessity.’¹⁴⁹

The relationship between images and devotees may be likened to that between a master and his domestic servant or as Eck jests, ‘playing house with God.’¹⁵⁰ The daily routine for an image incarnation is not dissimilar to that of any human, although the ‘master’ requires his servant to do these tasks for him – being wakened, bathed, clothed, fed and honoured before being allowed to sleep or given their leave. For obvious reasons, paintings cannot be bathed with water, but instead are adorned with garlands of flowers and showered with sacred powders.¹⁵¹ In worship, or *pūjā*, there are a number of bathing rituals or ‘affusions,’ which are thought to increase divine favour and encourage the bestowal of blessings.¹⁵² These are outlined in the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*:

With its head to the east, the image should be bathed with water infused with plaksa-fig, holy fig, ficus, acacia, and banyan trees, with plants deemed auspicious, and with sacrificial grass; with mud from the shores of river confluences, anthills, and mud from lotus ponds; with the five products of the cow and with water from holy bathing spots; and with water containing gold and gems along with fragrant perfumes. The bathing should be accompanied by the sounds of many instruments, shouts of best wishes, and the recitation of Vedic hymns.¹⁵³

Other forms of *pūjā* include food offerings, or *prasād*, where image deities are said symbolically to consume food placed before them and the remainder, perceived to be especially blessed, is distributed amongst the assembled devotees and light offerings, or *āratī*, where the camphor flame is commonly used to bathe the image in its soft light. It is difficult verbally to animate the vibrancy and atmosphere of these devotional settings, but the important point for our discussion is that, for a time, the deity is held to be

¹⁴⁹ Diane Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, Reprint ed. (Columbia University Press, 1998), 48.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Huyler, *Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion*, 55.

¹⁵² Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 36.

¹⁵³ BS 60.8-10 cited in Ibid.

present in the material image and the image is treated as a material manifestation of the deity. The formless assumes form.

The implication of this practice is that, at some point, that which the artist has formed through the manipulation of physical materials, transforms into something divine or in Davis' words, undergoes 'transubstantiation.'¹⁵⁴ This occurs when repeated *pūjā* meets with divine favour resulting in the divinisation of the image. If at any time an image becomes damaged or tainted (inevitable with near constant anointing) some record that the image is discarded, usually by ritual burial or immersion in water, and replaced with a new image,¹⁵⁵ where others suggest that images 'accrue potency as they become accreted with the marks of repeated devotion.'¹⁵⁶

The divine ability to enter into and depart from physical imagery brings an interesting dimension to an understanding of the relationship between devotee and image. The West is all too keen to throw accusations of idolatry at the image wealthy Hindus, but little consideration is generally given to the importance of the themes of impermanence and transience.¹⁵⁷ In spite of the exuberance and all consuming nature of Hindu *pūjā*, it is recognised that these experiences, largely fed by sensory perception, are transient and will pass. There are some particularly relevant examples of this in the domain of the visual arts. For instance, in the case of women spending hours constructing elaborate *yantras* from rice grains on the ground, subsequently placing a small lamp on each separate lotus leaf. These images are considered spiritual only for the duration that the lamps burn, thereafter, the image is left to be trodden into the dust.¹⁵⁸ We can take as

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 33.

¹⁵⁵ Huyler, *Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion*, 169.

¹⁵⁶ Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 11.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Richard Davis, "Enlivening Images: The Śaiva Rite of Invocation," in *Shastric Traditions in Indian Arts*, ed. Anna Libera Dallapiccola (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1989), 351.

¹⁵⁸ See Huyler, *Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion*, 204-207.

another example, women in Orissa rising early to decorate the outside walls of their homes with elaborate patterns and symbols, which a combination of daily dust and grime and the monsoon rains gradually disperses.¹⁵⁹ There is no abiding preciousness about these images, they are created as an act of devotion, house the deity for a time and then fade away. Made with anticipation of divine residence they are made to extol the deity and not to elevate the artist's status; indeed, very rarely, if ever, do Hindu images bear any mark of the artist's identity.

In practice, therefore, material and spiritual reality is held to overlap and interact on almost every level of the Hindu devotional life. From the earliest origins of the Indus Valley Civilisation through to the highly developed devotional cults, Hindu devotees appear to have acknowledged the spiritual merits of image adoration. Whilst ultimately the goal is to attain an unfettered union with the formless Ultimate Reality, Hindus recognise the value of the material artefact in aiding this devotional pursuit. Even Śaṅkara, amongst the most dedicated and disciplined of gurus, confesses to having utilised visual forms in the spiritual endeavour: 'O Lord, Pardon my three sins. I have in contemplation clothed in form Thyself that has no form; I have in praise described Thee who does transcend all qualities; and in visiting shrines I have ignored Thine Omnipresence.'¹⁶⁰

§3.6 Darśan – 'Seeing and Being Seen'

Awareness of the notion of *darśan* or 'auspicious sight,' popularly understood as meaning 'to see and be seen by the deity,' owes its widespread dissemination to Diana Eck who introduced the concept in her 1981 publication of the same name.¹⁶¹ A decade

¹⁵⁹ Dinanath Pathy, "Artist and Society: The Oriya Painter-Craftsman and His Social Setting," in *Indian Art: Forms, Concerns and Development in Historical Perspective*, ed. B.N. Goswamy (Chennai: Tamil Arts Academy, 2002), 296. See Huyler, *Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion*, 66.

¹⁶⁰ Cited in Saraswati, "The Art of Formless Form Ennobling the Life of Man," 264.

¹⁶¹ Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*.

later, Lawrence Babb's comprehensive *Redemptive Encounters* outlined living examples of *darśan* in the Radhasoami sect, among the Brahma Kumaris and by the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba.¹⁶² Together, Eck and Babb's work form the basis of all current treatment of the concept of *darśan*.¹⁶³

Babb argues that *darśan* is a form of visual exchange which 'establishes a special sort of intimacy' between the devotee and the deity.¹⁶⁴ It is common parlance for a devotee to claim to 'take' *darśan* from a deity and that, in return, the deity 'gives' *darśan* akin to the bestowal of a blessing. Although this type of mirrored vision is unfamiliar to Western Christianity it does seem to hold some resonance with the Eastern Orthodox icon tradition,¹⁶⁵ and it has otherwise been linked to Persian and Arabian devotion.¹⁶⁶ Contrary to some dominant Western ways of thinking of the senses, the East has never fully accepted the eyes as mere receptors of sensory data to be interpreted by the brain, rather Vidal asserts that it conforms more to the scientific 'theory of extramission' in which 'vision is active and motivated and [...] causes subject and object to have direct physical contact.'¹⁶⁷

The subject and object in *darśan* are the devotee and the deity itself (not to be confused with the concrete image), thus *darśan* is in some sense a communion of visible and

¹⁶² Lawrence A. Babb, "Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37, no. 4 (1981); Lawrence A. Babb, *Redemptive Encounters: Three Modern Styles in the Hindu Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

¹⁶³ Denis Vidal's short paper published on the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies website proved a helpful resource in charting current treatment of *darśan*. See Denis Vidal, "Darshan", School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London <http://www.soas.ac.uk/southasianstudies/keywords/> (accessed 4th March 2010).

¹⁶⁴ Babb, "Glancing," 388.

¹⁶⁵ The prohibition of imagery in the Hebrew scriptures and the iconoclastic controversy of the reformation era doubtless play a significant role in the rejection of the visual image by the Western Protestant Christian tradition and indeed, there are several instances of nineteenth century Hindu reformers offering polemics against idolatry including Rammohun Roy and Dayananda Sarasvati. For an extended treatment of Hindu iconoclasts, see Noel Salmond, *Hindu Iconoclasts: Rammohun Roy, Dayananda Sarasvati and Nineteenth-Century Polemics against Idolatry* (Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004).

¹⁶⁶ Philip Lutgendorf, "Is There an Indian Way of Filmmaking?," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 10, no. 3 (2006): 232.

¹⁶⁷ Vidal, "Darshan" (accessed 4 March 2010).

invisible. It is an exchange or, according to one writer, a 'visual dialogue' or even a 'visual intercourse.'¹⁶⁸ The unique feature of *darśan* is that for the duration of the 'connection' the deity bestows something of its very being on the devotee who, to quote Babb, 'drinks' the divine power.¹⁶⁹ Jan Gonda states 'the sight of a powerful being or influential object makes the seer share in the specific beneficial potency of that object or attract some of it.'¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, this distinctive transaction allows the devotee to see themselves, and furthermore the world, as the deity sees it.

Both Kramrisch and Gonda comment on the tactile nature of *darśan*, indeed Gonda, in his treatment of seeing in the Vedic texts notes that *darśan* is 'practically identical to touching or grasping.'¹⁷¹ Babb illustrates this point effectively in his work noting that in some devotional literature 'seeing' and 'touching' are joined in importance, particularly in those traditions which place special emphasis on the deity's feet. In these sects, devotees are permitted the opportunity to serve the deity by washing its feet and, rather disconcertingly, having done so to drink the remaining water or 'foot nectar' which is believed to contain divine power.¹⁷² Also of use to our attempts to make sense of the true nature of this form of 'looking' is to note the etymological association of *darśan* with 'philosophy' and 'knowledge.'¹⁷³ *Darśan*, therefore, is not a passing glance at a 'pretty' or even symbolic image, rather it is an encounter on the deepest level of a person's being, during which the deity bestows something of its very being upon the devotees who, for the duration of the fixed gazes, are permitted to 'drink' the divine power set before them ultimately affording them a share of divine potency.

¹⁶⁸ Whilst *darśan* is widely agreed to be a visual exchange, Lutgendorf wishes to refute any suggestion that the religious context for it is one of blissful silence since during the act of *darśan*, 'Hindu devotees are seldom "mute" [...] they pray, sing, petition, and express highly individual behaviour.' Lutgendorf, "Is There an Indian Way of Filmmaking?," 233-4.

¹⁶⁹ Babb, "Glancing," 388.

¹⁷⁰ Jan Gonda, *Eye and Gaze in the Veda* (Amsterdam, London: North Holland Publishing Company, 1969), 56.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 20; Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 136.

¹⁷² Babb, "Glancing," 395-396.

¹⁷³ This is most clearly evident in the term '*darśana*' which refers to the distinct philosophical schools. Cf. p.87.

This positive account of seeing must not be misconceived as labelling all such encounters as inevitably beneficial to both parties. Sight permits the passage of both good and evil between the devotee and the deity, and in both directions. Eck records an occasion where a bystander seemingly became the unwitting victim of a deity's evil gaze which resulted in their untimely death.¹⁷⁴ The first gaze of an image is thought to be so potent that often a mirror will be held in front of it to reflect its sight, so that the deity's superior gift of sight is met by its own gaze, thus guarding against any immediate harm to anyone else.¹⁷⁵ It is perhaps to be expected that a deity may possess such extreme potency, both good and evil; but equally important to acknowledge are the potentially negative effects of the devotee's gaze to the deity. In a manner analogous to the possibility of 'cross contamination' between the *varnas* or social classes, it is equally possible that the superior deity may be polluted by the inferior devotee. However, whether an act of *darśan* channels a flow of good or evil, the image itself facilitates a divine encounter although different traditions grant varying degrees of value to the physical form itself.

Darśan is, however, not limited to images. Popular gurus often hold *darśan* for the bestowal of blessings upon attendant devotees. Gandhi, for instance, regularly attracted crowds wishing to obtain sight of him believing that it would confer something of his wisdom upon them. Even in the western world gurus such as Mother Amma, also known as the 'hugging saint,' offer *darśan* without cost to packed audiences who have travelled from places far flung simply to receive a hug from her. This has been her lifetime's work, clocking up over 26 million hugs around the world she is dedicated to

¹⁷⁴ Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, 7.

¹⁷⁵ Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs*, 110.

her task and devotees continually return to receive a blessing and claim to feel her ‘good vibrations,’ even a sceptical BBC correspondent!¹⁷⁶

In our technologically advancing world purveyors of *darśan* now deploy the media of mass reproduction¹⁷⁷ as well as those of film,¹⁷⁸ television,¹⁷⁹ photography¹⁸⁰ and internet imagery. Sophie Hawkins’ work focussed on the guru Sai Baba, a ‘mixed media guru,’¹⁸¹ of whom his devotees claimed it possible to receive his *darśan* from internet images as well as video footage. Interesting to note, however, is that the devotees themselves were keen to stress that whilst *darśan* was possible and indeed acceptable through electronic mediation, it is not acceptable to offer *puja* before such an image.¹⁸² The key aspect of Hawkins’ work and interviews with the devotees, however, is the stress placed upon the image, in whatever form, as being merely a supplement or *aide memoire* to the preferred mental image which conveys his presence: ‘in this state of perpetual communion, “discourse” with God surpasses his vision.’¹⁸³ Hawkins’ suggestion here that the the mental image is the ideal form of communion with God endorses the yogic suggestion by Heinrich Zimmer that a devotee should concentrate on simultaneously mentally visualising all the measurements pertaining to an ideal image.

¹⁷⁶ See Mario Cacciottolo, "A Hug from Amma", BBC News Magazine <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/7130151.stm> (accessed 4 March 2010).

¹⁷⁷ See further Philip Lutgendorf, "Evolving a Monkey: Hanuman, Poster Art and Postcolonial Anxiety," ed. Sumathi Ramaswamy (New Delhi, London: Sage Publications, 2003); H. Daniel Smith, "Impact of 'God Posters' on Hindus and Their Devotional Traditions," in *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, ed. Lawrence A. Babb and Susan S Wadley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

¹⁷⁸ *Jai Santoshi Ma*, the 1975 low budget Bollywood movie, succeeded in popularising a hitherto little known goddess. The film has subsequently attracted great scholarly interest, particularly for its filmic portrayal of *darśan*, see Babb, "Glancing," 391-6; John Stratton Hawley, "*Devi: Goddesses of India (Prologue)*," in *Religion, Art and Visual Culture: A Cross Cultural Reader*, ed. S. Brent Plate (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 182ff.

¹⁷⁹ The television serial of the *Rāmāyaṇa* attracted massive audiences and resulted in viewers claiming to take *darśan* from the epic characters. An account of this can be found in Philip Lutgendorf, "All in the Raghu Family: A Video Epic in Cultural Context," in *Religion, Art and Visual Culture: A Cross Cultural Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

¹⁸⁰ Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs*, 106, 9.

¹⁸¹ Sophie Hawkins, "Bordering Realism. The Aesthetics of Sai Baba's Mediated Universe," in *Image Journeys: Audio-Visual Media and Cultural Change in India*, ed. Christiane Brosius and Melissa Butcher (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999), 141. See further the extensive study on Sathya Sai Baba in Babb, *Redemptive Encounters*, 159ff.

¹⁸² Hawkins, "Bordering Realism. The Aesthetics of Sai Baba's Mediated Universe," 148-9.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 149.

The ability to construct a mental idealised form without the need to translate that image into material form is the ideal expounded by Zimmer in his detailed differentiation between outward sight and inward vision.¹⁸⁴

Not only is 'darshan-by-proxy'¹⁸⁵ a feasible option in our age of mass reproduction, but Christiane Brosius wishes to take this a step further by claiming 'new audiovisual technologies may well affirm, and even increase the gazing subject's perception of an invisible, overwhelming and intimate presence in the images and their display as meaningful items.'¹⁸⁶ This growing acceptance of imagery in all forms is accounted for by Pinney who claims that images become divine socially rather than mechanically. In support of his claim he cites an example that an image can be purchased and treated as though it were a newspaper or other everyday item, until such a time as it is instated in a devotional context, a home shrine maybe, when the image assumes a divine character.¹⁸⁷

Perhaps most interesting is the claim that *darśan* can deliver a soteriological impact, such that Gell suggests when the gazes meet there occurs a 'union with God [and] a merging of consciousness'¹⁸⁸ and elsewhere that 'the transformed rarified inner presence' of the devotee has the 'potential to blend with the unknowable and indescribably creative source or deity.'¹⁸⁹ This blurring of identity in the context of visual exchange is significant, for whilst it must be recognised that a 'trans-media cosmic appreciation of the divine' is most desirable, nevertheless for the duration of the *darśan*, the image has facilitated a divine union. One cannot help but wonder whether

¹⁸⁴ Zimmer, *Artistic Form and Yoga in the Sacred Images of India*, 53-64.

¹⁸⁵ Hawkins, "Bordering Realism. The Aesthetics of Sai Baba's Mediated Universe," 148.

¹⁸⁶ Christiane Brosius, "Hindutva Intervisuality: Videos and the Politics of Representation," in *Beyond Appearances? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India*, ed. Sumathi Ramaswamy, Contributions to Indian Sociology Occasional Studies (New Delhi: London: Sage Publications, 2003), 276.

¹⁸⁷ Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs*, 111.

¹⁸⁸ Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1998), 117.

¹⁸⁹ Heather Elgood, *Hinduism and the Religious Arts* (London, New York: Cassell, 2000), 129.

the sustained *darśan* of an image, referred to by Babb as enabling the devotee to “drink” divine power,¹⁹⁰ is in fact the nearest example in the context of painting to the tasting of *rasa*. Abhinavagupta likens the tasting of *rasa* to an experience, however momentary, of divine union and if Lutgendorf’s assertion that *darśan* constitutes an interaction in the ‘vital realm of emotion’ is accepted, then it would seem we have sufficient cause to consider a link between the experience of *darśan* and drinking of the divine power of *rasa*.¹⁹¹

In this chapter we have seen the value ascribed to the products of the senses in the philosophies of three textual traditions and expounded the mythologies surrounding the origins of painting, as well as considering the connection, if understood to exist between the divine artist and the human painter. We have explored the role of visualisation and the precision of form in conforming to the Divine Ideal by engaging in a close reading of the *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*. Finally, we have looked at the art object as devotional focus and as a conduit facilitating *Darśan*, thus allowing the devotee to see and be seen by the deity through a physical icon. Whilst we might reasonably have expected Hindu traditions to ascribe less importance to material than Christian theologies, what we have found is that material is actively endorsed and employed diversely in the service of religious devotion. In chapter six we shall hear from a range of Christian voices on a spectrum which situate the material form and its significance, or abiding value, with varying degrees of proximity. The Hindu ideal of disciplined visualisation which encourages the devotee to rely on their mental apparatus to construct an immaterial ideal finds some similarities with Dorothy Sayers’ account of the creative trinity in which the Idea can exist entirely in the mind and be there complete without any physical outworking. Whilst both accounts advocate a dematerialised ideal they nevertheless

¹⁹⁰ Babb, "Glancing," 388.

¹⁹¹ Lutgendorf, "Is There an Indian Way of Filmmaking?," 234.

trace a positive connection with material. We have seen that some Hindu traditions place a heavy emphasis on the precision of form, however Eck's exposition on *darśan* stresses that the material acts as a conduit rather than the material itself becoming a divine substance. In chapter six we see how David Brown posits that the category of sacrament facilitates the idea that God can be sacramentally present in the physical world, art not withstanding. Next we pause to consider some of the key ideas which have arisen throughout our focus on Hindu traditions of artistry and which are worth considering in greater detail alongside Christian theological ideas on the same theme.

~ INTERIM REFLECTIONS ~

Before turning to consider Christian theologies around our three aesthetic themes, it will be helpful to pause and restate some of our key findings. In Chapter One we considered how the extensive content of the *Śilpaśāstras* seem, when taken at face value, to limit the scope for creative freedom within Hindu artistic traditions and yet, in engaging with some key thinkers as employed by Mosteller, we found that the texts are afforded varying degrees of authority by scholars and artists alike. More liberal interpretations, such as that espoused by Bose, view them as indicative of a general decline in artistic standards and argue that the real creative genius demonstrates absolute artistic freedom. Conservative interpretations view the *Śilpaśāstras* as absolutely essential to the construction of devotional imagery and, at very least, all temple imagery should conform to the canonical dictates. However, this inevitably admits geographical variations given the diverse texts on artistry which often contain contradictory information. As a practising artist Tagore outlines the most realistic view that the texts are useful for art instruction but should not replace the apprenticeship style of training, nor should they be treated as exhaustive. For Tagore the texts constitute training manuals for the novice artist but he maintains that the most skilled artists aspire to creative heights unfettered by the dictates of the *Śilpaśāstras*. In Chapter Four we shall consider Christian ideas on creative originality, the faithful transmission of received tradition and a Christian account of working with, and adding value to, that which is given both in the form of material and tradition. Once again, we will find a range of

views on the premium to be placed on artistic freedom in the creative task, and a potentially fruitful ground for conversation.

In Chapter Two we explored the complex theory of *rasa* or aesthetic emotion and in particular its relation to Hindu religious experience. We heard that *rasa* is unique to the aesthetic context and is transitory, but most pertinently for our proposed conversation between Christian and Hindu traditions of artistry is that several key commentaries on the nature of *rasa* refer to it as, at very least, analogous to a divine encounter whilst others gesture towards the possibility that the two kinds of experience could be coterminous. In Chapter Five we shall consider a host of perspectives which span a similar kind of ambiguity to that which we have seen in the Hindu debate surrounding the nature of the relationship between aesthetic and religious experience.

In Chapter Three we might reasonably have expected to find a less abiding significance attached to the material aspects of artistry and yet what we discovered was not only a rich wealth of Hindu imagery, but also evidence that the material world more broadly is actively employed in the service of the religious. Eck's account of the notion of *darśan*, of seeing and being seen by a deity through a physical icon, deviates slightly from a wholesale endorsement of the physical in that the material form is considered to conduit, for a time, through which the visual exchange can take place. Images can be decommissioned at such time as the deity is deemed to have departed, but some sects will still afford the physical remains of the image a full ceremonial cremation. In the next chapter we shall turn our attention to Christian ideas on creative originality, constraint and the shape of a responsible Christian account of artistry within the category of 'sub-creation'.

~ CHAPTER FOUR ~

CREATIVE ORIGINALITY, CONSTRAINT & 'SUB-CREATION' IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

§4.1 Introduction

Chapter One considered the extent to which the extensive and highly prescriptive texts on Hindu artistry known as the *Śilpaśāstras* limit the scope for artistic freedom in Hindu traditions of art. It acknowledged that over the course of the last century since the discovery of the texts they have been diversely interpreted by scholars and how readings of them have too often been influenced by the dominant Western trends in art theory thus unhelpfully clouding a properly contextualised reading of them. It outlined the possibility that they were composed in response to either a real or perceived decline in the standards of Hindu artistry, but highlighted key indications that they were never intended to displace apprenticeship to a master and the transfer of skills through inhabiting a living tradition which bequeathed both a practical obligation and a spiritual vocation. It concluded that the texts are likely to have functioned as encyclopaedic accounts of artistic techniques either for reference purposes or for use in the early stages of artistic training rather than as the prescriptive accounts they appear to be when treated in isolation, and that it was expected that each successive generation of artists would breathe life anew into these inherited traditions by exercising a degree of artistic freedom.

Whether the defining motif of the finest creative endeavour is deemed to be freedom and originality or an obedient adherence to some set of tradition dictated principles, this

chapter seeks to consider the contours of a responsible Christian account of artistry which takes seriously the limitations of working within the givenness of creation yet simultaneously recognises the call to creatively engage with those same materials to open up hitherto un-tapped realms of meaning.

§4.2 The Artist as Free Creative Spirit¹

The Bible tells us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and of particular relevance to our discussion here is the idea that in doing so God gave ‘free, untrammelled expression to His inner self by bringing into existence *new* realities.’² That God created the world from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) in an act of absolute freedom would seem to establish an unattainable ideal for subsequent human creative aspirations throughout history, but with the dawn of the Renaissance came the increasingly pervasive suggestion that the artist in some way mimics the ultimate act of divine creation.³ Whilst the language of creation and creativity had hitherto been entirely reserved for use in reference to the act of divine origination, post-Renaissance humanists extended its usage to incorporate acts of human creativity, such that the idea of the artist as creator became widely accepted as a way of thinking about the human creative endeavour and the semantics of ‘creativity’ increasingly found itself at home in the domain of art theory.⁴ This was not as would first appear an entirely unorthodox

¹ It was this sort of Western worldview which stood in stark contrast to the aesthetic principles unearthed in the *Śilpaśāstras* and which subsequently overshadowed their interpretation as prescriptive and thus restrictive. Cf. p.47. Mosteller accuses Tagore of espousing a typically Western Romantic view, see p.42.

² Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Carlisle: Solway, 1997), 51. My italics.

³ The Hebrew writers do not give a single term to denote all that is now encapsulated in the English word ‘create’ though it is interesting to note that perhaps its closest counterpart, the singular verb *bārā*, refers to a mode of creative activity which is reserved for God alone. See W. Bernhardt, "Bara'," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 246. Cf. p.146.

⁴ Leonardo is one such artist who gives an inflated account of the painter’s role: ‘The divinity which is the science of painting transmutes itself into a semblance of the divine mind’ and elsewhere he refers to the painter’s ability to create infinitely like unto the divine creator: man ‘shows himself to be a divine thing; for where nature finishes its production with its species, there man begins with natural things to make with the aid of this nature infinite species of things.’ Martin Kemp, "From "Mimesis" To "Fantasia": The Quattrocento Vocabulary of Creation, Inspiration and Genius in the Visual Arts," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 8 (1977): 382-3. And in the world of poetry, Christoforo Landino to whom the first

move as the Renaissance idea of the artist as ‘Creator’ found its warrant from certain ways of reading the biblical texts. The first of the two biblical creation narratives outlines that the divine creator in surveying the world which he had created, gifted it to humankind but, Hart argues, ‘there is the indication that enjoyment of this gift will involve not passive consumerism but a “fruitful” mode of occupation and possession of this rich habitation’ and, he continues, ‘this is cast in the wider context of the remarkable indication that among all creatures great and small it is upon human beings that God bestows the peculiar privilege and responsibility of being fashioned in his own image.’⁵ This idea has been substantiated in theological tradition such that the suggestion is ‘that man shared in the most fundamental activity of God – the activity of creation.’⁶ At the Renaissance, this biblically validated idea was nevertheless pushed to the extremes by being fused with Greek ideas about man’s inherent divinity, and became part of an ideology which ascribed far too much power and freedom to the human creature within the larger economy of creation. Thus a legitimate biblical suggestion is distorted into something ‘unbiblical’ in its portrayal, tending to elide the difference between God’s creative activity and ours. However, whilst the adoption of the language of creativity found a home as a working model for all sorts of human making, its religious and philosophical heritage was never entirely lost and the divine precedent continued to inform an understanding of human artistry. As in the Greek myth of Prometheus in which the protagonist steals fire from the gods and, by extension, creation as the divine prerogative, the eighteenth-century artist assumed a god-like status, both by self proclamation and public endorsement, and came to be viewed as ‘one blessed with a special gift or genius [and having] a uniquely valuable

use of the Creator metaphor is first traced states of the comparison: ‘Man makes out of matter whatever he makes. God creates out of nothing. But the poet, although he does not quite produce something out of nothing, yet, inspired by Divine madness, he does form something in an elegant song, so that he seems, by his fictions, to have produced great and highly admirable things nearly out of nothing.’ E.N. Tigerstedt, "The Poet as Creator: Origins of a Metaphor," *Comparative Literature Studies* 5 (1968): 458-9.

⁵ Trevor Hart, "Ch.9 - Genesis: Origination, Image and Autonomy," (St Andrews, Scotland: 2013), 5.

⁶ Cited in *Ibid.*, 8.

message to communicate,' one might say a gospel of sorts.⁷ Steiner refers to this inflated sense of vocation as the 'presumption of affinity,'⁸ whilst Sayers represents this Promethean excess in the form of speech given by the architect in the play she wrote on commission for the Canterbury Festival in 1937: "We are the master-craftsmen, God and I [...] Oh, but in making man God over-reached Himself and gave away His Godhead [...] Man stands equal with Him now, Partner and rival."⁹

It was out of this context that the idea of the artist as autonomous genius arose and, as one writer phrases it, the accolade of 'genius' became the 'post-Enlightenment equivalent of sainthood.'¹⁰ In concrete terms one way this manifested itself was in the inscription of the artist's name on their work thus forgoing any acknowledgement of collaboration. The Romantic era propelled the notion of the artist creating in perfect solitude having eschewed the centuries old practice of apprenticeship dedicated to the acquisition of time-honoured skills. Hart illustrates this point by citing the example of the French sculptor Auguste Rodin who, although he possessed a 'somewhat troubled relationship to questions of artistic originality,' nevertheless epitomised the idea of a creative original spirit.¹¹ One essayist and keen admirer of Rodin, punctuates his essay on Rodin's work with 'repeated acknowledgements of prodigious life-giving *newness*' and 'unable to resist provocative appeal to the divine precedent' punctuates his piece with the statement, 'He created.'¹² Perhaps on account of his repeated rejection from the prestigious Ecole des Beaux Arts, Rodin forged his own artistic path and became acclaimed for his independent creative mind with its ideas conceived outwith the

⁷ R Keith Sawyer, *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 12.

