

Aesthetics for a New Age¹

(Abstract)

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The paper first outlines a Theory of Value in general and of aesthetic value in particular based on the traditional Indian, Chinese, Tibetan, Persian, Heraclitean, Stoic and generally Greco-Roman conception of the evolution and history of humankind as a process of degeneration,² which I have developed into a more elaborate Philosophy of History. Then the paper outlines the Theory of Value that follows from the Philosophy in question.

According to the above-mentioned Philosophy of History, the basic delusion that the Buddha called *avidya* and that Heraclitus called *lethe* has been developing gradually throughout the present aeon, and has finally given rise to the current ecological crisis, which represents the *reductio ad absurdum* of the basic human delusion at its root and of all that developed interdependently with it. Therefore, this delusion finally can and must be overcome, for a New Age to be inaugurated—which will be characterized by Immanentist Spirituality, the surpassing of our illusion of being separate from the rest of the Ecosystem, Socio-Economical Equality, Experiential Plenitude and the surpassing of all vertical, instrumental relationships among human beings and between these and the rest of the ecosystem. The alternative to this is the destruction of humankind and perhaps of the entire “Ecosystem Earth.”³

In bringing about the necessary transformation referred to above, new kinds of art and a new aesthetic theory have a most important role to play. Their features combine those found in prehistoric art (in which the said aesthetic theory was implicit) and in various types of Eastern Art (in which the aforesaid aesthetic theory was explicit) with some of those outlined by Leo Tolstoy, Oscar Wilde, Sorel and Berth, William Morris and a series of theorists of the twentieth century. The art and the aesthetic theory in question will be those of the “New Age,” which will help the human psyche function as corresponds to this “New Age.”

A brief, most general and comprehensive outline of the kinds of art and the aesthetic theory in question follow.

Aesthetics for a New Age

Elías Capriles

The Source of Value in General and of Aesthetic Value in Particular in the Light of the “Perennial Philosophy of History”

One would say that there is something like a Gresham’s law⁴ of cultural evolution, according to which excessively simplistic ideas always replace the more elaborate ones, and the vulgar and obnoxious always replaces the beautiful. And yet the beautiful persists.

Gregory Bateson⁵

In the second essay of my book *Individuo, sociedad, ecosistema*,⁶ I elaborated upon that which I have called the “Perennial Philosophy of History”—a view of human evolution as a process of progressive corruption of the perfect, spontaneous primordial order that the Bible called Eden, that the Indians called *Satyayuga* (“Age of Truth”) or *Krityayuga* (“Age of Perfection”), that the Stoics and other Greco-Roman systems and individuals called “Golden Age,” and that Taoist sages in China constantly referred to by different terms. In the third and last of the essays in the book in question, on the basis of the philosophy of history I had presented in the second essay, I developed the theory of the nature, genesis and development of value at the root of the present paper. Although, in many senses, this theory returns to the most ancient doctrines known, I am convinced that it responds to the needs of this great dusk of history and of humankind, and that this flight of Athena’s owl might perhaps show us some of the most appropriate ways to follow in order to remedy the extremely grave crisis that we face on the ecological, social and individual levels.

According to Mahayana Buddhist doctrine, plenitude, happiness and a consummate dealing with practical matters are made impossible by the basic delusion that the Buddha called *avidya* and the Heraclitus referred to as *lethe*, which results from the “delusorily valued conceptualization”⁷ of the fragmentary contents of consciousness.⁸ We could say that the most immediate effect of this lack of systemic wisdom is the illusion of being an inherently separate entity with a private, particular consciousness and intelligence separate and independent from the Logos of which, in truth, every consciousness and every intellect are functions. As stated by Heraclitus:⁹

Although the Lógos is common (to all, being universal rather than personal), most people live as though they had a separate (psyche or) intelligence (of their own).

According to the cyclic theory of human evolution and history at the root of this paper, the delusion to which Heraclitus refers and the lack of systemic wisdom at

its root, have been developing since time immemorial. Its development veiled the Tao or Logos that had prevailed in the Golden Age, Age of Truth (*Satyayuga*) or Age of Perfection (*Krityayuga*), putting an end to the period in question; then, it propelled the process of degeneration which followed its course during the following eras, and, at the end of the Iron Age or Age of Darkness (the *Kaliyuga*— the era in which we find ourselves at present), it provoked the extremely grave ecological crisis that has led us to the brink of extinction—thus completing the *reductio ad absurdum* of the delusion that had been developing during the entire evolutionary cycle, and of the social, economic, political and cultural forms that developed interdependently with it. This *reductio ad absurdum*, in turn, will lead us to the recovery of systemic wisdom that will allow for the transition to a new Golden Age of Age of Truth.

Value and values, having arisen originally as a result of the occultation of the Tao or Logos, may be considered as a result from the process of development of the delusion associated to the lack of systemic wisdom. Lao Tzu noted in the *Tao-te-king* that:¹⁰

When the Tao is lost, we still have its virtue;¹¹
when its virtue is lost, we have humanity (or goodness);
having lost humanity, righteousness remains;
having lost righteousness, (only) propriety (or ritual) is left.

In fact, if we are free from ego and delusion, we shall not live on the basis of an illusory “particular intellect” which should decide the course to follow by taking learned values as a guide, but on the basis of the Logos or Tao,¹² which will manifest in an experience of total plenitude and in a spontaneous behavior free from selfishness that will benefit both ourselves and all other sentient beings. Therefore, we shall not conceive any value to aspire at, to which adapt our behavior, or on the basis of which take decisions. Only when the Logos or Tao has been lost, does arise the idea of “value,” and do spring forth the series of values/molds to which human beings should adapt in order to avoid acting against the common good.

We have seen that, in the Primordial Age, human experience was characterized by absolute plenitude, and spontaneous human behavior always achieved the good and happiness of both self and others. In fact, since human experience was absolute value, there were no *Werthehaftete Dinge* (things endowed with value) and there was no property (public or private). There being no sense of self, there was no selfishness, and there being no selfishness, human behavior was spontaneously good, so that there was no need to establish moral, social and other values as means to prevent all the evils issuing from selfishness.

Primordial humans did not feel separate from the plenitude of the unbroken continuum of the universe, and thus did not feel any lack. Since they did not experience themselves as separate selves, the whole world, including other human beings, animals, plants and minerals, was their own body and was taken care of as such. Since they obtained their sustenance through playful activities, they did not need to earn their bread “in the sweat of” their faces. Their behavior being spontaneous and beneficial to all, they did not need rules or prohibitions. In Taoist terminology, the Tao and its virtue (the *te* that naturally flows from the Tao) prevailed and thus there was no need to sanction love or to postulate justice.

The Fall of the human race, Biblically symbolized by Adam and Eve eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, corresponded to the introduction of Judgment: *Urteil*, the “original partition” that caused humans to feel separate from the rest of the universe, including other humans, and to oppose good to bad, love to hatred and so on and on, in an infinite series of dualities. Feeling separate, the human individual experiences her or himself as lack-of-the-plenitude-of-the-universal-continuum,¹³ and then unsuccessfully tries to fill this void by endowing objects with value and possessing them, so as to absorb the value projected on those objects, and by trying to get others to project value on her or himself, in order to feel “filled” with it—all of it as part of an attempt to overcome the uneasy sensation of lack.¹⁴

The sense of separate, autonomous selfhood and agency, and the selfishness issuing from it, arise together with the opposition of good and bad, gain and loss, and so on and on—thus giving rise to the need for moral values. As the Stoics knew well, acceptance begets pleasure, rejection begets displeasure and indifference results in neutral feelings:¹⁵ when we accept an object because we deem it beautiful, with the same token we accept the mental sensation in the heart *chakra*, making it pleasurable, and then we take the ensuing pleasure as proof of the “objective” beauty of the object; when we reject an object because we deem it ugly, with the same token we reject the mental sensation in the heart *chakra*, making it unpleasant, and then we take the ensuing displeasure as proof of the “objective” ugliness of the object; when we are indifferent toward an object because we deem it to be neither beautiful nor ugly, with the same token we remain indifferent to the mental sensation in the heart *chakra*, turning it into a neutral sensation, and then we take the ensuing neutral sensation as the proof of the objective lack of beauty or ugliness of the object.

We may suppose that, immediately after the Fall, and before human beings began valuing the forms that allowed them to experience the aesthetic pleasure derived from their acceptance, they surely prized the forms of nature and the creations of the human spirit that, by inhibiting judgment (i.e., by inducing an aesthetic *epoche*) and possibly suspending their sense of separate selfhood, induced sparks of the Primordial state of wholeness and plenitude. In *Heaven and Hell* Aldous Huxley wrote:¹⁶

Men have spent enormous amounts of time, energy and money on the finding, mining and cutting of coloured pebbles. Why? The utilitarian can offer no explanation for such fantastic behaviour. But as soon as we take into account the facts of visionary experience, everything becomes clear. In vision, men perceive a profusion of what Ezekiel calls “stones of fire,” of what Weir Mitchell describes as “transparent fruit.” These things are self-luminous, exhibit a praeternatural brilliance of colour and possess a praeternatural significance. The material objects which most nearly resemble these sources of visionary illumination are gem-stones. To acquire such a stone is to acquire something whose preciousness is guaranteed by the fact that it exists in the Other World.

This “Other World,” just like the one Plato’s Socrates describes in the *Phaedo*, is one in which¹⁷

...the colours are much purer and much more brilliant than they are down here...
The very mountains, the very stones have a richer gloss, a lovelier transparency and

intensity of hue. The precious stones of this lower world, our highly priced cornelians, jaspers, emeralds and all the rest, are but tiny fragments of these stones above. In the other earth there is no stone but is precious and exceeds in beauty every gem of ours.

However, unlike the *Phaedo*'s "Other World," Huxley's is not "above and beyond the world of matter:" it is this very world, as unveiled by the cleansing of what William Blake called the "Doors of Perception."¹⁸ There are, no doubt, degrees to this "cleansing," which may range from the temporary suspension of judgment that occurs in visionary experience, to the absolute dissolution of the false sense of self, of overvalued conceptualization and of judgment that is the ultimate aim of Buddhism, of several branches of Hinduism, of Taoism, of Sufism and of several other mystical traditions East and West.

We may also suppose that, as delusion developed, art ceased to privilege the forms that induce mystical, visionary and related experiences, and began to privilege the forms whose harmonies caused the viewer to spontaneously accept the object, and thus would experience the "aesthetic pleasure" that issues from acceptance.¹⁹ (In fact, the techniques of composition taught by the various schools seems to aim at the achievement of such harmonies.²⁰) Later on, traditional conventions establish what should be accepted and what should be rejected—and, finally, it is fashion that sets the criteria for acceptance or rejection: It is this that gives rise to aesthetic values.

However, as time passed, art not only ceased representing the forms that may grant access to mystical and/or visionary experience, but even ceased seeking to represent the forms whose inherent harmony naturally leads us to appreciate them and accept them. The changes taking place in the human spirit and its needs gives rise to some great creators who express the spirit of the times in some masterful works of art—which are then imitated by "lesser artists" who turn the new trend into a fashion lacking life and power, that must be accepted by "art-loving people" in order to be seen by others as being sensitive towards "good art." Thus the process of social, cultural and individual degeneration begets ever more arbitrary aesthetic criteria, which change ever more rapidly—causing the instability of aesthetic criteria which, among other things, especially since the nineteenth century has caused more and more philosophers to assert with ever-growing insistence that values are not objective.²¹

In order to get society to accept us, we have to assume the criteria which fashion imposes in the time and place in which we find ourselves, and to learn to appreciate the prevailing styles—or, at least, to learn to *pretend* that we appreciate them. Art becomes dilettantism, turning into a mere pretext for social encounters in which the members of the ruling classes show off, proving that they are worthy of appreciation in the measure in which they pretend to appreciate the supposed value of the kind of art imposed by fashion. In a few words, art becomes deceit and ceases to be art.

The Aim and Meaning of Eastern and Ancient Western Art and the Aberrant Evolution of Western Art in the Last Centuries

It is hardly correct to attribute an aim to the spontaneous, selfless activity of those who, in their art, manifest and express the state that Buddhists call Awakening.

However, if we were to attribute an aim to art produced under such circumstances, we could well express it as temporary suspension of judgment and progressive advance on the Path of Enlightenment.

In his *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy noted that traditional Christian and traditional Eastern Art sprang from a common ground. European Medieval Art (which may be said to come to an end with Raphael) and Eastern Art in general did not intend to merely imitate physical reality.²² They were not liable to Plato's criticism of the arts that merely copied the entities which, according to his own (exoteric) writings, were in turn but copies of the *eidos*, which constituted the "true reality" (a thesis rejected by the author of this article, together with the rest of Plato's dualism, and which was rejected by Aristotle, who as we all know considered realistic art as implying *poiesis* in so far as it attempted to set up an ideal—which the artist did not receive by *aisthesis*—for a class or species). In fact, a great deal of post-Greek, pre-Raphaelite European art—and an even greater amount of Eastern art—could by no means be condemned on the basis of Plato's thesis that works of art are mere "copies of copies;" even though Plato would have surely rejected the idea, they were the product of true *poiesis*: the creation of a *new* reality that had the power to alter human perception and, perhaps, open the "Doors of Perception" that grant access to the "Other World." In fact, the will is the core of "this world," and the art in question was most effective in achieving the function Schopenhauer attributed to art: that of achieving contemplative, will-free perception.²³

Moreover, as Coomaraswamy notes in *The Transformation of Nature in Art* in regard to the mystical art of the Far East, in the higher forms of art "connotation and denotation cannot be divided" and "no distinction is felt between what a thing 'is' and what it 'signifies'." In general, what I shall call "primordial art" involves the coincidence (*yuganaddha* or *coincidentia oppositorum*) of both terms in dualities such as connotation/denotation, being/significance, message/medium. The form has an immediate function, which is to open the Doors of Perception, and often also has the mediate function of orienting the practitioner on the Path of Awakening. Below we shall see that Tibetan mandalas are an outstanding example of this: they are one of the most powerful means for "opening the doors of perception," and also one of the most precise and thorough maps of the Path. In our time, we are so far from this conception of art that, as noted by Coomaraswamy in his *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, Walter Schewring went so far as to say that²⁴

Dante and Milton intended to be didactic: we shall consider this pretension as a curious weakness in masters of style whose true, albeit unconscious mission, was to present us with "aesthetic emotions."²⁵

In his great poem *Saudarananda*, the Buddhist sage, Ashvagoshya, wrote:²⁶

The work was not undertaken with a speculative aim, but with a practical one... Its purpose is to lead those who live in this life, beyond the state of misery and into the state of great bliss.

If we take painting as an index of the evolution of Western art, we have to conclude that—with some outstanding exceptions that include El Greco, Goya and a few others—after Raphael and until the Impressionist revolution, in Plato’s terms Western art was but “the copying of copies.”²⁷ The Impressionists and some of the early painters of the twentieth century managed to restore some *poietic* value to painting, but afterwards the progressive development of delusion led us much farther away from the Source, into an ever-increasing decadence that disguises itself as the achievement of *poietic* originality but is mere banality, lack of inspiration and search for notoriety. André Reszler says of Jean Sorel’s ideas about the art of his time:²⁸

Wherever he looks... he perceives the signs of decadence. He even sets out to follow the artistic movements of his time... in order to “study well the elements of an abhorrent decadence...” Art, highly corrupted by the bourgeoisie, nears its end, since it is but a mere residue bequeathed to the democratic era by an aristocratic society.

Just like academic art, avant-garde art will not escape its destiny. Painting has “fallen into absurdity, into an inconsistency of stupid forms.” Music “derails, becoming a mathematics of sounds in which there is no longer the slightest inspiration.”²⁹ (And Sorel deeply fears) “that literature will also enter the dance of death—the death of style.”

After Sorel, Edouard Berth took on “Renan’s question:”³⁰

We live on the shadow of a shadow, on the perfume of an empty flower vase; what will people live on after us? Civilization suddenly experiences “the sensation of a terrible emptiness.”

Translated into the language of art, decadence manifests itself in the prevalence, in regard to creation, of technique and intelligence. It is the victory of Apollo over Dionysus, and given the lack of great, common aims, the kingdom of individualism, art for art’s sake.

Or, rather, of non-art for non-art’s sake—for what is left can no longer be called art. Moreover, this apparent victory of Apollo may amount to a defeat, for he cannot be reduced to ego-driven intelligence and technique. Apollo is, above all, contemplative beauty—and, according to the view of the later Nietzsche, he may be included in a wider Dionysus rather than opposed to him: according to this view, Apollo may be fully reached once Dionysus has opened the Doors of Perception.³¹ Reszler concludes:³²

In the proliferation of signs emitted by a declining society, how can one recognize the signs of the *new*, when the *modern* is but the last gasp of the old in its process of dissolution?

Art in the West largely ceased to be a trigger for visionary experience and a map of the Path of Enlightenment, and then it was reduced to a means for attaining fame and money through adapting to irrational fashions that are the death of true art.

Gregory Bateson’s statement that “the vulgar and obnoxious always takes the place of the beautiful” is, indeed, quite apt in describing the process of aesthetic evolution of humankind, which is about to reach a decisive turning point. In fact, once the development of the process of degeneration that begins with a fracture both

in the psyche of human beings and in society, has led fragmentation to its logical extreme, and the practical effects of this fragmentation in turn cause it to achieve its *reductio ad absurdum*, the fracture and fragmentation in question will have to be surpassed—which will result in a regeneration that, in the aesthetical plane, will probably represent a re-establishment of true art³³ and will no doubt cause true beauty to shine in all human products. This is precisely what seems to be about to happen; we have reached the last stage of the age of darkness or *Kaliyuga*, and the development of delusion that has been going on through the aeon, has caused delusion to complete its *reductio ad absurdum*. Therefore, we are facing the threshold at which the total change, resulting in the radical regeneration of our species and of the global ecosystem, may become possible.

However, the degeneration of art has not been a universal phenomenon. In various Eastern civilizations, the indigenous Wisdom-traditions kept alive the true nature of art and, each in its own way, kept producing masterpieces with the power to profoundly alter human experience and to ultimately serve as aids on the Path of Awakening. Likewise, in Europe, during the process of development of delusion and ugliness that I have been reporting, many great individual creators arose, who expressed the spirit of their time and culture in masterful works of art—giving rise to new styles which were then imitated by “lesser artists” who turned the new trends into mere fashions lacking life and power. Similarly, there were times of splendor when collective creation reaches heights that cannot be explained by a mere, coincidental increase in the rate of birth or artistic geniuses.

