

**Art and secular spirituality**

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November 2001

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.

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0-612-79050-9

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## Acknowledgements

I would first like to express my gratitude to all my teachers from within recognized institutions and without. It is they who unselfishly donated innumerable hours of time and countless words of encouragement. My teachers must include my fellow students, throughout the years, from whom I have learned a great deal.

More particularly, I would like to thank my thesis advisor Boyd White for his help and valuable suggestions.

I would like to thank Michèle Hekimi for her technical and emotional support for the duration of this project.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my parents for their sacrifices and love that enabled me to pursue my education.

### **Abstract**

Despite the numerous examples throughout history, the study of secular spirituality in art was mostly ignored until recently by contemporary writers, critics, historians, philosophers and educators. In my thesis, through the examination of selected images and writings, I determine how a differentiation between doctrinal and secular spirituality can be established. The importance of a rooted cosmopolitan outlook with respect to cross-cultural artistic manifestations is explored with the aim of synthesizing spiritual elements that transcend all cultures. The political, social and educational implications of ignoring spirituality are examined. A proposal to incorporate spirituality into education is introduced using art as a means to self-knowledge and understanding the implications of interconnectedness.

### **Sommaire**

L'étude de la spiritualité dans l'art laïque a été ignorée jusqu'à récemment par les auteurs contemporains, les critiques, les historiens, les philosophes et les éducateurs. Dans ma thèse, je détermine comment on peut établir une différence entre une spiritualité doctrinale et séculière, cela en examinant une sélection d'images et de textes. L'importance d'une vision cosmopolite respectueuse des manifestations artistiques multiculturelles est explorée dans le but de découvrir les éléments spirituels qui transcendent toutes les cultures. J'examine les implications politico-sociales et éducationnelles découlant de la non-reconnaissance de la spiritualité. Je propose d'inclure la spiritualité dans l'éducation en utilisant l'art comme moyen pour tendre vers une meilleure connaissance de soi.

## Preface

I became interested in art at an early age by entering drawing contests and scribbling sketches in and on my notebooks at elementary school. Shortly afterwards I grew dissatisfied with the Catholic religion. Like many other members of the baby boom of the forties and fifties, I was influenced by the counter-culture of the sixties and seventies. I rejected the hypocrisy of the church after reading about the Crusades, the pope's slaves and the Inquisition. I became interested in mysticism. I remember being profoundly impressed by Aldous Huxley's book entitled *The Perennial Philosophy*. I also read about his experiments with mescaline. I explored mind-altering substances and their connection to altered states of consciousness. I read with great enthusiasm Carlos Castaneda's, peyote enhanced, spiritual journeys with the shaman of the American deserts. I was influenced by Eastern religious philosophies. I explored the *Bhagavad Gita*, *The Upanishads* and Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*.

Now, I prefer to think my spirituality draws from my personal experiences rather than religious doctrine. Despite my rejection of the Catholic religion, I was struck by its power when I first saw Michelangelo's magnificent paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in 1974. Looking up at that ceiling for as long as I could, I became aware of the strength of artistic vision to move people. Furthermore, a link was formed between spirituality and art that has fascinated me ever since.

I began to see art as everything not strictly essential for living. In other words, art seemed to me to be the only reason for living. I felt that once our basic needs are satisfied most people turn to some form of artistic activity. They paint their houses, buy fashionable clothes, listen to music or create art themselves. All of these require conscious or unconscious aesthetic decisions. I believed all of us



have an innate desire to beautify ourselves and our surroundings. I thought this existed since humans first appeared on earth. This began when our earliest ancestors had enough leisure time to think after satisfying their primary human needs of shelter and food. Cave paintings from twenty thousand years ago, or perhaps even earlier, did not seem to be a strict attempt at communication. There appeared to be an aesthetic attempt combined with structure and coherence that I feel are essential elements of art.

I began a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at Concordia University in Montreal. I majored in Studio Art. During that time I did a painting that I called *Art is God* although I was not sure what I meant by that title. Did I mean we worship art as some worship their God or Gods? Did I mean that everything worth living for derives from art? Did art create man? Was art all powerful? Do we structure our lives around art? What is Art? What is God? To answer my questions, I sought out examples of spirituality in the artistic expressions of other cultures. Luckily or perhaps fatefully, I had a part time job that both paid my way through university and enabled me to travel to countries with different manifestations of their spirituality.

I took stereo photographs that documented places, objects and people of spiritual or religious significance to various cultures throughout the world. These images were assembled into a show of photographic slides with narration and music entitled *Sacred Sites*. (See illustration number 1.)

The show was first presented for a stereo photography convention in Rochester in the summer of 1996. I discovered that the artistic creations, decorating temples, food offerings, holy men, places and countless other aspects of our lives, had both beauty and power. My travels reinforced a link between

*Varanasi*

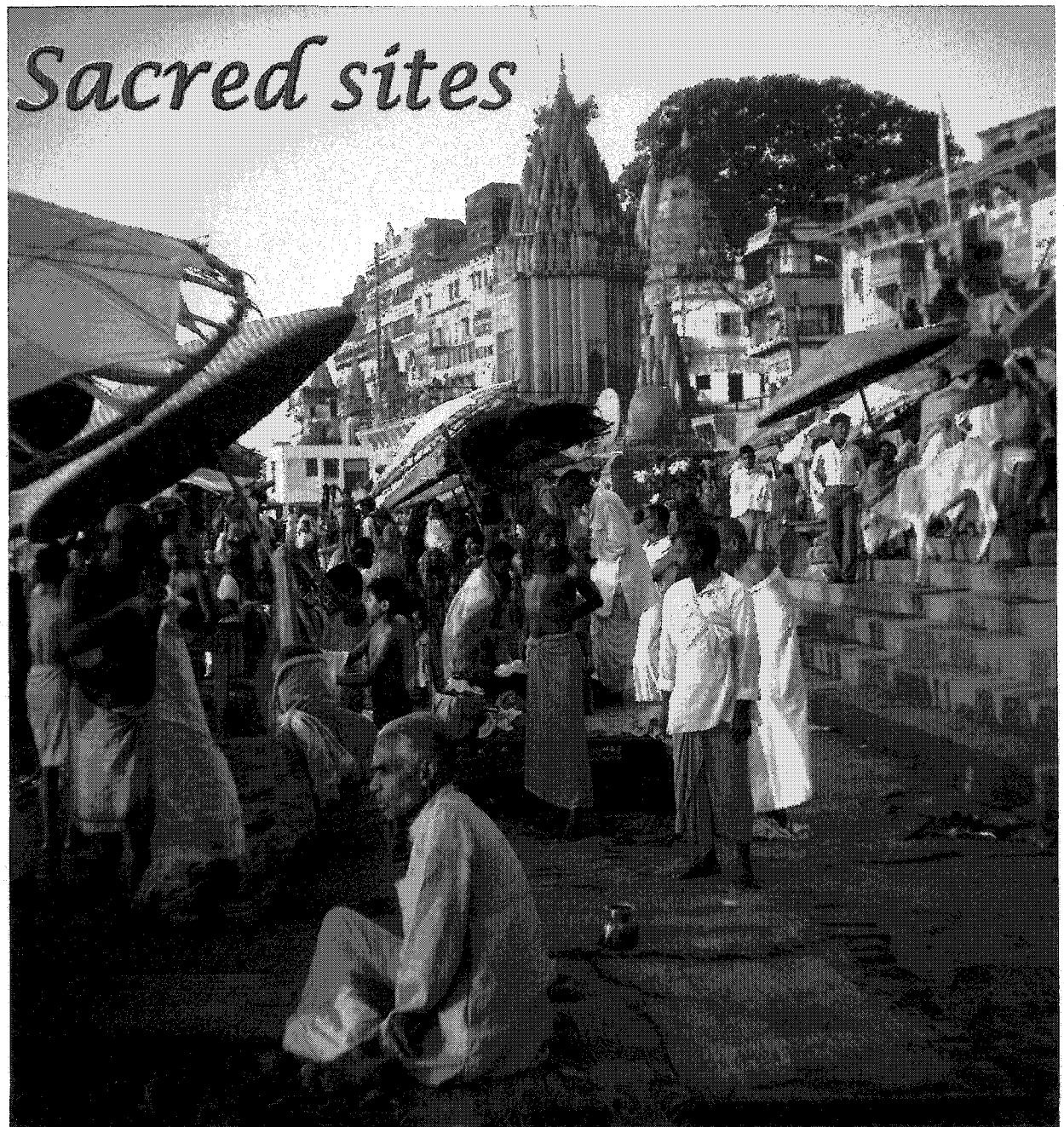


*Holy Man in a Holy City*



*Holy Man in a Holy City*

*India*



1. Sacred Sites, title slide

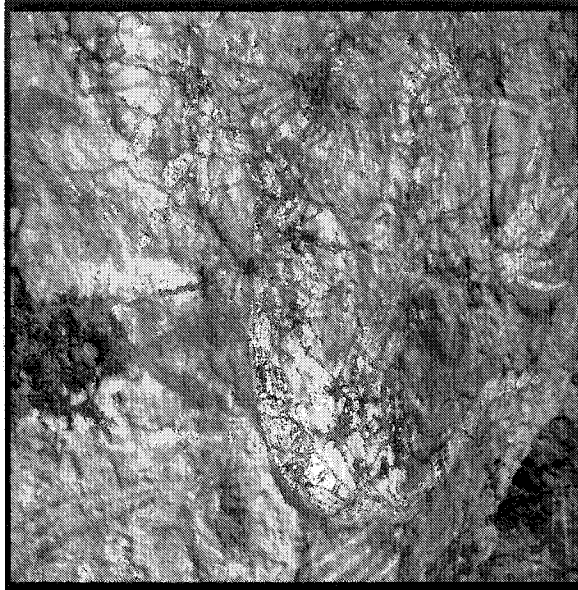
spirituality and what seemed to be a universal human desire to either create art or enjoy it.

After completing a teacher's certificate at the Université du Québec à Montréal, I taught art to high school students.

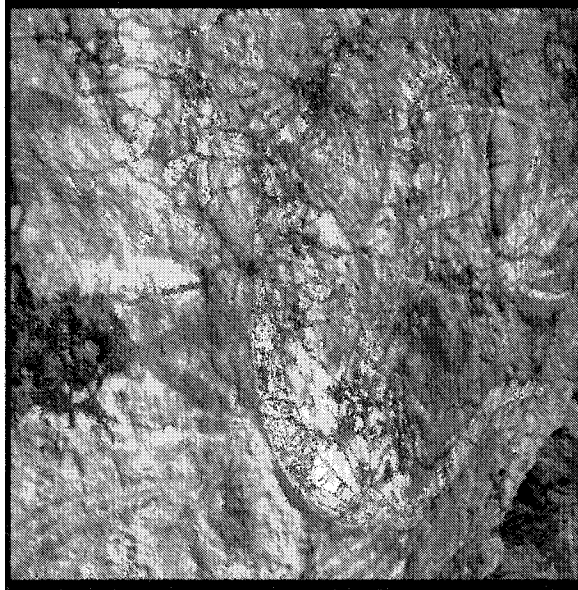
A year later, 1997, I enrolled in the master's Program in Culture and Values in Education. I began reading about contemporary approaches to values. From these readings, I learned that dissatisfaction with other approaches to moral and value's education led a number of researchers to turn to narrative. Storytelling was neglected by moral educators until recently. Some considered it unnecessary or even harmful to use stories to teach morality because stories could at times be full of superficial events, local prejudices and useless fictitious detail. Other approaches, such as Kohlberg's Values Clarification (1975), would leave us with cognitive moral exercises with no power to move us towards empathy and profound understanding. In *Why Johnny can't tell right from wrong*, author Kilpatrick (1992) discusses how abstracting the moral essence of a story into a moral principle would blind us to the human elements inextricably involved in these narratives. The narrative approach to values education places storytelling at the center. Proponents of the narrative approach feel that narrative is a basic human activity necessary to situate moral experiences in a meaningful and understandable context.

I substituted displaying a work of art for storytelling even though not all art is narrative in the strict sense of the word. I feel that even non-narrative art can be a way of telling a story or sharing an experience. This extends to nonrepresentational art that I produced at university. Kilpatrick (1992) feels that visualizing moral drama through literature or the visual arts can be a powerful method to move people to envision the human face of moral behaviour. He also

*Kakadu World Heritage Site*



*Nourlangie Rock*



*Nourlangie Rock*

*Australia*





2. Nourlangie Rock, Australia

contends that vision is central to virtue since (moral) behaviour is learned through observation. This made a lot of sense to me and I began to understand the force of art is in its depiction of the human elements that connect us and that all artists are telling their stories.

One example from my travels is the cave paintings at Nourlangie Rock in Australia. (See illustration number 2.)

In the northern part of the country, not far from the modern city of Darwin, is the World Heritage Site known as Kakadu. In it are caves with 30,000 year-old paintings. What you see here is known as the X-Ray style. It appears to be a Kangaroo or wallaby on the side of a rock overcropping. The Aboriginals return to paint over these images as part of their renewal of ties with the ancients. These forms, images, patterns or symbols are a way the knowledge of this traditional culture was communicated, lived, preserved, enlarged and renewed. (Lipsey, 1988)

I wondered if particular aesthetic values had meaning only within their specific tradition and culture or were they universal? I wondered if decorative art or non-representational art could tell a story or be of benefit to anyone other than the artist him or herself? I wondered if art could lead to justice for those ignored in the past? I wondered how art could communicate where everything else failed? Consideration of the above, led me to look at how art can transcend its origins and point to a universal spirituality that connects all living and non-living elements.

## **Introduction**

The primary objective of this thesis is to examine the idea of spiritual art in the context of our increasingly secular contemporary world. In order to do this, I briefly outline a number of ways artists have attempted to evoke spiritual themes in their works. I address the ways in which art can explore the mystery of spirituality outside the context of traditional religion, through non-doctrinal ways. Therefore, this paper includes a discussion of the difference between religious and spiritual art. After a brief introduction to these themes, I proceed to an analysis of a few of my photographs. I explore a personal spiritual reaction to art. Before that, I examine how the art of certain peoples was ignored in the past and how this situation might be remedied. Although I no longer teach art, I am still a teacher. Therefore, I finish with the implications of secular spiritual aesthetics with respect to contemporary education. This includes the relationship between aspects of spirituality and the creation of art.

## **Spirituality**

What do I mean by spirituality? Traditionally the spiritual has been associated with the immaterial. Particularly in Western religious traditions, what was considered spiritual involved that which is removed from this world. It has implied a differentiation between matter and spirit, body and mind, the now and the eternal, worldly and otherworldly. (Lipsey (1988), Coleman (1998)) This led to an ascetic spirituality that infused a monastic tradition in which retreat from many of the elements of nature was required in order to cultivate one's spirituality. My idea of spirituality is in line with a revised outlook on spirituality influenced in part by non-industrialized spiritual traditions, feminism, and environmentalism. (Sartwell (1995), Koppman (1999), Ferré (1996)) It involves



the matter, the body, the now, and the worldly in addition to their opposites previously listed.

I argue that spirituality is peace and harmony with all the living and the non-living elements of nature including humans, animals, plants and inorganic constituents. Therefore this involves the notion that we can be seen as both particular and a part of an invisible whole or oneness. As part of a oneness, the universal quality invokes the idea of timelessness. As a particular, the path to spiritual awareness is self-knowledge. Through creativity and art we can begin to discover both our uniqueness and our commonality.

