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MOMENTS OF AWAKENING Religious Myth and Reflexivity

In this essay I muse about the moments of “awakening” that occur in many people’s lives – moments which provide glimpses of an enhanced reality, are profoundly meaningful, and often inspire and inform their life and work.¹ One could also call them “initiatory” in that they propel the participant into experiencing hitherto unknown dimensions of emotional and cognitive depth. In the first part, I give examples of these moments in both my own life, and in the life of the historian Fred Gettings, as recounted in his 1987 book *The Secret Zodiac: The Hidden Art in Mediaeval Astrology*. In the second part, I theorise on these events in the light of the need for a *reflexive hermeneutics* in scholarship of ‘the sacred’, as discussed by Bernardo Kastrup (2014, 2015, 2016), Jeffrey J. Kripal (2001, 2007, 2014) and Iain McGilchrist (2009).



PART ONE



My Story

My first awakening experience happened at the age of sixteen, when I discovered the world of Renaissance and early Baroque music. Whilst my friends were out at discos, I would lie on the sofa with headphones on and immerse myself in the luscious soundscapes of Claudio Monteverdi’s *Vespers of the Blessed Virgin* (1610). This music touched my soul so deeply I would often weep with longing for the ineffable, unreachable place from which it seemed to emanate. I think I knew then that I would need to dedicate my life, in some way, to following this longing. I subsequently read music at university and spent many years as a professional musician, playing viol and baroque violin, always seeking for the elusive sense of communion with some deeper layer of reality that I knew was possible. There were moments when it happened, for which I shall be eternally grateful.

But playing music was not enough. I wanted to find out more about this experience of waking to another, richer (and often more painful) world, and why Renaissance culture was such a powerful catalyst for opening the door for me. My second “shift” in awareness occurred when I was at University in Leicester. I spent a year studying classical Greek culture,

1 See Taylor 2017, for a comprehensive exploration of this kind of “awakening”, in both spiritual and secular contexts.



which included reading Plato's *Republic* in translation. Not having read any Plato before, I was expecting a rather dull experience, and clearly remember sitting in a lecture theatre whilst an elderly lecturer read out a dry, formulaic account of Plato's ideas. Until, that is, he reached the allegory of the cave (*Republic* 514a-520a). Suddenly I was wide awake and listening intently to the story of the prisoners shackled by the back wall, only able to see shadows which they took to be the full extent of reality. As I followed the prisoner who managed to escape out of the cave, past the fire which was casting the shadows, and towards the light of the sun, something in me irrevocably changed and I found verification of my sense that there was indeed a dimension to reality which was simply not recognised by most of the people I knew. From that point on, I had a tradition to explore, a clear path to follow, which would set me free from the limitations of mundane reality through the power of the *symbolic image*. This of course, as Tim Addey has shown, is exactly Plato's intention in his use of mythic narrative at various points in the *Dialogues* (see Addey 2002).

I started reading in Western esoteric literature, I began learning astrology, and in my early twenties I was introduced to the *Letters* of the 15th century Florentine philosopher Marsilio Ficino (Ficino 1975, 1978, 1981). From there my academic journey began, as I completed an MA in Music Performance and a PhD in Music, writing about Ficino's avant-garde astrological music therapy, on which I subsequently published extensively (Voss 1992, 1998, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2006, 2007). I had a strong sense that Ficino himself was asking me to redeem the poetic power of astrological symbolism in an Enlightenment academy which was often incomprehending, distrustful or indeed inimical to "magic" as operative or efficacious.²

In 2000, the opportunity arose to record and create a live performance of *The Orphic Hymns* (Klutstein 1987) as ritual invocations to the planetary deities, inspired by Ficino's own invocatory magic (Marini Consort 2002). This was a life-changing project. In the ancient Norman church of St Bartholomew the Great in London, we performed pagan hymns at the high altar of a Christian church, with the appropriate incenses wafting around the pillars. It felt profoundly symbolic to be re-enacting the very harmonisation of the two traditions to which Ficino himself had dedicated his life and work. This event was another 'moment' which imaginatively empowered my academic projects, and which I consider to be the fulfilment of my PhD research – as the neuroscientist Iain McGilchrist would say, I was returning the intellectual explication (all 100,000 words of it!) of my original musical enchantment to «a new, enhanced understanding» (McGilchrist 2009: 206) through creative, embodied expression. But I leap ahead of myself.

