

A SYNOPTIC OF THE THREE CULTURES

Lear: You see how this world goes
Gloucester: I see it feelingly

King Lear, IV, vi, 145

Prelude

A motif - brief, intelligible, self-existent as it is - constitutes a melodic and rhythmic unit out of which, for example, the entire first movement of Beethoven's *Fifth* develops in figures repeated at different pitches and intervals; yet all the while recognisably the same. That is a motif. There is a mythic motif about that opening motif of the *Fifth*, directing the entire first movement. Schindler, one of Beethoven's earliest biographers, has him saying that the opening motif is 'Fate knocking at the door.' A likely story, made the more credible by Beethoven's scrawl, on his greatest score: 'Muss es sein? Es muss sein.' There is the leitmotif of the first culture: fate, not faith....

The First Culture

I repeat the leitmotif of the first culture: fate, not faith. That leitmotif is pagan and in the majority everywhere. It registers the incalculable force of the metadivine. Existent before God or gods, before nature and man, the metadivine represents what it is: that primacy of possibility which reappears variously in the third culture synchronically as Freud's 'trieb', Marx's classless society, and in other mythic repetitions examined elsewhere.¹

In its enormous variety, from Australian aboriginal to Platonic rational, lost original dream time or rational ideal forms, the first culture derived its pagan sense of reality from the otherwise hidden primordial realm of power. From this primordial realm, imperial messages which must be obeyed go out to its subjects, which included the gods themselves....

In the mythic and multiple truths of the first culture, all gods and all other beings, too, are born in the womb of the primordial. Above and beyond the fecund prepotence of the primordial, existing before all else and from which all else is born, there is absolutely nothing; not even desire. In the first culture, pagan and majority of cultures in all its enormous

variety, the unalterably directive motif, however it is played out and for however long, before the gods and all other occasions, remains as it was in the beginning: a decided primacy of possibility that is the hidden limit of freedom in that primacy. The thrust of third culture theory is toward freedom in that primacy. By contrast, in the first culture, primordiality of power, its character predestined, limits free will. Fate is that god-term of the first culture which decrees its non-negotiable terms to the gods, who are not what is prepotent in them and in their conduct: the primordial metadivine....

Even the sexuality of gods in the first culture is an aspect of the primordial thrust of power by which they are brought to life and death. Human destinies may be represented, however unknown and unknowingly, by some god within, itself subject to the metadivine primordial powers. Whether working in the Oedipus of Sophocles or of Freud, fate is there, incomprehensible as it is blameworthy. That destiny does not preclude responsibility which gave to the first culture its tragic tension. That tension cannot be resolved....

All tragic characters in the first culture can protest, as they die in despair, that they have been subjected to the will of some god. Dionysus has been so subjected to his divine father Zeus. That chief god himself has been subject to the mysterious primordial power. Before the primordiality of power the gods may appear to themselves as no more than flies to those familiarly wanton boys.

Metadivine power is to be feared, as are its agents. That force of destruction, whatever it creates - dramatic tragedy or new orders - made no moral sense: least of all to those all-too-human characters drawn into the miasma of force. Tragic heroes, clever clowns alike are drawn inescapably into the miasma. Heroes may be noble as Prince Hamlet and clowns clever as Polonius. The miasma of fate overpowers whoever strays too near it and even those not so near. Yet a Horatio, near as he is to Hamlet, survives to tell the story, however else he too may be dead. Fate teaches no moralities; nor does it teach immoralities. Fate is merely remorseless. Its workings can be watched dry-eyed....

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The Second Culture

The leitmotif of the second culture is nothing miasmic, nothing metadivine and impersonal. That leitmotif is of faith, not fate. Faith is in and of the personal: that creator-character that once and forever revealed himself in the familiar five words from Exodus III:14: 'I am that I am.'

