

Theologia of Transparent Objects

by

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For My Mother

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Abstract

The cultural philosopher Jean Baudrillard in his work *Le Système Des Objets* looked at the meanings of the object *per se* and came to the conclusion that we, ‘and objects are indeed bound together in a collusion in which the objects take on a certain density, an emotional value – what might be called a ‘presence’.’ (Baudrillard, J. 2005, p.14) His study of the meanings, therefore the language of objects, draws attention to the fact that they are always in movement away from our attempts to project meaning onto them, that they have a dimension which *transcends* their function for us and that is their technology, from whence they were made.

I argue that particularly in the case of transparent objects there is a further ‘transcendence’, that of the spiritual, or theological, and look at the relationship between meaning and language in response to such a ‘presence’.

This thesis is a systemic journey on the meanings and ‘dialogue’ of transparent objects, utilising case studies of selected objects and a self-reflexive research method, with the inclusion of autobiographical material. What is commonly thought of as the ‘transparent’ is examined as locus of dynamics of the self, alongside the ‘subtle’ transparency of the iconic function. I question what it is that transparent objects can tell us about our shared reality, through our apprehension of them and their particular qualities, what dialogues they bring forth, how do they in particular function as ‘earth angels’ (McNiff, 1995) and what they can bring, channel or enable.

I will argue that transparency as a quality of physical substances is a reminder of spirit in our lives and that transparent objects in particular can become holders of an intermediary projective, encapsulated space for that which we hold to be most cherished in our lives, whether that be spiritual or religious feeling, a sense of self and destiny, a site for the mediation of feelings of loss, bereavement and a reflective tool for meditative experience of feelings of peace, immanence and transcendence. I will show how the *theologia*, the speech of this ‘presence’ illuminates the importance of the individual hermeneutic in defining and creating our reality.

Chapter One

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to bring to consciousness the often unconscious spiritual dynamic in the apprehension of transparent objects and to examine the function of these, the way they can effectively 'minister' to us and to examine ways this function is appropriated. By entering into the mystery of these transparencies they can be revealed as a space for hermeneutical encryption/inscription...an airy palimpsest of our own meanings. I also wish to draw consciousness toward consumerism's appropriation of the qualities of transparent objects and to divert such a pre-cognised hypnotising consumer gaze to allow other types of seeing, experiencing and meaning-making to take place. To be consciously aware of the special and spiritual qualities of such substances could return their value to us and empower us to see the sacred in the polymer as well as in water, crystal and glass.

I will examine transparent* objects and the quality of transparency in the sense of being a locus for particular spiritual or religious feeling, looking at how they create a sense of special space, of otherness, of liminality and show their importance in terms of comparative religion by referring to examples of transparency in different faith traditions and none . I will look at transparent objects in themselves from a cultural history of perception of space, solidity and light, utilising art historical theory and philosophy to examine the dynamics of looking and transparency. Historically 'The history of western thought has been profoundly ocularcentric, or vision centered.' (Haynes, D. 1996, p.199). There are other ways to see, process and understand our reality, including that of the visionary imagination of the mind, which can perhaps be stimulated particularly from contemplation of the elusive visuality of the transparent object. Modern art and postmodern culture has been an attempt to counteract the solidity of this trope of ocularcentrism, criticism of which is seen particularly in French post-modern thought such as the philosophical writings of Jean Baudrillard.

(* denotes term in Glossary)

I will take his theoretical writing as a starting point to describe and understand our relationship with objects. His writings on the object *per se*, show that it has its own qualities that resist our emotions and psyche, ‘because it is different from them, irreducibly and fundamentally different, unique, an *essence*, a *substance*, an *Other*.’ (Levin, C. 1996, p.181) This otherness when combined with transparency conjures up the space between text, the bodiless, ‘otherness’ trace of ourselves, that we can ‘inscribe’ at intervals but never substitute. The investigation will develop a *theologia**, a text of my own experience from my Self/self* contemplating transparent objects utilising a self-reflexive* research method. The results constellate* the form of an eclectic ‘cascade’* of experience, theory and visual imagery.

To do this I will also look at the ways transparent objects in general bring light both physical and by extension spiritual to our attention in particular ways, how they can simply and easily convey mystery and paradox by being seemingly there and not there at the same time, like solid air. I will go on to focus on their membrane-like quality that encourages us towards the sublime, passing through them in the imaginary. Transparent objects therefore have qualities which stimulate our imaginary and consciousness in a very particular way and present us with an ‘otherness’ of materiality, space, a different sort of multi-dimensional ‘page’ allowing for a temporary interjection of a personal hermeneutic of such experience. My perspective proceeds from an acknowledgement of intuition rather than from the trajectory of enlightenment thinking. My conclusions will necessarily resist the finality and domination of the rational and scientific gaze.

Self-Reflexive Methodology

As a researcher taking an autobiographical enquiry, I can become transparent alongside and reflecting the ‘transparency’ in the subject matter. An eclectic ‘cascade’ of experience, theory and visual imagery, my chosen methodology follows this form with a process of flow and differentiation. Academic writing will always show the trace of the individual. As literary

academic Alice Kaplan says, 'I'm working on 1945 in France, which is very historical, but my writing problems remain much the same as in memoir: leaving stuff out, being elliptical, putting in too much information, shaping.' (Kaplan, A. 1996, p.164) Allowing the introjection of autobiographical material into an academic study could be seen as a transgression of educational mores when, 'the notion of sin as that which is displeasing in the sight of God has been transformed into a lapse from a prevailing professional fashion.' (Fox-Genovese, E. 1996, p.69)

Academic of fine art and womens' studies, Deborah Haynes also acknowledges the fact that processes of the personal are always present even in scholarly writing, that the self cannot be written out of any text... 'all writing is in some sense autobiography.' (Haynes, D., 1997, p.xiv) A self-reflexive research method then which looks at one's own dialogue within the structure of the research project itself will introduce a non-typical style as the particular and the personal is included. Educational researcher Ross Mooney states 'Since I participate when I observe, it is nonsense to try to split me and to say I can 'observe but not participate.' (Mooney, R. 1957, p.171)

A self-reflexive research method is a form of Heuristic enquiry which was developed by Clark Moustakas who describes it thus; 'Heuristic' research came into my life when I was searching for a word that would meaningfully encompass the processes that I believed to be essential in investigations of human experience. The root meaning of heuristic comes from the Greek word *heuriskein*, meaning to discover or find... The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge.' (Moustakas, C. 1990, p.9)

The data lies within and this aspect of self has to be awoken as one enters the current of process, with the ability to trust process itself. A story is created that documents, autobiographically, what is revealed through becoming the channel for this type of research. This requires the ability to be indwelling within oneself and to focus, staying with inner attention and clearing space for it akin to meditation. The frame of reference lies within. There are six key phases in this research process, they are; initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis.

The researcher Kim Etherington in her book 'Becoming a Reflexive Researcher' points out a certain drawback to this method when she says, 'in the wider world of academia my subjectivity and reflexivity would almost certainly be seen as self-indulgent or narcissistic, and a contamination of 'objectivity' which was still the legitimate benchmark for 'good' research, but later on her concern moves to 'producing a book that was readable, engaging and informative.' The success of the project is measured by the way it intellectually and emotionally stimulates and brings to life the reader's own internal dialogue. Changes in society and the growing prominence of womens' voices have led to recognition of new ways of knowing. There is a tendency for women perhaps to internalise male voices to attempt to achieve in a patriarchal education system, but in female self-reflexivity the voice is clear and freshly authentic. Historically,

'Feminist research approaches...with their emphasis on equality, challenged researchers to make transparent the values and beliefs that lay behind interpretations, lower the barrier between researcher and researched, and allow both sides to be seen and understood for who they were and what influenced them. This meant that researchers had to take responsibility for their views, using the first person pronoun 'I', thus losing the security of the anonymous third person.' (Etherington, K. 2004, p.27)

The enlivening aspect of reflexivity is that it provides richly contextual information for data, which arguably makes it easier for the reader to absorb and be nourished by, thus aiding dissemination. Oral history is the oldest form of history and autobiographical work goes back as far as Egyptian tomb inscriptions, but the particular forms of it today are based on an individuality that occurs alongside industrialisation in the modern age.

Personal Interest & Rationale:

The subject area of transparency and objects is currently under-researched in the field of theology and I believe it to be of vital relevance as it traverses a 'see-through' journey which acts as a bridge between experience, spiritual and religious worldviews from antiquity and medieval times through to modernity and the post-modern age. My own experience of cultural and spiritual exploration required an integration of East and West and led to a need to establish such an invisible transparent bridge within. An epileptic thinker, I experience both fragmentation of thought with flashes of insight and trance-like states of emptiness or wholeness. My experience of trance contributes to my interest in researching transparent objects, which can seem as a visual 'empty yet solid' counterpart to such experience. The spaces that are opened up in consciousness by temporary unavailability of words lead me to consider space in relation to text and hermeneutics.

My motivation for this research project also comes from a background of studying fine art, with its requirement to look at the context and meanings of the artworks one makes. There seems to be one aspect that is missing from this analysis of objects and their function though in art college education, and that is the spiritual dimension. Even less so the spiritual journey of the maker entwined with their objects. Unconscious marks made by the artist are not analysed as they are when one is studying art therapy for instance, but objects are looked at with a certain professional detachment from the standpoint of philosophers, theorists and psychoanalysis, particularly the Freudian tradition. Jung is conspicuously marginalised, as he is not within the field of art therapy, where the spiritual aspect of life is integrated and the path to individuation and/or healing of the maker is taken for granted. In the field of contemporary fine art the emphasis is on one's career trajectory as an artist, where to find opportunities, and the marketing of oneself and product.

My own fascination with transparent objects has been with me since earliest childhood in a village in Scotland. There was a beautifully limpid clear quartz crystal from Africa that had been a gift to a member of my mother's family who had fought in the Boer War, the story being that

he was given it for his sharp eyesight in detecting the enemy. It was however kept in the dark in a safe in the living room, our house having previously been the old police station, and except on one or two occasions, was only able to look at it glimmering away in there when the door was opened. I absorbed its importance and tried not to think about the problematic of any link between its extreme beauty and the horror of war and bloodshed, violence, as my young mind couldn't resolve it. I didn't like the violent imagery of Christianity either, and from the first I heard of it was repelled by it. I wanted only clarity and the light shining jewel-like through the stained glass.

Glossary of Terminology

Cascade: A non-linear, many-pointed form of conclusion in research. This quote from Jung beautifully describes his perception of the presence of the ‘cascade’ as he discovers it in his work ... ‘I fancied I was working along the best scientific lines, establishing facts, observing, classifying, describing causal and functional relations, only to discover in the end that I had involved myself in a net of reflections which extend far beyond natural science and ramify into the fields of philosophy, theology, comparative religion, and the human sciences in general.’ (Bailey, e. 1997, p21, quoting Jung)

Constellate: A Jungian term, a verb which defines how things appear, are perceived and noted in the cascade, a form(s), a conclusion(s) of a not- necessarily linear fashion.

Fetish: In Freudian theory an attachment to an object or idea which occurs like memory loss sustained at a moment of trauma as a displacement activity, generally used in a sexual sense. Here the meaning is less polarised and represents a process that can occur in a wider sense within the psyche.

Self/self: The transpersonal, greater-than-I Self and the personal everyday self that we experience as ourselves going about our daily business. The study of the self in theology presupposes that it is held to be sacred. Jung has written of the archetype of the Self as being the most important element composing the unconscious, it is psychologically an equivalent of the God-image.

Self-Reflexive Research Method: A process whereby I use an inner contemplative process of an object to reveal a text comprised from this dialectic, and then reflect upon it.

Theologia: Italian scholar Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) coined the term *prisca theologia* which refers to an ancient theology, an original union of philosophy and religion that predated his own age and belonged to a distant historical ‘vaunted age of gold’. (Allen, M.J.B. 1998, p24)

A practitioner of Renaissance 'magic' Ficino used contemplative imagination to inwardly receive divine forms or personifications. 'It was the magic of a highly artistic nature, heightening the artistic perceptions with magical procedures.' (Yates, F. 1964, p.104) His primary concern was the use of words to enable an art of *revelment* that takes place in a dialectic mode. I am using *theologia* to describe what happens in the reflective, immersive dialectic between ourselves, transparent objects and discernment of meaning.

Transparent: A quality of being able to see-through, to enter.

Chapter Two

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Summary

Jean Baudrillard

In order to approach the role and function of transparency in modern material culture, I have chosen to look at the social theorist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard as he has written extensively about objects, their significance and consumerism, as early as 1968, in his book; *Le Système des Objets*. However his ideas became most widely known academically during the 1990's. His name has become associated with the label of postmodernism, however that is now being questioned. (Redhead, S. 2008, p.1-11) He seems in fact to belong most of all to the movement we know as 'modernity' but his philosophical roots extend much, much further back than that as ; 'Marx and Engels are present but so too is Mani, the Persian Gnostic prophet writing nearly 2000 years ago.' (Redhead, S. 2008, p.8)

Discussing Baudrillard's philosophical work on the nature of ourselves and the object will provide a theoretical structure for the way we relate to transparent objects and what they can mean for us. A formative influence for Baudrillard was the philosopher Gaston Bachelard whose style of thinking and writing was poetic and centrifugal in its dynamic, rather than reaching towards linear progressive conclusions. He thus created a sense of space and centrality which we find in Baudrillard's theory... '(M)editation on matter creates an *open imagination*', (Bachelard,G. 1983, p.2) Personal inspiration is allowed into the philosophical process, 'Causes arising from the feelings and the heart must become formal causes if a work is to possess verbal variety, the ever changing life of light.' (Bachelard, G. 1983, p.1) He imagines and feels his way intuitively into substance in order to allow it to speak imaginally through him, to touch the '*material imagination*', (Bachelard, G. 1983, p.1)

The work of Baudrillard's theoretical background therefore is vast and difficult to categorise but as far as being postmodern is concerned it is his personal habit of clinging to older media that is perhaps most telling. He finds it difficult to write via a glassy screen preferring his typewriter, and for visual imagery prefers the photographic to digital media. He writes from a position that is

almost outside that of contemporary society. His personal use of technology extended only to a fax and answering machine.