In the development of two MA programmes in Canterbury, UK,³ my vision has always been to create a threefold synergy between a) the deep hermeneutic insights that arise through experiential engagement with texts, images and practices, b) the examination, in-

2 The implications of this are rooted in the Enlightenment triumph of rational philosophy over "superstition". Iain McGilchrist, in his authoritative study of human cognition, acutely observes that «magic is the way that the left hemisphere sees powers over which it has no control» (2009: 311). It is interesting to note that in his paper «Magic» (<http://www.academia.edu/25678359/Magic>, accessed 27/4/2017), Wouter Hanegraaff ends by warning the scholar against «falling under its spell», falling prey to illusions which may become «potent factors in the real world». In my view, this statement demonstrates McGilchrist's very point, which is the problem faced by the rational mind when confronted by events or phenomena that cannot be explained in its terms.

3 The MA in the Cultural Study of Cosmology and Divination, University of Kent (2006-2010) and the MA in Myth, Cosmology and the Sacred at Canterbury Christ Church University (2014-...).

terpretation and comparison of these forms in a more theoretical sense, and c) a reflection on cognitive processes and narratives that may contribute to personal understanding, development, meaning-making and transformation. Perhaps this could be seen as an alchemical marriage of heart, head, and – something else, a mysterious “third thing” which arises when one is profoundly moved: an inner sense which recognises the «limits of any autonomous reason» and «insist(s) on its own forms of more immediate knowledge» (Kripal 2007: 5).

In his 2007 book *The Serpent's Gift*, Jeffrey Kripal calls this process «gnostic», and suggests that the time has come for a «modern gnosis» in the study of the humanities. He boldly creates a model of a (post)modern intellectual as «the one who privileges knowledge over belief, who knows that she knows, and knows that what she knows cannot possibly be reconciled with the claims of any past or present religious tradition.» (Kripal 2007: 11) I will return to Kripal's gnostic scholar in part two, but it has certainly been the case that no religious tradition has ever attracted me into its fold. Instead, esoteric philosophy⁴ and practice (in particular, astrology) have provided the grand metaphor with which I “make sense” of the way symbolic images lead me to a tangible sense of the sacred, and this in turn has fuelled my vocation to bring meaning-making into an academic context.

Certainly when I learned more about neoplatonic theories of symbolism, I found a powerful hermeneutic within which to contextualise my direct “knowing” as the *theurgic* dimension of art – its capacity to lift the consciousness of the viewer or listener to participate in a more universal or archetypal realm of being.⁵ Platonic epistemology posits a pre-discursive, primal sense of identity with a universal source of intelligence (*nous*) which is both the beginning and end of the philosophic pursuit of reason (*episteme*) (Plato, *Republic* VI, 509d-513e). It has certainly been my own experience that rational and conceptual thinking naturally *follow* from the “intellectual intuition” which affords a direct connection with some other, transpersonal, non-rational ground of being. This notion is not only Platonic – more recently McGilchrist has demonstrated that for healthy cognitive functioning the left hemisphere's analytic and conceptual capacity should be *in service to* the right hemisphere's broader intuitive grasp of the “big picture” which he argues is fostered by the imagination through the arts and religious sense (McGilchrist 2009: 199). Let me now turn to another example of this very process.

Fred Gettings' Story

In either April or August in the mid 1970s, the historian, astrologer and esotericist Fred Gettings had an experience which he described as «intensely spiritual» (Gettings 1987: 38) and «the most profoundly aesthetic and arcane that I had ever had in my life» (*ibid.*: 41). It took place on a visit of his to the Florentine Basilica of San Miniato al Monte. Situated on

4 A brief definition of Western esotericism would be a path of spiritual development towards a higher consciousness which sees nature and cosmos as metaphor or symbol, and therefore as keys to unlocking a deep wisdom inaccessible to the rational mind. These traditions are rooted in the Gnostic, Hermetic, Neoplatonic and Hellenistic world of the first centuries CE. Such paths do not require “exoteric” religious forms, and have been traditionally repressed, hidden or deemed the preserve of heterodox spiritual movements. See Goodrick-Clarke 2008.

