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In Pursuit of Beauty: Biological  
Foundations of Aesthetics

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UNIVERSALS IN RITUAL AND HUMAN NATURE

by

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## Summary

This article explores ritual cross-culturally and demonstrates how the study of ritual has matured from its status as exotic and somewhat irrational peculiarities to an understanding of ritual as a form of communication. Through cross-cultural studies of ritual universal patterns are discovered both in the structure and the idioms of this form of communication.

Starting with the wellknown *rites de passage* of Arnold van Gennep the paper demonstrates that ritual is not merely found in "ethnographic" societies, but is an important part of human interaction in general. On the basis of an anthropological perspective, behaviour sequences in modern, industrial societies are shown to have a ritual structure where the universal pattern known from the study of smaller communities is repeated. It is also demonstrated that ritual is an important part of everyday life.

On the basis of field-experience it is emphasized that the intellectual understanding of ritual structure is not a necessary prerequisite for the acting out and staging of rituals. People are able to stage and indulge in rituals without any reflective understanding of its structure, just as people are able to speak a language without any reflective knowledge of grammar or syntax. The importance is participation. The fact of participation is demonstrated to be an existential necessity without which people will feel left out in a limbo.

The paper presents a hypothesis to the effect that the universals in rituals can be seen as a proof of their roots in the human nervous system. The term human nature is introduced polemically in opposition to the constructionist view of human culture. The particular articulation of the universal human nature presented in the theories of C.G. Jung's archetypes are substantiated with reference to universal ritual idioms like blood, milk and semen, as pointed out by Victor V. Turner. (Turner, V.: 1996. *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*. Cornell University Press, New York.)

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The existential dimension of ritual is discussed in a historical perspective where economic developments in Europe's recent past is shown to have disrupted the collective and ritualized community of the agrarian village. Without the close-knit network of the village and the ritualized calendrical rhythm of the agricultural cycle human beings experienced anxiety and alienation as if being in an existential void. This void was filled with nationalism where a measure of ritualism was restored and the ancient blood symbolism created a new unit of identification: The Nation State.

Rituals of manhood is discussed separately as an important and necessary step in the formation of masculine identity. These rituals also offers the most prominent examples of the archaic symbolism of blood, milk and semen. The understanding of human nature which is gained through an analysis of the rituals of manhood articulates interestingly with modern feminist epistemology.

Finally the esthetic and intellectual consequences of the empirical evolution of ritual in Hinduism, Judaism and Christianity is discussed and the rationalization of ritual through the victory of reformed protestantism is demonstrated as a particularly well documented case of the male form of spiritualism which has conquered the modern industrial world.

## Universals in Ritual and Human Nature

Ritual is strongly associated with social anthropology. In the earliest stages of this scientific child of exploration, trade and political domination, ritual was among the phenomena that possibly had the strongest, popular appeal. One of the reasons for this was possibly its esthetic appeal, esthetic in the broader meaning of the word: it appealed to the senses both in a positive and a negative way. Some rituals were

regarded as barbaric, others "primitive" and senseless. But the earliest pictures, photographs and reports of "pagan" rituals never failed to arouse curiosity and interest. But it took quite some time for the community of Western scholars to understand that ritual should be regarded as a special form of human communication with an important message to human understanding. In the following I shall explore ritual as a phenomenon of communication from several angles in order to reveal the underlying patterns of ritual communication.

The most important breakthrough in the analysis of ritual was of course Arnold van Gennep's discovery of the consistent pattern in the so called *rites de passage*, initiation rituals which are found in every known society of the world. (Van Gennep, A. 1960) Van Gennep's understanding of these rituals was partly inspired by law. Without legal understanding, the pattern discovered by van Gennep would have appeared rather meaningless. As every undergraduate student of anthropology today knows, initiation rituals consists of three clearly recognizable stages:

The first stage is that of separation. The novice is the main actor in the drama of initiation. Separation is expressed by several different ritual idioms, but in a cross-cultural perspective they have one element in common: separation is associated with some form of lesion, the most common of which is the circumcision. But the cutting of hair, the knocking out of a tooth and dramatic scarrification are among the most flamboyant idioms in the lexicon of non-verbal ritual communication.