Theory of Objects

At its most basic level Baudrillard looks at the meaning of the objects we use, collect and cherish in their direct functional aspect and as tokens, ideas, metaphors, bringers of 'atmosphere.' To give an example he looks at the immense tail fins of American cars that were meant to connote speed as a physical quality of the car but in fact they slowed it down, being in fact a signifier of sublimity, of the idea of victory over space. 'It was the presence of these fins that in our imagination propelled the car, which thanks to them, seem to fly along of its own accord, after the fashion of a higher organism. (Baudrillard, J. 2005, p.63)

Objects in their proliferation, qualities and functions are too diverse to classify. They escape us and our 'comprehensive' powers of description. Thereby they slip away from language into their own discourse. Baudrillard is concerned with the processes that take place when we relate to them. This takes us into another plane where they are to be found 'speaking'. The technology that created them characterizes them and then they are set on their way for their journey with us;

what happens to the object in the technological sphere is essential,
whereas what happens to it in the psychological or sociological sphere of
needs and practices is inessential. (Baudrillard, J. 2005, p.3)

He conceives of objects as being in perpetual flight from their earthly technology into the cultural realm. It is fully up to the user as to their function in our 'abstract' everyday environment. They are in that sense shapeshifting and escaping the linguistic system with its clearcut binary of what he defines as *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech). For objects, their system of speech and reference is in constant flux, concomitant with the growth of technology, and therefore of continuing, possibly eternal, complexity. This sort of angelic 'perpetual flight'

belong to the sphere between, and linking, what is human and 'heavenly', all the parts of the psyche, from the *id* of desire to the spiritual, often thought of as 'ascending'.

Mass Media Culture

In 1990 Baudrillard's book *Revenge of the Crystal : Selected Writings on the Modern Object and Its Destiny* was published. His choice of title here does not refer to crystals as subject matter but cleverly uses the part to suggest the dynamics of the whole as the book 'crystallised' (Baudrillard, J. 1990, p.18) around the theme of the object's 'revenge' in its own narrative, utilising paradox to speak for itself, expressing its essential indifference, another contrapuntal passion to our own of desire for them.

What is the crystal? It is the object, the pure object, the pure event, something no longer with any precise origin or end, to which the subject would like to attribute an origin and an end even though it has none, and which today perhaps begins to give an account of itself. (Baudrillard, J. 1990, p.18)

The paradox he speaks of is the sense of conflict between ourselves and static material culture and the potent sense of seduction we also feel towards certain objects of our desire. They do not desire and therefore belong to what he calls 'the order of destiny...either its desire or its destiny!' (Baudrillard, J.1990, p.19). They are not involved in the system of psychoanalytic projection that we as human beings experience from birth, and therefore can represent an escape from desire.

In the same work Baudrillard discusses Pop Art, the 20th century art movement that takes consumption as its starting point, and later the term 'Pop' came to refer in a wider sense to popular culture per se, e.g. Pop music. In Pop that consumption is turned into a celebration and glory of riotous colour and shiny surface, texture and proliferation of forms through the emphasis on the fleeting disposable brilliance of transient eye-catching imagery e.g. billboard advertising,

fast cars painted in sumptuous glossy pigments, speeded-up transient glory of excitement and materiality. However, Baudrillard notes that it is pure exteriority, with the loss of any interior symbolic function, that is celebrated here, and it becomes pure referent in the vast discourse of an all-consuming modern cultural system.

Whereas all art before Pop was based on a vision of the world 'as depth'...Pop claims to be at one with that immanent order of signs, with their industrial and serial production, and thus with the artificial or manufactured character of the whole environment. (Baudrillard, J. 1990, p.80)

Pop ultimately tries to do away with a culture of transcendence, giving us the immanence of the secular. Baudrillard states that there can then be no contemporary art that is not involved in; 'a compromise with and an accomplice of this manifest opacity.' (Baudrillard, J. 1990, p.82)

The essence of Pop as a system of signs is conveyed in its distillation into and focus on trademarks and logos. It is the first art movement to explore the status of the art object itself as a consumable, and it does this primarily through the series, echoing the production line. Stores of consumable objects then become as full of displays of precious objects. The ordinary thus becomes a metaphysical category and here is the theoretical contradiction inherent in Pop, with its echo of the mysticism of sacrifice.

Baudrillard talks of the presence of a certain cool smile (no longer of humour) which is one of the 'obligatory signs of consumption' (Baudrillard, J. 1990, p.87) comprised of a false distance which now signifies culture and appears in advertising. He goes on to say that the smile inherent in Pop is not that of critical distance but one of collusion. The medium of advertising *is* the message, the connecting tissue of signs, consumables and through them, each consumer to another. A neo-reality is created with the active imagination of the consumer, both individual in part and also consensual through the brand or 'code'. The 'code' is composed of all the industrial systems and ideas that make up the product and therefore is fragmentary and infinitely varied, especially by the time the consumer finally 'fabricates' the object in use. Advertising is, 'the

dominion of the pseudo-event par excellence. (It) turns the object into an event...by eliminating its objective characteristics.’ (Baudrillard, J. 1990, p.93)

In the seduction powers (*seducere*, L.: to lead away) of the object we are complicit in our desire to be ‘fooled’ by them, to reach and take part in this other reality. Baudrillard therefore states that advertising is beyond the true and the false, no longer having its referent in reality but in the utterance of a self-fulfilling prophecy. The statement becomes true just in its utterance and the type of statement it is a foretelling, e.g.: ‘Persil Washes Whiter’ is not a sentence, but Persil-speak.’ (Baudrillard, J. 1990, p.94) Repetition, the same method used in religious or spiritual chanting, helps to locate and establish the artificial synthesis of this neo-reality.

For Baudrillard *we* are where the locus of consumption takes place and we are taking part in cultural transformation when we consume. Since the advent of the industrial revolution as we interact in this way we are at one remove from our previous person-centered way of relating to each other, and are valued for our place in the process, making us ourselves like commodities. We live according to a new kind of temporality, which is reflected in our relationships with objects. A modern consumer, ‘sets in place a whole array of sham objects, of characteristic signs of happiness, and then waits...for happiness to alight.’ (Baudrillard, J. 1970, p.31)

Transparency and Presence

Object presence within space and personal processes of perception and relation to objects involves a transparency of space, light, reflection and even our relationship with time. This creates a code for the transparency of objects, space and ourselves, our minds. Baudrillard speaks of the space of the family home we grew up in as an enclosed *transcendent* space containing signs of a kind of *immanence* of the family within it. The objects that are markers or signs held within that space define what is outside or inside and our cultural boundaries. ‘Human beings and objects are indeed bound together in a collusion in which the objects take on a certain density, an emotional value – what might be called a ‘presence’.’ (Baudrillard, J. 2005, p.14)

The play of light in the modern space has changed defining a more freely circulating airy type of space, whereas in the past it had more the quality of penetrating through windows and illuminating from outside, imparting to objects a lit-within kind of sheen. The less enclosed spaces have freed objects into an insubstantiality they didn't have before, making them one with the space of modernity and that becoming their function and value. The space within and around an object can then be what it can be said to most importantly signify, finally.

As a French philosopher Baudrillard was commenting on his society and its history when he wrote *Le Système des Objets*. The French bourgeois interior typically is full of mirrors, on walls and incorporated into its furniture. The mirror as reflection of self, reflects the life of the individual in the gaze and through the reflected possessions in the room, defining an individual history and individuation of consciousness. A source of light, multiplied into superfluity, it represents French history and social order, epitomized by the *Galerie des Glaces* (Hall of Mirrors) built by Louis XIV in his palace at Versailles. This was the space he walked through every day on his way to the chapel. Mirrors although reflective, refer back to the centre of a room, especially when they take the place of walls. In modernity this classical centralizing function is avoided in architecture with openings and partitions to create transparency and light, without 'focus on or return to a central point' (Baudrillard, J. 2005, p.21-22), there is no convergence.

As modernity proceeds the 'mirrors' of the family portrait or photographs disappear and only objects without an intensely absolute value are allowed to exist in the space in combination, so art such as painting finally gives way to the flatter surface of the print which is at one further remove in itself and therefore has greater associative value as part of the whole space. No one object is allowed to dominate as a focal point. Mirrors return in fashion from time to time but always as tokens of baroque style, as antiques...what Baudrillard refers to as a secondary object. The function has changed necessarily from its original mode. The return is part of a process of introjections. Just as a mirror can introject space and certain meanings around that, a clock with its ticking heart echoing our own can introject past time qualities and serve them up to us in nicely measured slices, 'Country clocks are amongst the most sought-after of objects, precisely because they capture time and strip it of surprises within the intimacy of a piece of furniture.' (Baudrillard, J. 2005, p.22-23) This important process of introjection links objects for us with the

imaginary, the thinking, dreaming, remembering and imaging part of us that helps to locate us in everyday space and time in a way that is comfortable and reassuring for us, and stable.

Glass

With the decentralization of space in the modern period comes the advent of atmosphere created by the open-ended dialogue of the placing of objects that define and open up the flexible boundaries of this type of space. Of all materials Baudrillard wrote that glass most of all conveyed the idea of atmosphere. In terms of the modern interior its transparency is that of the future, where the material and ideal are one in the forward-thinking, forward-reaching dynamic it represents. A progressive material to use it allows the free-flow of light in the lived-in space more fully than before, it doesn't absorb odours or change over time in the marked way wood or metal does and it allows the mind to wander through the space. 'Fundamentally it is less a recipient than an isolator – the miracle of a rigid fluid – a content that is also a container, and hence the basis of a transparency between the two; a kind of transcendence,' (Baudrillard, J. 2005, p.42) This quote expresses a kind of 'symptom of conveyance' that we find in transparent objects, often in the marketplace...a substance identification equating to the 'transparent being of light', a 'container' of illuminated matter and spirit which we are. We are *also* that fluid made rigid.

Glass has an abstract symbolism due to the fact it represents the action of solidifying. It can flow and solidify into any shape, it represents *all*. From here is its link to the abstraction of our inner world also with its flow of ideas and inspiration, active imagination that takes shape. The abstractness of nature seems to flow through it, and the eye gains privileged entry through it also, with its instrumental use such as in the microscope. Its qualities of a kind of indestructible nothingness, no smell, no colour, no decay, give it a universal abstraction; 'glass exists at a sort of zero level of matter' (Baudrillard, J. 2005, p.42) This leads to a quality of ambiguity, which

glass has in abundance. Glass allows for ease of communication between that which is outer and inner, yet at the same time presents a kind of barrier from the outside world; it *is* that world.

Baudrillard writes about the transparency of glass presentation of goods, but doesn't mention transparent plastic, which at the time the original text was published in France during 1968 was not used prolifically to present heat-sealed packets of perishable foods the way it is at the present time, as he stretches his imagination towards a scenario where, 'We may confidently expect that before long it (glass) will be used to 'present' fruit and vegetables, ensuring that they remain as fresh as the morning dew.' (Baudrillard, J. 2005, p.44) Glass even signifies a high moral content and thus is a noble material in that it cannot decay and rot, odourless and indestructible; 'Invisible yet ubiquitous, it will constitute the ideal analogue of a more beautiful and limpidly clear life.' (Baudrillard, 2005, p.44)

Glass sells through its seduction and being disposable must be itself consumed at an accelerated rate. Atmosphere has reached its full *economic* meaning in see-through packaging. The walls of glass jars and bottles are membranes of sublimity, the edge we slip over in viewing only, between decay and preservation, mystery of life and death. The serial procession of this ever-changing, endlessly mouldable simulacra is bodiless. The bodily involvement of previous ages in gestural and physical work (not to be romanticized however) and in libidinal involvement of sexuality is removed in labour-saving mechanized production, but there are psychological and spiritual consequences for an in many ways more abundant, affluent and improved lifestyle.

Baudrillard's discourse on glass shows us how it is a symbol of the mystery of 'nothing and everything', a membrane and a solid equivalent of ourselves that we are reflected in, presenting us with a visual equivalent of transcendent qualities and meaning. He presents us with its fluid mass surrounding and giving us a cacophony of consumable products and enhancing their meaning. He paves the way for a future understanding of the qualities and meanings of the polymer and extruded plastics, transparent and even more prolific and shapeshifting, warmer to the touch and more flesh-like in its seduction. Baudrillard's discourse on objects per se brings us nearer towards an understanding of transparency and its 'throughness' in relation to 'surface' and the contextual space wherein the object is situated. He is concerned with metaphysical understanding, finding us as the locus of their constellation in the consensual neo-reality we

share. Baudrillard charts a route for the understanding of objects leading us from ideas of depth and transcendence to surface and immanence, through to their ‘flight’ into transparency within the light and space of modernity, signifiers of the ‘new’ space around them, as our relationship with space changes. The mystery of heavenly space being progressively conquered we are left with objects as secular carriers of that mystical sacrifice. This takes us to the point of creating our own spiritual and mystical meanings through our ownership and use of objects, the way we place them and contemplate them, our imaginal and lived dialogue with them.

Discourse Addressed to Oneself

The ‘*objet*’, cause or subject of a passion, *par excellence*, is the self, and the life of the self negotiating death. The passion for private property is often the strongest and most enduring of the passions as it takes its place in the interplay of the individual with life, involving defence and controlling mechanisms of the psyche. To be truly possessed an object has to be abstracted from its function and turned to face the subject of the owner in relationship. A practical utensil is never possessed in the same way, as it is cathected to the outside world of functionality.

A collection of objects construct a private world, a totality, referring to another only through their owner, the subject. The ‘pure’ object abstracted from its use, functions differently as part of a collection where it ceases to be a ‘table’ as such but becomes ‘a beautiful object.’ A collector will tend to replace the word ‘table’ with ‘object’ to reflect this shift in meaning.

