

THE TOPOLOGY OF MYSTICISM

As an artist I feel I have always been a Symbolist even as a child. This may have been the reason my father encouraged me in that direction from his own knowledge of the subject sensing my natural inclinations in that direction.

As one of the major influences on the modern sensibility Symbolism has constantly been subject to redefinition to fit a variety of artistic agendas. Examples are: the philosophy of the Bauhaus School of Design, first in Weimar and then in Dessau, the entirety of the Surrealist Movement, certain artists of the New York School of Abstract expressionism, or artists of the "New Age" during the 1960's. As a movement in itself, it formed in Europe about 1850 with the writer Edgar Allen Poe [1809-1849] being its immediate predecessor in America. Lasting until 1910 in its original form, by the fin de siècle, it was dubbed The International Symbolist Movement.

The American philosopher, William James [1842-1910] lived through it, was influenced by it, contributed to it, and in a certain sense was its hero. He was able to balance and integrate mysticism, art and science far better than the leaders of, for instance, The Theosophical Society that met in New York City in 1875 to do just that, but ended up creating another religion.

A definition of Symbolism that I have always liked is by René Terrasson who in his book "Pelléas et Mélisande ou L'Initiation", wrote: "the time of Symbolism may be defined as that superior instant when art combined with mysticism to reach the very meaning of existence through privileged metaphysical interrogation motivated by the need to return to the sources of being".

What I like about it is that the definition refers to any moment in history when the visionary genre [called symbolism in the 19th century] manifests itself.

"Privileged metaphysical interrogation" is a reference to the efforts of the so-called "perennial philosophers" whose traditional task has been the investigation of their mystical experience. This investigation, such as the work of the Neo-Platonist, Plotinus [204-270 AD], is not the result of any self-styled evangelism in behalf of a particular religion, or the desire to create an entirely new religion. Nor can "perennial philosophy" be used as a way station on one's personal "spiritual path" while waiting for "the new religion" to come along. This kind of "mystical agnosticism" is now popular with people who say they are not "religious" but they are "spiritual". "Perennial Philosophy" is a science, perhaps the first science, that studies the experience of mysticism, not from a position of a scholar simply describing the process but from that of a practitioner - The Mystic.

William James in his book "The Varieties of Religious Experience" comments of the possibilities of mystical states being advancements in knowledge by saying that to the mystic of the experience is absolutely authoritative. But to those outside the experience they are not bound to accept uncritically any revelations reported. And the mystical experience opens the possibility of other avenues to truth besides the physical senses. With that as a baseline of connecting being to knowing Symbolists from all eras of history have been in the process of expressing their revelations in the form of artworks. Others have indicated their experiences by founding religions, or by

means of what have been called inventions. Also degrees of intensity of mystical states yield different results.

In my case, I was initiated into having mystical experiences by means of lucid dreaming [the awareness that you are dreaming while in the dream state]. This state was induced by Electro-shock therapy. As a result, I was able to completely understand my father's passionate interest in mysticism and also the work of his friend Leonard Thompson Troland [1889-1932] an assistant professor of psychology at Harvard University. Troland in 1924 set up the first parapsychology laboratory at Harvard while also creating seminal inventions in electronics and optics. But his *magnum opus* "The Ultimate Theory of Mind and Matter" [unfinished at his sudden death] was shown to me by my father. The main concept of the book was influenced by the term "psychological parallelism" introduced by the German philosopher-psychologist Gustav Theodor Fechner [1801-1887]. Fascinated when I saw his chapter on mystical states best expressed by Combinatorial or Algebraic Topology - a topology [the study of surfaces] that has strong intuitive geometric appeal. After my initial mystical experience I knew Troland was right. From that day forth I have followed this Neo-Symbolist path in my artwork and will continue to do so into the future.