The lesion can be understood as an isomorph expression of the fact of being disconnected with a status in the community. The novice is cut off from his or her previous rights and duties. Being without rights and duties the person actually becomes a non-person and enters the next stage in the process: the liminal stage. We owe to Victor Turner our more profound understanding of this stage in *rites de passage*.

(Turner, V. 1969). When a person is deprived of all his previous rights and duties, he is reduced so to speak to a primordial situation, to a new beginning. The term primordial is used as a metaphor to emphasize the

possibility for change and relearning which characterize this stage in the sequence of *rites de passage*. From this primordial state grows a new person molded by his or her mentor into the form desired by the community.

The ritual is terminated by the stage of incorporation where the novice comes out in his new status and consummates it, commonly through a meal.

During my first field-work in Africa I was just like most of my anthropological colleagues impressed with the remarkable capacity of the Africans to stage impressive and moving rituals. Among the Sidama of Sothwestern Ethiopia I observed for the first time majestic rituals of "authentic" anthropological quality. (Brøgger, J.1986.) As my teacher Victor Turner had taught me, I ventured to get the local exegesis, the local understanding of the ritual procedure.

But to my immense disappointment there was very little "theological" understanding among even the most distinguished among my informants. Although I gradually was able to discuss the "theology" of rituals with my very intelligent friend Agaro Dome, I gradually came to realize that through our discussions we were creating a "Sidama" theology. I could explain van Genneps observations to Agaro, and he understood the logic of it. But it was not part of the Sidama universe of knowledge. Through my questioning I was actually in the process of creating a form of knowledge, in a way I became a missionary.

I came to the conclusion that it was not necessary for the actors of *rites de passage* to understand the logic of it more than it is necessary to understand grammar in order to speak a language. There are universals in the non-verbal language of rituals just as it is grammar in the spoken word, and these universals is part of human nature.

I am of course aware of the fact that it is not proper to speak of human nature, and also of the reasons why it is regarded as improper. But the question is implicit in the theme of this conference and therefore I insist on taking the bull by the horn. The idea of archetypes promoted by C.G. Jung is possibly the best articulation of the psychological correlate of

neurologically based structures in the human brain, and our search for universals in ritual is based on the hypothesis that these universals are expressions of archetypes, or primordial ideas.

In our age of deconstruction it is regarded as immensely politically incorrect to consider that it may be a human nature which is so to speak programmed by the human brain. There are of course no disagreement of the fact that human cultures are articulated in many different forms, but there are probably limits to the ways human nature can be changed through construction and deconstruction. Consistent pattern in the articulation of cultural forms is in my opinion an indication of universals of human nature.

But rituals are sensitive to social organization and it may be argued that *rites de passage* seem to be absent in the large-scale, modern, industrial societies. It is generally true that the main locus of the "anthropological" ritual is the small-scaled, rural community where social life tends to be repetitive. But if we take a second look at modern societies it does not take too much anthropological imagination to recognize that ritual still is part of our system of communication. That it seems to be absent is due to our way of categorization. We tend to regard "anthropological" rituals as in a way irrational. In modern societies the rites of passage are not recognized as such because they often appears as rational. In a career at the University from freshman to graduation, the characteristic structure of the rite of passage can be recognized. Even more recognizable are the ritualistic parts of the military training of the American Marines.

Before we return to the initiation of The Marines and related rituals I shall allow some freedom of speculation on the role of ritual in human life in general. As Erving Goffman has shown, the structure of everyday life is ritualistic. (Goffman, E .1959.) The ritualistic element in everyday life may seem trivial, but our well-being depends on it. Between both mental and social chaos stands the ritual which gives life its form and structure. Seen from this point if view there is in fact a mental craving for ritual. It is only through ritual that human beeings can be united into a

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community.