Possession being an abstract meaning all objects are treated to the same passion and then one will not suffice as the fulfillment of possession leads to a desire for a succession or a series, and even sometimes an obsessive demand arises to complete a series, but when this happens futility can set in, unless the collector is able to then present it to society at large. At this point the object has become both message and messenger, a kind of angel of community. Most usually it is the *absence* of a final desired item in a collection that leads to the human interface at last as the collector feels the need to broadcast in an attempt to locate the *presence*. Ownership of any object is both satisfying due to its place in a series and the promise of continuation, at the same time as being frustrating. It loses the sheen of desire once we have it and the libido cannot be fixed forever on it. It is ‘*the thing with which we construct our mourning*: the object represents our own death, but that death is transcended (symbolically) by virtue of the fact that we *possess*

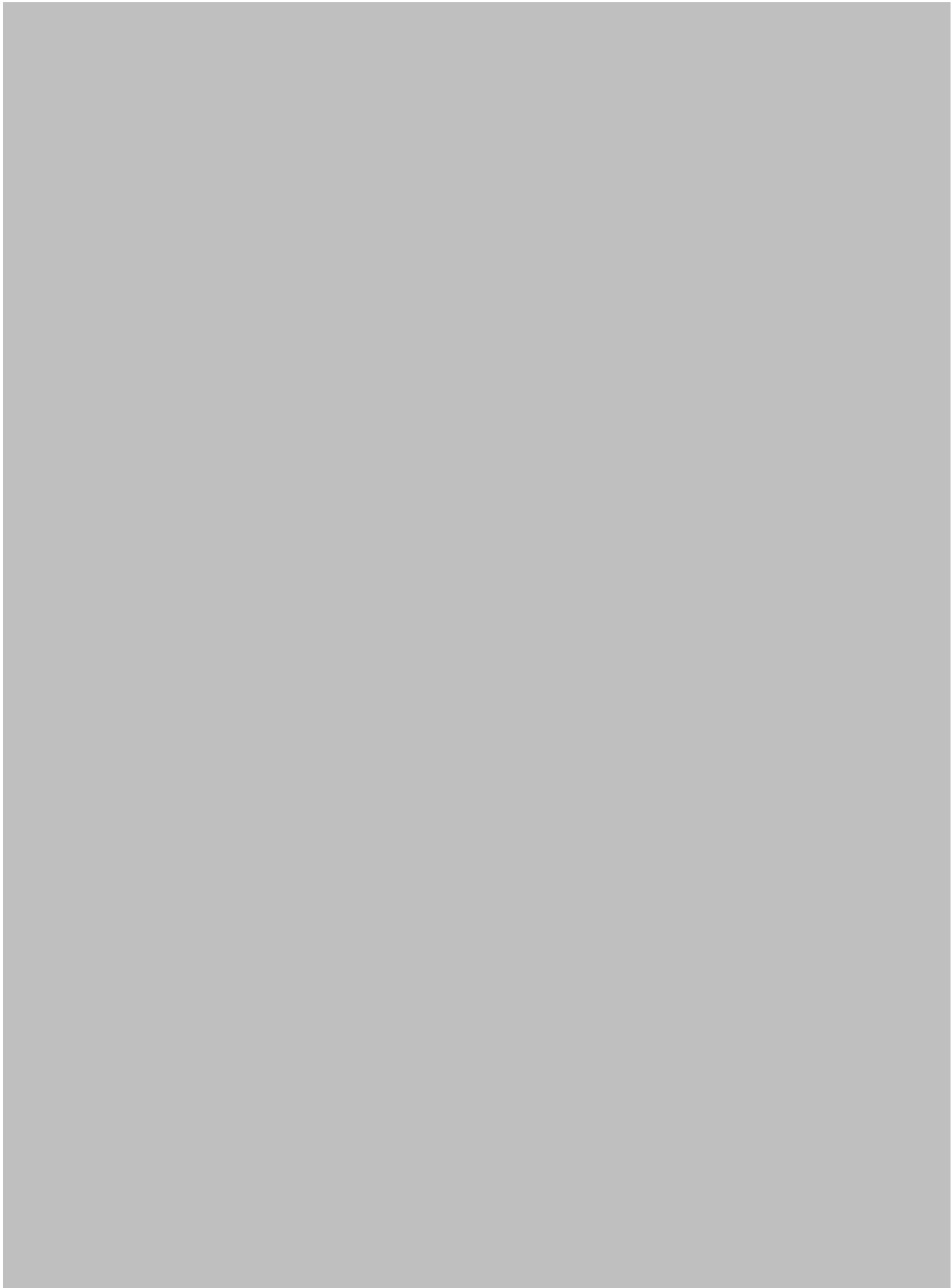
the object.’ (Baudrillard, J. 2005, p.104) We can work through our mourning of certain death by dint of objects, integrating death into life.

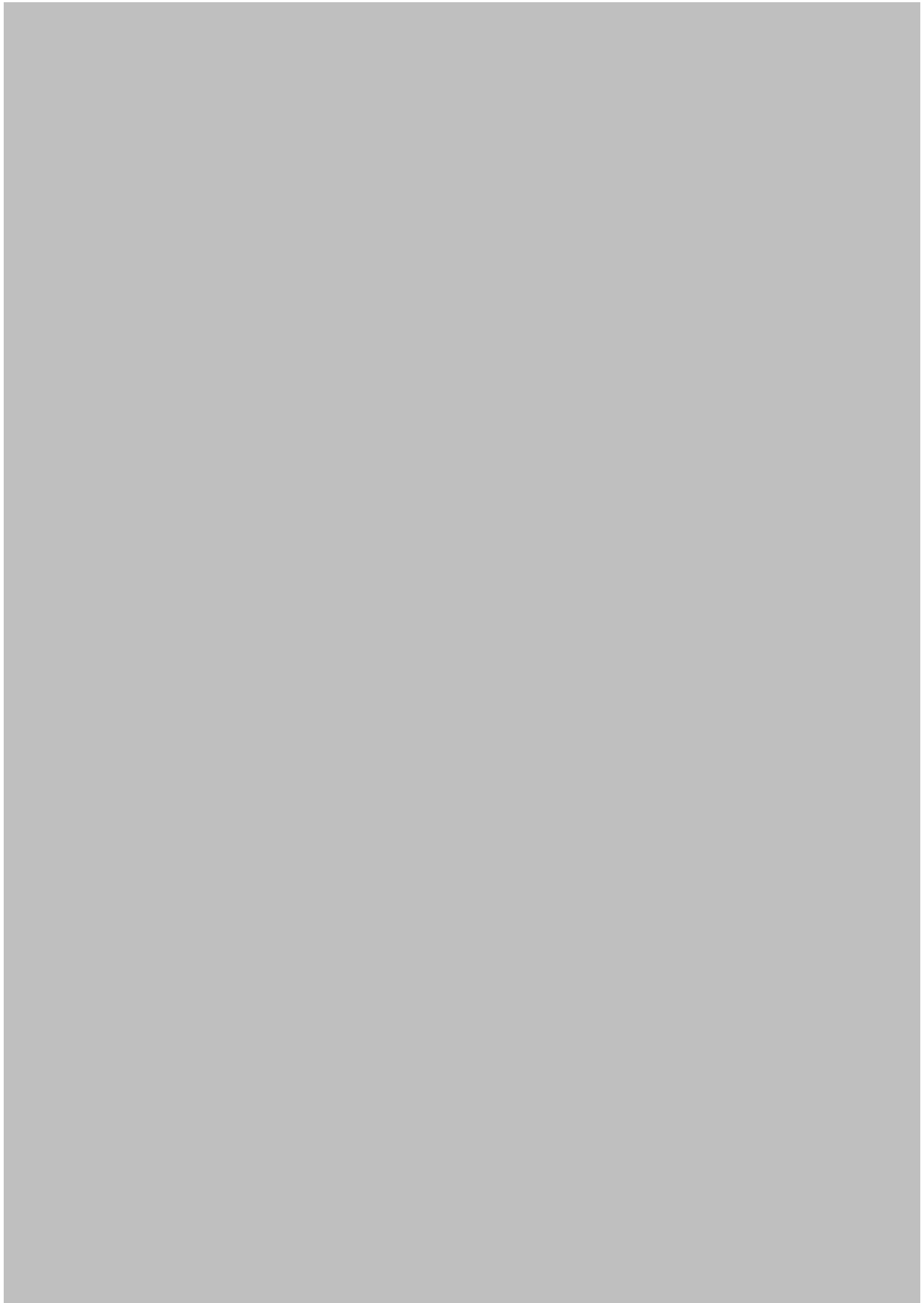
Desire itself is that impulse that drives us to repeat and signify ourselves through life and beyond into the space after death. Collecting is playing with that death. At its furthest reach the passion for collecting turns into jealousy and a desire to sequester, to prevent others from having those objects...but the real subject of that jealousy is oneself. In the case of the unique one-off art object that may be the subject of a personal passion, it takes its place as the end object, the one to end all others, the emblem of a series. It is the final term, the distillation of the series, the mystical container of the quintessence. It symbolizes all, etymologically from the Greek *sumballein*, to put together, the many in one, but consumption *per se* will always continue arising as it does from lack and disappointment in the desire for totality in the ‘life project’. Sacredness and historicity are simultaneous qualities in the antique object. In the case of the monstrance containing a holy relic, it is the glass vessel which permits the containment and simultaneous experiencing through appropriation through vision. We look at the divine and the divine looks back at us, our gaze is returned through the glass.

We have an intrinsic need for objects to embody more than pure functionality, we need to see something more in them and the transparent object surely offers more in the way of sight and light than any other, where external sight can meet intuitive insight. The sublime (*sub limina*) is always located somewhere else with fetishized objects symbolizing and facilitating an inward transcendence to a place of safety where the world is organised around the central point of the individual ego. I am using ‘Fetishized’ here not in the Freudian polarised sexual sense, but in a sense that moves that meaning towards the *theologia* of the next chapter. Again this shift does not polarise meaning.

Baudrillard’s theory of centrality of the classical interior space, that is reflected into its centre from all sides, is often employed in religious buildings. Light floods in from all aspects, angles to converge naturally throughout. This is also the case in the transparent object, of any historical period, shape and dimension. An example of Baudrillard’s classical centrality theory combined with transparent and reflective imagery is my interpretation of the following advertisement from 2012 for Dior. The model is seen walking through the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles in an

expectant trance–like state enshrining the royal procession to the chapel. She is possessed of her surroundings and transformed by them, by the environment of antique glass. In suspension, like the chandeliers, the advertisement could be said to capture the state where the infant is about to reach for the object to place in its mouth, the ‘mother-cell’ (Baudrillard, J. 2005, p.84) of high culture, available to all through the modest purchase of a transparent glass bottle of perfume.





In this image of an advertisement for the French perfume Bal à Versailles by Jean Desprez, utilising the above-mentioned of Baudrillard's theories, I interpret the bottle as appearing as a monstrosity containing a cherished scene of cultural antiquity and art. This time the commodity has entered one of the chandeliers at Versailles and we can project ourselves as safely ensconced therein. This could be said to symbolize the stage where the infant places the object fully in the mouth and becomes one with the desired mother, the spiritual ancestor and benefactor of life. One can again place oneself centrally into the picture of high culture by purchasing the glass bottle to establish personal relationship through ritual.

Chandeliers dazzle and entrance, are magically luminous and fragmented and yet an organized whole at the same time, held in beautiful seductive suspension in space, a sign of our mastery. Their light appears to be an inner light that is alive, a flickering of pieces emanating from a light-filled form. This is due to the fragmentation of the whole ... even the movement of the pieces themselves, suspended pendants of glass or crystal, contribute to the fragmented dispersal of light around a room, (often also reflected in mirrors), reflecting inwards to that central point of imagined or seen, experienced emanation. This light above us, suspended usually from a ceiling could be seen as 'more than ourselves', a 'magical' enviable object of our own life, which we can move around watching it shimmer and twinkle seductively, stimulating a cellular memory perhaps of ancestral astronomical experience also, creating a 'wondrous and worshipful' feeling. The chandelier is not only a feature of envy-of-the-self, but an opportunity to celebrate, in the act of visual consumption and movement.

In both crystalline-themed adverts there is through the repetition of icy coloured transparent objects in silver-grey monochrome an example of 'The retinted world of the advertisement'. (Williamson, J. 1978, p.23) The page is unified by a certain colour tint to encapsulate the myth of the product which can help us create, define and change our world, provide a point of entry into the other reality represented.

'For we want at one and the same time to be entirely self-made and yet be descended from someone; to succeed the Father yet simultaneously to proceed from the Father. Perhaps mankind will never manage to choose between embarking on the Promethean project of reorganizing the world, thus taking the place of the Father, and being directly descended from an original being. (Baudrillard, J. 2005, p.88)

The spiritual mother and father are present in the background of our desires and our objects are silent witnesses to our attempts to resolve our existence.



In this painting by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres titled '*The Virgin with the Host*' (1860) the

element of play with objects is interposed by cherubim and signifies the playful quality of spirit itself and our childlike desire to seek it when it is already there. The searching and overturning of the object vessels brings our attention to the poise and clasped hands of the virgin which along with her downward cast eyes fix invisible spirit centrally within the picture plane, as seen in Baudrillard's theory of precious objects of antiquity reflecting into the centre of the classical interior, to maintain traditional values and enclose and ramify the sanctuary of the space from the modern world outside. The golden disc in the forefront of the picture uses light to indicate the presence of spirit and its semi-reflection halved echoes the fact that we belong as much to spirit as to earthly existence. Light is a clear indicator in old paintings of spirit, a metaphor that can easily be carried or slid over into modern day objects of glass or other transparent substances, in the same way as 'there is no relic without a reliquary: the value 'slides' from the one to the other' (Baudrillard, J. 2005, p.84), without the need necessarily for the bodily trace of the making process.

Summary

Baudrillard's *Systeme des Objets* is useful for a theologia of transparent objects in that it helps to define a process of introjection and takes us into the invisible interior of the object, its imaginal space, reaching out through time. It looks at the value and play of the human spirit in relation to externalized value, with objects functioning as vital signs. This sheds light on the nature of the object constructed out of transparent material, in which we can almost *see* these invisible processes occurring, in its mystery. His theory of objects and their 'otherness' leads us to understand space in an imaginative way. The presence and absence of life and death is more *liminally* there in objects that oscillate on the edge of perception, semi-visible, *more* playful even. This visible shapeshifting of perception of objects and their meaning, with that of the space they inhabit and represent, brings us closer to a *theologia*, our personal meaningful dialogue with them which occurs 'next to' or, *particularly in the case of transparent objects*, 'through' the poetic dimension they inhabit or communicate to us. The next chapter follows on taking case examples of selected objects to look at the transparent function with the inclusion of personal *theologia* in order to demonstrate how they function as intermediary 'earth angels' (McNiff, 1995) and present a special ground in which to draw forth an individual hermeneutic.

Chapter Three

Case Examples:

Introduction to Case Examples

Crystal Cross, St. Michael & All Angels, Ledbury, Herefordshire

Aura Soma Balance Bottle Serapis Bey

Malevich's Black Square

Chanel No. 5

Summary

Introduction to Case Examples

Baudrillard's philosophical theory of objects is useful for this thesis up to the point where questions of meaning become theistic. His philosophy concerning objects and space takes us so far and I will introduce an eclectic mix of scholars and religious text who/which complement him. This chapter follows on from Baudrillard's examination of the secular cultural meanings of consumer objects and the atmosphere they create to add ideas and definitions of theology, spirituality, religion and their meaning in terms of transparent material in particular, for the personal and transpersonal.