⁸ George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation: Originating in the Gifford Lectures for 1990* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 18.

⁹ Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Zeal of Thy House* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1937), 69-70.

¹⁰ M. Garber, "Our Genius Problem," *The Atlantic Monthly* 290 (December 2002).

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2002/12/our-genius-problem/308435/>.

¹¹ Trevor Hart, "Ch.11 - Exile: Art, Creativity and Originality," (St Andrews, Scotland: 2013), 14.

¹² See *Ibid.*, 15. Original italics. Cf. Rainer Maria Rilke, "Auguste Rodin," in *Auguste Rodin: Readings on His Life and Work*, ed. Albert Elsen (Eaglewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall Inc., 1965), 138.

dominant traditions of the academy. Undoubtedly Rodin's own self perception and understanding of his vocation as an artist is complex, meaning that whilst on the one hand he argues that '[i]t is nature which makes of the artist – when he has understood and translated her – a creator, or rather her supreme copyist,' on the other he sought to 'remove the formulaic quality from contemporary sculpture in order to give new life to the sculpted body.'¹³ The analogy between the divine and human creator once considered heretical had now become the norm. 'In theological terms,' Hart argues, 'one might construe this as a shift from an economy of gift and response to one centred and reliant instead on autonomous human merits and achievements.'¹⁴

To a certain extent, Dorothy Sayers occupies herself such a standpoint in that she expounds an idealist account of the artist as creator. In a lecture given around the same time as the publication of *The Mind of the Maker* in which she expounds a Trinitarian account of the creative mind, Sayers proposes that the idea of art as 'creation' is the most important contribution Christian theology has made to the field of aesthetics and goes on to argue that the modern vague connotations of the language of 'creation' and 'creativity' can be attributed to their semantic divorce from their proper theological context and meaning.¹⁵ Sayers argues 'the true work of art [...] is something *new* – it is not primarily the copy or representation of anything,' it is 'a new creature. Something has been created.'¹⁶ Elsewhere Sayers argues that the trait held in common between divine and human maker is the 'desire and ability to make things' and coupled with her assertion that the artist's task is to 'create newness,' she seems to elevate the artist and her endeavours to a state of absolute autonomy thus eschewing any sense of the artist as

¹³ Ruth Butler, *Rodin: The Shape of Genius* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 96; Albert Elsen, *Auguste Rodin: Readings on His Life and Work* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1965), 158. Cf. Hart, "Exile," 14-19.

¹⁴ Hart, "Exile," 3.

¹⁵ Dorothy L. Sayers, "Towards a Christian Aesthetic," in *Our Culture: Its Christian Roots and Present Crisis*, ed. V.A. Demant (London: SPCK, 1947), 61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 60-1. Original italics.

inheritor of, or collaborator in, a tradition.¹⁷ And yet, Sayers does draw a distinction between divine and human creator in acknowledging that God creates ‘out of nothing’ and without conditions, an ability which the human artist can never hope to match, only ever being able to ‘rearrange the unalterable and indestructible units of matter in the universe and build them up into new forms.’¹⁸ Nevertheless Sayers does push the human/divine analogy to its limits and seems to suggest there are degrees of creating ‘out of nothing’ (as impossible as it may seem) for in her own words ‘it is the artist who, more than any other man, is able to create something out of nothing.’¹⁹ Thus it transpires that to her own mind the difference between human and divine making is one of ‘technical phraseology’ meaning that ‘between the mind of the maker and the Mind of his Maker, [there is] a difference, not of category, but only of quality and degree.’²⁰ In his review of *The Mind of the Maker*, C.S. Lewis cautions Sayers to remember that the analogy is, and can only ever be precisely that, an analogy and that following Sayers’ proposition some ‘vainglorious writers’ might be encouraged to overlook the metaphor in favour of identification with the divine creator.²¹ In no uncertain terms, Lewis restates the distinction in asserting that ‘an unbridgeable gulf yawns’ between human and divine artist as ‘all the “creative” artists of the human race cannot so much as summon up the phantasm of a single new primary colour.’²² However, and this is pivotal to Sayers argument, while she recognises that the creative mind constantly seeks expression in physical form, she argues that the ‘work of art has real existence apart from its translation into material form’ and thus it is at this level that she interprets the artist as being involved in the creation of ‘new and unique entities.’²³ Whilst Sayers has outlined a distinction between absolute creation and the limitations facing the human

¹⁷ Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1941), 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21. Cf. Sayers, "Towards a Christian Aesthetic," 61.

¹⁹ Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

²¹ C.S. Lewis, "Review: The Mind of the Maker," *Theology* 43 (1941): 248.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 22, 32.

artist, her Promethean sympathies remain evident and although she will admit that the work of art is a 'social act' she insists that 'the poet is, first and foremost his own society.'²⁴ That Sayers chooses to situate her theology of the creative mind in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity in which, we must remember, the Incarnation plays a pivotal role, seems confusing to say the least when her own proposal is that the creative image 'may remain entirely within the sphere of the imagination and [be] there complete.'²⁵ Ultimately Sayers proposes an exalted view of the artist as one 'expressing the freedom of his own nature in accordance with the law of his being,' giving rise to the creation of 'new and unique entities' in a manner akin, though she maintains slightly removed from, the divine creator.²⁶

Hart comments that contemporary expectations are that the artist brings something new to bear in her creative exploits and furthermore that the public defines this newness as integral to what the artist offers both by way of vision and resulting material artefact.²⁷ He draws from Margaret Boden's work on creativity in which she affirms that creative ideas are new but, she argues 'there's new – and then there's *new*.'²⁸ She goes on to draw the distinction between that which she calls 'H' or 'Historical Creativity' and 'P' or 'Psychological Creativity' where the former refers to the creative idea that has never before been in existence, as far as we know, throughout the whole course of history and the latter to the 'surprising, valuable idea that's new *to the person who comes up with it*' though they may not be the first person to experience it.²⁹ Hart elaborates that whilst Boden considers only those ideas which fall securely into the category of H-Creativity—'radically original ideas'—as rightfully entitled to the accolade 'creative,'

²⁴ Ibid., 32.

²⁵ Ibid., 31.

²⁶ Ibid., 32, 22.

²⁷ Cf. Hart, "Exile," 11.

²⁸ Margaret Boden, *Creativity and Art: Three Roads to Surprise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30. Original italics.

²⁹ Ibid. Original italics. See further Margaret A. Boden, *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 43-49.

they are nevertheless bound by some constraints by comparison with an act of origination *de novo*.³⁰ For they operate, Hart states, 'by reconfiguring some conceptual space so that such thoughts 'make sense' in a way that they did not and could not have before. And in doing so, these creative shifts or transformations make possible new ways of experiencing reality.'³¹

The Modernist artist Marcel Duchamp took the idea of creative newness to a different level with his now infamous urinal inscribed with the pseudonym 'R. MUTT' and with the title 'Fountain,' which he submitted for exhibit to a New York exhibition in 1916. It was rejected by the board of directors (of whom Duchamp was one) on the grounds of distaste, but although the incident saw him quickly resign from his post, what he achieved was to introduce to the art world a wholly 'new' way of thinking of art objects which was in itself somewhat paradoxical. His 'Readymades' could be (and literally were) anything. His arbitrary selection of a mass-produced object, the urinal, made the statement that at the level of the material form there is nothing new nor original, only the reconfiguration of things already made, a point emphasised by inscribing subsequent similarly arbitrarily selected urinals with the same pseudonym and exhibiting them to the public just like the first. However, whilst Duchamp's point is to suggest that there is no creative originality or newness at the level of the physical, the argument opens up to suggest that in transporting an object from the factory line to the exhibition setting he is 'creating a new thought for that object' meaning that artistic status is granted by the significance ascribed to it rather than on account of any inherent quality possessed by it.³² So, similarly to Sayers, he both asserts originality of conception (at the level of the idea) and denies it (at the level of the material object).

³⁰ Hart, "Exile," 29-30. Cf. Boden, *The Creative Mind*, 46, 51.

³¹ Hart, "Exile," 31.

³² Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 185. Cf. Hart, "Exile," 20-22.

The fact of the matter, as Hart so eloquently captures, is that ‘the contingent “givens” of our material and non-material existence render all manifestations of creaturely newness [...] relative to themselves and, we suppose, only an interruption or advent from beyond the system of cosmic regulation and what it permits could ever render something *absolutely* new.’³³ Whilst much of Western aesthetics post-Renaissance have tended to exalt the idea of the artist as creator despite its biblical and Christian heritage which promotes the idea of working with the givenness of creation, writers such as Sayers have, albeit paying grudging recognition to the fact, emphasised artistic freedom and the originality of conception as the primary vocation of the artist. Next we shall consider those who occupy a place at the opposite end of the spectrum and who are so consumed by working with both the givenness of the created world and the constraints of bequeathed artistic traditions, that they overlook the potential for creative originality and individual artistic contribution.

§4.3 Tradition and ‘Givenness’

Whilst post-Renaissance humanism extolled the creative ideal of artistic originality, Hart asserts that ‘no work of art [...] nor the individual ‘inner vision’ which conceives or it, is ever born out of nothing.’³⁴ He continues elsewhere, ‘...even the most ‘original’ and creative initiatives in the arts and elsewhere are bound to contingent actualities and possibilities of the given world.’³⁵ All artists, like it or not, embody a set of ‘traditions’ which influence to some greater or lesser extent their creative outputs: from the materials at their disposal to the artistic techniques employed in manipulating them, all of these are ‘given’ to the artist through nature and his experience of the world, meaning that his high aspirations of creative originality are always, to some extent, dependent. At the opposite end of the spectrum to those who cling to originality are those who

³³ Hart, "Exile," 9. Original italics.

³⁴ Ibid., 13.

³⁵ Trevor Hart, "Ch.12 - Return: Creativity, Collaboration and Accountability," (St Andrews, Scotland: 2013), 3.

consciously adhere to a set of aesthetic principles bequeathed by long established creative traditions.³⁶ Arguably the most classic example of this is the Orthodox tradition of icons which do ‘not spring from a sudden intuition, not from some great emotion, nor from purely abstract ideas, nor from streak of genius,’ rather they are the product of dedicated adherence to a set of liturgically sanctioned principles.³⁷ In faithfully adhering to the canons of iconographical formulae, the artist continues a doctrinal tradition concerned with ensuring the transmission of divine grace through a carefully articulated icon.

§4.3.1 The Iconographic Tradition

According to Christian tradition the imprint of Christ’s face left on a cloth, commonly known as the Holy Mandylion, serves as the earliest prototype of the figurative icon and in recreating it iconographers can ensure an enduring authenticity. The Second Council of Nicea in 787CE confirmed the legitimacy of the figurative icon created in the tradition of the mandylion and recorded that ‘the making of icons is not an innovation of painters, but an approved legislation and tradition of the catholic church’ and re-affirmed that ‘only the workmanship belongs to the painter.’³⁸ Obviously not all iconographers had the opportunity to reproduce from the original mandylion but a whole wealth of icons painted by ancient master iconographers over the course of history have continued its tradition. Over time, and through the faithful reproduction of established icons such as Rublev’s *Trinity*, iconographers assimilated the canonical principles of traditional iconography to a level which allowed them to create icons from their own mind.³⁹ Until that time, novice iconographers relied on *podlinniki*, or tracings,

³⁶ See for instance the example provided by the extensive *Śilpaśāstras*, p.16ff.

³⁷ Michel Quenot, *The Icon: Window on the Kingdom* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1991), 65.

³⁸ Cited in Robin Cormack, *Painting the Soul: Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 39.

³⁹ Cf. p.40. Tagore argues that the *citrasūtras* are only of use in the early training of students for instructing them in the ways of basic art techniques.

which could be re-used over and over again thus allowing them the practice they needed to master the art whilst simultaneously guarding against jeopardising the ongoing tradition. The rules associated with the *podlinniki* prevented ‘deliberate alteration or change in materials or composition of individual invention and personal expression on the part of the icon painter.’⁴⁰ In addition to a command of the technicalities of geometrical composition, early iconographers were also required to possess an advanced knowledge of colour chemistry.⁴¹ An applied understanding of the physical properties of each colour and how they interacted with others both on the palette and in the resulting work, meant that the iconographer must possess the practical skill of knowing the sequence to apply them in order to avoid unwanted effects. Apprenticeship to a master iconographer undertaken in conjunction with a detailed study of the practical manuals ensured the tradition was upheld. Perhaps the most famous guidebook is that composed by Dionysius of Fournia written during the Turkish occupation of Greece (c.1670-1745) and titled *Painters Guide of Mount Athos*.⁴² It comprises a practical compendium of technical information collated from his own experience as a skilled iconographer and built upon the traditions of the masters.

In addition to the practical directives afforded by the manuals, the Muscovite Council of 1551 declared that iconographers should be morally upstanding, ‘practice both spiritual and corporal purity’ as well as be supervised and have their work ‘personally examined’ by the ‘Archbishops and bishops in all the cities, villages and monasteries of their diocese.’⁴³ So although there have always been exacting practical expectations of the iconographer, he was also expected to commit himself to prayer in order that the work

⁴⁰ Margaret E. Kenna, "Icons in Theory and Practice: An Orthodox Christian Example," *History of Religions* 24, no. 4 (1985): 349.

⁴¹ John Taylor, *Icon Painting* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1979), 7. Cf. p.23f. The *citrasūtras* provide detailed accounts of how colours should be mixed and to which surfaces they should be applied in the interests of ensuring the longevity of the images.

⁴² Cormack, *Painting the Soul*, 29.

⁴³ Quenot, *The Icon*, 67-68.

he generated might serve God's purposes and thus worthily be dedicated to God's service. There are parallels here with the way that the Hindu artist is expected to engage in a strict discipline of meditation prior to painting in order that he might mentally visualise images worthy of prayers and offerings before it is translated into material form.⁴⁴

Once spiritually equipped the first stage in the production of an icon is preparing the board. Lime, birch and alder are commonly chosen, although in Mediterranean countries cypress wood is popular on account of its 'church smell.'⁴⁵ Cut along the grain at the thickest part and slowly dried over a period of months before being dipped in mercury chloride to rid it of any parasites, the wood is carefully prepared in the interests of preserving it in its final form. A frame is fashioned boasting a vertical grain and contrary to modern western framing, the icon's frame is commonly emblazoned with scripture or prayers. The surface is prepared with fabric bonded with fish glue and laid over with gesso. The solidity of the icon is dependent upon the careful application of the gesso which requires several layers with each being sanded down after drying. Whilst not expected of all iconographers, ancient masters were known to apply the gesso by hand and to work with it in this manner for quite some duration until they were satisfied with the ground they had prepared. With solid foundations in place, the sketching in the form of engraving with a sharpened implement can commence perhaps using a tracing from an iconographer's previous work or from a Master, or for the advanced iconographer sketching can be from the mind. Next the gilding is applied prior to painting and requires the finest brushes, and the use of egg tempera gives the colours a rich depth. The colours must be light resistant to promote longevity and mix well both for the purposes of fine application and to guard against unwanted chemical interaction

⁴⁴ Cf. p. 102f and 105f. See also the 'preparation' section in my treatment of the *Śilpaśāstras*, p.22.

⁴⁵ Egon Sendler, *The Icon: Image of the Invisible - Elements of Theology, Aesthetics and Technique*, trans. Steven Bigham (Oakwood Publications, 1988), 187.

which might affect the final brilliance of the image. The colour palette consists of earthy tones and, once complete, the icon is painted over with a coat of *oliphe* in the interests of preservation.⁴⁶

Any deviation from the canonical prescription, no matter how slight, could sever the connection between image and grace.⁴⁷ By indulging a creative fancy the iconographer risks jeopardising the theological value as authorised by the Orthodox fathers. And yet, whilst all icons are underpinned by an abiding structure, it is a mistake to assume that they can be reduced to it. For, as one writer on icons argues, in the same way that a written text might be re-published in translated form, it retains a connection with the original and is, in publishing terms, an imprint of its prototype.⁴⁸ The icon remains the possession of church tradition having been conceived through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and for this reason, the iconographer never signs his work. Surrendering ownership of the icon in this way guards against any residual element of the artist's personality which might be evident in the icon to pose an obstacle to the prayers of any prospective worshipper.⁴⁹ This self-suppression of the artist allows an emphasis on other-worldliness to come to the fore in an icon and this generally manifests itself in the subject's remote expression and dematerialised style. This is the core tradition that the wealth of iconographic schools now in existence have, despite technical advances in colour chemistry, artistic methods and quality of tools, sought to remain true to in the context of an abiding tradition. Brown argues that the manifold external influences on the iconographical tradition make the sense of an unbroken tradition a 'fiction' and that it is fair to say that 'it looks as though the religious justification may well have followed

⁴⁶ Cf. Leonid Ouspensky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Olten, Switzerland: Urs Graf-Verlag, 1952), 53-55; Sandler, *The Icon*, 184-205.

⁴⁷ Cf. p.46. Tagore claims that 'the realms of joy [...] are the final goal of all art' and although Tagore occupies a stance towards the liberal end of the spectrum regarding the rigidity of *śāstric* prescription, the desire to produce art worthy of worship and in certain instances divine inhabitation remains a pervasive theme in all Hindu artistry.

⁴⁸ Kenna, "Icons in Theory and Practice: An Orthodox Christian Example," 348.

⁴⁹ Quenot, *The Icon*, 71-2.

adoption of the practice rather than initiated it.⁵⁰ It is undeniable that the iconographic tradition has evolved over the course of history but this does not discredit what is, in essence, an enduring tradition maintained by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and not through any individual creative genius. However, Quenot notes ‘in spite of such fidelity to iconographic tradition [...] one never encounters two identical icons,’ but he does not attribute their respective, albeit relative, originality to artistic individualism rather to the aesthetic freedom which arises from communicating and ‘translating’ their faith through prayerful adherence to the Canons ‘which they must take to heart to enrich and revive.’⁵¹

§4.3.2 The Music of John Tavener and the Eastern Orthodox Tradition

The work of the western composer, John Tavener, epitomises all that the Greek Orthodox iconographic tradition stands for and he even refers to his musical compositions as ‘sounding ikons.’⁵² He questions why the sacred music in each successive age sounds so different, but he emphatically believes that it should not and attributes it to the rise of humanism which has promoted the concept of the artist as creative genius. ‘Innovation’ he argues passionately, ‘has nothing to do with tradition,’ and as one who draws both his spiritual energy and musical inspiration from Greek Orthodoxy he believes that tradition must be the mainstay in any creative enterprise.⁵³ In one interview he elaborates on this: ‘I don’t mean by tradition changing guards at Buckingham Palace, nor the Western art and classical music tradition with its fixation on the idea of artist as genius,’ he continues, ‘the concept of genius and the idolatry it

⁵⁰ David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 45. Cf. p. 45. Tagore argues that it is the artist and his creations that come first and then the lawgiver and his codes for art.

⁵¹ Quenot, *The Icon*, 70. Cf. p.35ff, for a detailed discussion regarding the extent to which the *citrasūtras* allow scope for artistic freedom and conversely how constrictive they are.

⁵² Bryan Izzard, "John Tavener: Beyond the Veil," (UK: 1998), 49:25.

⁵³ John Tavener, "Towards a Sacred Art," in *The Sense of the Sacramental: Movement and Measure in Art and Music, Place and Time*, ed. David Brown & Ann Loades (London: SPCK, 1995), 174.

implies is totally antipathetic to tradition.'⁵⁴ So the Western inclination to narrowly associate tradition with the classical music of Bach, Beethoven and Mozart is granted little credence by Tavener who believes that the Eastern emphasis on revealed theology endorses a 'sacred tradition which goes back to the source which in its highest meaning is God incarnate.'⁵⁵

Tavener argues that the West has become so dominated by humanism and the ego that it has lost sight of what is most important in the world, and for the Orthodox church this is tradition. For instance, to the Greek Orthodox the idea of incorporating a hymn or anthem into worship is to introduce the idea of 'entertainment' or a concert to the sacred context and Tavener even goes as far as to equate hymn singing in church to singing songs at a football match.⁵⁶ The liturgical tradition endures where the whims of human inventiveness fade away. 'No innovatory art can possess the magisterial, primordial beauty emanating from the divine.'⁵⁷

Tavener has not always been so committed to the Orthodox tradition. It took the wisdom of Father Anthony Bloom during a crisis period in his life to 'shock him out of his preoccupation with himself, to transform his notion of Orthodoxy as a convenient mirror for his own ideas and to look instead for the objective reality, the mystery under the veil.'⁵⁸ Another major influence on his work is that of the Orthodox nun Mother Thekla who brought about something of a spiritual awakening for Tavener and enabled him to see the texts and chants of Greek Orthodoxy as the 'stepping stones' and

⁵⁴ John Tavener and Malcolm Crowthers, "All at Sea? On the Eve of the Barbican Festival Devoted to His Music, John Tavener Talks to Malcolm Crowthers About the Sea, Bells, Religion and Life in Greece," *The Musical Times* 135, no. 1811 (1994): 11.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: 11-12.

⁵⁶ Izzard, "John Tavener: Beyond the Veil," 22:13; Tavener, "The Sense of the Sacramental," 174.

⁵⁷ Tavener, "The Sense of the Sacramental," 174.

⁵⁸ Peter Dudgeon, *Lifting the Veil: The Biography of Sir John Tavener* (London: Portrait, 2003), 95.

‘symbolic footholds’ to a wholesome composition which taps into the one tradition.⁵⁹ ‘The Holy Spirit does not endorse our deviations,’ argues Mother Thekla, ‘it keeps us where we were [...] to the traditions, to Christ.’⁶⁰ Interestingly, ancient Hindu chants as contained in the *Sāma Veda* have had a profound impact on Tavener, who has found a primordial beauty in them – of them he states ‘Christianity doesn’t possess the same kind of rhythmical language.’⁶¹ The music of the Byzantine tradition offered Tavener a way of composing that he believes plumbs the depths of the tradition which the East has clung to but which has been neglected by the West. Based around a system of eight tones each corresponding to a spiritual state, the music of Byzantium shares many similar characteristics to Russian, native American and ancient Hindu chant. Tavener chooses to set a melodic line against a Byzantine *ison* or drone which serves to represent the eternal tradition.⁶² Tavener is not blasé about the task he faces rather he recognises that continuing in the tradition requires a deep humility and one which requires endless repetition in order to serve as a conduit to the tradition. It is worth quoting him in full on this:

artists of the sacred [...] must submit to the discipline of practising, through endless repetition of a given form, until he has mastered all of it, so that its original transcendence begins to flow through him; no longer a matter of external copying or repetition, but a matter of directing the forces of primordial inspiration, of which he is now the vehicle, into formal patterns that long practice and meditation have allowed him to master both inwardly and outwardly.⁶³

For Tavener, this does not mean that tradition functions as ‘some sort of iron clamp,’ rather he attributes this kind of misunderstanding to modern society’s obsession with innovation and its failure to comprehend ‘newness’ in the context of Tradition.⁶⁴ ‘The trouble is’ he proposes, ‘we’re all too damned educated and far too damned cerebral’

⁵⁹ Ibid., 165.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 90.

⁶¹ Ibid., 122.

⁶² Ibid., 94-5.

⁶³ Tavener, "The Sense of the Sacramental," 172.

⁶⁴ Dudgeon, *Lifting the Veil*, 165.

and if only this were not the case, we would be able to share his understanding of ‘newness’ in the context of tradition as ‘the renewal of that which always abides.’⁶⁵ Like those working within the painted iconographic tradition, Tavener maintains a commitment to working with the givenness of tradition over the peculiarly modern pursuit of artistic innovation.⁶⁶ Tavener diagnoses the modern malady thus: ‘instead of thinking of it as a manipulation of externalities in a temporal context, one has to think of a rekindling of the ethos of the eternal.’⁶⁷

Both the iconographer’s painted icons and Tavener’s sounding ‘ikons’ stand as representative of a way of working within what has been bequeathed by tradition whilst seeking actively to suppress the imposition of any individual creative expression. This is encapsulated in the words of Bishop Kallistos Ware writing in *The Orthodox Way*: ‘Man is not just a logical and Eucharistic animal, but he is also a creative animal [...] This creative role he fulfils, *not by brute force, but through the clarity of his spiritual vision.*’⁶⁸ The key point here is that both the iconographer and Tavener are seeking spiritually to discern that which is already given in their respective bequeathed traditions rather than imposing individual creative will in the dogged pursuit of artistic originality. And yet, both the iconographic painting tradition and Tavener alike would agree that there is a sense of freedom bound up with tradition in the form of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Hart recognises this intricate relationship between freedom and tradition, dismissing notions of tradition as the ‘macabre and unwelcome grip upon the present moment of a dead and already decaying past’ and viewing it in rather more positive terms as:

⁶⁵ John Tavener and Edited by Brian Keeble, *The Music of Silence: A Composer's Testament* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 98.

⁶⁶ It is worth noting here that one should refer to ‘writing’ icons, but for the same of comprehension here, ‘painting’ is used.

⁶⁷ Tavener and Brian Keeble, *The Music of Silence*, 98.

⁶⁸ Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (London & Oxford: Mowbray, 1979), 69. My italics.

[T]he vibrant and dynamic embodiment of particular human vantage points upon the world, through the constantly developing forms of which core beliefs, institutions and practices are embedded and handed over from one time and place to another, and within the terms of which alone therefore the fresh insights, innovations and radical departures contingent upon individual vision and freedom are able to be conceived, given birth and permitted to grow and to flourish.⁶⁹

§4.4 Sub-creation

'We make still by the law in which we're made'⁷⁰

Whilst on the one hand Sayers extols the idea of artistic creativity as the pursuit of originality comparable to that displayed by the Divine Creator, on the other the iconographic tradition, and more recently Tavener, argue that innovation has no place in the truest expressions of creative art. Trevor Hart, however, navigates a middle path acknowledging that 'art must live with its antecedents, the material and non-material elements and composites from among which alone it is able to select, disintegrate, recombine and represent' and yet allowing for a 'significant newness' brought about when the artist receives the gift of these givens and makes more of them than is first received.⁷¹ This, Hart argues, demands 'the imaginative transformation of reality and never its mere reduplication' and is theologically affirmed by a responsible account of the doctrine of creation which actively affords humans a pivotal role in bringing to fruition the fullness of God's eschatological hope for the whole of creation.⁷²

In the Biblical account of creation, Hart notes, God creates in 'an act of absolute origination necessarily unparalleled within the creaturely order itself' and the singular Hebrew verb '*bārā*' used in the creation narratives specifically denotes a 'unique and non-transferable activity.'⁷³ Gunton refers to this as 'creation proper' (stressing

⁶⁹ Hart, "Return," 5.

⁷⁰ J.R.R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf, Including the Poem Mythopoeia & the Homecoming of Beorhtnoth* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 87.

⁷¹ Hart, "Exile," 2.

⁷² Hart, "Return," 1.

⁷³ Hart, *Between the Image and the Word*, 123. See Bernhardt, "'Bara'," 246. Cf. p.130.

elsewhere that ‘finite agents do not create’) and everything else is not ‘more creation, but simply what creator and creature alike and together make of what has been made.’⁷⁴ In creating the world, God granted it existence apart from himself thus simultaneously emphasising his own ‘otherness’ but also the distinct ‘creatureliness’ of all that he had created. Hart states ‘all this, of course, bespeaks the radical transcendence of God with respect to the cosmos, and its concomitant dependence on him not just for its inception but for its continuing moment-to-moment existence.’⁷⁵ The givenness of creation is to be ‘elicited, studied, explored and enjoyed’ within the measure of freedom granted by the Creator from whose hands it came.⁷⁶ Yet work carried out recently by biblical scholars suggests that the biblical narratives set the stage for an understanding that ‘the God of scripture [...] is no jealous guardian of his own “creative” prerogatives, but one whose work as Creator is – by virtue of his own choosing and self-limiting – ultimately achieved *per collaborationem*.’⁷⁷ In other words we are to consider that this created order was made in such a way as to render all human creative endeavours not merely analogous to the original act of divine incipience but to identify them as being demanded of us by the God of scripture by way of conscription into a creaturely participation in his own creative endeavours. Essentially, this world is ‘going somewhere’ and we are creatively obligated to participate in its unfolding development.