The public drama we recognize as ritual even in the large scale societies like the celebration of 4. of July in the USA, June 1. in Italy and 17. of May in Norway approach the "anthropological" rituals in both form and expression, and are of great importance for the experience of identity and fellowship. To religious congregations, not only the liturgy of the service in Church is clearly ritualistic, but the Churches offers a calendric structuring of time which connect events in the social realm with astronomic phenomena like the movement of our planet around the sun. Our calendar and our reckoning of time seem to us perfectly rational. But do we really understand the concept of time outside the realm of our ritualistic patterning of social life? What has the movement of the planet around the sun to do with the growth and decline of the human body which we celebrate in ritual form whenever we recognize our birthdays? I really do not understand, but it was possibly understood by Einstein. But without the ritual structure we would probably feel lost, placed in the limbo of emptiness which haunted the imagination of medieval man.

This point of view connects with the existential crises of modern human beings and are acutely articulated in the problem of freedom which for the first time confronted mankind with the disintegration of the medieval village. The life of medieval human beings was ritualistic in a more obvious and recognizable way than in our time. This was so because the scale of society was of "human" proportions. The village was equal to the relevant and recognizable social universe as it still is in certain so called backwards areas in the Old World. In fact the village has been the habitat of humankind since the neolithic revolution and the structure of life in the village did not offer much freedom of choice.

In the village both your personal life and your public life was determined by tradition. The annual rythm og the agricultural cycle was logged into the religious calendar and connected the life of the village and of its individual to a larger sphere of meaning which possibly was poorly understood but instead intensely experienced, which is a different matter altogether. This became clear to me during my fieldwork among

the Sidama of Southwestern Ethiopia as well as during my fieldwork in south European villages. (Brøgger, J.: 1971 and 1992) Ritual is participation. The hidden meaning of the rituals and its patterning and "grammar" is the concern of scientific reflection, but it has little to do with the experience of the participants. I maintain that there is in fact a craving for ritual which is demonstrated by the existential crises and the feeling alienation which is the normal experience of human beings deprived of the ritual patterning of life.

The disintegration of the medieval village was a response to the economic forces of early industrialism and the introduction of money and markets. The system of delayed exchange through which the village community was interconnected was disrupted by the cash deal. Money brought independence and freedom, but at the cost of intimate, human fellowship. With the disintegration of the village community the ritual monopoly of the Mother Church was also challenged.

This was part of the general challenge of the medieval hierarchy which followed in the wake of the Great Transformation of the aristocratic, agrarian society into the age of industrialism, money and markets. With this transformation there was a dramatic change in the form and expression of ritual. These changes are part of the history of the protestant cultural revolution which we shall return to in the following. But before we discuss these matters we shall take a closer look at the dramatic change in rituals of identity which followed in the wake of the disintegration of the medieval village.

The problem of freedom which confronted the human beings "liberated" from the tyranny of communal life, had several solutions. One of them, which is French of origin, is what we may call heroic individualism. We encounter this French tradition in its most articulate form in Sartre's existentialism. This heroic individualism is based on pure reason and in theory leaves all rituals behind as archaic expression of human life. The freedom from collective and ritual dominance demands that each individual takes responsibility for himself and constructs his own life independently of the common public opinion and small-minded *petit-*



*bourgeois* ritualism. If you scratch the heroic individualism, its aristocratic nature is revealed. The heroic French individualism is the historic product of the great aristocratic *Homme de lettre*, economically and socially independent human beings exemplified by men like Rochefoucauld and Montesquieu. In its bourgeois form it articulates with an identification with human rights and universalism which is a secularized version of the Christian idea of the brotherhood of man.

It has been transplanted from the intellectual gardens of France to the robust North American soil. Completely divorced from its aristocratic origins this heroic individualism embarked on a new and unexplored territory in the New World where it appears in the rugged individualism encountered in different forms in The Wild West, in American Business, and lately, it may be argued, in American Feminism.

