

## RHYTHM, MYTH, AND SPIRIT

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As a language of the imagination, music, like myth, speaks of the possibility of a world unified through rhythm. What can rhythm, as a code of meaning, contribute to an understanding of the 'world problematique' - or, in other words, the human dilemma? What is possible here is a general contextual framework. By examining the idea of rhythm, and music in general, against the background of a cross-section of the sciences and the humanities, what may emerge is a general model towards a just social order - one that better harmonizes reality with the idea of reality.

In 1692, William Molyneux wrote:

...we do see all objects in two places... the mind or visive faculty takes no notice  
... From hence this paradoxical corollary arise; that an object may be seen in two  
places yet not seen double... (Maclochlainn, 7)

Molyneux's statement, while seeming irrational and even absurd on the surface, takes shrewd notice of the fundamental paradox between what we know and what we see -- between fact and value. While dialogue is an attempt to verbalize this relationship (Berger, 9), there remain aspects of this relationship that words can never describe.

Verbal language makes visible only a small band of light in the spectrum of expanded possibilities. To say anything of value something of the other possibilities must be recognized. To 'see' in the fullest sense requires that the self be seen in relation to the other -- to see things as they are and not as they are thought to be. Music, like myth, offers a language in which this may be possible.

Merriam suggests that the "fine arts are mediative functions in human adaptation and create a world of common meanings" (cited in Levinson and Malone, 177). Moreover, Claude Lévi-Strauss states: "Myth and music are like conductors of an orchestra whose listeners are the silent performers" (cited in Feld, xiii). Also, music appears to "follow rules that are often far from being arbitrary" (Blacking, 24). "The meaning of music lies not in the fact that it is too vague for words, but that it is too precise for words" (Kubler cited in Leshan and Margenau, 190).

As in the shaman's power song or the Australian aboriginal 'songline,' rhythm is the bridge leading to the underworld of the imagination and experience. Jim Nolman's musical interspecies communication efforts with dolphins, orca, and beluga whales exemplifies the universal language of rhythm. Rhythm may be understood as the tonal language of myth, an imaging system expressing life's deepest sentiments, and appearing as a "metaphor transparent to transcendence" (Campbell 1986:56).

The anthropologist Edward T. Hall, in his book *The Dance of Life*, attempts to grasp the nature of rhythm in the context of culture. Hall argues that rhythm, not unlike myth, is a deeply ingrained pattern of life experience, passed down through the generations and comprising the underlying structures and processes of culture. He calls this "primary level culture" (1984:6).

Rhythm is inherent in nature and therefore in man. The beat of our body is the beat of the earth. The cycles of day and night, of the moon, and of the seasons were instrumental in the formation of the ancient psyche. They are the rhythms of primary culture which we still celebrate at Christmas, New Years, and

Easter, to name a few. Furthermore, Hall maintains that the rhythms of primary level culture are largely hidden from everyday experience, having been relegated through sociocultural development to the shadows of the collective unconscious. These underlying rhythms nevertheless comprise the "unspoken and implicit rules of behaviour and thought that control everything that we do. This hidden cultural grammar defines the way in which people view the world, determines their values, and establishes the basic tempo and rhythms of life" (1984:6).

Primary level culture exhibits both symbolic and biological expression. The emerging science of chronobiology is currently charting the rhythms of the human body, which directly influence the state of our physical and mental health. The biological clock (as opposed to mechanical time) plays the role of bodily conductor, synchronizing the diverse and complex rhythms of physiological processes, the basis of enculturation. Three months before birth the fetus begins to synchronize with the spoken words of its mother. When we communicate (relate) to each other, our brain waves synchronize into a unified sequence of frequencies. Likewise, successful human interaction with the outer environment relies on the synchronization of rhythms, culminating in what we feel and recognize as culture.

The synchronization or "entrainment" principle is a naturally occurring phenomenon. The high school experiment in which two identical tuning forks will drive each other is the same principle that explains why a room full of pendulum clocks, all with pendula of the same length, will synchronize their beat. What is called 'mode locking,' explains why one side of the moon always faces the earth, and why a radio receiver can lock into a slightly oscillating frequency. Furthermore, the study of chaotic behaviour in systems or chaos observes order emerging from apparent disorder through a syncing process whimsically called a "strange attractor" (Gleick, 121-53). This phenomenon offers an explanation for the patterned formations of galaxies and clouds, to the rhythms of social and economic behaviour, including the rhythms of the human body. The aesthetically rich symmetries of fractal geometry are the visual, mathematical representations of order and pattern emerging from apparent randomness -- a representation of the way in which we imagine.