5 On the function of the symbolic in the theurgic rituals of Neoplatonism, see Shaw 1998; Struck 2003, chs 6 and 7.

the south side of the river Arno, this exquisite 13th century medieval church is located high up above Piazza Michelangelo, the steep climb up the hill being mentioned by Dante in his *Divina Commedia* (*Purgatorio*, canto 12). Now an Olivetan Benedictine monastery, it is still a living Christian centre. The interior is covered in marble ornamentation, with a most exquisite zodiac inlaid in the floor at the entrance to the apse.

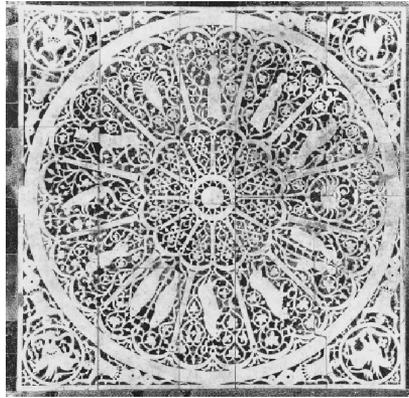


Fig. 1, the zodiac in San Miniato al Monte

On this particular occasion, Gettings was contemplating the large mosaic of Christ in Glory above the high altar. As he sat quietly, he observed the sun's rays shine in through the clerestory window and light up Christ's prominent right foot. As an astrologer, Gettings knew that the feet were ruled by the zodiac sign of Pisces, and this moment of illumination confirmed for him, after several years of research into the zodiacal and heliacal symbolism in the building (including the fact that the sunlight also lit up Pisces symbols in the zodiac and on the entrance to the inner sanctum, *ibid.*, 36-42), that the Basilica had been intended as a solar temple for experiencing the mystery of the divinity of Christ as the Solar Logos (explored fully at *ibid.*: 148-158).



Fig. 2, Christ in Glory, San Miniato al Monte

In fact his journey of discovery had begun some years before, when he visited the Church for the first time in order to view the marble zodiac. He says: «With one of those perspicacious insights, all too rare in ordinary life, I sensed from this first view of the zodiac that much of my future life would somehow be involved with solving the problems of symbolism set by its iconography and orientation.» (*ibid.*: 1) He refers to the «tremendous excitement of my soul» and likens the experience to a Platonic “remembering”, «as though, already, in some hidden part of my being I knew about the mysteries of San Miniato, and had to unravel them from within myself, rather than to seek them in the outer fabric of the church.» (*ibid.*: 2)

Like my moments of awakening, Gettings’ account demonstrates how our deepest apprehensions of what is “real” or “true” happen outside the confines of so-called consensual reality, and yet require “working out” in the world. The “aha” experience will always require a context and language. But what is its truth? I would suggest that a *reflexive* move, back to our own cognitive or biographical self, might guard against the trap of an illusory objectivism that somehow assumes “truth” to be located “outside” or independently of the *moment of participation* itself. Indeed, in relation to the wealth of symbolic associations that opened up for Gettings, we should bear in mind the important fact that symbolism in itself has no meaning *unless* it is taken up as meaningful by the observer. As Rudolf Steiner observes:

A symbol that is merely a symbol, merely a copy or image, has no meaning: there is only significance in what can become a reality, in what can become a living force. If a symbol acts upon the spirit of humanity in such a way that intuitive forces are set free, then we are dealing with a true symbol. (Steiner, lecture 1904, in Gettings 1987: ix)

In other words, a symbol can only be “true” *when* it is recognised and grasped intuitively by an individual or a group, otherwise it is a dead thing, a mere second-hand allegory or abstract concept, as the historian of religion Henry Corbin often remarked (see Wasserstrom 1999: 92). Both Gettings and I experienced the “freeing of intuitive forces” through musical, textual and astrological symbolism and then took on the intellectual task of interpretation and theorising in our respective fields in order to communicate something of these forces, to build bridges between the ineffable and the concrete. Why? I think it is to do with the realisation that something is *at stake* for human beings in revelations we call sacred, and this realisation impels one to try to communicate it for the good of all. But it is not easy. Gettings tells us that there is no textual evidence for the importance of the light display he witnessed, but that for him, the impact of the vision was evidence enough – it «neither brooks nor seeks an argument» (Gettings 1987: 87).