But there are other solutions than the heroic individualism. It is also possible to return to the tyranny of the village in a new form through religious sects and totalitarian political parties. In Germany the fear of freedom, as demonstrated by Eric Fromm (Fromm, E. 1941.) generated a special ritual form through which a measure of village communality could be resurrected in symbolic, ritual form through what Anderson has named the imagined community and we in everyday language refer to as the Nation State. (Anderson B., 1983)

The Nation State of course was not conceived by the German people. As most social institutions it developed gradually and was not in any meaningful sense conceived by any particular mind. Empirically the Nation State is the authentic child of French feudalism and the development of the absolute monarchy. From the point of view of the absolute monarchy and its civil servants, like cardinal Richelieu, the territory we now refer to as France served as a convenient management unit of industrialism. Through the economic policy of mercantilism and the standardization of the language combined with general enlightenment of the population, France developed an economic and political strength which made her into one of the strongest political entities in the world.

French became the language of the European courts from

Leningrad and Stockholm to the petty principalities of Germany. The Nation State was established in the eighteenth century, but nationalism had to wait for the nineteenth century to be borne.

While the Nation State is a French phenomenon, nationalism is a German contribution to the ideological repertory of mankind. The seeds of nationalism can be observed in the reaction to political and cultural dominance found in many parts of the world. It appears in many diguises, but the common underlying theme is the dream of *The golden age*. The golden age was the good old days when we were in control of our own affairs, before the intrusion of foreign dominance and corruption. In Melanesia it appears in the form of the Cargo cult, among American Indians the Ghost dance movement is an example. In the anthropological litterature these movements are referred to as millennial movements. But both the term and the standard interpretation of the phenomenon has not recognized the theme of *The golden age* as particularly important. This, however, is a powerful idea because its articulates with primordial images of tribe, ancestors and blood. But the millennial movements have been, as maintained by Peter Worsley (Worsley, P. 1957.) recognized as proto-nationalism. In this presentation the theme is emphasized because our concern is universals of human nature.

In the German orbit the idea of *The golden age* resurrected ideas of the old Germanic pantheon and forms of life which preceded the cosmopolitan French universalism with its obvious links with the classical Roman antiquity. The authentic German-ness had in the ideas of Johann Gottfried Herder been preserved by the people, Das Volk. The term Das Volk became a powerful populist term in he lexicon both of democratic, protestant political movements and of totalitarian racist ideologies which in its most pernicious form consolidated in National Socialism or Nazism. It was also embraced by the marxists who managed to promote the fiction that an ideological elite in fact represented the people.

But our concern is this context the power of an archetype, a primordial idea of solidarity frequently symbolized by ideas of blood, which together with the other bodily fluids like milk blood and semen

serve as powerful ritual idioms because of their spontaneous appeal to human emotions. (Turner, op.cit.). In the nazi-rhetoric the ideas of Blut und Boden (Blood and earth) served to consolidate the idea of the German Nation around this primordial image of solidarity. The existential void which the disruption of the local community, the village, left behind was filled by the ideas of a basic identity symbolized by blood and race in a dominant, but now hopefully buried, version of German ideology, by universalism among the French.

' The political expression of this unit of solidarity is the Nation State. The Nation State within the framework of German ideas is a protestant phenomenon. Only through a disruption of the links with the cosmopolitan Mother Church is the sovereign Nation State possible.

In the ritual center of the Mother Church the powerful idiom of blood is present in the Christian communion which is the cardinal ritual also in the protestant churches. But the universal commensality of Western Christianity had been broken. In Western Europe the Christian community is divided by separate tables. From this separateness arose the Nation States of Europe. The Nation State proved to be an extremely powerful unit of political and economic management. The secret of its power is not merely industrialism and the practical application of knowledge, its force is rooted in the spiritual realm, in the belief in the Nation State. Nationalism reaches the individual through its emblems and its rituals.