Hall suggests that humankind is immersed in a sea of rhythm, expressed in an expansive array of variation. Hovering beneath the surface of everyday awareness are the rhythms of body language, of which certain features are universal. Hall explains the findings of a playground experiment where the children are filmed without audio recording. The visual events were then 'tracked' with a sequence of pre-recorded music. The result was a nearly complete synchronization of the beat of the music with that of the children. The children were, in Hall's view, in effect dancing to the beat of a common underlying rhythm, expressing themselves as only children know how. The common belief is that "rhythm originates in the music, not that music is a highly specialized releaser of rhythm already in the individual" (Hall 1984:178).

The significance of this hidden dimension of culture is made explicit through a culture's art, of which music partakes. In a study of the Zuni tribe in New Mexico, Hall observed that folk music is judged by how well it reflects or resonates with the experiences of the community. Their music is the basis of community. It serves to intensify identification with each other and with the earth; it clarifies the informal rules of the community, and interprets the thoughts and actions of each individual (all nearly identical to Campbell's [1985] four functions of myth). "The songs perform an emergent formulative function because they

come from that unconscious previously un verbalized layer representing group sentiments and beliefs. That is why the very good songs are co'ya (co'ya is congruence on all levels)" (Hall 1984:171).

The concept of co'ya points to the relative duality of experience, at least in the Zufi imagination. Music in countless cultures, like the experience of the sacred, is not distinguished apart from the rituals of daily life. Moreover, an integrative feature in the language of the Kaluli tribe in New Guinea illuminates this unity-within-duality perspective. The term 'hega' refers to speaking or song texts where "the reference is to a hidden or underlying meaning or motive" (Feld, 250). In addition, the term 'sa-salan' denotes the "first Kaluli metalinguistic-poetic concept" meaning 'inner speaking' or 'meaning inside speaking' (Hall, 133). Here the relationship between metaphor and fact is firmly established. While both relate to different ways of 'seeing' the world, each is enfolded within the other.

Co'ya, hega, and sa-salan signify the rhythmic unifying principle underlying all experience. The value and significance of such a perspective is greatly underestimated in a society where the values of science and technology are regarded as the measure of all things. One of Einstein's most cherished beliefs was that while the world can be understood in terms of reason, theory is acknowledged through the criteria of aesthetics. Furthermore, neither of these two perspectives can be reduced in terms of the other. For instance, the composer and theorist Paul Hindemith attempted to "compose a piece of music based on a fundamental set of frequencies occurring naturally in atomic physics." The result was failure: "... the physically basic frequencies were not suitable for any sort of acoustic transcription" (Leshan and Margenau, 195).

The failure to reduce reason (physics) to the level of aesthetics directly exemplifies the fragmentation that has occurred in the Western imagination. To be sure the evolutionary split between object and subject carries survival value, permitting manipulation of the environment. But there are limits. Julian Jaynes' argument of an object/subject split occurring between the time of Homer and Plato, according to Berman, operated as a crisis function while at the same time seeding the imagination with the potentiality for the fragmentation and alienation that has come to characterize contemporary history. Berman even goes as far as to claim that since 1600 A.D., and in particular since the Industrial Revolution, "the West has been in perpetual crises" (302).

There is an interesting corollary to the topic of fragmentation. The specialization of the two hemispheres of the brain appears to be unique to the human species. As Ornstein states:

the left hemisphere is predominantly involved with analytic thinking, especially language and logic. This hemisphere seems to process information sequentially ... The right hemisphere, by contrast, appears to be primarily responsible for our orientation in space, artistic talents, body awareness, and recognition of faces. It processes information more diffusely than the left hemisphere does, and integrates material in a simultaneous, rather than linear, fashion (cited in Blacking, 19-20).

Also, the "complementary workings of our two thought processes permit our highest achievements, but most occupations value one mode over the other ... a complete human consciousness should include both modes of thought" (loc. cit.).