For a traditional kind of scholarship which finds itself on empirical evidence, this kind of immediate insight is problematic, and usually dismissed as anecdotal. It simply finds no place in a discourse which operates on a different plane of reference. As Gettings remarks, «Such an experience, like any experience edging on the miraculous interpenetration of the spiritual with the material, has no need of documentation, or even of explanation with the framework of zodiacal imagery» (*ibid.*: 88). But that does not mean that it can’t be acknowledged as the impetus, the inspiration, for scholarly attention, the *primary* field of all subsequent investigation. Gettings saw something, as I did when reading Plato and listening to Monteverdi, that could be reduced neither to mere “subjective” opinion, nor to historical fact, because the symbolic meaning was “realised” *both* internally as emotive and spine-tingling, *and* intellectually as part of a universal discourse about symbolic perception and interpretation.

These two modes of understanding may be implicit in esoteric traditions, but in academic approaches the act of numinous revelation is rarely included as part of the research process, unless theoretically.⁶ Since pre-modern sacred texts, art and music are rarely intended to be merely decorative or aesthetic, but are *functional* in their concern to link humans harmoniously with the spiritual realm, I am interested in finding methodological frameworks which can encompass this deeply attentive mode of apprehension. It is heartening to find intuitive and imaginal pedagogies within Education which address the mythopoetic and spiritual dimensions of learning (e.g. Willis, Leonard, Morrison & Hodge 2009; Leonard & Willis 2010; Anderson & Braud 2011), and I have championed the theological four senses hermeneutic as a framework which restores the link between theory and interior experience (Voss 2009). This framework creates an epistemological flow from “outer” literal and allegorical meanings to the tropological sense, the point where the soul “turns” through being deeply moved. There is then a reconnection with the world, and finally an integrative sense of the whole which is termed “mystical” in its mode of direct, all-encompassing knowing. Parallels with the four-fold alchemical process are obvious (see Raff 2000), and models such as these provide metaphorical frameworks within which awakening moments can be theorised and integrated within a spectrum of consciousness. As such, I suggest, they are immensely valuable in our rationalist world of oppositional binaries.

PART TWO

On Religious Myth

I have alluded to the tension that arises, both in the academic world and in mainstream culture, between the inner authority of “direct knowing” and the “outer” authority of historical and cultural information. This is in large part due to the ever-widening gulf between our intuitive and rational minds as researched by McGilchrist (2009), and it raises a problematic for the study of the “sacred” dimension of reality. The tension has been clearly articulated by the historian of Western esotericism, Wouter Hanegraaff (2012), who postulates a clear distinction between what he calls «historiography» (or «the history of truth») and «religionism» (or the «truth of history»), and says «we are dealing with two types of reasoning that are internally consistent but mutually exclusive», insisting that there is no common term between them (Hanegraaff 2012: 301). He himself upholds an approach of «methodological agnosticism» where the writer «limits himself to what can be verified empirically or historically» (*ibid.*: 357), and opposes this to «the project of exploring historical sources in search of what is eternal and universal» (*ibid.*: 296). As a liberal Enlightenment scholar, he is highly critical of Kripal’s “gnostic” approach as «promoting personal beliefs and preferences» (Hanegraaff 2008: 271), but Kripal has demonstrated that this is far from his intention:

[There are] types of understanding that are at once passionate and critical, personal and objective, religious and academic. Such forms of knowledge are not simply academic,

6 Further on this, see Voss, 2017.

although they are that as well, and rigorously so. But they are also transformative, and sometimes soteriological. (Kripal 2001: 5)

I have examined their debate more fully elsewhere (Voss 2017), but Kripal states, in his riposte to Hanegraaff, that he is «no longer willing to define the intellectual life along strict historical and materialistic lines» (Kripal 2008: 279) and his considerable intellectual output is dedicated to asking «profound questions about the nature of reality» (*ibid.*). This has led him to propose a new mode of inquiry, beyond the classrooms of “faith” and “reason”, which he terms the «third classroom» of gnostic epiphany (Kripal 2007: 23). In *Comparing Religions* (2015: xii) he calls for a threefold initiatory approach to the study of the humanities, which aims for a «school of the more» (Kripal 2014: 366-7) where the student can both study the myriad stained glass windows of cultural forms, *and* move through them, to the light which shines through (*ibid.*: 391-2).