In fact, the process of degeneration does not seem to be lineal but, rather, to develop in a spiral motion. Times of dullness are followed by times of splendor in which wonderful works of art are produced—which some Anarchist thinkers have associated to a temporary weakening or fading away of the State and/or of class and other social differences. One of the Anarchist interpretations of this phenomenon was developed by Rocker in *Nationalism & Culture*:³⁴

Power and culture are, in the deepest sense of the terms, diametrically opposed, and the blossoming of one of them is inconceivable without a weakening of the other. A powerful central apparatus is the greatest obstacle to the development of culture.

According to many Anarchist lovers of Greek culture, the object of their love arose because of the practice of direct democracy. This, however, is difficult to uphold insofar as the latter had the insurmountable defect of excluding considerable segments of society and being built over the infamous institution of slavery. And, in fact, some have related this fact, as well as the rise of “reason” (understood as the workings of secondary process and the brain’s left hemisphere) in the Greece of city-states, with the dull realism which characterized a great deal of Greek art—the realism that led Plato, who thought physical entities were imperfect copies of supersensible *eidōs*, to disparage art on the basis of the theory according to which it was but an imperfect copy of an imperfect copy. In my opinion, artistic *creation* as such took place in Greece, mainly in the fields of architecture, music and poetry—and especially in that of philosophical poetry, of which the greatest exponent was Heraclitus, but also, though to a lesser extent, in theatrical works, lyric poetry and the

epics.³⁵ It is possibly not the result of a mere coincidence that poetry is the only Greek art whose name suggests the idea of creation (*poiesis*).

Instead, the free cities of the Middle Ages throughout Europe, with no kings or sovereigns, but under the administration of the workers' Guilds and Associations of mutual aid, produced a more creative art, whose symbol was the gothic Cathedral, "created by the whole of the people." The art that arose in the free cities possessed strong visionary and "objective" qualities, which triggered the mystical and visionary experiences that allowed Christians to "renew their faith."

There is, thus, some truth to Rucker's thesis. Nonetheless, the thesis in question should not be made into an absolute law; we must remember that there are many works of art whose significance does not seem to be made clear by examining their relations with the macropolitical, macrosocial and macroeconomic forces of its time³⁶—and that, perhaps, there were many extraordinary cases to which the following words by Jean Sorel may be applied:³⁷

"...The producer of genius"... possesses a "complete originality." He (or she) is not subject to the influence of the environment, of the time in which he (or she) arose. (For example, the "immortal" paintings of a Rembrandt could not be understood by trying to find in them the reflection of the Dutch bourgeoisie of his time.)

"It would therefore be useless to search the 'historical laws of artistic creation'. Between art and society there are too many intermediaries for being able to lay bare a direct and rigid link: the genius is "too personal to be subject to a law."

Perhaps the work of many geniuses cannot be explained in terms of political, social and economic forces, but most likely it always reflected the spirit of the times—and, probably, in many cases the upsurge of a genius has had to do, at least to some extent, with micro-political, micro-social and micro-economic conditions. In fact, many masterpieces by individual "geniuses" and many great collective creations were produced by individuals who, having become organized in non-authoritarian, non-centralized communities with the aim of transforming their own psyche (even when such communities were established within centralized, authoritarian States), freed themselves, to a greater or lesser degree, both from their inner fracture and from the power structures into which they had been conditioned. In all cases, it is this liberation—whether or not it is (partly) the result of an intensive communitarian experience, and whether or not it is established to a greater or lesser degree—that allows for the production of an authentic "objective" or "visionary" art.

Some Features of "Primitive," Primordial Art, and Some Notes about Chinese Painting

The prevailing ideology, which claims that everything gets better with "progress," has taken such deep roots in most of us, that we laugh at the idea that the evolutionary process of the last few millennia may have represented a progressive decay of harmony and perfection, thus constituting a negative or aberrant development. In spite of the recent findings of paleopathology,³⁸ we keep feeling that our present condition represents an enormous spiritual advancement in regard to the condition of "primitive" human beings. However, this is not the opinion of those who

have carried out a thorough study of the art of the Paleolithic. Andreas Lommel writes:³⁹

There are some who would rather avoid any speculation (in regard to the spiritual development of those who created the wondrous Franco-Cantabrian primitive art), for the problem poses unsolvable questions to the student of prehistory and especially to anyone naïvely convinced of the march of progress. If “primitive man” was able to produce such wonderful works of art with his rough stone and bone instruments, he could not have been in any sense “primitive” in the artistic and intellectual sense, and, contrariwise, must have reached an as yet unsurpassed level of development. This demonstrates that mental and artistic evolution does not develop side by side with the progress of material civilization. To accept this hypothesis would amount to revolutionizing the picture of human development as we see it—i.e., as a more or less linear progression.

It is equally significant that, as noted by Jacques Cauvin:⁴⁰

Though it is known that religious feeling has accompanied the human species for a long time, it is not easy to date the appearance of the first gods. Paleolithic art already had a “religious” content, but it seems not to have had reference to gods. The notion of a divinity manifests itself for the first time in the Near East in the form of female terracotta statuettes, at the very beginning of the “Neolithic revolution”—a very important moment in the history of humankind. Preceding by a short time the first agricultural experiments, this psychological mutation could partly explain the formidable transformation of the Neolithic.

Cauvin notes that the predominantly “animalistic” or “zoomorphic” Franco-Cantabrian art of the Paleolithic and the artistic manifestations of the same type and period in the Near East had a non-theistic, naturalistic religious content reminiscent of the Chinese *yin-yang*, and expressed a “horizontal” vision of the universe (corresponding to that which Dumézil called the “magic” vision): there is nothing beyond the world and above human beings that they should worship. The transformation constituted by the “birth of the gods” had not yet taken place; it was to take place in the Near East at the very beginning of the Neolithic. When the gods appeared—beginning with a female figure and a bull-god—human beings positioned themselves below them, as adoring and supplicant. Cauvin says of this transformation:⁴¹

This art seems to reflect an event of psychological character. The sacred is no longer on the level of man, but “over” him. This translates itself into the belief in a supreme entity, who may have human or animal form, whereas, from then on, humankind is below and turns toward it through the effort of praying, expressed by the arms extended toward the sky...

Not only is then the Goddess the first supreme power in human form—i.e., the origin and supremacy of the natural world is conceived by man, for the first time, “in his image and likeness,” including the psychic power expressed by the “gaze” of the statuettes—but the divine plane is that on which the opposites unite and tensions are resolved.

Formerly, the “divine” plane of the “union of opposites” was “here,” in the world. The gods appeared when “this plane” became that of the duality and conflict of opposites, whose union could only be conceived in a “beyond.” This completion of the “expulsion from Eden” began in the Near East with “Neolithization,” and progressively spread throughout the rest of the world: the “here” ceased to be paradise, which was transferred to a “beyond,” and soon after human beings found themselves cultivating the land and raising livestock—which inaugurated an era of hard and constant toil that according to Cauvin was not at all necessary from the standpoint of resources.⁴²

Prehistoric painting expresses the condition preceding the transition described above—a condition characterized by that which Dumézil called the magic *Weltanschauung*, according to which all is the manifestation of a single principle, and so the sacred must not be worshiped outside and above the world, but celebrated *in* the world. Just as Chinese Taoist and Ch’an painting would continue to do even until our age, prehistoric painting gave empty space at least as much importance as it gave material forms—to the extent that it may be found at the very center of the work of art. This feature of the primordial *Weltanschauung* may be expressed in terms of the words of the *Prajñaparamita Hrdaya Sutra*:⁴³

The Bodhisattva of Compassion, in a state of deep Contemplation, saw the emptiness of all five skandhas and sundered the bonds that caused him suffering. Hear then! Form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no other than form; form is only emptiness, emptiness is only form.

“Primitive” painting is, thus, an example of ecological mentality. In an attempt to destroy one of the sides of the coin of life—death, illness, pain and all that we do not want in life—we apply corrosives to it, which then go through the coin and destroy the other side. The equal value given to empty space and to space filled with material forms is a sign of a human disposition and *Weltanschauung* that is free from the above error: it does *not* try to affirm existence against non-existence.

The vein of “primitive” painting connects with that of Chinese Taoist and Ch’an painting. In fact, the Taoist treatises establish quite precisely the respective sizes of the different elements that may enter into a composition—the mountains are overwhelming in size, the trees much smaller, animals still smaller, and human beings are the smallest of all frequently used elements. Isn’t this a sign of an ethics quite contrary to the ones expressed by current translations of *Genesis*, or by René Descartes when he claimed, “man must be lord and master of Nature”? In prehistoric painting, we often find a combination of multiple perspectives, which may be contrasted to the egocentric drive to impose on Nature one’s own single perspective. Just as the Chinese Taoist and Ch’an landscapes minimize the importance of the human element, the multiple perspectives of some prehistoric paintings minimize the importance of the artist’s ego.

Prehistoric paintings and their Chinese heirs are not subject to the straight jacket of strict rules of composition like the ones that have been almost universally accepted in the West. In *Heaven and Hell*, Aldous Huxley noted that, in a conversation with Roger Fry, the latter kept insisting that Monet’s *Water Lilies* had no right to be so shockingly unorganized, so totally without a proper composition

skeleton; they were all wrong, artistically speaking—and yet, he had to admit, and yet... In Huxley's words, they were “transporting.” The same happens with the composition found in so many prehistoric paintings and their Chinese heirs, so strange to the Western eye, and yet so... visionary. And so ecological, in so far as they show no attempt to impose on Nature the order conceived by humans.

In one of his letters, French painter N. Poussin (1595-1665) asserted that truth is, above all, Nature as that which is before us—Nature that “...the rational conception modifies, embellishes and selects, shunning all that does not lend itself to be subject to order, avoiding the complex, whereas authentic truth requires the representation of the whole of Nature...” This is perhaps the purest expression of some of the values of European Rationalism and Classicism, which constitute the most extreme instance of the aesthetic values that prevailed in Europe since Raphael and the Renaissance to the Impressionist revolution,⁴⁴ and which constitute the very opposite of those which inspired and guided the artistic work of “primitive” painters and their Chinese heirs.

Moreover, prehistoric painting (as well as Chinese Taoist and Ch'an painting later on) never incurred in the dull realism that, much later, Plato would scorn with the theory according to which works of art are mere “copies of copies”. A great deal of Chinese Taoist and Ch'an painting may be regarded as an extension and a sophisticated development of prehistoric painting, which probably was possible because in China true sages maintained a far greater influence on society than they did in the West. Moreover, the Chinese produced a most wonderful Impressionism *avant la lettre*, as well as pieces that may be considered to correspond to several other tendencies that arose in the West after the realistic paradigm was discarded by most of the artists who achieved renown.

If the features common to both prehistoric and Chinese art considered above may be said to be “ecological,” the same has to apply to the respect the Chinese artist often pays to the material he or she works on, whose *li* or pattern-principle must be followed and fully revealed, rather than arbitrarily impose on it a creation of the imagination. The artist or craftsman often reveals the *li* of the material, infusing it with the *ch'i* of the living representation, to produce a work beyond the duality of creator and creation.

The Arts as Ways of Liberation

Finally, it must be noted that a most important feature of Chinese painting is the fact that it is undertaken as a *tao* (Japanese: *do*): a Way to Liberation or Awakening. Just as primordial art in general transcends the duality connotation / denotation, message / medium, Chinese art in particular transcends the duality between creator and creation. The painter was supposed to be in a state of spontaneity, and—it is well known today—the tools and materials were chosen so that no amendments were possible. The idea was that the form of art should arise out of the Formless *through* the artist, who should not produce the traits out of conscious intention—a manifestation of ego-delusion—but out of the selfless spontaneity of *wei-wu-wei* and *tzu-jan*. The explanation of this principle is commonplace; suffice it to say that in self-conscious action, at the very moment of action, consciousness reflects on the agent as an object and establishes a link of being between itself and

the object that is being perceived as acting. So, the subject momentarily becomes an object, which subtly interferes with its spontaneity, flawing the action with a hesitation. Given the materials used by Chinese painters, any expert having the necessary spiritual realization would clearly recognize in a painting the resultant flaw. In this light, it is easy to see why, when the famous painter who had striven all his life to attain originality, finally knew he had attained it, he realized that he was painting the Tao of the Ancients.

The surpassing of the inner fracture that introduces the separation between an aspect that controls, and another that is controlled, is at the root of the wonderful art produced by Taoist and Ch'an Buddhist artists, as well as by like-minded artists of other traditions.⁴⁵ In artists who are inwardly divided, the aspect of the psyche that has the function of controlling—associated to the internalized observer-director-judge that Freud called “superego”—tries to control the individual's artistic activity at will, interfering with the Tao's spontaneous creative flow. However, when the artist has become free from the fracture that separates an aspect that is in control from another that is being controlled and thus no longer is inwardly divided, an unobstructed flow of the Tao's spontaneity may manifest, which results in incomparable works of art.⁴⁶ Chuang Tzu said that:⁴⁷

Ch'ui the craftsman could draw circles by hand better than using compasses. His fingers seemed to accommodate se easily to the thing he was working that he did not need to fix his attention. His mental faculties thus remained one (i.e., integrated) and suffered no impediment.

If the craftsman in question had needed to fix his attention on the object that he was working and on the hands with which he was working it, and to control his activity with the attention in question, he would have been as impeded and encumbered as the centipede of the Anglo-Saxon poem:⁴⁸

The centipede was happy, quite,
until the toad in fun
told him: “pray, which leg goes after which?”
which brought his mind to such a pitch
that he fell into a ditch
while thinking how to run.

The artist's self-obstruction, self-impediment or self-encumbering may be proportional to the extent to which she or he is regarded as the only responsible for his or her work and is appraised according to the latter's degree of excellence: the fear—or, in Sartre's terminology, anguish—to err will make the artist more prone to self-obstruction, to the extent to which it may elicit faltering hesitations. These hesitations may be magnified by exposure to the Other's objectifying gaze, which drives the artist to become Being-for-Others⁴⁹—to such an extent that even Zen masters with a certain degree of spiritual realization have been unable to extricate themselves from the self-obstruction begotten by the Other's critical gaze. An example of this is the following anecdote:⁵⁰

Master Kosen drew (in Chinese characters) the words “The First Principle,” which are carved on the gate of the Oaku Temple in Kyoto. He drew them with his brush on a sheet of paper and then they were carved on wood.

A student of the master had mixed the ink for him and had remained standing next to him, watching the master’s calligraphy. This student said “Not so good!” Kosen tried again. The student said “this is worse than the former!” and Kosen tried again.

After attempt number sixty-four, the ink was running out and the student went out to mix more. Left alone, undistracted by the watch of any critical eye, Kosen did one more quick drawing with the remaining ink. When the student returned, he took a good look at this last effort.

“A masterpiece!” he said.

Whoever has become unwaveringly established in the state of Awakening, so that the Tao flows uninterruptedly through her or him, will not be affected by the Other’s gaze and will be able to produce a masterpiece even before the watchful gaze of the most critical and severe of observers.

We have seen that, in the Far East, the fine arts, craftsmanship, ceremonies and martial arts are undertaken as *Tao* or *Do*. Similarly, in the Middle East and in South Asia, craftsmanship has been one of the four Sufi paths to realization. In Tibet, sacred dances—such as *chams*, *mandala* dances and *Dakini* dances—have been practiced as ways of liberation, and the same has happened among the Sufis since Maulana Jalaladdin Rumi adopted the use of *sama*’ and, later on, the *Mevlevi* sect of dancing dervishes was established. In the West, according to George Sorel:⁵¹

In high Antiquity, art had attracted a great number of citizens: the great importance of sacred dances was partly due to the fact that they gathered all citizens as performers; the choirs of singers, the public festivals, derived their value from the same cause.

Sorel understood that the participation in art by the whole of the people is of the greatest importance, but does not seem to have realized that even more important is overcoming the fracture in the psyche into a controlling and a controlled aspect, and thus being free from the self-obstruction that it begets. To keep to a state of integration is far more essential and important for an artist than the mere mastering of a technique (although it is only after a technique has been mastered, that to keep to a state of integration may become the occasion for the manifestation of true art).⁵² The dancer who keeps to such a state flows in such a way that her or his members and the whole of his or her body move at a uniform speed, without ever faltering, for the movement is not interrupted by hesitations, as would be the case if she or he were controlling his or her movements and correcting them as they are performed. What keeps us aghast in a dancer who keeps to a state of integration is not so much his or her technique as the fact that the spontaneity of the Tao is flowing through the performer—we are kept aghast by the flow of the Absolute condition, before which our petty individual personality remains in awe and may momentarily come to nothing. Even in our days, when we *sincerely* admire someone’s art, we do so because the art in question is manifesting to a greater or lesser degree the Tao’s spontaneity and may allow us to have some glimpse of the latter.⁵³

A Brief Reference to India— Inseparability of connotation and denotation in Tantric sculpture

An in-depth analysis of Indian art would deserve a treatment far beyond the scope of this essay—and, moreover, after Coomaraswamy, it would be to some extent superfluous. However, I shall advance some *extremely brief* reflections on a manifestation of Indian art that, in my opinion, shows most clearly the characteristics of primordial art—and yet is very different from Chinese Taoist and Ch’an painting and from Tibetan painting: Tantric sculpture, of which I shall take Khajuraho as a paradigm.

The fact that I chose Tantric sculpture does not mean that I think non-Tantric sculpture and the rest of Indian arts are less valuable. Indian classical music is one of the most elaborate and finest in the whole world. Indian painting—and, in particular, the Buddhist style of painting that achieved its summit in the Ajanta caves (which is very different from the Rajput painting that developed mainly in Maharashtra, from those forms of painting developed mostly by Bhakta Hindus that were used mainly to represent deities such as Krishna, Radha and the Gopis, and from the way of painting developed by the Muslim painters who worked under Moghul patronage)—is also a most outstanding manifestation of the human spirit. The visionary quality of the Ajanta paintings has to do with the combination of composition, color and smoothness of lines, whereas their spiritual message is embodied in the facial expressions and stares of the figures: the inseparability of both elements is the inseparability of connotation and denotation. In turn, Indian sculpture in general is almost always an integral part of the absorbing architectural complexes into which it so organically blends.