The over-emphasis on left brain values not only underlies the Western model of progress but is a perspective that reduces human value to technique --

where 'thou' becomes an 'it'. The consequences are the perpetuation of socioeconomic injustice, ecological warfare, and a spiritual disaster, foreshadowed by the Grail legend and characterized by semiological symbol inversion; progress becomes regress and light becomes darkness.

If rhythm is the medium whereby an enlarged vision of self and society is secured, then the ethos of industrial/corporate consciousness is an impairment of this goal: an anti-rhythm running counter to the qualities of compassion, solidarity, and creativity. In a dysfunctioning myth, Campbell argues, the signs and symbols are no longer working, or are "working only in producing deviant effects." Consequently, there is an inevitable "sense both of dissociation from the local social nexus and of quest within and without, for life, which the brain will take for 'meaning'" (1985:5).

While we currently endure a socio-political culture overwhelmed by a sense of maintenance over a sense of mission, the dissolution of the efficacy of traditional symbols (themselves transformed into commodities) signals to Campbell the proximity of radical change. That is, a conclusion of the "childhood cycle" and a "return or recognition of the hero, when, after a long period of obscurity, his true character is revealed" (1973:329). Likewise, Jaynes' object/subject dichotomy, in the context of crisis function, engages a gestation period in the quest for human identity. For Berman, this incubation period is nearing completion, its probable climax being a "violent morphogenesis" (288).

The theologian Ewart Cousins, following Karl Jaspers, senses the approach of a second "axial period": the evolution of the great spiritual awakening that occurred between two and three thousand years ago in the Middle and Far East. This perspective dovetails with the vision of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who saw human evolution in terms of social and cultural advancement, culminating in a final spiritual unity.

The concept of crisis in Chinese is represented by two characters; the first indicates danger while the second denotes opportunity. Given the present human crises, the psychologist Carl Jung believed that we are "living in what the Greeks called 'kairos' -- the right time -- for a metamorphosis of the gods, i.e., of the fundamental principles and symbols" (Jung 1958:123). What is called for is nothing short of a metonymy, or rebirth of spirit. As Jaynes and Teilhard de Chardin speculated, such an evolutionary demand may even result in the emergence of a new species.

One evolutionary demand of the present time is the demand for creativity. Creativity implies neoteny, the retention of childlike mental and physical characteristics (one study even implies that neotenic-looking children already have an evolutionary advantage [Weintraub, 88]). The conceptualizations behind the English language, however, are not conducive to the creative demand. The etymology of the words illusion, delusion, and collusion all find their root in the Latin 'ludere', 'to play.'

So illusion implies playing false with perception;  
delusion, playing false with thought; collusion, playing false together  
in order to support each other's illusions and delusions... the English  
language does not have a word for thought which plays true (Bohm  
and Peat, 48).

Incidentally, the Japanese 'asobu' is a term that underlies the concept of play and its thorough integration within Japanese culture. What all this has to do with rhythm and myth may not seem readily apparent. We have discussed the nature and

phenomenon of rhythm in the context of nature, human understanding, and human behaviour. We have explored the absence of rhythm in Western culture and a proposed link between rhythm *qua* creativity and human survival and evolution. What remains is to understand rhythm as a messenger that carries the potential for meaning and understanding. Thus, the work of Gregory Bateson deserves mention.

Bateson's work in cybernetic theory, the science of messages, centres on the idea of redundancy and feedback as crucial to the creation of communication. Moreover, he theorized that communication contributes to the realization of equilibrium in a system. All natural systems strive for equilibrium or homeostasis by optimizing rather than maximizing their variables. In a study of Balinese culture, Bateson realized that "stability requires change and flexibility" (cited in Berman, 257), the basis of evolutionary adaptation. What he calls "steady state culture" is characterized by an "emphasis on balance, no variable is deliberately maximized...;" it is an ethic that "obeys a law on nonlinear cause and effect, especially with respect to the environment" (Berman, 257-8).