I am very attracted by Kripal’s radical stance, most of all perhaps by his emphasis on *reflexivity* as a fundamental ingredient in the creation of new paradigms of study. For scholars and teachers to be «profoundly aware of their own cognitive (and I would add, autobiographical) processes» (Kripal 2007: 8) vis-à-vis their material means that their writing can potentially be deeply transformative for themselves and their readers, albeit not without certain «existential risks» (Kripal 2014: xii) as they may be led to abandon previously cherished attitudes or assumptions, or to challenge prevailing norms and expectations.

There is a “vertical” dimension to texts and images that were intended to provide the means for humans to “wake up” in a spiritual sense, as they point to a place beyond all appearances, to a *quality* of being inaccessible to the discursive mind. To deny this, to flatten out the different way of seeing «which all have but few use» (Plotinus 1.6.8) to the “horizontal” plane of historical or cultural trends, is, to quote Corbin, simply perpetuating an empty shell (Corbin 1999: 38). Timothy Scott has lamented that «symbolic interpretation has become a practice to be studied rather than a mode of study itself» (Scott 2008: 2), and if we return to a metaphysical hermeneutics, we find substantial discussion about the necessity of bringing “the two eyes of the soul” into alignment, not conflict. The medieval philosopher/mystic Ibn’ Arabi speaks of these two kinds of knowing as «imitation» and «realisation» (Chittick 2007: 71-2). Imitation is second hand or theoretical knowledge, learned through the received traditions such as the sciences. Realisation is intellectual knowledge in the Platonic sense, tasting, or knowing intimately for oneself, through the power of the heart (Corbin 1997: 222). A third element is that of knowledge through ritual practice, for «knowledge without practice is not true knowledge» according to Ibn’ Arabi (Chittick 1989: 35). Thus intuitive, theoretical and practical dimensions are seen as complementary within the Sufi tradition, but they all contribute to an overall *pious* orientation towards a supreme divine being. In our secular world, it is a scientific materialism divorced from piety to any divine being (apart from itself, perhaps?) which is set as the benchmark of truth (Sheldrake 2012; Kastrup 2015). To justify and promote the epistemological status of “mythic revelation” within a rationalist discourse is no mean feat, and this is the challenge taken up by philosopher and scientist Bernardo Kastrup.

Like both McGilchrist and Kripal, Kastrup is on the cutting edge of “third classroom” scholarship which seeks to promote a way for contemporary scholars of myth, religion, spirituality and the paranormal to re-integrate their “eye of imagination” without sacrificing the hard-won powers of the rational mind (Kastrup 2016: 10-12). Kastrup takes up McGilchrist’s plea to restore the power of metaphor, asking us to reflect

on the relationship between our emotional and intellectual ways of knowing. He suggests that when our senses perceive images in the world, our mind needs a code which gives them meaning, and which evokes an emotional response; this code is the *myth*, the story which makes sense of the images:

One always lives according to a myth, for a continuous interpretation of consensus reality is inherent to the human condition. The question is whether one's chosen myth resonates with one's deepest intuitions or runs counter to them. (Kastrup 2016: 20)

He defines myth as «a story that implies a certain way of interpreting consensus reality so as to derive meaning and affective charge from its images and interactions» (*ibid.*:17), and a religious myth as «a myth that imbues life with purposefulness, timelessness and boundlessness» (*ibid.*: 23). In this way, symbolic discourses such as Platonic cosmology or astrology act as metaphoric mirrors for those who engage with them imaginatively, but should never be regarded as objective, universally applicable truth-statements. For a myth to be “true” in Kastrup’s definition, it must have this potential, otherwise it collapses into a “deprived myth” which simply perpetuates a limited and often dangerous worldview (such as, in his opinion, materialism; Kastrup 2014; 2016: 19-20).