Artists and those who value art are intimately connected to all that is material. They take relish in the details and earthly components involved in structuring matter into art. Occasionally the elements of ceremony, celebration, ritual, gesture and symbol in their art enable some to see that the artwork is not just an object but it is also part of a whole. The work of art can represent something that is beyond itself. It can express to both the artist and all others the latent spiritual nature of all of us. (Lipsey, 1988) This is the beginning of the development of an inner strength and a wisdom needed for correct and appropriate moral behaviour necessary to change our future for the better. Tranquility, orderliness, purity and gracefulness in thought and action spring from this interior illumination. But there can be no real harmony, peace, balance, order or grace without empathy. I hope spirituality can make the earth a place where dignity and justice prevails.

Part one begins with an examination of the confinement of the spiritual to doctrinal religion in the Western world. It continues with a brief overview of a number of Western artists known for the spiritual characteristics of their secular

images. It attempts to explore how abstract art can be spiritual and the input of abstract artists to spirituality. This includes the theoretical contributions of Kandinsky and Mondrian. The writings of these two influential artists are examined.

Next, chapter one focuses on figurative art, especially its modern variations in the art of Braque and Matisse. Their art is analyzed most particularly with respect to the concept of true self-knowledge.

Chapter two examines the rooted cosmopolitanism of Appiah with respect to understanding other cultures. It looks at how poststructuralist thinking can lead to enhancing respect for other culture's values and artistic expressions. Liberation theology is discussed as it pertains to the revolutionary mural art of Diego Rivera. Charles Taylor's idea of authenticity and self-image is examined. Chapter two concludes with a personal testimony of the way contact with other cultures influenced my understanding of spirituality.

In Part two, spiritual aspects of other societies can be looked upon and adapted to our culture to increase our interconnectedness and awareness of our own spirituality. In education, one way to do this is through art. In art education, spirituality can be divided into two broad categories. However, the two categories overlap especially when discussing empathy. Empathy, or reciprocity as Swanger calls it, involves a recreation of the art in the percipient. Therefore creation of and perception of art "embrace the creative consciousness." (Swanger, 1991) Furthermore art-making involves profound perception which also usually involves

empathy. Nevertheless, I have chosen to include the discussion of empathy in the creation of art although it could easily fit into the category of learning about art.

The first category, dealt with in chapter three, involves the relationship between spirituality and the creation of art. In this category, implications are considered when the artist is about to create a work of art. Thus in education when students are invited to create, what are the spiritual implications of that process?

The second category, dealt with in Chapter four, involves the relationship of spirituality to art when students are required to perceive it and judge it. It involves the discussion of problems and solutions to making education more spiritual. It explores what educators can do to make education more of a spiritual journey .

## PART ONE

### RELIGIOUS VERSUS SPIRITUAL ART

#### 1. Traditional to modern spiritual art

##### I. Introduction

The combination of the words secular spirituality may sound strange to some people. In fact it may appear to be an oxymoron. Some prefer to oppose the sacred with the secular. In *Reclaiming the Spiritual in Art*, Perlmutter (1999) argues that political religious organizations have purposely ignored or dismissed “unconventional” manifestations of spiritual art. Here unconventional can be read as non-religious. She claims this goes back to the second commandment in the Bible where we are warned not to make “graven images”. The images associated with this warning refer to idols or false Gods in the Judaeo-Christian concept. Worshipping a false deity was strictly forbidden. These ideas prohibiting making spiritual images outside the traditional religious context continued into Christianity and Islam. And Western culture, dominated for many years by Judaism, Catholicism and Protestantism ignored and dismissed secular spiritual aesthetics. More particularly, Shantz (1999) argues that religious institutions have often excluded or devalued women. Therefore contemporary female artists also sought spirituality in art outside of the established religious system.

Yet, Western and non-western, male and female, artists, not associated with organized religions, have often attempted to link spirituality with art.

## II. Figurative art

### a. Introduction

Because secular spiritual art has existed throughout the ages from traditional, to modern and contemporary art, it is useful to my purposes to divide the discussion of secular spirituality in art into two broad, and somewhat arbitrary, categories: figurative art and non-figurative art. Without getting into a complex semantic discussion of the terminology, a simple explanation of the differences for this thesis should be sufficient. Narrowly defined, figurative refers to any manner of representation using animal or human forms. (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1971) These were the forms that our earliest ancestors mostly used. More broadly defined, and especially in the context of modern art, figurative refers to representation in art using recognizable forms or objects as opposed to non-figurative or abstract forms. Figurative forms are those normally found in the exterior world but can also include imaginary forms loosely based on those of the exterior. Thus figurative art includes the art that has existed since man first painted or drew on the walls of caves. It has had a perennial role in communication and expression of man's needs, aspirations, emotions, thoughts, understandings, and spirituality.

By opposition to figurative art, non-figurative, abstract, art can be called art that represents an interior world. Occasionally it is referred to as non-representational art. (This refinement is of importance to artists, art critics, art historians and art philosophers but for my purposes it can be considered synonymous with abstract art.) Put another way, abstract art is a type of art whose content does not represent the world, whether real or imagined, as we perceive it. (*Le Robert*, 1993) Abstract art uses the elements of representation such as points,

lines, planes and colours mostly for their own sake and not as part of an attempt to represent other recognizable objects. However, it is important to point out that abstract art does not always mean interesting designs arranged in patterns of lines, colours and forms. As Lipsey (1988, p.24) argues, “serious abstract art--the art that claims Kandinsky, Mondrian and Klee and others as parent and guide—is made up of analogies.” Speaking about the points, lines and planes of abstract art, Kandinsky himself adds

The open eye and the open ear transform  
the slightest disturbance into a profound  
experience. Voices are heard on every side. The  
world resounds [die Welt klingt]. Like an explorer  
immersing himself in new, unknown lands, one  
makes discoveries in one's environment, normally  
mute, begins to speak an increasingly distinct  
language. Thus dead signs turn into living  
symbols. The dead come to life. Naturally, the  
new science of art can only come about provided  
that signs become symbols and the open eye and  
the open ear make possible the passage from  
silence to speech. (cited in Lipsey, 1988, p.222)

What this means to my understanding of spirituality is no matter the style of the abstract artwork, whether it be highly decorative or not, it can be an analogy for a personal vision or a transcendent vision that is greater than one's own life.

As I said earlier, the two categories of figurative and abstract art are somewhat arbitrary. This is because there can be elements of abstraction in much otherwise figurative art. Even in the basic figurative painting on the walls of the caves in Lascaux, France, for example, most experts would be hard pressed to determine the correspondence between the lines and colours that make up the art and exterior world figures they are supposed to represent. This problem becomes more apparent in the case of modern artists who occasionally purposely include figurative and non-figurative elements in the same work. “The figurative sculpture of Henry Moore for example, incorporates many abstract elements: its eloquence often derives from the tension between the natural and the abstract form” (Lipsey, 1988, p.23)

Even within an artistic movement elements of figurative and non-figurative art can overlap. Yves Tanguy, the French-born American surrealist painter deals with mostly abstract imagery whereas other well-known surrealists such as Salvador Dali and Magritte are primarily figurative artists.

#### **b. Traditional spiritual art**

All religions use some form of art whether it be literature, song, music, dance, calligraphy, poetry, sculpture or architecture. In traditional religious art, spiritual elements of a work of art could be seen and understood by members of a particular religion without too much difficulty. In Christianity, an image of Jesus would evoke the bridge between the divine and the human. A painting of Krishna, in Hinduism, could be understood to imply the form of God descending as an avatar to aid earthlings. But could an image of the ten *sefirot* of Hasidic Judaism mean something to a Zen Buddhist?

I would say that for most Buddhists it would evoke no spiritual feeling whatsoever unless of course the Buddhist was knowledgeable in the visual language or symbolism of Hasidic Judaism. Because the idea of the link between the divine and the human is found in numerous cultures and many religions it transcends religion and enters into the spiritual realm for me. Orderliness is a similar concept. In *To Know as We are Known*, Palmer (1993) says Muslims and Christians have different ways of bringing order to the enormous amounts of sensory data we receive every minute. Yet, I would say, the idea that order is necessary and desirable is present in all cultures and religions. It is in the spiritual realm for me. This spiritual realm is accessible to all whether they are religious or not. Education has an enormous potential and responsibility to demonstrate the spiritual links and universal ideas found throughout religious and non-religious art. I do not think it prudent to wait until the child is old enough to enroll in a university-level course in comparative theology before he or she is exposed to the idea of a universal human consciousness or spirituality.

### **c. Modern spiritual art**

For the non-specialist, modern and complex figurative art poses a problem of understanding. In the twentieth and twenty-first century, art continued its evolution. It went from more and more complex figurative art of the Modernists into total abstraction and back again. From there, it proceeded to conceptual work of the Postmodernists. Just as it would be relatively easy for a Frenchman to understand the *Gleaners* by Jean François Millet, it would be more difficult for him to understand Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, an early Cubist work, bordering on the abstract. However, it is possible to understand the visual language of complex figurative art and find spiritual elements in it. Lipsey (1988)



provides ways to uncover the spiritual in some of the eminent figurative artists of the twentieth century. Before examining the work of two individual artists, George Braque and Henri Matisse, in more detail, let us look briefly at modern artistic movement that incorporates elements of figurative and non-figurative art.

### **i. Surrealism**

The artistic movement known as Surrealism was given a formal baptism in André Breton's (1924) *Manifesto of Surrealism*. It incorporated a belief in creative expression not hindered by rationality and traditional values. The creative process was aided by recourse to chance, the unconscious and dreams. (Lipsey, 1988)

The unconscious process of spirituality can be seen in the works of a number of Surrealists including Max Ernst. Yet Surrealist art is not normally considered religious. In fact, it may be considered to be anti-religious if we think of some of Dali's paintings. However many Surrealists seem to acknowledge that there is a greater reality beyond the earthly realm. With Ernst and others there appears to be an attempt at exploring what lies removed from that which we can access through our senses. Surrealist art exhibits and explores the mystery of the spirit of our existence.

James Gleeson is one of Australia's most important contemporary Surrealists. He describes his art as being a search for self-knowledge and how we are connected to the rest of the cosmos.

### **ii. Georges Braque (1882-1963)**

Similar to El Greco's *A View of Toledo*, Braque's *Château at La Roche-Guyon*, is a landscape with buildings in it. Both paintings are suffused with a

shimmering energy that seems to dematerialize the solidity of the man made and natural forms in the images. This energy could be the wind but it seems to come more from the artist's mind and spirit. Both El Greco and Braque were not just painting what they saw. Braque, in particular, has altered the image in a way that leaves no doubt he is in a search for a deeper meaning. He has abandoned the attempt to merely give an illusion of a castle on a hill. He has compressed the image in such a way the elements blend into one another. A tree becomes part of a building. The image begins to resemble a checkerboard pattern on the canvas. Braque is searching for the meaning in three ways: perception itself, what is seen and the illusion of image making.

Here Lipsey (1988) points out the importance of images to convey meaning that can not necessarily be translated into words. Lipsey says the spiritual in art is an idea vast in scope conveyed through an image complete in itself, not an illustration but an illumination. (This is elaborated later in the education section.) In Braque's *Château at La Roche-Guyon*, it seems as if two distinct but reciprocal forces co-inhabit the painting simultaneously. "The angular pattern of the buildings reads as the Cartesian reality of order and logic, while the foliage, streaming in and around it, reads as a complementary energy, freer, less predictable, dynamic." (Lipsey, 1988, p. 54) This dualism seems to be part of both Nature and man's intellectual urge to impose order on Nature.

Interpreting the painting in this manner is an exploration of human understanding. In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky (1947) wrote

"Artists are obeying Socrates' advice: "Know thyself." Consciously or unconsciously, artists are studying and investigating their materials, weighing the spiritual value of those elements with which it is their privilege to work with."

Of course, this painting and other Cubist works could be interpreted differently. To some it could merely be a technical exercise in style. But if an interpretation that leads to greater understanding of the human spirit can be helpful why not investigate it? Kandinsky said that artists are involved in an inquiry of the elements they must work with. This analysis necessarily involved determining their spiritual worth.

### **iii. Henri Matisse (1869-1954)**

Amongst figurative artists of the twentieth century, Matisse would not normally be thought of as having a spiritual connotation to his art. Like Marc Chagall, a painter more obviously interested in the spiritual, Matisse was commissioned to decorate the interior of a church. However Matisse was considered to have rather vague religious views. Picasso for one, could not understand how Matisse could accept the commission in a church context. In a reply to Picasso, Matisse explained that despite his lack of formal religious faith, he was able to work through meditation. Matisse felt he could be fully absorbed by what he was attempting so that he was working in a state of mind approaching prayer. (Lipsey, 1988, p. 256) This spirituality, outside of formal religion, was elaborated on by Matisse in his writings about his commission.

Matisse felt that the purpose of modern art was not simply to delight the senses, something that the decorative beauty of his artworks certainly do. Rather, Matisse felt spirituality could spring from love of the image to be created, love of creation itself and great sincerity. He believed that a profound expression of himself in color and form was sufficient. He felt that creating the interior of the Chapel of the Rosary of the Dominican Sisters in Vence awoke him to self-knowledge.

Sincerity for Matisse was a word rich in possibility. For him it meant vision, exploration and creation. It allowed the artist freedom because it placed him in the realm of true self-knowledge. From this security, Matisse believed the artist was able to produce work ripe with emotion.

In his writings, and in his art, we can find a search for something deeper. He was looking for harmony, purity and peace. He wanted workers to find solace in his art. Matisse wanted his art, partly through simplification of forms and ideas, to calm people. He strove to find and depict the beauty of the world.

One of his works, *Bonheur de vivre*, exhibits his love of life and happiness. It depicts a life in the beauty of the outdoors. It praises humanity and Nature. It is full of love, music and dance in a simple yet refined manner. It harks back to a lost age of innocence similar to the Garden of Eden. But at the same time it evokes what we all seem to need so desperately: beauty, love and the simple pleasures of life.

### III. Non-figurative or abstract spiritual art

#### a. Introduction

Shantz (1999, p. 62) says abstract art can be easily linked to spirituality because it is an “irreducible, nondiscursive and silent experience.” She clarifies this by stating that the non-specific content of abstract art enables this link to be made if the spiritual is considered as transcendent or numinous rather than phenomenal. Of course, ultimate reality can not be simplified any more easily than can a work of art. But abstract art can use elements of reality such as colours and lines as symbols to reveal the transcendent. Abstract art can be nondiscursive, because it appeals to intuition rather than reason. Rationality can neither set up a list of rules to follow in order to create a great work of abstract art, nor can it offer direct spiritual illumination. A sublime work of art seems better suited to communicating the infinite than does rational discourse. Steer (1996), in *See through music (notes from an unpopular composer)*, discusses how music, as a nonliteral experience offers a gateway to the numinous reality within us. Numinous refers to the numen or plural numina. The numina were the spirits some, including the animists, believed to be inhabiting certain places and objects. Some now use numinous to refer to a mysterious spiritually-elevated presence that is difficult to apprehend in a purely rational manner. (Coleman (1998) A correlation exists between music and visual art because they both are non-literal experiences. What can be applied to one can also be applied to the other. Lipsey (1988, p. 96) adds that abstraction in visual art, offers a language to represent or discover order and disorder. It illuminates the structure of the self and the world.