The case examples of objects I will look at from a viewpoint where philosophy and theology are merged. The *prisca theologia* approach of Ficino is now useful for looking at the element of the personal to be introduced in relation to objects. The reflective dialectic process which reveals returns us to a process from a time when philosophical thought and religious feeling were as one. Wonderment, awe and contemplation could be seen as functions of what we might term as 'love' in its human sense. The use of contemplative imagination can now be turned towards objects to reveal an art, a dialogue, a *theologia* of objects.

Theological elements in philosophy relating to modern culture proceed from the impulse to counteract the dehumanising and limiting effect of industrial production, to restore a 'higher order' for the possibilities regarding the formation of personality and a recovery of the metaphysical love that embraces and reunites all things.' (Cobb, K. 2005, p. 93) Theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich delineated two senses of the word religious, one institutional, the other showing that '*religious substance* (my italics) is embedded in every cultural phenomenon in which meaning can be detected.' (Cobb, K. 2005, p.92)

This cultural religious substance refers to a revelatory depth in ordinary things and experiences, glimpsed, apprehended, without being fully understood or mediated by an authority from outside oneself. The philosopher Henry Habberley Price writes of the difficulties faced by the theistic philosopher, in that; 'there is something inappropriate, something almost blasphemous or impious, in talking about God at all. The proper thing is not to speak about ...but to address (God)' (Price, H. 1964, p.5-6) Just as bad, or even worse, is to talk about love. 'A philosopher (at

least in anglo-saxon countries) is not supposed to mention it, still less discuss it. This is something which is “not done”...a theistic philosopher is breaking the trade union rules of his craft and must break them not once or twice, but continually.’ (Hick, J. (Ed.) 1964, p.7)

Spirituality, a term which is notoriously difficult, if possible at all, to define, and which can lead into the mystical, for me refers to the individual spirit or inner self and a belief in something greater or beyond the self, an immaterial or something beyond the verbally describable, reality. In John Hick's book, *The Fifth Dimension, An Exploration of The Spiritual Realm*, he avoids any clear definition of the word spirituality and it doesn't even occur in the index. Rather he uses the word 'to refer to a fifth dimension of our nature which enables us to respond to a fifth dimension of the universe...the ultimate reality that underlies, interpenetrates and transcends the physical universe.' (Hick, J. 1999, p.2)

Hick goes on to explain that what is religious refers to concepts ‘of transcendent non-physical reality or realities – such as gods, demons, angels, Dharma, Tao, Brahman, heaven, hell, eternal life.’ (Hick, J. 1999, p.110) These can also be mixed and blurred with any other concept for religious use, i.e. trees, the sun, a person, and therefore he takes;

‘religious’ and ‘mystical’ experience to be two terms for the same range of phenomena, which extends from a mild sense – momentary or enduring – of divine or holy presence to the most powerful...experiences of unity with a greater and higher reality. (Hick, J. 1999, p.110)

The meaning of the term religious experience is often linked to images of all the world major faiths, whether textual or not, while understanding that the hermeneutic of these will be understood individually, more often than not with the mediating guidance of an ‘ordained’ guide. However this thesis argues that the individual ‘texts’ that we have, i.e. not ‘contained’ and mediated for our absorption and interpretation in the sense of the religious texts of the major world faiths, form a theologia, which can be discerned observation of our own active imagination as images that might occur within, inner verbal dialogue or exteriorised verbal/non-verbal form. Through sensing, feeling and thinking about the deepest meanings of being as we find them, we become theologians. The individual aspect of this leads to the sense of the mystical, and can co-

exist with that which is thought of as religious, which is what I understand by John Hick's quote above.

Hick uses the term 'transcendent' and I agree with him that 'in speaking of this, the limitations of language create a problem to which there is ...no satisfactory solution.' (Hick, J. 1999, p.9) Transcendent as a word changes its meaning throughout different eras and in the modern era has become diffused into many meanings so that it can only be a pointer to that which is beyond us and our comprehension, in whatever form that occurs, and yet of very great importance to everybody 'religious' or not. Hick uses an array of inter-changeable terms for the Transcendent, such as the Ultimate, Absolute Reality, the Real. What they have in common is that 'they' must be the 'ground' for existence in that we and nothing can exist outside of it. This 'ground' is therefore materially located.

The philosopher Martin Heidegger in his work *Being and Time* took knowledge of what Being means to be the starting point for all knowledge. Heidegger's Being is non-verbal, in that it precedes the telling of stories which could trace successions of beings back to one another and an original Being, as he does not postulate Being as an entity of itself, it is 'the transcendens pure and simple.' (Heidegger, M. 1962, p.38) The non-verbal, the visual sense would thus precede the oral and written form as the source of theological information, of what it means to be here. The transcendens Heidegger describes seems to have the meaning of plurality of that which transcends the material. It is diffracted, to use the common metaphorical image of light for the immaterial, religious and/or spiritual in conjunction with scientific understanding of how light is dispersed through a transparent prism. The scientific gaze that looks downward through a transparent lens at material reality for understanding however is something that has often come to replace that which is understood as transcendent as in the power and 'gaze' of a 'higher' being, the creator, again often associated with the metaphor of 'light' being received from above, divine grace.

A transparent object can become a transitional locus between heaven and earth, as shown in the poem 'On a Drop of Dew' by seventeenth-century metaphysical poet Andrew Marvell, where the

transparent planet-like object communes dynamically between earth and the heavenly sphere above;

Moving, but on a point below,
 It all about does upward bend.
 Such did the manna's sacred dew distil;
 White, and entire, though congealed and chill.
 Congealed on earth: but does, dissolving, run
 Into the glories of th' Almighty Sun. (Marvell. A. 2007, p.42)

Physical light and theological light have often become admixed in their meaning and visual conception. Heidegger's Being therefore, in visual conceptual terms would have the quality of transparency. Transparent objects, which differ in their presentation of the quality of transparency, will have this quality of metaphorical presentation of that 'ground' of Being. It is this immaterial reality that I contend is projected onto or through transparent objects. In a church building the obvious example is the use of stained glass to allow the space to be illuminated by daylight passing through, while utilizing that natural light to, usually, enliven illustrations of religious scenes. Most people in modernity probably tend to think of the sky in learned astronomical and secular terms, whilst holding vestiges of an earlier belief in it as the divine abode of God and angels and many relying on the body of the church, liturgy and ritual as a safe haven between the two.

In contrast a mediaeval example of transparent objects being used meditatively in a sacred context is that of the twelfth-century abbot Suger of Saint-Denis in France. He 'speaks of a certain new stained glass window that has the power of 'urging us onward from the material to the immaterial.'" (Zinn, G. 1986, p.37) The culture at Saint-Denis was a combination of contemplation and compassionate action. Suger meditated intensely on precious stones and stained glass and found them by means of the action of *transfere*, an analogical means to experience that of the 'higher world.' (Zinn, G. 1986, p.36 This contemplation then returned as inspiration for practical action on earth. The earliest writer, also in the twelfth-century, of the processes by which contemplation of objects could be used in this way was Richard of the monastery of Saint-Victor. He describes how 'a person 'rises up by means of the quality of

visible things to knowledge of invisible things.’’ (Zinn, g.1986, p.37) At the Abbey of Saint Denis, among the many rituals, a precious crystal candelabra was placed centrally on the altar thus showing a radial point of correspondence, between themselves, their ritual and the higher world, geometrically thought of as spherical.

To return to modernity, the church as a containing environment replicates in some sense the first containing environment of the home and parental figure(s) and can provide a sense of security, with belief and conduct system in place. As one looks to the window for light, one sees the Christian story replicated there which will most likely bring the mind back to the centre of the service and community, and serve to reinforce them. The psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, with her theory of Object Relations, built on the work of Freud and also Ferenczi and wrote ‘Stages in the Development of the Sense of Reality’ in 1913. Klein found that the child carries a sense of omnipotence with which it can meet halfway the news that a God exists who is also omnipotent. She states that;

The idea of an invisible, omnipotent and omniscient deity is overwhelming for the child, all the more because two things markedly favour its effective force...an innate need for authority (and the child’s) own omnipotence-feeling leads the child to assume it for his environment too. (Klein, M. 1988, p.23)

The stained glass window could thus be said perhaps to hang at that imaginal and real halfway point as a reminder of this process. The religious and spiritual metaphors of ‘darkness’ and ‘light’ come into play with real light and shadow. To quote an early twentieth century artisan of the craft;

you must always remember that a window is, after all, only a window... windows should ‘dream’ and so be treated to look like what they are...subjects painted on a thin and brittle film, hung in mid-air between the dark and the light. (Whall, C., 1905, p.94)

It is the window itself here that has the quality of dreaming, an almost aboriginal description, showing that that which could be thought of as a 'primitive' function is held within the glass, safely, and functionally at one remove, neutralized. 'Primitive' because uneducated and uncivilized by the message of Christianity, the transparent substance provides the supporting light glaze to the images and is allowed to display its qualities under the control and skill of the craftsmen, serving their earthly function. This text guides them towards the right mental attitude to allow the windows to carry out their theological function.

If we move to consider this kind of 'see-through' image within another tradition; within the Hindu text the Shvetashvatara Upanishad the Supreme Being is described in a way that renders him as possibly transparent and water-like...colourless, like a chemical precipitation he displays colours and then inverts all he has displayed back into clear solution.

The One who, himself without colour,
 By the manifold exercise of his power
 Distributes many colours in his hidden purpose,
 And into whom, its end and its beginning
 The whole universe dissolves –
 He is God, (Ch.4, v.1)

This theistic Upanishad amplifies the theme of devotion to a personal God which is also found in other Upanishads, to the point where there is a fusion between Creator and Creation. The Absolute Brahman does not stand separate from Nature or *pradhana* but in a beautiful twist, this Nature belongs to his Self, is part of it. This 'Upanishad is an attempt to reconcile the different philosophical and religious views which prevailed at the time of its composition.' (Radhakrishnan, S.1953, p.707) Simultaneously therefore, it will aim towards reconciling all forms of perception, including the symbolic, such as the imaginal visual duality when 'According to Indian cosmology, the earth rests on water' (Thera, N. 1981, p.52)

The invisible 'face' of God is identical with the 'womb' of God that forms within itself and is that form. The French word *facette*, which means 'face' is the derivative for the word 'facets',

meaning the many reflective ‘faces’ of shiny, often transparent glass or precious stones which carry a sense of mystery, in that they are many and one at the same time... there is also held within such an image a sense of implied purity. *Sveta* means pure, commonly often translated in colour terms into that which is white, or clear, colourless.

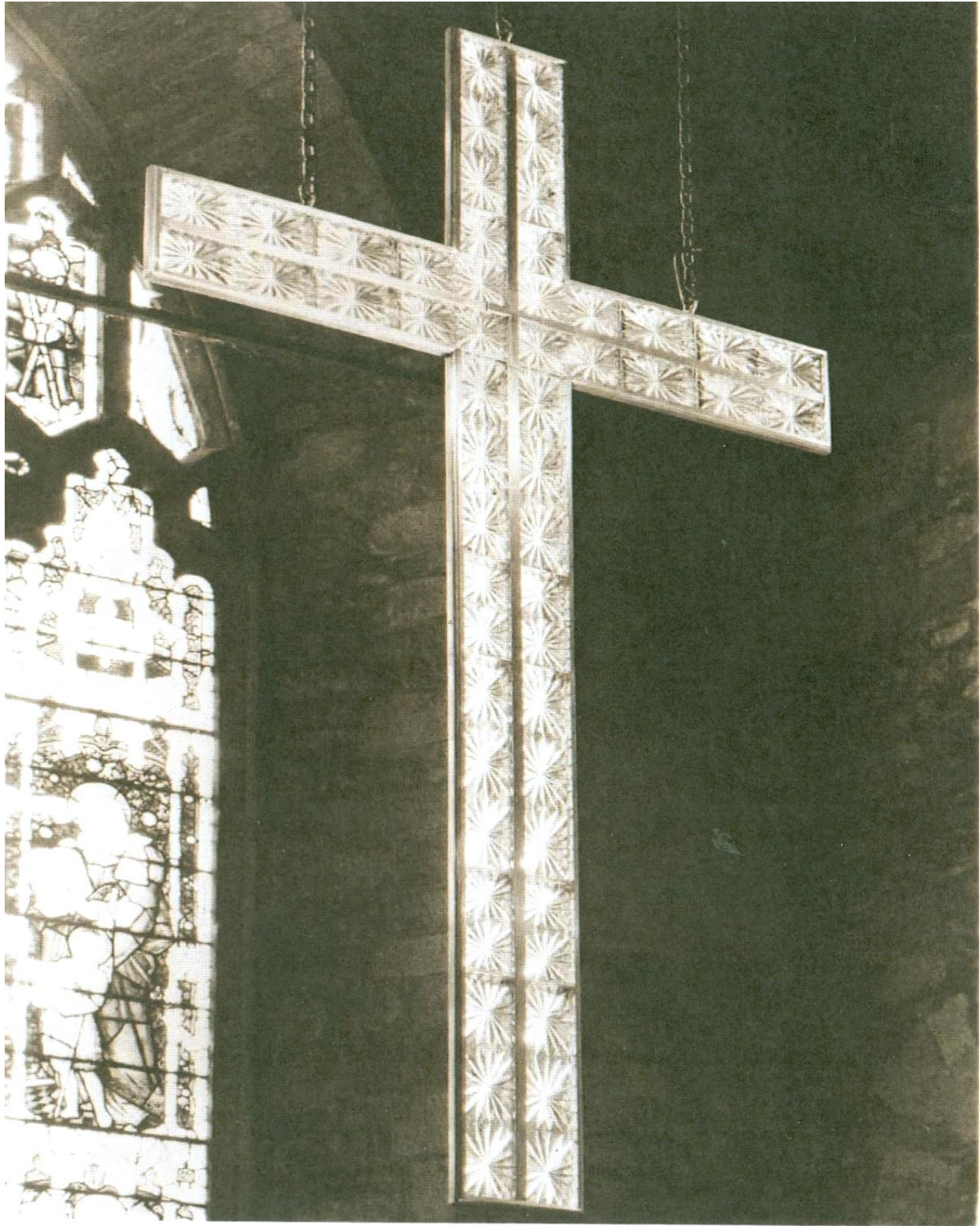
The homogenisation of God and Matter in the Shvetashvatara Upanishad produces not only transparency, but every colour, known or unknown. The act of looking is then dynamically imbued with divinity whether looking ‘at’ or ‘through’, in fact all ‘at’ is ‘through’. In modern Western human relational terms ‘The human race is a myriad of refractive surfaces staining the white radiance of eternity. Each surface refracts the refraction of refractions of refractions. Each self refracts the refractions of others’ refractions of refractions of others’ refractions...’ (Laing, R.D, Phillipson, H, Lee, A.R, 1969, p.3)