Tantric sculpture achieved its peak in Khajuraho, Konarak, Bhuvaneshvar and a few other sites. However, Konarak is near the sea, which caused considerable corrosion to the stone, and Bhuvaneshvar and the other sites are less abundant in sculptures. Khajuraho, instead, is well endowed with statues, and these are relatively well conserved, which makes it far easier to appreciate what I take as the most outstanding feature of the figures: *their facial expressions and stares*. (This statement clearly contradicts Gilles Béguin’s outrageous comment in *L’art indien*, according to which, in the statues of Khajuraho, the ornamental demands for their integration into the architectural complex “explain the clumsy achievement of some details: *smiling, little expressive, stereotyped faces, and conventional jewels*.”)⁵⁴

In the figures of Khajuraho, we have a most outstanding example of the nonduality of connotation and denotation, of message and medium—which is, nonetheless, radically different from the one represented by the forms of Tibetan art we shall consider next.⁵⁵ On one hand, the union of the male and female figures is an illustration both of a central element in the Tantras’ *Sahaja* Path of Enlightenment, and of the state of *Yuganaddha* or “coincident manifestation of the opposites” that is the aim of the Path. On the other hand, the faces and stares of couples are such marvelous expressions of the bliss of non-dual states, and their bodies and postures are so sensual, that by merely contemplating them, the viewer may have access to feelings in which sensuality is inseparable from spirituality—and, eventually, even come to experience the state of *Yuganaddha* the figures represent.

Tibetan Painting—The *Mandala* as a Paradigm of the Inseparability of Connotation and Denotation

In *Die Kunst Tibets*⁵⁶ Heinz E. R. Martin, classified Tibetan painting into (1) visionary; (2) mandalas; (3) contemplative, and (4) didactic—which amounts to classifying it into three of its general, common features, plus one of its varieties. The whole of Tibetan painting, which is one of the most outstanding examples of the nonduality of connotation and denotation, is simultaneously visionary, contemplative, and didactic—whereas some paintings are also mandalas.⁵⁷

All Tibetan paintings are visionary: the use of vivid colors, the *suchness* of clouds, rocks and landscapes in general, the *isness* of some facial expressions and stares, may have an immediate effect on the “Doors of Perception,” suspending the viewer’s judgment and immersing her or him in a state of wonder...⁵⁸ or beyond, in states that may serve as a springboard to the state of *Rigpa'i Yeshe*—the anoxic Gnosis that makes evident the true nature of reality.⁵⁹ All Tibetan paintings are contemplative, in so far as they are used as a support for different practices of visualization and, in some cases, even for bare non-dual, non-conceptual Contemplation. And all Tibetan paintings are didactic, in so far as they impart teachings on the Dharma (e.g., paintings of the Buddhist Wheel of Life), on the lives of masters, on the characteristics of meditation deities, or on the structure of the Dzogchen Path of Awakening. The latter is most outstanding in the paintings that depict mandalas, which are among the most remarkable examples of visionary art and may also be used as an effective support for the practice of Contemplation, understood as “resting in anoxic Gnosis.” And mandalas are also didactic, for they are maps of the Dzogchen process of Enlightenment.

C. G. Jung realized that mandalas which, in dream or hallucination, manifested spontaneously to some neurotic “patients,” were maps showing the road to sanity—a state which in Eastern mysticism is not reduced to the mere remission of neurosis (which Jung correctly understood as potentially healing spontaneous processes), but is conceived as the surpassing of the basic human delusion that has been developing toward its *reductio ad absurdum* as the aeon advances. Jung noted that the center of the *mandala* represents the basic non-duality, non-plurality of both the “physical” Universe and consciousness, whereas the periphery represents the world of duality and plurality—which, insofar as these two features are taken as absolute, self-existing and *given*, is a world of delusion and error.

However, Jung failed to appreciate several of the Dzogchen *mandala*’s multiple levels of meaning. Let us consider a *mandala* depicting (1) The Primordial Buddha in male-female union (Kunzang Yab-Yum) at the center; (2) four fierce, wrathful guardians or dakinis in a circular chasm of fire, who act as doorkeepers at the four gates that allow entrance into the *mandala*’s center, and (3) the normal world of overvalued duality and plurality in the periphery.

(1) The central figure is the Adi or Primordial Buddha—Primordial Awareness or Primordial Awareness in its non-duality, non-plurality, bare non-conceptuality and absence of delusion. (2) The four guardians at the gates represent the dynamic of transition between the center and the periphery. (3) The periphery represents the normal state, in which we are totally deluded: since we are confused,

and since we are confused about the fact that we are confused, we take our judgments and perceptions to be essentially correct.

If we regard these three “zones” of the *mandala* as stages on the Dzogchen path,⁶⁰ they may be explained thus: (1) In the periphery, delusion and contradiction are active but have not been realized as such. (2) In the intermediate zone, represented by the wrathful guardians, delusion and contradiction have been realized as such and have turned into extreme conflict. (3) In the center, delusion and contradiction have dissolved in the anomic Gnosis of absolute, non-dual, undeluded awareness.

The Tibetan term *khil-khor*, which translates the Sanskrit word *mandala*, means center-periphery, and thus expresses the very dynamics the *mandala* represents—a dynamics that may be aptly understood in terms of the etymology of the Sanskrit term given by Tibetan master Pema Karpo: *manda* means “essence” (the absolute, universal essence), whereas *la* means “to accept.” The dynamics of the *mandala* is that of coming to terms with the state represented by the center, which is dreaded by those in the periphery—although, once in the center, there is no longer any acceptance or rejection, for there is no illusion of a separate perceiver who may accept or reject her or his experience.

1.- *The periphery as a stage*

Normal deluded people at the periphery take for absolute truth their sensation of selfhood and their experience of the world as a conglomerate of inherently existing, separate, substantial entities. This is a gross error, for the universe is a continuum of which all entities are particular manifestations—in terms of today’s physics, it is the single four-dimensional energy continuum posited by Einstein, the non-dimensional implicate order beyond space and time and thus beyond divisions posited by David Bohm, the single multidimensional energy field of Superunification Theory, etc. Concepts and words define themselves by *genus proximum et differentiam specificam*, but that which encompasses *all entities* and that *all entities* (are), does not exclude anything and has no contraries—nor is there any wider category that may contain it. *Achintya* or “the unthinkable” is one of the names Mahayana Buddhists gave to this absolute truth that cannot be understood in terms of concepts or expressed in words, but which can certainly be unveiled by a non-conceptual, non-dual anomic Gnosis.

Notwithstanding the above, we experience in terms of concepts the fragments we single out in the universal continuum, and take this experience to be the true nature of the universe. This is the basic delusion that constituted the “Fall” of humankind and that has been progressively developing with the aeon toward its *reductio ad absurdum*—which has almost been achieved in the present ecological crisis that, if no radical change is soon made, will quickly put an end to humankind. This crisis proves that the basic perceptions and ideas on the basis of all human action were delusory.

Normal people, who feel their selfhood to be substantial and absolutely true, are terrified of their own insubstantiality—represented by the center of the *mandala*. Thus, at the peripheral stage, the guardians of the four gates represent the dread of

insubstantiality that keeps people from moving into the center of the *mandala*—a dread that is etymologically expressed by the word *panic*.

Normality is a state of small Time-Space-Knowledge characterized by a slight focus of conscious attention that is very little permeable—necessary for us to take our own selves and all other entities as substantial, and for keeping to our self-image and usual sense of self (which, according to Sartre’s theory of Bad Faith, is the result of the “intentional” occultation of many facts and occurrences, and, according to Freudian theory, is the result of repression by the “subconscious”). The increase of bioenergetic input (Tibetan, *thig-le*; Sanskrit, *kundalini*), widens and renders more “permeable” the focus of the individual’s conscious attention, widening Space-Time-Awareness,⁶¹ but cannot *cause* Enlightenment. In the unprepared individual who clings to the illusion of substantiality, rather than resulting in the unveiling of the *mandala*’s center, it may produce disturbances or induce states of madness.

The word *panic*, which indicates a powerful “irrational” and uncontrollable fear, derives from the god *Pan*—Totality or Wholeness. *Pan* may become patent due to the *pan*-oramification of consciousness related to the increase of bioenergetic input, unveiling the insubstantiality of our selves and thus—since we have been taught to cling to our separate identity and to dread the disappearance of this identity,⁶² and because of the current prevalence of neurosis—unchaining experiences of dread. Also, the widening and permeabilization of conscious attention may allow “ego-dystonic” contents⁶³ into consciousness, threatening the individual’s ego functioning and self-image. Furthermore, panoramification causes whatever pain may manifest, to be experienced by the individual in its full intensity, which unleashes self-catalyzing loops (i.e., positive feedback loops) of pain, anguish and distress.

Thus, to those who are in the *mandala*’s periphery, the guardians represent the dread of the insubstantiality whose realization is represented by the center—i.e., they represent *panic* in the etymological sense of the word. Frightened by the guardians barring the gate to what they take to be a dead-end street leading to an abyss, deluded beings cling to their own delusion—i.e., to the periphery. As expressed in a special context by R. D. Laing, they think that in the direction of the center “there is an abyss, there are wild beasts.”

2.- *The intermediate zone as a stage*

People enter the intermediate zone when they can no longer cling to delusion and feel at ease with it. This zone is characterized by a process of auto-catalysis that leads to the threshold level where, if all conditions are given—including knowledge of the instructions and other favorable conditions—the tension inherent in delusion breaks and the individual “enters” the center.

3.- *The center as a stage or series of stages*

After “entering” the center, a high bioenergetic input should be maintained in order to keep the guardians or wrathful dakinis awake and alert, so that whenever the individual leaves the center he or she will not fall into the tranquility of the periphery and feel at ease in delusion: (the dynamics represented by) the guardians or wrathful

dakinis will catch her or him and the ensuing agitation will work as a reminder to apply the instructions.

Later on, each and every time the individual leaves the center, if a high bioenergetic input is “feeding the guardians or wrathful dakinis,” the dynamics they represent will spontaneously and automatically push her or him into the center.

Finally, once the propensities to leave the center have been neutralized, the person no longer strays from it. Then, the guardians or wrathful dakinis are her or his spontaneous actionless activities, which help Enlighten others—who, however, are no longer perceived as sentient beings to be Enlightened. Though there is no activity of mind, the guardians or wrathful dakinis repel those who are unprepared, making them perceive the Enlightened individual as shocking and raw, and attract those who are ready, creating the conditions for them to move swiftly to the center. The practitioner has become a lama-heruka, shocking like a wrathful deity, and his or her activities are the wrathful dakinis (or guardians).

Thus, the Tibetan *mandala* is at the same time visionary art, contemplative art, and didactic art illustrating the whole of the Dzogchen Path. No better example of the nonduality of connotation and denotation, of medium and message, may be found in the art of painting: the non-dual, non-conceptual state represented by the *mandala*'s center is the very state the ripe individual may have access to through Contemplation of the *mandala*.

The *mandala* principle is central to different mystical traditions of humankind and appears in the literature and the arts of many civilizations. In order to explain this fact, there is no need to establish genetic links between different traditions and civilizations: if Jung's patients could hallucinate or dream of mandalas and thus obtain spontaneous maps of the process they had to undergo, it is clear that all true mystics would naturally be familiar with the principle they represent.

Idries Shah has told the story of the Sufi disciple of Ibn El Arabi who dreamed of Maaruf Kharki surrounded by flames. Thinking that the great master was in hell, in great tribulation he went to see El Arabi for an explanation. The master told him that the flames did not mean Maaruf was in hell, but represented that which he had to go through in order to reach the state of Maaruf—a region of experience that Sufis often call “the chasm of fire.”⁶⁴

Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the *Mandala*

The *mandala* principle is the essence of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, independently of whether or not Asín Palacios is right when he seeks the inspiration for Dante's main work in the Muslim accounts of Prophet Mohammed's Ascension. We have seen that Dante insisted in being didactic and would not accept that forms of art lacking a message could have an inherent value—he could not conceive the absurd idea of art without a message. The structure of the “beyond” as presented in the *Divine Comedy* corresponds quite precisely to the dynamics of the *mandala*. Guided by Virgil, Dante leaves the realm of the living and goes down into hell. According to Gregory Bateson, the “positive feedback loop” that drives the process of experiential *reductio ad absurdum*, and that process itself, are what Freud called *Thanatos* or “death instinct.” Thus, we can say that Dante's entrance into hell means that the contradiction that characterizes the *mandala*'s periphery has turned into

conflict, and that conflict is in the process of developing, blindly and waywardly driven and catalyzed by the *Thanatos*.

Dante's descent into hell toward its lowest circle and his entrance into Purgatory through the opening at the bottom of hell corresponds to the development of conflict toward the threshold at which the occurrence of anoic Gnosis re-orientes the process in an obviously healthy direction, introducing a mechanism of spontaneous interruption of *thanatic* positive feedback loops. Dante cannot have immediate access to Heaven (in the sense of the Tibetan word *namkha*, rather than in that of the Buddhist *deva loka* or *deva gati*), because he has to "purge" or "purify" his deeply ingrained obscurations and defilements through the repeated transformation of contradiction into conflict and the self-liberation of conflict in anoic Gnosis. Yet the process does no longer pertain to hell, because anoic Gnosis unveils Heaven, and since Dante has already had access to It, he knows Purgatory to be the way to Heaven and its suffering not to be eternal, but a purge that he must go through if he is to become established in Heaven. Once in Purgatory, the process is no longer catalyzed solely by *Thanatos*, but also by the Wisdom issuing from the repeated self-liberation of basic contradiction (delusion) and conflict in anoic Gnosis.

Once delusion has been "purged" through its repeated self-liberation in anoic Gnosis, Dante enters Heaven and, ultimately, establishes himself in the *Empireo*—the very center of the *mandala*.⁶⁵

Although the connections of the Khajagan Sufis and the Ismailians, with Dzogchen masters in Central Asia and with Western esoteric orders (beginning with the Templars, who reportedly received teachings from Hassan Ibn El Sabbah and/or his disciples), may tempt one to conceive genetic explanations for the identity of the didactic content in *mandala* paintings and in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, it is more important to keep in mind that all human symbolism issues from a single universal source.

The *Mandala* and the Inseparability of Connotation and Denotation in a Contemporary Work of Art

Art, "the return from abstraction to life," (should become) the guardian of man's "immortal" part against the contemporary forces of alienation, (embodied in) the empire of abstract science or (in) the "banality of comfort."

André Reszler⁶⁶

In my book *Individuo - sociedad - ecosistema* and in my articles "Las aventuras del fabuloso hombre-máquina," "La escritura, una visión mítica," and "La escritura: visión mítica de la evolución de los medios y sus mensajes,"⁶⁷ I dedicated many reflections to the unidirectional structure of the mass media in general and of the audiovisual media in particular. In fact, the mere existence of media such as TV is antidemocratic, for—inverting the intention behind Mc Luhan's words—the message is the medium, and if the medium is one that transmits (manipulated and manipulating) information but does not allow the receiver to reply, its message—i.e., what it teaches us—is that we must receive orders—explicit, or implicit in a vision of facts—but never dispute them. Thus, the mass media are crudely instrumental means of manipulation, rather than—as Mc Luhan pretended—means of global integration

that would turn the world into a “global village.” As noted, among others, by Arthur Eichler:⁶⁸

The idea of the ‘global village’ based on the modern mass media has always been a spurious concept, for the essence of a village is that all communication must go in both directions, or involve various people at the same time, all giving and receiving. A one-directional communication can never take the place of a true communal or social culture.

According to Habermas, the appearance of the mass media represented a triumph of *communicative action* (which must always be structured as a subject-subject relation) over *instrumental action* (which is structured as a subject-object relation)—and, only later on, the media became means of manipulation. This could not be to a greater degree untrue; whether we consider the *origin* or the *structure* of the mass media, we have to conclude that they are wholly instrumental. If we exclude the *Acta Diurna* supposedly instituted by Julius Cæsar and other non-commercial organs, and we agree that newspapers appeared in 1609 when they arose as commercial enterprises in Germany, we have to concede that they were invented by the bourgeoisie, not only as a commercial enterprise, but as crudely instrumental means to manipulate the masses and thereby seize and keep political, economic and social power. In order to justify the “liberal” project, both in the economic and the political fields, Habermas—the Frankfurt philosopher surreptitiously converted to capitalistic liberalism—had to arbitrarily define the concept of *communicative action*, widening and distorting it meaning by establishing that, if the receiver of the messages of one-directional media *willingly* accepts the overt or covert judgments contained in those messages, that is “communicative action.” However, to Habermas, *interest* determines knowledge to a great extent—and the interest of those who created the mass media was not two-directional or multi-directional communication, but the one-directional diffusion of messages, which *as a structure* is eminently instrumental. In fact, the mass media have had a crucial role in establishing instrumental relations in the human psyche and in turning human beings into *means*.

Habermas has proposed that we set well-defined limits to separate the field of “communicative action”—which he claims must be that of the relations between human beings—and the field of “instrumental action”—which he claims must be that of the relations between human beings and their natural environment (the third field posited by Habermas, which is that of “emancipatory action,” in spite of being the most important one, will not be considered here). In his view, the field of “instrumental action” must be characterized by instrumental subject-object relations, whereas the field of “communicative action” must not be characterized by such relations, but by communicative, subject-subject relations. Habermas is overlooking two key facts: (a) Instrumental dealings with Nature in terms of subject-object relations—as foretold by Chief Seattle—has led humankind to the brink of extinction; and (b) Since the two kinds of relations contemplated by Habermas are based on computations of what in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* of 1895 Freud called “primary process” (associated to the functioning of the brain’s right hemisphere), once instrumental action appears, there is no way to keep it confined within the field of the relations between human beings and their environment and

thus prevent the objectification of human beings and the transference of instrumental relations to the interpersonal realm.⁶⁹ Thus, the double consequence of Habermas' thesis would be the continuation of the rapid, sustained destruction of the environment that we face—and, therefore, the final destruction of humankind—and the conservation of the exploitation and oppression of human beings for as long as we survive.

Though his flirtation with National Socialism sheds doubts on Heidegger's enmity towards totalitarianism, oppression and manipulation, the Black Forest philosopher seems to have understood that, once technology causes instrumental relations to develop, these cannot be kept to a given field of relations. In fact, a subject surrounded by mere objects ends up objectifying the subjects themselves. This is why Heidegger says that...⁷⁰

...modern science and the totalitarian State are, at the same time, consequences and sequences in the essence of technology.

Nevertheless, like all negative entities and events arising as a result of the process of the *reductio ad absurdum* of delusion, the mass media and the book industry have a positive function: in spite of the fact that the homogeneous, one-directional diffusion of messages on a global level cannot produce a global village, it can allow for the first time the worldwide dissemination of the doctrines and systems aimed at achieving both individual and social liberation—just as a gem can be entangled in a venomous thicket.⁷¹ The media have already furthered the development of delusion and caused the basic contradiction to turn into conflict on a global level; now we must turn them into the vehicle for the worldwide dissemination of the doctrines that would allow for the resolution of conflict and the transition to a new evolutionary stage. Once this transition has been achieved, we must get rid of those media.