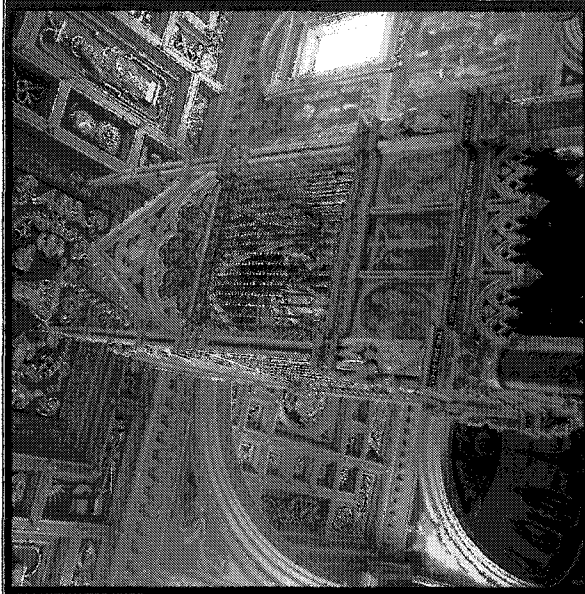
It would be difficult to associate a particular religion to abstract art. To be fair, it should be stated immediately that merely being acquainted with the works

of abstract artists is not enough to be able to reconstruct the artist's intentions and ideas of spirituality. Abstract art has within it the possibility of appealing to everyone. Because most abstract art has no outward indication of any particular deity or religion, it could be spiritually significant to any member of any religion. This may be true of figurative religious art also. I should point out that I believe many non-Christians have been just as moved by the Sistine Chapel Ceiling as I was. The leaders of the Catholic Church were well aware of the ability of art to awe, inspire and "reveal" the power and glory of God. (See illustration number 9.) My high school art teacher told me that Michelangelo was commissioned to create the cupola in St-Peter's Basilica in Rome for this reason. The church wanted the people sitting in the pews to look upwards towards God and be awed by the beauty of the art on the ceiling. Numerous others, regardless of their religious ideas, have been awed by the Indo-Islamic or Mogul mausoleum built by the Shah Jahan for his beloved wife: the Taj Mahal. (See illustration number 3.)

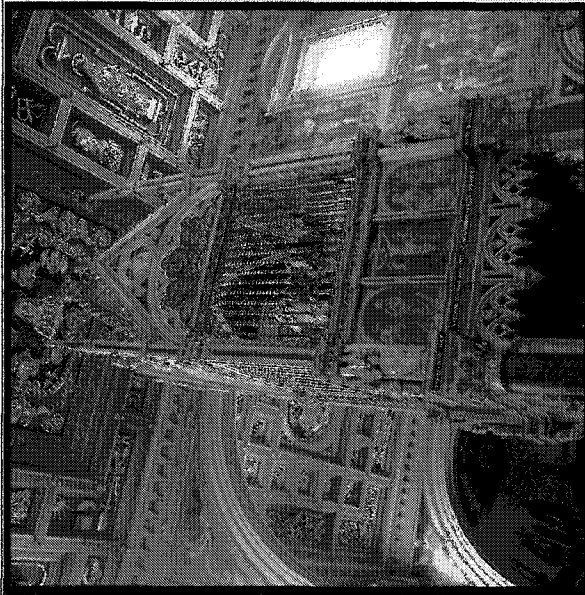
However, abstract art, would seem to be a wonderful opportunity for offering spiritual illumination to those not associated with a particular religion. On a theoretical basis we know this to be true. However, even in the most nonrepresentational art, aspects of the artist's heritage and personality can be detected. The artist's spirit and doctrinal religious beliefs could still be communicated in an abstract work. Therefore all abstract art is not necessarily spiritually secular.

On the other hand, abstract art could be spiritually meaningless to all. Some critics went so far as to label minimalist and abstract art as signaling the death of God! This is understandable when seen within the perspective of the parallels between art and religion. Many, including Kandinsky, correctly noted that periods of great artistic achievements were also periods of intense spiritual or

*Rome*



*San Giovanni in Laterno*



*San Giovanni in Laterno*

*Italy*



9. San Giovanni in Laterno, Rome



Agra

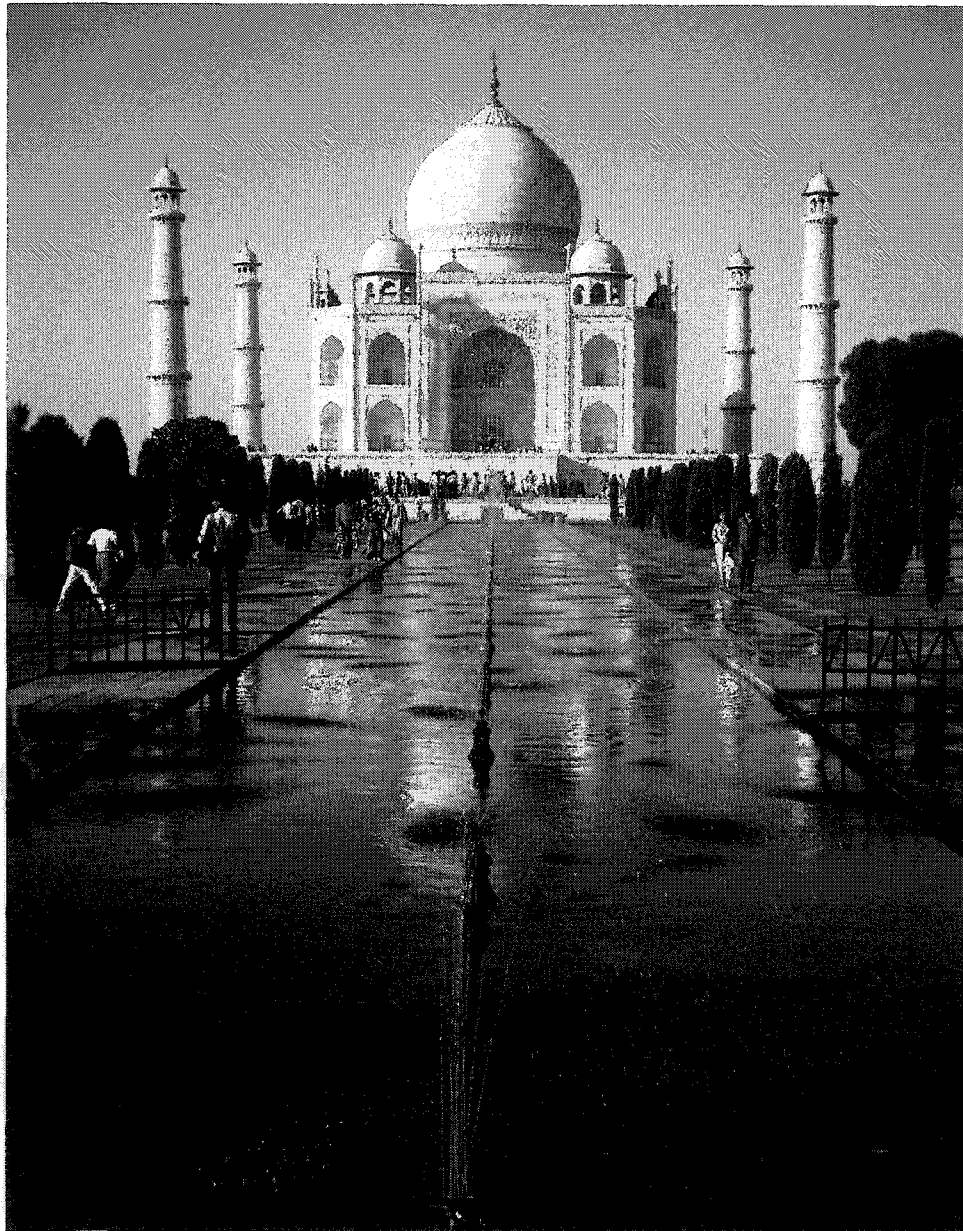


Taj Mahal



Taj Mahal

India



3. Taj Mahal, India

religious activity. Just think of all the art produced that contains an image of a God, a prophet or some other spiritual symbol. In Western art alone these images would fill gallery after gallery to the brim.

Neither is all abstract art spiritual. At worst, it could merely be a way to organize elements of the artist's chosen visual language. At its best it could either arise from the spiritual or it could illuminate the spiritual. It depends upon the abilities of the artist. Once again before looking at individual non-figurative artists and their works, let us look briefly at an important contemporary abstract art movement that some consider succeeded in producing many images of aesthetic and spiritual power.

#### **b. Abstract expressionism**

This art movement began in the fifties in New York. Many artists from this school are now well known: Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt, Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, Robert Motherwell, Franz Kline, et al.

The movement borrowed the pictorial vocabulary of much of Kandinsky's abstract art. Dynamic interactions of colours and lines filled with an intensity of expression could apply to just as well to Kandinsky as it could to the Abstract Expressionists. (Lipsey, 1988) A wide variety of styles emerged within the movement but it could be characterized as a liberation from traditional brushwork painting and an exclusion of representational content. Often paint would be applied with a vigorous energy via unorthodox methods like swishing the paint on with the hands in the manner of Jackson Pollock or using large, house-painting rollers as many did.

Abstract Expressionists were, for the most part, considered to be "spiritual".

Harold Rosenberg, one of the principal champions and critics of Abstract Expressionism (Clement Greenberg was the other), wrote about the American artist's spiritual ambitions.

In sum, what the new American artist sought was not a richer or more contemporary fiction (like the Surrealists), but the formal sign of a language of the inner kingdom—equivalents in paint of a flash, no matter how transitory, of what had been known throughout the centuries as spiritual enlightenment.

(cited in Lipsey, 1988, p. 300)

Clyfford Still, Adolph Gottlieb, Ad Reinhardt and even Jackson Pollock were involved in personal spiritual quests. With respect to secular spirituality, Pollock echoed a Zen Buddhist approach I will explore later when he said that “Churches are okay if you got to belong to something to feel safe, but artists don’t need that ... they’re part of the universal energy in their creating. Look—existence is. We’re part of all like everything else...” (Cited in Lipsey, 1988, p. 306)

Mark Rothco and Barnett Newman also wrote about the transcendental in their art making. Aspects of Rothco’s paintings related to the spiritual were said to include “agony, drama, and mystical, shimmering light”. (Drury & Voight, 1999, p. 59) A common feature among the Abstract Expressionists was the spirituality stemming from the unconscious.

### **c. Kandinsky (1866 - 1944)**

If the artists choose to avoid images of the deities, does it mean that their art is spiritually void? Arguably the first serious abstract artist, the Russian,

Wassily Kandinsky, did not think so. Kandinsky deplored the rampant materialism of the nineteenth century and believed art was a means to free mankind from this nightmare. In Kandinsky's (1947, p. 24) essential monograph, *Concerning The Spiritual in Art, and painting in particular* he wrote that the artist should strive towards more refined and subtle emotions. This did not mean the artist ignored the intellect to rely solely on emotion or intuition.

Nothing was farther from my mind than an appeal to the intellect, to the brain. This task would still have been premature today and will lie before the artists as the next, important, and unavoidable aim(=step) in the further evolution of art. Nothing can and will be dangerous any longer to the spirit once it is established and deeply rooted, not even therefore the much-to-be-feared-brainwork in art.

In "*Love's Knowledge: Essays on philosophy and literature*", Nussbaum (1990) argues in favour of Aristotle's defense of the use of the emotions and the imagination in addition to the intellect, as being fundamental to rational choice. It seems to me Kandinsky would agree with Nussbaum's idea that to only apprehend something cognitively or intellectually is insufficient. Perception of course requires both cognition and apprehension with the senses. Nussbaum refers to this as seeing a complex reality with lucidity, imagination and feeling.

Kandinsky sometimes referred to the idea of inner necessity as honesty. It resembles a powerful conscience speaking to the artist/seeker/guide. The artist's inner voice demands the artist pay close attention to the intrinsic qualities of the innermost nature of all he perceives. He seems to be striving for the soul. That inner entity that drives human consciousness.

Kandinsky manifested a distrust of organized religion and its traditional sacred imagery. Kandinsky felt that the artist should be free to choose his material as he sees fit. He considered this a spiritual freedom absolutely necessary in art and life. Kandinsky refers to those who paint pictures trying to render the divine when he talks about Matisse. It seems that Kandinsky would prefer that artists used the elements and materials of art itself to uncover spirituality. (Lipsey, 1988, p. 45) To this end Kandinsky rarely speaks of traditional religious iconography to render spirituality but rather of the pure elements of art. When describing the colour white, for example, he refers to a harmony of silence that white entails. He speaks of the pregnant possibilities this silence has within it. He speaks of a rich nothingness. Kandinsky also spoke of the inner sound and inner necessity that pointed towards using abstract forms to render the universe of spiritually alive creatures. Kandinsky, for example, said that a triangle was a spiritual element in itself. Although Kandinsky touched upon the idea that forms had spiritual value, we should turn to Mondrian for an elaboration of these ideas.

#### **d. Mondrian (1872-1944)**

Piet Mondrian was brought up in a strict Calvinist household but strove for a universal spirituality in his painting and writings about art. In 1909, Mondrian

became a Theosophist. After this time, much of his art and writing dealt with issues related to the mostly Eastern Idealist thoughts of the Theosophical Society. He was wary of the past. He did not want to hear the church bells reminding him of the religions and art of past times. He championed the new man essentially different from the old. He felt that art could be a vehicle to transcend individuality to achieve universality. He thought that art should concern itself with knowing the depths of inwardness. He felt that art should bring about a harmony between this inwardness and one's outer life. He wrote that art now surpasses religion in its quest for spirituality. (Lipsey, 1988, p.67)

Mondrian chose abstract art to express his feelings on spirituality. He felt that life was becoming more abstract. For Mondrian, a truly modern individual was concerned with the consciousness of the human spirit. Only abstract art could express this cosmic, universal aesthetic. In abstract painting and music, the artist perceiving the external world, according to Mondrian, comes to recognize and depict the universal it holds. Put another way, a work of art for Mondrian was a way that the universal became subjective. The essential nature of all things exists in the universal which is the basis for all life and art. Art therefore should be the expression of the universal.

Lipsey's (1988) analysis of Mondrian's art reveals how it progressed towards more and more abstract images. But the spiritual quest is evident even in his early, non-abstract paintings. This can be seen in the way the forms of nature simplify into harmonious patterns. It seems to be a search for the universal, the transcendent forms of life. The innumerable natural colours also are subtly reduced to a few simple contrasts: hot red earth tones and cold blue, sky tints. Often the energies of the earth seem to unite with those from the sky: symbolic union of the benefits of the universal upper and the lower forces.

In his later, more abstract works, Mondrian strove to reduce the marks of individuality that he felt reduced the quality of the universal. He strove to achieve a dynamic equilibrium of opposing forces resulting in harmony. This resulted in a tendency towards simplicity of colour and form. He reduced his palette to the primary colours: red, yellow and blue. These are of course the essence of all colours. White, grey and black could also be used to express the notion of space. Likewise he reduced all lines to straight lines which imply curved and diagonal lines. Furthermore, he used vertical lines to notate all active, masculine force and horizontal lines to represent passive, feminine force. He felt this would allow him to represent the all-opposing forces in life by the crossing of perpendicular lines.