The calendrical rituals, many of them a heritage from Imperial Rome, was in early Christianity through skillful management by the Vatican transformed into rituals of the Saints and of the Virgin. In parts of Italy the rituals of the patron saints are still among the most meaningful rituals, and there is no coincidence that the term for country and village in Italy is the same, *paese*.

In protestant countries the celebration of the Saints and the Virgin faded gradually, but with the rise of nationalism cultic rituals of the Nation filled the void left by the religious festivals.

In Norway, one of the newer independent Nation States of Europe

the 17. mai, the birth of the Norwegian constitution is celebrated with large parades of children in every little community of the country. The main parade in the capital of Oslo, the childrens parade passes the royal castle where His Majesty and his family stand for hours saluting the cheering crowds.

These parades has little in common with the parades of totalitarian states because the enthusiasm of the crowd is authentic. The participation in the parades is voluntary. The 17. og May is also a day to dress up in the national costumes developed in the different local communities in the agrarian period. Today these archaic garments, which earlier were emblematic of the different local community, have had a renaissance as national symbols. They were incidentally part of the national image presented during the Olympic Games at Lillehammer.

The national rituals contribute to the willingness of the population to die for the Nation, a fact which was demonstrated by the spontaneous mobilization of a major part of the Nation States of Europe during the nazi occupation. During the five years of occupation the importance of the national rituals were demonstrated clandestinely. People in Norway were risking their lives and liberty to celebrate the birth of the Nation. Although nationalism is not the same as ethnic identity, both phenomena is rooted in the archetypes of human fellowship with its archive of ritual symbols: the flags, the costumes, the parades with its spesial beat and music and the most basic, an also most dangeous, the primordial idea of the common blood.

After having explored the ritual expression of human fellowship we are ready to approach the rituals of manhood. These rituals also demonstrate a pattern which may be taken as a confirmation of universals of human nature. As examples of *rites de passage*, rituals of manhood have the characteristic structure demonstrated by Arnold van Gennep.

The stage of separation usually starts some time before the boys reach puberty. Some variation in the ages can be demonstrated cross-culturally. But what they have in common is that the boys are tranferred

from the realm of the mothers into the realm of the fathers, in other words from the realm of the feminine into the realm of the masculine. Before the rise of industrialism human communities were normally separated into mutually exclusive gender cultures. The main reason for this separation which we can observe in many of the ethnographic reports we have of rituals of manhood in small, tribal communities, is the male responsibility for the actual physical defence of the village and/or the community of villages.

In order to transform little boys into fierce warriors, the most dramatic rituals we have in the whole ethnography of rituals are staged. Some of the most dramatic and also best documented cases we have in the ethnographic literature is from New Guinea.

New Guinea is from the point of view of anthropology a virtual experimental garden of neolithic cultures. Because of its location outside the traditional lines of communication between the great civilizations of mankind, New Guinea has preserved up till the present day forms of human culture which have disappeared almost everywhere else except in great rain forests of the Amazon.

We shall take as our ethnographic example the male initiation ritual of the Sambia, meticulously described by Gilbert Herdt in his famous book *Guardians of the Flutes*. (Herdt, G., 1981)

When the Sambian boys reach the age of about seven years, they are forcefully "kidnapped" from their mothers and brought to a secret initiation-ground in the forest. Here they are subjected to a rather shocking series of ritual physical trials which from our point of view amounts to authentic torture. The most painful is the nose-bleeding ritual in which sharp bundles of grass are driven into the noses of the novices. The consequence of this treatment is profuse nose-bleeding. This nose-bleeding is regarded as most important because it purifies the boys of the remnants of feminine substance which has been absorbed by the boys when they were in the custody of their mothers. The symbol of this femininity is the mother's milk which Turner ranks with semen and blood as one of the important symbolic bodily fluids. The feminine substance is

associated in the ideology of the Sambia with the softness and care of the world of women. If this substance is not removed, the boys will fail to grow into strong men and warriors. This is explained to the boys during the execution of the ritual and is understood not as acts of arbitrary cruelty, but as the only way to become strong men. We can recognize the parallel in the mobbing of the recruits to the American Marines who in the early period of their initiation are accused of being sissies and faggots.