And, among the various ways in which the media in question may help us achieve the impending revolution in our relational/cognitive structures, is by becoming the means for the liberating, Enlightening art of our time—an art with a function similar to that of *The Divine Comedy* in its time, or of mandalas in traditional Tibet, and so on. However, in our time we are for the first time in history facing a life-or-death crossroads which offers us a narrow path to survival leading to the New Age of wisdom, equality, freedom, plenitude and spirituality, and many ample and well-built roads to rapid self-destruction amid generalized, ever growing suffering. This introduces a further demand on any true art: it must have a political function in helping us avoid the roads to self-destruction and take the path to survival and the New Age. In short, the true art of our age must also be activist.

The media that define a give time—as the one-directional, manipulative, deprivation and hunger producing mass media define ours—are most likely to become the means for the greatest works of art produced in that time. And, in fact, the prevailing audiovisual media have already given us some masterpieces which fulfill all of the above conditions for the art of our time, and which range among the greatest works of art of the transitional age in which we find ourselves. One of the most outstanding audiovisual masterpieces of our time and the one I shall use as an example of the art of the time in question, is the acclaimed movie called *Baraka*.⁷²

In fact, if the *Divine Comedy* is the *mandala* of European literature, *Baraka* is the *mandala* of the so-called “seventh art,”⁷³ and a pioneer in a new, rapidly developing class of movies and videos.⁷⁴ The movie’s success in illustrating the *mandala*-principle and its perfect coincidence of connotation and denotation, message and medium, content and form, could only have been made possible by the unsurpassable screenplay, direction, photography and music which blended into the movie—and, above all, by the masterful integration into a single whole of all of these and the other elements making the work.

The Center of the Mandala and Its Imitations

The movie illustrates the condition represented by the center of the *mandala* and conditions that are somehow “near” to that represented by the *mandala*’s center, with a wide gamma of images—which range from that of the monkey which seems to find himself in a state of deep relaxation at the beginning of the movie, through the rituals of so-called “primitive peoples” and of the Balinese and other Eastern civilizations, to the images of mystics pertaining to various traditions while they remain in states of Contemplation and/or they perform traditional rituals.

In general, all that represents the *mandala*’s center or states which imitate the condition in question—the “primitive” and Eastern rituals, the mystics in Contemplation and/or performing ceremonies, as well as many apparently pristine landscapes—is presented in a such a way as to induce analogous states in the viewer, and could hardly be more effective in achieving this end. In fact, I cannot think of many contemporary works of art with the visionary power of *Baraka*; the images are filmed, processed and edited so that they will alter the viewer’s perception, allowing her or him to experience states analogous or similar to the ones that the movie is illustrating. Thus the indivisibility of connotation and denotation, of message and medium, or content and form, could hardly be more striking.

The Periphery of the Mandala

The periphery of the *mandala*, and in particular the *reductio ad absurdum* of the peripheral condition in the state of extreme imbalance which the Hopi American Indians call *ko-yaa-nis-qatsi*⁷⁵—i.e., our present psychological and social state and, in general, the global ecological crisis—is represented by a series of ugly, somber, depressing, anguishing, destructive, polluted views of our civilization, and may perhaps be condensed in the serial, lifeless, expressionless face of a passenger of an underground train (which I guessed to be in Tokyo).

The Periphery Viewed from the Center

However, the movie does not merely set up a contrast between ugly, depressing and disgusting views depicting the condition that the Hopis call *ko-yaa-nis-qatsi*, and the mind-altering views representing the *mandala*’s center and the various states that imitate this condition (in which, as we have seen, connotation and denotation are inseparable). The Chinese Hua Yen school of Buddhism divides reality into four Dharmadhatus, which are (1) that of *shih* or phenomena, (2) that of *li*

or Principle, (3) that of *li-shih-wu-ai* or coincident manifestation and nonobstruction of Principle and phenomena, and (4) that of *shih-shih-wu-ai* or coincident manifestation and nonobstruction of the different phenomena among themselves. The *mandala*'s periphery is the overvalued perception of the dharmadhatu of *shih* or phenomena, which absolutely shuns any glimpse of the dharmadhatu of *li* or Principle—so that phenomena are taken to be inherently existing substances. The dharmadhatu of *li-shih-wu-ai*, instead, consists in the perception of phenomena from the condition of the center. Again and again, *Baraka* shows us the peripheral condition of *ko-yaa-nis-qatsi* in such a way as to induce in us states that are near, or which somehow imitate, the condition represented by the *mandala*'s center. Thus, we view the peripheral condition of *ko-yaa-nis-qatsi* from the condition represented by the *mandala*'s center, or from states that imitate this condition. This is most important, because it is the reason why the movie does not lead us to reject an aspect of our experience and of our world—which would affirm and sustain our illusory division and separateness, at the core of the peripheral condition of small space-time-knowledge—but helps us keep to the *mandala*'s center and integrate all wayward elements into it by allowing us to perceive the periphery from the amplexity of the center. This helps us to overcome dualities and dichotomies instead of reinforcing them, as often happens when individuals who lack the necessary wisdom produce supposed works of art representing the prevailing state of affairs.⁷⁶

The Movie's Political Message and Philosophy of History

Baraka is not only about the change of consciousness that constitutes the “internal,” individual *conditio sine qua non* both of survival and of the inauguration of a New Age. The movie is also about the need for a radical, total transformation of our way of living—ranging from the political, through the social and the economic, to the cultural and spiritual aspects of human organization. In fact, I can hardly conceive of a more effective denouncement of the prevailing culture of death, of ecological devastation, of the exploitation and inequality that makes the exploiters into lifeless androids and the exploited into subhuman debris, of the social, economic and cultural system that turns its members into hungry ghosts and denizens of hell, and of the political system which perpetrates bondage by making it pose as democratic freedom.

However, the political activism of *Baraka* is not limited to the denouncement of the prevailing state of affairs. The movie also gives us the keys to find the direction of the impending transformation that is the condition of our survival and of the inauguration of the New Age: the breathtaking views of apparently pristine landscapes, the integrated psychological condition of “primitive” peoples, the “higher” psychological integration of the mystics of various cultures—all of this is showing the way to the New Age.

Moreover, there is a whole philosophy of history—identical, similar or analogous to the one at the root of this paper—implicit in *Baraka*. The movie helps us realize that “primitive” peoples possess a considerable degree of **wholeness**, **wholesomeness** and **holiness**—i.e., of effective integration—and at the same time shows that, the more a civilization “evolves” in the direction in which the prevailing worldwide civilization has evolved, the more advanced the condition of *ko-yaa-nis-*

qatsi. However, this does not result in a pessimistic vision of the present and future of humankind; on the contrary, the movie implicitly and elegantly calls for the restoration of the primordial order—as our state of life itself “calls for another way of living.”

Art for a New Age

We have seen that the superhighways that, according to the prevailing ideologies, would lead us into a technological paradise, actually lead to an ever-increasing hell, our degeneration to “sub-human” levels and, ultimately, the rapid extinction of our species and of most of the ecosystem. Their core is human delusion as we know it.

The unpaved path of reintegration with the rest of the ecosystem is the one that might grant our survival and prevent the further degeneration that would cause our species to lose all that is characteristically human. If taken immediately, while there is still time, this path would lead us into the New Age of spirituality, equality, freedom and plenitude envisaged by the Utopians of the past—but which in our time is bound to become *En-topic*, as it constitutes the very condition of survival.

If all evils actually issue from ego-delusion and the selfishness it implies, and when we overcome the delusion in question we realize that our own body is in truth the whole universe and all life-forms in it, then when ego-delusion is overcome by humankind, the whole universe, with all its life-forms, will be taken care of by all of us as our own body.

Now, if each and every member of society got *totally* rid of delusion and of *all traces* of delusion, would the ensuing “superhumankind” still have the need for artistic expression? If no one experienced tensions to liberate, wouldn’t the impulse to artistic expression leading to the production of works of art disappear altogether? Would we continue to have the need for artistic expression even in such a degree of perfection? Wouldn’t society itself vanish altogether—just like, according to some Tibetan legends, would have happened to the kingdom of Shambhala after all of its subjects became fully Enlightened?⁷⁷

At any rate, we can be certain that the reductio ad absurdum of human basic delusion, and of the prevailing social, economic, political, cultural and technological forms, would result in the dissolution of the distinction between work and art. In fact, in the ensuing communitarian, harmonic, steady society, the creative spontaneity of the Tao would produce works of art incomparably finer and more beautiful than those produced in our time.

The art of the New Age would no doubt possess all the characteristics of primordial art that have been listed in this paper, as well as whatever specific requirements the New Age would beget—among which *might* be included many of the requirements foreseen by several of the utopian and non-violent Anarchist thinkers of the last two or three centuries.

We could most likely expect the dissolution of the boundaries between the artist and the common worker, and between art and productive work, as foreseen by William Morris, among others. And, since concepts are defined by contrast with their opposites, the collapse of the distinction between work and art would cause the very notion of art to fade away.

Likewise, the art of the future will probably transcend the dichotomy between a “creator” (or an “imitator,” if we think *mimesis* should be more important than *poiesis*) and a set of “viewers” or “receivers,” which still plagues the masterpieces of our time—including the ones which I used as examples of the truest art of our time. In fact, art must be revolutionary not only in its message and content, or in the coincidence between these and the medium and form of expression, but also in its *structure*—and even in the artist’s *state of mind* at the time of producing the work. Therefore, artistic forms of expression would ultimately have to cease being one-directional, with the active “creator” at one side of the medium and a relatively passive “receiver” at the other end.⁷⁸ In fact, if such dichotomies—and with them all other dichotomies—are to be overcome, right from the present time artistic expression will have to begin transcending them. This is not easy, for collective, transient art forms such as the happening, the multimedia, the event and so on do not seem to have the liberating powers of true art, which I have attempted to describe in this paper.⁷⁹

The prevailing, dualistic structure of the arts is related to the drive to produce a work that will last for posterity, immortalizing its “creator.” And just as the art of the New Age will most likely do away with the dichotomy between producer and consumer, it will most certainly be bereft of the wayward drive in question—which is a function of ego-delusion and of an individualistic, parceled society marked by “right wing institutions” like the Family, Private Property, the State, the School, the Mass Media, the Jail, the Psychiatric Ward, the Army and so on and on.⁸⁰ Such drives could not even be conceived if delusion and the institutions in question (which develop interdependently with it) were overcome to a greater or lesser extent, as it will necessarily happen if we take the path of survival leading to the New Age, rather than keeping ahead on the road of extinction and degeneration. Once delusion has been reduced to absurdity, either it is rapidly overcome or else it rapidly destroys us.

We may also envisage that, in the New Age, the reproductive type of art criticized by William Godwin may come to an end, and the pure *poiesis* of Nowness no longer gives place to the mere performance of musical or theatrical works written in the past. In fact, in some of the communities in which art has been an anonymous product, music has been based on improvisation on the basis of a given theme, rather than being confined to the mere reproduction of rigid schemes conceived by long-gone musicians. If every note that arises is absolute plenitude, joy and bliss, and the creator is free from ego during creation, there will be no drive to write down the music that arises spontaneously at every moment, and the desire for recognition and illusory immortality will no longer arise.

However, it is also possible that the return to cyclic time that would follow the *reductio ad absurdum* of progress and of the illusion of lineal time, will allow for the *ritual repetition* of significant ceremonies liable to induce experiences of timelessness—which might feature music, performances and perhaps even pre-established dialogues.⁸¹ At any rate, there can be no doubt that the art of the future will be free from the thirst for innovation that characterized it during the last centuries. Once the production of artistic monuments to individuality is overcome, there will be no longer the problem denounced by Oscar Wilde:⁸²

The public uses the great classics of a country to stop the progress of art. It degrades them by transforming them into manifestations of authority. It uses them as though they were wooden rattles in order to prevent the free expression of beauty under new forms.

Yet this does not mean that art should seek originality above everything, constantly searching for new forms of expression and trying not to repeat the forms of the past. One of the most famous exponents of traditional Chinese painting noted that, throughout his whole life, he had unsuccessfully sought originality; when he finally realized he had achieved it, he realized that he “had been painting the Tao of the ancients.” Originality does not consist in inventing totally new forms of expression, but in undertaking the work of art in an unintentional state that is unconditioned by the past—such as the one that Mahayana, Vajrayana and Atiyana Buddhists call “Enlightenment,” and which is also the aim of the Taoist, the Sufi, some Hindu Tantric and Bhakta, and other mystical teachings of humankind. The truly original work of art is the one that arises through the Tao’s spontaneity, without premeditation or conditioning, and in which no illusory mental subject arises to seemingly destroy the **wholeness**, **wholesomeness** and **holiness** of our original condition.

Since in the future Golden Age or Age of Truth, the artificial boundaries that presently separate art and life would have dissolved, it seems appropriate to consider the words by D. T. Suzuki, the Japanese professor who popularized Zen Buddhism in the West:⁸³

We cannot all be expected to be scientists, but we are so constituted by nature that we can all be artists—not, indeed, artists of special kinds, such as painters, sculptors, musicians, poets, etc., but artists of life. This profession, “artist of life,” may sound new and quite odd, but in point of fact we are all born artists of life and, not knowing it, most of us fail to be so and the result is that we make a mess of our lives, asking, “what is the meaning of life?,” “Are we not facing a blank nothingness?,” “After living seventy-eight, or even ninety, years, where do we go? Nobody knows,” etc., etc. I am told that most modern men and women are neurotic on this account. But the Zen-man can tell them that they all have forgotten that they are born artists, creative artists of life, and that as soon as they realize this fact and truth they will all be cured of neurosis or psychosis or whatever name they have for their trouble.

What then is meant by being an artist of life?

Artists of any kind, as far as we know, have to use one instrument or another to express themselves, to demonstrate their creativity in one form or another. The sculptor has to have stone or wood or clay and the chisel or some other tools to impress his ideas on the material. But an artist of life has no need of going out of himself. All the material, all the implements, all the technical skill that are ordinarily required are with him from the time of his birth, perhaps even before his parents gave him birth. This is unusual, extraordinary, you may exclaim. But when you think about this for a while you will, I am sure, realize what I mean. If you do not, I will be more explicit and tell you this: the body, the physical body we all have, is the material, corresponding to the painter’s canvas, the sculptor’s wood or stone or clay, the musician’s violin or flute, the singer’s vocal cords. And everything that is attached to the body, such as the hands, the feet, the trunk of the body, the head, the viscera, the nerves, the cells, thoughts, feelings, senses—everything, indeed, that goes to make up

the whole personality—is both the material on which and the instruments with which the person molds his creative genius into conduct, into behavior, into all forms of action, indeed into life itself. To such a person his life reflects every image he creates out of the inexhaustible source of the unconscious. To such, his every deed expresses originality, creativity, his living personality. There is in it no conventionality, no conformity, no inhibitory motivation. He moves just as he pleases. His behavior is like the wind which bloweth as it listeth. He has no self encased in his fragmentary, limited, restrained, egocentric existence. he is gone out of this prison. One of the great Zen masters of the T'ang says: "With a man who is master of himself wherever he may be found he behaves truly to himself." This man I call the true artist of life.

His Self has touched the unconscious, the source of infinite possibilities. His is "no-mind." Says St. Augustine, "Love God and do what you will." This corresponds to the poem of Bunan, the Zen master of the seventeenth century:

While alive
be a dead man,
thoroughly dead;
and act as you will
and all is good.

To love God is to have no self, to be of no-mind, to become "a dead man," to be free from the constrictive motivations of consciousness. This man's "Good morning" has no human element of any kind of vested interest. He is addressed and he responds. He feels hungry and eats. Superficially, he is a natural man, coming right out of nature with no complicated ideologies of modern civilized man. But how rich his inward life is! Because it is in direct communion with the great unconscious.

When Suzuki speaks of "loving God," he is using the terms accepted by our culture; in truth, Ch'an and Zen Buddhism does not posit the existence of any god. According to Ch'an and Zen, all is the Absolute, Suchness (*tathata*), the Tao. Nonetheless, "fallen" human beings, who believe themselves to be separate and autonomous individuals, conceive the Absolute as an all-powerful, supernatural and otherworldly person external to themselves.

What Suzuki has said might be even better understood if we apply to art what the following aphorism of the *Huainanzi* says of happiness:⁸⁴

Those who may reach the point at which they do not derive pleasure from anything, discover that they can then enjoy everything. There being nothing they do not enjoy, their happiness is paramount (supreme?).

¹ For a far more comprehensive and exhaustive exposition of the aesthetic theory presented in these pages, see Capriles, Elías (2000b), *Estética primordial y arte visionario. Un enfoque cíclico-evolutivo comparado*. Mérida, Venezuela, Publicaciones del Grupo de Investigación en Estudios de Asia y Africa (GIEAA)/CDCHT-ULA. In the near future, an English version, revised and enlarged, will be produced.

² This conception of the degenerative evolution and history of humankind was common to Chinese Taoism, Tibetan Bön, Indian Shivaism, Persian Zurvanism and the Greek Dionysian tradition, among other closely related religions. For an account of the unity of Indian Shivaism, the Greek Dionysian tradition and the Egyptian cult of Osiris see Daniélou, Alain (1979; Spanish 1987), *Shiva y Dionisos*. Barcelona, Kairós. For the unity of these traditions, Tibetan Bön, Persian Zurvanism and Chinese Taoism, see (1) Capriles, Elías (2000a), *Budismo y dzogchén. La doctrina del Buda y el vehículo supremo del budismo tibetano*. Vitoria (Spain), Ediciones La Llave; and (2) Capriles, Elías (2000b), *Estética primordial y arte visionario. Un enfoque cíclico-evolutivo comparado*. Mérida, Venezuela, Publicaciones del Grupo de Investigación en Estudios de Asia y Africa (GIEAA)/CDCHT-ULA.

For various expositions of the relations that obtained between Western and Eastern Eurasia in the most remote (pre-Indo-European, pre-Semitic) past, and a contrast between the ancient agricultural civilizations of Eurasia (including the Dravidian, the Elamite, the Sumerian, the Minoic, the Himalayan, the Chinese, the Persian and other civilizations), on the one hand, and the Indo-European and Semitic nomadic peoples, on the other, see, among other texts: (1) Gimbutas, Marija (1989), *Il linguaggio della dea. Mito e culto della dea madre nell'Europa neolitica*. Longanesi, Milan. English version: *The Language of the Goddess*. London, Thames & Hudson. (2) Gimbutas, Marija (Spanish 1991), *Dioses y diosas de la vieja Europa del 7000 al 3500 a.C.* Madrid, Edit. Itsmo. (3) Eisler, Riane (1987), *The Chalice and the Blade. Our History, Our Future*. San Francisco, Harper & Row. (4) Bocchi, Gianluca and Mauro Ceruti (1993), *Origini di storie*. Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore.