Former Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks outlines that in both biblical and post biblical sources there is the ‘attribution of a remarkable dignity to human action.’⁷⁸ He continues that *homo sapiens* is unique amongst creatures in that it is itself creative and capable of bringing about more than is given, that which Hart calls ‘enhancing or adding value to

⁷⁴ Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 89, 1n2.

⁷⁵ Hart, *Between the Image and the Word*, 124.

⁷⁶ Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 172.

⁷⁷ Hart, *Between the Image and the Word*, 126, paraphrasing William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 41.)

⁷⁸ Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (London: Continuum Books, 2005), 79.

it.⁷⁹ This is a theme explored in Chaim Potok's novel *My Name is Asher Lev* in which a young Jewish man embraces his passion and abilities towards painting which ultimately leads him to paint a crucifixion to be exhibited in a New York gallery. In the opening pages of the novel, Asher introduces himself, 'I am an observant Jew. Yes, of course, observant Jews do not paint crucifixions. As a matter of fact, observant Jews do not paint at all – in the way that I am painting.'⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Asher does paint and faces a good deal of resistance from his family for, in indulging his creative side, he brings great shame on his Orthodox family. Asher seeks solace and finds encouragement in the character of the Rebbe who continues to impart wisdom to Asher throughout the course of his subsequent artistic career through to the exhibition of the *Brooklyn Crucifixion*. At one point the Rebbe explains to Asher 'Certain things are given and it is for man to use them to bring goodness into the world.'⁸¹ And elsewhere in conversation with his father who expresses his disgust at his son painting nudes, Asher elaborates '...because I am part of a tradition, Papa [...] Mastery of the art form of the nude is very important to that tradition.'⁸² This sense of a spiritual obligation of working with what is given to us in creation is encapsulated in the Jewish notion of *Tikkun Olam* which has its origins in sixteenth century Kabbalism and the mystical tradition of the Rabbi Isaac Luria. Hart summarises its central theme: this world is given to us imperfect in the sense of being unfulfilled and 'every Jew, in the radical particularity of his or her circumstance, is called to share actively in the process of "mending," "perfecting" or completing the harmonious whole which God intends his creation to become and to be.'⁸³ In its original form, Sacks argues that the notion of *tikkun* referred primarily to piety and spirituality rather than to any social obligations, but over the course of the last century any act

⁷⁹ Hart, *Between the Image and the Word*, 132; Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*, 79.

⁸⁰ Chaim Potok, *My Name Is Asher Lev* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), 3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 304.

⁸³ Hart, *Between the Image and the Word*, 128.

designed to promote good and avoid evil has come to be designated an act of *tikkun*.⁸⁴

The rationale behind the concept is concisely summarised by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik thus: ‘When God created the world, He provided an opportunity for the work of his hands – man – to participate in His creation. The Creator, as it were, impaired reality in order that mortal man could repair its flaws and perfect it.’⁸⁵

Hart recognises that there are theological difficulties with the concept which preclude its easy transplantation to a Christian context and draws specific attention to two key criticisms.⁸⁶ Firstly, Christian orthodoxy would find particularly problematic the assertion that God created an imperfect world. Central to Christian doctrine is the belief in a primal goodness evidenced in a world which ‘is from first to last the work of a Creator the hallmarks of whose character are infinite goodness, wisdom and love.’⁸⁷ For the mainstream Augustinian tradition in particular, all imperfections now evident in the created world must be attributed to the misuse of humankind’s God given freedom rather than to existing fault lines in the way the world was originally made. Instead, Hart promotes Barth’s reading of Genesis 1.31 – ‘It was good’ – ‘not as a valediction, but instead as an ordination, proleptic and eschatological in its vision; all that God has made is indeed “very good” given its promised end in the fulfilment of the eternal covenant.’⁸⁸ In the work of Paul Fiddes’ we find an account of the Fall which does not locate it temporally as a one-off historical event but rather as the net result of the continuing imperfection of human creatureliness. This should not be mistaken as equating creatureliness and fallenness. Rather Fiddes account, which recognises that

⁸⁴ Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*, 78.

⁸⁵ Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, trans. Lawrence Kaplan (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 101, cited in Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*, 71.

⁸⁶ Hart, *Between the Image and the Word*, 129-130.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 212-3.

‘creation itself comes to us as yet incomplete and empirically “imperfect” [...] prefers to direct us to Christ, and to the fulfilment of God’s promise in the future of Christ.’⁸⁹

A second theological difficulty in the notion of *tikkun* lies, Hart suggests, in the danger of placing too high a significance on human acts, creative or otherwise, for any suggestion that humankind takes responsibility for the ultimate redemption of the created order risks at best elevating and at worst substituting creaturely action for divine action. Sacks recognises an ‘unresolved tension’ over this point within the Jewish notion, and Hart observes that ‘it is, paradoxically, *both* something that God will do and must be implored to do (since we cannot), *and* something that we must do in the here and now and in the nitty-gritty of everyday decisions and actions.’⁹⁰ Within Christian theology, though, Hart argues, with its doctrine of the atoning humanity of Christ, the resources exist to make better sense of the central thrust of the notion of *tikkun olam*.

In the messianic, priestly humanity of Christ, the Church discerns and proclaims a fully human action of *tikkun* corresponding directly to the creative and redemptive purposes and activity of God the Father and energised from first to last by the activity of the Holy Spirit.⁹¹

Central to a responsible account of creativity within the redemptive purposes of God is thus a carefully articulated Christology in which the ‘from above’ and ‘from below’ elements of *tikkun* can be held together. A recent book by Richard Bauckham draws attention to the way in which both Johannine and Pauline accounts of Christ identify him as playing an active role in the creation of the cosmos.⁹² This same Creator Son who performed as mediator in the original creative act took flesh, became man and so assumed our fallen nature, yet in doing so rejected all that goes against God’s desire for

⁸⁹ Paul Fiddes, *Freedom and Limit: A Dialogue between Literature and Christian Doctrine* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 130.

⁹⁰ Hart, *Between the Image and the Word*, 131. Original italics.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 18, cf. 26f.

creation and so ‘in Christ our broken and distorted humanity has been re-established in its proper orientation toward the Creator.’⁹³ Hart writes,

At one level [...] acknowledgement of the self-substitution of God’s humanity for ours in Christ renders every other human action inconsequential: and yet, paradoxically, it simultaneously charges every action with a new significance by situating it within the sphere of action undertaken in union with Christ.⁹⁴

In the incarnation and resurrection, Christ transformed this physical world, not just humankind, but the whole extended landscape of God’s creation. Begbie is clear that ‘we are involved in a common history with the physical world and cannot entertain our own redemption in isolation from it.’⁹⁵ To that end he makes a plea for the ‘recovery of a deeper sense of our embeddedness in creation and of the physicality of the artistic creation.’⁹⁶ This theme is taken up by Wolterstorff who argues that ‘the artist who sees life and reality as a Christian will not [...] see [creation] as something from which to be liberated [...] Instead he will see the world as a storehouse of materials out of which he can select so as to make his work.’⁹⁷ As embodiments of a creation set aright by love then, Begbie argues that we are called to interact with it and in so doing, collaboratively work towards the transformation of creation by ‘bringing forth new forms of order out of what we are given at the hand of the Creator.’⁹⁸

In the work of both Hart and Begbie, what we find is an account of artistic creativity which eschews the excesses and hubris to which Sayers leaves herself open, but also resists the misguided humility of accounts which claim that the artist is called and able to do no more than transmit that which he or she has first received, in a state essentially unmodified. Acknowledging the insights and concerns lying behind each of these

⁹³ Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 177.

⁹⁴ Hart, *Between the Image and the Word*, 132.

⁹⁵ Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 174.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁹⁷ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic*, 70.

⁹⁸ Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 179-180.

excesses, both theologians seek to situate an account of responsible creaturely creativity in a *via media*, not by weakening the impulses in each direction, but by insisting that, if anchored in Christ's own creaturely response (as precisely the action of God acting now *humanly*), our creativity can be *both* fully human *and* simultaneously a sharing vicariously in the continuing creative action of God himself.

This idea is neatly brought together by J.R.R. Tolkien, a contemporary of Sayers, in his elucidation of that which he refers to as Primary and Secondary reality where the former refers to the world as given to us in God's creation and the latter to human acts of *Ars* or 'sub-creation.' Tolkien sketches the outlines of a theological aesthetic which posits that God created the world in such a way that creaturely participation and engagement with it is not simply warranted but actively demanded by it. Only through imaginatively responding to God's world can humans ever seek to make sense of it ('Yet trees are not 'trees,' until so named and seen –/ and never were so named, till those had been/ who speech's involuted breath unfurled...') but more than that, we are called to share in God's creative vision and work towards bringing it to its intended glorified end.⁹⁹ Elsewhere in the Elvish creation myth 'Ainulindalë', the Creator figure Eru or Illuvatar requires the active participation of his creatures, the Ainur or the Valar, in bringing the cosmos to all fullness. Illuvatar declares a 'mighty theme' and says to the Ainur "I will now that ye make in harmony together a Great Music [...] ye shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices."¹⁰⁰ The Ainur obey the Creator's demand and so arose 'endless interchanging melodies woven in harmony that passed beyond hearing into the depths and into the heights.'¹⁰¹ Also key to the central theme in Tolkien's myth is the idea that Illuvatar, the Creator, grants his creation a degree of independence as the myth states he 'will sit and hearken, and be

⁹⁹ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 86.

¹⁰⁰ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977), 3.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

glad that through you great beauty has been wakened into song.¹⁰² Here Tolkien's Creator affords a significant degree of responsibility to his creatures in that it is through their embellishment of the theme that 'great beauty' has flourished. Even when discord is wrought by the malign influence of Melkor, Illuvatar does not eradicate his contribution; rather he transfigures and redeems it by incorporating it into the 'Mighty Theme' such that it is granted its own creative worth. As sub-creators, 'we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker.'¹⁰³

Only God can finally heal world and bring it to completion. But he has chosen to do so not *without* a corresponding human action, but precisely in, with and through such action, concluded once and for all in the humanity of his own Son, but participated in and replicated ever and again in the Spirit-filled lives of others until the time when God will be all in all.¹⁰⁴

In this chapter we have seen how Sayers' notion of the artistic genius and creative originality stands in stark contrast to the view of the artist as portrayed by the prescriptive content of the *Śilpaśāstras* as outlined in Chapter One. We have looked at the comparable Christian iconographic tradition which shares some similarities with the broad ideology of the *Śilpaśāstras* and considered Tavener's sympathies with the Eastern Orthodox tradition which shapes his musical endeavours to rekindle the ethos of the eternal. Finally, we have explored how Tolkien's category of 'sub-creation' navigates a middle path between absolute artistic freedom and an artistry constrained by 'givens' both in the form of traditions and material. In Chapter One we challenged the apparently rigid constraints of the *Śilpaśāstras* by engaging in a close reading of the work of some key Hindu scholars and artists as identified by Mosteller. On first appearances the encyclopaedic content of the *Śilpaśāstras* seem to heavily constrain the freedom of the Hindu artist and yet in Bose we found an account which largely

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 56 cf. 87.

¹⁰⁴ Hart, *Between the Image and the Word*, 132. Original italics.

dismissed the texts as being indicative of a decline in the standards of Indian art. Bose argued that the artistic qualities of 'beauty and grace' can be imparted by the creative genius alone and not by an imposed adherence to the complex and, in parts, contradictory artistic canons. In promoting this kind of creative freedom Bose shows sympathy with romanticism and its focus on the autonomous creative genius and, in this, Bose and Sayers share common emphases. Sayers argues that the characteristic common to both divine creator and human artist is the 'desire and ability to make things' and that the artist should concern himself solely with 'creating newness'.¹⁰⁵ She elevates the artist to a state of absolute autonomy and eschews any suggestion of the artist as inheritor of, or collaborator in, a tradition. Bose does not take his view of Hindu creative freedom to the same extent, but Coomaraswamy, who takes a more conservative line than Bose in stipulating that the texts function as a 'rule of thumb', endorses the role of mental visualisation as the pinnacle of the artistic pursuit. He posits that in certain forms of yogic practice, the physical art object functions as a mere aid, arguably even a by-product, to the real discipline of seeking to construct and retain an idealised mental image. This esoteric discipline finds similarities with Sayers, and yet Coomaraswamy also recognises the value of the artistic canons in the physical construction of large scale images. The spiritual component of the artistic process, which we noted is largely overlooked by Mosteller, is emphasized more by Coomaraswamy and Tagore, although perhaps surprisingly, we find a seemingly heavier weight of artistic responsibility in the work of Christian iconographers and the music of John Tavener who both see their roles as being to ensure the continuity of a sacred tradition. Tagore brings an artist's perspective to bear on his reading of the *Śilpaśāstras* and with it a degree of tempering. He recognises the value of the texts for training purposes, and acknowledges that where they are taught effectively they will inevitably always leave a latent impression on pupils and potentially inform, however

¹⁰⁵ Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 17.

implicitly, their future creative output, but Tagore argues that ultimately artists should aspire to imbue life and creative grace into their creations which cannot be taught by practical instruction alone. Whilst set in the context of different wider theologies Tagore and Hart share some sympathies with the idea of taking what is given, be it in the form of materials or received traditions and augmenting it, or making more than what was initially given. In this chapter we have identified several potential points for conversation between Hindu and Christian scholars, and artists, including between Sayers and Coomaraswamy on questions of art as Idea, between Tagore and Hart on an understanding of ‘making more’ of that which is received and on the faithful transmission of received tradition in both visual and musical contexts. Contrary to first impressions the extensive Hindu canons of art play host to diverse interpretations and it is in this fluidity that conversation with Christian perspectives on the same theme can be staged. In the next chapter we will look at aesthetic experiences and religious encounters in Christian thought by engaging with the work of a range of Christian writers on the subject.

~ CHAPTER FIVE ~

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCES AND RELIGIOUS ENCOUNTERS IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

§5.1 Introduction

Associations between aesthetic and religious experiences are far from unique to the Hindu tradition.¹ The Christian tradition boasts a long, and at times difficult, history of theological debate surrounding aesthetic and religious experiences and the nature of the relationship between the two.² Interestingly, in some Christian theological accounts of artistry we find examples taken from Hindu traditions used to supplement discussions on the topic thus serving, perhaps, as a precursor to my own proposal that Hindu and Christian traditions can engage with one another on questions of aesthetic concern.

Chapter Two considered the scholarly contribution made by Abhinavagupta to an understanding of the complex Hindu notion of *rasa* and more specifically to its relation with the highest aspiration of the religious devotee. Although we identified a host of voices arguing for varying degrees of identification between religious and aesthetic experience we ultimately arrived at an attribution of analogy rather than identity. It is particularly relevant to recognise that Abhinavagupta's own cultural context would not

¹ It is interesting to note that some key Christian theologians have seen fit to cite examples from the Hindu tradition to supplement their discussions. See Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 29; Patrick Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty: An Introduction to Theological Aesthetics*, Second ed. (London: SCM Press Ltd, 2002), 17fn, 62fn; Richard Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts: Encountering God through Music, Art and Rhetoric* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 29-30.

² Concise historical overviews of discussion surrounding God and Beauty can be found in Armand A Maurer, *About Beauty: A Thomistic Interpretation* (Houston, Texas: Centre for Thomistic Studies, 1983), 105-125; John Navone, *Toward a Theology of Beauty* (Minnesota, USA: Liturgical Press, 1996), 1-35; Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty*, 53-76 esp 55-71.

have strictly demarcated between the religious and the aesthetic and as such it is in the grey areas between the two that we find the fertile soil for Christian and Hindu traditions to engage. What we find in both traditions is evidence of an often ambiguous relationship between aesthetic experiences and religious encounters, and in what follows we hear from a range of Christian voices each of whom espouse a particular way of thinking about aesthetic ideas but in whom we also find a degree of ambiguity regarding the relation between the religious and the aesthetic.

Christian mystics in particular have often chosen the language of beauty to articulate their spiritual encounters. Thus, according to one thirteenth-century mystic speaking of such an occasion: 'There I beheld a beauty so great that I can say naught concerning it, save that I saw supreme beauty, containing within Itself all goodness.'³ Using the term 'beauty' in this way to denote divine presence is all the more striking since the Bible itself offers relatively little by way of identifying beauty as a distinctly divine attribute, nor does it offer any clear biblical account of beauty. This is not to say, of course, that scripture is devoid of any references to beauty. As one might reasonably expect, there is a wealth of instances where geographical, and even anatomical, features of God's creation are described as 'beautiful.'⁴ The book of Wisdom explicitly identifies God as the source of beauty in the world,⁵ and the same thought is implied in the creation narratives of Genesis where God himself, having created the world, surveys it and declares it to be 'good' or 'beautiful' in the original Hebrew.⁶ Whilst translators now tend to shy from the language of 'beauty' preferring 'goodness,' 'glory' or 'splendour,'

³ Angela of Foligno (1248-1309) cited in Navone, *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 34.

⁴ Cf. Jeremiah 3:19; Ezra 7:27; Hosea 10:11; Isaiah 52:7.

⁵ Wisdom 13: 3-5.

⁶ The translation of the Hebrew here is supplied by Claus Westermann, "Beauty in the Hebrew Bible," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press), 586-7.

the suggestion remains that God declared his finished creation intrinsically ‘beautiful.’⁷ James Martin’s work *Beauty and Holiness* interprets the Psalmist’s call to ‘worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness’ to suggest that it is to the concept of ‘holiness’ as such that we must direct our efforts to gain an insight into the biblical understanding of ‘beauty.’⁸ Elsewhere in the Hebrew scriptures, there are a handful of references which ally God himself more directly and closely with the attribute of beauty—for instance where Isaiah speaks of the ‘beauty of our God,’⁹ or the Psalmists describe God as ‘clothed with beauty’¹⁰ and as having ‘put on praise and beauty.’¹¹ All of these citations translate the Hebrew ‘*hadar*’ as ‘beauty,’ but this is by no means a uniform translation, with recent translations favouring ‘splendour’ or ‘glory.’¹² All this, though, remains a relatively slender and uncertain basis on which to construct a theology of divine beauty, or of beauty as a defining characteristic of God himself.

Notwithstanding this paucity of biblical evidence, the identification of God as the primary exemplar as well as the creative source of beauty is confidently espoused, for instance, in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. In his *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas makes few explicit links between Beauty and God, but he does report (and endorse) in passing the sentiment of Pseudo Dionysius that ‘God is goodness and beauty itself.’¹³ Elsewhere in the *Summa* this same idea is expressed indirectly and can be deduced from Aquinas’ insistence that all creaturely perfections must first be present in the creator as their

⁷ For a detailed treatment of Hebrew root forms of the term ‘beauty,’ see G. Henton Davies, “Beauty,” in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962).

⁸ Writing on Psalm 29:2, James Alfred Martin, *Beauty and Holiness: The Dialogue between Aesthetics and Religion* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 9.

⁹ Isaiah 35:2, cf. Davies, “Beauty.”

¹⁰ Psalm 92:1, cf. Saint Robert Bellarmine, *A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. Michael J. Miller (Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire: Loreto Publications, 2003), 235.

¹¹ Psalm 103:1, cf. Davies, “Beauty,” 371.

¹² For a detailed analysis of the Hebrew root forms used in a range of scriptural references to ‘beauty’ see *Ibid.*, 371-2.

¹³ *Summa Theologiae* 2b.34.i. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St Thomas Aquinas Literally Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province*, 22 vols., vol. 9 (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1921), 451.

cause.¹⁴ This is doubtless rooted in the work of the Middle Platonist Proclus who states: ‘Everything which by its existence bestows a character on others itself primitively possesses that character, which it communicates to the recipient.’¹⁵ God is, then, ‘goodness, intelligence, unity and beauty, but He is all of them, and infinitely more, because He is pure being.’¹⁶ In chapter 4 of Pseudo Dionysius’ *Divine Names* he clearly outlines that he perceives all that is beautiful in the world to be located in God as Beauty: ‘what is beautiful is said to be participant on beauty; beauty is said to be the participating in the beauty producing cause of all that is beautiful.’¹⁷ It is in Aquinas’ commentary on the *Divine Names* that he offers his most sustained reflection on God as ‘Beauty’ and in which he fully endorses Dionysius’ claim that God *is* Beauty itself.¹⁸

If Aquinas epitomises the theological approach which traces all instances of created beauty back to their origin in God as Beauty itself, there are others who are equally keen to distinguish firmly between the two. George Pattison cites Søren Kierkegaard as a convenient representative of the post-Reformation fervour to demarcate the spheres of the aesthetic and the religious.¹⁹ In particular, Kierkegaard decries the Romantic tendency to conflate religion and art,²⁰ and the resultant elevation of art to a plain where it is believed to offer an ‘immediate revelation of the holy.’²¹ He makes reference to the ‘exaltation of art that makes people jam a theater (*sic*) to see a play as if it were a matter

¹⁴ *Summa Theologiae* 1a. iv.2. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin Text and English Translations, Introductions, Notes, Appendices and Glossaries*, LX vols., vol. II (London: Blackfriars in conjunction with Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964-76), 53.

¹⁵ Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, trans. E.R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953), 21.

¹⁶ Maurer, *About Beauty: A Thomistic Interpretation*, 113.

¹⁷ IV.7. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, trans. John D. Jones (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1980), 138.

¹⁸ Aquinas asserts that ‘the beauty of the creature is nothing else than the likeness of the divine beauty participated in things.’ Cited in Maurer, *About Beauty: A Thomistic Interpretation*, 116.

¹⁹ George Pattison, *Art, Modernity and Faith: Restoring the Image*, Second ed. (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1998). Pattison’s extensive work on Kierkegaard is to be commended particularly for his detailed treatment of Kierkegaard’s desire to distinguish between the religious and the aesthetic. For a concise précis, see George Pattison, “Art in an Age of Reflection,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For his extended treatment, see George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

²⁰ George Pattison argues that for Hegel and Kierkegaard alike, ‘Romanticism means the absolutisation of the aesthetic standpoint.’ Pattison, *Kierkegaard*, 43.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

of salvation,'²² and elsewhere writes of the endemic confusion between religious and aesthetic objectives: 'One wishes to be edified in the theatre, to be esthetically (*sic*) stimulated in church; one wishes to be converted by novels, to be entertained by devotional books; one wishes to have philosophy in the pulpit and a preacher on the lecture platform.'²³ Kierkegaard ultimately argues for the boundaries between the religious and the aesthetic to be clearly re-stated:

The religious then plays the same role as the esthetic, but as the superior.... The esthetic outcome is external, and the external is the guarantee that the outcome is there...The religious outcome, indifferent toward the external, is assured only in the internal, that is, in faith. Indifferent toward the externality, which the esthetic needs... The religious is simply and solely qualitatively dialectic and disdains quantity, in which esthetics has its task. (*sic*)²⁴

Only when the two endeavours have been disentangled, can both the religious and aesthetic be free to develop to their highest potential, untrammelled by inappropriate entanglement with the other. Pattison, summarising Kierkegaard's position states 'the aesthetic may no longer be regarded as a legitimate stage on the path to religious awakening. To stay with the aesthetic is to refuse the religious [...] the aesthetic has become the inauthentic.'²⁵

Christian treatments of the relationship between God and beauty, and between religious and aesthetic experience, can thus be situated on a spectrum with writers like Aquinas identifying God as Beauty itself at one end and those in sympathy with Kierkegaard's call for clear separation between the two domains at the other. In this chapter, five voices in particular will be considered, each situated at a distinct point on this putative spectrum. First, the recent work of David Brown argues for a new form of 'natural

²² Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling / Repetition*, trans. Howard V. Hong ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), 165.

²³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. Howard V. Hong ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), 149.

²⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, trans. Howard V. Hong ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), 442-3.

²⁵ Pattison, "Art in an Age of Reflection," 97.

religion' in which our shared human experiences of various sorts (including aesthetic experiences arising from our encounters with natural and cultural phenomena of one sort or another) may be or become the 'sacramental' mediators of an encounter with God, thus effectively identifying the one sort of encounter as coterminous with the other. Richard Viladesau, meanwhile, argues initially only for a natural kinship between aesthetic and religious experience on the basis that they involve analogous feeling states. As his argument proceeds, though, Viladesau adopts a much more robustly Thomist position, insisting that an experience of creaturely beauty has its infinite 'horizon' in God, and is thus in effect already an experience of God himself. John Ruskin proposes that in all our creaturely experiences of beauty we are apprehending objects as they exist in their relation to God; however, he ultimately wishes to retain the distinction between God as the Ultimate beauty and those reflections of that beauty that we encounter in the world and in the arts. Next, Frank Burch Brown acknowledges a natural suitability of the arts for the service of religion but ultimately seeks to avoid any conflation of the distinct aims of the two categories and as such maintains a clear distinction between the aesthetic and the religious. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a look at the work of the Dutch Calvinist theologian Abraham Kuyper as someone who is fully sympathetic to and supportive of the arts, but who maintains that the aesthetic and the religious should remain completely separate, thus allowing both to attain their fullest development.

§5.2 David Brown

'This world is where God can be encountered and encountered often.'²⁶

In the first chapter of David Brown's *God and Enchantment of Place* he makes the claim that 'this world is where God can be encountered, and encountered often,' a claim which he then seeks to substantiate through the rest of his book and the subsequent two

²⁶ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 9.

volumes in the series.²⁷ His scope is broad and takes in a diverse range of topics spanning the natural world, psychological experiences and cultural phenomena, but it is his treatment of the ‘aesthetic’ under its many forms that affords him a voice in this discussion. It is perhaps also worth noting that his writing suggests that he would hold some sympathy with the larger project at hand here, namely the comparative reflection on Christian and Hindu perspectives, for he states quite clearly: ‘Christians need to recognise the complexities of their own world before pronouncing unqualified judgement on the situation of others [...] it is only by listening carefully to perspectives other than one’s own, allowing them their distinctive voice that more balanced judgements will ensue.’²⁸ Furthermore, it is interesting that of the art forms he chooses to expand upon, the majority find parallel texts within the Hindu tradition which boasts a wealth of scripture dedicated to specific art forms.²⁹ The crux of Brown’s thesis is that many kinds of natural experience, including aesthetic experiences associated with natural and artistic phenomena, might also be occasions for an experience of God and it is this idea that demands some unpacking and critical reflection here.

Brown’s concern is to ‘reclaim for religious experience great areas of human encounter with the divine that have either been marginalized in contemporary Christianity or almost wholly ignored.’³⁰ He takes as a case in point the Olympics that at one time found their *raison d’être* in religion. In their earliest years, the games were shaped by a complex mix of religious rituals, but most striking was the idea that the gods ‘communicated [a] grace of body’ to the elite athletes, bestowing upon them a ‘bodily

²⁷ Ibid. See also David Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); David Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁸ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 23.

²⁹ For instance, the *Nāṭya Śāstra* deals with music and drama, the *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra* focuses on the principles of architecture, the *Citralakṣaṇa* of *Nagnajit* outlines the ideals of painting and the *Sāhitya Darpaṇa* is primarily concerned with literature.

³⁰ Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary*, 1.

lustre.’³¹ Significantly, Brown acknowledges at this point that the athlete’s ‘bodily lustre,’ although ‘distinctive,’ is merely analogous rather than identical to the divine. However, although here he is at pains to stress the link is one of analogy and not of identity, elsewhere he appears to be much more concerned with *identifying* the two sorts of experience; he issues the call for us to ‘[experience] the natural world and human imitations of it not just as a means to some further end *but as themselves the vehicle that makes possible an encounter with God*, discovering an enchantment, an absorption that like worship requires no further justification.’³² Now, it is clear that the religious milieu of the games has been lost, but Brown’s argument is that all sorts of human experiences, including sport, drama, humour, place and home, which once made ‘invaluable contributions’ to the ways in which we understand God have been ‘relegated to the periphery of religious reflection.’³³ Brown attributes this to the rise of science and the resultant ‘advance of rationality into all areas of life’ causing the retreat of religion from great swathes of human experience which once held a legitimate place in religious life.³⁴ Brown describes it as ‘the disenchantment of the world,’ a phrase thought to have initially been coined by the philosopher Schiller and unpacked by the sociologist Weber and which refers to the general trend that once science has ‘explained’ aspects of human experience, religion has surrendered its significance and retreated. In its place, Brown claims, ‘pseudo-spiritualities’ such as Feng Shui have occupied the void once filled by religion and are indicative of the modern tendency to seek some profitable end to every experience in the way that adherence to the principles of Feng Shui is expected to promote wellbeing. Brown expresses sympathy with the work of Kieran Flanagan, who suggests what is needed is the ‘resacralization of liturgy in order to bring enchantment once more’ and blames the Second Vatican Council for replacing ‘mystery’ with

³¹ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 14.