Faith means trust and obedience to highest most absolute authority: the one and only God who acts in history uniquely by commandment and grace. In the second culture of Rome as in Jerusalem, even given grace, the largely prohibitive commandments, interdictory in character, must be kept. Even to the question of a rich young intellectual on what he must do to enter the kingdom, Jesus answers: "Keep the commandments." Those commandments, divine Law, have not been abrogated by one jot or tittle, anywhere in the second culture. The commanding truths, revealed by highest absolute authority and elaborated by the practicing observant elites of that authority, first to themselves, are not before and above everything else. Before commanding truths there exists their author. Before the existence of that authorial God, One or Three in One, as various traditions of that second culture would have it in their own quests for historical power intellectualized - there is nothing.

In the beginning of the second culture, there was no primordial realm of power above, beyond or parallel to the authorial divine. Nothing is metadivine. Everything beneath the authorial divine is its creation. The superb thing in creation is human being. Its superbity is in the free capacity of human being either to destroy everything created, including himself, or to elaborate that creation in a theoretical life for which only the human has been given the amplitude that, in the ladder languages of faith, is generally named 'spirit.' From this inspiration and aspiration, the intentional word self revealed creator of all things, creature of the second culture derive their separate self-identities, each its own inwardly, however commonly they may be numbered together. In their commonality as societies, men remain dependant creation. The crucial text for the aesthetics of authority is, was and ever shall be Genesis I:26-27: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." This truth sheer imagery, that mere likeness granted, what follows for man in his sodalities?

The least that follows is that there cannot be human self-knowledge without some knowledge of the creator authority established by doxologies, however concealing, derived from that text. Second-culture doxologies need no philosophies nor sociologies. Rather, doxologies oppose all philosophies and psychologies; for they have been purchased by minds asserting

their autonomy from theologies. Such assertions can lead only to the subversions of the sense of truth inward to the self and thence to a culture untrue to its expressive form of all cultures: as the symbolic of sacred order. Except in that form, cultures may be created but they are immanently so self destructive that they become what I have called... 'anti-cultures.' The third culture is the number of this anti-culture of creative destruction. To that destruction, the creative elites of the third culture appear, as it were, consecrated...²

The second culture has grown progressively more incomprehensible to many ostensive selves in it. Sacred order and the self locatable in that order, predicate of the second culture, derives from the commanding truths of highest absolute authority. Neither sacred order nor the self sideling endlessly within its vertical, seeking offices of the power with which to abolish that authority, can be abolished except at a price paid for by plunges into depths unknowable except negationally in transgressive personality and in the arts and sciences of divine law denied. Those negational arts and sciences are to the third culture what theology was to the second. It is nonsense or ignorance, if not shrewd timidity in the elites of the second culture, to deny the warfare between science and art, on the one hand, and theology on the other. Science and art do produce 'values'; that is precisely what is wrong in them and with them. Behind those 'values' there is nothing.

Not only great modern art, such as that of Picasso or Joyce, but the entire scientific knowledge industry has been built on the ruins of the second culture, and by renegades from that culture. That culture creates pleasure out of life in the ruins. In pursuit of that pleasure, the self that was found in its relation to highest absolute authority, as faith, has been lost in roles played as if life were a succession of amateur theatricals, with an experimental laboratory as the world's stage. On that stage, rather in that laboratory, self-identity is no longer inviolable. Each resembles every other as a player of role faiths. Sacred history has been rewritten as a series of scenarios, composed to fill in time that would be empty if not recomposed out of the mountain of wasted faiths left behind by the second culture as its legacy to the third.

By contrast, the leitmotif of the second culture, so far as its survives, is that it cannot be composed or recomposed. Rather, It, called 'He' by tradition, has composed us. Once composed, the divinely created motif of self finds itself free to rewrite the score; but never outside the scale of sacred order. Outside sacred order, nothing exists. Nothing can come of this nothing, except the sacrifice of self and its cultivation as an offering of the unrealized self to the Nothing. Nietzsche called

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this offering "the third sacrifice."³....

Of life lived obediently in a sacred order of transcendent and revealed truths, independent of this world and yet penetrating it with sanctity, people in perpetual therapies of interpretation would know nothing.⁴ Perpetual therapy, the way of life in the third culture, aimed to resolve the authority of the past in the radical contemporaneity of whatever takes power in the present, may be far more bizarre than a life of perpetual prayer. The least popular kind of knowledge remains *faith/knowledge* of the highest in the highest: faith, not fate. All knowledge of truths transcending the world as it affirms itself in itself, a world helpless in theory before its own mute facts, must take the second culture of faith as its predicate.