³ According to the philosophy of history at the root of this work, the particularly grave and definitive conflicts that we confront and the even graver conflicts to come are the tangible results of the experiential *reductio ad absurdum* of delusion—i.e., of the basic human contradiction—achieved through the evolution and history of humankind. Only the dissolution of the basic human contradiction will result in the dissolution of the contradictions issuing from it, and prevent the appearance of new contradictions and of the conflicts issuing from them.

As we know, the method of verification through *reductio ad absurdum* consists in the logical development of a thesis until the contradictions that may lie hidden in it become apparent; if contradictions appear, the thesis will have proven false and therefore non-functional. The concept of an experiential *reductio ad absurdum* allowing for the transcendence of a given state of affairs was used by Gregory Bateson (Bateson, Gregory [1972], *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. New York: Ballantine Books) in order to explain a process whereby an individual can overcome a state of psychological imbalance and suffering, and achieve greater sanity. The process in question is not a mere reasoning whose only consequence is the *intellectual* knowledge that a given premise was mistaken. Rather, it is a process occurring in the experience of human beings, which develops until functioning on the basis of the original “premise”—which is not merely a postulate, but a state and a functioning of the psyche—becomes impossible or untenable, showing *in the individual's experience* that the “premise” in question *does not work*. Then, the experience of the person who lived the process of *reductio ad absurdum* may cease being founded on the refuted “premise,” and suffer such a radical transformation that we can speak of an “inner revolution.”

Here we are not concerned with the individual or psychiatric aspect of the experiential *reductio ad absurdum*—which was the one described by Bateson—but with its evolutionary and historical function, which leads humankind, through a progressive worsening of the state of affairs, to the transcendence of delusion and the transition to a new evolutionary stage. Later on we shall see how contradiction develops progressively during human evolution and history, until it reveals itself as such and turns into conflict, and finally it may collapse, once it has been proven that it *does not work*.

For the time being, it is important to note that the process of experiential *reductio ad absurdum* is possible thanks to a positive feedback loop that Gregory Bateson identified with the *Thanatos* or so-called “death instinct.” This loop causes the individual to attempt, with ever greater momentum, to repeat and make ever more pronounced the experience of suffering and the functional obstruction that characterize the most extreme and frustrating manifestations of delusion, until it is proven that the latter *does not work* and so it may be given up—or, rather, until the functioning and state of mind to be overcome reach the level where *they break up*.

The delusion that is undergoing an experiential *reductio ad absurdum* with the wayward evolution of humankind may be understood in terms of Spinoza's concepts of “incompleteness” and “abstraction;” it may be said (as did Hegel in regard to his own conception of delusion) that it reveals

itself as such, *through the contradictions it generates* [however, in *Individuo - sociedad - ecosistema* (Mérida, Consejo de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Los Andes, 1994) and in “La inversión hegeliana de la historia” (Revista *Filosofía*, Maestría de Filosofía de la Universidad de Los Andes, No. 4), I showed that delusion can only reveal itself as such through the contradictions it generates, if—contrary to Hegel’s thesis—reality is not self-contradictory and contradiction issues from confusing the conceptual map with the territory of the *given*]. Delusion implies, and grows with, the objectification, by human beings, of the segments their mental functions single out in the living Whole, and the attribution of substance to the segments in question.

Human delusion arises when what we call “our mind”—the “superficial” segment of the Holistic Awareness inherent in the Universal Essence—becomes unaware of most of the Cognitive Totality, and becomes unaware also of the fact that itself and its objects are but manifestations, appearances, functions and segments of Universal, Holistic Awareness. In other words, dualistic, fragmentary consciousness feels separate from the Undivided Totality of Awareness—of which it is a function, an appearance and a segment—and, *unaware* of that Totality, obtains only fragmentary perceptions that deform the *given* but which are taken as *given*.

Thus, “incompleteness” and “abstraction” are the result of mental functions performing at least two fundamental operations of *abstraction* and creation: (a) they *abstract* from the Totality a segment of Awareness and give rise to the appearance of a subject of knowledge and action, identifying the latter with the abstracted segment and causing it to feel different and separate from the Single Energy Field, the Implicate Order or however we conceive Totality, and to feel autonomous and independent; (b) they *abstract* segments of the Totality from which the subject feels separate, isolating them and giving rise to the appearance that the abstracted segments are entities *in themselves* isolated and separate. The subject that experiences the results of the above two operations is under delusion, for it believes it is thoroughly grasping the true character of the *given* when in fact it is obtaining but a series of *abstracted*, fragmentary, *incomplete* and distorting experiences.

Now, as soon as consciousness feels separate from Totality and from the plenitude inherent in it, it experiences itself as *lack of plenitude*, and feels an uncontrollable need to fill that lack. If the prevailing culture possesses no means to contain the drive to fill the lack and check its development—and, worse still, if that drive is encouraged by all means, as happens in our culture—it will bolt and the individual will try to fill her or his feeling of lack by countless means, all of them extremely harmful to the ecosystem.

The mental functions of the individuals experiencing the lack, single out, conceive and substantiate numberless entities out of the Totality from which they feel separate and which they are unable to grasp as such. The entities thus abstracted are then endowed with greater or lesser value according to the degree to which individuals imagine—or, in our culture, to which they are made to believe—that their use, consumption or possession will fill their lack. Thus, individuals could try to fill their lack by possessing and consuming “entities endowed with value” (in Heidegger’s words, *Werthehaftete Dinge*), and thus consume the world. Also, they could try to fill their lack, overcome the sensation of powerlessness before the flow of experience, or assert their freedom before the Other, by obtaining “material” power, and destroying the ecosystem and/or oppressing others through its abuse. Or else they could try to get others to admire and value them by presenting themselves as the embodiment of the qualities they admire and/or endowing themselves with the possessions that they value—assuming anti-ecological values and consuming the planet with their cancerous acquisitiveness. And so on, *ad nauseam*.

The paradox is that the more an individual tries to fill her or himself with objects, with pleasure or with the value others project on him or her, the more will that individual assert her or himself as lack-of-objects, lack-of-pleasure, lack-of-value, etc., and thus the more the sensation of lack will increase. This causes individuals to try to fill the lack with ever greater impetus, and thus to feel ever emptier, more unhappy and more dissatisfied, and become ever more dangerous to the health of the ecosystem.

A society of individuals of the kind described above in the long run becomes lethal to the global ecosystem. It is unaware that the world and the universe are an integrated Whole, and that the “parts” we can abstract within that Whole are segments in a web of interrelations and interconnections; therefore, if a society of this kind manages to get sufficient power to be able to interfere with the functioning of the global ecosystem, it can destroy the latter.

According to the approach of systems theory, ecosystems, social systems and organisms—including cells and organs from those organisms—

“...are wholes whose specific structures arise from the interactions and interdependence of their parts. The activity of systems involves a process known as transaction—the simultaneous and mutually interdependent interaction between multiple components. Systemic properties are destroyed when a system is dissected, either physically or theoretically, into isolated elements. Although we can discern individual parts in any system, the nature of the whole is always different from the mere sum of its parts.”

When, perceptually and theoretically, human beings dissect the system, they no longer grasp the interdependence of its parts. If they are moved by the thirst that we have been considering and have obtained enough technological power to physically dissect the system, they will do so, destroying the parts that they feel threatening or unpleasant and/or tearing off the parts that they want to possess or consume, or that they would like to have elsewhere. Thus “abstraction”—in the sense of “abstracting segments from the whole where they belong”—and “incompleteness”—in the sense of “fragmentation”—in human experience can lead to the destruction of the system in which human beings are embedded and of which they are parts.

This shows how is it that error/delusion—which, as we have seen, according to Spinoza consists in “incompleteness and abstraction”—reveals itself as such through the contradictions it produces. There is an obvious contradiction between the aims that we pursued when we developed our technological project—greater plenitude, increased comfort, further happiness, more security, etc.—and what we actually achieved: an increase in environmental, social, economic, political, cultural and other contradictions, which has made our lives ever more unpleasant and has brought us to the verge of extinction.

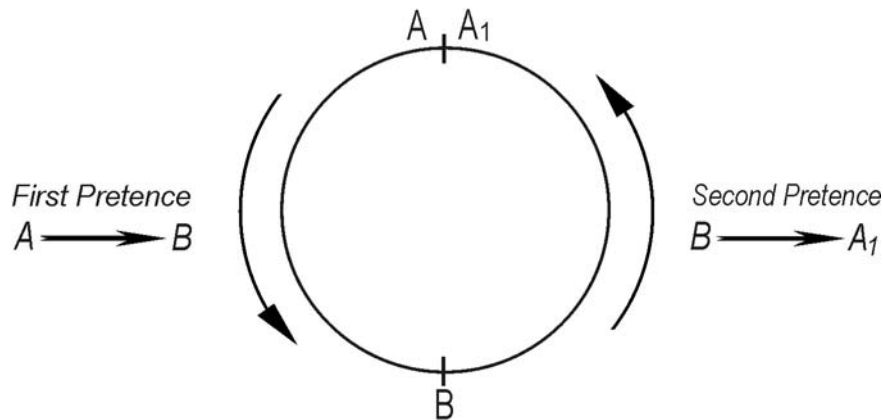
According to Hegel’s works, the most perfect religion and culture produced by the development of Mind are those of the German philosopher’s own time and place. The State—the ideal of which is for Hegel the Prussian State of his time—is the earthly manifestation of the divinity; it is the concrete universal; the place where objective Mind, having overcome the opposition between family and civil society, comes to full realization; the point where objective Mind stops and rests. In the same way—as we have seen—according to the *Phenomenology of Mind* the increase of alienation, fragmentation and delusion throughout human evolution and history is a process of perfecting of Mind, of increment of wholeness and of progressive reduction of alienation. Let us consider in greater detail some elements of this inversion.

Hegel affirms that we must overcome the vision that, upon seeing a tree, loses sight of the forest, and thus reach wholeness. This, to Hegel, means overcoming the alienation of the subject in regard to the object, so that the former recognizes itself in the latter—or, more exactly, so that self-consciousness recognizes itself in Nature. According to the *Phenomenology*, self-consciousness is an achievement that must be conserved: Hegel refused to see that self-consciousness, as overvalued-ideation-of-self (whose nucleus is what Sartre called *Being-for-Itself*), is in truth one of the most basic manifestations and the pivotal element of delusion—i.e., of the root both of our present predicament and of the unhappy consciousness. Thus, by insisting on the conservation and development of self-consciousness, Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is saying that delusion must be conserved and perfected toward its most extreme expression, which is reached when self-consciousness “recognizes itself in the external world” and believes it has overcome error/alienation and achieved wholeness, realization and reintegration. Thus, what Hegel actually proposed was that an original *phenomenological negation* (a concept that I have explained in my book *Individuo - sociedad - ecosistema* and in my article “La inversión hegeliana de la historia”) should be conserved and “surpassed” in a second *phenomenological negation*. This means that the author of the *Phenomenology* believed that authenticity should be achieved through the mechanism that Sartre called *bad faith*, and that Ronald D. Laing called *elusion* and represented as a “spiral of pretenses.”

Bad faith is self-deceit, which Sartre explained as a “double deceit”—in one and the same operation, I deceive myself, and deceive myself about the fact that I am deceiving myself—and which can be explained as an “infinite deceit”—for in that operation I am also deceiving myself about the fact that I am deceiving myself about the fact that I am deceiving myself... *ad infinitum*.

Laing explained as follows the mechanism of *elusion* that he represented as a “spiral of pretenses:”

“Elusion is a relation in which one pretends oneself away from one’s original self: then pretends oneself back from this pretense so as to appear to have arrived back at the starting point. A double pretense simulates no pretense. The only way to “realize” one’s original state is to forego the first pretense, but once one adds a second pretense to it, as far as I can see, there is no end to the series of possible pretenses. I am. I pretend I am not. I pretend I am. I pretend I am not pretending to be pretending...



“The positions A and A, on the perimeter of the circle are separated by an impermeable barrier which is thinner and more transparent than one can imagine. Begin at A and move towards B. Instead of going back in a clockwise direction to A, continue in an anti-clockwise direction to point A., A and A, are ‘so near and yet so far’. They are so close that one says: ‘Is not A, as good as A, if it is indistinguishable from A?’” [Laing, Ronald D. (1961/1969), *Self and Others*. London, Tavistock (hard cover, *The Self and the Others*), and Harmondsworth, Pelican (paperback, *Self and Others*).]

In truth, one does not acknowledge that one has arrived at a state indistinguishable from A, but manages to believe that one has *truly* arrived at A, and will never accept that the state one has arrived at is not A. What happens is that, in the operation of pretense, one has also pretended not to be pretending (and so on, *ad infinitum*).

The operation described by Laing explains the *phenomenological double negation* that plagues Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind*. *Self-consciousness* is the culminating point in the process of *denying that one is the Totality that (is) our Essence (-as-basis)*; that is, in the negation that excludes from the “I” all that is not the subject or noetic pole of knowledge and what—in Sartre’s language—it *becomes* upon establishing a link of being with the object-for-others indicated by an individual’s name (becoming, in Sartre’s language, *Being-for-Others*) or else with a self-image. This *first negation* can be represented as point B in Laing’s diagram. Then, *conserving self-consciousness*, we must “recognize ourselves in the object:” we do not go back to point A, for we conserve the first negation represented by point B; nonetheless, when we “recognize ourselves in the world,” we obtain the illusion of having foregone that negation, for we no longer feel alien to Nature and the “external world:” we have reached point A1, of total lack of authenticity and spuriousness. Let us consider this in greater detail.

Point A corresponds to what we (are) *in truth*: the Totality that I called “Essence (-as-basis);” the common ground and matrix of all entities—of both subjects and objects. Point B indicates the negation of (being) the Totality that was represented as A, and the assertion of our separate individuality (whose nucleus is the appearance that Sartre called *Being-for-Itself*, which is the *conditio sine qua non* of *bad faith*). This state represented by point B is what is known as alienation, for fragmentary consciousness *makes itself unaware* that its objects and itself (are) all the one Awareness, putting itself “at a distance from itself”—at a distance from the Holistic Awareness that consciousness (is) *in truth*—and thus generating the *lack of plenitude* that is at the root of the unhappy consciousness (*duhkha*). In Hegel’s language, alienation lies in the fact that self-consciousness experiences itself as

separate from the reality to which it belongs, and therefore from itself, for that reality is *consciousness of reality* and thus is consciousness itself. Now, once the self-conscious, apparently autonomous and separate entity represented by point B has appeared, it (i.e., self-consciousness) tries desperately and by all means to attain the Totality that it (is) *in truth*: the Essence (-as-basis). Nonetheless, by so doing it asserts itself as entity-separate-from-Totality-and-wanting-to-attain-that-Totality, thus maintaining its illusion of being at a distance from it. If, conserving oneself as an apparently autonomous and separate self-conscious entity, one feels that one has overcome alienation, what one has attained is but the *illusion* of having overcome alienation: a spurious state of lack of authenticity; a false appearance; point A1 in Laing's diagram.

This reasoning may seem to be mere speculation, but actually it is the rational explanation of what the Dzogchen (*rdzogs-chen*) practitioner clearly “grasps” in her or his practice: in so far as the *subject of knowledge* (or *noetic pole of knowledge*) (is) *existent*, there (is) an overvalued dualism that is nothing but alienation and delusion and, as such, is unhappy consciousness in one of its least unhappy states. Only when the subject of knowledge disappears and overvaluation comes to an end, is there authentic realized Plenitude and Authenticity. Though this can be demonstrated through reasoning, it will only be *really* understood through the contrast between (dualistic, overvalued) experience and its dissolution in the supreme spiritual practice, which in Tibet is known as ‘Dzogchen.’

Thus, what Hegel considers as supremely authentic, is a state of double pretense—i.e., of lack of authenticity or spuriousness—and of ideational overvaluation—i.e., of delusion—even more dangerous than the ones common to normal people: being more inauthentic than these, for it involves further revolutions of the spiral of pretenses, it passes for the attainment of authenticity and the dissolution of the limitations of fragmented consciousness in reintegration.

Hegel thinks that “reintegration” is what is attained by the idealistic philosopher who, like himself, has *conceptually* recognized himself in the object that seemed external—but who, nonetheless, is still under delusion and, in his daily life, reacts to life situations as though these were objective, external and independent from him—causing his butler to have a low opinion of him. The idealist philosopher has not been through spiritual practices such as those of Dzogchen and Tantrism, which result in the dissolution of the subject-object duality. Worse still, he does not even aspire to that dissolution—which is the only way to genuinely reintegrate what seemed other—for he believes that self-consciousness must be conserved in “reintegration.” All the philosopher does is to “get into his mind” a new idea about the nature of the world, superposing a new pretense on the preceding ones, and failing to get his experience to constantly match the idea that he has adopted. Of course, Hegel seemingly speaks of an *experience*—rather than a mere thought—of apparent reintegration, but even if there is such an experience, it will be temporary and the author of the *Phenomenology* will only regard it as authentic if its nucleus is self-consciousness—which is overvalued ideation and delusion. Therefore, Hegel's reintegration is a *false reintegration*: there can be genuine reintegration only when self-consciousness dissolves.

⁴ Economic law according to which, when in a given country, two coins of different values are currency, the most valuable one tends to be treasured or exported and, thus, the “bad” coin replaces the “good” one. The first proponent of this law was Thomas Gresham (1519-1579).

⁵ Bateson, Gregory (1979), *Mind and Nature. A Necessary Unity*. New York, Dutton. Due to the fact that the original English text was not available, the quote had to be retranslated into English from the Spanish translation (1982; first reprint 1990): *Espíritu y naturaleza*. Buenos Aires, Amorrortu editores S. A.

⁶ Capriles, Elías (1994), *Individuo, sociedad, ecosistema: Ensayos sobre filosofía, política y mística*. Mérida, Venezuela, Universidad de Los Andes.

⁷ This concept is used in the teaching known as Dzogchen (*rdzogs-chen*), and specifically in the work of the Tibetan thinker and mystic Longchen Rabjampa (*kLong-chen Rab-'byams-pa*; in particular, cf. Longchen Rabjampa [English 1978], *The Four-Themed Precious Garland*. Dharamsala, Kangra Dist., H.P., India, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.). It was also used by the Yogachara School of Buddhism. The concept in question was explained in various of my books, including: *Budismo y dzogchén: La doctrina del Buda y el vehículo supremo del budismo tibetano* (2000a), Vitoria (Spain), Ediciones La Llave (an English version in three volumes is being prepared); *Estética primordial y arte visionario: Un enfoque cíclico-evolutivo comparado* (2000b), Mérida, Venezuela, Publicaciones del

Grupo de Investigación en Estudios de Asia y Africa (GIEAA)/CDCHT-ULA. *Individuo - sociedad - ecosistema* (1994, Mérida, Consejo de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Los Andes); and in my work in progress *The Four Philosophical Schools Traditionally Taught in Tibet (in Relation to the Dzogchen Teachings)*.