#### **e. Conclusion**

So what then distinguishes religious art from spiritual art? An Australian artist, John Coburn, thinks it a matter of degree. "I think you can be deeply religious, semi-religious or spiritual...." (Drury & Voight, 1999, p. 50) In many religions, the spiritual can be considered opposed to the material. Parishioners are often chided for letting their materialism obstruct their religious attitude. When we speak of materialism, the term often used is egocentric. A selfish materialism is opposed with an unselfish wisdom and understanding of things beyond our immediate physical needs. The spiritual refers to an ability to search beyond what is obvious compared to that which is deep inside of all of us. Yet traditional religion is bound up in dogmatism and ceremony. As Lipsey (1988) points out, this seems to be at odds with the act of looking beyond. I agree when he says spirituality involves searching. It involves a pilgrimage of sorts. Despite the fact traditional religion seems to outline the abstract knowledge of the cosmos and human nature, it also seeks renewal through pilgrimage. "The pilgrim gains new



eyes, a new feeling for things, a new sense of life, and this newness within cannot help but brighten the world at large and reveal its exquisite order.” (Lipsey, 1988, p. 11) It can be a quest to relieve the burden of our difficult lives. It can be a desire to discover our underlying unity. But Lipsey (1988) also knows that spirituality can be an inner strength that allows for sincere understanding and wisdom in times when chaos appears to run wild. Clarity of vision often occurs when spirituality favours reconsideration and an unselfish perspective.

Another contemporary Australian artist, James Gleeson, says religious art “springs from religion itself, which is just an attempt to come to grips with the mysteries of existence.” (Drury and Voight, 1996, p. 24) Any art that has to do with religion could be religious but not all religious art is spiritual or sacred. Gleeson says that El Greco’s depiction of Christ is spiritual because it is no longer the repetition of classic recognizable forms. He goes on to say that El Greco’s Christ involves an imaginary or emotional experience. The inner dimension is brought to the external form.

To some, it may seem to be ridiculous to speak of the spiritual in the context of major Western art. (Koppman, 1999) Such art of the Cubists, Abstract expressionists, Surrealists, and other members of the industrialized Western artworld, is treated like a commodity to be sold at the highest price possible. Having a work by one of these artists enters the profane realm of status. Many of these works that have little to do with the sacred are sold for millions in auctions. Perhaps it is the way our culture sets art apart from life that many people have difficulty understanding how art in our culture can be sacred?

Yet the art itself still has the power to evoke the spiritual. Many of these successful artists seem to be surrounded by a distinctive quality of sacredness.

And many collectors that invest in expensive art hope they can somehow be blessed by the sacred aura manifest in the artwork. (Koppman, 1999)

## 2. Rooted cosmopolitanism

### I. Introduction

I have traveled extensively throughout the world and documented my travels in stereo photography. In many ways my perspective on secular spirituality is a result of my contact with other cultures and their “art”. It is without doubt difficult to apply our understandings about art to similar cultural expressions in different societies. I have learned that many cultures do not have a word that can be related to “art”. (Koppman, 1999) Nevertheless we can only use our conceptual categories to understand other cultures and their manifestations of the sacred or the spiritual.

Consistent with Anthony Appiah’s (1998) view of cosmopolitanism in *Cosmopolitan Patriots*, is the celebration of different perspectives, cultures and people. He says there would be no point in being cosmopolitan if all cultures were homogeneous. This necessarily involves, as Appiah puts it, circulation of people. This does not mean circulation for cultural tourism in the sense of exploitation or commercial purposes. It involves making the effort to understand and learn from the other cultures. What is learned can be applied to better understanding of one’s own culture. Seeing our culture from or with a different perspective can help find our failures and our successes, as Nussbaum (1997) points out. Earle J. Coleman rightly argues, in *Creativity and Spirituality*, that the great religions complement each other.

“... a member of one religion can engage those of other faiths in dialogue in order to understand, evaluate, or temper his own feelings and beliefs.

Those who bring nothing but doctrines, dogmas or propositions to the dialogue situation will fail.

Success requires an intuitive receptivity and an existential posture-one that engages the total self, i.e. intellect, heart and will.”

(Coleman, 1998, p. 4)

Incorporating diverse values and view points also is consistent with the multicultural, pluralist nature of my modern North American culture. Unfortunately this was not so in the recent past.

As mentioned earlier, political religious organizations have purposely ignored or dismissed “unconventional” manifestations of spiritual art. This is particularly true for aboriginal or indigenous spiritual art. The Vatican Museum has a gallery full of sacred or spiritual art that the missionaries “collected”. I visited the museum in 1999 when I was living in Rome. It is called the Missionary Museum Of Ethnology. What follows is the description from the web site.

The material is vast and various and is presented according to didactic principles so as to document the religious cults of the various civilizations which have flourished in other continents over an enormous span of time, from centuries before the coming of Christ right up to our times.

(Roma 2000, 2001)

The web site lists a few of the sacred or spiritual items the museum displays: Quetzalcoatl (the Plumed Serpent) - Mexico, Aztec (15th c.), Maiden spirit mask (Agbogho) - Nigeria, Igbo people (19th c.), figure of a divinity - Colombia, Aruaco (collected 1691), the god Tu - Polynesia, Gambier Islands (collected 1834-36), the god Rogo - Polynesia, Gambier Islands (collected 1834-36), and the god Tupu - Polynesia, Gambier Islands (collected 1834-36).

Things are slowly changing and the missionary zeal for collecting “idolatrous” art has diminished somewhat. Recent postmodern, and more particularly poststructuralist, trends have advanced the positive aspects of “pluralism, change, flexibility, playfulness, uniqueness and respect for differences”. (Ferré, 1996)

## **II. Liberation theology**

A discussion of liberation theology is important to my interests in spiritual art because we know local and indigenous culture of the past was repressed or ignored. Voices of the disenfranchised were not heard in many colonized nations.(Ferré, 1996) In Mexico, for example, the church was responsible for keeping the social, political and cultural status quo. This meant that local's interests and the art that represented them was dismissed as unworthy of that from Europe.

In Mexico, even the stones for building the post office come from Europe, like all that was considered worthwhile. Beyond the boundaries of official art, ...the genius engraver José Guadalupe Posada strips naked his country and his time. No critic takes him seriously. He has no pupils,

although two young artists have been following him since they were children. José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera haunt Posada's workshop and watch him labor. (Galeano 1988, p. 60)

We now know that, in 1924, Diego Rivera went on to produce epic murals of his people and all the peoples of Mexico. Rivera's murals depicted the struggles of Emiliano Zapata to achieve decent living standards for the indigenous and lower class Mexicans. The works of Orozco and Rivera fit into my criteria of secular spirituality because they use empathy as a means to arrive at a system of justice that applies to all not just the wealthy or those that happen to belong to certain faith. The images of Rivera were not hung on the walls of a particular church. These works are the basis for an active and adequate reply to injustice that is required for my interpretation of spiritual integrity. There can be no real tranquility or harmony without justice for all.

The visually narrative, representational nature of Rivera's murals enables the moral experiences of the locals to be situated in a meaningful and understandable context. This in turn may enable the wealthy and the poor to see the humanity in moral behaviour. But as I have argued earlier, and as Swanger (1991) argues, an abstract work can also invoke empathy or reciprocity. In this particular case the figurative images were probably most appropriate for the context of urban Mexico at that time.

Why they were painted as murals is also indicative of one of the strengths of visual art. Visual art has not been "kidnapped" by the intellectual elite. It can "speak to" all who can see. Artists can express that which can not be said or written. The paintings on the walls of the

caves in Lascaux, France existed thousands of years before the evidence of the first writing. They evoked feelings and perceptual reactions. The dancer, the musician and the abstract artist exemplify and express feelings and forms. Worlds are not made up solely from what is said literally or metaphorically “but also by what is exemplified and expressed.”

(Goodman, 1985, p. 12) As the Swiss artist Paul Klee said “Art does not reproduce the visible rather it makes visible”. (cited in Coleman, 1998, p. 141)

Poor Mexican’s were illiterate but not blind. All who passed could see what was on the walls of the Ministry of Education and other buildings in Mexico City, “ the wretched of the earth become the subjects of art and history rather than objects of use, scorn and pity” (Galeano, 1988, p.59).

As the contemporary Protestant theologian, Schubert Ogden says, the old, imperial religious images of the premodern or modern eras can no longer symbolize a God that is concerned with the misery of human masses. (Ferré, 1996) New ways of constructing theory are demanded by liberation theology. Diego Rivera echoes this when he says that gods, angels, archangels, saints, kings and emperors are no longer the heroes of Mexican painting. The people are the heroes now.

### **III. Postmodernism**

Instead of emphasizing the broader postmodern approach that deconstructs all aspects of the social context, in “*Socially Responsive Educational Research*”, Stringer (1993) used ideological themes to provide a structure that would offer help to educators and researchers amongst minorities. In Foucault, he found ideas

to eliminate subjugation by choosing local planning, local knowledge and local decision making. This means indigenous people would have control in the way local schools are run, what curricula is used and who decides what is best for the local population. Foucault is referring to the concept of a democratic structure, allowing for popular participation.

And Derrida's ideas echo those of Foucault. Derrida advocates looking for means to override the control of those in positions of power he calls "culture producers". Applying this to education of indigenous people, Stringer (1993) insists on enhancing, instead of denigrating, local art, dance, music and history. This way, outside experts and professionals would not be able to impose their concept of the good upon indigenous people by dismissing or ignoring the valuable contributions aboriginal artists have made to culture.

#### **IV. Change through cross-cultural contact**

I see spirituality in some ways a fusion of the best parts of many different religions. This is similar to the way Charles Taylor speaks of a fusing of horizons.

"What the presumption requires of us is not peremptory and inauthentic judgements of equal value, but a willingness to be open to comparative cultural study of the kind that must displace our horizons in the resulting fusions. What it requires above all is an admission that we are very far away from that ultimate horizon from which the relative



worth of different cultures might be evident.”

(Taylor, 1994, p. 73)

Learning about the spiritual artistic aspects of different cultures can lead to insights into our own spirituality or lack of it. With respect to Appiah's views on cosmopolitanism, this implies that the cosmopolitan is rooted in his own culture.

One danger is that ethnic minorities are being swamped by the hegemony of a larger, global (American) culture. The Aborigines of Australia use their sacred art and ceremonial practices to teach the younger generations their traditions. (Drury & Voight, 1996, p. 98) Even those artists exposed to western contemporary art and culture through travel, remain close to their traditions. They feel the production and recording of their art is the most important way for them to educate their children and others for the preservation of their culture.

Visual expression is integrated into ceremonial culture, and each person is taught the designs that describe their land, and how to make and decorate ceremonial instruments. Unlike western contemporary art, this Aboriginal art is not simply making a picture, but each time is a total engagement of making a Dreaming.

(Ibid.)

A true cosmopolitan would be concerned that such fragile cultures resist assimilation and disappearance. This is not to say

that “cultural hybridization” should be avoided at all costs. This is not possible.

In the educational context, the arguments Appiah (1998) puts forward to defend patriotism are relevant to culture as it relates to respect for traditions. This pertains to my ideas about spiritual art as a form of moral perspective rooted in the local psyche. Regarding patriotism versus cosmopolitanism, he rightfully points out that people can take pride in the nation, state or even smaller communities. Feelings people have are important in such questions as self-esteem, the need to feel wanted and the sense of belonging. But not just states or nations, smaller groupings of people are also important. Furthermore, the small scale of these closer communities is to be celebrated for the richness of cultural variety they allow.

This is not to say that preserving spiritual art should be an excuse to preserve all elements of a particular culture. There are some aspects of some cultures that do not deserve to be preserved or continued. This is beyond the scope of my paper but I would like to say that who decides what aspects are to be preserved needs to consider the impact of self-respect, self-esteem and spirituality.

## **V. Authenticity**

Following Rousseau’s ideas on the concept of how individual identity has now become so important, Taylor (1994) speaks of the idea of authenticity. He outlines how individuals now are thought to have a moral sense grounded in their feelings as opposed to the older way of calculating the consequences of right of wrong actions in the hope of being rewarded in an after life. He continues to say that the way in which moral actions are pursued, in an individual, is something that is necessary to be true and complete human beings. In other words, our moral

salvation occurs when we are in “authentic moral contact with ourselves” (Taylor, 1994, p. 29).

Authenticity therefore can only be achieved if we know who we are and where we are coming from. In this respect, I see the need for minority cultures, such as the Inuit, to preserve their history and understand their past. How can this be done in a school system that ignores their culture and history?

In order to understand how identity is related to recognition, Taylor (1994) says we must realize that identity is dialogical in nature. He means that we become fully authentic humans only through exchange with others on two levels. The first is the intimate level, where exchange and struggle takes place between significant others to develop an authentic identity. On the broader public level, groups seek recognition of their identities. On this broad level, one could argue that the minority cultures need to accept the exchanges with the larger cultures and whatever changes occur are necessary and inevitable. Recognition demands universal, liberal principles of equal dignity. This often can blend authentic identities into the one large homogeneous identity of the hegemonic culture. In this sense true authenticity is lost.

Taylor (1994) says that minority groups are often given a poor depiction of themselves. This can occur when the school curriculum revolves around culture and history totally alien to the ethnic minority. It forces the excluded groups to feel inferior or ignored. In this sense, no recognition occurs and therefore identity suffers. Poor self-image is the result.

Here perhaps I differ with Taylor (1994) when he speaks of works of art or literature that should be admitted to the canon of acceptable works. He says that all races and cultures should “enjoy the presumption that their traditional culture has value”. If he means value to someone else or if he is referring to a universal

value that can be applied to any liberal democratic society, I would argue that extending the value of one's cultural tradition to the broader context is not necessary, although I do agree that recognizing the value of their culture and respecting it is helpful. What is most important to me is that it has worth to the minority ethnic group and this helps them to define themselves. For example, for many indigenous people, their works of art and their narratives framed in the ancient stories embody within them their traditions and values. In this sense, they join with their ancestors and develop a continuity with their past. European based educational systems ignored these narratives. Even at a minor level as follows this can be easily seen.

When the British explorers, such as Perry, got stuck in the winter ice off Melville Island, they wintered among the residents of Igloolik but did not take advantage of the cultural advantages surrounding them; for example, the explorers did not adopt Inuit clothing even though their own was clearly inadequate. That is one of the main reasons for their failure. There was a reluctance on the part of the Royal Navy to accept the riches of Inuit culture and make use of it.

At worst missionaries demonized and denigrated indigenous culture and narratives. If the group's children are not educated in their traditions, the link to their values and history is broken. In my opinion this is extremely important. Therefore examples of a universal spirituality need to be found in the art of all cultures. I believe this is possible. If it can not be found within their own culture, I do not think it will speak to them with sufficient force.

## VI. Dignity

Appiah (1998) quotes his father saying that no matter where we choose to live we should leave that place better than we found it. It was moral imperative for the author's father to love all of mankind and his duty, as a human being, required him to act in a way grounded upon a respect for human dignity, equality and personal autonomy. Appiah (1998) argues that this moral perspective transcends all cultures. He says that it is wrong to contrast liberalism or cosmopolitanism with patriotism because all three can simultaneously hold similar liberal or humanist beliefs and values. Furthermore, it is because of the existence of states and nations that different manifestations of culture exist to be celebrated by the cosmopolitan. What is important is that different moral opinions amongst or between nations/states are compatible with basic human rights.