Toward the dissolution of *faith/knowledge*, the theoretical predicates of therapy were first formulated by a Christian theologian who reconstituted reality in a brilliant dialectic of Yes and No: Peter Abelard. Diverse theorists of the third culture, from Jakob Bohme to Sigmund Freud, descend from Abelard. With his dialectic of Yes and No, the antithetical law of being, Abelard first broke that unity between the knower and known upon which the commanding truths of the second culture founded their rational spirituality and social legitimacy. In its destructive result, the Abelardian dialectic found instead that any ascent to a higher life produced its own antithetical lowering. Obedience, not to speak of union with highest absolute authority, was cut off in both theory and practice. Transgression more than hinted its equality with the interdicts. Both were equally creative and necessary in sacred order. Whatever his conscious intention, Abelard achieved a superb dismissal of the entire ancient tradition of *faith/knowledge*, the praxes of both Jerusalem and Rome. That dismissal can be inferred from the passage following:

*Intellection (Intellectus) is the act of the soul, by which it is said to be intelligent (Intellegens). The form toward which intellection is directed is some imaginary and made-up (ficta) thing, which the soul manufactures for itself as it wishes and of what sort it wishes, such as are those imaginary cities which we see in sleep.*⁵

Freud never put better the theory of therapeutically resolute fictions of authority as an instrument for visualizing a reality that was transformable, through emotive transferences of authority to nothing but intellection itself. Moreover, Abelard revived the ancient truth that mind is inseparable from body and dies with it except in the culture of collective memory. Mind dying with the body, it followed that where commanding truths had been once heard in Revelation, there was nothing more than the repeatable intellectual activity of experimental imagination. Displacing tradition with experiment, mind recon-

quered sacred order, by relegating it to the transient because experimental world of ficta. However systematically constructed, a figment of imagination is no transcendent and singularly commanding truth. Abelard opened the way to the third-cultural worship of a totally immanentist and manipulable world of produced things. He explains that figments of imagination are made up so that through them we may think about things. In fact there is no other way to think about things that will lead the thinker any way toward the things themselves.

We reach the nominalist consummation of the second culture: that words were invented and made trustworthy so that men might have a doctrine of things. By this Abelard intended no doxology of these figments, but only an intellectual instrumentality *through* these figments. The immanent and material world became subject to a course of intellectualization that, in making do with creative fictions, introduced the third culture of a reality endlessly constructed and deconstructed by and in those very ficta.

Thus it was that sacred order became discardable reality. New cards of identity were issued to the self by a power of rationality that thought it could use irrationality to liven the dead sacred scene by its own power to mobilize both routines of sober investigation and explosions of enthusiastic hatred channelled by trained routinizers of a life turned completely political: toward the endless conquest of power. The antipolitical conviction that God exists and had communicated Himself directly in Revelation took its place among other ficta of inevitable supernaturalism of mind itself as it made up its various immanent applications. Science and art, liberated from all theological reference, could constitute themselves as composed notes toward a supreme fiction that was understood to be supreme only as fiction....

The fictive leitmotif can be sounded in three words that compose a prelude to the third culture and a postlude to the second: therapy, not theology. But surely, in its arrogance theology deserved its fate. Therapy has been more modest. The therapy of all therapies is not to attach oneself exclusively to one therapy. The danger in following the way of one therapy is that it will promote one supreme fictional self at the expense of others equally claimant. In the age of the therapeutic, 'self' is a merely honorific term for a repertory company of actors, some better than others in the actual occasions of their performances. Against its own performances, the inward theonomic self cannot survive in good faith, but only in bad; as a mere critic of its performances. Freud impersonated this mere critic as "super-ego." By this impersonification, Freud designed the enlargement of the analytic room, with its couch and chair of recycled

egos itself an enlargement of the confessional booth, into a hospital theatre. In the institutional history of culture, the hospital theatre of the third culture takes over and remodels the church of the second to suit its own architectonic needs for display performances that are meaningful - i.e. that the critic can see feelingly, through his blindness. Therefore, reason not a theological need and an unpolitical self. Instead of that self-image after the likeness of its creator, there, in our really fictional world of hospital theatre, are only quasi selves, all equally unrealizable in order that none become unthinkable....