⁸ As noted by Einstein, the universe is a continuum, and the parts we single-out in the continuum in question are not separate in any sense—neither by a layer of some substance different from the rest of the continuum nor by a layer of nothingness—from the rest of the universe. Moreover, Einstein showed that the sub-atomic particles that make up physical entities do not conserve their matter; rather, they constitute themselves with the energy of the zone of the continuum through which “they are passing”—which means that in the universe there are no Aristotelian substances that conserve both their matter and their form. And some of the most recent theories of sub-atomic physics even claim that, at a certain dimensional level, there are neither space nor time—conditions of any separation—and that space and time arise out of a non-dimensional reality by means of processes that involve the human mind and experience.

Human beings can understand the world as a series of self-existing, separate and disconnected objects, and can maintain an acceptable sense of identity, because of the mental functions that allow consciousness to ignore aspects and segments of reality. Attention can be limited to certain segments of the sensory Totality and to certain ideas in terms of which the segments and their functions and relations are interpreted (which, in Gestalt terms, become figure), leaving other segments and ideas out of the field of conscious attention (which, in Gestalt terms, become background). The focus of conscious attention is limited and sealed; at a time, it chooses and singles-out for perception, in terms of an idea (understanding) corresponding to it, only a segment of one of the sensory fields—or else focuses on one overvalued idea after another in the flow of thought used for interpreting the world and its functioning in daily life. Everything else remains outside the focus of attention, being ignored to a great extent.

In his most important book *Time, Space and Knowledge. A New Vision of Reality* (Tarthang Tulku, 1977, *Time, Space and Knowledge. A New Vision of Reality*. Emmerlyville, California, Dharma Publishing.), Tibetan Lama Tarthang Tulku presented the West with a Buddhist teaching, associated to the *Kalachakra Tantra*, that may help us understand the most common kind of human delusory experience, which is one of extremely fragmentary knowledge, very fleeting time and an enormously restricted sense of space.

That commonest kind of space-time-knowledge and delusion, and the perceptions and ideas that characterize it, were likened by Shakyamuni Buddha to the perspective a frog at the bottom of a deep well has of the sky and the ideas the frog may form about it. Probably, the frog will think that the sky is a small blue circle. If, unaware that the abstracted segment is part of a wider whole where each part is related to all others, the frog acts on the segment with a powerful technology, it will probably produce unforeseen and undesired effects. This is why Tibetan Lama Dungse Thinle Norbu *Rinpoche* commented that “the frog must become oceanic.”

The perceptions and ideas characteristic of the state of small space-time-knowledge can also be illustrated by the image of a madman walking in the dark, illuminating his way with a flashlight and taking the segments illumined by the narrow beam for self-existing entities, inherently separate from the darkened rest of his visual field. The difference is that consciousness does not arbitrarily abstract any segment of the whole, but singles-out segments that *conserve their pattern through the passing of time* and that the individual has learned to understand as entities.

This perspective was illustrated, in the *Tathagatagarbhasutra*, with the story of a group of men in the dark who tried to ascertain the identity of an elephant (quoted in Dudjom Rinpoche, Jigdräl Yeshe Dorje [*bDud-'joms Rin-po-che, 'Jigs-'bral Ye-shes rDo-rje*], Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein, translators [English, 1991], *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. I, p. 295. Boston, Wisdom Publications):

“The king assembled many blind men and, (making them face) an elephant, commanded, ‘Describe (this object’s) particular characteristics’. Those among them who felt the elephant’s nose said that (the object) resembled an iron hook. Those who felt the eyes said that (it) resembled bowls. Those who felt the ears said (it) resembled winnowing baskets. Those who felt the back said it resembled a sedan chair, and those who felt the tail said it resembled a string. Indeed, though (their description responded to the parts of the) elephant (they touched), they were lacking in overall understanding...”

In the Middle Ages, the above story was adapted in their writings by the great *Sufi* poets. According to Sana'i and Al Ghazali, the men were blind; according to Rumi, they were in the dark. Adapting once more the original story, it can be summarized as follows: the first man laid his hand on the elephant's back and concluded that the object was a throne; the second got hold of the trunk and thought that it was a hose; the third grasped the ear and inferred that it was a fan; the fourth embraced a leg and believed it was a pillar; finally, the fifth clasped the tail and, throwing it away, fled in terror shouting that the object was a snake.

Technological humans not only perceive the organic Whole of which we are parts as a series of different entities, but, moreover, try to wrench off and possess the "entities" that they believe useful and destroy those that seem to them threatening or annoying. To use the above story as a simile, we can say that they demolish the pillar and kill the serpent in order to avoid stumbling against the former or being bitten by the latter, and tear off the hosepipe, the fan and the throne in order to use and possess them. Thus, *homo technicus* could go as far as to kill the elephant, whose corpse would fall on him, killing both him and his fellows: destroying the system of which we are parts, we would cause our own destruction. Nevertheless, if we awaken in time, before destroying ourselves, we shall learn from the *reductio ad absurdum* of delusion achieved through the development of the "rationalist" technological project whereby our profane, short-sighted and ignorant fragmentary consciousness, believing itself separate from Nature, attempted to control the latter. Thus, we shall give up that project and, recovering the Wisdom inherent in the Essence, we shall survive and build an enlightened society.

The trees do not let people possessed by fragmentation and delusion see the forest. Annoyed by the obstruction caused by a tree and unaware that the tree is part of a forest, a deluded person could decide to set the former on fire, causing the whole forest to burn and him or herself to be consumed.

Gregory Bateson pointed out that, when we are in the normal state of small space-time-knowledge, upon seeing an arc we do not realize that it is part of a circuit. Thus, if we perceive in an arc an imbalance that threatens our well being and comfort, we shall direct our powerful technological weapons against the arc, attacking it and destroying the circuit of which both the arc and ourselves are parts. This is why the Anglo-American sage said that Cannon could write the book *The Wisdom of the Body*, but that no one could write a book called *The Wisdom of Medical Science*, for wisdom is precisely what that science lacks.

The Wisdom inherent in our Essence, regulates the infinitely complex functions of our organism without using linear intelligence, and they work in a most perfect way. As soon as linear intelligence comes into play, trying to control the spontaneous functioning of Nature, problems, malfunctions and imbalances arise, for the action of fragmentary consciousness interferes with the infinitely perfect non-linear intelligence inherent in the Universal Essence (according to neurologists, in human beings the non-linear functions are specially related to the functioning of the brain's right hemisphere; Wisdom depends on the integration of the brain's two hemispheres). If people had to control the organism's functions with their linear intelligence, they would die immediately, for, upon directing attention to one function, all other functions would go out of control. *Homo technicus* believed that he could use his linear intelligence to impose on the real world the order conceived by his imagination and so, in his anthropocentric pursuit, destroyed the natural order while failing to create a viable artificial one.

As noted by Alan Watts, our fragmentary consciousness does not allow us to grasp the unity of the coin of life. Since we are unaware of the interdependence of what we deem "negative"—death, illness, discomfort, risk, pain, etc.—and what we regard as "positive"—life, health, comfort, security, pleasure, etc.—we develop powerful corrosives to apply on the "negative" side of the coin in order to destroy it and keep only the "positive" side, hoping that we shall not have to face the "negative" ever again. Having applied the corrosives for long enough, we open a hole through the coin, destroying also the side that we wanted to preserve.

⁹ Fragment 2 by Heraclitus according to Diels-Kranz, 23 according to Marcovich. The translation is the one given in Kirk, G. S., and J. E. Raven (1966; Spanish 1970), *Los filósofos presocráticos. Historia crítica con selección de textos* (Madrid, Editorial Gredos, S. A.), which I roughly retranslated into English. Instead of "particular intelligence," Cappelletti translates "particular understanding," whereas Diels gives us "private understanding."

¹⁰ Adapted from various translations. The loss of the Tao is illusory, for in truth the loss in question is part of the Tao's flow, and the same applies to the thoughts and acts of human beings after the "Fall."

¹¹ In Chinese, *te*, which is the Tao's virtue in the sense in which one speaks of the "healing virtue" of a plant. It is not "virtue" in the sense in which a person is said to be virtuous when she or he resists the impulses issuing from selfishness, and artificially sets to help others.

¹² As we all know, St. John Evangelist lived in Ephesus—Heraclitus' place of birth—and his usage of the word can but remind us the Ancient Greek philosopher's use of the term. It is significant that the translators of St. John's Gospel into Chinese rendered "Logos" as "Tao," so that the Gospel begins "In the beginning there was the Tao."

¹³ This is a way of explaining this phenomenon on the basis of contemporary physics. If we are more rigorous with our explanations, we shall have to acknowledge that we cannot assume the existence of a "physical universe" external to our perception. However, independently of our theories about reality, there can be no doubt that, once the continuum of our experience is divided by the subject-object cleavage, the subject experiences the lack of the wholeness of the said continuum and of the plenitude inherent in wholeness.

¹⁴ The illusory separation of the mental subject or noetic pole of knowledge from the rest of the universal field, may be explained in terms of some of the most basic concepts in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*—insofar as we take care to re-define them with the greatest possible exactness. If we re-define Sartre's concept of Self, we may use it to indicate the state of plenitude in which we do not feel separate from the rest of the universe, as well as the non-duality and non-separateness underlying our delusory experience of duality and separateness.

Besides the Self, Sartre posited two different modes of being, which he indicated by the traditional terms Being-in-Itself and Being-for-Itself. In general terms, we could say that what Sartre called Being-for-Itself corresponds to dualistic, deluded consciousness, whereas what he labeled Being-in-Itself corresponds to the continuum that consciousness perceives as a physical universe separate from itself and in which it singles out its successive objects.

The Self or *Soi* surpasses the duality of the above two modes of being, and Sartre defined the being of the Self as *value* itself. According to the French thinker, the Self or *Soi* is "the being of consciousness," defined as non-thetic, non-positional self-consciousness. Every positional consciousness of object is at the same time non-positional consciousness (of) itself—or, in terms that I consider to be more exact, is non-positional consciousness (of) being positional consciousness of object. Thus, it would seem that Sartre considered the Self or *Soi* to be but the non-reflexive impression that a reflexive consciousness is aware of something different from itself—i.e., the very basis of dualism. If so, Sartre's Self or *Soi* would be the very root of the delusion consisting in experiencing ourselves as separate from the *Lógos* or the *Physis*, which manifests precisely as the experience of lack of plenitude/value that derives from experiencing ourselves as separate from the Universal continuum. But in this case the Self or *Soi* could not be that which surpasses the duality Being-in-Itself/Being-for-Itself, and which constitutes (the root of) *value*—which, however, it must be in so far as Sartre referred to it as *holon* and regarded it as the very surpassing of the duality Being-in-Itself/Being-for-Itself. (Where I no doubt disagree with Sartre is in that I regard the *holon* as an effective possibility and as the very aim of human existence.)

Thus, for the term Self to refer to the continuum of undivided plenitude that constitutes the Basis of our experience and which comprehends the whole of the phenomenal realm—including both what we consider "physical" and what we consider "mental," objects and subjects—I would have to redefine it. The continuum in question may be compared to a mirror which allows for the appearance of countless reflections—all phenomena—but which at the same time constitutes the *prima materia* of these phenomena, for (it is) that which the phenomena in question (are) *in truth*. Understood as the basic reality represented by the mirror in question, the Self would certainly surpass the duality between the two modes of being that Sartre called Being-in-Itself and Being-for-Itself, and would no doubt constitute the plenitude whose illusory loss gives rise to *value*. [The reader must be warned that the above sense of the term Self goes against the logic inherent in language, for the concept of self is the opposite of the concept of other, but the Self in the sense I am using the term is not other to anything. Moreover, what I am calling Self is empty of inherent existence (*shunyata*; *stong-pa-nyid*)—and thus in Buddhist terms it is *anatman* or no-self.]

Furthermore, elsewhere I have distinguished between the Self-as-fruit and the Self-as-base: the former is the state of plenitude in which we do not feel separate from the rest of the Universe that is called Enlightenment and which corresponds to the direct, non-conceptual unveiling of the latter—i.e., of the uncreated Base (*gzhi*) of all human beings and of the whole universe, which corresponds to the non-duality and non-separateness underlying our delusory experience of duality and separateness. Finally, the Self-as-path is the manifestation of this state while on the Path.

¹⁵ If the whole of our naked body is caressed with a goose's feather by an attractive member of the opposite sex, we shall experience pleasure. However, if this goes on uninterruptedly for days and days, at some point we shall reject the sensation, and though the quality of the latter will not change, it shall become unbearable to us, so that the very sensation that formerly was pleasurable will turn into a torture. Conversely, a masochist can enjoy what most of us would experience as pain and would want to shun. All of this proves that it is acceptance that turns sensation into pleasure, that it is rejection that turns it into pain, and that it is indifference that makes it neutral.

¹⁶ Huxley, Aldous (1956), *Heaven & Hell*, p. 24. London, Chatto & Windus.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

¹⁸ Blake, William (1975, with an Introducción by Sir Geoffrey Keynes), *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Oxford & New York, Oxford University Press (in association with The Trianon Press, Paris).

¹⁹ This is a most widespread theory in European pre-Kantian aesthetics (according to Hume, for example, forms that are harmonious produce pleasure, whereas deformities produce uneasiness). The problem comes when we try to define terms such as “form” and “deformity,” “harmonious” and “disharmonious.”

²⁰ The technique in question may aim at achieving the harmonies in question, but it does not necessarily succeed in so doing. In fact, rationalist philosophy left us with the burden of a rejection of the natural, apparently chaotic order of Nature, and a compulsion to impose on Nature the arbitrary order conceived by the intellect—a tendency at the root, both of the “conscious purpose against Nature” which begot the ecological crisis that we face, and of the lifeless art of some of Europe's classical artists (Poussin will later on be taken as a paradigm of this tendency, although many of his compositions are really impressive).

²¹ This is an oversimplification I had to incur in due to the limits of space in a book chapter. For an encompassing explanation of this see Capriles, Elías (2000b), *Estética primordial y arte visionario. Un enfoque cíclico-evolutivo comparado*. Mérida, Venezuela, Publicaciones del Grupo de Investigación en Estudios de Asia y Africa (GIEAA)/CDCHT-ULA.

²² In particular, European Medieval painting did not try to imitate the three-dimensionality of “this world,” for its purpose was to illustrate, and whenever possible give access to the experience of, what may be referred to as “another world.” This seems to have been the practical result of a combination of Christianity and Platonism, and though I am not particularly enthusiastic about any of these two ideological systems, the results were definitively visionary.

²³ As we shall see, the Chinese Taoist or Ch'an artist had to *produce* the work of art in a will-less state that goes far beyond what was conceived by Schopenhauer. This, however, does not mean that—as Schopenhauer would think—such an art would lack a message: we shall also see that, in what I call “primordial” art, denotation and connotation coincide. (To Hegel, art was, to a lesser or greater extent, the embodiment of the Idea in sensuous form; however, his theory of art is radically different from the general unspoken theory on the basis of “primordial” art.)

²⁴ Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. (1956), *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*. New York, Dover Publications.

²⁵ In primordial art, the function of what the Indian term *rasa* (in the sense of *aesthetic emotion*), is to catalyze the process of Enlightenment, rather than merely thrilling people or helping to relax tensions—thus going far beyond Aristotle's *katharsis*, no matter how we interpret this concept. However, even those mystical orders that made a greater use of *rasa* as a means to go beyond *rasa*—such as the Indian Chisti Sufis, who have produced some of the most outstanding Indian musicians of the last nine centuries—were aware of the danger that *rasa* users may stick to it rather than transcending it. Hadrat Muinuddin Chisti himself wrote:

“They know we listen to music and through it perceive certain secrets. Therefore they play music and immerse themselves in “states.” You must know that every learning must fulfill all of its requisites—not only music, thought, concentration. Remember: the wonderful production of milk by a

cow that kicks the bucket is useless.” (Retranslated into English from Shah, Idries, 2d Spanish edition, 1978, *El camino del sufí*. Buenos Aires, Editorial Paidós.)

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ The Romantics began to be more and more *poietic*, breaking away with the purely *mimetic* — though idealized by the proportions and considerations imposed by “reason”—type of art that had prevailed ever since Raphael. However, it was not until the Impressionist revolution that there arose the general drive to achieve *poiesis* that has prevailed ever since (or which, at least, is always *pretended* by those who, lacking inspiration, reproduce banality in their search for notoriety).

²⁸ Translated into English from Reszler, André (1973; Spanish 1974), *La estética anarquista*. Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica.

²⁹ This was no doubt happening with classical music (*lato sensu*) at the time when Sorel wrote about it; however, we shall see that (at least in my opinion) some rock and roll musicians would begin producing high-quality music some time after Sorel.

In fact, the whole history of narrow aesthetics may be understood as struggle between those who favored *poiesis* and those who favored *mimesis*. Some theories—which range from Descartes through Adam Smith to Hanslick—seem to imply that music might be the least mimetic of the arts. Plato, who barred the arts in general from his *Republic* on the double account that they were but imperfect copies of imperfect copies, and that they set wayward moral models to imitate (as was the case with the gods and heroes of the traditional epics), not only allowed music into it, but made of it a most important element in the guardians’ curriculum: while Gymnastics (so despised by the Stoics) was the core of physical education, music (so appreciated by the Pythagoreans) was the core of spiritual education—the two inseparable elements in the harmonic formation of the moral personality, which should prepare the soul for the study of dialectics and, ultimately, for the contemplation of good itself. (The totalitarian, elitist philosopher’s good opinion of music does not make music any more valuable; however, the fact that the worst enemy of *mimesis* and of the arts in general appreciated music, may imply that he did not consider it to be as purely mimetic as the other arts.)

Descartes, like Hanslick much after him, thought that music was unable to express anything whatsoever except itself. According to Adam Smith, music is dialogue and passion, and it is the equivalence of the effects upon the mind that comes into play in the supposed imitation of music. When music imitates another art, it becomes less interesting than when it remains pure music, whereas “...without any imitation, instrumental music may produce very considerable effects.”