I have been arguing in essence that you can be cosmopolitan--celebrating the variety of human cultures; rooted--loyal to one local society (or a few) that you count as home; liberal--convinced of the value of the individual; and patriotic--celebrating the state (or states) within which you live. The cosmopolitanism flows from the same sources that nourish the liberalism, for it is the variety of human forms of life that provides the vocabulary of the language of individual choice. (Appiah, 1998, p. 106)

One fictional example is from the film *Amistad*. Theodore Joadson, is a black Abolitionist who works with Lewis Tappan, a white Abolitionist. It does not matter which race or ethnic group they belong to. Even if they are on opposite ends of the spectrum with respect to the injustice in question, as were the white Abolitionists who helped the black slaves. They both have the same spiritual relationship to the cause of abolishing slavery.

I can think of Mahatma Ghandi who as an Indian lawyer worked against Apartheid in South Africa. He worked mainly, but not exclusively, with black Africans. I believe his understanding of empathy and spirituality meant that universal human dignity needed to be defended in overturning laws that denied equality for black South Africans.

Consequently, consistent with Appiah's (1998) definition of liberal cosmopolitanism is the idea of equal dignity for all persons, not merely for the elite or those from one's own community. My idea of dignity includes not just freedom from racism, sexism, and anthropocentrism, but alternatives to substance abuse, alcoholism and suicide that the marginalized people are frequently confronting.

## **VII. Ritual and ceremony**

If we analyze a few of my photographs, as points of departure, we can examine my understanding of spirituality. Consider, for example, *Balinese Woman with Offering Near Ubud*. (See illustration number 4.) I was on my way to see to a temple in central Bali when I saw this scene. What immediately struck me was the way the woman seemed oblivious to all the vehicles speeding down the road. I was in one of them. Even in 1986, Bali was overcrowded with hucksters vying for all available tourist dollars. If you tried to walk, mini buses

Ubud



Balinese Woman with Offering

Bali



Balinese Woman with Offering



4. Balinese Woman With Food Offering  
© 1986



would stop every five minutes to ask if you wanted a lift. This woman seemed to have nothing to do with money of any sort. She had another purpose. She was a participant in a ritual ceremony conducted five times each season.

These pillars of fruit, eggs, flowers, pressed rice, and chickens that Balinese women carry on their heads, may weigh up to 150 pounds. The offering was to be deposited in the temple as we can see in the close-up, *Food Offering, Bali*. Dewri Sri, the rice goddess, was about to receive the tribute. Traditional culture's spiritual lives were often linked to utilitarian art objects of daily life. (See illustration number 5.)

While the offerings sit in the temple, the rice goddess will feast on the essence of the food; the substance is taken home to be eaten later by the spiritual yet practical Balinese.

Why did I find this scene to be spiritual? One reason is that I believe aspects of the ritual ceremony are missing from our secular culture, but still needed by many of us. As a former Catholic, I still enjoy the rituals involved in the celebration of High Mass. I particularly like the sermons, the incense, Communion, the wonderful choirs and their music. At Easter and Christmas, I usually attend midnight mass, much to the delight of my mother, where the ritual aspect is more pronounced than on a regular Sunday mass.

The ritual I was fortunate enough to witness is an integral part of the Balinese system of beliefs. The beliefs and practices are a blend of Hinduism, ancestor worship and animism. Animist beliefs allow for spirit to reside in matter. According to this belief system all organic things, including rocks, trees and clouds, can have a will, a brain or even a soul. The temple, the offerings were deposited in, is surrounded by beautifully terraced rice fields. The relationship of the Balinese to the land is obvious. They are dependent on it for their food,

Ubud



Food Offering



Food Offering

Bali



5. Food Offering, Bali  
© 1986

shelter and spiritual nourishment. They understand this. They respect the land and venerate it via the Rice Goddess. Through this veneration, the Balinese acknowledge something greater than the individual. Nature is something that transcends individual concerns to reach an elevated, spiritual level. Similar to the aspects of the animist Aboriginal culture in Australia, this Balinese ceremony is intended to propagate the “well being of the land and its human, plant and animal life.” (Drury & Voight, p.98)

If we look closely on both sides of the road, we can see long plants or fronds arching or drooping over it. These are also there for gods. In fact, every street corner in Bali has an altar or some form of offering. The Balinese are wonderful practitioners of the art of turning the mundane into the sacred. “What seems to differentiate our art from the artmaking activities of non-Western, nonindustrial cultures is precisely the lack in our own artworld of the original integration of art and life and art and the sacred.” (Koppman, 1999, p. 154) For the Balinese, it seems life is a marvelous gift and therefore it should be celebrated in every way possible. “When asked about art, a Bali native of our times replied, we do everything as well as we can; we have no real art.” (cited in Coleman, 1998, p. xiii) To me, he seemed to be saying, “Why would we not want to have our physical environment reflect the best of our spirituality?”.

### **VIII. Environment**

The Balinese woman, walking down the busy and noisy road, seemed to possess an inner sense of peace and harmony. It was as if her purpose protected her from the unpleasantness that surrounded her. The Balinese woman was partaking in a type of pilgrimage where she was offering a sacrifice and her spiritual purpose protected her from the hardships of her journey. Like the

pilgrims climbing Mount Sinai or the steps at St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal, the pain fades away in the fulfilment of a spiritual duty.

Outwardly, the Balinese woman was going to the shrine with the offering to give thanks and perhaps to express her love for the divine. The spiritual relevance of this particular scene to me lies in its archetypal characteristics. Many believe pilgrimage is a universal pattern of human experience, both historically and geographically. (Clift & Clift, 1996, p. 9) In Jung's writing, the primordial images or archetypes are referred to as constantly repeated experiences of humanity. These archetypes are often considered to have intrinsically sacred or numinous qualities within them. "Pilgrimage is a journey, a ritual, a commemoration, a search for something, perhaps even something the pilgrim does not fully perceive." (Clift & Clift, 1996, p. 9) A Balinese pilgrim bringing gifts to the Hindu/animist shrine invokes manifestations of ceremony, celebration, ritual, gesture, and symbol.

Ritual actions provide a link between the physical reality and the inner reality of the spirit. The ritual brings symbolic meaning to everyday reality. (Clift & Clift, 1996, p. 15) Symbols in turn, are bridges to other realities. Symbols not only indicate but also participate in other realities. The pilgrim is performing a ritual act and by doing so is consciously attempting to change the act into an active dynamic symbol. In the case of my Balinese example, the beauty of the offering itself awed me.

But why was the offering beautiful to me? I think the beauty of the offering was a function of the harmony I saw in the individual elements that went into its make up. Obviously all the food was grown or produced locally. I like the inclusion of the eggs with the cooked chicken and the flowers with the fruit. This in one sense is a symbol of the circle of life. The way the food was arranged

in large circles proceeding to smaller ones at the top provided a sense of balance. Another way balance was achieved was by placing the larger and heavier avocados on the bottom circle with the light flowers on the top. This enabled the entire offering to be gracefully balanced on the head of the woman with the aid of a small dish and a single piece of cloth. Symmetry occurs in the repetition of elements, for example, the avocados and the pressed rice cakes. Despite the variety of the elements, unity was accomplished.

This food offering is a good example to show how unity and beauty can be looked at in another way. The offering is beautiful at face value because of, in part, the harmony of the elements. The nature of the materials themselves seemed so appropriate. The rice was pressed and dyed to form black and white cakes, evidently symbolizing good and evil. I felt the natural elements were transformed into something different. It is almost akin to a mystical transformation from basic elements of food into a work of beauty fit for the gods.

The offering could be seen at another level as a manifestation of a universal spiritual reality. If you were religious you could say it was the work of God; if you were not you could see it as an example of nature's interconnectedness. For example, as a non-religious member of Green Peace, you could see it as a product and a part of a holistic natural system. Coleman (1998) argues the spiritual beauty of the offering appears when it can be seen both as particular and a part of an invisible whole or oneness. He says that the particular brings concreteness to the aesthetic experience and the universal renders it timeless.

### **a. Japanese landscape architecture**

The way that environment can be a reflection of spirituality can also be seen in the approach of Japanese landscape architecture. Landscape architecture is considered an art form in Japan. Many years after my trip to Bali, I visited a garden erected as a memorial to Dr. Inazo Nitobe who died while visiting Victoria in 1933. (See illustration number 6.)

Nitobe's goal in life was to bridge the new and old Asian cultures, across the Pacific. The Nitobe Memorial Garden, on the U.B.C. Campus in Vancouver, was designed by a distinguished Japanese landscape architect, Professor Kannosuke Mori of Chiba University.

The garden was conceived to reflect an idealised conception of nature. This includes harmony of forests, rivers, waterfalls, islands and seas. An attempt is made to balance the masculine and feminine forces attributed to the natural elements. Small-scale representation of natural scenery is also evident in the dwarfed, Bonsai Japanese Maples and Flowering Cherry trees. The garden includes a Tea Garden and a shelter for the Tea ceremony. The design was intended to refresh the spirit, to provide a sense of peace, and harmony with all of nature including animals and humans. It was created to deepen the visitor's understanding of life.

### **b. Environmentalism**

Discovering our interconnectedness with all of nature can be seen from the perspective of a postmodern movement sometimes called environmentalism. (Ferré, 1996) This movement questions the assumptions of anthropocentrism. Human concerns are put into the context of concerns for all the elements of nature. This is nothing new in the aboriginal communities around the world. It is

*Vancouver, B.C.*



*Nitobe Memorial Garden, U.B.C.*



*Nitobe Memorial Garden, U.B.C.*

*Canada*





6. Nitobe Memorial Garden, U.B.C. © 2000

new only because it is being seriously considered by the philosophies of European-Western, white world.

The importance of the environment and nature with respect to art, both native and non-native is manifest throughout numerous civilizations and time periods. In Canada, “landscape as teacher” is discussed by Raffan (1992) in *Frontier, Homeland And Sacred Space: A Collaborative Investigation Into Cross-Cultural Perceptions Of Place In The Thelon Game Sanctuary, Northwest Territories (Inuit, Lutsel K'e Dene)*. The author discusses how land served as a source of indigenous epistemology and inspiration for visual art, poetry, song, photography and sculpture.

Non-native artists have also been overwhelmed by the importance of nature and the environment. The Group of Seven produced many exquisite documents to the beauty and power of nature. It would not take much to convince them of the values inherent in respecting nature in questions of human versus environmental ethics.

### **c. Shelter**

Radical transformations of the natural world in modern cities have led to unpleasant, unpredictable, intense, and uncontrollable stimuli that are pushing researchers to acknowledge the health and learning benefits of reduced stimulation environments. The photo of a slum in Jakarta looks peaceful. But the stench of the open sewer behind the shacks was overwhelming. (See illustration number 7.)

The average population density is 1,871 people per square mile in Java. Compare this with a population density of 1 person per square mile in Saskatchewan. The main thoroughfare, Jalan Husni Thamrin Street, runs through

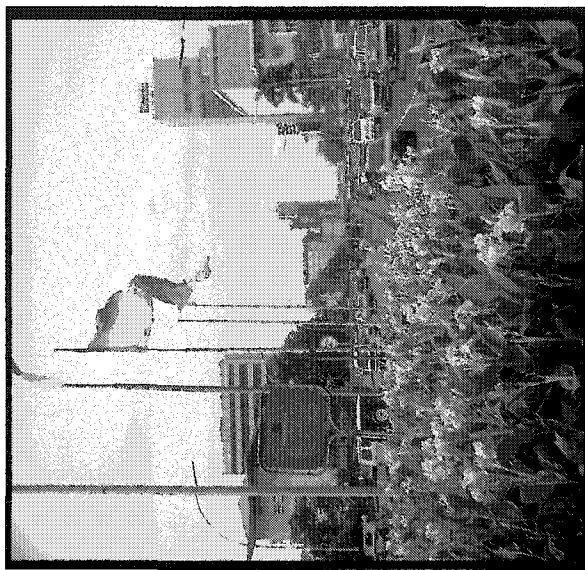
downtown Jakarta. The overcrowded street full of countless vehicle's noise and emission exhaust was just as unpleasant as the overcrowded slum despite the use of tulips in the foreground. (See illustration number 8.)

Paradoxically, educational environments need added stimuli but of a spiritual nature, as discussed later on. Studies reveal that stressful stimuli lead to unnecessarily high levels of fatigue. (Gallagher, 1993, p. 159) The worst offender amongst stress stimulators is noise. The quiet sounds of tiny waterfalls and leaves rustling in the wind in the Japanese garden would be welcomed by many city dwellers. This need for quiet takes on a spiritual overtone. It is as if tranquillity is needed to allow the soul the time to "breathe".

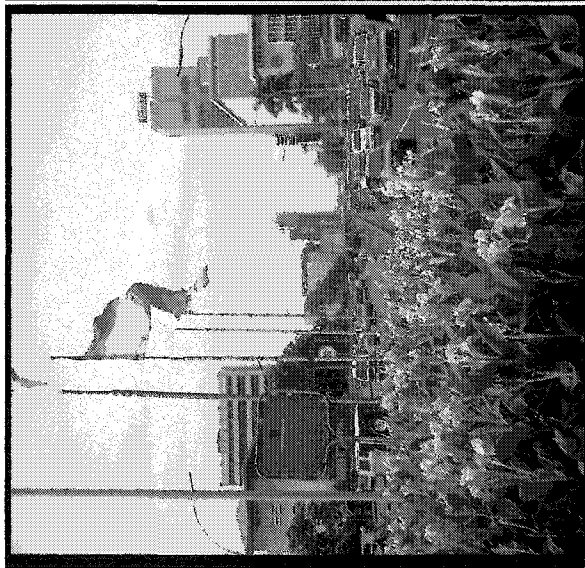
George Bernard Shaw was a builder who constructed a writing room in his garden (a beautiful semi-natural environment to start with). It was simple because it was a shed containing nothing but the basic necessities of the writer's trade. It was convenient because it was just outside his main house. It was also comfortable and novel because it was built on a large mechanical wheel and the entire room could be rotated to benefit from the energy and warmth of the sun's rays no matter what direction they came from. He named it "*The Shelter*". (Rybczynski, 1990, p. 170)

In a parallel example, Petrarch, the 14<sup>th</sup> century Italian, humanist, poet, reawakened Italian's appreciation for the pleasures of country life. He wrote: "I came to the villa at Cregi to cultivate not my field but my soul" (cited in Rybczynski, 1992, p. 38)