³² *Ibid.*, 36. My italics.

³³ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

‘function.’³⁵ By way of elaboration Brown draws attention to the way that worship now functions as a means to an end, serving to strengthen community and drive mission, rather than as a worthwhile end in itself, worshipping God in and for its own sake. This type of instrumentality endemic in our culture has had significant implications for a Christian understanding of the arts in particular in that they have come to be valued only in as much as they preach the gospel or serve some other end. ‘Enchantment,’ Brown argues, ‘lies in the discovery of God under such forms, whether or not any further practical consequences follow.’³⁶

There are two main theological ideas that underpin Brown’s project and his call for the re-enchantment of the world. The first is the basic Christian belief in a generous God and the second is an appeal to the category of sacrament. The latter is built on a broad and distinctive use of the concept, explanation of which will be reserved for the following chapter on Spirit and Matter due to its greater importance for our argument there. Central to the Christian faith is a belief in a generous God who creates the world in love, desires the well-being of all his creatures and to draw them into communion with himself.³⁷ In view of this Brown asks ‘if God is truly generous, would we not expect to find him at work everywhere and in such a way that all human beings could not only respond to him, however implicitly, but also develop insights from which even Christians can learn?’³⁸ He acknowledges that, for some, expanding the horizons of potential divine encounter in this way may signify ‘a diminution of the Christian

³⁵ Ibid., 19.

³⁶ Ibid., 22.

³⁷ In his *Church Dogmatics* Barth states ‘[W]e can understand the positing of reality [...] only as the work of [God’s] love. He wills and posits the creature neither out of caprice nor necessity, but because He has loved it from eternity, because He wills to demonstrate His love for it, and because He wills not to limit His glory by its existence and being, but to reveal and manifest it in His own co-existence with it [...] Because God loves the creature, its creation and continuance and preservation point beyond themselves to an exercise and fulfilment of His love [...] to which creation in all its glory looks and moves, and of which creation is the supposition.’ Karl Barth, “The Doctrine of Creation,” in *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 95-6. The Systematic Theologian Emil Brunner makes a similar point, cf. Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics: The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, trans. Oliver Wyon, vol. II (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 13, 20.

³⁸ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 8.

conviction,' but argues that this is not inevitable.³⁹ Thus he cites Barth and Balthasar as key exponents of a divine generosity, but is critical of them for not developing the idea to its fullest potential. His criticism, however, is not their hesitancy at acknowledging the presence of God outside the confines of the Church, rather it is the criteria by which they argue God's activity should be identified and appraised. For both, it is the Christian revelation which sets the framework within which all claims to divine encounter should be evaluated. To put it baldly, for a divine experience to be validated as precisely that, it must fulfil criteria provided by scripture or Christian theology grounded in scripture. In actual fact, however, there are a great number of contexts and issues (some of which Brown goes on to address) for which no clear biblical criteria can be identified. Furthermore, Brown suggests, it is unjustifiable to suppose that all forms of human experience, which are not explicitly endorsed in scripture, are exempt from the possibility of mediating the reality of God. In fact, Brown proposes quite the opposite: we should expect to find this 'marvellously generous God' at work 'everywhere.'⁴⁰

In the opening pages of *God and Grace of Body* Brown refers to a bygone time when architecture and gardens were widely held to mediate God's presence. In doing so, he himself gestures towards the existence of some qualifications regarding what might function in this way. Thus 'some building styles spoke of God and others not [and] some garden designs could evoke a sense of divine presence and others not.'⁴¹ But Brown does not tell us which or why. The absence of definitive criteria here has been widely criticised, but one reviewer succinctly brings the point home: 'how does one know that *this* body (or garden, or building or art work) is really revelatory of *God*?'⁴² Of course just as importantly is how do we know that *that* artwork (and so on) is *not*

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary*, 2.

⁴² Mark Laynesmith, "Book Review: David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*. Reclaiming Human Experience," *Modern Believing* 46, no. 4 (2005): 57. Original italics.

revelatory of God? Brown does pre-empt the call for criteria, insisting that a 'more fundamental aim has be achieved first [and that is] the need to take such experience seriously in the first place.'⁴³ As already indicated, Brown is of the opinion that appeals to biblical criteria are of limited usefulness, and is cautious of allowing the Christian revelation alone to dictate what kinds of experience may mediate a divine encounter. Although he commends the work of Balthasar and acknowledges his theological underpinning, Brown accuses his dependency on the Christian revelation as the 'imposition of predetermined judgements'⁴⁴ which to his mind, renders Balthasar's work on *Theodramatik* 'seriously deficient.'⁴⁵ The question begging to be asked, though, is if the Christian revelation should not always be the yardstick by which all potential religious encounters are measured, how does Brown propose that such experiences should be evaluated – either in advance or in retrospect? Brown's theological endeavour then, is to redress the incongruence of the proclamation of a 'marvellously generous God' who has given himself to be known freely in the church and in biblical revelation, yet outside that revelation is held to render himself available only 'faintly' and even then in a way that only 'acquires proper legitimacy and intelligibility' when understood in the context of the Christian revelation.⁴⁶ His proposal is the development of a form of 'natural religion' along the lines we have indicated.

Brown frequently uses the terms 'mediating' and 'reflecting' to describe the way that nature and products of human creativity may relate us to God or as he sometimes prefers 'the Divine,' but precisely what kind of mediation or reflection he has in mind is often difficult to discern.⁴⁷ He acknowledges that there are at least two ways in which

⁴³ Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary*, 2.

⁴⁴ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 7.

⁴⁵ Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama*, 2.

⁴⁶ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 8.

⁴⁷ Brown clarifies 'I sometimes substitute "the Divine" for God as a way of reminding readers that whilst I would wish to attribute such experiences to the Christian God, the divinity so encountered is sometimes understood somewhat differently.' Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary*, 2fn.

the creaturely material might 'mediate' something of the divine. 'Certainly two worlds interconnect, but is the force of the interconnection to give us some sense of another divine reality that draws us beyond our own, or is the experience rather one of the divine invading the material order and transforming it?'⁴⁸ A helpful illustration of the relevant distinction here can be drawn from his treatment of icons. The traditional conception is that icons point beyond themselves and 'should reflect the fact that the beauty of the supernatural is of an altogether different kind and status from human artefacts or even natural beauty.'⁴⁹ The icon's mediation of the divine then is 'a participatory pull elsewhere rather than an endorsement of what is already before one's eyes.'⁵⁰ By way of contrast, Brown's discussion of the handling of the natural world through the media of paint stresses the potential for divine encounter in the fabric of the world itself. He reminds us that there is a long history of the world being treated as God's 'second book,' an idea picked up by the Romantic movement towards the end of the eighteenth century, which found the divine in nature at its 'most majestic or awesome' in places like the Scottish Highlands or the American Rockies.⁵¹ Brown takes the work of the artist Albrecht Aldorfer as illustrative of one who works with the grandeur of the natural world resulting in a 'lively sense of God being mediated through the richness and dynamism of nature.'⁵² In his discussion of painting Brown pushes for a more immanent understanding of the divine in the grandeur of the natural world which may subsequently be augmented by the artist, but he remains elusive regarding the precise nature of this. If in places he limits the divine to merely being gestured towards then in other places his claims are much bolder: 'All the world is imbued through and through with divine presence [...] the activity of God is everywhere in the material

⁴⁸ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 15.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 119.

world that is his creator, and not at all an isolated or occasional phenomenon.⁵³ The danger here is that the distinction between the Creator God and the world as his creation becomes blurred, though Brown cites with approval the work of Constable, which ‘conjures up a world in which God is suffused throughout his creation, *but never reduced to identity with it.*’⁵⁴ Nevertheless Brown remains convinced that both a ‘naturally occurring stone and a religiously inspired art work may both offer an experience of the divine in equal measure.’⁵⁵

Brown offers no hard and fast rules regarding what might function as a vehicle to a divine experience and suggests that both art forms and natural phenomena may point beyond themselves towards the divine and be endowed with greater gravitas in their own right in doing so. Such is the case with the body and dance more specifically. Brown tells us that ‘bodies are capable of pointing beyond themselves’⁵⁶ and ‘of initiating or deepening experience of the divine.’⁵⁷ Elsewhere he suggests dance may mediate ‘the actual phenomena of religious experience.’⁵⁸ Such claims bring the search for divine presence firmly into the realm of human experience where he argues it is to be found ‘deeply embedded in our world in virtue of the fact that God is the creator of all that is.’⁵⁹ Even beyond the fabric of the world, Brown argues that language can also function sacramentally meaning that ‘words [...] are not just a medium for conveying something else [...] God is himself sometimes to be found in and through words.’⁶⁰ ‘Metaphor,’ he argues, ‘can also open up the type of experience that revealed Christ to be acting in God’s place and so divine.’⁶¹ The suggestion appears to be that experiences

⁵³ Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary*, 4.

⁵⁴ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 121. My italics.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁶ Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary*, 21.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁰ Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama*, 17.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 56. Brown makes a similar point in another publication that ‘words [...] both [point] to a divine reality beyond themselves, while at the same time mediating, however inadequately, something of that

of the creative and the natural world as such may prove to be not just consonant with or analogous to, but in some sense identical to a divine encounter. Thus ‘instead of functioning as inference, there was the possibility that a divine structure is *already implicit* in certain forms of experience in the natural world, whether these be of majesty, beauty or whatever.’⁶² To illustrate this using icons as an example, Brown’s point is that it is not the strict adherence to some code of how icons should be painted that matters in order that they may reflect the divine, for this affords the church the role of stipulating interpretive criteria.⁶³ Instead, it is the very paint on board which holds intrinsic worth which is not dictated by any perceived outcome. Divine experiences are there to be had ‘in advance of any specific revelation.’⁶⁴ That means that where beauty, majesty and awe are in evidence in the world, an experience of the divine may ensue.

Brown argues that the forced narrowing of perceived relevance of vast swathes of human experience, both of the natural world and of culture, is symptomatic of a broader ‘malaise’ affecting theology in general and it is precisely these ‘very limited horizons’ that his project seeks to address.⁶⁵ His bold stance suggests that aesthetic and religious experiences can be understood as co-terminous though the absence of any definitive criteria by which to judge experiences makes it difficult to determine the exceptions to the rule. Brown’s appeal to the category of ‘natural religion’ suggests that God is available to be ‘naturally’ experienced through various natural and cultural phenomena but this approach seems to remove any element of God himself taking the initiative and choosing to make himself known in certain aspects of the world and not in others. Thinking of the divine presence in this way is in danger of falling victim to a form of pantheism which promotes the idea that God can be found ‘in’ all creaturely things

reality.’ David Brown and Ann Loades, eds., *Christ: The Sacramental Word. Incarnation, Sacrament and Poetry* (London: SPCK, 1996), 6.

⁶² Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 22. My italics.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

but ultimately refuses complete capture within them retaining a sense of being greater than the sum of them all. Brown does not clearly address these issues, but he does on occasion gesture towards God actively choosing to make himself known in certain instances, which seems at odds with his approach being purely an exercise in natural religion.⁶⁶ Finally however, Brown's argument is very clearly that both nature and culture can instigate a divine encounter and according to Brown this is not a 'new' idea, it is a venture concerned with recovering the sense of enchantment that Christianity once held, but which has been lost.

§5.3 Richard Viladesau & Rudolf Otto 'God [as] the horizon of every experience of beauty.'⁶⁷

In the opening pages of his *Theology and the Arts* Richard Viladesau writes about the relatively recent resurgence of interest in religious music from Gregorian chant to Hindu *bhajans* and ventures some suggestions as to why this might be the case.⁶⁸ He considers several explanations from it being simply a 'transient phase in public taste' or a mere 'nostalgia for tradition' to the more spiritually weighty possibilities of it being indicative of a modern 'spiritual hunger' or even 'evidence of a religious revival.'⁶⁹ He even goes as far as to question whether it marks the 'degeneration of religion into art.'⁷⁰ Finally, however, he concedes that it is unlikely that there is any single reason for this modern trend, but he takes from it his focus on 'the relation of artistic beauty to the human spirit's "ascent" to God.'⁷¹

⁶⁶ In one reference he speaks of a 'divinely initiated movement.' David Brown and Ann Loades, eds., *The Sense of the Sacramental: Movement and Measure in Art and Music, Place and Time* (London: SPCK, 1995), 2. In the context of the arts, he states that poets often refer to the metaphors they use as derived from 'elsewhere' leading Brown to question 'how far it might be legitimate to speak of some metaphors [...] as God given.' Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama*, 45.

⁶⁷ Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 149.

⁶⁸ Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, 11ff.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

Viladesau builds on the foundations laid by the Scholastics, who, as we have already noted, identified God as the Beautiful and so posits that 'beauty has its pre-eminent exemplar in God,' resulting in the idea that all earthly manifestations of beauty hold God as their source.⁷² Indeed, elsewhere Viladesau makes the illustration that 'all things could be seen as a vast work of art manifesting God's ineffable beauty.'⁷³ He acknowledges that Christianity has long held a 'nagging suspicion'⁷⁴ of the arts particularly with regard to their role in the Christian spiritual life where the most positive evaluations have praised the ability of art to elevate the soul to the highest plains and the negative to label it as a 'rival religion.'⁷⁵ Although Viladeasau's stance is closer to the former he remains aware of the real dilemmas posed by the arts for the Christian tradition. In the first chapter of *Theology and the Arts* he considers the contributions made to the debate by Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas before unpacking his own view that 'beauty has an intrinsic relation to the sacred and that art can therefore be a means of the mind's apprehension of God,'⁷⁶ and it seems pertinent to do the same here. Viladesau cites Augustine and Aquinas as examples of key thinkers who have grappled with the 'conflict between an ascetic spirituality and immersion in sense experience' and by extension the idea that the arts might have something to bring to an understanding of God, but it is their respective interpretations of how the aesthetic relates to the religious that affords them their consideration here.⁷⁷

Augustine, writing at a time when 'pagan sensualism'⁷⁸ threatened the early church's mandate to worship in spirit and truth, expresses some reluctance towards the use of music in the church through a sense that it may only serve as a 'gratification of [the]

⁷² Richard Viladesau, "Theosis and Beauty," *Theology Today* 65, no. 2 (2008): 183.

⁷³ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 108.

⁷⁴ Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, 14.

⁷⁵ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 185.

⁷⁶ Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, 13.

⁷⁷ Jan Michael Joncas, "Review: Theology and the Arts: Encountering God through Music, Art and Rhetoric by Richard Viladesau," *Pro Ecclesia* XII, no. 2 (2003): 238.

⁷⁸ Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, 16.

flesh.⁷⁹ However, Augustine does not disregard it completely for he recognises that whilst music can lead one astray it can also be of great benefit in raising the soul to God: ‘So I waver between the danger that lies in gratifying the senses and benefits which, as I know from experience, can accrue from singing. Without committing myself to an irrevocable opinion, I am inclined to approve of the custom of singing in church, in order that by indulging the ears weaker spirits may be inspired by feelings of devotion.’⁸⁰ Although Augustine arrives at a modestly positive appraisal of music’s role within the church, he does place some qualifications on its use – primarily that attention should always be directed to the words in order that the excitation of feelings might not distract from the true purpose of worship. That said, however, he does acknowledge a form of silent praise he refers to as ‘jubilation,’ which he states is ‘a sort of sound of joy without words, [...] the voice of a soul poured out in joy.’⁸¹ But it is not the particulars governing the use of music in church that is particularly interesting about Augustine’s position, it is rather that, as Hent de Vries notes, ‘the Augustinian notion of the soul suggests a natural kinship with music.’⁸² In the *Confessions*, Augustine writes of the ‘secret correspondence’ which can occur when a person elevated by song finds their soul raised to God in a time of heightened devotion.⁸³ In another translation it is rendered, ‘when [...] sung these sacred words stir my mind to greater religious fervour and kindle in me a more ardent flame of piety than they would if they were not sung; and I also know that there are particular modes in song and in the voice, corresponding to my various emotions and able to stimulate them because of some mysterious relationship between the two.’⁸⁴ So, despite some reservations, Augustine is convinced of a ‘mysterious relationship’ between song and the elevation of the soul, though

⁷⁹ Ibid., 19. Cf. Confessions X.XXXIII. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1961), 238.

⁸⁰ *Confessions* X, XXXIII. Augustine, *Confessions*, 239.

⁸¹ Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, 23.

⁸² Sander Van Maas, "Intimate Exteriorities: Inventing Religion through Music," in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent De Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 763.

⁸³ Confessions XX, XXXIII cited in Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, 19.

⁸⁴ Confessions XX, XXXIII in R.S Pine-Coffin, Augustine, *Confessions*, 238.

Harrison would argue that for Augustine ‘it is not the temporal corporeal manifestations of art which should win man’s attention, but their Idea or Archetype.’⁸⁵

Although writing much later and in response to a different kind of music to that referred to by Augustine, Aquinas also made a clear connection between the aesthetic and the religious. In response to his own question ‘whether song should be used in prayer of praise?’ he answers in the affirmative and states that there is no reason why worship *in the flesh* might not lead to true spiritual devotion, although he is clear that instrumental music has no place in the church on account of the distraction it causes and should not be used in the service of prayer.⁸⁶ Aquinas distinguishes between two kinds of praise: ‘mind praise,’ which he labels as the highest form, and ‘mouth praise,’ which, although not negating its value altogether, Aquinas argues is impeded by two main reasons. The first is that ‘mouth praise’ or singing can cause the singer to become distracted by the content of the song and secondly that words set to music make the meaning less intelligible and for these reasons Aquinas states that ‘songs should not be used in prayer (of praise).’⁸⁷ But, elsewhere in the *Summa*, Aquinas gestures towards an exception since he introduces the idea that it is ‘intention’ which is most important. Viladesau’s clarification of his stance is that ‘such *intention* can be present even without *attention* to words.’⁸⁸ Here Aquinas is acknowledging a form of praise which mediates an ‘intentionality’ towards God in which the words are, perhaps even only momentarily, subordinated to the music. Aquinas notes ‘sometimes this “intention,” by which the soul is carried toward God, is so intense that the mind forgets everything else.’⁸⁹ However, Viladesau is quick to remind that the criterion of ‘genuine faith’ in the New Testament

⁸⁵ Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of St Augustine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 30.

⁸⁶ *Summa Theologica* II II, q.91 art. 2 cited in Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, 20.

⁸⁷ *ST* II II, q.91 art. 2, 5 cited in *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 23. Original italics.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* Cf. *ST* II II, q. 83, a. 13, c.

‘is not an elevated state of feeling but an encounter with God’s historical revelation in Christ and a response to it in concrete action.’⁹⁰

Both Augustine’s ‘secret correspondence’ and Aquinas’ ‘intentionality’ constitute ways to understand how the aesthetic might overlap with the religious, hence their inclusion here, but Viladesau cites Rudolf Otto as one who presents a convincing argument as to how feelings arising from aesthetic emotion can serve to give rise to those emotions which occur from an experience of the holy. Otto’s proposal has its roots in the psychological law which states ‘that ideas “attract” one another, and that one will excite another and call it into consciousness, if it resembles it.’⁹¹ Together with his own religious interpretation of an earlier concept which Otto himself labels ‘divination’ he posits a way of ‘apprehending reality which is shared by aesthetics and religion.’⁹²

It is important to draw attention to the distinction which Otto makes between the ‘holy’ and the category he calls the ‘numinous’ or the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. The primary difference as he sees it is that where the ‘holy’ incorporates both the rational and non-rational elements of the divine, an experience of the numinous refers specifically to that moment of religious insight which cannot be articulated in rational terms, but which ‘may be evoked in various ways.’⁹³ In Otto’s theory elucidated in his ‘Law of Associations’ he suggests that an experience of the numinous may generate analogous feelings drawn from other areas of life, for instance, the moral, the beautiful and the intellectual. Furthermore, this excitation of analogous feelings, Otto states, can and does operate in the reverse direction, meaning that a trumpet voluntary or a

⁹⁰ Ibid., 31.

⁹¹ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey, Ninth ed. (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1943), 42.

⁹² Cf. Martin, *Beauty and Holiness: The Dialogue between Aesthetics and Religion*, 69.

⁹³ Ibid., 69-70. My reasoning for drawing attention to this distinction here is in the hope that I can draw a parallel with the Hindu experience of *rasa*, cf. Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West*, trans. Bertha L. Bracey (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1932).

beautiful sunrise might give rise to those feelings associated with a religious experience.⁹⁴ It is relevant to note here that Otto identifies the aesthetic use of darkness and silence as being particularly conducive to inciting the arousal of an analogous religious emotion.⁹⁵ Otto states that the movement from one experience to the other arises through an ‘imperceptibly gradual transition.’⁹⁶ In response, Viladesau justifiably seeks clarification and asks: ‘Is the human encounter with the Holy a separate experience, *alongside* those of the beautiful, the good, and so on, or rather is it *identical* with those experiences when seen in their deepest reality, as their ground?’⁹⁷ On this point, Otto is clear that there should be no ‘substitution of ideas,’ for he states ‘it is not the feeling itself which evolves or transmutes rather it is *I* who makes the transition from one kind of feeling to another.’⁹⁸ To reiterate, Otto does not argue that the aesthetic feeling itself mysteriously morphs into a religious experience and is thus identical, rather on account of its ‘numerous analogies’ the one experience gives rise to an analogous other.⁹⁹

Now this marks the point of departure for Viladesau: he notes that in Otto’s proposal the apprehension of the numinous relies on an ‘explicitly religious consciousness’ in order that one might be able to make the transition from an aesthetic emotion to a religious one, but Viladesau’s stance is ‘based on the conviction that there is also an underlying implicit or transcendental dimension of religious experience.’¹⁰⁰ The implications of this are such that the numinous – being ontologically identical to the good, the beautiful and the true – is always to be co-experienced whenever humans experience beauty, for ultimately its ground is to be found in the *mysterium tremendum*

⁹⁴ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 152.

⁹⁵ Cf. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 70.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁹⁷ Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, 40. Original italics.

⁹⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 42. Original italics.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁰⁰ Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, 41.

et fascinans. In clarification, since the beauty of the divine can never be experienced directly Viladesau suggests that we are to interpret all experiences of beauty, such as those provided by the arts, as a manifestation, albeit in dilute form, of the numinous. Thus, in contrast to Otto's perceived relationship of analogy between the aesthetic and the religious, Viladesau draws the link rather more closely, by stating an identity between them. For him 'the beauty of art, like all beauty, not only tells us of the nature of our final horizon and goal, but also evokes its gratuitous presence, drawing us to that goal and giving us already a taste of its reality.'¹⁰¹

Viladesau's argument is initially built on a healthy respect for the caution of Augustine and Aquinas together with an acknowledgement that certain types of music are naturally suited to use in worship contexts. He goes on to unpack Otto's 'Law of Associations' which suggests that the relationship between the aesthetic and religious can be interpreted as one of analogy since there can be no mistaking that such experiences incite 'an intense feeling of striving towards something beyond the moment.'¹⁰² However, Viladesau ultimately pushes beyond Otto's understanding that the two experiences might be analogous and suggests that there is an identity of sorts between the aesthetic and religious, arriving at the conclusion that 'the experience of finite beauty in a spiritual being implies the unavoidable [...] co-affirmation of an infinite beauty: the reality we call God.'¹⁰³ So whilst he admits that a religious encounter generated through an experience of beauty in the arts might admit of degrees,¹⁰⁴ 'the

¹⁰¹ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 150.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ It is perhaps worth noting that not all have acknowledged these degrees. One reviewer criticises Viladesau for 'sounding at times as though he is about to affirm, uncritically, every form and experience of beauty as revelatory and religious.' See Frank Burch Brown, "Aesthetics, Music and Theology: A Review of Current Literature," *Arts* 13, no. 2 (2001): 34.

only thing that could be worthy of the sort of delight and joy we take in finite beauties is a transcendent, infinite Beauty.’¹⁰⁵

§5.4 John Ruskin

Theoria – ‘The response to beauty of one’s whole moral being.’¹⁰⁶

The young John Ruskin, born in 1819, was a sensitive and nervous child, but he grew into a studious, thoughtful and observant adult.¹⁰⁷ Ruskin’s love of the natural world and his engagement with it as in some sense ‘God’s second book’ doubtless fuelled his own artistic endeavours ultimately resulting in him becoming celebrated as an accomplished landscape artist in his own right.¹⁰⁸ Once praised for having ‘the microscopic eye of a bird,’ it was his meticulous attention to detail that set his botanical and geological sketches apart and from which he gained great personal satisfaction.¹⁰⁹ In addition, his sustained academic contribution to the fields of both aesthetics and theology have not only secured him a place in the annals of history but afford him ongoing consideration in such matters and hence his inclusion here.

Ruskin succumbed to the enchantment of nature at a young age when the stunning vista of Derwent Water in the Lake District kindled in him an ‘intense joy, mingled with awe.’¹¹⁰ Some years later during a visit to Chamonix in the south of France Ruskin found himself once again struck by the force of nature, both literally and metaphorically, when he witnessed an avalanche, the magnificence of which led him to situate himself ‘before and in the presence of the manifested deity.’¹¹¹ These encounters, complemented later by the natural theological thought of Adam Sedgewick amongst

¹⁰⁵ Andrew Chignell, "Review: Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art by Richard Viladesau," *Theology Today* 57, no. 4 (2001): 570.

¹⁰⁶ Peter Fuller, *Theoria: Art and the Absence of Grace* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1998), 45.

¹⁰⁷ M. H. Spielmann, *John Ruskin* (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd, 1900), 17.

¹⁰⁸ Fuller, *Theoria*, 33, cf. 41ff.

¹⁰⁹ Spielmann, *John Ruskin*, 70.

¹¹⁰ *MP III*, E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., *The Works of John Ruskin*, vol. V, Library ed. (London: George Allen, 1904), 365.

¹¹¹ Michael Wheeler, *Ruskin's God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 52.

others, cultivated in Ruskin a deep sense of the transparency of nature to reveal something of the Divine creator to whom he attributed its splendour.

In May 1842 Ruskin published the first volume of *Modern Painters* under the pseudonym ‘a graduate of Oxford.’ Dedicated simply to ‘The Landscape Painters of England’ it took the form of critical exposition of landscape painting and featured an impassioned defence of the work of the landscape artist J.M.W Turner.¹¹² The ‘brilliance and fire’ and ‘the force and genius of his powerful pleading’¹¹³ claimed a tremendous reception, and in the preface to the second edition of the volume, Ruskin re-states the focus of his efforts as rightfully belonging to the God behind the natural world:

That which ought to have been a witness to the omnipotence of God, has become an exhibition to the dexterity of man; and that which would have lifted our thoughts to the throne of the Deity, has encumbered them with the intentions of his creatures.¹¹⁴

It was in the pages of *Modern Painters I* that Ruskin elaborated on his understanding of the relationship between beauty and the natural world and by extension its portrayal in the work of landscape artists. In a short chapter entitled ‘Of Ideas on Beauty’ Ruskin defines the beautiful as ‘any material object which can give us pleasure in the simple contemplation of its outward qualities without any direct and definite exertion of the intellect.’¹¹⁵ Put simply, he attributes our ability to discern that which is beautiful to a kind of natural instinct: we enjoy experiences of beauty because to do so is in the very nature of the way we human beings have been made. In theological terms, Ruskin argues:

¹¹² Cf. *Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹³ Spielmann, *John Ruskin*, 25.

¹¹⁴ *MP I*, E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., *The Works of John Ruskin*, vol. III Library ed. (London: George Allen, 1903(i)), 22.

¹¹⁵ *MP I*, *Ibid.*, 109.