When I was a child, I learned to appreciate Beethoven’s music. Then, when I was in my late teens, I turned to Bach and the baroque, and my esteem for Beethoven fell to an all-time low (I thought pure music was ‘higher’ than passional music). Finally, I understood that Beethoven’s music expressed and responded to the spirit of his time, having a power to move Beethoven’s contemporaries, which Bach’s music had lost altogether at the time. This, in turn, led me to realize that the power that Beethoven’s music had in his time and culture does not have a parallel in the so-called “classical music” (*lato sensu*) of our time, but in the best of rock and roll, blues and perhaps a few other types of music that are considered “popular.”

In fact, some rock and roll pieces (perhaps mainly in the categories of blues, symphonic and psychotronic rock) combine some of the best, the richest, and the most elaborate and complex music of our time, with the most powerful visionary effect of any contemporary music (and we should keep in mind that no music is, at any time of history, more visionary than the music of that very time).

Also in Rock and roll, we often find the coincidence of denotation and connotation which characterizes higher forms of art—and in many cases we find convey ecological and political messages. However, this is not always so; many pieces have words that do not correspond to the visionary quality of the art, and some even promote hate and destruction, or devil-worship, and convey other wayward messages which are incompatible with true art.

Also in music, great creators set new trends, which are then followed by those who are not equally creative, and who will be the source of decadence. (It must be noted that, during the sixties, when rock and roll first achieved the heights I am referring to, the music in question expressed the feelings of very limited sectors of the world’s population, and thus could not be so universally appreciated. Nowadays, however, the economic interests of the show biz and the mass media—and, in some cases, even State institutions of First World countries trying to further the short-sighted interests of the countries in question—have resulted in a worldwide campaign that has taught growing masses

of people to appreciate rock and roll—but, with the same token, a great deal of the music in question has become but big-money-business lacking any artistic or visionary qualities.)

On the other hand, almost all of those who listen to the best rock and roll tend to adhere to the *rasa* or aesthetic emotion elicited by the music in question, rather than using it consistently as a means to go beyond *rasa*. But this does not contradict to above claim, that rock and roll is the summit of the music of our time in the West.

Music (though not in its present forms) may provided us with a paradigm for the arts of the future, in so far as it offers excellent possibilities for overcoming the dichotomy between creator and/or performer, on the one hand, and receiver, on the other. In fact, music is an activity in which many may participate, all of them as creators and performers and none of them as pure “passive” listeners.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ This paper was written several years ago. Since, my theories have developed considerably, but I did not want to wholly change the content of the original paper. For my current interpretation, see Capriles, Elías (2000b), *Estética primordial y arte visionario. Un enfoque cíclico-evolutivo comparado*. Mérida, Venezuela, Publicaciones del Grupo de Investigación en Estudios de Asia y Africa (GIEAA)/CDCHT-ULA.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ We shall see later on that, if the regeneration in question resulted in sufficiently integrated state, the concept of art would dissolve to the extent to which everything would become art.

³⁴ Rucker (1937; Spanish 1977), *Nacionalismo y cultura*, Madrid; quoted by Reszler, André (1973; Spanish 1974), in *La estética anarquista*. Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, and retranslated into English by myself. It must be noted that isolated artists have produced masterpieces in totalitarian societies, and the greatness of such works has sometimes lied in the fact that they wonderfully reflect the terror of Big Brother.

³⁵ Of course, Greek statues harmonized with the surrounding architecture, and in some cases even had some “objective” or “visionary” quality—and the same may be said of other Greek arts. However, I think creativity was more evident in poetry, music and architecture, than in the other arts of ancient Greece.

³⁶ Translated into English from Reszler, André (1973; Spanish 1974), *La estética anarquista*. Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, p. 47.

³⁷ Translated into English from Reszler, André (1973; Spanish 1974), *La estética anarquista*. Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, p. 82.

³⁸ In an article by Martine Lochouarn that appeared in *Sciences et Avenir* (No. 553, March 1993, pp. 44-7), which reviews the recent findings of paleopathology, we are informed that the findings in question strongly suggest that prehistoric human beings did not know either war or violent crime—but, quite the opposite, were characterized by caring and nurturing. In fact, very few prehistoric human remains evidence traumas, and in those which do, they seem to have been the result of accidents rather than of war or violent crime—and, moreover, some accidental traumas were found to have healed due to medical care and nurturing.

In turn, according to Time & Life’s *The Library of Curious and Unusual Facts*, paleopathology has shown that many thousands of years ago brain surgery was practised in Europe, and 80% of patients survived.

³⁹ Lommel, Andreas, *El arte prehistórico y primitivo (El mundo del Arte—Las artes plásticas de sus orígenes a la actualidad*, Vol. I. Aggs Industrias Gráficas S.A., Brasil).

⁴⁰ Cauvin, Jacques (1987), “L’apparition des premières divinités.” Paris, *La Recherche*, N° 195, December 1987.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² Cauvin thinks that the “ecological” theories of the Americans Lewin Binford and Kent Flannery are baseless, for according to him research has demonstrated that in the Near East, at the time when farming appeared, there was abundant game, fish and wild vegetables to be gathered, so that there was no “ecological” need to give up the way of life of hunters-fishers-gatherers and develop farming, which demanded many hours of daily toil—instead of the two or three hours that, in favorable climates, were necessary for hunting, fishing and gathering—and which laid a heavy full-time responsibility on the shoulders of individuals. Thus, Cauvin makes material transformations depend

on spiritual changes, firmly anchoring his position in the results of research. Now, even if Cauvin is proven right, we must remember that the structure of the human mind is inseparable from the social relations in which the individual develops, being molded by them as much as it molds them: the seeds of degeneration were already sprouting in the Age of Truth or *Satyayuga*.

⁴³ This is the shortest of all *Prajñāparamita Sūtras*, of which there are multiple translations, out of which I compounded this one. In it, the term “emptiness” does not mean lack of material form, but lack of the self-existence, substantiality, independence and inherent existence we wrongly attribute to entities. However, taken literally as “lack of form,” the text aptly expresses a most important feature of Chinese Taoist and Ch’an painting.

⁴⁴ The Romantics had already drifted away from these conceptions, but not to the extent to which this was done by the Impressionists.

⁴⁵ According to Chinese Taoists, their tradition is one and the same with Tibetan pre-Buddhist Bön, which some 3,800 years ago would have introduced the *rdzogs-chen* teachings into Tibet. According to the Ancient or *rNyīng-ma-pa* Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the first Buddhist *rdzogs-chen* master was *dGa’-rab rDo-rje*, who lived in Öddyana (whose capital was in the Swat valley in Pakistan or the Kabul valley in Afghanistan). From him issued two different lines of transmission: a lay one which was imported to Tibet, where it flourished and has been conserved until our time, and a monastic one which was transmitted by Nagarjuna and Aryadeva (Kanadeva). According to the *Sūtra de Hui-neng*, Nagarjuna and Kanadeva are successive Patriarchs of the *Ch’an* or *Zen* school. In the same way, according to Idries Shah, Sufi master Jabir el-Hayyam—the famous Geber of European alchemists—was a close friend of the Barmecides, viziers to Harun ar-Rashid, who possessed the secret teachings transmitted by the Buddhist sages from Afghanistan (who probably received them to a considerable extent from the ancient traditions of the area). In turn, various Indian wisdom-traditions derive from Tibetan traditions, and some from Sufism. Thus some of the most important wisdom-traditions of humankind are interwoven in a *mandala*-carpet made out of *rgyud* (the Tibetan term meaning “woolen thread,” “Tantra,” “continuity of Enlightened Awareness”) or *suf* (“wool” in Arabic, which according to some is the root of the term Sufism—although some most important Sufis have denied this etymology).

⁴⁶ This shows that the Freudian structure of the psyche is, in the best of cases, a product of a given civilization, which must be transcended for humankind to enter a New Age of harmony. I have produced elaborated criticisms of Freud’s theses in others of my works.

⁴⁷ Watts, Alan (1956), *The Way of Zen*. New York, Pantheon Books. Retranslated into English from the Spanish edition (1961; Edhasa 1977. 2a reprint 1984), *El camino del zen* (translated into Spanish by Juan Adolfo Vázquez; fragment retranslated into English by myself), Barcelona, Edhasa, p. 46. Cf. also Giles (1926), *Chuang-tzu*. Shanghai, Kelly & Walsh, p. 242.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ This is Sartre’s term for the phenomenon in question. Sartre speaks of Being-for-Itself, which corresponds to the apparently separate mental subject, and Being-in-Itself, which is the mode of being of all that appears as object. Being-for-Others arises when Being-for-Itself becomes that phenomenon of Being-in-Itself which is indicated by the individual’s name. Sartre says that this occurs, for example, when one “feels touched in the heart by the Other’s look” (for example, when one is looking through a keyhole and then one suddenly realizes one is being watched as one is in such a shameful act).

⁵⁰ Retranslated into English by myself from: Anonymous editor (1959), *Zen Buddhism. An Introduction to Zen with Stories, Parables and Koan Riddles Told by the Zen Masters*. Mount Vernon (New York), The Peter Pauper Press., pp. 13-4.

⁵¹ Sorel, Jean, translated into English from the quote in Reszler, André (1973; Spanish 1974), *La estética anarquista*. Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, p. 76.

⁵² Clearly, to the extent to which the dance has to fit into some pre-established patterns, technique will have to be learned self-consciously by means of the control exerted by an aspect of the psyche (Cf. Bateson, Gregory (1972), *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. New York, Ballantine, and London, Paladin.). Now, once the technique has been mastered, the artist must overcome all self-consciousness and free her or himself from the inner fracture of the psyche, so that there be no longer an aspect that controls, observes and judges.

⁵³ The most extreme instance of this is when the artist is in the state of Enlightenment itself—though this is rarest in our days among artists who are not realized practitioners of one of humankind’s genuine Wisdom traditions.

⁵⁴ 1984, Flammarion, Paris. Béguin’s scornful reference to “conventional jewels” 45 years after Coomaraswamy’s “Ornament” (*Art Bulletin XXI*, 1938, pp. 315-82; for a commented summary see Marchianò, Grazia, “The Power of Ornament,” *New Observations* 64, Jan.-Feb. 1989, pp. 17-20) is as hard to explain as his contemptuous comments in regard to the facial expressions of the statues. In Vajrayana Buddhism, for example, jewels are necessary ornaments of all the deities that manifest in the visionary level of Enlightened experience called Sambhogakaya, for they express the “richness” that characterizes the level in question. Although most remaining temples in Khajuraho are non-Buddhist (most are Shaiva, some are Jaina and some Vajrayana Buddhist), and most figures do *not* represent visionary, Sambhogakaya deities but “physical” (Nirmanakaya) practitioners, there can be no doubt that—as noted by Coomaraswamy in regard to the whole of Indian Art—the jewels represent some of their symbolic attributes. In fact, as we have seen, primordial art, and in particular Eastern art, is in general as didactic as it is visionary and contemplative. The least that can be said about Béguin is that he has no understanding whatsoever of ecstasy and non-dual states and, therefore, is handicapped for judging and explaining Eastern and, in general, “primordial” art.

Moreover, how could anyone say, as late as 1984—when there was already a wide corpus of direct translations from the Tibetan and Sanskrit, as well as many authoritative works by well-informed scholars and practitioners—that “Tantric conceptions are still badly known”?

⁵⁵ In Tibetan *sculpture*, however, the inseparability of connotation and denotation is quite similar to what is found in Indian Tantric sculpture. Examples of this are the Tibetan bronzes representing male and female figures in sexual union (*yab-yum*), as well as the yab-yum figures at the center of the mandalas considered in the section on Tibetan Art—and, perhaps even to a greater degree, the statue of Padmasambhava of which he said “Its stare is like mine” (often mistranslated as “It looks like me”).

⁵⁶ Martin, Heinz E. R. (1977), *Die Kunst Tibets*. München, Wilhelm Heyne Verlag.

⁵⁷ A more correct classification would be: (1) On the basis of the medium: (a) *tangkhas* (hanging rolls mounted on silk), and (b) frescoes. (2) On the basis of their content: (a) mandalas; (b) illustrations of “sacred history” (masters, important deeds of masters, diffusion of teachings, etc.); (c) meditation deities (devas and dakinis) and guardians, and (d) illustrations of especially relevant Buddhist teachings (such as the Wheel of Life).

⁵⁸ In his conversations with Aeckermann, Goethe advised: “Sell all your knowledge and buy wonder.” Tibetan art is at the same time visionary *and* didactic, and thus does not ask us to sell away our knowledge.

⁵⁹ Gnosis is the cognitive event that unveils the Absolute—which Buddhists, unlike Christian Gnostics, do *not* conceive of as a personal God. This Gnosis is *anoic* because *noia* or mind, understood as subject-object duality and overvalued conceptualization, is dissolved by the cognitive event in question.

⁶⁰ In the Upadesha series of Dzogchen teachings, the stages in question are traversed through the successive practices of Tekchö and Tögel. Whereas instructions for Tekchö are available in various books in Western languages [one of the most important being Dudjom Rinpoche’s *Richö* or *Extracting the Quintessence of Accomplishment*. (Kalimpong, West Bengal, India). See also my own *The Source of Danger is Fear—Paradoxes of the Realm of Delusion and Instructions for the Practice of the Dzogchen Upadesha* (1990b, Mérida, Venezuela, Editorial Reflejos)], instructions for Tögel—the higher level of *upadesha* practice—are not available in any book in a Western language.

⁶¹ Tarthang Tulku, 1977, *Time, Space and Knowledge. A New Vision of Reality*, Emmerlyville, Ca., Dharma Publishing. Westerners have attempted to explain this phenomenon in terms of changes in the brain’s biochemistry. However, as yet there is no “proven” theory in this respect. What concerns us is that, in the unprepared individual, this may result in psychosis—which, as noted by Dabrowski, Bateson, Laing and many others, may become a self-initiation process, but most often is institutionally turned into a self-destruction process.

It must be noted that in the state of small Space-Time-Knowledge there is knowledge properly speaking, which, as French poet Paul Claudel noted, involves the co-emergence or interdependent arising of the mental subject and the object (*la connaissance est la co-naissance du sujet et de l’objet*), but in the stated of Total Space-time-Awareness there is no knowledge properly speaking, as there is

no subject-object duality, no conceptualization and none of the characteristics inherent to what the Dzogchen (*rdzogs-chen*) teachings refer to by the Sanskrit word *chitta* and the Tibetan term *sems*.

⁶² Though in general we associate the dissolution of our habitual identity with *death*, the dissolution in question may also occur in depersonalization and, in general, in “psychotic de-realization.” It must be noted that, according to Professor Elémire Zolla (1986, *L’amante invisible*, Marsilio Editori S.P.A.), “Pan begets panic, and each and every community is founded on the panic hidden in every assembly, up to the most solemn.” Thus, my explanation of panic may be that of the ultimate driving force behind the phenomena that Sartre described in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and that Fromm analyzed in *Fear of Freedom*.

⁶³ Contents that contradict one’s self-image or conscious identity.

⁶⁴ There is no need to exclude genetic links, either. It has been claimed that the *mandala* derived from Mesopotamian Zigurats, and the Sumerians lived in Mesopotamia. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1927/1965, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, Karl W. Hiersemann/Dover Publications Inc., New York) and several others have suggested there is a unity between the Sumerian and the Dravidian civilizations (and those of the areas in between). In my book *Estética primordial y arte visionario* (2000, Mérida, GIEAA/CDCHT – ULA), basing myself on works by Alain Daniélou, Riane Eisler, Marija Gimbutas, Mauro Ceruti and Gianluca Bocchi, among others, I have hypothesized that there is also a unity between the Sumerian civilization and the ancient Kushan-Tibetan civilization of the Zhang Zhung.

⁶⁵ The *Divine Comedy*’s hell corresponds to the first stage of the Dzogchen teachings’ *mandala*-Path, which in his book *Matrix of Mystery. Scientific and Humanistic Aspects of rDzogs-chen Thought* (1984, Boulder, Shambhala) Herbert V. Guenther called “dis-chreodic movement” and which leads the practitioner down through hell to the “threshold level” corresponding to the very bottom of the lowest circle. Only then may what Dr. Guenther called “dis-chreodic interruption,” corresponding to the transition to purgatory, take place: what the author called “pristine cognitions” arise, re-orienting the process, which becomes what he called an “eu-chreodic movement.” Finally, what Dr. Guenther called a “stable flux of homeorhesis” leads the individual into and through the final stages of the process, which correspond to the successive levels of the *Divine Comedy*’s Heaven.

However, Dr. Guenther’s terminology is incorrect, for the term *chreod* was coined by Waddington to indicate a process of *homeorhesis* or simple development, which is one kind of *morphostasis* (a process involving neither a change of norms nor a change of code) rather than *morphogenesis* (which involves a change both of norms and code). The occurrence of anoic Gnosis (i.e., “pristine cognitions”) corresponding to what Dr. Guenther called “dischreodic interruption”—which is made possible by the *reductio ad absurdum* of primary process codes, programs and metaprograms—and the ensuing process of progressive self-liberation that he called “eu-chreodic movement,” lead to liberation from programming and metaprogramming and thus go even beyond morphogenesis—and therefore to refer to them I use the term *metamorphia*. This process involves a change of code and the emergence of new levels of organization, but its essential feature is the surpassing of *conditioning* by all programs and metaprograms, of overvaluation and dualism. Enlightenment cannot be understood in terms of the concept of “programming and metaprogramming of the human biocomputer” popularized by John Lilly, for the essence of Enlightenment is freedom in regard to *any* program.

The terms I used—except for the word *metamorphia*—are those coined by Walter Buckley in *Sociology and Modern Systems Theory* (1967, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall), just as used and understood by Anthony Wilden in *System and Structure* (1972; 2d edition 1980; London, Tavistock).

To conclude, it must be noted that the *katharsis* illustrated by the *Divine Comedy* is to Aristotle’s *katharsis*, more or less what Heraclitus’ *Logos* is to Aristotle’s *Logos*—independently of whether we interpret Aristotle’s *katharsis* following Castelvetro; Maggi, Chapelain, Godeau or Dacier; Batteaux; Lessing; Bockh, Weil or Bernays; L. H. Butler; C. Diano—or any other scholar, for that matter.

In fact, the *katharsis* illustrated by the *Divine Comedy* purifies in a definitive and irreversible manner the basic human delusion that constitutes the very root of all passions, resulting in a radical and irreversible transformation of the individual’s experience: once the cause has been uprooted, all of its negative effects cease to manifest. Instead, no matter how we interpret Aristotle’s *katharsis*, the

purification in question does not uproot human delusion—source of all passions—and thus its effects can only be temporary and reversible.

⁶⁶ Translated into English from Reszler, André (1973; Spanish 1974), *La estética anarquista*. Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, p. 47. I wrote “should become” (which was put in brackets) instead of “is” because, at present, art is very rarely the guardian of humankind’s “immortal” part—and if art were to become such a guardian, most of it would have to undergo a total transformation. Likewise, the phrase “embodied in” was introduced by me for the sake of clarity.