No myth, if imposed from without or dogmatically enforced, will «resonate with one’s deepest intuitions» and therefore will not awaken any unconscious dimensions of mind. This needs to be an organic process of sympathetic resonance, unique to each individual. Kastrup has pointed to the importance, for the reflexive scholar, of being able to take the imaginative and emotional step of fully entering into the “truth” of one’s chosen myth, philosophy or religion – but at the same time, being able to stand outside it intellectually, and see that it can only ever be one “partial image” of the mysterious whole (Kastrup 2016: 52; see also Voss 2017):

If a religious myth resonates deeply with your inner intuitions and survives a reasonably critical assessment of its depth, then you should emotionally – though not intellectually – take it on board as if it were literally true ... there is no better description of transcendent truths than the religious myth that resonates with your heart. (Kastrup 2016: 47)

Similarly, McGilchrist points to the imperative of preserving the vitality of mythopoetic ways of knowing in themselves, in their own mode of *implicitness*:

Many important aspects of experience, those that the right hemisphere is particularly well equipped to deal with – our passions, our sense of humour, all metaphoric and symbolic understanding (and with it the metaphoric and symbolic nature of art), all religious sense, all imaginative and intuitive processes – are denatured by becoming the object of focussed attention, which renders them explicit, therefore mechanical, lifeless. (McGilchrist 2009: 209)

McGilchrist emphasises the quality of *presencing*, as opposed to *representation* (*ibid.*: 178-9) which enables the imagination to soar through the exquisite variety of outer cultural forms, like Kripal’s stained glass windows, to something beyond that they capture or reflect. This is also a right-hemisphere function, engaging with «the primacy of experience», «before the left-hemisphere has *re-presented* it» (*ibid.*: 179). The key, according to both Kripal and Kastrup, is the ability to «choose the right metaphor» (*ibid.*: 179), or religious myth,

that will allow this to happen. Here, I would add, astrological insight can be invaluable as a narrative which points to the “right” kind of metaphor for each individual, to the myth which will be most nourishing. Religious myths unveil truths that cannot be seen in any other way – they are, as Kastrup suggests, «the only pointers we have to a form of salvation» (Kastrup 2016: 46). This takes us straight back to Socrates, who says several times in the Platonic dialogues that the truth revealed through mythic narrative will save you *if you believe it* (e.g. *Republic*, 614c, *Phaedo*, 114b). This is a huge claim for the power of heartfelt commitment to an archetypal narrative, and very difficult for the rational mind to accept as anything beyond subjective opinion. In the “third classroom”, it is as if the intellect, having fully explicated and examined the insights of the “awakening moment”, then grants permission to the heart to be fully emotionally open, whilst standing back and watching this happen. Thus “faith” is no longer opposed to rational explanation, but forms another, complementary, mode of vision: «Faith is the sincere *emotional* openness to the transcendent truths connoted by a story, beyond the superficial, literal appearances of the story’s denotations.» (Kastrup 2016: 49)

With reference to my own experiences, I do not assume that the fact that I can make meaning from them in terms of neoplatonic symbol-theory means that this *is* how reality is constructed. Similarly, Fred Gettings, as an astrologer, is highly aware that the language he speaks determines, to a large extent, the meanings he finds in San Miniato (Gettings 1987: 2), although as an esotericist he is already convinced of the deliberately hidden dimension of medieval cosmic symbolism, just waiting to be revealed to one who can see it. From the perspective of an empirical historian, these myths and metaphors may merely be aesthetic allegories, or fictions, or cultural representations. As McGilchrist tells us, «it is only whatever can “leap” beyond the world of language and reason that can break out of the imprisoning hall of mirrors and reconnect us with the lived world.» (McGilchrist 2009: 229-30) This, he says, is the *imaginative* power:

It is the faculty of imagination ... which enables us to take things back from the world of the left hemisphere and make them live again in the right. It is in this way, not by meretricious novelty, that things are made truly new once again. (McGilchrist 2009: 199)

Both Kripal and McGilchrist call for a hermeneutics of imagination to mediate between the opposites (of “reason” and “gnosis”), and a revitalised understanding of *metaphor* as the key to this process. The metaphor of the “human as two” which is both physiologically demonstrable in neuroscience, *and* symbolically demonstrable in the history of Western thought and culture, can thus be re-stated as the human as «Two *and* One» (Kripal 2010: 270). That is, there is a third position which intuits the whole picture through an imaginative leap which also involves a reflexive “loop” back to one’s own responsibility in meaning-making, that is, the realisation that we ourselves partake of a larger consciousness which is projecting endless images onto the screen of life. As Kripal puts it:

we might imagine “turning around” from all those entrancing movies on the screen to the projector behind us doing all that projecting. We might gaze at the light coming through the hole in the wall and look at the looker looking back at us. (Kripal 2014: 392)