Crystal Cross at St. Michael and All Angels in Ledbury, Herefordshire

With Christianity being the dominant seed culture in Britain it forms a part of daily life in all sorts of ways, and particularly at the grammar school I went to in Ledbury, Herefordshire. In the local church of St. Michael and All Angels there hangs an unusual transparent cross, constructed of clear colourless glass held inside a simple metal frame, which the light shines through, giving it a disembodied air all of its own. The metaphorical theological light of church glass is fused into an abstract shape and then diffused into many new points of light pointing in different directions, hinting at a reality more stellar perhaps than trinitarian. A personal theology of this apprehension writes the self into relationship with the object. I am approaching the writing of experiential texts as a research method, in the spirit of ‘Everyone the author of their own Bible.’ (Cheetham, T. 2002, p.21), which proceeds from the hermeneutical philosophical work of the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, who put forward a definition of hermeneutics that was ‘related to the concrete, existing, acting human being in the process of understanding dialogue...the starting point for a viable hermeneutics that can serve as a *core* (my italic) for special hermeneutics, such as the biblical.’ (Palmer, R.E. 1969, p.85)

An analogy of map-making shows the contrast between the;

‘frames of reference of one who makes maps from other people’s maps with one who makes a map from his direct experience on a journey. The former is comparable to a consumer’s orientation and the latter to a producer’s orientation. To make a map from direct experience on journey is to take stimuli which do not come in the shape of maps at all and to transform these cues into a map-like product. This is very different from taking stimuli which are in the shape of maps already and then making maps out of them... (N)o other being occupies my particular space-time position. I am differentiated, individual.’ (Mooney, R. L. 1957, p.168-169)



CRYSTAL CROSS, LEDBURY CHURCH

Returning to Schleiermacher, in his book 'Christmas Eve' he uses a creative writing process to make his theory accessible to the ordinary reader. It goes way beyond the traditional religious meaning of Christmas. Translator W. Hastie writes in the appendix to his volume that Schleiermacher,

seeks the significance of the Festival of Christmas, not so much in its ecclesiastical as in its genuinely human relation, in its being the Christmas of the household and of the children; and he will therefore interpret everything symbolically – the Child, the night, the lights, and so on – as presenting beautiful images of the spiritual life and of man's being born again. (Hastie, W. 1890, p.78)

The following piece of autobiographical text contains by implication a re-evaluation of traditional Christian imagery of the cross and has a metamorphic theophany as its ground, whether inwardly or outwardly perceived. In Christian theology Docetism, considered heresy, rejects the belief that Christ was God by the transformation of God emptying himself into him (Kenosis) and makes of him a theophany, an image, albeit a living one, a lived life. 'With the dokhema we enter the strange imaginal interworld where thought and thing mingle...It is the realm of subtle bodies and of embodied thoughts.' (Cheetham, T. 2002, p.12) My experiential account is of my non-religious apprehension of a glass cross symbol. With its seemingly liminal transparent presence I was able to involve myself with it in my own dokhema.

The school services took place in the local church, a short distance away, a familiar stroll down the alley with its old stone walls. Once inside I saw a dull crystal cross hung from the ceiling... Just faceted glass really, but I'd never seen one before anywhere. Like most churches it was quite dark inside, but sometimes the light did catch on these grisly blade-chiselled facets and held the cross in a dull glowing, rather than sharp blinking way. It didn't hand it back in other words. It fascinated me this rather lame appropriation of light and made me laugh inside. I certainly wasn't going to start believing in a text I never had because of that! The laugh went with me when I went outside, and the abstraction of spiritual meaning into light and plain-coloured glass as its messenger, like that of any old cut glass vase in someone's home, played

gently on my mind, the iconography of the cross aside. Here was the proof, unlike in the religious scenes of the stained glass windows, that sheer unglamorous transparency could be used for meaningful ends. It mattered to others, they like it, not just me. Without even realizing it, I took a symbol of the community at large to heart. What I wanted was space, the maternal empty space around the figures in the stained glass windows depicting a story I didn't like and couldn't believe in, and I resented the societal pressure to do so that always seemed there in the background. I wanted to escape into that purity, the purity of transparency. We sing every day at school assembly the Everlasting Mercy by John Masefield. Forced to stand there mouthing, 'Oh Christ who...' but one image is strikingly beautiful, of glittering feet walking across a field. He's a local poet and it's certainly beautiful around here, and it gets in your bones. Sunlight on crunchy frosty miles scintillating underfoot, the secure stillness and peace of a perfect Herefordshire hedge on a country lane topped like a muffin with a foot of snow, wadded in by white fields all around and other's homes occasionally appearing along the way, cherishing their innards quietly on a crisp winter's day. (autobiographical material)

In the above piece of writing the relation between self and transparent object creates a perceptual feeling of a new kind of space. The visual metaphor of light and a diffused crystalline quality extends into the surrounding environment both physical and spiritual, to create 'space' for a personal hermeneutic.

This faceted transparent object was first imagined by the rector at the time in 1963, who wanted a cross above the high altar and 'had in mind one that would shine brilliantly when the light played on it.' (Farquharson, D. 1971) The church committee agreed as they saw it as a means of physically bringing light into the darkened space of the chancel. As it turned out it was also suspended as a memorial to the late wife of a Mr. M. A.L. Green who, 'having paid his donation into the church funds, left the matter entirely in the hands of the Committee of The Friends, it being understood that the Parochial Church Council, although raising no objection, was in no way responsible.' (Farquharson, D. 1971) This looks like a disclaimer against it having any further deep meaning, i.e. becoming in any way a locus for the Christ in the church, a contemplational object, but then, 'the cross was illuminated for the first time on 4th June 1967 at

the Consecration Ceremony by the Rt. Revd. Mark A. Hodson, Bishop of Hereford.’ (Farquharson, D. 1971)

This is in some ways analogous to the activity of the Brahmin priest, who establishes the presence of the deity within the *murti* by means of ritual touching *nyasa* and infusing the breathlife in the rite *pranapratishta*, by means of reciting a *mantra*. The illumination of the cross has something in common with the placing of divine light within the eyes of the *murti* to shine forth with blessings on all who gaze into them. The greater Self can be equated to the Indian concept of *Purusha*, the primal ‘stuff’ from whom the deities were created; ‘from his mind the moon was born, and from his eye the sun’ (Rg. Veda x 90) The Indian artist, the *silpin*, only starts work on the creation of the image after a process of careful preparation and purification and then, in accordance with the rules of proportion in the *silpasatras*, ‘Entering into a state of concentration by means of yoga, the silpin is to visualize the completed image in the mind’s eye...and prays that he may successfully bring to form the divine image he has seen.’ (Eck, D. 1985, p.52)

To look at this process and approach understanding from a psychological and developmental point of view, the psychologist Rudolph Arnheim is useful and appropriate. He realized that visual images speak directly within the psyche and shape thought, not the other way around as Western societies tend to assume. Images are pivotal to our imagination and therefore a part of our internal religious experience. He states that;

In looking at an object we reach out for it. With an invisible finger we move through the space around us, go out to the distant places where things are found, touch them, catch them, scan their surfaces, trace their borders, explore their texture. It is an eminently active occupation.
(Arnheim, R. 1969, p. 19)

The relationship between the object and the viewer is reciprocal and the qualities of seeing are dependent on the qualities of the individual. Arnheim’s theory of ‘vectors’ (from Latin, meaning :

carrier) to describe invisible forces of energy also allows for energies to emanate from objects with qualities that have affect towards ourselves... 'shifting attention to how we are formed by external things, places and events, moves psychology into the physical world' (McNiff, S. 1995, p.97) rather than locating it solely 'within' ourselves.

Arnheim's ideas were influenced by the reading of ancient texts on the art of seeing. In mediaeval scholarly texts, at a time when most people couldn't read, it was widely accepted that images, created things, were from and of God. Their materiality helped people to experientially apprehend the mystery of incarnation and religious images could depict the path to follow in an easily assimilated way. According to the thirteenth-century philosopher and theologian Bonaventure, the senses were the first of the steps towards apprehension of God. He then conjectured that 'images move from being merely traces of God to being *simulacra*, divinely given real signs' (my italics) (Haynes, D. 1997, p.57)

Arnheim's description of seeing is that of an individualized process according to our own storehouse of images and experiences. In the case of the crystal cross, and with his theory of the power of the visual preceding the textual, the liturgy would have been secondary to the effects of the faceted glass of the transparent cross, an attempt to contain and explain it. The facets pinpoint and define a multiplicity in the light. This reflects the multiplicity of the self, a quantum self where we can exist in more than just one location in time perhaps, or at least a self that contains 'many', like the multiplicity of deities in Hinduism that are ultimately all part of the one God. Within Hinduism something further happens as the consecrated deity gives *darsan*, a special reflected gaze where the worshipper not only sees but wishes to be seen, blessed. This *darsan* is also present in holy persons, saints or avatars where even to catch a glimpse of them is considered auspicious. *Darsan* is also sought in; places *themselves* (my italics) which are thought to be natural epiphanies of the divine: the peaks of the Himalayas, which are said to be the abode of the Gods; the river Ganga, which is said to fall from heaven to earth (Eck, D. 1985, p.5)

These images of snowy peaks and flowing clear water are both crystalline and transparent, and have a reflective quality which is akin to the qualities of glass. In contrast, within the Latin inscription of the early Christian oral tradition of the Desert Fathers, such images appear in

description, such as ‘crystal spring’ (Waddell, H. 1936, p.48), ‘Paul climbing the steps of heaven, and shining white as snow. (Waddell, H. 1936, p.51)

The image of glass and Christianity have a long history that goes back at least to its mention in the New Testament book of Revelation; ‘and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal. Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind’ (Rev 4:6 NRS) This almost psychedelic image, lacking only the colour spectrum of psychedelia, describes full transparency of vision.

This quality of transparency being devoid of darkness and evil is shown in the following quote; ‘And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands’ (Rev 15:2 NRS) Here the image is of glass mixed with fire, an age-old understood symbol of transformation and purification, linked with the practice of alchemy, where substances are heated in a crucible to create gold, the ‘philosopher’s stone’, also representative of wisdom. This was an outer chemical practice which took place alongside inner transformation. This echoes Arnheim’s theory, as the practitioner sees himself reflected in the substances and their changes at a deep level within.

This fact of depth psychology was also known by philosopher and theologian of Islam Henry Corbin, also an active member of the Eranos Institute, along with Arnheim and Jung. Corbin writing of *ta’wil*, the hermeneutic of symbolic understanding, elucidates that ‘like can only be known by like. Your mode of understanding corresponds to your mode of being.’ (Cheetham, T. 2012, p.21) The Islamic term *Ta’wil* refers to a dynamically active process of the soul, whereby symbolic understanding carries the soul back to the source, concomitant with intellectual understanding, creating a spiritually awakened opening. ‘hermeneutics and ontology are inseparably joined....(t)he schism between thought and being is healed.’ (Cheetham, T. 2012, p.21) This is what happens in alchemy, considered by ‘the first Imam of the Shiites (to be) the sister of Prophecy and thus indispensable for spiritual growth.’ (Cheetham, T. 2012, p.21) In the Western tradition also the psychologist Carl Jung who studied alchemical processes in great depth, wrote that the philosopher’s stone was a symbol of something eternal that, ‘some alchemists compared to the mystical experience of God within one’s own soul,’ and goes on to

say that, ‘It usually takes prolonged suffering to burn away all the superfluous psychic elements concealing the stone.’ (Jung, C. 1964, p.210) However this image of fire can also have an unpleasant binary aspect where the populace is split into good and bad, and the image of fire is there to coerce and produce fear and obedience, rather than wilfully joyous following of the message ‘The hymn of praise in Rev 15 comes after the tribulation of the people of God as they survive the ordeal of the sea of glass mingled with fire.’ (Kovaks , J. & Rowland, C., 2004, p.170) To compare with the poetical use of heavenly sea imagery by Milton in *Paradise Lost*; ‘underneath a bright sea flowed/Of jasper or of liquid pearl’ (Milton, 2005, p.70) this is a much softer, kinder image where within a molten mineral mass we are encouraged to focus on the beauty of the substances representing a glimpse of future peace after the turmoil experienced in everyday life with its inevitable negative forces or what might be deemed the Antichrist. The appearance of transparent objects in the Book of Revelation is also seen in the description of the Holy City, with its contents almost like a shopping list:

The wall is built of Jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass. I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the lord God almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. (Rev 21: 18-23 NRS)

This beautiful extended passage in Revelation describes the light of God and the Lamb using the metaphor of beautiful earthly substance that reflects the light of the sun, which can serve as a reminder of that other kind of light, the inner joy of spirit and faith. Spirituality and theology can meet in this third transitional object, wherever we find it to be, either as a reminder of our own personal mystery or journey, or of the Christian faith. The word ‘transparent’ links the reader with the mysteries of glass on earth, a mystery easily available to all to be seen, unlike the

biblical mysteries which are temporally in the past, if they are to be believed as actually having taken place.

With imagery reminiscent of psychedelia, with its fracturing and proliferation of the gaze, along with descriptions of many colours, there is a metaphoric link with other and expanded realms of consciousness in crystal gemstones. The light and colour they bring to us seems also to be an innate faculty of the mind appears when substances such as LSD are taken, where certain types of images are common among users, and certainly can be a spiritual experience, for instance in this experiential description of taking LSD by the philosopher Alan Watts;

Looking up, I saw that the stars were colored with the same reds, greens and blues that one sees in iridescent glass, and passing across them was the single light of a jet plane taking forever to streak across the sky. At the same time, the trees, shrubs, and flowers seemed to be living jewelry, inwardly luminous like intricate structures of jade, alabaster, or coral, and yet breathing and flowing with the same life that was in me.

