

Swami Brahmachari Ajay Yoghi

On the skirt of Nanda Devi, in the Indian Himalayas, beside the fire in an old stone house, I watch Bramachari Arjuna Yogui heating a teapot over some embers. I wait patiently until he serves the tea and sits on a cushion before asking him the first question...

Pistolo: You were educated at European universities. You read Philosophy in Holland, where you taught transcendental meditation. Then you went back to India. At the present time you teach Sanskrit and yoga at Rishikesh. The fact that you delved into two such different traditions of thought as the oriental and the occidental must have given you a certain perspective about each of them. Let us begin with art: what do you think is the basic difference between both cultures' ways of seeing art?

Brahmachari: In our culture the concept of art is still linked to nature and divinity. Let's take music as an example. In the East we have musical pieces called ragas. Some ragas are associated with one particular time of the day. In this way, when a musician plays a raga in the morning, he must take it into account that the act of playing isn't strictly speaking musical activity, but that it is a prayer to the sun and the morning. On the other hand, ragas have a basic structure as regards rhythm and melody; but their development is free and open for creativity. Another of the characteristics that define our music is that we don't have written scores, so we transmit musical knowledge from person to person: from master to disciple. In the West, however we find the opposite situation: musicians must interpret written scores and keep as closely as possible to the musical transcription. In your classical music there is no room for improvisation. Each piece is a closed work. Interpretations vary little. The musician is not allowed to make a creative contribution.

What link is there, in your opinion, between the art world and Oriental introspection disciplines like yoga?

A great deal in my work. I do research into life. I study the formations of those structures that we call reality. But addressing the mystery of life is a very difficult task, because on doing so, we are attempting to approach an absolute essence, which appears before our eyes as a phenomenon that has infinite manifestations. It is precisely this multiple nature of reality that makes me use different disciplines in my studies. To perform my research I use both Occidental sciences and Oriental introspection techniques, since each cognitive discipline provides a new viewpoint. To explain it by using a metaphor, I would say the real irradiates blinding light. In order for us to see it, we filter it through prisms. The colours that emerge are projected on the multiple manifestations of life. Each colour tints a different branch of knowledge. Therefore, although each science seems different to us, we must not forget that they are all tinted with the same light.

Many people think that after the last scientific revolution in the 19th century -which led to such specialisation of disciplines that it almost did away with the dialogue between the sciences- the end of Post-Modernity would bring about a return to a more humanistic ideal. That the barriers between scientists and artists would somehow be removed...

I quite agree. Quantum physicists work with such tiny particles that we cannot see them even through a microscope but they verify them experimentally. They are actual philosophers who explain to us that

in their world there is no such thing as objectivity. Objects are not here or there, but in both places at the same time. For their part, mathematicians endeavour to understand the shape of the universe by studying the geometry of multidimensional spaces. They both work with the abstract principles of metaphysics, which shows that when a cognitive discipline goes as far as possible it ends up going beyond its own limits and invading the terrain that in principle seemed to belong to another field of knowledge... It looks as though we are somehow going back to the genesis of science, in Ancient Greece, when the best mathematicians, astronomers and biologists were philosophers...

As you said before, all disciplines after all try to find the patterns that give movement and shape to the universe. Some do so by studying microparticles or by means of a numeric calculation of imaginary spaces; others by studying the movement of the planets and the displacement of matter... Do you think there are trustworthy at microscopic and macrocosmic level?

Without a doubt. I think there are laws inherent to energy. The cosmos is full of paths and channels that regulate the traffic of energy at all levels. It all depends on the viewpoint from which the study is made. A neurologist would say ideas travel along the neuronal networks in our brain. A physicist, that magnetic fields generate telluric currents on the planets. A biologist, that there are oceanic currents that regulate the temperature of the Earth. An astronomer, that in outer space there are supercords in the shape of circlets or loops that stretch to infinity. Vibrating at a rhythm that sends waves of gravity through the universe...

Bramachari pauses, smiles, takes a sip of his tea and looks at me in a condescending manner...

And now, Ulises my friend, it's your turn to explain and mine to ask questions... What is the importance of yoga and meditation in your personal conception of art?

First I should make it clear that my work is not restricted exclusively to the creative act (inspiration), but the whole of my life. Thence the importance of yoga in my work process. Let's say my work is an endless series of experiments about the conscience, the mind and the body. So if I want to know how these elements work, knowledge of yoga and all the disciplines that study the relationship between the body, the mind and the spirit is essential.

You are speaking of a very personal thing, an intimate experience. But art must show its face to the spectator. Don't you want to transmit your work to the public?

All research processes leave their mark behind: the remains of the action. There is a discipline in art called performance, which is based mainly on the fact that the artists themselves becomes the objet d'art. The artists transform their ordinary everyday actions into something creative, endowing them with an almost ritual value. Then the ordinariness of the moment turns into an artistic act and the magic element of the action is spontaneously created. The objects manipulated, the video, music and photographs are thus linked to the Parthenon of art and at the same time to the other side of art, which is just as necessary: galleries, museums and exhibition spaces.

To go back to what you were saying earlier about the art you make with the aid of Oriental relaxation techniques. Can you explain how you use meditation in your work?

I try to use the knowledge acquired with yoga to develop new experiences that allow me to evolve by combining this technique with other elements. For example, I mix pranayama (diaphragmatic breathing) techniques with alpha waves (brain waves) produced by analogical synthesisers; and I add psychedelic light in tune with my heartbeat. On the other hand, the projections display the signals of the synthesiser, so the visuals are formed by acoustic stimuli. I used all these elements for Meditación

(Meditation), a performance that enables me to generate states of pleasurable consciousness in the spectators.

I'm glad to hear that yoga and meditation techniques can be used for artistic purposes; that is good, because, in our view, art should help develop awareness. And, in essence, it is merely an instrument to interfuse with the creator. Does this sort of actions that you do form part of a new movement in the West that could help people achieve greater awareness?

That is a path that is being opened up little by little, and as every action is mimetic, as soon as important artists start to perform creative actions that go beyond the threshold of art to permeate the social fabric and transform it, it will be time for the change you speak of to take place.