*Jakarta, Java*



*Jalan Husni Thamrin St.*



*Jalan Husni Thamrin St.*

*Indonesia*



8. Jalan Husni Thamrin Street, Jakarta  
© 1986

*Jakarta, Java*



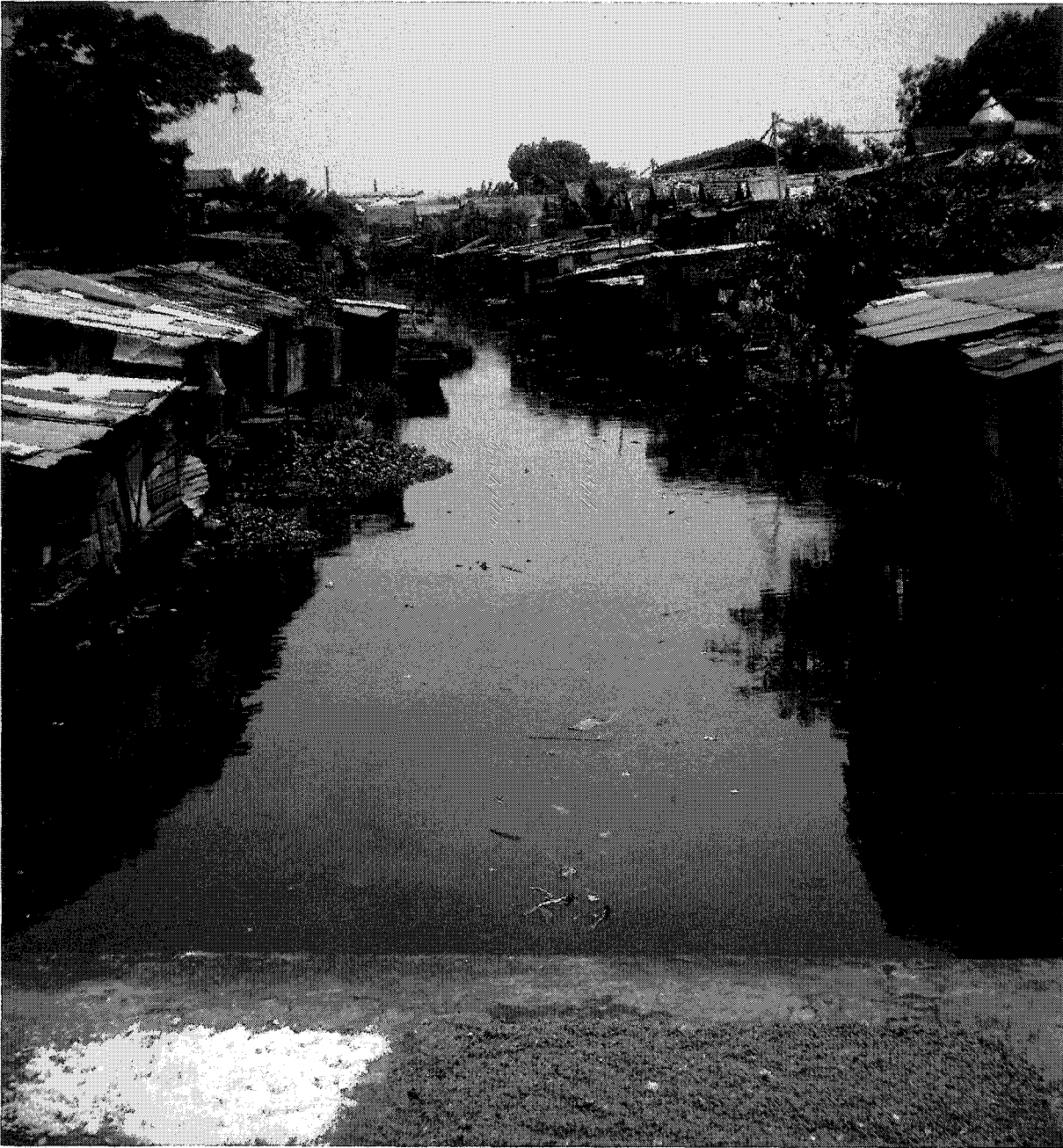
*Slum*



*Slum*

*Indonesia*





7. Jakarta Slum, Java  
© 1986

## PART TWO

### EDUCATION AND SPIRITUAL AESTHETICS

#### 3. Spirituality and the creation of art

##### I. Introduction

Through the process of creating or making, the quest for discovering our humanity can be fulfilled. Tappan and Brown (1996) believe that moral development proceeds towards the goal of authorship. It can lead towards moral development in the individual who "creates" a narrative. It is developmental like Piaget's cognitive theories and like Kohlberg's (1975) stages but without the rigid structure and the levels. Authorship is achieved when the person in relating his or her personal moral experience narrative takes a stand, thereby establishing his or her point of view. In doing so, the individual must assume responsibility for his or her moral decisions and actions. Of course, when relating the story, the individual must necessarily reflect upon the story and will usually learn from this reflection.

A narrative approach to education, according to Tappan and Brown (1996), should enable students to tell their own stories, thus developing authority and responsibility. Introspection concerning actions and decisions made and told enhances the developmental aspect of the use of narrative.

I think Nussbaum (1990) agrees with this aspect of authorship although taken from the point of view of the creative artist who nevertheless uses the material of life and strives to evince value from it. The artist assumes responsibility to get it exactly right, to be precise and to omit nothing of importance. In this sense the artist's vocation is a moral vocation.



## II. Beauty

One viewer remarked that looking at paintings by Rothko and Reinhardt made him respond to their simplicity and quietness by emulating it. (Lipsey, 1988) In *On Beauty And Being Just*, Scarry (1999) says “What is the felt experience of standing in the presence of a beautiful boy, or flower or bird? It seems to incite, even to require the act of replication.” (p.3)

Whether it be in poetry, music, photography or drawing there is a need replicate the beauty one sees before one’s eyes. There is often a desire to make interpretations of the replication from one art form to another. A beautiful piece of music, for example, inspires the visual artist to create something beautiful for the eyes. Scarry (1999) carries it further to argue that this desire to reproduce leads to the begetting of children. Beauty incites creation and procreation.

Understanding the process of creation involves knowing that art involves proliferating the beautiful. This process implies that the object, person or event that generates the proliferation continues to be present in the newly created artwork. Paul Klee, the Swiss artist and educator, illustrates this.

May I use the simile of the tree? ... Thus he  
stands as the trunk of the tree. Battered and  
stirred by the strength of the flow, he guides the  
vision onto his work.

Nobody would affirm that the tree grows its  
crown in the image of its root. Between above  
and below can be no mirrored reflection. It is  
obvious that different functions expanding in  
different elements must produce divergences.

But it is just the artist who at times is denied those departures from nature which his art demands. He has even been charged with incompetence and deliberate distortion.

And yet, standing at his appointed place, the trunk of the tree, he does nothing other than gather and pass on what comes to him from the depths. He neither serves nor rules—he transmits.

His position is humble. And the beauty at the crown is not his own. He is merely a channel.

(cited in Lipsey, 1999, p. 176)

Beauty does not always result in material replication. Sometimes the duplication occurs in one individual over a length of time. Staring in awe at a beautiful object or person involves the desire to experience more of it. The sensation can be distributed to many people, when museums display the beautiful so all can enjoy it. Scarry (1999) argues that the process of endless sensory proliferation inspires some philosophers to consider the idea of eternity.

The idea of material proliferation, in the form of art or otherwise, makes one think of plenitude or bounty for all to have enough. Beauty could even result in something far closer to avarice and selfish materialism, instead of enlightened spirituality. It causes poor quality imitations to be produced for sale or for private enjoyment.

Yet the desire to be in the presence of beauty can either involve bringing the beautiful to you or seeking it elsewhere. This will to be illuminated by the beautiful is at the heart of education. (Scarry, 1999, p. 4)

### **III. Self-communication**

Educators, like artists, seek out, illustrate and clarify beauty. As mentioned earlier, Matisse believed that creating leads to self-knowledge. Why this is so is because art is an extremely important means of self-communication. It permits illumination, understanding, where there would otherwise be darkness and confusion. (Wesselow, 1986) Let me provide an example from my personal experience to justify this previous statement.

As a painter I enjoyed the ritual of preparing my canvases. I built my own frames. I stretched my canvases over the structures. Then, I gessoed the canvas a few times, sanding the rough surfaces before each new coat. Kate Briscoe speaks of mixing sand in her pigment as a meditative process. "Everything has to be absolutely right, or else I can't do a painting. I prepare everything." (Drury & Voight, 1996, p. 36) Tim Johnson speaks about one of his collaborative paintings.

... in a spiritual painting, things like balance and scale and tone all contribute to the look of a painting- and to whether it is peaceful or harmonious. I was aware of ... having the right sort of respect for what I was doing. Here was some kind of energy there that I had to conform to. Doing it was a very spiritual experience.  
(Drury & Voight, 1996, p. 107)

I wondered what it was like to create the Balinese offering? I wondered if the women had similar feelings of meditation and of being involved in a process of mystical transformation.

I imagined the amount of effort and work that went into creating the Balinese offering. I marveled at the devotion involved in putting together that huge amount of food. I was humbled by the time it must have taken to arrange the avocados, the flowers, and the eggs. How long did it take to press and colour the rice cakes? I recall visiting the Ajanta and Elorha “caves” near Bombay, India. I was dumbfounded by the detail of the carvings and the extensive temples, shrines and buildings carved from solid rock. Apparently it took over a thousand years for the stone carving and building work to be completed. E. M. Forster (1978) wrote about this incredible place of worship in *A passage to India*. The much smaller food offering was in some ways similar to these caves but on a humbler scale. The Balinese food offering rendered articulate the devotion and spirituality of the Balinese.

#### **IV. Epistemology and troth**

Previously I noted how spirituality is opposed to egocentric materialism. In similar fashion, some have contrasted man’s power grabbing concerns associated with his craving for possessions versus his concerns for simply being and creating. Human history is full of accounts of possessiveness and power struggles leading to war and destruction. Using knowledge to obtain power over the elements led to the fabrication of the atomic bomb even if the result was far from the original intention. (Palmer, 1993)

Destruction is the antithesis of spirituality. Searching for wisdom and self-knowledge are traditionally associated with spirituality. Palmer (1993) argues that the drive for knowledge normally comes from curiosity or a desire to control one's surroundings. But, he continues, the search for knowledge should come from love or compassion. I would argue that in a child curiosity springs from the desire to control his surroundings as a means of survival. In the adult, I would agree that the motive behind knowledge should be compassion or love. This needs to be taught as it does not come intuitively to most people. Here art education and/or spiritual education can serve a vital role. Narrow-minded, near-sighted, egocentric education may lead to destruction. To begin to understand how education can become more spiritual, Palmer (1993) illustrates the problem of objectivity and subjectivity.

If we let one child die of starvation or neglect, our spirituality is somehow diminished. By allowing one teenager to commit suicide we have avoided our spiritual responsibility. If we allow one species of insect or animal to become extinct we have not lived up to our spiritual potential. If a rainforest is destroyed we are all affected not only physically through ozone depletion because of the greenhouse effect. We are also losers at the spiritual level. Paula Gunn Allen, a Keres Pueblo Indian, argues that "spiritual integrity demands an active and appropriate human response to injustice." (cited in Koppman, 1999, p. 52) Before we can begin to respond to injustice we need to recognize it. But perhaps we should also try to see what is at the root of injustice.

I do not agree with Palmer when he says there is "no such thing as spirituality in general. Every spiritual search must be guided by a particular literature, practice, and community of faith". (Palmer, 1993, p. 14) Looking at Palmer's inquiry into epistemology and truth, it is possible to see that it can lead

to similar interpretations in a number of different spiritual traditions: Christianity, Judaism and Zen Buddhism. These interpretations are the basis for a system of universal justice based on empathy and spirituality.

In the not too distant past, scientific methodology valued a sharp distinction between the objects to be known and the knowers. Knowledge was valued if it was (or was thought to be) free of all subjectivity. Things were analyzed, measured and observed using methods guaranteeing no interference from the observers. The resulting evidence could be found again by independent observers if they could merely reproduce the same methodology used in the initial observation. Thus the scientific method was established to remove any doubt in the objectivity of the knowledge.

New theories in science have now replaced this outdated concept with another that puts all knowledge as the inevitable interaction between the knower and the known. Scientists now understand that the very act of measuring something changes the way it behaves or appears.

In the social sciences qualitative methodology is one term that refers to the new way that research is influenced by the subjectivity of the researchers. In education this has profound implications for the teacher and the students. Palmer brings out his concept of truth.

#### **a.Troth**

The word comes from Old (treowth) or Middle English (trouthe). The same root that gives rise to the word “troth”: entering into a covenant or agreement with others to respect mutual ideas. For Palmer (1993) this community idea means that the knower is joined with the known. This concept does not allow objectification of people, or things in our universe. It means that we can no longer be in a position of power, manipulation, control or ownership with respect

to people or things. For Palmer (1993) a Christian/Quaker, it means, as a betrothal implies, entering in to a compassionate and spiritual relationship with all that we know.

#### **b. I thou**

The essentially spiritual relationship with all things of the universe is qualified as I/Thou rather than I/It by Martin Buber (Coleman, 1998). In this Jewish man's understanding, one views the other as a Thou. In doing so the other is given sanctity whether it be a tree, an animal or a person. No longer can people, animal species or forests be manipulated, destroyed for short-sighted political or social expediency.

#### **c. Zen aesthetics**

In *Ethics and Aesthetics are One: The Case of Zen Aesthetics*, Bai (1997) argues that previously, moral philosophy assumed human nature and human purpose were more or less givens. Knowledge of our essence (*ergon*) enabled us to clearly understand the goals (*telos*) we were striving towards. Foundational metaphysics provided these goals in a system of belief in a transcendental force outside of human reality. Moral behaviour consisted of using rationality and free will to achieve these goals. Human nature and human goals were conceived of as being fixed and objective. In other words, rules of conduct were determined and morality, primarily, meant following these rules.

Essentialism and foundationalism no longer hold sway over the minds in Western metaphysics. Postmodern thinking rejects the idea of a noumenal reality that exists independently of human interference. All reality is interpretation, as

Bai says, and this interpretation is shaded by prior experience. Now a plurality of moral arguments springs forth from the vacuum left when the universal principles and rules of traditional Western morality fade away. Ethics becomes open to interpretation. Ethical judgements begin to resemble aesthetic judgements because they are based upon what feels right, what fits, what is most harmonious, what is most attractive rather than immutable, ahistorical, transcendental criteria. Ethical justification requires convincing perceptual arguments that must rely on consensus while maintaining tolerance of perceptual difference.

Bai (1997) says this plurality of interpretations, visions and versions does not mean that there is no common ground upon which to build a public morality. Neither does it mean there are no norms or guidelines. The author finds common concepts in the field of the arts and in the language of morals that serve to enrich understanding of the two areas. Respect for difference, ambiguity, and uncertainty, are common in the arts. And, I would say, they are also found in moral dilemmas. Furthermore, as Nussbaum (1990) argued, sensitivity and receptivity are key elements in the arts and in moral understanding. These qualities are essential to empathetic moral imagination because they are needed to understand the feelings and aspirations of others. Similarly Bailin (1993) would say that because ambiguity is found in both aesthetics and morality, it does not boil down to a choice between the subjective and particular on one side versus the objective and the rational on the other. She argues the two perspectives are joined in the idea of appreciation. Appreciation of the situation at hand requires both the intellectual response of rationality and emotional response of caring.



### **i. Empathy**

Bai (1997), Swanger (1991), and Bailin (1993) seem to agree with the idea that empathy is key to moral behaviour not only because it enables astute understanding. Without empathy, we could be morally blind. I was watching the made-for-TV-movie about the war-crime trials of the Nazis at the end of the Second World War in Nuremberg. The actor, portraying the chief prosecutor, said that the definition of evil was the absence of empathy. Empathy is essential for moral judgements, because “evil in the world can in large part be accounted for by the absence in reciprocity in moral decision making.” (Swanger, 1991, p. 103)

Bai (1997) makes an important distinction when she argues that the capacity for empathy is not the same as the will to demonstrate empathy. The author believes the primary task of a moral agent is to develop the capacity for empathy. As an example of cultivating empathy, Bai (1997) turns to Zen aesthetics. In fact, it is Buddhism that deconstructs the duality of consciousness whereby the distance between the subject and the object is dissolved to achieve enhanced, (true?), empathy. Compassion, according to Buddhist psychology and epistemology, results when we arrive at the state of non-dual consciousness.