[W]e may indeed perceive, as far as we are acquainted with [God's] nature, that we have been so constructed as, when in a healthy and cultivated state of mind, to derive pleasure from whatever things are illustrative of that nature; but we do not receive pleasure from them because they are illustrative of it, nor from any perception that they are illustrative of it, but instinctively and necessarily, as we derive sensual pleasure from the scent of a rose.¹¹⁶

Ruskin's argument then is that when we encounter beauty in the natural world, we do so because it is 'illustrative' of God's nature; however, and this seems important, we are open to experiences of beauty not because they are illustrative of the deity, but because it is an instinctive creaturely response. It is by honing these natural instincts or 'laws' as Ruskin refers to them, that humans cultivate 'taste' and are thus able 'to derive pleasure always from that which God originally intended should give him pleasure.'¹¹⁷ Interestingly Ruskin also observes that it is impossible for a person to articulate precisely that which incites these experiences rather 'he will say that the thing gratifies, fills, hallows, exalts his mind, but he will not be able to say why or how.'¹¹⁸

Although Ruskin does not fully articulate an overarching theological framework in the first volume of *Modern Painters*, he certainly gestures towards the existence of one and he is clear that there is a connection between experiences of beauty in the natural world and God. The important point for our purposes here is that whilst Ruskin forges a close connection between the two kinds of experiences he does not fully equate them. Ruskin argues that experiences of creaturely beauty can be illustrative of, not identical with, an experience of divine beauty. The pleasure we draw from experiences of creaturely beauty occurs through an instinctive creaturely response to properties 'illustrating' certain attributes of God. Being illustrative, they are not identical, but can be thought of as comparable or analogous. Thus Ruskin's home on our putative spectrum belongs

¹¹⁶ *MP I*, Ibid.

¹¹⁷ *MP I*, Ibid., 109-10.

¹¹⁸ *MP I*, Ibid., 110-11.

where Viladesau starts out, namely that experiences of beauty and experiences of God are analogous to one another.

A protracted amount of time lapsed before the second volume of *Modern Painters* was released, during which time Ruskin travelled Europe where his encounters with the work of Fra Angelico and Tintoretto had a profound impact upon him. Writing to his father at that time, Ruskin writes:

I have been quite upset in my calculations by that rascal Tintoret – he has shown me some totally new fields of art and altered my feelings in many respects – or at least deepened or modified them – and I shall work quite differently, after seeing him, from my former method. I can't see enough of him, and the more I look the more wonderful he becomes.¹¹⁹

Ruskin had been forced to rethink his scathing appraisal of the received canons of landscape art about which he had written so disparagingly in *Modern Painters I* in favour of the work of Turner and so returned home in the closing days of 1845 with the intention of writing, with 'higher kindled feeling,'¹²⁰ a 'very nice book'¹²¹ which was to become the second volume of *Modern Painters II*.

In the preface to the second edition of Volume II, Ruskin outlined that what followed constituted his attempt 'to explain to [him]self, and then demonstrate to others, the nature of that quality of beauty which [he] now saw to exist through all the happy conditions of living organism; and down to the minutest detail and finished material structure naturally produced.'¹²² Here, rather more than in the first volume, Ruskin sketches the contours of an overarching theological framework which was significantly influenced by the Anglican theologian Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical*

¹¹⁹ Harold Shapiro, ed., *Ruskin in Italy: Letters to His Parents* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1845), 221.

¹²⁰ John Ruskin, *Praeterita and Dilecta*, Everyman ed. (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 366.

¹²¹ Shapiro, ed., *Ruskin in Italy*, 187.

¹²² Ruskin, *Praeterita and Dilecta*, 366.

Polity.¹²³ Hooker, and Ruskin in his turn, succeeded in navigating a path which avoided both elevating nature to a divine state and reducing God to identity with the beauty of the world, thus retaining a clear distinction between the Creator and the created. Hooker's view that creaturely beauty points towards the beauty of God is taken up by Ruskin, and he says as much:

[F]inish, exactment and refinement [...] are commonly desired in the works of men, owing both to their difficulty of accomplishment and consequent expression of care and power [...] and from their greater resemblance to the working of God, whose "absolute exactness" says Hooker, "all things imitate, by tending to that which is most exquisite in every particular."¹²⁴

Two clear themes are evident in the second volume of *Modern Painters*: the first half of the tome draws the distinction between aesthesis as traditionally conceived and what Ruskin names 'Theoria,' whilst the second half outlines three different kinds of imagination. Considering them in reverse: of the three types of imagination Ruskin identifies, namely associative, penetrative and contemplative, only the 'Penetrative Imagination' is directly relevant to our discussion here. The penetrative imagination, Ruskin argues, 'sees the heart and inner nature, and makes them felt, but is often obscure, mysterious and interrupted in its giving of outer detail.'¹²⁵ His point is that there is more to artistic 'truthfulness' than mere verisimilitude – an idea which he first considered as a young graduate when undertaking to sketch some ivy which gave rise to something of an aesthetic epiphany: 'no one had ever taught me to draw what was really there! [...] of course I had the records of places, but had never seen the beauty of anything, not even of a stone – how much less of a leaf.'¹²⁶ What Ruskin is suggesting is that it is a mistake to suppose that the artist should be concerned with producing some

¹²³ Ruskin records 'I had always a trick of imitating, more or less, the last book I had read with admiration; and it farther seemed to me that for the purposes of argument [...] Hooker's English was the perfectest existing model.' *Ibid.*, 367.

¹²⁴ *MP II*, E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., *The Works of John Ruskin*, vol. IV, Library ed. (London: George Allen, 1903(ii)), 136.

¹²⁵ *MP II*, *Ibid.*, 253.

¹²⁶ E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., *The Works of John Ruskin*, vol. XXXV, Library ed. (London: George Allen, 1908), 311; Fuller, *Theoria*, 10.

thing new or original, rather the artist's task is render in material form 'a more essential truth than is seen at the surface of things.'¹²⁷ So, far from being works of 'fancy' or 'falsehood' Ruskin argues that the best painters manage to penetrate to the very essence of that which they seek to portray and subsequently render that 'genuineness' in material form.¹²⁸

It is in the first half of Volume II that Ruskin elaborates on the nature of that 'genuineness' by elaborating on the concept of 'theoria.' In his first volume Ruskin suggests that humans have been made in such a way as to respond instinctively, however innately, to those things of nature which carry God's imprint, but it is in his careful distinction between aesthesis as traditionally conceived and his category of theoria that the mechanism of that response becomes fully worked out. Aesthesis, we are told, refers to the everyday animal responses to external stimuli where the stimuli are the qualities of things, be they a physical landscape or an artistic representation of one, which serve to excite our senses or engage our intellects. To state the matter baldly, aesthesis denotes a sensory or intellectual response of some sort. But Ruskin's category of theoria marks a 'higher level' of response, for it is 'the response to beauty of one's whole moral being.'¹²⁹ Ruskin only speaks of beauty in the context of 'theoria' and when he does so, he is clear that experiences or 'impressions' of beauty are not in any way sensual, nor are they intellectual, rather they are 'moral' and it is this which sharply distinguishes aesthesis from theoria.¹³⁰ Theoria is 'the full comprehension and contemplation of the beauty as a gift of God: a gift not necessary to our being, but added to, and elevating it.'¹³¹ Elsewhere Ruskin states that the term 'Beauty' should only be used to denote the qualities of those objects which 'may be shown in some sort

¹²⁷ *MP II*, Cook and Wedderburn, eds., *Works of Ruskin Vol IV*, 253.

¹²⁸ *MP II*, Ibid.

¹²⁹ Fuller, *Theoria*, 45.

¹³⁰ 'But I wholly deny that the impressions of beauty are in any way sensual; they are neither sensual, nor intellectual, but moral.' *MP II*, Cook and Wedderburn, eds., *Works of Ruskin Vol IV*, 42.

¹³¹ *MP II*, Ibid., 47.

typical of the Divine attributes.’¹³² In other words, in our creaturely experiences of beauty we are apprehending these objects as they exist in their relation to God rather than in isolation and it is in this way that Ruskin forges the connection between aesthetic and religious experience. He argues that everything which is edifying on account of its beauty has been created to be so by its divine creator. He argues ‘God will not make anything an object of life to His creatures which does not point to, or partake of himself’ and it is this idea which raises the value of the arts in Ruskin’s eyes, to afford them the ability to stimulate a religious experience.¹³³ Where the arts aspire to beauty, ‘there is caused by them not only a strong affection towards the object in which they exist, but [...] a perception of the immediate operation of the Intelligence which so formed us, and so feeds us.’¹³⁴ In contrast however, Ruskin warns that where the arts appeal to aesthesis and to the gratification of the senses, they ‘sink into mere amusement; ministers to morbid sensibilities, ticklers and fanners of the soul’s sleep.’¹³⁵

It is important to note that the relationship Ruskin admits between aesthesis and theoria changes as his own understanding of God and of nature develops. Although he is keen to link aesthesis with sensory perception and theoria with an altogether higher category of experience, he does not wish to completely segregate them for there is an implication that the one may naturally open out on to the other.¹³⁶ This should not be mistaken as suggesting that it is possible by some human endeavour to activate theoria, for Ruskin states: ‘these emotions are in no way resultant from, nor obtainable by, any operation of the intellect.’¹³⁷

¹³² *MP II*, *Ibid.*, 64.

¹³³ *MP II*, *Ibid.*, 46.

¹³⁴ *MP II*, *Ibid.*, 47.

¹³⁵ *MP II*, *Ibid.*, 36.

¹³⁶ See Fuller, *Theoria*, 48.

¹³⁷ *MP II*, Cook and Wedderburn, eds., *Works of Ruskin Vol IV*, 49.

It was the avalanche in Chamonix which instilled in Ruskin ‘the real meaning of the word “Beautiful”’ and arguably fuelled his later work regarding the imprint of God’s glory on the created world.¹³⁸ He argues that ‘everything in nature is more or less beautiful, [...of] its own kind and degree’ but that whilst the ‘theoretic faculty’ seeks out that which reflects God’s beauty, not all perceive it, even in spite of a natural predisposition towards it.¹³⁹ In marked contrast to Brown, Ruskin gestures towards the existence of some criteria by which such experiences might be measured and states they ‘are dependent upon a pure and right state of heart.’¹⁴⁰ Unlike Viladesau, meanwhile, Ruskin is keen to retain the distinction between God as the ultimate Beauty and those reflections of that beauty in the world, though his very positive appraisal of the arts affords them a valuable role in religious life.

§5.5 Frank Burch Brown

Art ‘[generates] a sense of divine mystery and grace within and among and beyond things earthly and tangible.’¹⁴¹

A contemporary exponent of a view not too far removed from Ruskin is Frank Burch Brown, who also recognises the natural suitability of art for the service of religion. In keeping with Ruskin, Burch Brown does not fully equate aesthetic and religious experience, but does afford art a valid role in the life of the Church, a concession which the next person on our putative spectrum, Abraham Kuyper, wholeheartedly resists. In *Good Taste, Bad Taste and Christian Taste*, Burch Brown states his aim to ‘look for ways in which the distinctive and virtually unique traits of our enjoyment of art merge with and diverge from – religious concerns and loves.’¹⁴²

¹³⁸ *MP II*, Ibid., 364 cf. 144.

¹³⁹ *MP I & II*, Cook and Wedderburn, eds., *Works of Ruskin, Vol III*, 111; Cook and Wedderburn, eds., *Works of Ruskin Vol IV*, 42.

¹⁴⁰ *MP II*, Cook and Wedderburn, eds., *Works of Ruskin Vol IV*, 49.

¹⁴¹ Frank Burch Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste and Christian Taste: Aesthetics in Christian Life* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 2000), 120.

¹⁴² Ibid., 96.

Burch Brown clearly distinguishes between an aesthetic and a strictly religious experience in stating that ‘no capacity of the human mind, however sensitive or creative, can truly encompass the Holy as glimpsed in moments such as the Transfiguration,’ and in speaking of a connection between art and religion he acknowledges the risk of trivialising one or the other, or indeed both.¹⁴³ Nevertheless it is precisely the ineffability of the religious goal which Burch Brown argues ‘often cries out for an artistic and symbolic medium to break through the limitations of ordinary thoughts and words.’¹⁴⁴ Thus it is that Burch Brown posits that the ‘spheres’ (using the same language we shall see arise in our discussion on Kuyper) of religion and art interact and overlap¹⁴⁵ in such a way that art might afford a ‘brief foretaste and revelation of a new order within or beyond the old – yet without yielding a sheerly unmediated vision of God.’¹⁴⁶

In contextualising his stance Burch Brown engages in a critical dialogue with Augustine, who, by his own admission, vacillates between the spiritual value of the arts and their power to lead the Christian astray. Burch Brown surmises that it is reasonable to suggest that Augustine might conclude that artists, in creating a work after a world marked by God’s beautiful design, are ‘actualising a God given capacity’ to do so and furthermore that we can also expect Augustine to suggest that those works might also serve to point us towards God.¹⁴⁷ Burch Brown decries Augustine’s inconsistent evaluation of aesthetic experience in the religious pursuit of the spiritual and in turn his ‘[failure] to see how much the vision of God and the enjoyment of the spiritual senses remain indebted to, and in dialogue with, the physical senses and their aesthetic

¹⁴³ Ibid., x.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., x-xi.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 23.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 96.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 100.

transformation.’¹⁴⁸ He pushes forward nevertheless, in the belief that beauty, including artistic beauty, which appeals to our physical senses and in which our creative imagination delights, can facilitate our ascent up the spiritual ladder providing it does not ‘appeal to that which is least spiritual in us.’¹⁴⁹

In seeking to outline an approach which combines both a love of God and a love of art – of ‘holiness and beauty’—Burch Brown proposes an ‘embodied’ spirituality and theology which incorporates the idea that ‘our perceptions, thoughts and imaginations lead us beyond our bodily boundaries to the far reaches of the mental and spiritual universe.’¹⁵⁰ Building on Augustine’s premise that the love of anything, including artistic creativity we are to suppose, finds Christian sanction if it takes place ‘in God,’ Burch Brown briefly outlines a number of ways of understanding how art can be loved ‘in God.’ An artwork may be *dedicated* to God as a gift, *addressed* to God as a prayer or *consecrated* for his service. Art can be *received* on *behalf* of God or be *shared* with God in an act of aesthetic appreciation. We might love art *with* God thus limiting the art we love for its own sake and we might *receive* or *perceive* art as somehow being *from* God as is true of the whole realm of nature.¹⁵¹

Burch Brown advocates another more mysterious way that we might seek to love art in God and that is when it serves as a medium by which God *becomes* present to us. He proposes ‘the artwork or artistic medium is then transformed into something by which the transcendence of God is celebrated or genuinely mediated, not simply reported or honoured.’¹⁵² He recognises the real danger of giving way to idolatry in treating art in this way but nevertheless cautiously proceeds to state that it is ‘as though God adopted

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 109.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 111.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 110-111.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 117-119. Original italics.

¹⁵² Ibid., 119.

the medium as God's own.¹⁵³ Through the material form, Burch Brown suggests, we might undergo an aesthetic experience of transcendence of one sort or another. He outlines four different gradations of transcendence: negative, radical, proximate and immanent. In negative transcendence God only appears as the 'Absent One [...] signified only by the depth of artfully expressed yearning.'¹⁵⁴ In radical transcendence God is sensed as the 'Holy Other' whom we cannot approach, but who might choose to move towards us. In proximate transcendence, art functions as sacramental and '[generates] a sense of divine mystery and grace within and among and beyond things earthly and tangible.'¹⁵⁵ Finally, immanent transcendence is a way of perceiving the sacred as 'altogether immersed in the ordinary.'¹⁵⁶

Whilst Burch Brown never loses sight of the fact that created art is the product of human hands and remains acutely aware of the ever looming threat of idolatry, he proposes that 'our engagement with art participates in a spiritual conversion whereby aesthetic taste is transformed into something more; into a faithful longing and joyful anticipation of a kind that Christians might call "eschatological" and perhaps "apocalyptic."¹⁵⁷ We shall see this anticipatory function of art elucidated at greater length by Abraham Kuyper, but where Kuyper rejects art's use in the church, Burch Brown does not and this is a key distinction which needs to be highlighted between them. Burch Brown concedes that 'in those rare moments when the aesthetic experience becomes graciously transformed – it soon fades'¹⁵⁸ such that our experiences of artistic beauty are 'mutable and transitory' where the highest beauty is 'changeless and eternal.'¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 120.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 96.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 101.

What is particularly pertinent for our discussion is Burch Brown's elaboration, albeit brief, on the Indian theory of *rasa* which he appears to use in such a way to support his own stance. He is at pains to draw out that even in the elaborately worked out theory of *rasa*, the highest religious experience remains one which is unmediated by anything, even the finest of art forms. What Burch Brown goes on to suggest is that 'in this respect the ultimate religious state differs not only from religious experience that is aesthetic but also from every other kind of religious experience.'¹⁶⁰ This would seem to be a distinction that Burch Brown himself is keen to retain in his own elucidation of the relation between aesthetic and religious experience, such that '[although] astute artistic taste and true religious maturity cannot simply be equated [...] there are genuinely excellent artistic modes of spiritual exercise' which do not amount to a conflation of the distinct aims of the aesthetic and religious pursuits, rather admit of a natural suitability between them.¹⁶¹

§5.6 Abraham Kuyper

'The alliance of religion and art represents a lower stage of religious, and in general of human development.'¹⁶²

The final point on our spectrum is occupied by the Dutch neo-Calvinist theologian Abraham Kuyper as someone who is fully sympathetic to and supportive of the arts, but who maintains that the aesthetic and the religious should remain wholly distinct, thus allowing both to attain their fullest development. Kuyper fully recognises the value of art, stating that '[it] is no fringe that is attached to the garment and no amusement that is added to life, but a most serious power in our present existence.'¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 261-2.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁶² Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1931; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 146.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 151.

Kuyper was a highly gifted academic in a wide range of disciplines and claimed careers in journalism, the Church, literature and politics, indeed his career culminated in being installed as the Prime Minister of the Netherlands at the beginning of the twentieth century. He was arguably the most ardent exponent of Dutch neo-Calvinism which has its roots in the Netherlands of the sixteenth century and is rooted in the reformation theology of John Calvin. The Dutch neo-Calvinists never claimed to be the proponents of an original theology, rather they sought to restate the centrality of Calvin's theology, although it is Kuyper's endeavour to address the long history of accusations that Calvinism is inherently inartistic which is particularly pertinent here.

Calvin extolled the pursuit of worshipping God in 'spirit and truth,' which to his mind necessitated the removal of all forms of visual mediation believed to have become aesthetic substitutes for the higher purer goal of religion and their replacement with the centrality of the Divine Word.¹⁶⁴ Calvin's strict interpretation of the Second Commandment led him to assert: 'God Himself is the sole and proper witness to Himself' and subsequently that 'whatever men learn of God from images is futile, indeed false.'¹⁶⁵ Calvin's theology aimed at harnessing the human mind and its natural propensity to manufacture idols. The stripping of imagery from the ecclesiastical setting was intended, in effect, to save the human mind from itself by removing objects to which the mind could ultimately commit, thus serving to dilute God's 'incomprehensible essence.'¹⁶⁶ Thus it is axiomatic where accusations of Calvin's intolerance of art have sprung from, but what Kuyper seeks to outline is an altogether more positive appraisal of Calvin's theology and to do so he places heavy emphasis on Calvin's recognition that 'sculpture and painting are gifts of God' for which should be

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Leslie P. Spelman, "Calvin and the Arts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 6, no. 3 (1948).

¹⁶⁵ *Institutes* I, xi, 1; *Institutes* I, xi, 5. John Calvin, in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960). All subsequent references to Calvin's '*Institutes*' will be taken from this translation.

¹⁶⁶ *Institutes* I, xi, 3.

sought ‘a pure and legitimate use.’¹⁶⁷ That Kuyper casts Calvin’s treatment of the arts in rather more glowing terms than is perhaps warranted need not concern us here; suffice to say that Kuyper’s interpretation endorses the arts as ‘by [them] we might glorify God, and ennoble human life, and drink at the fountain of higher pleasures.’¹⁶⁸

In 1898, Kuyper delivered the Stone Lectures, one of which entitled ‘Calvinism and Art’ sought to defend Calvinism against a long history of accusations of being inherently inartistic; however it is his attempt to establish the proximity of the aesthetic and the religious to one another which makes him a worthy contributor to our discussion here. In the Lecture’s opening paragraphs he acknowledges the debt that art owes religion, having once flourished in its fertile compost, and argues that history is replete with evidence that ‘art derived her richest motive from religion.’¹⁶⁹ He recognises that ‘in this cold, irreligious and practical age the warmth of this devotion to art has kept alive many higher aspirations of the soul, which might readily have died.’¹⁷⁰ However, by way of caution, he stresses ‘the love of art [...] should not blind our eyes, but ought to be soberly and critically examined.’¹⁷¹

There is no doubt in Kuyper’s mind that there are holy benefits of art: for those who have ‘sinned away the highest gifts’ he outlines, the ‘love of art leads men to seek enjoyment in nobler directions and lessens the appetite for lower sensuality.’¹⁷² These benefits should not be overstated however, for those ‘unable to grasp the holier benefits of religion, the mysticism of the heart reacts in an art intoxication’ thus truncating the higher pursuit of spirit and truth.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ *Institutes* I, xi, 12.

¹⁶⁸ Kuyper, *Lectures*, 153.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 156, 143.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 143.

Kuyper attributes the emancipation of art from religion to Calvinism thus, having put an end to the ‘unjustifiable tutelage of the church over all human life, art included,’ art was freed to become a principal branch by itself and gained its independence.¹⁷⁴ Simultaneously religion was released from the sphere of symbolical worship and allowed to rise to the higher plain of worship where sight is afforded a lesser ability to attain the heights of spiritual wisdom. Kuyper takes as his endorsement that whilst the religion of Israel held a place for symbolic worship, the new Covenant replaced it and enabled ‘the purely spiritual [to break] through the nebula of the symbolical.’¹⁷⁵ Kuyper acknowledges that symbolic worship served the people well under the religion of Israel, but he is scathing of any suggestion that the visual might hold a role in contemporary religious practice, stating that ‘second childhood, in [...] old age, is a painful, retrograde movement, [for] the man who fears God, and whose faculties remain clear and unimpaired, does not on the brink of age return to the play things of his infancy.’¹⁷⁶ He attributes urges to reintroduce the symbolic into worship as symptomatic of a need for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit in order to guard against the regression to a lower level.

Underpinning all this is a strictly ordered theological framework centred on God’s absolute sovereignty and that which Kuyper refers to as ‘sphere sovereignty.’ The idea of God’s supreme sovereignty is encapsulated in Kuyper’s often quoted declaration marking the climax of his opening speech at the Free University of Amsterdam: ‘There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry “Mine.”’¹⁷⁷ Sovereignty is central to the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 160.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 147.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 149.

¹⁷⁷ James Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 488.

Calvinist understanding of creation which interprets the world as a law ordered system ‘impregnated with unalterable laws which provide the framework within which we live.’¹⁷⁸ The absolute Sovereign extends power throughout the visible and the invisible worlds as well as through the material and spiritual and is found primarily in Jesus. This absolute sovereignty finds at its centre the Calvinist call to relinquish the sensual forms of worship and instead strain to the higher level of Spirit and Truth. This ascent is summarised by Kuyper: ‘...when this ministry of shadows has served the purposes of the Lord, Christ comes to prophesy the hour when God shall no longer be worshipped in the monumental temple at Jerusalem, but shall rather be worshipped in spirit and truth. And in keeping with this prophecy you find no trace or shadow of art for worship in all the apostolic literature.’¹⁷⁹

Within this strictly law ordered system under the absolute sovereignty of God life is divided into different spheres each with their own sovereignty. Whilst there are many ‘sub’ spheres, Kuyper identifies three main spheres – sovereignty of state, sovereignty of society and sovereignty of church. ‘Human life,’ Kuyper outlines, ‘appears to be neither simple nor uniform but represents an infinitely complex composite organism. It is so constituted that [...] there are all kinds of spheres in life, as many as the starry hosts in the firmament, whose boundaries are drawn with firm lines, each having its own principle as a focal point [...] and because each has its own domain, within the boundaries of that domain each has its own sovereignty.’¹⁸⁰ Each sphere possesses its own distinctive identity and that identity should not be challenged or infringed in any way. Kuyper likens the functioning of these spheres to cogwheels and stresses that ‘through [...] interaction emerges the rich, multifaceted multiformity of human life,’ but he extends the analogy to warn of ‘the danger that one sphere in life may encroach on

¹⁷⁸ Kuyper cited in Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 85.

¹⁷⁹ Kuyper, *Lectures*, 147.

¹⁸⁰ Kuyper cited in Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 86.

its neighbour, like a sticky wheel that shears off one cog after another until the whole operation is disrupted.’¹⁸¹ Each domain is strictly governed by God’s ordinances which are specific to every aspect of life not withstanding the arts, for there are even ‘ordinances of God for our imagination, in the domain of aesthetics.’¹⁸² Whilst Kuyper recognises that the common soil for all these distinct spheres is the absolute sovereignty of God, he repeatedly asserts the need for each sphere to achieve its independent highest development and that art should seek the same end by striving to purge itself of impurities and by realising its own unique capacity.

If absolute sovereignty and sphere sovereignty are the central elements of the neo-Calvinist worldview, then ‘common grace’ is the glue that binds them together not least because it is only through the power of common grace that enjoyment of the spheres is possible. The function of common grace is essentially two-fold, firstly the restraint of the effects of sin and secondly the progressive aspect of encouraging culture to develop.¹⁸³ In Calvinist theologies common grace came into operation immediately after the Fall and brought with it numerous ordinances and laws for the governance of the world and subsequently operated through Christ.¹⁸⁴ In discerning a ‘common grace’ there is also a ‘special grace’ and an important distinction to be made between the two. Whilst common grace is the sustaining and all-pervading capacity for culture which restrains sin and is ‘restricted to this earthly temporal life,’ special grace is that which refers to the Holy Spirit’s call to repentance and faith, is the preserve of the elect and ‘extends into eternity.’¹⁸⁵ In the same way that Kuyper argues that absolute and sphere sovereignty are intertwined, he argues that a similarly close connection exists between common and special grace.

¹⁸¹ Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper*, 467.

¹⁸² Kuyper, *Lectures*, 70.

¹⁸³ Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 87.

¹⁸⁴ For more on Calvin’s treatment of ‘common’ or ‘general’ grace, see Calvin, "Institutes," 276fn.63.

¹⁸⁵ Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 88.

Kuyper's theological framework under the absolute sovereignty of God establishes a way of envisaging how religion and art might not only relate to one another in proximity, but more importantly perhaps, with regard to the distinctness of their ultimate goals. Following the emancipation of art from religion after the Reformation, they both forged an independent existence and it was deemed that only through a certain purity within their respective domains could either expect to attain their fullest development unfettered by the concerns of the other. Religion, in being released from sensual forms of worship, can now '[arise] to that higher plain where it graduates from the symbolical into the clearly conscious life.'¹⁸⁶ So despite Kuyper's proclamation that 'art reveals ordinances of creation which neither science, nor politics, nor religious life, nor even revelation can bring to light'¹⁸⁷ and that the 'real genius of art seeks the heights of isolation rather than the plains below,'¹⁸⁸ a sharp distinction remains between the spiritual heights to which religion can propel a believer and the symbolical realm which is the farthest aesthetics can ever hope to take a person. Kuyper is at pains, however, to stress that all spheres, including art, express a unity at their root where the finite springs from the infinite and is even prepared to admit that art is 'far more nearly allied to religion than to our thinking or to our ethical being.'¹⁸⁹

Despite his Calvinist theological roots, Kuyper also appeals to Hegel and the Hegelian Von Hartmann to substantiate his claim that sensual worship cannot attain the spiritual heights of a religion practiced in spirit and truth.¹⁹⁰ Whilst Hegel recognised art as 'one way of bringing to our minds and expressing the Divine,'¹⁹¹ it did not constitute the

¹⁸⁶ Kuyper, *Lectures*, 147.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁹¹ Hegel, *Aesthetics* I.7 cited in Allen Speight, *The Philosophy of Hegel* (Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2008), 103.