⁶⁷ Capriles, Elías (1994), *Individuo, sociedad, ecosistema: Ensayos sobre filosofía, política y mística*. Mérida, Venezuela, Universidad de Los Andes. Capriles, Elías (1990), “Las aventuras del fabuloso hombre-máquina. Contra Habermas y la *ratio technica*”. Mérida, Venezuela, revista *Actual* (tercera época) de la Universidad de Los Andes, N° 16-17, pp. 77-90. Capriles, Elías (1995), “El libro: Una visión mítica”. Revista *Versal* del Consejo de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Los Andes, No. 1. Capriles, Elías (1996), “La escritura: Visión mítica de la evolución de los medios y sus mensajes”. Revista *Versal* del Consejo de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Los Andes, No. 2.

⁶⁸ Eichler, Arturo (1987), *S.O.S. Planeta Tierra*. Caracas, Guardia Nacional de Venezuela.

⁶⁹ Primary process (associated to the functioning of the brain’s right hemisphere) only becomes conscious as such in dreams and during so-called “altered states of consciousness,” yet it constantly functions while we are conscious in our daily life, providing the basis for all of our “conscious” experiences. Primary process is the *analogical* basis of all *digital* and conscious communications of secondary process (associated to the functioning of the brain’s left hemisphere) occurring in the “normal” state of wakefulness, both within the individual and between her or him and other individuals: it functions as the matrix of verbal language, which is dualistic and clearly defines the identity of interacting individuals. As noted by Fenichel [Fenichel, Otto (1945), *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*. New York, Norton. Cf. also Bateson, Gregory (compilation 1972), *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. New York, Ballantine, and London, Paladin.], in primary process the emphasis is on the type of relations taking place between individuals rather than on who is who in those relations. Thus, once we develop a certain type of primary process relation—for example, instrumental subject-object relations—there is no way to confine them within the field of human-environment relations: though secondary process may enable us to discriminate one field and one type of relations from the other, this will be done against a background of instrumental primary process relations that are bound to condition also our interaction with other human beings. And since—as also noted by Fenichel—primary process “lacks negatives,” there will be no way to consciously say “no” to a given type of primary process relation—e.g., the instrumental—and do away with it.

As noted by Bateson, the only way to drop a primary process relation is by developing until it achieves its *reductio ad absurdum*. According to the philosophy of history that I developed in *Individuo - sociedad - ecosistema*, the current ecological crisis constitutes the *reductio ad absurdum* of the relational structures that have been developing in all fields—cognitive, psychological, political, economic, social, cultural, etc.—through the present aeon. We are about the point at which, either the relational structures in question are overcome, or else humankind and most other species are extinguished or suffer a major genetic degeneration.

The systemic functioning of the two types of human mental process first outlined by Freud in the *Project* of 1895 and successively elaborated upon by authors such as Bateson, Haley, Lacan, Wilden and Pribram. In particular, the fact that primary process is analogical and secondary process is digital was underlined by Gregory Bateson in *Mind and Nature*, by Anthony Wilden in *System and Structure*, etc. Cf. (1) Freud, Sigmund (1895; Spanish 1974), *Proyecto de una psicología para neurólogos y otros escritos*. Madrid, Alianza Editorial. (2) Bateson, Gregory (compilation 1972), *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. New York, Ballantine, & London, Paladin. (3) Bateson, Gregory (1979), *Mind and Nature. A Necessary Unity*. New York, Dutton. (4) Wilden, Anthony (1972; 2d ed., 1980), *System and Structure*. London, Tavistock. (5) Pribram, Karl and Merton Gill (1976), *Freud’s “Project” Re-assessed*. New York, Basic Books. (6) Lacan, Jacques (1957), “L’instance de la lettre dans l’inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud.” In *La Psychanalyse*, N° 3, 1957, pp. 47-81. (7) Lacan, Jacques (Spanish 1971/1972), *Lectura estructuralista de Freud*.

⁷⁰ Heidegger (1950), *Holzwege. Eine Sammlung von Vorträgen*. The quotation was translated into English by myself, from the Spanish translation done by José Rovira Armengol that was published as *Sendas perdidas*.

⁷¹ The doctrines and systems for achieving individual liberation or Enlightenment include those transmitted by the Tibetan Buddhist and Bön traditions (and, in particular, the Dzogchen tradition, regarded by Tibetans as the very summit of human spirituality), by the Sufi traditions, by Ch'an and Zen Buddhism, by various Hindu non-casteistic Tantric and Bhakta traditions, etc. The doctrines that aim at political, social, economic and cultural liberation are those which, being egalitarian and aiming at overcoming the institutions that evolved interdependently with the state of affairs that must be overcome (from the State to the Family, including the whole of "right wing institutions"—which, unlike Ivan Illich, I classify according to their *structure*), do not propose resorting to authoritarian means: as we have seen, the means and media *are* inseparable from the ends.

⁷² *Baraka* (Arab term used by the Sufis to convey a meaning encompassing those of the English nouns "grace," "power," "blessings," etc.). Photography and Direction by Ron Fricke. Production: Mark Magidson. Music composed and conducted by Michael Sterns. Screenplay by Ron Fricke, Mark Magidson and Bob Green. Editing: Ron Fricke, Marc Magidson and David E. Aubrey. © 1992 by Magidson Films Inc.; video copy distributed by Blue Diamond Video.

⁷³ Some may feel outraged by my comparison of *Baraka* and the *Divine Comedy*, which is revered as one of the greatest classics of all times. Though this may be partly due to a widespread tendency to worship the past and the revered, it may be true that the *Divine Comedy's* message is at a higher level than *Baraka's*, and that the creation of Dante's masterpiece may have been more demanding for the artist than that of the movie in question.

⁷⁴ *Koyaanisqatsi* was made before *Baraka*, but there is no doubt the latter is better achieved than the former. [*Koyaanisqatsi* (*ko-yaa-nis-qatsi*: Hopi American Indian term meaning "crazy life," "life in turmoil," "life out of balance," "life disintegrating" or "a state of life that calls for another way of living"). Directed and Produced by Godfrey Reggio. Director of Photography: Ron Fricke. Music by Philip Glass, produced and recorded by Kurt Munkacsi, and conducted by Michael Riesman; music direction and additional music: Michael Honing. IRE Presentations; a Francis Ford Coppola presentation.]

Miramar productions, in turn, have begun producing a whole series of movies that aim at altering human perception in a way similar to that achieved by *Baraka* and *Koyaanisqatsi*, but which are *not always* so explicit in their messages (and so the coincidence of connotation and denotation is *not so evident*). In fact, those Miramar movies featuring landscapes, wildlife, etc. (such as *Anima Mundi*, *Natural States*, *Desert Vision*, *Earth Dance*, etc.), have an implicit ecological message (which is equally present in that fine documentary featuring mainly architectonic works called *Chronos*). This is not so universally true in Miramar's computer animation movies (such as *Computer Animation Festival*, *Grok Gazer*, *The Mind's Eye*, *Gate to the Mind's Eye*, *Beyond the Mind's Eye*, and those which combine animation with documentaries, like *Light Dance*, *Tangerine Dream*, etc.). Although many of the sequences compiled into the movies in question are doubtless visionary masterpieces and many of them contain images which are themselves on the level of many of the most highly prized paintings of the twentieth century, not in all of them are evident messages that may correspond to their effect in our perception—no doubt, some have most evident ecological and/or spiritual messages, but the messages implicit in the themes of some of them may seem to be Star-Trek-like.

It is clear that the idea of making movies with visionary effects is not as new as the movies I have referred to; since the sixties and seventies, there were attempts to make movies have visionary effects—especially in the case of movies having to do with rock music or with the so-called "Underground." This tendency then leaked into some mainstream movies, and also became a main feature of some *avant-garde* movies (British director Philip Ridley claims to have achieved extraordinary effects in *The Reflecting Skin*, and even more so in *Darkly Noon*, but I have not seen either of these movies and thus cannot say anything about those effects—or about the movies' message, for that matter).

Finally, it is important to note that, if the social and mental transformation that is necessary for us to reach the New Age is to really achieve its aim, those who take part in it should avoid the psychedelic hedonism of the '60s. In fact, users of psychedelics sooner or later face the *panic* that characterizes the *mandala's* intermediate zone, yet lack the whole of the conditions necessary for the experience in question to become the gate to the *mandala's* center. The result is the generalization of psychotomimetic experiences, psychiatrizations, self-destructive madness, addiction to hard drugs resorted to as a means to either recover the capacity to socialize or to sedate the pain of the hells,

adherence to fake spiritual organizations and gurus who exploit the person's need to hold to some clutch, adherence to authoritarian and/or terrorist political organizations, etc., etc.

⁷⁵ Cf. the preceding footnote.

⁷⁶ This is, more or less, what happens with Theodor Adorno's theory of art, according to which the art of our ugly times has to be ugly, so that it will not merely provide us with a possibility of escape that may help the present state of affairs to continue to prevail. Art has to show the ugliness of the current state of affairs, as *Baraka* does, but it also has to do it in such a way that it allows us to glimpse the condition that we have to achieve if the current state of affairs is to be overcome—which *Baraka* also does in a most excellent manner.

⁷⁷ According to Tibetan Lama Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, the truth is that Shambhala was conquered by the Turks, who destroyed the prevailing religion in all of its forms. Yet legend has it that Shambhala and its people disappeared into the sky after everyone became fully Enlightened.

⁷⁸ The "receiver" is never really passive, for reception requires an active work involving de-codification, singling-out of figures against a background, judgment or the failure to judge induced by the visionary quality of the art form, etc.

⁷⁹ The event is the result of modifications Yoko Ono did to the happening; however, the event, as it has been known, is as uneventful as the happening, the multimedia and so on.

⁸⁰ Ivan Illich [Illich, Ivan (1971), *Deschooling Society*. New York, Harper & Row. I used the French version (1971), *Une société sans école*. Paris, Éditions du Seuil.] divided human institutions into "right wing" and "left wing." He writes:

"Some (institutions) have developed in such a way that they characterize and define our time; others are more modest and pass, so to say, unnoticed. The first seem to be in charge of the manipulation of human beings; we shall call them "manipulative" institutions and we shall place them, for the clarity of this explanation, on the right of the institutional fan or spectrum; on the left, we shall place those which, on the contrary, make human activities easier. Let us be content with defining them as "open" and uncontriving..."

"On both extremes we can observe the presence of institutional services; however, on one side, we face a contrived manipulation which causes the client to undergo advertisement, aggression, indoctrination or electric shocks. On the other side, the service represents increased possibilities in the frame of defined limits, while the client remains independent. On the right, institutions tend to become complex, in so far as their method of production carries with it a previous definition and the need to convince the consumer that he or she cannot live without the offered product or service, which causes the budgets (of those institutions) to increase ceaselessly. On the left, the institution presents itself rather as a network to facilitate communication or cooperation among the clients who take the initiative (of using them)."

According to Michel Foucault, what could be called "ideology" is not a false consciousness of "real" relations, but the "real" consciousness of false relations. The knowledge which power uses to maintain itself is the secondary process interpretation and justification of prevailing, wayward primary process relations; it is the combination of secondary process knowledge and primary process relations that serves as the cognitive and experiential base for the prevailing system/model-of-power. In *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Michel Foucault [translated into English from Foucault, Michel (1975, Spanish, 1976), *Vigilar y castigar. Nacimiento de la prisión*. Mexico, Siglo XXI Editores, S.A.] writes:

"It is not that the activity of the subject of knowledge produces a knowledge, useful or recalcitrant to power; rather, power-knowledge, the processes and struggles which go through it and which constitute it, determine the shapes, as well as the possible fields, of knowledge."

According to Foucault, "scientific knowledge about human beings" was the result of a specific model of subjection and represented the birth of the human being as an object of "scientific" knowledge—which, in turn, was necessary for the development of that model of subjection into its present forms. Knowledge is inseparable from power, for power is not something applied to the masses from outside by the ruling class, but something that invades them, goes through them and is supported on them—just as they, in their struggle against power, support themselves on the holds power has on them, and therefore with their struggle maintain and confirm the power which they fight. This is why the prevailing power cannot be defeated unless it is identified within the individual's own psyche, reduced to its phenomenal components—which David Cooper calls "internalized others"—

and uprooted in an “inner revolution.” And this is also why Gilles Deleuze says that, more than ideologies, the sciences are “a generalized axiom system or abstract machine.” Deleuze [translated from Deleuze, Gilles (1977, Spanish 1980), “Psicoanálisis muerto analiza.” In Deleuze, Gilles, and Parnet, Claire, *Diálogos*. Valencia, Editorial Pre-Textos.] writes:

“What Foucault says is true, any formation of power has the need for a knowledge on which it nonetheless does not depend, but which would have no efficacy without that formation. Now, that usable knowledge may adopt two forms: either an unofficial form, such as when it installs itself in the “pores” in order to cover up such and such failure in the established order; or else an official form, when it constitutes in itself a symbolic order which provides the established powers with a generalized axiom system. For example, historians of Antiquity show the complementarity Greek-city/Euclidean-geometry. This is so not because the geometers are the ones who hold power, but because Euclidean geometry constitutes the knowledge or the abstract machine that the city needs for its organization of power, of space and of time. No State lacks the need of an image of the thought which may serve it as axiom system or as an abstract machine, and which in return it will endow with the strength it needs in order to function: hence the inadequacy of the concept of ideology, which does not at all account for this relation. Thus, the disgusting role of classical philosophy such as we have seen it was to provide the apparatuses of power, Church or State, with the knowledge convenient to them. Could it be said that nowadays it is the human sciences which perform that role of providing... modern apparatuses of power with an abstract machine on the condition that they give them the desired promotion? Psychoanalysis has made its proposals: to become an official language and an official knowledge which may replace philosophy, to provide us with an axiom system about man which replaces mathematics, to invoke the Honestas and a mass function. Yet it is doubtful that it will succeed. The apparatuses of power are more easily inclined toward physics, biology or information theory.”

A formation/organization of power is itself an *order* in the primary process of individuals, established as those individuals learn to function within institutions which are structured after that order, and which comprehends an organization of space and time and a given kind of knowledge. Time accelerated, reaching its current pace—typical of the later stages of the *kaliyuga* —and capitalism attained its “developed” form, thanks to a particular structuring of the primary process of individuals—and to a knowledge which serves as its secondary process correlate—which allows for an ever increasing “efficiency in production” and for “making an ever better use of time” (!). Individuals learned to coordinate their activities in regard to the time of the clock and in general adopted the use and disposition of space, time and knowledge required by the emerging power structures. Hence the structure of current “right wing institutions.”

The school arranges the time of both pupils and teachers in a tight schedule; it places on one side of the square classroom the teacher/symbol-of-power who imposes on the pupils the official knowledge which they have to accept as The Truth, and places the students who must accept the “knowledge” imparted by the teacher at the other side of the room, facing the teacher in well arranged rows according to social position or else to the marks assigned them. The factory imposes a strict timetable on workers, overseers and managers, arranging workers and overseers in an orderly way and perfectly coupling workers and machines. The army imposes a tight schedule on its members and divides people into those who must be obeyed and—facing them arranged in rows with perfect discipline and a perfect organization of space and time—those who must obey. Television also imposes on the watchers a program (structure of time) and a coordinated arrangement of people and objects (structure of space), featuring a speaker in the screen who emits conditioning messages and watchers who face the screen without being able to contest the messages and structures received. And so on and on.

The development of ballet in France during the kingdom of Louis XIV and the gradual development of modern military discipline may have elaborated on the original model for the use of space and time provided by the monasteries, making possible the development of capitalism and—later on—of “real socialisms.”

This is why I felt the need to explain Ivan Illich’s classification of institutions into “right wing” and “left wing” on the basis of the discoveries made by Foucault and Deleuze. In spite of overlooking the fact that “right wing institutions” are extensions of the Family and/or of the State, Illich’s criterion for classifying institutions cannot be said to be wrong. However, I think the discoveries made by Foucault and Deleuze can help us improve that criterion. If we are to decide

whether an institution—for example, the fire brigade—is located toward the left, the center or the right of the institutional spectrum, we must observe its *structure*. The fire brigade is organized after a military model which conditions the experience of its members—the use and disposition of their space, time and knowledge—and also that of the people who interact with them, precisely as required by the power structures of contemporary societies. Therefore, though other institutions are to the right of the fire brigade, the latter is no doubt a “right wing institution:” it helps its members and those with whom they interact to function within ever more complex and all-controlling power structures, and makes possible the ever more efficient use of space and time necessary for the development of capitalism and of “real socialisms.” According to this criterion, a genuine left wing institution would be, for example, a Commune in which each and every member can organize her or his own space, time and knowledge at will—and, ultimately, transcend space, time and knowledge—in so far as he or she does his or her share of the common work in the Community.

It is also very significant that Deleuze places among the sciences tending to become the official language and official knowledge of contemporary apparatuses of power, precisely those that to Wilden, Capra and others constitute the basis of the New Paradigm—which, to them, represents the answer to the crisis that we face. Though the substitution of processes for entities typical of systems theory goes in the direction of Wisdom, the knowledge it offers us—just as that offered us by the New Physics and the other disciplines that have become the basis of the so-called “New Paradigm”—can (as noted by one of the participants in the New Paradigm Symposium organized by the Elmwood Institute at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, Ca., in 1985) serve the prevailing power structures in achieving their “old paradigm” goals. In itself, a paradigm shift cannot help us survive and build the enlightened society of the future. Survival and the construction of a New Age depend on the radical transformation of the psyche and of the experience of individuals that we have been considering all along. A paradigm shift—provided it is permissible to speak of such a thing, which Walt Anderson thinks it is not—can only serve as a supplement to that transformation.

⁸¹ This cannot be foreseen; it will be so if it corresponds to the spirit of the New Age.

⁸² Retranslated into English from the Spanish translation in Wilde, Oscar (Spanish 1951), *Obras Completas*, p. 1.293, *El alma del hombre bajo el socialismo*. Madrid, Aguilar.

⁸³ Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro, in Fromm, Erich, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki y Richard de Martino (1960), *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*. New York, Harper & Row, pp. 15-6. Reproduced in Sohl, Robert & Audrey Carr (editors) (1970), *The Gospel According to Zen. Beyond the Death of God*. New York, Mentor Books (The New American Library, Inc.), pp. 19-21.

⁸⁴ Retranslated into English from: Masters from Huainan/Thomas Cleary (English 1990, Spanish 1992), *El Tao de la política*. Barcelona, Los Libros de la Liebre de Marzo, p. 71.