Plato’s cave again. In Jungian terms, the symbolic function renders unconscious contents conscious, and Jung too emphasises the role played by the active imagination in co-creating

meaning: «Whether a thing is a symbol or not depends chiefly upon the attitude of the consciousness considering it» he observes (Jung 1976: 51). In the light of this, Kastrup wants to create new, plausible myths for the modern world, which will keep the archetypes alive. For as soon as mental processes start appropriating myths, turning them into dogmas, creeds, fixed theories, infallible concepts or literal truths, their awakening power is lost and they breed conflict. As he puts it:

When the Christian myth is honoured by being *emotionally* taken *as if* it were the literal truth, Christians live lives of meaning and transcendent significance, escaping the madness of a materialist society and coming closer to truth. When it is *intellectually* taken to *be* the literal truth, countless innocent people die burning at the stake or at the point of the crusader's sword. (Kastrup 2016: 53)

Belief, then, in the sense of an emotional commitment, is the factor that keeps the myth alive (Kastrup 2016: 67). Jesus will not save you if his story does not resonate with your heart, if you do not *take it up as true*, but the myth of Dionysus might well serve the purpose. It is a fact of our modern world that there are many myths and traditions to choose from, and not much recognition in our established religions (or indeed sciences) that they can only offer a particular interpretation of the whole.

To return to our moments of grace. For both myself and Fred Gettings, music, myth and art prompted us “to ask the right questions” and provided conditions in which we could take “a brief peek beyond” (Kastrup 2015). Our truths were “perceptual”, not explanatory, and say nothing about any ultimate truth of these conditions for anyone else. They were unique, unpredictable and unreplicable insights, and their unshakeable certainty says more about myself and Gettings than any kind of ultimate, objective truth in the symbols themselves.

To find and live the transcendent truth portrayed by religious myths, we must not look “outside”, for there is no such place. The “outside” is nothing more than an abstraction of the intellect. We must look where *all* reality resides: our own mind,⁷ profound aspects of which are given symbolic expression in the form of religious myth. (Kastrup 2016: 126)

One could argue that great music, great architecture and great mythologies provide the conditions for symbols to speak, but there is no guarantee that they will.

To sum up then, I suggest that our awakening moments can be understood, and framed, as right-hemisphere glimpses into a territory uncharted by the rational mind – primary, pre-linguistic intuitions of transcendence. They then require the laborious, painstaking and dedicated task of articulation and interpretation in the world, through the particular lenses of mythic expression which resonate with our hearts. I cannot speak for Fred Gettings, but for me, over forty years of emotional and intellectual commitment to the *eros* awoken in

7 By “mind”, Kastrup as an idealist does not mean the materialist view of mind as an epiphenomenon of the brain, but mind as a «filter» which interfaces with what might be termed a cosmic consciousness or universal «mind at large» (see Kastrup 2014: 53-76).

me by Monteverdi have certainly given rise to a greater sense of clarity, integration, communication and *relationship* between the two modes of knowing, very much in the manner of the threefold process described by McGilchrist, which I alluded to earlier. He describes this reciprocal movement as follows:

What is offered by the right hemisphere to the left hemisphere is offered back again and taken up into a synthesis involving both hemispheres. This must be true of the processes of creativity, of the understanding of works of art, of the development of the religious sense. In each there is a progress from an intuitive apprehension of whatever it may be, via a more formal process of enrichment through conscious, detailed analytic understanding, to a new, enhanced intuitive understanding of this whole, now transformed by the process that it has undergone. (McGilchrist 2009: 206)

I have also come to recognise an urgent sense of responsibility in response to the precarious state of our world, and the need to create new paths to wisdom within our academic institutions. Kastrup's observation that those who try to communicate any kind of deeper consciousness «are often drowned out by the hysterical cacophony of our media ... or worse: they are discredited by an uncritical academic establishment that has come to confuse reason and empirical honesty with the metaphysical conjectures of materialism» (Kastrup 2016: 236-7) often seems all too true. But we have to try.

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