...To the theorists of the third culture the ficta is the thing. Without this aesthetic of authority the social poetry of life giving what is then called 'meaning' to that life, there is no authority. 'God' is the term we symbolic animals use to give our lives its shifts of meaning. Else there would be panic and emptiness. It is panic and emptiness that creates, by the human fear of it, the sacred fear from which the second culture fled into faith.

THE THIRD CULTURE

Here following are Nietzsche's three dying words of the fear that forms the true counter-culture, the second: "God is dead." Not that absolutely everything is permitted in the third culture. Of course, there are rules. Every society has its system of rules. But rules are not interdicts, in the manner of divinely commanded and prohibitive truths, as in the second culture. Nor are rules to be recycled as 'taboos,' those sacred fears of the primordial power and its unknown wishes as they occurred constantly to members in the first culture.

No first culture now exists, I reckon, except in fictive recyclings, more or less Freudian, in the third. Even as it conserves and rediscovers in neuroses the useful fiction of synchronicity, the first culture reckoned dead and inaccessible even to the most imaginative theorists of the unconscious and archetypal, members of the third culture believe they can live well enough by infinitely recycled fictions. Religion becomes form, however temporary, in art and truth is transferred to therapies of resolution...

My doubts about the doctrine of synchronicity are supported by the implication of Nietzsche's leitmotif 'God is dead.' Not merely the one true god is dead; rather, with him all gods have died. God-terms are fictions. Nietzsche's supreme fiction appears in the second edition of his *Frohliche Wissenschaft*, subtitled *La Gaya Scienza*, exactly a century ago. Yet we must remember that in the famous Book III, Section 125, of *Die frohliche Wissenschaft*, it is a madman who cries up the dedel-

fication - what Max Weber later called the "disenchantment of all cultures."

Whither is God? I will tell you. We have killed him - you and I. All of us are his murderers. Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually, backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Is there anything up or down? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we smell nothing yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him...

*What water is there for us to cleanse ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games, shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of [the death of god]? There has never been a greater deed...*⁶

Other than theonomic sensibilities synchronic with his atheism, what could have possessed Nietzsche to raise the question whether, to appear worthy of the death of God, members of the third culture must - even might - try to become gods? This smacks of euhemerism, heroic nostalgia in the form of publishing the split in his yearning after the heroic. That way Nietzsche's madness lay dead ahead.

Earlier, Nietzsche remembered "the greatest danger": the danger that has always "hovered over humanity - that "eruption of madness" he himself soon suffered in his own long second death. Madness meant to Nietzsche the "eruption of arbitrariness" the "joy of human unreason";⁷ in short, the energies of belonging nowhere in sacred order because it has been reasoned out of existence. Only in his madness could Nietzsche achieve a rationalism so radical that it emptied itself, as God the Father may be thought to empty himself in the very man of the Son. That kenotic way lies either Christ idolatry or the therapeutic rationalization of madness as we can witness its play in world hospital theatre, as cathedrals of the self. There remains the inevitable act of declaring each empty and overworked canvas a masterpiece, not because it reads well, but only because there is no text; only the readings.⁸

Readings, not what is being read, have become culture. In that manner, the address in the third culture may be said to address itself in the most familiar, if not downright insolent, way. Such a manner of self-address is most easily achieved by a synchronic of transgressions celebrated as therapeutic. Such a synchronic is inseparable from the third-cultural sense of supreme well-being that was steadily understood, in the second culture, as being deathly ill...

...In the spirit of third cultural understanding, nothing is

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tremendous. Nothing is a 'big deal,' everything is permitted in principle if not in practice. The third is the most principled of cultures. It remains the case, synchronic in the three cultures, that one popular, yet terribly untrue, test of principle is a willingness to die for it.