(Watts, A. 1986, p.143-144)

Alan Watts' record of his transpersonal experience unites the same metaphor of crystalline light for spiritual light in his perception of transitional forms. The breadth and depth of his expansive experience seems to tap into an existential layer of 'life memory' not normally available to us.

The philosopher Henri Bergson had a theory of pure memory that he called 'souvenir pur.' His conclusion was that the brain has a fundamentally protective role and filters memories away from us that would be of no use in the moment... there is therefore a store of unavailable memories, including the transpersonal. Writing of this store the psychologist Alfred Adler says, 'We may also have access to this world usually kept from us until after death by the use of psychedelic drugs.' (Adler, A. 1979, p.146) Jung's theory of the collective unconscious alluded to here is reflected in this statement about night-time dreaming by a five-year-old child, recorded by the child psychologist Jean Piaget, when she says, '*Moi je suis dans le rêve, le rêve n'est pas dans ma tête.*' (I am in the dream, the dream isn't in my head) (Adler, A. 1979, p.16)

Jung's idea of the collective Psyche has the unconscious as a plurality akin to sparks, luminosities that have their own consciousness often referred to in 'the alchemical concept of the sparks, the *'radii atque scintillae'* (my italics) of the 'Anima Catholica', the 'World Soul.'" (Adler, A. 1979, p.34) These images of sparkling luminosity do seem to occur repeatedly in contexts of consciousness, mystery of being, becoming, and of God's realm. Psychologist James Hillman, who worked extensively on Jungian theories, came to the conclusion that the self is, 'like 'stars or sparks or luminous fish eyes'.' (Adler, A. 1979, p.56) and that there are impersonal demands from archetypes of Gods and Goddesses that push *through* (my italics) our psyche. This cancels out and goes beyond a 'Protestant direction of analytical psychology' (Adler, A. 1979, p.56) which seeks a fixed redemptive goal. Hillman felt that Jung's psychological theory ultimately stopped at the Christ figure, *radially* reflected in his circular mandala images of the self reaching for the Self, whereas he identifies many archetypal complexes corresponding to other divine figures. The accessing of this archetypal imaging faculty of the mind mentioned above is echoed in the 'insight' of a blind person Helen Keller, who had never had exterior sight was able, 'to dream of exquisite and beautiful things resembling crystals. On being given a crystal to handle ...Miss Keller was particularly moved' (Wilson, F. 1977, p.120) For her the form was mirroring her inner sight, she was 'seeing' with her fingertips and completing the image, just as for the non-visually impaired the idol reflects the gaze like a mirror.

The following experiential text describes interiority of form as perceived through an Indian Classical Dance process, a dance form which is based upon the sacred geometry of the circle and the square, and so leads to the constellation* of this within the dancer who will experience the process and shape of the dance from the inside out.

With hands clasped in front, feet perfectly aligned we rise up on tip-toes and down again, knees bent. This time we're to do it with eyes closed, but what's this? I can't do it without losing my balance immediately. The disturbing difference makes me realize how much I am using my sight to steady myself in even the simplest of movements. I learn that there is such a thing as a blind troupe of Bharatanatyam dancers in India. How do they do it? Again with eyes shut I learn to move by imagining inside myself. I visualize, imagine my body in the correct shape, and like within the frame of the crystal cross, I am molten inside and fluid as the light and I flow out to

fill the geometric shape, of Classical Indian Dance. I learn that I am not my exterior, but a spirit filling and fusing with something resembling an archetype, and passing through each shape as it changes. It starts from a still point within. (autobiographical material)

Aura Soma Balance Bottle : Serapis Bey

God has a history of invisibility...take for instance in the words of this well-known hymn, 'Immortal, invisible, god only wise, In light inaccessible hid from our eyes' (Chalmers Smith, W. 1986, p.380) In terms of colourless clarity, 'Westerners have become accustomed to regarding God as a kind of separate and invisible being inhabiting a non-material realm of 'the supernatural' or 'heaven'. (Pattison, S. 2007, p.255) In the Hindu tradition God is allowed to pervade every molecule of material reality, and feminist theologians of Christianity have criticised the model of the absent God arguing that he/she can be found in the creation. In the Svetasvatara Upanishad god is described as covered in a substance/non-substance akin to what we know of as transparent thread... 'The one God who, according to his own nature, covers himself like a spider with threads produced from pradhana (unmanifested matter), may He grant us entrance into Brahman.' (Ch 6, v. 10)

John Hick writes of the fact that sight is our major sense, proportionately in the brain, and our apprehension of God, our spiritual experience, is caused by who we are and then by the 'impact', not in its physical sense, that our experience of this apprehension has on us... 'The various God-figures and the various non-personal foci of religious meditation are, according to our big picture, different transformations of the impact upon us of the ultimately Real.' (Hick, J. 1999, p.40) Between who we are and that form of impact there seems to lie a gap, an airy gap, therefore a transparent one, not filled by our concepts. This airy or ether-like gap, the distance between us and the surface of God's 'spider threads' for instance, between consciousnesses we are capable of experiencing, has been experienced and documented through the stages of anaesthesia and waking and then described in terms of a screen with properties of transparency... 'our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of

consciousness , whilst all about it, parted from it by the *filmiest of screens* (my italics) there are potential forms of consciousness entirely different.’ (James, W. 1985, p.388)

In modern secular society I contend that this transparent-like gap-space could be localised and projected into/onto transparent objects. This would take place in the realm of illogical consciousness which is consciously referred to as mysticism. The visual oscillation in a transparent object such as glass, caused by its varying degrees of limited opacity, can give a fascination of what is ‘there and also not there’. This goes beyond the ‘logic of the things of the phenomenal world’, (Ouspensky, P.D. 1949, p. 252) and takes us towards what is stated in Vedanta as ‘Tat twam asi ’ translated as ‘Thou art That’. This has as its meaning, ‘Thou art both thou and not thou (which) corresponds to the super-logical formula, A is both A and Not-A.’ (Ouspensky, P.D. 1949, p. 252)

An example of this container aspect and transparency being consciously utilised is the Aura Soma colour healing system of alternative medicine which was channelled and created by Vicky Wall. (Merivale, P. 1998) Aura Soma products and consultations can be said to be part of the New Age Movement, where, ‘there are no central authorities that dictate what is right or wrong....adherents...partake of different ideas and practices, arranged by training centres, gurus, therapists or other adherents.’(Brolin, J. 2003, p. 389) A series of the bottles, in an array of jewel-coloured split ‘oil and water’ mixes were first presented to the public at a stand at the Subud World Congress held at Windsor in 1983. Subud is an international spiritual movement originating in Indonesia which was founded by Muhammaq Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo, with a practice, the *latihan*, which consists of an inner listening and prompting to express according to the individual, which can be in any form and therefore is not necessarily bound to the verbal.

Vicky Wall, as she writes in her memoir, *The Miracle of Colour Healing* (Wall, V. 1990) was a healer of partial sight and then blindness who was able to see the coloured auras surrounding people from a very young age. She saw herself as a divine channel and the way her collection of bottles came into being was similar to the Subud *latihan* as it was unpremeditated.

The process of creation seems to have been done in a sort of trance-like state ; ‘I do not remember the next few hours, nor how ‘Balance’ was actually born’ (Wall, V. 1990, p.58)

Balance was the name she gave at that time to the bottles, now named Equilibrium, part of the system named Aura Soma. '*Aura* in latin means the light...it also means breeze; a slight movement of air. Soma derives from several sources; from Greek it means body, from Aramaic it means the being; and from Sanskrit it means living energies.' (Merivale, P.1998, p.26)

Vicky Wall was from an orthodox patriarchal Jewish background, and as such was excluded from the learning, of which her father was a proponent, of the sub-sect of Kabbalism. It is likely she 'received' its 'essence' by familial osmosis, as she was very receptive and open to perceiving in different ways, including having a strong ability to see the coloured auras of people. 'Clairvoyant means, simply, clear seeing,' (Merivale, P. 1998, p.44) and it seems she had this ability and that the system of clear and coloured bottles is a physical reflection and manifestation of this.

The bottles are believed to work through the chakra system of the body, the wheels of energy that occur at certain key points, used in Eastern medicine. In the Hindu tradition it is known that there are seven of these chakra points in and around the body. They both store and generate energy. They form a line from the base of the spine to just above the top of the head, each having energies that oscillate at different frequencies. They correspond to a series of different colours that can be seen naturally in the diffraction of light in the rainbow and the aim is to keep them all functioning healthily. 'To understand the necessity for keeping the chakras well adjusted, Vicky Wall suggested the analogy of seven television sets stacked on top of one another.' (Merivale, P. 1998, p.45)

Transparent objects, being filled with white light, can filter the light in such a way that they allow certain colours to be seen through them. These colours are surfaces in fact, even if particles of pigment. A transparent object when seen at its edges becomes limited in its transparency and displays a subtle colour dependent on the properties of the substance, its grain, what it is comprised of. Our perception of colour is also a factor, our individuality. Transparent objects, in themselves, are a ground... 'they should be conceived as visual media, like air or water, rather as perceptual objects.' (Mizrah, V. 2010, p.13)

In the Aura Soma system there is a reference to a group of 'masters' who have existed throughout time, people who lived on earth and through their actions were able to transcend

matter to exist in a spiritual realm. Serapis Bey is one of these masters known and revered for their spirituality. This individual,

‘was born into the family of one of the beys who ruled the Otto-Turkish Empire(1290-1603)...a young priest king (who) reached enlightenment through developing an understanding of suffering and of alleviation of suffering, both concepts that are inherent in the clear colour’ (Booth, M. & McKnight, C. 2006, p.166)

Serapis Bey, B54, Clear/Clear, is the only one that has no colour in it whatsoever, yet still is mixed during treatment and, ‘Shakes together as : Clear’ (Booth, M. & McKnight, C. 2006, p.166) Often alternately referred to as White in the aura soma system, the Clear is said to represent clear quartz crystal just as much as what is referred to as ‘crystal glass.’ Clear quartz crystal is also referred to as, ‘the solidification of pure light.’ (Merivale, P. 1998, p.197)

The Clear contains the paradox of allowing light to pass through and being at the same time reflective, in the way the moon reflects the light of the sun. In transformational terms the metaphors of... ‘The White snow and the Clear ice are both forms of frozen water; and water is the element which is associated with emotion. Thus the Clear may symbolize frozen emotion.’ (Merivale, P. 1998, p.199) Snow is also mentioned as having the ability by its covering beauty to conceal the dark, shadow side of our nature. The Clear may represent tears, rage, grief, all important parts of a healing process, and the light at the end of the tunnel. Finally, ‘Clear is the head and the Godhead of colour. It is the sun and the moon, and the shining brightness of stars.’ (Merivale, P. 1998, p.200).

The Serapis Bey, Clear/Clear Balance Bottle can be seen in an almost central position in the following image of colour combination variations;



Although transparent and therefore having a ‘through’ aspect that we would find in the icon, Aura Soma bottles could also be deemed to function as idols when Vicky Wall states; ‘Above all (they) provide a mirror for the soul, giving knowledge of the true self which, once revealed and understood can be healed.’ (Wall, V. 1990, p.88) This second function is most likely due to the colour choices, in a way similar to the Luscher Color Test (Luscher, M. 1969), where choices of colours and sequences reveal information about personality and processes in an individual at a given time. These *two functions then become combined* as the bottles are supposed to be shaken so that the oil and water sections become mixed and a system of readings has evolved based on the formation and actions of the bubbles and striations in the resulting emulsion. Within this system the visual equivalent of colourlessness is depicted as the full healing of imbalances in the chakras, energy centres in the body, each of which is known by a corresponding colour. As pure light seems to have no colour but its rays in fact contain all the spectrum of colours, it seems logical to conclude that. It is a fullness designated by an absence.

The bottles are, in themselves, a collection of physically beautiful transparent objects and in honouring the divinity of the material world we can move to fully the beauty of material objects that are manufactured by people and utilizing such objects for worship which has been a deep human need to exteriorize experience since time immemorial. Historically the Protestant tradition with its anti-iconism, while striving to serve a non-distracting purpose, ultimately still needs objects ... its churches are full of Bibles, stained glass and the decorative structure of the church and its furniture serve to define the sense of belonging, God’s presence and the specialness of the space. However;

relationships with artefacts should not replace relationships with other humans. This easily happens in Christianity; consider the way in which buildings, books and ideas become an excuse for failure to encounter and experience real, living humans - fetishism in action. (Pattison, S. 2007, p.258)

Objects can function as tokens of remembrance, photographs of loved ones swiftly bring back memories of the person and the time they were taken. The perception of beauty can be a very personal thing but widely held appreciation of the beauty of creation shows that we also share

profoundly share in it. To ignore it in attempts to stave off idolatry is surely to deny the divinity inherent in the creation...

It seems ungracious not to take delight

In day because it turns so soon to night (Laing, R. 1978)

The invisibility of God in modernity, secular or otherwise becomes the invisibility of love itself and the apt description of its qualities of transparency and standing outside the pressures of the economic system are expressed by the popular psychiatrist, poet and yogi R.D. Laing when he says;

Love is sheer joy. But it has to suffer you

And me. It can't avoid its Calvary.

Silent. Unseen. Transparent, pure and true,

Rich in its own reward of poverty. (Laing, R. 1978)

The kenosis of God emptying into Christ as a sort of vassal is here moved into the ordinary person, everyone has it, but it's not total... we are still intermixed, like the reverse of a snowstorm globe, the particles of love are transparent in us, the *gross* body of a container. In the following piece of autobiographical writing I explore a *subtle* self, projecting myself into a container as a mediating locus by my gaze, and experiencing what I would call 'ordinary kenosis' where the gaze of patriarchy is separate from the divine gaze.

Looking into transparent glass bottles my gaze can penetrate, dream and experience the power of the gaze, an antidote to living in a patriarchy, where a woman is always the subject of the gaze, in life, in advertising, like a commodity herself. There is no escape, but the parameters of the glass enclosure seal a precious space, which the projection of myself can travel through and inhabit. Any liquid therein seems/is enchanted by my special presence, thoughts, memories and feelings. I am both reflected and experience myself as a powerful being with see-through powers, all the way through to the divine, my essence. (autobiographical material)

The above extract shows how easy it is to engage with transparent objects, and to consciously or unconsciously start appropriating them for self-healing, empowerment, creating one's own meanings. In the case of Aura Soma there is conscious direction towards healing with a therapist as another mediator to assist in the unfolding of the process and interpretation.