In the social system of New Guinea warfare was the order of the day until the recent pacification of the tribal population. A village without fierce warriors would be unable to survive. The fact that the Sambi people are able to survive in a comparatively inhospitable ecological niche surrounded by strong competitors, commands respect and serves to mute our criticism of the cruelty of the ritual.

The force of the males as defenders and providers is essential to survival. Consequently the most flamboyantly masculine of the males and the most daring of the warriors reap the admiration of the women and also have easier access to the sexual favours, the "distribution" of which is the prerogative of the women. It is up to the women to choose among the young men to whom they will bestow their favours.

Sexual potency and masculine power is associated with semen, number three in Turner's triad of symbolic bodily fluids: milk, blood and semen.

In the thinking of the Sambi, the strength of the village is its treasure of semen. This treasure must be transmitted to the next generation through actual insemination of the boys. Fellatio thus is an important part of the ritual of manhood. Without insemination the boys will fail to grow up and will be unable to serve the village as warriors and providers. The insemination is not consummated in one ritual act. The boys have to be inseminated for several years until they reach puberty, and will be able to become inseminators themselves. It is thus the duty of the young, unmarried men to serve as inseminators. The semen of the married men is in the service of procreation and is regarded as too valuable to be wasted on boys. The semen is believed to be stored in the

bodies of the growing boys through a special organ.

The initiation-ritual of theSambi has much in common with that of the African Samburu. (Spencer, P.: 1965.) TheSamburu is a pastoral people and also a people of warriors. The Samburu boys are in the same way as the Sambis snatched from their mothers and brought to an initiation camp in the woods away from the village. In this camp they are subjected to a kind of bleeding with which we are more familiar, i.e. through circumcision of the penis. The operation is performed without any kind of anaesthetics and is most painful. The boys, however, are expected to endure the operation without any signs of complaint, fear or grief. A boy who is unable to sustain the pain without flinching, is shamed forever and will have a hard time regaining his reputation as a male.

As pointed out initially, an important part of the ritual of manhood is suffering. In order to become a man, the boy must pass through an ordeal which tests his endurance and stamina. Comparative material demonstrates that this is not only the case among warriors. The Mehinaku of the Amazone forest who have recently been studied by the American anthropologist Thomas Gregor ( Gregor, T. : 1985.) is actually a peace-loving tribe who, because of the inaccessibility of their geographic location, have been able to live in peace for generation, also subject their boys to ordeals. The Mehinaku are just like theSambi, concerned that their boys shall grow up as respectable males, i.e. good and strong providers. At a comparatively young age, the boys are discouraged from staying in the company of the women. This is also the concern of women, who will chase the little boys away from the realm of women as soon as they reach five years of age.

A few years before they reach puberty, the boys start to prepare for their ritual of manhood. They must get up early in the morning and practice strenuous exercise in order to get rid of their boyish softness. The crucial ritual is consummated when they are around twelve years of age.

The Mehinaku ordeal is piercing of the earlobes which is painful, but much less so than the nosebleeding of theSambi and the circumcision of the Samburu. It appears that the severity of the ordeal is

among "anthropological people" dependent upon the demands of their life as grown men.

There are in the ethnographic literature less material on the initiation of women. This is not so merely because the craft of anthropology earlier to a certain degree has been a male project, but because the girls do not have to part with the world of mothers in the same way as the boys. The male ordeal seems to be a ritual universal. This seems to be so because both boys and girls start their lives as an extension of the female body. This extension is through the first year of life both physical and psychological, after the first period of symbiosis between mother and child the relationship is more psychological of nature. But in order to become a man, the boy must break loose from the identification with the mother. Although this is a controversial issue, I maintain that only women can beget children, but only men can transform little boys into mature males. It is interesting to observe that this fact is in a way recognised by feminist epistemologists like Sandra Harding who maintains that the symbiotic relationship in the first year of life is essential to an understanding of the uniqueness of the female perception. (Harding, S. 1989).