‘highest vocation’ of man.¹⁹² Hegel’s argument centred on the three domains of Philosophy, Religion and Art and it was in relation to each that he expounded the extent to which the absolute spirit could be known through them. For him, philosophy or logic¹⁹³ marked the pinnacle of the human pursuit of the absolute, with religion and art relegated to the realm of ‘representational thought.’¹⁹⁴ Religious practice and art are bound by the use of forms and materials drawn from this earthly world to denote the higher, strictly conceptual realm of the absolute though, of the two, Hegel would elevate religion above the aesthetic. Pattison phrases it thus: ‘Hegel sees the process of spiritualisation as leading to a state of consciousness which art itself cannot encompass [...the] image must yield to the word, and the word is comprehended in the laws of logic.’¹⁹⁵ So whilst Hegel acknowledges that art can function as a ‘sensual presentation of the Absolute itself’¹⁹⁶ it does not mark the highest manifestation of it in the way that religion and, even higher, philosophy do.¹⁹⁷ Hegel’s philosophy endorses the Calvinistic aspiration of worshipping in spirit and truth and his philosophy of God, helpfully summarised by Karelis, correlates with this: ‘The Christian God too is indeed a concrete personality, but is purely spirituality and is to be known as spirit and in spirit. His medium of existence is therefore essentially inner knowledge and not the external natural form through which he can be represented only imperfectly and not in the whole profundity of his nature.’¹⁹⁸ Kuyper replaces philosophy as the highest rung of the spiritual ladder with the worship of God in spirit and in truth and draws specifically on Hegel’s insistence that art can only reflect truth which is already known in its religious form, but it can take that knowledge to the highest place where it may subsequently leap into the purely spiritual, the last step of which even art cannot facilitate.

¹⁹² Hegel, *Aesthetics* I.11 Pattison, *Art, Modernity and Faith*, 97.

¹⁹³ Hegel used the term ‘Concept’ to elaborate the ideal pursuit of logic, cf. Speight, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, 62.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁹⁵ Pattison, *Art, Modernity and Faith*, 97.

¹⁹⁶ Hegel, *Aesthetics* I.70, Speight, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, 104.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁹⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Introduction to Aesthetics with an Interpretive Essay by Charles Karelis*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 72.

Following in the tradition of Calvin, who referred to this world as a ‘beautiful theatre,’ Kuyper endorses a theological account of beauty.¹⁹⁹ Whilst the highest expression of beauty is God’s glory, this ‘world of forms [and] the world of tints [...] can have no other source than God, and it is our privilege as bearers of his image, to have a perception of this beautiful world, artistically to reproduce it and humanly to enjoy it.’²⁰⁰ In a marked contrast to his strict demarcation of the aesthetic and religious spheres, here Kuyper appears to concede that earthly beauty might serve to mediate something of God’s ultimate beauty: ‘the beautiful is not the product of our own fantasy, nor of our subjective perception, but has an objective existence, being itself the expression of a Divine perfection.’²⁰¹ However, almost by way of pulling the reins on this idea he outlines that ‘as a sad consequence of sin the real beautiful has fled from us’ but its *imprint* can be found in the created world in the qualities of harmony, balance, symmetry and rhythm.²⁰² He shifts, then, from affirming the beauty of the created world as a divine attribute to it being an imprint or reflection of what once was and will be again in the new creation. The artist’s task is to ‘discover in those natural forms the order of the beautiful and, enriched by this higher knowledge,’ to reproduce artistically and in doing so, augment it in such a way as to prophesy the coming full glory of God’s kingdom.²⁰³ It is art’s ability to function in this way which affords it a closer proximity to the religious endeavour in Kuyper’s mind. ‘Standing by the ruins of this once so wonderfully beautiful creation, art points out to the Calvinist both the still visible lines of the original plan, and what is even more, the splendid restoration by which the Supreme Artist and Master Builder will one day renew and enhance the beauty of His

¹⁹⁹ *Institutes* I.xiv.20, cf. I.v.1

²⁰⁰ Kuyper, *Lectures*, 157.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

original creation.²⁰⁴ The artist works to remind people of the perfect beauty of the pre-fallen world and whilst simultaneously serving as ‘co-labourer’ in bringing this world, in the fullness of time, to its ultimate glory.²⁰⁵ In this way, Kuyper asserts that whilst aesthetic experience is more closely allied to the religious life than other spheres, it is nonetheless wholly distinct and infringement of the ordinances of either sphere upon the other only serves to jeopardise the highest development of each.

Kuyper outlines a well-defined theological structure in which there can be no mistaking that the ‘alliance of religion and art represents a *lower* stage of religious, and in general of human development.’²⁰⁶ He asserts that it is in the interests of both religion and art to cast off entanglement with the other and, in keeping with the ordinances set for each by the absolute sovereign, allow them to attain their respective highest points of development. Whilst he will concede that art and religion are more closely allied than other spheres, he wishes to restate the distinction. In the words of his colleague and successor at the Free University of Amsterdam with whom he doubtless would have agreed: ‘Art cannot close the gulf between the ideal and the real, it cannot make the yonder of its vision the here of our present world, it shows us the glory of Canaan from a distance, but it does not usher us into the better country nor make us citizens of it. Art is much, but it is not everything [...] Art cannot reconcile sin.’²⁰⁷

In this chapter we have heard five Christian voices on a spectrum ranging from those who equate God with Beauty to those who wish to demarcate strictly between the aesthetic and the religious and comparably, in Chapter Two, we also encountered a degree of ambiguity in Hindu scholarship over the relation between religious and aesthetic experiences. In Brown we saw how human experience of manifold sorts might

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 155. Original italics.

²⁰⁵ Kuyper cited in Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 88.

²⁰⁶ Kuyper, *Lectures*, 146.

²⁰⁷ Herman Bavinck cited in Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 100.

function as sacramental mediators of divine encounter. In Viladesau and Otto we saw a natural kinship between the aesthetic and the religious allowing the scope for analogous, potentially identical, experiences. In Ruskin we saw how in our creaturely experiences of beauty we are apprehending those things as they exist in their relation to God and it is in this sense that Ruskin forges a connection between aesthetic and religious experience. In Burch Brown we found an account which recognises the natural suitability of the arts for the service of religion but which, in the interests of avoiding a conflation of interests, ultimately retains the distinction between the two categories. In Kuyper we saw someone who is broadly sympathetic towards the arts but who maintains that the aesthetic and the religious should remain wholly distinct thus allowing each to attain its fullest development. The five voices we have outlined in this chapter replicate on a broader scale the ambiguity found in a more focussed way in our Hindu discussion of the nature of *rasa* and its relation to Hindu religious experience. At the one end of the spectrum we have seen that Brown opens the possibility that great swathes of human experience, the arts notwithstanding, might serve as occasions for a divine encounter, and by way of comparison between Christian and Hindu culture it seems relevant to draw attention to the colour, vibrancy and wealth of Hindu devotional imagery and more broadly religious culture which suffuse everyday life in India. Yet, at the opposite end of the spectrum, Kuyper wishes to demarcate strictly between the aesthetic and the religious, but the distinction in the Hindu context extends perhaps no further than stating that *rasa* is limited to the aesthetic context. The most fruitful focus for the proposed conversation between the two traditions within this particular aesthetic concern would seem to be in the ‘maybe’ which is evident both in Abhinavagupta’s ambiguous commentary over the nature of the relationship between *rasa* and religious experience, and in Viladesau’s shift in tone, influenced by his reading of Otto, to a more ambiguous stance on the nature of the same relationship. In our next chapter we turn to assess the relationship between the physical art object and that which we perceive

through it which transcends its materiality as expounded by a range of Christian theologians.

~ CHAPTER SIX ~

SPIRIT & MATTER IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

§ 6.1 Introduction

‘Our human senses and materiality and bodiliness are not things to be escaped from and left behind, but to be transformed and transfigured.’¹

Whether it be paint daubed on canvas or the haunting symphony of a grand orchestra, all ‘art’ relies in the first instance on some configuration of raw materials of one sort or another. Of course there is more to a physical work of art than that which is presented in material form. This surplus might be named its ‘value’ or ‘significance,’ or even the ‘spiritual’ aspect of a work. Yet, whilst the artist’s intention in creating her work might well be to convey some transcendent meaning, she is nevertheless bound to do so using those products that excite the senses. ‘For art in all its manifestations directs us initially towards, and immerses us in one way or another and to some extent in, the world of the senses.’²

In our earlier exploration of Hindu ideas surrounding the relationship between the physical world and the spiritual realm, we noted that whilst the tradition boasts a strong history of the production of material artefacts, there is a pervasive Hindu emphasis on the impermanence of matter and the ‘final dissolution of all forms.’³ Nevertheless, we explored the content of Hindu myths outlining the origins of painting which allowed the

¹ Geoffrey Rowell, "The Significance of Sacramentality," in *The Gestures of God: Explorations in Sacramentality*, ed. Geoffrey Rowell (London, New York: Continuum, 2004), 4.

² Trevor Hart, "Through the Arts: Hearing, Seeing and Touching the Truth," in *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts*, ed. Jeremy Begbie (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 7.

³ Jyoti Sahi, "Sacred Space and Image as Sacrament: An Indian Perspective," in *The Gestures of God: Explorations in Sacramentality*, ed. Geoffrey Rowell (London, New York: Continuum, 2004), 129.

possibility of drawing an analogous relationship between the divine creator and the human artist. The material artefacts recovered from archaeological excavations at one of the oldest Hindu sites reveal prototype images of what are now believed to be major gods of the Hindu pantheon. The devotional schools which have developed in their name have relied on a wealth of imagery in the form of icons, statues, temples and colourful religious festivals and each in their own way have played a vital role in communicating the spirituality of the deities behind those traditions. In the context of the Hindu notion of *darśan*, of seeing and being seen by god, the material icon functions as a two way lens through which the devotee can look into the eyes of god whilst simultaneously reaping the benefits of the deity's blessings bestowed through sight. Certain schools of yogic thought advocate a discipline of constructing a mental image through visualisation techniques based in meditation. The ultimate aim of this kind of visualisation is to transcend the physical by constructing, and retaining, a perfect mental image in a meditative state.⁴ Once again, the undercurrent of a mistrust in the physical world is evident, but it is nevertheless tempered by the wealth of rich and varied Hindu traditions which not only rely on but actively conscript the physical world in their service to the gods of the Hindu pantheon.

For Christians, however, 'matter does not lie in the farthest and lowest relationship to God, as neo-Platonism holds [...] on the contrary: the entire economy of salvation has always employed material things too. Thus matter is not at all an obstacle on the way to God, but becomes by its participation in Christ's mystery the medium through which salvation is accomplished.'⁵ By comparison with Hinduism, therefore, we might reasonably expect distinctively Christian approaches to the arts to have a positive

⁴ Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, 21-23. Cf. p.96f.

⁵ Rowell, "The Significance of Sacramentality," 4.

account to offer of the materiality of art, and the status of art's embodiment vis-à-vis the identity and significance of the 'work.'

In testing this supposition, this chapter will consider a selection of views on the relationship between the physical art object and that which we perceive through it which yet transcends its materiality. We turn first to the work of Dorothy Sayers, a writer celebrated for her ability to convey creedal orthodoxy in a readable and persuasive form, and one whose most well-known work of Christian theology combines doctrinal exposition with reflection upon the shape a distinctly Christian aesthetic might take. As we shall see, though, it is an account in which the material forms of art are granted less space than we might naturally expect.

§6.2 Dorothy Sayers

'The creative act [...] does not depend for its fulfilment upon its manifestation in material form.'⁶

Dorothy Sayers was born in 1893 to an Anglican clergyman and his wife in Oxford and was one of the first women to graduate with an Oxford degree in 1915. Sayers is arguably best known for her dramatic scripts as well as her corpus of crime fiction, particularly those featuring the sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey, and perhaps less well known for the theological writing she produced later in her career.⁷ Although as a young adult Sayers published several volumes of religious poetry,⁸ she subsequently displayed no real interest in religious writing until 1937 when she wrote *The Zeal of Thy House* for the Canterbury Festival.⁹ Despite writing in a letter to a contemporary around that time that 'it's always perilous for laymen to expound theology,' whatever trepidation she had did not deter her, and her desire to defend Christianity from 'slip-slop and fiddle-faddle'

⁶ Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 82.

⁷ See Carolyn Heilbrun, "Sayers, Lord Peter and God," *The American Scholar* 37, no. 2 (1968).

⁸ Dorothy L. Sayers, *Catholic Tales and Christian Songs* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1918).

⁹ Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Zeal of Thy House," in *Four Sacred Plays*, ed. Dorothy L. Sayers (London: Victor Gollancz, 1948).

gathered momentum.¹⁰ She went on to write *The Man Born to Be King*, a series of plays centred on the Gospel accounts of the life of Christ, which was broadcast on BBC radio for many months spanning late 1941 through most of 1942.¹¹ The publication of *The Mind of the Maker* in 1941 marked the culmination of what Sayers herself called ‘an odd theological adventure’ and constituted a sustained theological reflection on the creative mind.¹² Sayers was passionate in her desire to expound a specifically Christian aesthetic based on her belief that ‘if we commit ourselves to saying that the Christian revelation discovers to us the nature of *all* truth, then it must discover to us the nature of the truth about Art among other things.’¹³ Sayers draws her examples from her own experience as a writer but, in her own words, ‘what is true of the writer is true also of the painter, the musician and all workers of creative imagination in whatever form.’¹⁴

Sayers acknowledges her debt to the aesthetic theory of R.G. Collingwood as outlined in his seminal text *The Principles of Art* and claims her only expansion in restating his theory is to elaborate that which he calls ‘Art Proper’ within an explicitly Trinitarian framework.¹⁵ Sayers endorses Collingwood’s distinction between ‘Art Proper’ and the so-called ‘Pseudo-Arts’ and although they differ slightly on the names they attribute the latter, they are nevertheless in agreement as to their nature. The ‘Pseudo-Arts’ are ‘Entertainment Art’ which ‘dissipates the energies of the audience and pour[s] them down the drain’¹⁶ and ‘Spellbinding Art’ which ‘canalises energy into a sort of mill

¹⁰ Cited in Laura K. Simmons, *Creed without Chaos: Exploring Theology in the Writings of Dorothy L. Sayers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 11, 61.

¹¹ Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Man Born to Be King: A Play Cycle on the Life of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (London: Gollancz, 1943).

¹² Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*; Simmons, *Creed without Chaos*, 142.

¹³ Sayers, "Towards a Christian Aesthetic," 51. Original italics.

¹⁴ Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 27.

¹⁵ Rubinstein makes some interesting comments on Sayers’ originality and her reliance on Collingwood’s theory. See Ernest Rubinstein, *Religion and the Muse: The Vexed Relation between Religion and Western Literature* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 108.

¹⁶ See Collingwood’s ‘Amusement Art, cf. R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 69-77; Sayers, "Towards a Christian Aesthetic," 58.

stream to turn the wheel of action.’¹⁷ However, both Collingwood and Sayers alike recognise that neither of these kinds of ‘art’ so called account for the true work of ‘Art’ which ‘has real existence apart from its translation into material form.’¹⁸ Here Sayers makes an important distinction between the physical artefact and the spiritual reality informing it and she elucidates a convincing Trinitarian framework to endorse her claim, but some groundwork needs to be laid first.

Sayers lays the foundations for her Christian aesthetic by drawing the connection that the characteristic common to both man and God is the ‘desire and ability to make things.’¹⁹ Their respective abilities to ‘create’ differ of course in that God creates *ex nihilo* or ‘out of nothing’ where man is limited by the raw materials made available to him and thus ‘can only rearrange the unalterable and indestructible units of matter in the universe and build them up into new forms.’²⁰ In this sense, ‘newness’ remains a feature common to the work of the Divine Creator and the human maker alike: ‘the true work of art, then, is something *new* – it is not primarily the copy or representation of anything.’²¹ With this in mind Sayers rejects the words ‘copy’ and ‘imitation’ to describe the artist’s efforts and prefers to use the idea that what the artist is doing is to ‘image forth.’²² Here the analogy with the Trinity becomes apparent, for Christian theology argues that God creates through his Son who is ‘continually begotten from [...] the Father, in an eternal creative activity,’ and furthermore, Sayers continues, certain strands of theological thought argue that ‘the Father [...] is only known to himself by beholding his image in his Son.’²³ The key point Sayers is making here is that the image put forth by the Creator, either human or Divine, existed first in its

¹⁷ See Collingwood’s ‘Magic Art’, Collingwood, *Principles of Art*, 80-82, 84-94; Sayers, "Towards a Christian Aesthetic," 59.

¹⁸ Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 22. cf. Collingwood, *Principles of Art*, 139.

¹⁹ Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

²¹ Sayers, "Towards a Christian Aesthetic," 60. Original italics.

²² *Ibid.*, 61.

²³ *Ibid.*

entirety in the mind of the maker and only through its expression can the maker experience it.²⁴ It is well worth citing Sayers at some length to establish the point she is making here:

There is something which is, in the deepest sense of the words, *unimaginable*, known to itself (and still more, to us) only by the image in which it expresses itself through creation; and, says Christian theology very emphatically, the Son, who is the express image, is not the copy, or imitation, or representation of the Father, nor yet inferior or subsequent to the Father in any way – in the last resort, in the depths of their mysterious being, the Unimaginable and the Image are *one and the same*.²⁵

In other words the physical work of art is the outward presentation of an entirely interior event, yet its execution is unavoidable for only in its rendering can the artist experience the real ‘spiritual’ happening which essentially renders the physical artefact little more than a necessary by-product. Sayers states it thus: ‘the work of art has real existence apart from its translation into material form. Without the thought, though the material parts already exist, the form does not and cannot exist.’²⁶ There are clear parallels here with Coomaraswamy, who states that for the Hindu artist who has engaged in a strict yogic discipline of visualisation ‘the work of art is completed before the work of transcription or representation is begun.’²⁷

Sayers argues that the universe is shot through with Trinitarian structures and processes and she takes the trinity of sight as her example whose component processes are ‘the form seen, the act of vision, and the mental attention which correlates the two,’ all of which occur simultaneously yet in essence remain distinct processes.²⁸ The first

²⁴ It is interesting to read Simmons’ account of the skills Sayers possessed in her work as a crime writer: ‘Writing detective fiction requires the ability to visualise a complete story...’ This, it would seem directly correlates with what Sayers’ says about the work of art existing completely in the artist’s mind prior to execution. Simmons, *Creed without Chaos*, 49.

²⁵ Sayers, "Towards a Christian Aesthetic," 62. Original italics.

²⁶ Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 22.

²⁷ Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, 23. Cf. p.101.

²⁸ Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 27. Sayers elaborates a simplified version of her creative trinity in a BBC radio broadcast where she elaborates the threefold process in relation to desiring a cigarette. See Suzanne

appearance of Sayers' trinity of the creative mind was in the closing speech of her 1937 play, *The Zeal of Thy House*, although it was not until the publication of *The Mind of the Maker* that she fully elucidated it. Sayers' thesis is that 'every work [or act] of creation is threefold, an earthly trinity to match the heavenly' and it the creative trinity comprises the Creative Idea as the image of the Father, the Creative Energy as the image of the Word and the Creative Power as the image of the indwelling Spirit.²⁹ Let us consider these in turn.

'First, [...] there is the Creative Idea, passionless, timeless, beholding the whole work complete at once, the end in the beginning; and this is the image of the Father.'³⁰ The Idea is perhaps the most difficult of the creative trinity to grasp; however, at its most basic it can be understood as the 'interior happening' or creative event which precedes any physical work involving raw materials.³¹ Perhaps most importantly however, it also precedes any mental effort as 'the very formulation of the Idea in the writer's mind is not the Idea itself, but its self awareness in the Energy.'³² The Idea is complete in and of itself quite apart from its execution in material form and it remains unchanged by the 'toils and troubles of composition.'³³ For Sayers this is the analogy of the theological idea that 'the Word was in the beginning with God.'³⁴

'Second, there is the Creative Energy [*or Activity*] begotten of that idea, working in time from the beginning to the end, with sweat and passion, being incarnate in the bonds of matter: and this is the image of the Word.'³⁵ The Energy is perhaps the most familiar

Bray, *The Christ of the Creeds and Other Broadcast Messages to the British People During World War II* (West Sussex, UK: Dorothy L. Sayers Society, 2008), 50.

²⁹ Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 28.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ This is Sayers' choice of expression to convey what is happening in her illustrative example of the play *Agamemnon*, cf. Sayers, "Towards a Christian Aesthetic," 62.

³² Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 28-9.

³³ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁴ John 1:1.

³⁵ Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 28.

aspect of the creative process and refers to the physical process of manipulating raw materials, whether oil on canvas or notes on a stave, the artist's endeavour is to labour with the sole intention of expressing the 'eternal and Immutable Ideal.'³⁶ In Sayers' theological overview, expending the Creative Energy expresses the idea that 'the Son and the Father are one: the poet himself did not know what his experience was until he created the poem which revealed his own experience to himself.'³⁷

'Third, there is the Creative Power, the meaning of the work and its response in the lively soul: and this is the image of the indwelling Spirit.'³⁸ It is essentially that which is not only communicated to the art's public but also to the artist himself since it is 'by thus recognising it in its expression he makes it his own – integrates it into himself [meaning] it is no longer something happening *to* him, but something happening *in* him.'³⁹

Sayers continually stresses that whilst each aspect of her creative trinity are distinct processes, the Idea is always present to the writer as a 'complete and timeless whole.'⁴⁰ In stating that the Idea is complete in its germinal phase before it has been endowed with a physical form, Sayers' point is that the Idea does not demand to be incarnated in material form for it to find its fulfilment. She explicitly states that 'the whole complex relation [...] may remain entirely within the sphere of the imagination and is there complete [just as] the Trinity abides and works and is responsive to itself in heaven.'⁴¹ However, Sayers does concede that it is always the desire of the creative mind to find its

³⁶ Ibid., 30.

³⁷ Sayers, "Towards a Christian Aesthetic," 63. Here Sayers is intellectually indebted to Collingwood, who draws the distinction between those things which merely 'happen' to people, for instance in a sensuous experience, such as when a person hears the sounds of a symphony and those things which are processed and experienced by people in what Collingwood refers to as 'an act of consciousness converting that impression into an idea.' Collingwood, *Principles of Art*, 306.

³⁸ Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 28.

³⁹ Sayers, "Towards a Christian Aesthetic," 64. Original italics.

⁴⁰ Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 29.

⁴¹ Ibid., 31. Cf. Collingwood, *Principles of Art*, 139ff.

material form just as 'it is the nature of the Word to reveal itself.'⁴² In firmly distinguishing the material form and the spiritual entity which feeds it, Sayers' theory follows in the tradition of Collingwood. Collingwood argues that it is a mistake to suppose that the oils on canvas, the marble finely sculpted and the celestial harmonies composed comprise the true work of art rather in all those instances the real work of art, the 'Art Proper,' lies in the artist's mind. In an ideal world the Idea would be conveyed from the artist to the audience without the need for material incarnation thus allotting the physical form little more than a necessary by-product.

Sayers' account that the 'real' work of art can remain discarnate and yet be fully and wholly itself seems somewhat problematical in a tradition which holds 'incarnation' to be of central importance. There are some serious theological questions to be answered about whether the Trinitarian doctrine would permit the Son of God to remain discarnate, but even if that were to be so, in view of the fact that Word *did* become flesh thus endowing our material with a new significance, it seems strange (as well as untrue to the phenomenology of artistry) that a Christian, theologically-informed view of the arts should seem to grant so grudging a place to the materiality of the 'work.'

We have seen that Sayers, like Collingwood before her, is of the opinion that 'Art properly belongs to another dimension altogether' thus firmly delineating between the material and spiritual elements of art.⁴³ However, although Sayers seems to call into question the final value of the material artefact, she does at least trace a positive connection between the physical object and the real 'work' of art. For another strand of

⁴² Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 111. Elsewhere Sayers elaborates 'We may perhaps say that creation in some form or another is necessary to the nature of God; what we cannot say is that this or any particular form of creation is necessary to Him. It is in His mind, complete, whether He writes it down or not.' Sayers, *Mind of the Maker*, 32.

⁴³ Hart, "Through the Arts," 10.

western aesthetic theorising even this positive link between the two is cut and the relation between artefact and meaning becomes essentially random.

§6.3 John Carey & Marcel Duchamp

‘Is it a work of art? [...] ‘Yes if you think it is; no, if not.’’⁴⁴

Where Sayers’ argument renders the material form little more than a by-product to the art work she nevertheless maintains continuity between the physical artefact and its meaning, which she argues constitutes the work of art proper. There are others, however, who promulgate a strict discontinuity between the material presentation and the ‘real’ work of art, meaning that whilst the physical work must exist it is only arbitrarily linked with its significance. The voices we shall hear in this section are not in any obvious sense ‘Christian’ commentators on the arts; however, they arise in a culture shaped by Christian perspectives and each constitute reactions to those perspectives. Although the conceptual art movement did not reach its peak until the late 1960s and early 70s there were some forerunners, like Marcel Duchamp, for instance, whose work epitomised much of its philosophy.⁴⁵ Much of Duchamp’s later work, particularly his ‘Readymades’ exemplified one of the key characteristics of the conceptual genre, namely the dematerialisation of the artwork. Where traditional art has always generally been interpreted through its subject matter and its physical medium, for instance, gouache on board, conceptual art downgrades the abiding relevance of the physical form making it merely the material occasion rather than the actual artistic medium.⁴⁶ In this sense the distinction is drawn between the ‘Definition and the Thing’ where the ‘Thing’ can be anything (a urinal, a brillo box, a bicycle wheel etc.) but what is

⁴⁴ John Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006), 30.

⁴⁵ Duchamp is described by one writer as ‘conceptual before conceptualism.’ See Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens, eds., *Who's Afraid of Conceptual Art?* (London: Routledge, 2010), 10.

⁴⁶ For further discussion of this and other features of conceptual art, see *ibid.*, 1-34, esp. 22-24.

important about it happens at a level which transcends the physical and constitutes the real artistic medium.⁴⁷

In his book *What Good Are the Arts?* John Carey ventures an exploration and ultimately an answer to the question ‘what is a work of art?’ but equally important, he states, is the question ‘what is *not* a work of art? What *cannot* be?’⁴⁸ In the discussion that follows it becomes apparent that in the collapse of the boundaries between what can and what cannot be a work of art (in terms of its physical form) there follows a split between the material artefact and its significance. In other words there is no direct correlation between matter and spirit. It is worth unpacking some of Carey’s groundwork, for whilst the question he seeks to answer is certainly not a new one, his answer does deviate from a number of key aestheticians.

Kant, whose *Critique of Judgement* set the tone for almost the entire history of western aesthetics in the modern period, acknowledges that matters of taste are entirely subjective but argues that the quality of beauty ‘pleases universally’⁴⁹ and belongs to an eternal realm which he calls the ‘super sensible substrate of nature.’⁵⁰ Here beauty resides alongside goodness and truth meaning that, in Carey’s words Kant’s ‘special aesthetic state came to resemble a quasi-religious ecstasy in which the art lover’s soul gained access to a higher realm.’⁵¹ Kant denies that ‘the feeling of mere agreeableness to the senses’⁵² plays any role in the apprehension of beauty, a claim which Hegel concurs with, though he admits that the arts are ‘the sensuous presentation of the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 35-61.

⁴⁸ Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?*, 4. Original italics.

⁴⁹ CoAJ I, II, §9, Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 60.

⁵⁰ CoTJ I, §16, Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Critique of Teleological Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), 67.

⁵¹ Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?*, 11-12.

⁵² CoAJ I, II, §9, Kant, *Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, 57.

Absolute itself.⁵³ For both Kant and Hegel beauty is that universal quality inherent in art that, whilst ultimately elevating the viewer to a higher plain, nevertheless grants the material form a vital role in the making of meaning. In Hegel's words, 'the Concept of the beautiful [...] unites metaphysical universality with the precision of real particularity.'⁵⁴ Carey, however, argues that the time when absolute and universal qualities defined art is long past and that it was the work of the American art critic Arthur Danto which 'mark[ed] the end of the struggle to find separate, distinct, universal qualities that distinguish works of art.'⁵⁵

Abstract Expressionism climaxed in the 1960s with the advent of Pop Art and it was the work of Andy Warhol, his *Brillo Box* in particular, which for Danto 'rendered almost worthless everything written by philosophers on Art.'⁵⁶ Warhol's *Brillo Box* was to all intents and purposes indistinguishable from countless others stacked on grocery store shelves, but the fact that this one, exhibited in the Stable Gallery, New York in April 1964, had been promoted to the status of art instigated debate surrounding what can, and cannot, be a work of art. Danto's point is that what makes it art is nothing to do with any of its physical properties it is rather to do with how it is regarded. In this sense, Danto argues, anything can become a work of art without any perceptible change in its physical form. That which promotes an otherwise everyday box of soapflakes to the status of art is quite simply that it has been declared as such. However, and this is important for Danto, the only people qualified to authorise this promotion are those art critics who possess a sound knowledge of the history of art. 'What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo Box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo Box is a certain theory of art. It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from

⁵³ Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?*, 12. Cf. Hegel, *Hegel's Introduction to Aesthetics with an Interpretive Essay by Charles Karelis*, 70.