Malevich's Black Square

There is another kind of fullness to the transparent or white light that contains all colours, a not necessarily opposite image which is the density of the colour black, where all the spectrum rays are absorbed. This colour perhaps more than any monochrome, in its saturation, can also lead the mind to contemplate limitless space and one's place within that,

there is another Darkness, one that is not merely black, but is a Night, a dazzling Blackness... (T)his is the Black Light of what Corbin calls supraconsciousness ... (T)his dazzling Black Light heralds the annihilation of the *ego* in the Divine Presence... It announces the Nothing that exists beyond all being,... The Black Light marks the region of the Absolute, the *Deus absconditus*, the unknown and unknowable God. (Cheetham, T. 2002, p.7)

The transparency of blackness is the 'dissolving power of the Hidden God' (Cheetham, T. 2002, p.11), the *theophanic* perception, or the perception of expansion, of '*throughness*'. I am using these terms interchangeably to apply to a sense of belonging or access to something greater than the personal self... 'There is a balance, an '*essential community being visible and invisible things*' (my italics) and it is the function of theophanic perception to reveal this community as it is within the power of each being to perceive.' (Cheetham, T. 2002, p.11) The oscillation of the visible and invisible, with God, or 'more than' appearing in both and neither, gives a transparency that is free of dogma. This can be seen in the iconic painting that is Kasimir

Malevich's Black Square. In order to understand this kind of 'transparent blackness' we need to look at art historical theory and notions of purity.

In the postmodern space we are now both viewer and participant in the event of consumption/interaction, something which is seen particularly in the artform of the installation, presently to be discussed. Within Western painting there was a move from representational perspective, through cubism, which broke up the picture plane into a multi-perspective, to abstraction expressive or otherwise, pop and then minimalism, always with a critical art theory going on at the same time. There was progressive 'flattening' of the picture surface, undivided by forms,

What was needed was *purity* – a style in which lines, forms, contours, colors all became unified on the flat surface. This business of flatness became quite an issue; an obsession, one might say. (There arose a) question of what an artist could or could not without violating the principle of Flatness – 'the integrity of the picture plane' as it became known (Wolfe, T. 1975, p.53)

This conceptual flatness gradually took the critique of painting's limits in the gallery space further to find ways to break up that space in three dimensions, which led to the art-form of the environment. The installation as an artform could be in a gallery, or any other space outside of the gallery, and was set up, usually temporarily, to establish an area of changed perception in our space of lived life.

There is a similarity with this and the world of the Byzantine icon which draws the viewer in to a space in which to participate, and that space is represented not by the use of perspective but by a flattening out of the picture plane. This was to provide an alternative special form of space... the icon and space in what could be described as a symbiotic relationship. Again this is a differentiation from ordinary lived space.

Russian Icon painters were traditionally anonymous and like the Indian *silpin* were required to follow rules of design and to be properly spiritually prepared to carry out the task of arbiter of

the vision of another world, a channel for translation. However their own individual touches in painting style further enlivened the images and eventually they became commodities in the marketplace and begun to be signed. Of all Russian icons the *Spas nerukotvornyi* which translates as ‘The Saviour Not Made by Human Hands’ is possibly the most influential . It is a twelfth century Novgorodian icon, painted in tempura on wood (see below). The flat image of Christ’s face floating on the picture plane is a representation of an image made when, as legend has it, Jesus bathed his face in water and pressed it into linen to give a facsimile to Hannan, a painter living in Constantinople in 944. He had tried to capture Jesus’s face in painting, but was unable, ‘because of the radiant and ever changing nature of his face.’ (Simmons, W. 1978, p.12)



The process of Pagan worship becoming Christianised was a slow one and icons found their place in the home lit by a burning candle where once ‘the chaplet of birch leaves that were hung with rags and linen and placed in the *peredni ugol* , or front corner, of the hut during particular pagan festivals.’ (Haynes, D. 1995, p.140) The relation to the Christ in the Russian icon is not that of the ‘personal’ so as the cosmic Christ evident in community, therefore the space opens up through it and paves the way for the abstract as it embodies the energy of transformation. Being figurative though it is not a visually transparent type of image, but an energetic one. Energetic visual transparency *can* occur in painting when it is an *imagined* journey through the picture plane, which since the development of air and space travel in the twentieth century, gives us another way to apprehend a painting,

Perhaps you can’t *walk* into an Abstract Expressionist painting – but you can *fly* through...Just look at a de Kooning or a Rothko or a Franz Kline. Look at that ‘airy’ quality, those ‘areas floating in space’, those cloud formations, all that ‘illusionistic space’ with its evocations of intergalactic travel. (Wolfe T. 1975, p.80)

Of the ‘(m)ore ‘theological’ abstract expressionists’ (Hughes, R. 1991, p.296) Mark Rothko called into being a state of expansive contemplation. Rothko’s misty and layered oblongs of colour often have a band across them which in fact indicates an affinity with landscape, inviting us in to an experience of expansion that we can apprehend. At times a trancelike experience, ‘this desire for ritual, histrionic ‘presence’’ (Hughes R. 1991, p.320) equates with the function of an icon. The Rothko Chapel in Houston contains a series of carefully painted, almost completely monochrome paintings like memorial slabs but with the personal also reduced almost completely, a fine line between this life and the expansion into the after-life, the infinite. His practice of emblems of contemplative depth in a flat picture surface follows on from a tradition known as American Luminism landscape painting, but he was aiming to evoke a much grander presence. ‘Their spiritual content was summed up, long before Rothko painted them, by an American evangelist of the thirties who declared that his idea of the deity was ‘a great, luminous, oblong blur.’’ (Hughes, R. 1991, p.320)

The Russian icon tradition was part of the cultural background of the twentieth-century painter Kasimir Malevich who created a work called *Black Square on a White Background*, now just known simply as *Black Square*, that was a significant turning point in modern art. Intuitively he realized its importance as after he had painted it ‘he realized this was such an important event in his artistic life that for a week he could not drink, eat or sleep.’ (Haynes, D. 1995, p.147) He was not interested in stimulating personal taste through feeling but rather was trying to address what the spiritual meant for him and his contemporaries which was the greater self, the suprapersonal. It was exhibited in the ‘0,10’ exhibition in December 1915, and can be seen in the photograph below to occupy the top corner space, the traditional position for the icon.



Malevich was probably the main theorist in the art movement known as Suprematism which had the aim of using pure form and colour to touch the feelings and speak to the spirit/soul of viewers. Malevich was working as an artist in revolutionary and post-revolutionary Russia and wanted to

prioritise the spiritual while the restructuring of communism with all its material concerns was taking place. This was based on his appreciation of icon art;

Through icon art, I understood the emotional art of the peasants, which I had loved earlier, but whose meaning I hadn't fully understood....the icon painters, who had achieved a great mastery of technique, conveyed meaning outside of spatial and linear perspective (Haynes, D. 1995, p.146)

The icon functions as a window to a special world where through and beyond the paint divinity lies. Malevich's Black Square was a stepping stone in modern art away from representation. Its blackness surrounded by a white border suggests the deepness of space, stillness and the expansion of the night sky, and its quality of 'through' thus makes it a transparent image in a sense.

The transparency of this black Russian icon of modern art differs in that it requires sight to 'look through'. This looking takes place imaginatively and intuitively and refers us profoundly to an inner dimension. It draws us in and at the same time positions us outside as the viewer in the stance of recognition of our depths and future possibilities, an opening out where we can say we have seen ourselves. We allow ourselves and the picture to be 'filled' by this mysterious double-dimensionality, dialogue of spirit. In that sense the Black Square takes the place of the Christ image, filled by God, and a locus for our experience of being filled with that God spirit.

The original painting of Black Square shows an underlayer when x-rayed of the angular planes he was working with immediately before the conception of the breakthrough painting. The pictorial dynamic that took place was that one of these planes came forward and became, 'the main figure, the 'partial eclipse' was transformed in a single instant into a 'total eclipse'; the black square blocked nature's lamp. 'Things vanished like smoke' – and before Malevich arose the absolute, the world as nonobjectivity.' (Shatskikh, A. 2012, p.44-p.45)

1977, going to the exhibition, *'Light Fantastic'* at the Tate on the bus, Hereford Art College. There are holographic lasers, seen for the first time by all of us, describing three dimensional objects in a dark space. It's creepy, like walking round an x-ray, and the colours are so bright and fluorescent. Never seen the like, it's too modern almost, dazzling lasers like a net, but though

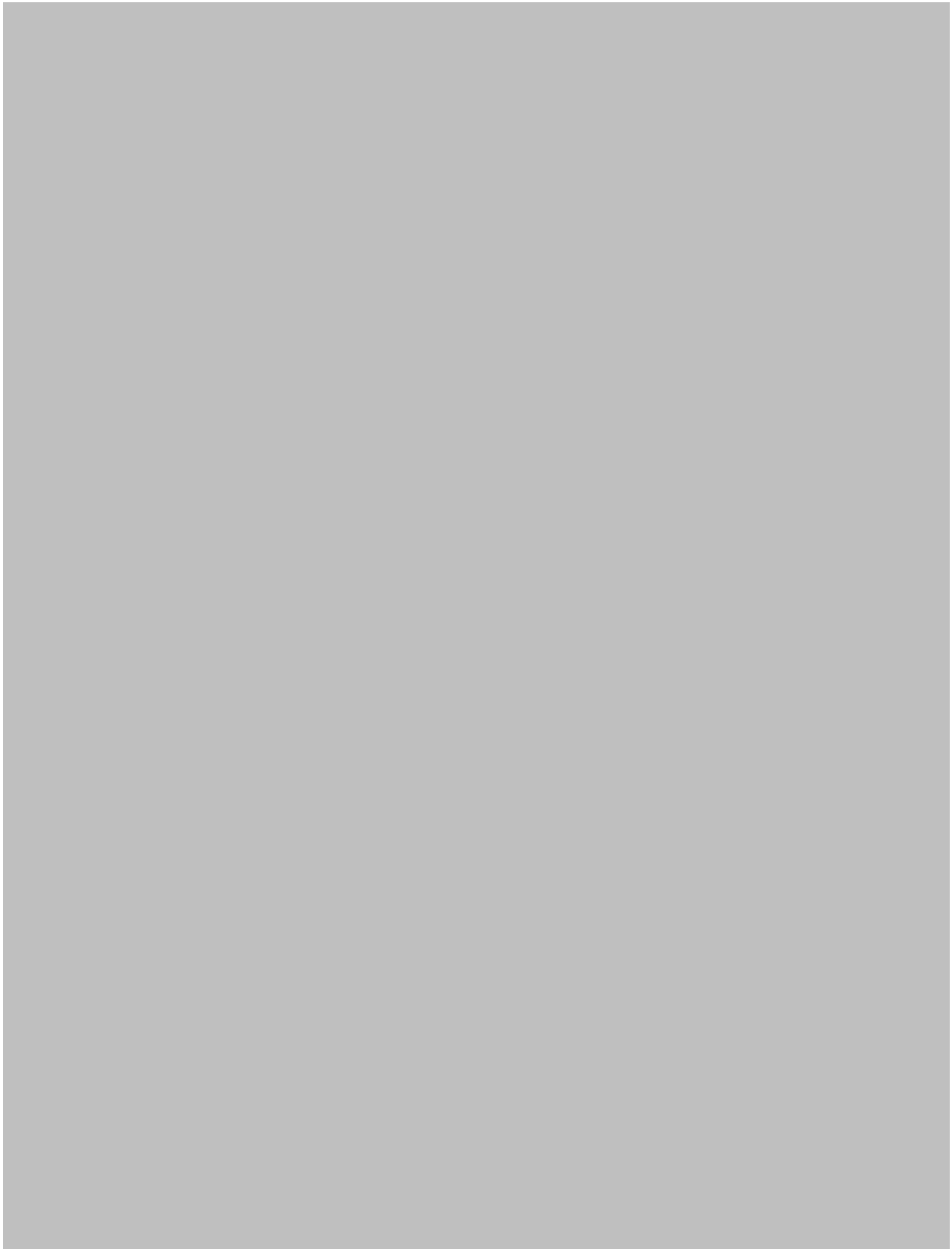
impressive, it feels false, too far away from what we can do, as art students, ourselves. I drift off, to look round the Tate by myself, and soon find something that catches my attention. More than catches my attention. I become fixed before it, Yves Klein's International Klein Blue, a square of pure pigment so stunning, I just wanted to stand before it, recognizing myself, surprisingly, in an abstract painting. I looked to see who it was by, 'I like him,' I thought. (autobiographical material)