The archetypes need environmental stimulation to emerge as psychological realities in human consciousness. If the archetypes are neglected, they will take revenge. Neurotic suffering and unfulfilled lives is the price of a neglect of the archetypes.

Finally we shall explore a pattern in the historical development of ritual which is most relevant to the question of esthetics. This pattern can be described as the tendency towards rationalization in the ritual expression with the growth of civilizations. A well documented case of this rationalization is the transformation of the old Aryan fertility rituals of the past into the less flamboyant ritualism of Hinduism, as described by Max Weber in his classic on the religion of India. This transformation is the contribution of the Hindu ritual experts or priests. This rationalization may also be referred to as intellectualization, and furthermore of male intellectualism.



Male spiritualism is often associated with sexual abstinence. There are several reasons for this phenomenon. One of them is the opposition between ecstasy and ascetism. To the ascetic the price of communion with divinity is deprivation through fasting, prayer and abstinence from creature comforts. The ecstasies, however can reach their highs through sensory stimulation like dancing, drumming and even drugs. To the ascetics these cheap "instant" communions are deplorable and at odds with the systematic and disciplined regime required by the narrow way of ascetic virtue. Ecstasy as a phenomenon thus becomes suspect, a fact which includes sexual ecstasy, which may be described as the most democratic of all forms of ecstasy.

Another reason is that sex includes relationship to women and to fertility. To many "ethnographic" people fertility is associated with the female sphere which, as among the Sambi, is regarded as a threat to masculinity. Fertility is associated with blood, and menstrual blood is, as demonstrated by Melford Spiro (Spiro, M. 1992) regarded as thoroughly impure and dangerous by the majority of cultures we know.

To the Manichean priesthood, which was rather influential in the late Roman period, absolute celibacy was the rule. Men belonged to the sphere of spirituality which would be contaminated by the presence of women. This incidentally was one of the reasons why Saint Augustine converted to Christianity.

Christianity was not from the very beginning an ascetically inclined sect. But the ideal of poverty was clearly implicit in the lives of the apostles. With the rise of the power of the Mother Church, ascetically inclined idealists criticised the opulence of the Church. It can be maintained that an ascetic opposition existed in the Church through the ages. The Church sometimes crushed the ascetic opposition with violent means, as was the case with the Cathars of Southern France, but the main policy was to allow the ascetics to fulfill their inclinations in monastic institutions. An important case is the Benedictinians, who possibly prepared the ground for the protestant work ethic.