Postlude

It is impossible to enter into the deepest most directive feelings of dead or deadly cultures such as the first and third, respectively. Accepting that impossibility, I have not titled this a synchronic of the three cultures but, more modestly, a *synoptic*.

Depth psychologists and artists of the third culture have tried to break and enter the second culture, synchronicity adopted as their methodological weapon. I cite one among many weapons of synchronicity: Freud's doctrine of the authority of the past sickening, with its repetitions, the pleasures of the present. Other examples of the synchronic method at its deadliest can be briefly cited here: Jung's theory of the archetypes;⁹ Picasso's primitivism; Joyce's recyclings of first and second cultural detritus in third-cultural epics of the self saying, like Molly Bloom, 'yes' to everything; Pound's *Cantos*.¹⁰

These mad or malicious entries into the second culture represent efforts of a genius tantamount to what used to be called mortal sin. All represent the unprecedented aesthetic of abolitionist movement to break the sacred order which all cultures register as the human position, however shifting, in that eternally ordered and authorized vertical. An empirically more accurate and theoretically truer synchronics of culture, less hostile to the joy of ascending to a higher life in its vertical of authority, can be developed by seeing how readings are made of abiding realities that are inseparable from belief.

By contrast, the continuing destabilization of our inherited culture, in its personal authority, is of a piece with the humiliation of the divine word that was directive in it. That famous and serious sociologist, Isalah, knew how to read cultures and personalities; heads of families and whole peoples broken within short spans of history. Perhaps nowadays the process of destabilization is cut even shorter than it was in Isalah's time, which he gives as "three score and five years." The destabilization of culture and personality is an effect with a synchronic cause known to Isalah: "If ye will not have faith, surely ye shall not be established." (Is, VII:9) This was translated into the Christian tradition of truth in the form of *credo ut intelligam*. Luther translated Isalah's reading into the still-current sociologically and aesthetically functionalist half-truth that if you do not believe you do not abide. I say 'half-truth' because in order to

abide some knowledge of where it is that the self can abide is ineliminable from belief. To the question of how and in what we see feelingly where we are, I would return were there world enough and time. An answer can be given indirectly, in a way preliminary to another lecture: by looking at such images of where we are as may lead us to intimation of what we are; each in our own way of ascent and descent within the three motifs of the vertical of authority within which all experience is moral experience ■

NOTES

1. The book from which these pages are drawn continues my assault on third-culture theory as a negation of truth in sacred order.
2. For a reasonably brief and straightforward theory of the third cultural elites as destroyers, see, for example, J. A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York, 1942), pp. 121-163.
3. *Beyond Good and Evil*, III, 55.
4. On the theory of interpretation in the third culture, see further, "The Tactics of Interpretation," in *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer*, 3rd edition (Chicago, 1979), pp. 102-147. Of course, the interpretative literature on interpretation is immense. For a modest, squarely second cultural assessment, see John Wilkinson, *Interpretation and Community* (London, 1963).
5. B. Geyer, ed., *Peter Abelard's Philosophische Schriften* (B.G.P.M. XX) (Munster, 1919-27), 20-25f.
6. F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. with commentary by W. Kaufmann (New York, 1974), pp. 181-182.
7. *Op. cit.*, pp. 130-131.
8. So the modern painter-critic can improve upon Balzac's unknown masterpiece.
9. Jung's theory of the archetypes is too well known for discussion. Cf. his important essays undergirding that theory in *The Collected Works*, edited by Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler (New York, 1960), Vol. 8, "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle," pp. 419-519; and "On Synchronicity," pp. 520-531.
10. On that ranting volunteer beau linguist of Fascism, Ezra Pound, see *The Cantos* (New York, 1948), pp. 17 et pass., with its "great bulk, huge mass, thesaurus" of polyglot slang celebrating primordial hatred of the second culture in its "elders," "scribes," and "grinning teaching rabbis" (p. 105).

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Philip Rieff esquisse par la methode de la recherche du motif fondamental les leit-motives des trois cultures dans lesquelles nous vivons plus ou moins synchroniquement et peut-être même heureusement.