Bateson's cybernetic and cultural studies led him directly to the formulation of a mental 'metapattern' that at once governs the way that we understand messages, and the way that nature evolves. "The pattern which connects" (Bateson, 12) is by definition unquantifiable, a syntax (following Chomsky) that not only relates ideas to one another, but a sense of participation in the possibilities that the idea creates. A vital function of this metapattern, or meta-rhythm, may include the concept of the unconscious 'Zeitgeist,' which Jung defined as the principle that compensates "the attitude of the conscious mind and anticipates changes to come" (1958, 121). This is especially significant in light of the new literacy being "musical rather than verbal" (Steiner, 29).

The artist or musician is an individual, not unlike a shaman, who is sensitive to the underlying sensibilities of the collective psyche. He or she serves "as a medium of communication both between individuals and between individuals in the supernatural world" (cited in Leshan and Margenau, 177). If Toynebee's claim holds true, that political fragmentation within a polity intensifies creative output, then one would expect to see evidence of an alternative vision of society emerging at the present time. Indeed, such does seem to be the case. There is substantial evidence, emerging through music, of a new understanding, an enlarged vision communicating evolutionary possibilities toward a sustainable and meaningful existence. The following lyrics, from the American musical group Mike and the Mechanics, conveys this message:

swear allegiance to the flag  
whatever flag they offer  
never hint at what you really feel  
teach the children quietly  
for someday sons and daughters,  
we'll rise up and fight while we stand still  
can you hear me running?  
can you hear me calling you?

The Canadian group, The Parachute Club, restates this message in a more explicit and optimistic manner:

we want loving, laughter again  
we want heartbeat, all madness to end  
we want dancing, want to run in the street  
we want freedom to live in this peace

we want power, want to make it okay  
want to be singing at the end of the day  
children to breathe a new light  
we want freedom to love who we please  
rise up, rise up, the spirit's time has come...

While the author calls on the lyrics of 'pop' music, the focus is on the quality of the message -- one that is congruent with the values and concerns of 'folk' music -- rather than the implied elitism of its marketing. Moreover, these songs are listened to by literally millions of young people (and perhaps the not-so-young). To one degree or another, these lyrics speak to the impulse (in Camus' phrase) to be something more and other than what we are, to see more and other than what we see. As Teilhard de Chardin argued, "to see or to perish" (31) is humankind's ultimate condition. In realizing the vision offered by the expanded possibility it is necessary to determine what capacities and sensitivities "can be released and at what stages in life they could be ritualized" (Blacking, 25).

Moving from the sociological into the psychological sphere, Bateson's 'metapattern' finds parallel in the mental phenomenon of synchronicity, which Jung believed constituted a fundamental psychic law. Synchronicity can be understood as a "creative act" involving a "meaningful coincidence in time" and leading to "meaningful arrangements" (Jung 1985, 142, 144, 146). The final possibility is one of meaningful experience and meaningful culture. Jung believed that the regularity and significance of such a phenomenon could be acknowledged through a greater awareness and understanding of the self.

In a more intimate sense, the synchronizing of rhythms implies the concept of religion. One root of the word religion is 're-ligare,' to re-connect. What is re-connected, re-remembered, or re-cognized is the intrinsic harmony between two diverse but potentially rhythmic patterns: the sacred and the profane, the common experience of life and the original experience of life. The tragedy of our time, echoing G.K. Chesterson, is that we have forgotten that we have forgotten. Thus the sign points toward the need for sacrifice. The self, wrote Elie Wiesel, exists for those who do not seek it. The realization is one that can be cherished only when shared.

The reconnection of possibility with reality is symbolized in theology by the miracle of the incarnation: "...the perfect fusion of symbol and event, of fact and interpretation" (Polkinghorne, xiv). In the spirit of liberation theology, the Christian message of salvation includes salvation from social and economic injustice. Justice as equated with spirit coincides with the realization and activation of the values of family and community. For those still uncomfortable with the word spirit, the qualities extending from individual and collective solidarity: charity, compassion, and creativity, all equally suffice.

The present socio-economic order has rationalized itself as a reflection of competition, exploitation, and survival in nature. The foundation of such a narrow perspective has now been enlarged. Metaphysics is fusing with physics, and the supernatural is seen to be only a previously unrecognized aspect of the natural. The implication is a recognition of a deep and profound holistic and interdependent vision of natural processes. The logical extension is the recognition of a global consciousness, an at-one-ment in the sphere of social, economic and political reality.

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