Consistent with Buddhism, Zen aesthetics conceives perception of true beauty when the self is submerged into the beautiful object. Bai points out that this state of consciousness is an expression of intention and thus is not outwardly detectable. What is important is the motivation and sentiments of the person. When the behaviour is an expression of a mind seeking harmony and connection between self and the external world, it could be said to be nondual. When the subject no longer experiences the separation from what surrounds it, the subject is in a characteristically nondual state of consciousness. In all art forms, even

martial arts, the artist attempts “to be one with” the media and the subjects he or she depicts (or confronts).

To develop her idea that ethics and aesthetics are one, the art form Bai (1997) chooses is *The Way of the Tea*. I was fortunate to be a spectator at a presentation of a tea ceremony at Outremont High School a few years ago. Unfortunately, the natural surroundings so beautifully described in Bai’s (1997) article were missing. However, despite the stage in the auditorium setting, the simplicity and elegance of the ceremony did convey (to the students present and myself) feelings of harmony and tranquillity in an often-boisterous place.

As Bai (1997) argues, the peaceful surroundings are part of the aesthetic/ethical experience. The entire ceremony promotes increased awareness of all that surrounds the person, at the same time enabling the person to forget the ordinary preoccupations of the self. It’s an exercise designed to enhance reverence for others and self-control of the ego. The participants experience harmony with each other and with all of nature. The aesthetic experience of the Tea Ceremony becomes a source of peace, nonviolence and compassion because the harmonious and interconnectedness of all beings is made apparent.

The ritual that involves sipping the tea from the bowl, wiping the rim and passing it to the next person is almost identical to the Yaqona or Kava drinking ceremony I participated in on the island of Fiji. “...the act of sharing creates an invisible bond between the participants. The visitor feels warmth and acceptance among complete strangers.” (Kay, 34)

Similarly the *kidouch* in Judaism, practiced on the eve of *shabat*, involves drinking from the same cup of wine that is passed around the table to be shared by all. The Tea ceremony revolves around two other concepts: purity and tranquillity. Purity involves the mind and heart being free from egotistical desires that often

cause disturbances. Tranquility is the result of this pure mind-heart. With a pure and tranquil state the mind and heart are able to be receptive and keenly aware of what surrounds them. Thus the mind-heart is ready for true empathy.

Bai (1997) concludes by saying that even simple art forms hold the potential for nondual participation. Art making that involves deep perception requires the artist to appreciate the mystery and miracle of life. Art making can involve the capacity for wonder, empathy and reverence for all that lives and dies. Bai quotes the example of the artist drawing a leaf. The drawing act renders the leaf with dignity and worth because of what the artist and the leaf share.

In the Western poet, Walt Whitman's, (1959) *Leaves of grass*, similar sentiments are expressed.

I celebrate myself,  
 And what I assume you shall assume,  
 For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to  
 you.  
 I loafe and invite my soul,  
 I lean and loafe at my ease ... observing a spear of  
 summer grass.

(Whitman, 1959, p.26)

Whitman goes on to find unending beauty in the smallest and most common things.

And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the  
 fields,  
 And brown ants in little wells beneath them,  
 And mossy scabs of the worm fence, and heaped  
 stones, and elder and mulen and pokeweed.

(Whitman, 1959, p. 29)

And he continues.

“I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars”

(Whitman, 1959, p.55)

Furthermore Whitman, can identify or empathise with all that surrounds him

because he can see evidence of a universal soul in all people, animals and things.

Swiftly arose and spread around me the  
 peace and joy and knowledge that pass all  
 the art and argument of the earth;  
 And I know that the hand of God is the  
 elderhand of my own,  
 And I know that the spirit of God is the  
 eldest brother of my own,  
 And that all the men ever born are also my  
 brothers... and the women my sisters and  
 lovers,  
 And that a kelson of the creation is love;

(Whitman, 1959, p. 29)

Techniques similar to the Buddhist idea of “becoming one with”, in an effort to discover our interconnectedness and to enhance true understanding and empathy, have been used by a few remarkable Western “artists”. The last two examples use external physical modifications as catharsis provoking psychological, emotional and rational understanding.

George Orwell, the upper middle-class Englishman, began living on next to nothing in cheap hotels in London and Paris. He took a job as a kitchen porter

in Paris. He said that one of the reasons he wrote was “a desire to see things as they really are, to find out the true facts and store them up for posterity. I write because there is some lie I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention”. (Orwell, 1933, p. III) The book that was the result of this experiment in empathy was *Down and Out in Paris and London*.

In 1959, another writer, John Howard Griffin, wrote *Black Like Me*. This powerful experiment in true(?) empathy details the experiences of a white man who darkened the colour of his skin in order to write about racism in the United States. Griffin wanted to experience the hatred first hand, so he became black (on the exterior at least). His level of understanding, compassion and caring for those shunned by the White American mainstream was certainly enhanced by his efforts.

## 4. Secular and spiritual art education

### I. Introduction

The social implications of spiritual art on education are important to me. Perhaps because I am a teacher, or maybe just because I am practically minded, I think of educational issues close to me and perhaps close to other teachers also. In the school where I teach, we worry about issues that involve our student's success or failure. We worry about their behavior mostly as it relates to harming themselves or others, interrupting their learning or distracting other students from learning.

The problems our students have are not all that uncommon throughout Quebec which has one of the highest dropout rates in all of North America. One of the issues that concern us are students who are working part-time after school. Are they too tired to do well in school after working all evening or all night? They say at least one of our students is a stripper and another is a prostitute.

We see violence in our schools. It seems to be increasing daily. Weapons ("armes blanches" in French, different forms of knives or weapons but not guns or rifles) accumulate in the drawers of those responsible in the administration. These weapons are confiscated from students before they can be used. But sometimes we are too late.

Drugs are a problem at our school. I often smell drugs on students clothing and we know that students buy and sell in the school itself. Suicide, teenage pregnancy, intimidation, "taxing", bullying, are but a few problems the high school students in Quebec are confronting.

But the problems we face seem to pale in comparison with the problems faced by the Inuit youth in northern Quebec. They face glue sniffing epidemics as

well as the highest suicide rates in the world, in addition to related social problems such as alcoholism, neglect and abuse. A new problem was added to the list when recent reports revealed the alarmingly high number of indigenous people working in the sex trade as prostitutes and gigolos.

## II. Narrative art

In *The End Of Education: Redefining The Value Of School*, Postman (1995) describes the same consequences when he talks of people who “have no gods to serve”: suicide, random violence, drug addiction, alcoholism, etc. Our society, and our education system that is both responsible for, and a reflection of it, is devoid of spirituality. I wondered if there was a way education could bring about changes to help correct these problems.

Postman (1995) argues for narratives that speak of origins, narratives that speak about the future. I take the liberty to substitute art for narratives. He describes stories that provide rules of conduct and stories that construct ideals. Postman’s narratives provide a source of authority. But he says above all they must furnish a “sense of continuity and purpose”. (Postman, 1995)

Tappan and Brown (1992, p. 177) propose that we can really only learn of moral experiences of others by hearing, or seeing or reading about them afterwards in a narrative structure that involves the knowing, feeling and doing parameters that are inseparable. Those moral choices and decisions are given meaning by telling stories about them.

Like Kilpatrick, Witherall, Tran and Othus (1995) view narrative as a powerful tool that empowers the listener with the ability to imagine himself involved in the teller's life experiences, thereby enriching and strengthening the bonds between people. Nussbaum would say this identification with the

characters of the story allows us to respond better to our own life and to be more perceptive and open to being “touched by life”. This sharing of one's stories enables people in a modern pluralistic society situation to develop empathy and respect for those from different cultures, times and backgrounds. Through explanation, demystification and, at times personal confrontation, this approach leads towards “...a sense of intimacy and community among persons”(Morris, 1994, p. 80).

In order for this art to function, it would seem it must come from within the culture. I do not think art from the outside could serve this purpose. I think that the art presented by the missionaries and European conquerors are failing the Inuit today because they do not provide a sense of continuity for the Inuit. They do not speak of the Inuit's origins. They do not seriously consider a future for the Inuit.

### **III. Global values**

In *Educating for a Peaceful Future*, Carson and Smith (1997) point to the potential art has for the development of “human and global perspectives”. In part, they outline how art can lead to an awareness of human values, how art can increase intercultural understanding, how art can lead to diminishing violence. They speak of visual art in general and do not mention spiritual art.

I would classify what they speak of as a subset of secular spiritual aesthetics. The authors mention that a peaceful world society could be built if its members could simultaneously celebrate differences amongst cultures and respect those values that are universally shared. I would like to see a greater appreciation of the importance of sacred aspects of all societies.



I would like to see the Southern populations benefiting from the insights of other ethnic groups as to what is essentially sacred in life. For example, I feel we have much to learn from the Aboriginal communities in Canada and the world about the meaning of what is or should be sacred. I hope a multi-ethnic society such as ours can learn to keep the positive aspects from all cultures and incorporate them in a new way to benefit all.

#### **IV. Conflicting ideologies**

The authors of *Educating for a Peaceful Future* imply a dichotomy between the East and the West when they say that recognized masterpieces from both these “directions” could reflect universal human values”. (Carson, Smith, 1997, p. 161) However we now know that the dichotomy no longer reflects the multitude of cultures and ideologies in the twenty-first century. Carson and Smith (1997) are correct in saying that cultures are typified by the values they uphold. They fail to mention that these values are often still tied to a particular religion, despite the increasing secularization of our world.

Osama Bin Laden speaks of infidels when he describes the Americans. The Taliban makes no bones about its ties to Islamic religion. The American public somehow believes it is primarily a non-religious society. The current president of the United States, George Bush, finished his latest televised address to the nation with the words God Bless America. American institutions have separated church and state, yet the underlying national consciousness has not separated itself from religious ideology. Schools are closed for Christian holy days. The Holy Bible is used in the courts of law. The Americans trust of God is even declared in writing on all their money. (Koppman, 1999)

Instead of enforcing, through repetition, the idea of a dichotomy between East and West, I think it would be more constructive to view different cultural contributions from a universal spiritual perspective. Carson and Smith list positive and negative values that are often found in art. The positive values they list are almost all qualities one can associate with spirituality. The Japanese landscape artists sought to “educate” those who passed through their gardens if only subliminally. They hoped the tranquil environment would refresh the spirit and furnish a sense of peace and harmony. They aimed to increase the visitor’s understanding of life.

Tranquility, orderliness, purity, gracefulness can be considered secular spiritual qualities found in art ranging from Japanese landscape architecture through Indo-Islamic architecture and on to Abstract Expressionist painting.

For example, tranquility, the state of freedom from agitation of mind, heart and spirit, has been seen as a positive spiritual aspect of one’s inner reality that can be seen as reflected in an external reality of nature such as a Japanese Tea Garden. (See Koppman, 1999, for a postmodern feminist deconstruction of the concept of tranquility.) St. Teresa of Avila speaks of traveling the road to God in peace and quietness.

The other values listed by Carson and Smith are: joyfulness, freedom, unity, hope, passion, purity, humility, honesty, loyalty, courage, respectfulness, kindness, love and appreciation. No list can be complete. Teachers of art have the responsibility to increase students understanding of the spiritual values in art. However, without needing to list all the spiritual aspects that can be found in art, it is important for teachers of art, religion, morality or any subject, to search for spiritual meaning in all they teach.

### a. Holy wars

The most dangerous of all oxymorons has once again been spoken often enough to attract serious attention. The same Taliban that blew up 600-year-old Buddhist sculptures has called for a “holy war”. (When the Taliban released footage of the demolition to news organizations, I wondered why they were doing this? To me it seems that the power of sacred art to change or influence behaviour was not lost on the Taliban of Afghanistan. Why else would they go to the trouble of destroying two ancient Buddhist statues that dated back to the third and fifth centuries?)

Is this “jihad” a war against all those attacking a specific religion? Is it a war against those attacking members of a particular religion? Is it a war of one religion against another? Is it the clash of fundamentally different ideologies? Of all the world’s trouble spots today, how many of them could be linked to the clash of religious ideology? Would these spots include Northern Ireland, Israel, Kashmir and Kosovo? Others would say in all cases it is a case of have versus have-not.

After September 11, 2001, our understanding of the world changed. In part, we were once again reminded how easily one group of individuals could destroy life and property. In the weeks that followed, I was struck by one evening newscast showing an apartment here in Montreal. Suspected as a terrorist hideout, it had many posters inscribed with Arabic calligraphy that were said to be verses from the Koran. I was reminded of the calligraphy I saw on the walls of the Taj Mahal in India. (See illustration number 10.) Sadly, I had read that fear of a terrorist attack has led to security being increased there also.

## **b. Islamic art**

The Taj Mahal (completed in 1654) is probably the most famous building in the world. The great architectural achievement is located in the middle of India, in the state of Udar Pradesh, and sits on the south bank of the Jamuna River. It was built under orders from Shah Jahan, the fifth Mogul emperor of Hindustan. It is a mausoleum for his beloved wife, Arjumand Banu Begum. After construction of the Taj Mahal, she became known as “Mumtaz Mahal or Chosen One of the Palace”. The Indo-Islamic style of architecture was derived from earlier Romano-Byzantine style and is typical of the buildings after the Muslim invasion of India. This style was copied by later Hindu princes in India. The minarets on each corner and mosques and forts throughout India reflect this popular style.

The Shah Jahan wished to have a copy of the Taj Mahal built of black marble on the opposite side of the river for his own burial. It was to be connected by a small bridge so that his beloved wife and himself would be joined even in death. The mausoleum was built of pure white Makrana marble with inlaid precious stones. What one does not see in most pictures is the lyrical Islamic calligraphy covering the entire building.

André Enard a French artist who lived in New York used Islamic patterns and calligraphy in his art. He felt that it was an artist's duty to search for a relationship with a higher reality. “Isn't it the ultimate desire of human beings to perceive an order of laws that surpasses us yet is also within us, and to participate in that order?” (cited in Lipsey, 1988, p. 416)

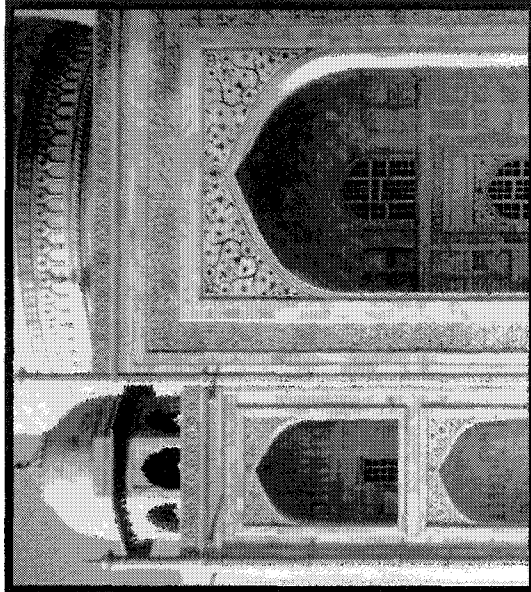
## V. Why isn't education spiritual?