Through the great cultural revolution of the reformation, the ascetic

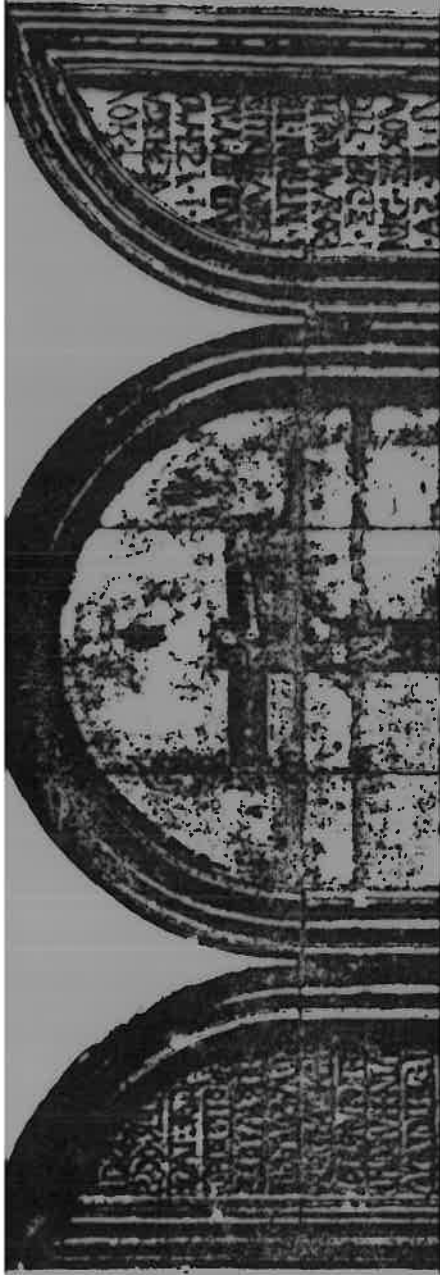
opposition for the first time established itself with political independence. One of the most influential was Jean Calvin (1509-1564) of Geneva. He is in this context of great importance because he completely changed the liturgy of the Church, i.e. the rituals of the service. As an ascetic Calvin deplored the sensual elements of the Catholic service which from his point of view was an opulent theatrical performance with incense, parades, Gregorian music, many places acted out within the framework of richly decorated and majestically constructed cathedrals. This was a sin against the ascetic spiritualism which we recognize both in the Hindu and the Manichean priesthood. A daring parallel may also be drawn to the Sambhi initiation rituals. The Sambhi males may without stretching the concept too far be regarded as ascetics with their cold war against the creature comforts of the female world.

The role of semen is not irrelevant in this context because it is frequently associated with male spiritualism. Aristotle is quite explicit on this issue. "A boy is like a woman in his form, and the woman is like an impotent man, the female deficiency is rooted in her inability to change edible matter into semen.... The semen has the quality of movement and when the movement stops, each part (possibly the ovum) receive life and soul... It is obvious that semen has soul, and is a potential soul." (quoted from Monsen, N.: 1984) Even in Aristotle we are confronted with the primordial symbolism which Turner referred to.

The impact of the Calvinist theology cannot be overestimated. Possibly it is the spiritual root of western capitalism, but it also changed the esthetic sensibility of protestant civilization. Calvin was against ritual which he regarded as an inferior form of communication because it appealed to the senses, i.e. to the ecstatic dimension in life. From Calvin's teaching arose the iconoclasm of protestant esthetics. The *ritual* was substituted by the *word*. The *priest* became a *preacher*. The *word* may be regarded as pure spiritualism

The church was emptied of most of its artistic decorations and the ritual was substituted by the sermon. I have referred to this process as rationalization. It went much further than the reforms of the Hindu priests





and introduced the era of what we may refer to as protestant intellectualism which is related to modern scientific intellectualism and maybe the first is a precondition of the second.

The influence of the calvinist spiritualism of artistic expression is enormous. This fact can be recognized by anyone who compare the artistic poverty of protestant churches with the richly decorated catholic churches.

The change in artistic expression which followed in the wake of protestantism can be highlighted by a comparison of two altar-pieces from Norway. One altar tryptic from Ringsaker church a few miles north of Lillehammer in Norway (see plate 1) was introduced a few years before the protestant cultural revolution. It presents biblical themes in vivid colours and realistic wood-carvings. It is the only tryptic of its sort preserved in Norway, all the others were burned because of the iconoclasm which followed in the wake of the reformation.

In Hvaler Church in Southern Norway we find an example of the post-reformation art. (see plate 2). The pictures have been replaced by script. This example illustrates in visual form the cool, protestant intellectualism which gradually has conquered most of the industrialized world.

This last pattern recognized in the evolution of ritual may not be universal although it can be recognized in Hinduism, Judaism and Christianity. Whether this puritan intellectualism will conquer the world is yet to be seen. It may be maintained that one of its brainchildren, functionalist architecture, already has at least the urban world already in its grip.

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