⁵⁴ Hegel, *Hegel's Introduction to Aesthetics with an Interpretive Essay by Charles Karelis*, 22.

⁵⁵ Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?*, 16.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

collapsing into the real object which it is.⁵⁷ What further distinguishes art in Danto's argument is that it should possess meaning and not only that, but it should be the artist's intended meaning and its value is measured only in as far as it successfully conveys that. Danto elaborates:

If interpretations are what constitute works, there are no works without them and works are misconstituted when interpretation is wrong. And knowing the artist's interpretation is in effect identifying what he or she has made. The interpretation is not something outside the work: work and interpretation arise together in aesthetic consciousness. As interpretation is inseparable from work, it is inseparable from the artist if it is the artist's work.⁵⁸

Carey concurs with Danto that the measure of an artwork is not to be found in its physical form though he cannot agree that that it is the artist's realised intention corroborated by the art world which validates an object as a work of art. Whilst Carey acknowledges Danto's contribution in shifting the focus from the absolute definitions of Kant and Hegel, Carey argues that Danto has not moved as far as he might in that he clings to a notion that 'there is a kind of transhistorical essence in art, everywhere and always the same.'⁵⁹

Carey argues that Marcel Duchamp's upturned urinal exhibited under the name 'Fountain' was making essentially the same point as Warhol's Brillo Box did decades later. Duchamp's urinal, 'turned on its back like an immobilised turtle'⁶⁰ and inscribed with the signature 'R.Mutt,' was submitted for inclusion in an exhibition being hosted by the American Society of Independent Artists of which Duchamp himself was on the board of Directors. Duchamp retained his anonymity having given the artist's name as 'Mutt' from Philadelphia and then sat back to await news of its reception, however,

⁵⁷ Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964): 581.

⁵⁸ Arthur C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 45.

⁵⁹ Danto cited in Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?*, 18. Cf. Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 95.

⁶⁰ Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, 32.

following a close vote, the submission was deemed to be a joke and it was removed forthwith which resulted in Duchamp's resignation from the board soon thereafter.⁶¹ The question comes to the fore once again regarding the difference between an ordinary everyday object and an ontologically identical object which is declared to be a work of art. What is it that distinguishes Duchamp's *Fountain* from 'countless urinals distributed for the convenience of gentlemen everywhere?'⁶² The answer, as with Warhol's Brillo Box, is that in selecting that particular urinal Duchamp has endowed it with a meaning thus admitting it to the status of art. In the words of one author, '[Duchamp] took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view [and] created a new thought for that object.'⁶³ After Duchamp, the question why *this* urinal rather than any other, or why a urinal rather than any other object, now meets with the shrugged response 'no reason' as, to all intents and purposes, the physical object is selected at random and not for any material quality it possesses which admits to the status of a work of art.

Carey shares Danto's recognition that the real significance of the artwork is not a quality inherent within the work which could in fact be anything. Duchamp proves this point himself in having reissued up to eight different urinals for subsequent exhibitions.⁶⁴ Carey argues that Danto's theory loses its credibility in supposing that the accreditation of art works is limited to those belonging to the art world; 'no-one, except the art-world, believes that any more.'⁶⁵ Instead Carey's own answer to the question 'What is a work of art?' is 'A work of art is anything that anyone has ever considered a

⁶¹ Cf. William Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's Fountain: Aesthetic Object, Icon or Anti Art?," in *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry de Duve (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The MIT Press, 1991), 136-9.

⁶² Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1981), 53.

⁶³ Jindrich Chaloupecky and Paul Wilson, "Marcel Duchamp: A Re-Evaluation," *Artibus et Historiae* 6, no. 11 (1985): 131.

⁶⁴ Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, 32.

⁶⁵ Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?*, 29.

work of art, though it may be a work of art only for that one person.’⁶⁶ In throwing wide the gates as to what can be considered a work of art, Carey drives the conceptual stance of Duchamp, amongst others, still further and to its reduction *ab surdum*, such that the value of the material art object possesses no objective ground neither in some quality of the object or in the judgement of ‘the art world.’ Instead, it is a matter of individual subjective valuation meaning that if I want something to be art then, for me at, it is.

§6.4 Rowan Williams & Jacques Maritain

‘Art seeks to reshape the data of the world so as to make their fundamental structure and relation visible.’⁶⁷

Whilst Carey effectively divorces the material artefact from its spiritual worth, there are others who argue that the physical form is naturally endowed with significance thus rendering the material and spiritual inextricably linked. In 2005 Rowan Williams was invited to deliver The Clark Lectures in Trinity College Cambridge under the heading *Grace, Necessity and Imagination: Reflections on Art and Love*, the content of which was subsequently published later that year. His stated objective was to consider ‘what kind of *work* creative composition is, and what kind of reality it claims to show or make’ and in doing so he sought to restate the work of the French Catholic theologian Jacques Maritain.⁶⁸ Maritain published two significant works on aesthetics during his lifetime: the first *Art and Scholasticism* in 1921⁶⁹ and the second, which first found an audience in lecture form, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* in 1953.⁷⁰ Both works expounded a Thomist account of culture, specifically the arts; however, they were prematurely cast aside in the friction of Catholic politics post Vatican II and thus Williams contends Maritain’s aesthetics have been denied the serious consideration they

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (Harrisburg PA: Morehouse, 2005), 17-18.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 3. Original italics. For a brief biography of Maritain, see J.F. Declan Quinn, "Review: Grace & Necessity. Reflections on Art and Love by Rowan Williams," *Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society* 22, no. 1 (2007/08): 451.

⁶⁹ Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism with Other Essays*, trans. J. F. Scanlon (London: Sheed and Ward, 1930).

⁷⁰ Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (London: The Harvill Press, 1954).

deserve. Williams states of Maritain's work that it raises the possibility that there is 'an unavoidably theological element to all artistic labour,' and contains echoes of early twentieth-century Modernist art theory which focuses principally on the physicality of the artwork, both inner and outer, rather than on any external philosophical point of reference.⁷¹

Art, Maritain posits, is a virtue of the Practical Intellect, which is concerned with action as opposed to knowledge. Williams cites Aristotle's distinction between two kinds of action – doing and making – the former being concerned with the 'right use of freedom for the sake of human good' and the latter, the more intellectual of the two, concerned with the production of some form of end product which 'aims not at the good of humanity but at the good of what is made.'⁷² For Aquinas, in whose tradition Maritain and Williams' after him ground their own aesthetic theories, preserving the integrity of the material is one of three conditions assigned to beauty⁷³ and it is this element of Maritain's own theory which closely allies the physical work of art with its meaning or significance and thus draws the attention of Williams. 'The issue is always and only about the integrity of the work,' rather than about conforming to any externally imposed category of beauty, for this will naturally follow when a piece is well made.⁷⁴ Williams, like Maritain before him, operates within a world view which sees the physicality of this world as being imminently bound up with its significance as opposed to pointing beyond itself to a spiritual realm elsewhere. Williams acknowledges the distinction between grace and nature which affords the created world its own integrity independent of God's continuous intervention, and yet he also admits a certain continuity between

⁷¹ Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 5, 8.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 11. Cf. Maritain, *CI*, 44ff.

⁷³ Alongside proportion and splendour or radiance, cf. Maritain, *AS*, 24.

⁷⁴ Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 27.

them which opens creative processes to the purposes of God when engaged with honestly.⁷⁵

So, according to Williams, the artist should seek to attune herself to the inner rhythms and ‘pulsions’ of the world, for only in doing so can she hope to reveal its ‘essential reality.’⁷⁶ ‘Art seeks to reshape the data of the world so as to make their fundamental structure and relation visible;’ to reveal, in a sense, rather than conceal.⁷⁷ However, Williams is at pains to point out that the art object is not itself grounded directly in ‘intelligible reality’ in a manner which circumvents the fabric of the world, rather the artist can only ever endeavour to reflect the divine as it is found embedded in the material world.⁷⁸ In this sense, when an artist aspires towards abstraction, Williams argues she has fallen victim to the ‘magical fallacy’ of seeking to change the world in some way and in doing so distorting its significance through the resulting artwork. Here Williams cites Maritain, art ‘spreads over [things] a secret which it first discovered in them, in their invisible substance or in their endless exchanges and correspondences.’⁷⁹ So the artist should be seeking to draw out the intrinsic significance of the material world rather than engage in a Promethean endeavour to create a new world. Williams thus acknowledges that perhaps ‘the artist *does* set out to change the world, but—if we can manage the paradox—to change it into itself.’⁸⁰

Furthermore, Williams argues, ‘the artist as artist is not called on to love God or the world or humanity, but to love what he or she is doing,’ meaning that the artist’s attentions should always be concentrated on the good of the work being made to the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 27. Cf. Maritain, *CI*, ch8, esp. 302.

⁷⁷ Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 17-18. Cf. Maritain, *AS*, 90.

⁷⁸ Cf. Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 20.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 18. Cf. Maritain, *AS*, 96.

⁸⁰ Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 18. Original italics.

exclusion of all else.⁸¹ The artistic process is not concerned with the imposition of pre-conceived ideas upon matter; rather, it should reflect the artist's self-imposed demotion in favour of drawing out of the material that which Aquinas calls the 'splendor formae' or 'splendor of form,' revealing 'a sense of the work achieved as giving itself to the observer in an "overflow" of presence.'⁸² Thus, in Williams' aesthetic, art is not bound by its labours nor should it be seen as solely the embodiment of the artist's idea, rather in its highest form it should express 'some kind of relation with an aspect of reality otherwise unknown.'⁸³

For Williams there is no doubt that the artistic significance relies upon its expression in material form, for it can only be impressed upon the receptive mind through the concrete work of art and never by a purely mental exchange of ideas.⁸⁴ This is in marked contrast to the conceptual stance adopted by Carey, whose aesthetic placed the significance of the material work firmly outside its physical co-ordinates and again from Sayers and Collingwood for whom the material form is finally dispensable once the meaning has been grasped. Where the artwork for Carey held its significance at a purely mental level and depended for its worth upon the intellectual imposition of the artist's pre-conceived ideas, Williams' argues that a work's significance is intimately entwined with the physical form and that the skilled artist seeks to render visible the 'unseen structures' of that with which he works.⁸⁵ To seek to impose meaning would make it an exercise of the will and Williams is clear that the creative endeavour belongs firmly in the domain of the intellect.⁸⁶ We have seen that Williams sketches an aesthetic which intrinsically relates the physical to the spiritual through the artist's endeavours to draw out the inherent significance of the material form, but there are others who wish to make

⁸¹ Ibid., 15.

⁸² Ibid., 13.

⁸³ Ibid., 13, 17.

⁸⁴ Cf. Ibid., 20.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 17.

this connection even closer and thus enter the category of ‘sacrament’ and it is to one such writer, David Brown, that we now turn our attention.

§6.5 David Brown & C.S. Lewis

‘God can come sacramentally close to his world and vouchsafe experience of himself through the material.’⁸⁷

Brown seeks to forge a close link between the spiritual and the material and argues that the philosophy which undergirds this is to be located ‘through a reinvigorated sense of the sacramental.’⁸⁸ Brown’s appeal to the category of sacrament is based in the wider usage of the term as employed in the first millennium, though he recognises that the twentieth century has seen a gradual return to that definition perhaps most notably after the second Vatican Council. Where the traditional sacraments are generally accepted as limited in number and confined to the domain of the church, Brown is not solely pushing for a reinstatement of its earliest usage, but wishes to push the boundaries still further. He asserts ‘so far from the sacramental being seen as essentially ecclesiastical or narrowly Christian, it should instead be viewed as a major, and perhaps even the primary way of exploring God’s relationship to our world.’⁸⁹ Building on the basic Christian belief in a generous God who has given himself to be known in and through the created world, Brown argues that ‘God might speak not only through the biblical revelation but also through implicit promises given in the way the world has been made.’⁹⁰ Brown is mindful that for some his approach may be seen to mark a diminution in the Christian conviction but Brown argues that this could only be a legitimate criticism if biblical revelation provided clear criteria for judging the sorts of experience which he seeks to address. Brown’s category of the ‘sacramental’ denotes ‘the presence of God being mediated in and through the material, whether that material be naturally

⁸⁷ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 88.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

occurring or humanly structured to reflect perceived divine givens.⁹¹ Thus art in its myriad forms can claim sacramental value in ‘mediating, integrally and non-referentially, various kinds of religious significance.’⁹²

Brown’s project is rooted in a desire to reclaim and expand upon the notion of sacrament as it was employed in its earliest, and widest, classical context. Although its nearest New Testament equivalent, *mysterion* meaning ‘mysteries’ or ‘secrets,’ is not used to refer to any of the traditionally agreed sacraments in the New Testament, it is favoured over *sacramentum* which came to be used more in the sense attached to *mysterion* than its widely accepted definition as an oath of allegiance. Over time the two terms came to be used interchangeably and the meaning attached to *sacramentum* expanded to accommodate this absorbed sense of mystery.⁹³ Thus, Brown argues, sacrament came to refer to ‘any mysterious indwelling that anticipates or points to some greater reality.’⁹⁴ In the first millennium ‘sacrament’ in both its Greek and Latin forms was used in reference to a wide range of subjects in contexts which extended beyond the confines of Christian practices.⁹⁵ Even Augustine recognises its use in both sacred and secular contexts and, together with Pope Leo the Great, is instrumental in widening its usage still further. By the High Middle Ages, however, the definition has become fixed and the number of sacraments is set at seven, each with their own requirements and thus setting in motion the move towards ‘the disenchantment of the world,’ as marked by the

⁹¹ Ibid., 25.

⁹² Mark Wynn, "Re-Enchanting the World: The Possibility of Materially-Mediated Religious Experience," in *Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture: Responses to the Work of David Brown*, ed. Robert MacSwain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 16.

⁹³ One Bible dictionary entry records that the term *sacramentum* was repeatedly employed in the Vulgate to render the Greek *mysterion* meaning ‘mystery,’ and furthermore the association of mystery with sacrament gained further consolidation in the work of Tertullian. However, it should be noted that in one reasonably recent publication the author wishes to resist the ‘facile equation of *sacramentum* with the Greek word *mysterion*’ but nevertheless the association between the two terms remains extant. R. C. Grant and H. H. Rowley, eds., *Dictionary of the Bible*, Second ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), 868; Daniel G. Van Slyke, "Sacramentum in Ancient Non-Christian Authors," *Antiphon* 9, no. 2 (2005): 167.

⁹⁴ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 26.

⁹⁵ See Slyke’s article regarding the use of the term in non-Christian contexts particularly its use in reference to an oath of allegiance in military contexts which likewise saw some development regarding its meaning. Slyke, "Sacramentum in Ancient Non-Christian Authors."

‘continuing advance of rationality into all areas of life and the resultant retreat of religion.’⁹⁶ The Reformation marked a further step away from the magical element of sacrament as evidenced by Luther’s move towards a private mysticism and Calvin’s towards an instrumental rationality. Later still at the Second Vatican Council the need to retain some form of control over that which the Church can admit to the category of sacrament and an emphasis on instrumentality over mystery remains central. At other key points in the twentieth century, however, there were moves made towards reinstating the magical into the sacramental and a key exponent of such a view is the theologian Oliver Quick. Quick draws a distinction between Ethical Sacramentalism and Aesthetic Sacramentalism where the former is concerned with instrumental goodness and the latter with the beauty of expression.⁹⁷ Brown sketches a crude parallel with Quick by appealing to Aristotle’s ‘achieved effects’ and Plato’s ‘participated presence’ respectively and suggests that it is in the latter that the first millennium’s use of ‘sacrament’ can be found.⁹⁸ Brown thus proposes a working definition for his use of ‘sacrament’ as ‘the symbolic mediation of the divine in and through the material’ and further elaborates that ‘in a proper sense of the sacramental, the mediation is not purely instrumental, instead the material symbol says something about God in its own right.’⁹⁹ Here Brown uses worship as an example: Worship is ‘more than just a matter of strengthening the community for mission and service. At its heart lies the adoration of God, basking in his presence in and for its own sake.’¹⁰⁰ What Brown’s project is concerned to do is to extend this integral and non-referential sense of the sacramental to enable it to encompass experiences both of the natural world and of the creative arts. To

⁹⁶ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 17.

⁹⁷ ‘The aesthetic attitude seems to be strongly characteristic of philosophical idealism in almost all its forms. Inevitably, therefore, it subordinates doing to contemplating, moral goodness to beauty, instrumentality to significance, time to eternity.’ He elaborates, Aesthetic Sacramentalism ‘invites us to see in the world as a whole the sacrament of God’s self-expression, and in particular sacraments special arrangements of what is outward whereby that universal self-expression may be made more apparent and appreciable.’ (Oliver Chase Quick, *The Christian Sacraments* (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd, 1927), 40-41.)

⁹⁸ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 30.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

be clear, what Brown is arguing is that the arts can mediate something of the divine presence in itself 'as a matter of an imminent given rather than of central neutral features pointing instrumentally beyond themselves' and furthermore that they can even function in this way in advance of any specific revelation.¹⁰¹

Over the course of three volumes Brown seeks to unpack his thesis in relation to a host of different kinds of experience ranging from dance to gardening and landscape painting to pop music. In his treatment of architecture, often thought of as 'an essentially human and not a divine artefact,' Brown refutes any such opposition and instead promotes the view that architecture, both sacred and secular, can mediate divine presence.¹⁰² Few would question the ability of most church architectural styles over the centuries to foster some sense of the sacred,¹⁰³ but the question Brown seeks to answer is whether it can only do so because of 'the presence of a prayerful community or of artificially imposed signs that remind us of the biblical revelation,' or perhaps 'only in so far as it serves the ends of the liturgy or the liturgical community.'¹⁰⁴ Brown's argument is that religious experience is not contingent upon the presence of these features, instead he contends that architecture by its very fabric can mediate divine presence quite apart from any instrumental value it may hold. In Brown's own words, 'architecture has the power to imitate or mimic God's actions elsewhere in the natural and human world; so through that imitation it can open up the possibility of God himself using such means to communicate with humankind.'¹⁰⁵ He argues that church architecture in particular capitalises on the idea that the heavens and the divine are closely linked so it is no surprise that towering gothic spires stretch, indeed point, heavenwards. Where spires, minarets and ancient totem poles climb towards heaven, Brown argues, 'the intention

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 22 cf. 33.

¹⁰² Ibid., 245.

¹⁰³ See Brown's comment on the same, Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ David Brown, "Re-Conceiving the Sacramental," in *The Gestures of God: Explorations in Sacramentality*, ed. Geoffrey Rowell (London, New York: Continuum, 2004), 32.

¹⁰⁵ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 245.

and the prayer is the same, that here, heaven and earth are linked, made sacramentally one by realization of the divine presence here on earth.¹⁰⁶ Elsewhere, Brown comments on the skilful employment of natural light in many sacred settings where careful architectural design sensitive to the daily course of the sun can serve to promote a sense of divine presence. Wherever light shines, ‘the message remains the same, God inhabits this space.’¹⁰⁷ Brown’s comments on stained glass in particular are worth citing in full here:

Nowhere does this find a more conspicuous application than in stained glass, for here minimal stone support and light flooding through the glass are used, working in unison, to imply a building, as it were, taking flight, with the scenes in the glass now caught up into a new and ethereal world, where lightness of stone and light in the glass are alike used to convey the transcendent overcoming of this world's limitations.¹⁰⁸

However it is not in keeping with Brown’s wider project to limit application of his category to explicitly religious architecture. He recognises the divine transcendence exemplified in much Gothic and Neo-Gothic architecture, but equally he acknowledges the divine imminence epitomised by Modernism. He recounts a debate between Sir John Betjemen and Sir Nickolaus Pevsener in the mid-twentieth century in which Betjemen’s refined stance in reference to Modernism was that ‘it is precisely the familiarity of the ordinary and the idiosyncratic that can most easily speak of the security that comes from an all encompassing divine presence.’¹⁰⁹ Brown notes that Gothic styles were recreated in much neo-Classic architecture thus granting a certain divine flavour to a diverse range of secular sites including the Houses of Parliament, some of Glasgow University’s buildings and a number of British railway stations, including that of my

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 248.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 249.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 274.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 328.

own home town, Huddersfield, of whose frontage Betjeman commented it has ‘the finest façade of any such building in the country.’¹¹⁰

Mark Wynn’s paper arising from a conference given in St Andrews celebrating the work of David Brown provides a commentary through the lens of phenomenological literature on the idea that all sorts of material forms can mediate a divine presence. Though some of Brown’s ideas are ‘strikingly convergent’ with related concerns found in phenomenological typologies of sacred places, Wynn argues Brown does not engage with this literature at any great length.¹¹¹ Such literature, Wynn argues, is centred on three major themes; however, it is the theme of sacred space and sensory experience that holds some particular relevance here. The typology argues that sacred spaces are often located at sites which are geographically difficult to access and which thus require a certain single-minded determination to reach, often facing certain physical challenges along the way. Wynn surmises then that it is fair to say that the meaning associated with such buildings or sites can only be gained by those who have assumed the ‘right kind of bodily demeanour.’¹¹² However, the key to understanding the relevance to Brown’s argument is that this demeanour is not necessarily limited to an extrinsic recognition; rather, it is more of a primordial bodily response to the sacred: ‘the sacred is apprehended in and under material forms, and its import for the believer is communicated in the responses of the body, rather than in some more discursive mode.’¹¹³ The parallel Wynn draws here is that this argument does not rely on the external imposition of a religious meaning to any given material form for this would suggest a certain degree of inference is at work; rather than, in Wynn’s perception ‘the whole point of the sacred space is [...] to establish conditions under which some new

¹¹⁰ Inviting the response from a local author ‘it is – as long as you don’t go inside,’ Deric Longden, *Enough to Make a Cat Laugh* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2007), 97.

¹¹¹ Wynn, "Re-Enchanting the World," 116. Cf. Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 24.

¹¹² Wynn, "Re-Enchanting the World," 117.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

and deeper apprehension of sacred meanings can be achieved.’¹¹⁴ The key idea is that the apprehension of a divine presence does not hinge on eliciting a certain kind of intellectual response, ‘instead, material forms here play a more integral, and less discursive or inferential, role in mediating a sense of the divine.’¹¹⁵

This is not to say that words themselves do not hold a place in materially mediating divine presence, for Brown argues that ‘their power is greatest when they act neither purely referentially nor as some form of internal play’ and instead, ‘function sacramentally in both pointing to a divine reality beyond themselves, while at the same time mediating, however inadequately, something of that reality.’¹¹⁶ In C.S. Lewis’ short essay entitled ‘Transposition’ in which he too adopts the category of sacrament to denote how material forms may themselves give rise to a spiritual encounter without any external point of reference, he uses the illustration of mystical writing, the content of which on face value possesses clear natural significance but on another level functions as a spiritual language intended to create an associated religious experience.

Lewis introduces his essay with a discussion on that most ‘embarrassing phenomenon’ – *glossolalia* or speaking in tongues. Whilst acknowledging its origins in the biblical account of the first Pentecost, Lewis nevertheless admits, with refreshing honesty, his own uncertainty around it as a phenomena, not least because it would seem that such occurrences of it can be, and often are, interpreted by both Christian and non-Christians alike as ‘a kind of hysteria, an involuntary discharge of nervous excitement’ and consequentially therefore, an entirely natural phenomenon in the strict sense of the word.¹¹⁷ The issue for Lewis then is firstly the acknowledgement that there is a distinction to be made between what can on at least one occasion, namely the first

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 118.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 119.

¹¹⁶ Brown and Loades, eds., *Christ: The Sacramental Word*, 3, 6.

¹¹⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Transposition, and Other Addresses* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1949), 9.

Pentecost, be the ‘organ of the Holy Ghost’ and on potentially all other occasions be entirely natural, perhaps even pathological, and secondly, the recognition of an ‘obvious continuity between things which are admittedly natural and things which, it is claimed, are spiritual; the reappearance in what professes to be our supernatural life of all the same old elements which make up our natural life and (it would seem) of no others.’¹¹⁸ Here Lewis argues that the term which denotes this kind of continuity is ‘Transposition’ which ‘occurs whenever the higher reproduces itself in the lower.’¹¹⁹

The ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ of Lewis’ ‘Transposition’ requires some unpacking to draw out its full significance. Lewis’ main distinction between the two is with reference to emotional life as the higher and sensory experience as the lower and he expands upon this idea using an extract from Samuel Pepys diary as an example. In it Pepys contends that the sound of wind music ‘did wrap up [his] soul and made [him] really sick’ and although an educated deduction by the reader surmises that he is writing about an induced state of aesthetic rapture, Lewis quite rightly notes that linguistically there is little indication to suggest that what Pepys’ actually experienced was anything other than on a par to that which a rough channel crossing might also induce.¹²⁰ Here then, Lewis argues, the emotional life is ‘higher’ or ‘richer’ than its sensory manifestation for the senses are limited in number meaning that, for example, nausea can be equally interpreted as sea-sickness, stage fright or, in this case, aesthetic delight. So it becomes evident that the senses compensate by using the same sensation to represent different emotions, sometimes even opposite emotions. Lewis also outlines examples from the art world to make a similar point, for instance how a music score originally intended for a full orchestra is arranged and played solely by a piano, so we might say the ‘richer’ (or higher) is transposed into the lower, in which the piano score must somehow

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 10-11.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 16.

¹²⁰ Cf. Ibid., 12.

compensate for the absence of the flautists etc. Or similarly how the artist executes a careful use of angles to transpose a three dimensional landscape on to a flat sheet of paper. In both instances, Lewis argues, ‘if the richer system is to be represented in the poorer at all, this can only be by giving each element in the poorer system more than one meaning.’¹²¹

Lewis draws two conclusions concerning that which he has defined as ‘Transposition’: firstly, ‘it is clear that in each case what is happening in the lower medium can be understood only if we know the higher medium,’¹²² and secondly, the relation between the two should not be called ‘symbolical’ but ‘sacramental.’¹²³ In turn, the idea that we can only understand what is happening in the lower medium if we know the higher makes a certain amount of sense when we reconsider the example of the lone pianist trying to compensate for the absence of a full orchestra by utilising advanced musical techniques to do so. Whilst it is entirely reasonable to suppose that a listener who has never had the benefit of hearing the full orchestral score can fully delight in the pianist’s solo performance, the point that Lewis is making is that a fore-knowledge of the richer performance grants a new significance to the solo performance. Similarly, Lewis argues, ‘we understand pictures only because we know and inhabit the three-dimensional world.’¹²⁴ In other words the landscape painting is afforded a real visual depth because we first know the richness of this world.

Lewis’ insistence that the ‘lower’ can only be understood through a knowledge of the ‘higher’ appears to constitute a form of criterion by which all purported experiences of the divine as encountered through the material world must be measured. Lewis’ argument precludes an experience of the divine, for instance arising from the perfect

¹²¹ Ibid., 13.

¹²² Ibid., 14.

¹²³ Ibid., 15.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 14.

panoramic vista, without first having some foreknowledge of the 'higher' system, namely the Christian revelation. 'Everything is different when you approach the Transposition from above,' Lewis argues, 'spiritual things are spiritually discerned.'¹²⁵ This is in marked contrast to Brown, who resists outlining any criteria by which experiences of God might be measured. He is very clear that by using the Christian revelation as the 'criteria of assessment [...] there is little sense of learning or of discovery, and more a feeling of the imposition of predetermined judgements.'¹²⁶ Furthermore Brown explicitly states that reflections of the divine are available to be experienced 'even in advance of any specific revelation.'¹²⁷ So for Brown, unlike Lewis, an experience of the divine is not contingent on any prior divine revelation; rather he advocates that 'God can be mediated through nature and culture in experiences that have their *own* intrinsic value.'¹²⁸ In positing that the lower experience can only be understood by knowing the higher Lewis is in effect setting limitations not necessarily on *what* can mediate divine presence but on *who* can claim to have had a divine encounter through the material world; a boundary which Brown is not readily prepared to lay. Whilst other academics have embraced the idea of 'sacramentality' as the 'divine initiative to mediate divine redemptive presence to us' they have similarly shared a sense of Lewis' caution about how such presence might be interpreted and stressed that 'we need to be alert to the dangers closely associated with it.'¹²⁹ Brown's project has been criticised for its lack of criteria and in comparison with Lewis' approach it is easy to see why.

Lewis' second conclusion is that the nature of the relationship between spirit and matter subsumed under his term 'Transposition' is sacramental and not symbolical. Here Lewis

¹²⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹²⁶ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 7.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 23. My italics.