I remember singing songs from an early age. I remember studying art at high school since grade nine. I was lucky enough to have a good art teacher. I was interested. I continued to earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at Concordia University. I also studied art in France. In my spare time, I began a degree in Integrated Music Studies. I learned about the various movements in art and much about the lives of the individual artists. But during all this time I only heard slight murmurs of the spiritual possibility of art. Perhaps I was not receptive to these ideas or perhaps I was not ready for them. There seems to be no space for discussion of spirituality in art programs and no space for discussing art in religious studies. (Shantz, 1999)

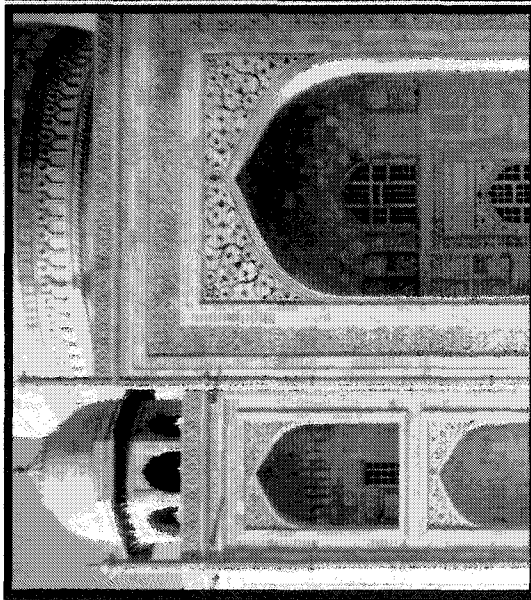
In high school, if spirituality was given as an optional course like computer science, art, or woodworking, I am sure few students would sign up for it. In fact, if the option was given to teachers few would volunteer to teach it either. But if you told teachers that searching for a deeper meaning to what connects all of us together could rather easily be incorporated into their subject specific curriculum, I feel many more would be interested. In the Quebec high school system, spiritual issues are relegated to a few periods per week of moral and religions studies. I believe spirituality can be broached in almost all school subjects. It is a question of approach.

Public education now suffers from the lack of adequate vision to enable students to find meaning in education. Students are now directed towards goals that serve only to enslave them to a lifestyle of consumerism, economic utility and worship of the latest manifestation (gadget) of the god of technology. (Postman, 1995) This is achieved by matching lack of adequate finances in public education with corporations willing to sponsor "free" technology for schools in exchange for

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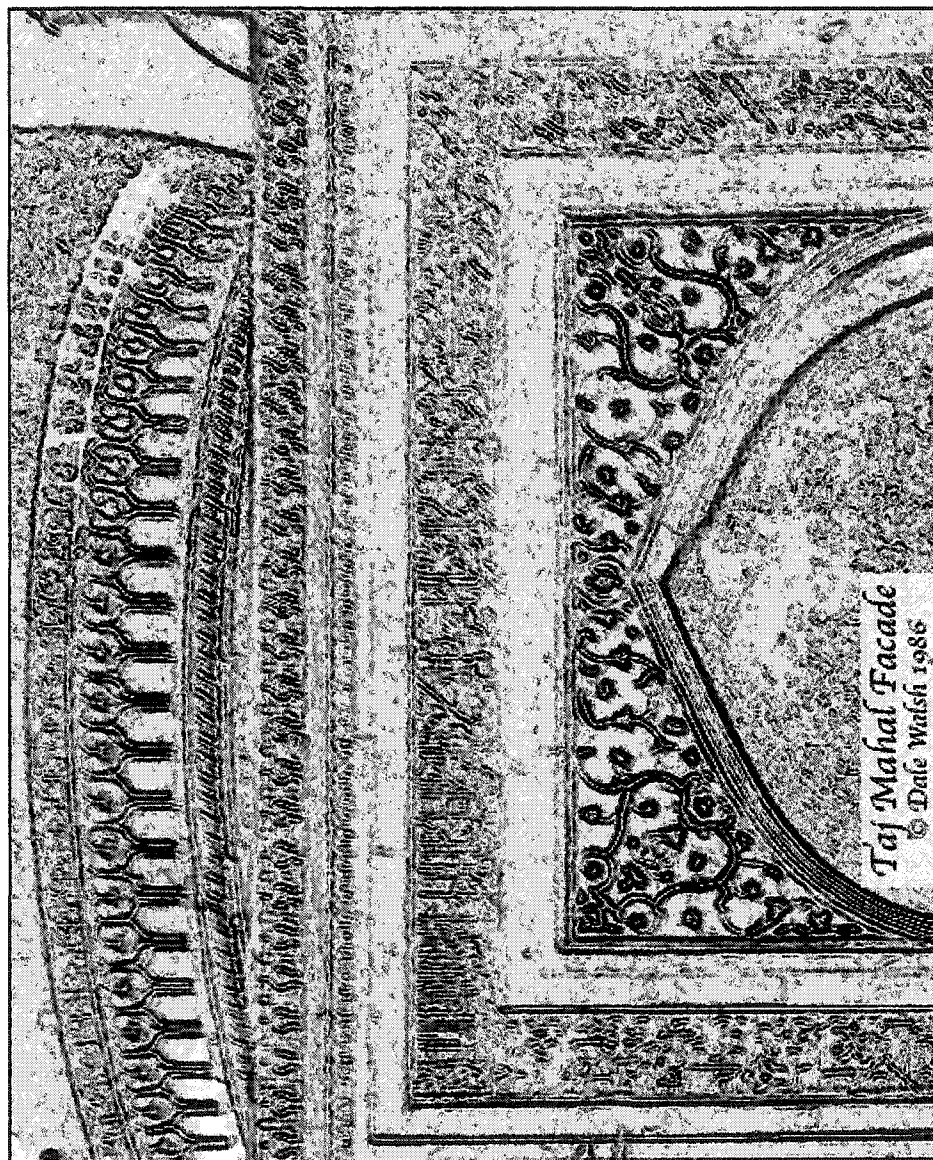


Taj Mahal



Taj Mahal

India



10. Façade of the Taj Mahal

the privilege of being able to broadcast commercial messages to young minds. (Palmer, 1995) Serving the gods of utilitarianism, efficiency and consumerism could leave our society spiritually bankrupt.

I went to the Université de Montpellier in France in 1975. That year, a bill was passed in government that tied the local Universities in France to the major economic producers of the area in which that university was located. For example, the University of Montpellier, being in a wine growing area, would be required to gradually phase out all courses and degree programs not pertaining directly to the production of wine. The students rightfully went on strike to protest this ridiculously short-sighted attempt at reducing Universities to solely serving economic needs. The same concerns are still resurfacing 25 years later. I suspect they will continue to pose problems for students of the future until politicians realize that a good education needs to be broad enough to see beyond the narrow confines of economics.

But why was this so? As mentioned earlier, the spiritual in art was minimized due to the way the second commandment was interpreted with regards to idolatry. Furthermore, beginning mostly with Modernism, art came to be seen as an individualistic enterprise. But as we have seen with many artists throughout modernism and into the twentieth century, art can have spiritual and universal importance. The implications for the community and the world at large are important.

## **VI. Problems and possible solutions**

Postmodern art has begun to be a way that the individual can join with his or her community. Previously, most art has sprung from individuals. However we now have to realize that our community now includes the entire world. A



postmodern ritual artist named Vijali developed a project named *World Wheel: Theatre of the Earth* that included a segment about how Americans justified killing people in other countries. The final section of the performance dealt with achieving harmony by uniting man, woman and earth. But now it seems to me vitally important to emphasize how art, including abstract art and music, can reveal the spiritual. I think it is the role of art teachers from elementary school through university to teach children that art can be used to bring harmony to the world. I never imagined how art could open the doors to universal human understanding.

Kandinsky felt that the art could harmonize the individual with the whole. Paul Klee said the role of art was to not let us forget that we a part of a larger whole. He said we were “creatures on a star amongst stars”. (Lipsey, 1988, p. 214) Art could be used to overcome divisiveness and achieve a unity of human consciousness. Kandinsky thought that the artist was a teacher of sorts, or a guide. He felt that this was a crucial role given to those that had an inborn power of vision. He though that artists were the first to hear inspiration.

Palmer (1993) argues that within the confines or possibilities of the typical classroom, the teacher can create a hospitable physical learning environment. The physical space must encourage open teacher-student dialogue.

It must also be healthy for the spirit and soul of both the teacher and the students. At the school where I work, the physical environment is worse than inhuman. I now teach Computer Science in two different classrooms. Both have tiny, less than one foot square, windows looking onto the hallways. I eat lunch on another floor in the same school. The room we eat in has no outside windows either. And my office has only small door widows looking into the library.

Why are there so few windows? I was told, there are so few windows in my classrooms because of the value of computers. It would be too easy to steal the computers if there were many windows, and even easier if these windows happened to be facing the outside of the school. It seems the soul is somehow stifled in such an environment. It is completely lifeless.

We see no plants, we see no sunlight and we see no other life forms except the artificial ones that occasionally pop through those Windows Bill Gates keeps pushing on us. Few creatures could live long in artificial light. Is the sterile, unnatural environment of grey or even unpainted concrete walls healthy for the soul and the spirit? It reminds me of Eldridge Cleaver's book *Soul on Ice* written in a prison. Have our schools become prisons of the soul and spirits of our youth?

The classroom is devoid other life forms, so connection with them can only usually be made with much difficulty. We are physically cut off from all of nature. Perhaps paradoxically, spirituality is related to sensuality. Through our senses we experience and connect with the earth and all its forms of life. Matisse spoke of spirituality being linked to the love of creation itself. Perhaps this what he was referring to. The number one leisure activity of Canadians is gardening. Why is that? People working in sterile, artificial, virtual computer environments feel the need to connect with the soil of the earth. They need to feel it run through their fingers. They need to smell it. Perhaps these are the simple pleasures and joys of life Matisse refers to. (Lipsey, 1988)

Big city schools do not offer students much for eyes, ears, skin or nose. What do we smell in the schools? Do we smell flowers, fresh morning rain, hay being harvested, sheep's wool? No we smell ammonia used to clean the hallways, stale wooden desks and the hot air passing over silicon computer chips. I loved doing ceramics in school partly because I loved the smell of the clay we used.

Art education can adequately develop faculties of sensation. Seeing, hearing, smelling and handling need development and refinement. If we are to be fully alive our powers of perception need to be exposed to the material of life.

Obviously, students can not be expected to appreciate the common problems of all life forms on the planet if they are continually separated from them in artificial environments. Students can not be expected to make a spiritual connection.

Many elementary teachers bring plants and even animals to school to liven up the classroom. But I can assure you this rarely happened where I taught at in high schools or in the universities I attended. Sure we can put up posters, sculptures, drawings and many other reminders but it is not quite the same thing.

Palmer offers two more ways that education can become more of a spiritual journey. The first is the dramatic space should invite students to be critical participants in the search for understanding and truth. I teach in a school where average class size is 32 students per teacher. Our time periods are 75 minutes long. Calculation reveals that the average time a teacher can spend with a student in class is about two minutes! Is this minimal teacher to student interaction enough? No, obviously the teacher-student ratio is too large. The simple solution would be to reduce it. (Palmer, 1993, p. 71)

The correct conceptual space is essential for learning and truth to flourish. According to Palmer (1993), this space consists of three dimensions: openness to truth by removing unnecessary clutter in our minds, boundaries that force one to face the truth and hospitality towards the strange and unusual possibilities of truth. One solution is that the communal conceptual space can be created through the use of assigned readings that open instead of fill student's minds. Simple techniques such as being honest about one's fears can be used to dispel anxiety

that inhibits a truly open and hospitable learning space. Silence that encourages reflection in the learning environment can be used to foster insight and a sense of community.

This temporal space is often missing our busy lives. We have no time for reflection or meditation. It seems the pressure is there to always be doing something constructive, rushing from one task to the next. Teachers using questions instead of imposing answers can lead students to become aware of solutions offered through their own understanding and that of other students.

But to study with a teacher who not only  
speaks but listens, who not only gives answers but  
asks questions and welcomes our insights, who  
provides information and theories that do not close  
doors but open new ones, who encourages students  
to help each other learn--to study with such a  
teacher is to know the power of a learning space.

(Palmer, 1983, p.70)

## **VII. Conclusion**

In education, understanding the spiritual in art can lead to a grasp of the mystery of being and becoming. Profound art is certainly a search for meaning. Yet some surely would consider ideas of secular spirituality nonsense, superstition or even heresy. What allows me to explore the notion? My contribution is based on limited personal experience but as I have tried to show, many artists not attached to any institutionalized religion have manifest spirituality in their art. The sheer breadth of the phenomenon through many cultures and epochs makes it worthy of further study

Art can be a means to spiritual consciousness or an expression of it. Art can offer a direct, transformative encounter with the spiritual. The art of the offering is a vital part of life for the Balinese. Their art is connected to life itself and it is connected to something beyond life. Their spiritual art is an attempt to connect with a transcendent understanding. When I speak of spirituality, I am not referring to an ascetic spirituality. I am referring to a spirituality that values creation and life. It is not removed from life but a part of all of us.

Kazantsakis, (1965) in *Report to Greco*, reports his frustration in talking to ascetic monks living in caves. Kazantsakis, in search of his own spirituality, sought out those he thought could help him. He went into monasteries and even remote locations where men had gone to pursue lives free from the mundane. They had gone to seek a more direct relationship with their God. Partly because Kazantsakis asked them difficult questions, the ascetics often took him to be the devil incarnate. These religious people were seeking a higher level of spirituality but in so doing cut them selves off from all life. I am not interested in this form of spirituality and neither was Kazantsakis who moved on to help people by working with the United Nations.

Other monks and religious seekers kept a closer link to the living.

Even in ascetic culture of the strictest medieval monasteries, art insisted on its warm relation with the everyday, and so in the margins and the decorative lettering of the sacred texts we find monks chopping wood, ringing tower bells, stooping over scriptorium desks—none of the images quite necessary, all of them in keeping with the artist's regard for life around them.

(Lipsey, 1988, p. 13)

I am more interested in this manifestation of spirituality through art that revels in the manifestations of everyday life's activities. Furthermore, because my understanding of spirituality necessitates interaction with the elements of the world, just as art involves interaction with the materials of art, it can lead to values that respect life and nature. There is no guarantee that an increased awareness of spirituality in art or life will lead to correct moral behaviour. As Swanger (1991) insists there are no simple answers in judging morality and art. He calls them open forms because they are complex and rather elusive. Both are open to a variety of interpretations that may even be contradictory at times. But my educational aims for secular spirituality and art are to further understanding and judgement in ways of acting upon that knowledge. Beyond the scope of this thesis but a possible subject for future study would be a correlation between awareness of secular aesthetic spirituality and moral behaviour.

In the first part of this thesis, I attempted to illustrate the link between secular spirituality and art both within highly industrialized Western cultures and more traditional, non-industrialized, societies. What is important for the future of all cultures is that we can educate our children to enrich their understandings of themselves and to develop within them an appreciation of the spiritual links common to all living and non-living elements of our world.

## **List of Illustrations**

All photographs and images are copyrighted by the author.

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5. Food offering Bali
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7. Jakarta slum.
8. Jalan Husni Thamrin Street, in downtown Jakarta
9. San Giovanni in Laterno, Rome
10. Facade of the Taj Mahal

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