¹²⁹ Ann Loades, "Finding New Sense in the 'Sacramental'," in *The Gestures of God: Explorations in Sacramentality*, ed. Geoffrey Rowell (London, New York: Continuum, 2004), 162.

draws heavily on the doctrine of the incarnation to substantiate his point. Transposition, he recognises, cannot always appropriately be labelled symbolism, and differs from it in that ‘in varying degrees the lower reality can actually be drawn into the higher and become part of it’ meaning that ‘the sensation which accompanies joy becomes itself joy.’¹³⁰ Where symbolism does not necessarily rely on any continuity between the material form and what it symbolises, for instance in the sense that a written word is discontinuous with its meaning, the relationship between spirit and matter in transposition is more intimately entwined. Here Lewis employs the example of painting: ‘Pictures are part of the visible world themselves and represent it only by being part of it.’¹³¹

§6.6 Trevor Hart

‘This flesh [...] is itself complicit in and contributory to the meanings we discern and make and share together in the world as God has created it.’¹³²

Despite Brown’s resistance to setting the Christian revelation as the standard by which to measure divine experience, his work is nevertheless underpinned by a clear Christology. Where his Christology is lacking, however, is in the absence of any serious consideration of the biblical and classical doctrine of the incarnation, which, Trevor Hart argues, would ‘reap considerable dividends’ for a greater understanding of the significance of artistry, both human and divine, within the divine economy.¹³³ Hart argues that it is a mistake to think of the incarnation as a ‘temporary theophany’; rather it is ‘an abiding reality within the triune life of God, flesh situated now at the Father’s right hand for all time, and *mediating any and every approach* we care, or dare, to make

¹³⁰ Lewis, *Transposition, and Other Addresses*, 18-19.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³² Trevor Hart, "Lectio Divina?," in *Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture: Responses to the Work of David Brown*, ed. Robert Macswain (2012), 227.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 235.

to the throne of grace.’¹³⁴ In other words, by virtue of the incarnation, matter assumes a new significance and we discover that ‘matter matters.’¹³⁵

Quite apart from the religious context the connection between the material and the non-material is perhaps no-where more evident than it is in the use of words. Hart affirms Brown’s comments that all words, across multiple occupations ‘have a charge of mystery clinging to them’; however, despite this residual sense of mystery, even their most literal application and careful articulation fails to speak fully into life that to which they refer.¹³⁶ Admittedly different words, diverse uses and various combinations of the two render some words more transparent to mystery than others. A rich poetic image has the capacity to draw the reader through it to a deeper mystery first discovered and grasped by the skilled poet who, in Hart’s words, grants ‘eyes to see and ears to hear to those whose seeing and hearing is otherwise less full or differently tuned.’¹³⁷ This is the arts’ ability to render back to the apprehender more than is physically presented in the raw materials and what Hart calls the ‘added value dimension of creativity.’¹³⁸ This is rarely an instantaneous experience, however, and Rowan Williams makes a point of noting that artistic meaning takes time to percolate, and in this way ‘the poet jolts us, causing us to “stand and stare” at the world, to pause and look again, and again, rather than moving quickly on, content that we have seen all and understood all.’¹³⁹

Brown appeals to the Stoic logos doctrine to make sense of how experiences of the natural and creative world may serve as divine experiences. Thus, he argues, it is ‘the Logos that permeates all of creation and so provides the foundation for things unlike to

¹³⁴ Ibid., 227. My italics.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 228-9.

¹³⁷ Hart, "Through the Arts," 5.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Hart, "*Lectio Divina?*," 231, 230.

be illuminatingly compared, as well as things alike.’¹⁴⁰ So the very fabric of God’s creation marks this world, and thus the materials with which the artist works, with a residual sense of divine mystery. Brown recognises the ability of a carefully honed metaphor to both exhibit a certain inexhaustibility whilst possessing a ‘deep underlying interconnectivity’ and it is the creative tension held between them that affords creaturely mysteries to in turn ‘render [...] us more receptive to mysteries of a more ultimate sort, the mystery from which all earthly mysteries take their name.’¹⁴¹ This raises some concerns for Hart and it is worth citing in full here his appraisal of the assumption which lies at the heart of Brown’s proposal:

The assumption in all this appears to be that God [..] *as Logos* [...] is *fundamentally continuous* [...] with that created mystery and with our experiences of the same, so that to have experienced the mystery lying ‘at the heart of words’ is in some direct sense *already to have had* an experience of the divine Logos, or at the very least to have been drawn to the threshold of such an experience, the one being in effect a natural extension or concomitant of the other.¹⁴²

Hart’s concern in all this is whether it is justifiable to assume a continuity between human and divine ‘mystery’ in this way and recognises that for those whose theologies rely on a doctrine of ‘God’s presence-as-radically-other’ this step from creaturely mystery into the ultimate mystery through the fabric of the world will prove significantly problematical.¹⁴³ In response Hart proposes that the incarnation – ‘a gratuitous act of flesh-taking and meaning-making’ – offers a distinctly Christian framework within which we might consider the nature of the relationship between spirit and matter, both with regard to the natural world and the products created using its raw materials alike.¹⁴⁴ Hart’s preference for a model of the arts within the doctrine of the

¹⁴⁰ Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama*, 72.

¹⁴¹ Hart, "Lectio Divina?," 231-2. Cf. Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama*, 46ff.

¹⁴² Hart, "Lectio Divina?," 234. Original italics.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 236.

incarnation is not immediately incompatible with Brown's sacramental approach, but it is nevertheless different.

Hart stresses that in this act of 'flesh-taking' God endowed this flesh with 'significance stretching inexhaustibly beyond the limits of the creaturely form,' and not only this flesh, but by extension the 'stuff' of human nature and of human culture also.¹⁴⁵ It is important to the strength of Hart's argument to acknowledge that in becoming man, the Divine Word fully inhabited human flesh and was subject to the same human weaknesses, flaws and shortcomings that we are, and yet at the same time, scripture holds the tension that this God-man was simultaneously so much more, playing host to a whole realm of divine mystery.¹⁴⁶ This is the logic of the traditionally articulated hypostatic union in which 'God, for all his overwhelming otherness, is nonetheless conjoined strikingly and surprisingly with our humanity through the posited unity of a common grammatical subject,' and herein, Hart argues, lays a tantalisingly close comparison with the poetic image.¹⁴⁷

In a similar manner to how the whole realm of divine mystery cannot be contained within the Word's human form, Hart posits that the meaning or significance attached to a particular art form lay beyond its physical co-ordinates. The meaning attached to an art form which extends beyond the raw materials of its composition is nevertheless inextricably bound up with its physicality: 'vitaly, [our] eyes and ears do not see or hear less than what is presented physically, and what they see and hear is bound inextricably with the "more" that there is to be discerned.'¹⁴⁸ In an analogous manner, the Divine Word assumed a physical form and became fully human and yet few would argue that the significance of this historical figure is restricted to his physical existence.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Hart, "Through the Arts," 17.

¹⁴⁷ Hart, "*Lectio Divina?*," 237.

¹⁴⁸ Hart, "Through the Arts," 23.

‘God took flesh and we must never lose sight of that’¹⁴⁹ and in a manner akin to it, ‘art no matter how sublime roots us again and again in that fleshliness which is an inescapable feature of human life in God’s world at its best and worst alike.’¹⁵⁰

Whilst Hart is outlining an analogous relationship between the ‘more than’ of the Divine Word made man and the same of the human art-form, he stresses that the ‘more than’ in the two domains do not belong to the same category.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, Hart’s argument is clear in positing the idea that spirit and matter are inextricably linked and that it is only through this physical world that we can ever hope to access the mystery beyond. This is as true for the art object as it is in the doctrine of the incarnation.

In this chapter we considered the relationship between the physical art object and its ‘spiritual’ significance in the Christian tradition. Firstly, we revisited the theological contribution of Sayers in the form of her creative trinity and saw that whilst she does trace a positive connection between the physical and the spiritual elements of art, she ultimately stresses that the true work of art has its existence apart from its translation into material form. Secondly we heard from Carey and Duchamp who although not espousing a Christian theological stance do write from within a culture informed by Christian perspectives thus warranting their consideration here. We saw how they respectively promulgate a strict discontinuity between the material presentation and its significance. Thirdly we explored Williams’ thesis that there is an unavoidably theological element to every artistic endeavour which should be dedicated to drawing out the inherent significance of the material form. Fourthly, we expounded Brown and Lewis’ respective uses of the category of sacrament to forge a close link between the spiritual and the material. Finally, we have seen in Hart’s work how an account of the creative arts underpinned by a clear Christology charges the ‘stuff’ of this material

¹⁴⁹ Hart, "*Lectio Divina?*," 238.

¹⁵⁰ Hart, "Through the Arts," 7.

¹⁵¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 22.

world, and by extension any resulting art form, with 'added value' thus inextricably binding the physical art object with its spiritual significance. In Chapter Three we could reasonably have expected to find less value ascribed to materiality in Hindu traditions in comparison to Christian accounts on the same subject as explored in this chapter. However, what we have seen is a perhaps surprisingly more positive evaluation of materiality in Hindu traditions where the physical is widely employed in the service of the divine, and in this chapter we have heard voices which call into question the abiding significance of the material art object. In bringing Hindu and Christian voices into conversation over the, at times, complex relationship between the spiritual and material aspects of art in Christian and Hindu traditions stereotypes have been re-evaluated and a deeper understanding of, and mutual respect for, the diversity of perspectives and traditions within each faith sets firm foundations for a positive interfaith relationship.

~ CONCLUSION ~

This thesis has sought to test the hypothesis that a conversation between Christian and Hindu traditions on questions of aesthetic concern might not only be feasible, but also a fruitful mode of engagement and could serve not only to reciprocally illuminate key aesthetic concerns but also obliquely touch upon matters of key theological importance without exciting the sort of defensive response which can arise from dialogue on key doctrinal issues. We have posited that the arts possess a natural suitability in the service of such an encounter and as such are ideally placed to facilitate the sort of gentle conversation proposed here. At the outset we heard how the Three Faiths Forum's public arts initiative *Urban Dialogues* is exploring the interface between religious dialogue and art in a practical setting indicating the willingness and indeed commitment of artists from diverse religious perspectives to participate in such an exchange. Our purpose has not been to conduct such a conversation but, by consideration of relevant materials within both traditions, to explore the religious and philosophical underpinning of such an exchange and thus establish the existence of sufficient conditions to make conversation a worthwhile and potentially fruitful project.

We have considered three aesthetic concerns each selected for their shared relevance, albeit in different forms, in both traditions. We have seen how each theme plays host to a range of different perspectives and it is in this diversity of interpretation that multiple points of potential conversational exchange open up. It will be helpful here to consider

the conclusions we have drawn in each chapter alongside those from the same theme in the other tradition in order to emphasise the value of such an exchange.

The first aesthetic concern we have attended to is the nature of artistic freedom, and the extent to which artistic creativity is understood to be constrained by its participation in social realities and traditions of practice of one sort or another. In Chapter One we considered how far the Hindu artist is able to embrace creative freedom and to what extent he is constrained by the extensive texts on artistry. We saw how high standards of craft production extend back to the earliest known roots of the Hindu tradition and identified religious mythologies surrounding craft's divine benefactor, Viśvakarma. We observed how a close relationship between craft and caste affiliation speak of practical obligation and spiritual vocation, both jointly concerned with upholding cosmic order. We explored the apparently encyclopaedic content of the *Śilpaśāstras* and considered the possibility that they may have arisen due to a decline in general standards of art. It would seem that the texts were influenced by geographical factors and that this may account for inconsistencies between them. They have been diversely interpreted and in some cases readings of them have been unhelpfully coloured by dominant trends in western art theory. A close reading of a selection of interpretations revealed that the *Śilpaśāstras* are unlikely to have been written with rigid conformation to their principles in mind, but rather with a view to ensuring a degree of artistic competency, most likely in the early days of an artist's training. The spiritual aspiration at the heart of any art endeavour cannot be codified in the same manner as technical instruction; however, bequeathed traditions play an important role in the training of any artist, but ultimately the artists of successive generations must seek to breathe new life into received instruction and embrace a degree of artistic freedom.

In Chapter Four we considered Christian ideas surrounding creative originality, constraint and the category of ‘sub-creation.’ We saw how the dominant trend in art theory after the Renaissance was to elevate the status of the artist to that of a creative genius. Although the notion of the artist as creator holds roots in the biblical account of God as creator, the idea was taken to the extreme through the influence of Greek ideas. Creation no longer remained the sole domain of divine prerogative, giving way to the view of an autonomous creative genius working in splendid isolation and without any perceived boundaries: this is referred to by Steiner as the ‘presumption of affinity.’ We recall how the dominant influence of the western world at the time the Hindu manuals for art were unearthed is likely to have coloured how they were interpreted, and it is not difficult to see how the idealised western view of the autonomous artist is entirely at odds with how the verbatim translation of the texts portray the Indian artist as being highly constrained.

We have seen how the idea of newness is central to Sayers’ account of artistic creativity and she maintains that the characteristic common to both man and God is the desire and the ability to make things. Whilst she acknowledges that God creates *ex nihilo* (absolute newness) she argues that the difference between human and divine artistry is not one of category but of quality and degree. In Chapter One we saw how all Hindu craftsmen claim divine heritage from Viśvakarma who, having been ejected from the celestial realms by the curses of nymphs, was born a *brahmin* and became an architect. Whilst Viśvakarma is reputed to have served as carpenter to the gods prior to his earthly descent, he is never charged with the responsibility of having created the heavens and the earth, so any comparison drawn between the artist and the Christian God with the artist and Viśvakarma is specious. Sayers’ claim is significantly weightier in terms of equating the human artist with the creator God and thus we might have expected to find a greater degree of prescription in her account of artistry in order to ensure that the

human artist meets the standard set by the divine prototype, yet it is in the far lesser Hindu claim which amounts more to divine association that we find comprehensive instructions for the creation of art.

We have seen that there is a strong eastern tradition of Christian iconography which shares some similarities with elements of the Hindu iconographic tradition. The Hindu texts on iconography are far more extensive, though the principles feeding both the Christian and Hindu traditions of iconography seem to share some similarities with regard to careful preparation, both spiritually and selecting the best materials in the interests of longevity and guarding against any unwanted colour interactions. In both traditions there are conventions to be followed bequeathed by inherited skills or through copying the masters until a sufficient degree of proficiency is attained and with the paramount concern always being that of ensuring the continued transmission of grace through the resulting physical icon. There are marked similarities in the iconographic traditions of both religious cultures, but what we saw in the work of Tavener is how the received tradition, which he suggests extends as far back to the early Vedic chants, should be taken into one's heart and rediscovered anew. For Tavener, unlike Sayers, newness in the context of tradition is the renewal of that which abides. It is not about moulding externalities but about rekindling the ethos of the eternal. This theme is highlighted by Kramrisch in the context of the Hindu icon tradition as 'movement:' it is the life breath of tradition which is renewed in every successive age. In both the Christian and Hindu iconographic traditions we have seen how both centre on a received tradition but each require the artist to augment it though their own artistry.

In Hart we find a theological account of human making which not only accommodates responsible artistry but actively conscripts it by taking the 'givenness' of our respective particularities and adding value to it thus advancing God's creation towards its divinely

intended end. Whilst not contextualised in the same terms as advancing creation, the Hindu craftsman, born into a craftsman caste is divinely ordained to fulfil his inherited vocational duties in order to uphold cosmic order.

What we have seen then is how an understanding of the artist as autonomous creative spirit as extolled by post Renaissance humanism can be situated as the polar opposite to the prescriptive Hindu manuals for painting. However, both traditions play host to a range of views from near absolute artistic freedom (ie. Sayers & Bose) to a reliance on that which is given both in the form of materials and received artistic traditions (ie. Mosteller & Tavener). In addition we found mediating positions on both sides; we concluded that Coomaraswamy and Tagore sit at either side of the centre point on our putative spectrum, but it is arguably Coomaraswamy who most closely matches Hart's account of taking the givenness of the material world and bequeathed traditions, and yet at the same time 'adding to' and making something more of it.

The second aesthetic concern we have considered is the relationship between aesthetic experience and experiences of a distinctly religious sort. In Chapter Two we explored the complex Hindu concept of *rasa* and discussed the extent to which aesthetic emotion might be considered analogous or, as some sources suggest, identical to religious experience. We focussed on the contribution made to the subject by Abhinavagupta, who inhabits a tradition which accommodates the idea of a bodily awakening, or *samaveśa*, in which a devotee is afforded a profound moment of religious insight whilst inhabiting a physical body. Abhinavagupta recognises that in expounding his own aesthetic theory based around *rasa* he has arrived at the same inner terrain as that of the highest spiritual ideal. We have seen how some debate exists around the exact nature of a *rasa* experience, but Abhinavagupta refers to it as a 'tasting' which is of a non-ordinary sort and is unique to the aesthetic environment. It cannot be engineered and

can be as unexpected as a floor giving way: It is transitory and limited. For the duration of the 'tasting' the ego is transcended and a state of generality is entered. Both aesthetic experience and religious realisation demand that the ego is transcended and the removal of obstacles, though nothing new is created. We have seen how a number of key authors on the subject have posited a close affinity between religious and aesthetic experience, however, there are some differences which scholars have drawn particular attention to, most notably that attainment of the highest religious ideal is permanent, not transitory (though this is accommodated in the Kashmiri Śaivite notion of *samaveśa* outlined above) and that the religious ideal does not depend on a material medium. In conclusion we acknowledged a close relationship between the two experiences but accommodated a fluidity of definition, which is in keeping with the wider religious Hindu milieu.

In Chapter Five we considered five voices on a putative spectrum with Aquinas at one end who identifies God as Beauty itself and at the other Kierkegaard as representative of those who wish to strictly demarcate between the aesthetic and the religious. Firstly, Brown posits his belief in a generous God at work everywhere and he identifies every experience of beauty, majesty and awe as occasions of a divine encounter. He argues that this world is imbued with divine presence and, in some instances at least, aesthetic experience and religious encounter can be identical though he omits to outline any criteria by which these experiences might be judged. In contrast to Brown's project, the Hindu notion of *rasa* is limited to the artistic setting and does not extend to everyday experience. It is strictly non-ordinary and arises from the careful combination of Determinants, Consequents and Transients which combine with a latent impression and give rise to an experience of *rasa*. Nevertheless, there is some interesting common ground between the two traditions, not least as regards the ambiguous relationship between aesthetic and religious experience.

Secondly, Viladesau affirms Otto's distinction between the Holy and the Numinous, where the former incorporates both rational and non-rational elements of the divine and the latter is the moment of religious insight which is strictly non-rational. He also draws from Otto's 'Law of Associations,' adapted from the field of psychology, which states that ideas excite other ideas which resemble them. Otto suggests that the Numinous can generate analogous feelings in other areas of life and that the reverse is also true; however, he stresses that the movement between the two sorts of experiences is 'imperceptibly gradual.' Viladesau differs from Otto in that where Otto stresses that an experience of the numinous is conditional upon a prior explicitly religious consciousness, Viladesau argues that there can be an underlying implicit religious consciousness which facilitates an experience of the numinous. Viladesau also suggests that the two kinds of experiences can be identical where Otto limits the relationship to one of analogy. I suspect that of the scholarly accounts we discussed in our treatment of *rasa* in Chapter Two, the opinions can be considered to vacillate between Otto's analogous experiences and Viladesau's tendency towards identification of the aesthetic and the religious. Contrary to Otto's argument that the transition is 'imperceptibly gradual,' in Hindu sources we read that a *rasa* encounter constitutes a sudden flash of insight which does not last. On the other hand, Viladesau's suggestion that one can possess implicit religious consciousness which can be excited by the aesthetic context resonates with the notion of 'beginningless latent impressions' which might be unconscious to the one who owns them, but which play a vital role in activating a *rasa* experience. Regardless of whether we conclude that aesthetic emotion and religious encounter are identical, we found in Patankar's reading of Abhinavagupta that *rasa* allows a move from the particular to the universal and back to the particular, where the latter 'particular' is different to the former, having been transformed by the experience. In Viladesau's stronger statement of the matter he argues that aesthetic experiences can give us a taste of our final horizon and goal as well as drawing us forward by giving us

a foretaste of that beauty. A great deal of theorising has centred around the composite elements which combine to give rise to a *rasa* experience, but excessive theorising should not fool us into believing that *rasa* depends upon a purely mathematical formulation rather, as we have seen, it can occur as unexpectedly as the floor giving way.

Thirdly, Ruskin endorses a close relationship between beauty and the natural world and he argues that we encounter that beauty because it is illustrative of God's nature and we instinctively respond. In being illustrative it is thus comparable, not identical, to God's beauty. Ruskin differentiates between *aesthesis* and *theoria* where the former denotes any animalistic response to external stimuli, and the latter marks a higher response to beauty when we experience that beauty as it exists in its relation to God.

Fourthly, Burch Brown argues for the natural suitability of art in the service of religion, but wishes to retain the distinction to guard against trivialising either or both. He acknowledges that art may serve as a medium to divine truths, but these encounters are mutable and transitory. He recognises that there are a great many artistic practices which have been employed in the service of religion, but strongly insists that art and religion should not be conflated.

Finally, Kuyper acknowledges the power of the arts but strongly demarcates the boundaries between art and religion thus allowing each to attain their highest development, though he does recognise that of all the spheres in life, religion and art are most closely allied. Kuyper recognises that art is useful at a lower stage of religious development but strongly maintains that art is limited and cannot ultimately reconcile sin. In Chapter Two we noted that Bharata's *Nāṭya Śāstra* has been referred to as the fifth Veda and is commended for rendering the religious pursuit universally accessible

through active engagement with the arts of all kinds. In contrast to Kuyper's account of artistry which limits the usefulness of the arts to a lower realm and reserves access to the higher through the pursuit of spirit and truth, the Hindu concept of aesthetic emotion is posited as being universally valid.

This aesthetic concern has highlighted the debate evident in both traditions over the relationship between aesthetic and religious experience. We have seen how the Hindu hesitancy over the identification of the two kinds of encounter is matched on a broader scale in the work of the Christian scholars we have considered and it is arguably in this aesthetic concern that we find the most accessible conversational topic to carry forward with questions regarding the nature, importance and enduring significance of aesthetic experience.

The third aesthetic concern we have outlined is the relationship between material and non-material aspects of art and the significance attaching to the material in particular. In Chapter Three we saw that although there is a strong Hindu emphasis on the final impermanence of matter, the material world is heavily conscripted in the service of the divine, particularly in the context of worship. We mapped a spectrum of views on how the products of the senses should be treated; on the one hand with a deep sense of suspicion and an aspiration to surmount them, and on the other with a commitment to embracing them in the pursuit of a deeper knowledge and experience of the divine. We considered how two sacred texts expound rich mythologies surrounding the origins of painting and we saw how they could be suggestive of an analogous relationship between the divine creator and the human artist. We acknowledged the importance of form in the construction of the ideal Hindu image in which it serves to unite the unmanifest with the manifest. This is embodied in the act of artistry by embracing a process of meditative visualisation and seeking to mentally retain that image without the need to translate it

into material form. Nevertheless the physical art object has long been imbued with spiritual significance as evidenced by archaeological finds from the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation and the devotional cults which have flourished around gods of the Hindu pantheon. These traditions have thrived around devotional icons which have shared a close affinity with a divine presence. We have seen how these images can function as a two-way lens through which devotees may see the deity but in return that they may also 'be seen' by the god who can convey blessings through the physical icon. Whilst there is without doubt an undercurrent of mistrust in the physical world with the spiritual pursuit being dedicated to attaining union with the divine, there can be little doubt that there are many varied Hindu traditions which actively endorse the material art form in its service of the divine. Furthermore, in certain instances as we have seen, the divine endorses the physical world by embodying it.

In Chapter Six we might reasonably have expected to find a more positive evaluation of material in Christian thought than in Hindu traditions, many of which promote the impermanence of matter and the final dissolution of forms. What we have seen however are a selection of views ranging from an absolute discontinuity between the physical artefact and its significance to the suggestion that all material, either naturally occurring or humanly constructed can serve to mediate a sense of the divine.

In Sayers' account of artistry which is expounded within the context of Trinity, she argues that the true work of art, or the Idea, has real existence apart from its translation into material form. The work of art is complete in and of itself in the artist's mind and remains unchanged during the artistic labours which bring it to its material form. Whilst the Art is properly the Idea she does acknowledge that it is always the desire of the creative mind to incarnate an image and it is only in its physical form that the artist and his audience are able to experience it. Sayers' emphasis is on how the entire art process

can exist entirely in the imagination and be there complete, but where a work is carried through to material execution it functions as the outward form of a properly interior reality. Sayers' trinitarian account of the arts seems to neglect serious consideration of the incarnation which doubtless impacts on the value placed on the physical work of art. We have seen that there are key points of convergence with Hindu practices of visualisation of which Coomaraswamy states a work is complete before its transcription into material form. Where for Sayers the physical work appears to be a by-product of an essentially internal event, it does serve as the locus through which both the artist and the audience may experience the idea. In certain strands of Hindu thought, however, where a mental image is constructed through disciplined meditation and contemplation on the proportional canons, the ideal is always to retain it as a mental image. It is only an untrained mind which is as yet unable to mentally retain all the relevant proportions that turns to physically creating the image which in this setting is a by-product in the true sense of the term. Those engaged in the strictest yogic discipline are concerned for their own spiritual development and thus the physical outworking is not used for either their own or others experience. The ideal remains the construction of a perfectly proportioned mental image.

For Carey, the designation of an art object is based on an individual subjective evaluation and is no longer dependent on whether an art critic deems it to be so nor does a work have to fulfil the artist's intended meaning to be admitted to the category of 'Art.' Carey's view stands as indicative of a strict discontinuity between the art object and its significance and is epitomised in the work of Duchamp and his 'Readymades.' Williams posits a Christian account of artistry in which art should seek to draw out the intrinsic significance of the world. His is an embedded theology in which the artist should be drawn deeper into the world rather than pointing beyond it. Brown and Lewis draw from the category of sacrament in their respective theologies. For Brown any

material object, either naturally occurring or man-made can mediate something of the presence of God self referentially, not instrumentally. Where Brown neglects to set any criteria for measuring such experiences, Lewis' 'Transposition,' which posits a continuity between Higher and Lower experiences, stipulates that we can only understand the Lower experience if we have foreknowledge of the Higher. Finally, Hart outlines a theology of artistry which takes the doctrine of the incarnation seriously and in which we affirm that 'matter matters.' In the Incarnation, Christ took flesh and endowed this material world with a new significance, and it is in this material world that art grounds us again and again. Art should concern itself with drawing out the added value dimension of this flesh.

By way of comparison, we saw in Chapter Three how in Hindu textual traditions the products of the senses are largely treated with a degree of mistrust on account of the pervasive spiritual aim being ultimately to transcend materiality. Nevertheless we saw examples of how material artefacts endowed with spiritual significance were in evidence from the earliest known roots of the Hindu tradition when high standards of skilled craftsmanship were in operation. Over the course of time, statues and images have become focal points for worship both in the temple context and in home shrines. In some instances these are treated as constituting the physical presence of the deity and in others they are perceived as conduits through which the deity can see and be seen.

The pervasive theme of this thesis is best identified in the 'maybe' of the theological and philosophical stances of Abhinavagupta and Viladesau in their respective discussions on the relationship between religious and aesthetic experience. Both exhibit an openness to possibility and it is only within this kind of approach that the benefits of the proposed conversation between Hindu and Christian traditions are to be found. The 'maybe' of my own approach requires that stereotypical preconceptions of each

conversation partner are set aside in favour of a willingness to consider the possibility of points of both convergence and divergence alike. It is shaped by a belief that there might be significant gain in the form of a heightened awareness of, and greater respect for, the religious other, as well as a deepened personal spiritual understanding through engaging with interpretive strategies found within another faith tradition and philosophical frameworks.

On the basis of the conclusions we have drawn from our treatment of the three aesthetic concerns, it seems reasonable to conclude that, despite some substantial differences of emphasis and outlook, Hindu and Christian discussions of aesthetic issues share significant common concerns, and overlap at points in some unexpected ways in their strategies of response; each is thus likely to derive benefit from the form of conversation proposed at the outset of this thesis. Furthermore it has been seen that aesthetic issues are in each case closely wedded to religious and theological frameworks of understanding, rendering it likely that such a conversation would quickly extend beyond immediate aesthetic concerns to touch indirectly upon matters of theological importance, without exciting the sorts of defensive postures associated with conventional models of dialogue.

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