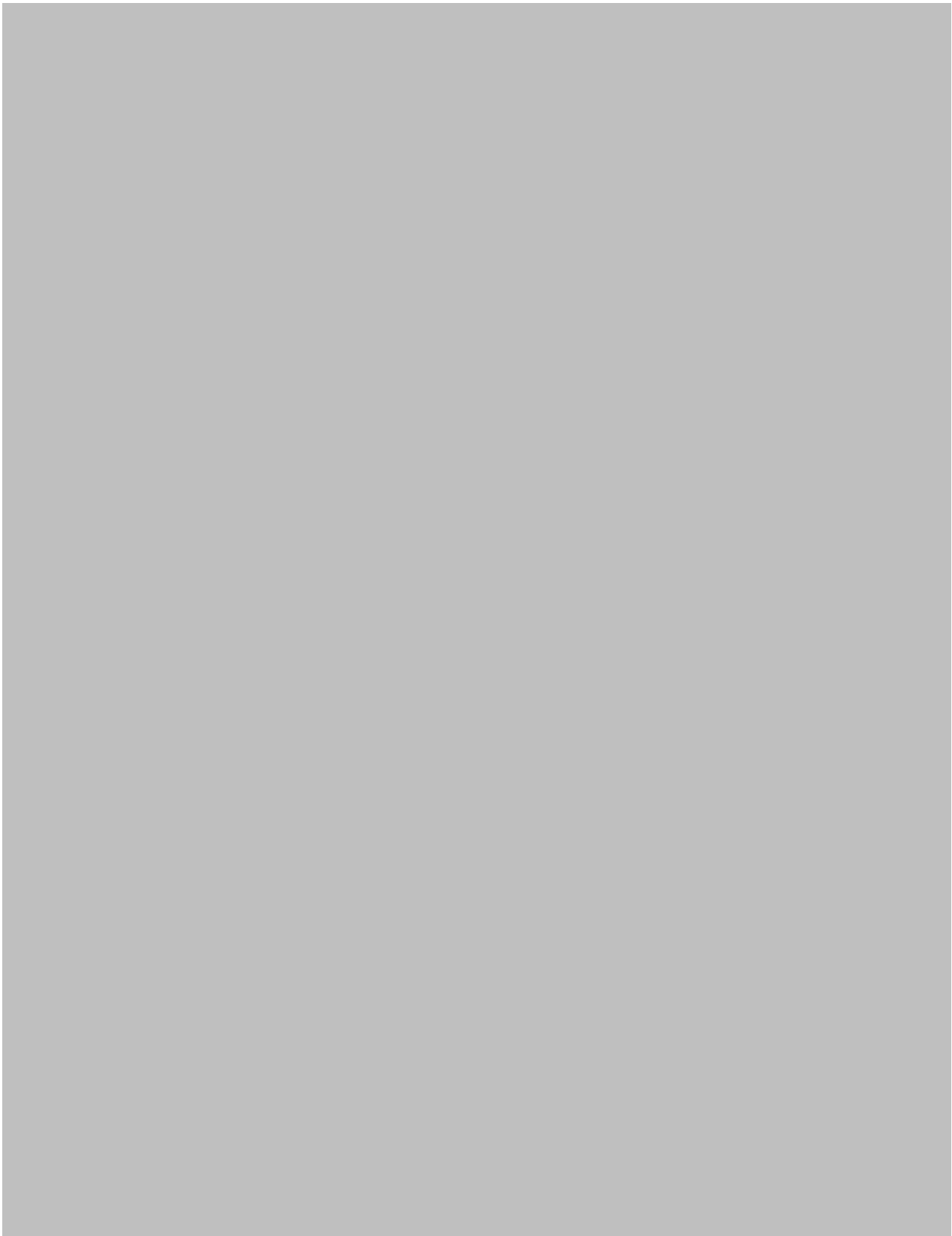
In the extract above the painting is experienced by the self as having an effect akin to Malevich's Black Square, in that it was, an iconic painting, all one colour, that introduces an invisible community 'through' its ground by its expansive monochrome surface. It was only when I gazed at the printed words of the information board next to it that I saw the artist's name and, also having a name, was able to locate a separate self. Lasers pass through the air of the enclosed gallery space defining trajectories and shapes that appear and disappear as one moves around them but have an intrinsic limitation in the fact that they present an experience of 'surface' that has no lasting dimension... no contained space, centre or stable surface presentation of possibility of 'throughness' to community with which to relate to.

Chanel No 5

To examine the icon of the Chanel No. 5 glass bottle in terms of its history and significance as a transparent object I will begin by looking at a history of transparency in vessels of importance to the community. The religious vessel known as the monstrance takes its name from the verb *monstrare*, to show or exhibit. Since the Middle Ages it has come to be known as a container with a crystal cylinder to protect and exhibit material charged with importance, such as relics or the Host, material that becomes transformed into the body of Christ for believers. A dark spot on the moon appeared repeatedly in a vision to an Augustinian nun Juliana of Liege in 1208 and meditating on this, ‘she came to understand that the dark spot represented the lack of a feast in honour of the blessed sacrament.’ (Busch-Reisinger 1975, p.99) Vessels that allowed for the visibility of the contents were needed, a reliquary for relics, a monstrance for the sacrament of the Host, and sometimes both together. The earliest surviving example of a glass windowed monstrance, seen in the following photograph, for exhibiting the Host, was made in 1286 and takes the form of a hexagonal barrel of windows, in which the glass could be equated to the full light of the moon, which unites with the light of the sun for completion of the two halves of sight inner (mystical) and outer.

These mediievally-sourced images of the psyche still have unconscious relevance today in the twenty-first century, when so many people are at a loss as to what to believe and turn to consumerism for satisfaction and the construction of the self as we reach for ‘the ultimate freedom , namely the freedom to choose the objects which will distinguish one from other people’ (Baudrillard, J. 2005, p.199). This mysterious ‘otherness’ aspect of ourselves in relation to a personalised self, is something we may seek to glimpse in products with certain qualities, forming a sort of divine twin, a syzygy, as described in the two types of natural light mentioned above. In the following 1980’s Chanel No. 5 advertisement we see the model clutching the almost person-sized bottle as if it were her lover, and her arm is seen *through* it, like the arm of another, that is in fact herself. Together, the model and the iconic bottle form a mysterious pair.





In the twentieth century, with its own secular icons, the perfume bottle for Chanel No. 5 was a glass vessel of widespread importance with its contents, named the '*monstre*' (Mazzeo, T. 2010, p.197) within the industry due to its pervasive success. Its simple everyday pharmaceutical design was also influenced by Cistercian architecture and numerical symbolism. As seen in the following early advertising image from 1937, taken as a whole it has a very abstract, and here almost ghostly presence.



The perfume's creator Coco Chanel, with her austere but also fragrant childhood at the Cistercian monastery at Aubazine, France came to absorb its almost minimalist values and aesthetics as deeply her own, in the absence of both her parents. It was an environment of light and shadow;

The keyhole doorways are dark wood against vast expanses of pale stone...cool solidity of arching walls, adorned only with the play of light and the sun streaking in through colourless lead-paned windows. (Mazzeo, T. 2010, p.6)

Coco Chanel had been abandoned in early childhood by her father, her only remaining parent, to an orphanage, the abbey at Aubazine, founded in the twelfth century by Saint Etienne d'Obazine. She was desperately unhappy but did absorb peace from the abbey environment, which was minimal, filled with light and shade. Throughout her life though she would never say the word 'Aubazine', in which according to Freud's theory the moment of trauma was held and forever linked. 'The process involved when a fetish* first becomes established seems reminiscent...of the way memories are blocked out in traumatic amnesia.' (Freud, 2006, p.92)

It was a place filled with the fresh clean smells of laundry, dried iris root, rosewood and verbena, and she imbibed these alongside the visually clean lines of the surrounding architecture. She developed a fetish for the number five and had a lifelong belief in the occult mysticism of numbers... 'in this ancient branch of the Catholic faith (five) was a special number- the number of quintessence: the pure and perfect embodiment of a thing's essence...also, that other thing- ether, spirit.' (Mazzeo, 2010, p.9) The shape and symbol of the circle was also an important feature of Cistercian architecture representing God's perfection. Later her own designer symbol was to be two interlocking letters 'C' within a circle. The creation of exclusive, luxury high quality perfumes such as Chanel No.5 was when it was first created and still is today (but to a lesser extent due its extensive production) produces a special singular object chosen by the self which easily lends itself to feelings of transitional 'enchantment.'

An example of early twentieth-century tongue-in-cheek awareness of the role of the consumer object as a locus for this displaced type of energy is seen in the following advertising image from

1927 where the company L.T.Piver has created a perfume named *Fétiche*, the French translation of the English word fetish. We see a transparent block of a bottle placed between two corresponding items, all with elements of the same design reminiscent of high-speed motor racing. The subliminal message seems to be that if you feel blocked in some way you can at least purchase a fetish, a token of initiation into the high society world of speed and glamour, *movement*. The positioning of the transparent objects and design theme here play on the ‘throughness’ dynamic of the transparent object as if it represents charmed air.



This *movement* through transparency, into what I would call ‘glass-airspace’, a combination of visual space within the clear glass itself and of air, can be of spiritual significance through the perfume bottles being given as love tokens, and as a cultural panacea in a wider sense. Ultimately the almost wholly transparent Chanel No.5 bottle became a cultural icon after it was distributed for sale tax-free alongside chocolate, nylons and cigarettes through the United States Army. Chanel’s shop in Paris remained open for a limited daily supply of perfume for the entire duration of the Second World War. It was a cherished commodity for soldiers of *any* nationality

who were lined up waiting outside her shop before it opened every day. The sparkling crystalline interior was lit with the presence of these transparent and precious bottles. It must have been like visiting a shrine away from the extreme ugliness of war to enter there. A perhaps unconscious cultural meeting place for memories and hopes of peace and love.

For most consumers there are unconscious processes at work. A sign is always pointing to an Other, something it is not, but which it means, and the *gestalt*, the formation and pulling together of the self, is what is offered in the enchanted space of the object advertisement. We can gel disparate parts of self for a moment inside the exclusive perfume bottle in our imaginary, and then experientially by use of the ‘magical’ substance in repetition, which reaffirms.

‘What the advertisement clearly does is thus to signify, to represent to us the *object* of desire...that object is the self’ (Williamson, J. 1978, p.60) The advert’s success depends on feeding on our need to create and sustain a feeling of coherence and meaning in our experience of lived life. Others can also be constellated in the gestalt function within the transparent womb-like area of the bottle, functioning in the way the reliquary or monstrance does, bringing a special presence to our attention, whatever we wish it to be. There is a sense of the magic spell, where ‘a commodity can be placed between an action and its effects, or rather, between desire and result, encapsulating in itself a transformation... (even)to the extent of containing a person or place in one magical vessel.’ (Williamson, J. 1978, p.147-149)

In the following advertising image from 1984 the picture plane is filled entirely with the model’s hand and a huge bottle. The hand grasps the crystal stopper, which is enlarged to the size of a doorknob, to possibly open into a liminal space of another, improved world, perhaps a ‘larger’ place where desires are fulfilled, an ever-expansive transparent space, like an imaginal personal heaven...you participate by opening the door as a co-creator.



Of particular relevance to transparent objects, this type of liminality has been examined by philosopher C.H. Hinton. He describes this membrane as an ‘aether...(which) must then be supposed to have the properties of the surface of a fluid; only, of course, it is a solid three-dimensional surface, not a two-dimensional surface.’ (Hinton, C.H. 1888, p.60) Another dimension becomes apparent as, ‘The noted mathematician Riemann understood that when higher dimension of space are in question, *time, by some means, translates itself into space*, and he regarded the MATERIAL ATOM *as the entrance of the fourth dimension into three dimensional space.*’ (Ouspensky, P.D. 1949, p.42-43) The atom has an iconic presence in the imaginary with its depth psychology of not being readily visible. A fluid surface membrane exists on liquids where they meet the air, and could, in transparency, be visually imagined in ever reducible size until such a mysterious ‘atom’ describes and opens up to both ‘here and there’.

As Bachelard, philosopher of the imagination says, ‘Why does everyone always associate the notion of the individual with form? Is there not an individuality in depth that makes matter a totality, even in its smallest divisions?’ (Bachelard, G. 1983, p.2)

Summary

This chapter takes several case examples of chosen objects to examine the transparent function and its interface with philosophical and spiritual/ theological meaning supported by a series of complementary scholars and religious texts. Transparency as a screen between different types of consciousness is presented, with the transparency of blackness and the iconic function in transparent objects. Heidegger's Being, as an active transcendence is taken to show how the visual metaphor of transparent substance can be perceived as the ground of that being. The transparent atom is presented as an iconic presence of spatial mystery in the psyche. Autobiographical texts expand and describe this cultural religious substance and transparent function in terms of a personal *theologia*. Ficino's relective internal dialogue and Schleiermacher's theory of hermeneutics are taken as starting points for this kind of self-reflexive theological research writing.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

The cultural philosophical theory of Jean Baudrillard is taken as a starting point for looking at the meaning of transparent objects and provides a structural basis for a systemic journey to explore spiritual and religious meaning and the iconic function. Autobiographical writing with a self-reflexive research method is utilised to develop a *theologia* of the transparent function. An eclectic series of objects are examined; the Crystal Cross at Ledbury in Herefordshire, the Aura Soma Balance Bottle Serapis Bey, Kasimir Malevich's Black Square painting and the Chanel No.5 perfume bottle. Transparency as a locus of a 'throughness' with the aspect of a screen is established as a site for mediation of a personal spiritual hermeneutic.

I conclude that transparent objects are the locus of inherently special qualities that easily translate and relate to religious and spiritual expansion, being particularly accessible to the play of astronomical light and as a focus for feelings of divine 'light' or presence. They are 'spaces' that are ether-like, they show us in material form the membrane between dimensions. The membrane itself is invisible, but we can perceive its edge imaginally. This point was seen in the autobiographical experiential writing of the case study of the Crystal Cross in chapter 3.

The oscillation at the edges and gleam of light in transparent objects, with a sense of looking in, through, over and around, allows us in this imaginal way, to touch and experience this membrane between matter, consciousness and spirit. These qualities of transparent objects make them potent forms of 'earth angels' (McNiff, S. 1995) which can minister to us personally, as a consumer, in alternative medicine, within sacred spaces, where it is important to approach them with a sense of play as well as reverence. This point was justified in chapter 2, when we considered how Baudrillard described the 'sliding' of value from the (transparent) reliquary to the relic.

Our own apprehension and/or dialogue about this experience can be both verbal and non-verbal. In each case this can create a hermeneutic that is spiritual, if only at a sense of wonder at such materials, a *theologia*. Our presence/dialogue can fill the ‘spaces’ of transparent objects, penetrate the ‘porous’ membrane and be in a sense ‘held’ within the object to form a hermeneutic of the self, of lived experience. The ‘ground’ of transparency seems to intrinsically produce objects that ‘appear’ from it gemstones, glass, crystal, clear plastic, polymers. This point was justified when we considered Hinton’s philosophy of the atom in the summary to chapter 3.

To describe this experience verbally is to reach this ‘ground’ and in a sense inscribe it with an individuation which goes beyond Carl Jung’s theory of the psyche with its ultimately Christian-nuanced vanishing point of individuation. Within my own *theologia*, cellophane-like pages emerge from this ‘ground’, to form a surface for inscription that is simultaneously of it, a transparent ‘book’ that responds the way cellophane responds to touch, to moisture, moving towards it, moulding itself to the body that inscribes, as in an embrace. Autobiographical experiential writing is used to meet, explore and enclose this space for understanding.

Describing the relationships we have with objects and their cultural meanings the philosopher Jean Baudrillard in his book *Système des Objets* , shows how historically in a classical interior all is reflected towards the protective and cherished centre point. The transparent object with its quality of ‘throughness’ and in its ‘shapeshifting’ can extend its *theologia* in any direction. The function of the icon is the pivot of this connection, which acts as a bridge, or cascade of relation between antiquity, modernity and the postmodern. With icons being sites of repeated mediation for the *pneuma*, breath or spirit, they have an opacity that is simultaneously ‘transparent’ in their breadth of ‘throughness’ and ‘opening out’ reflecting back to the contemplator. This quality and function is seen in the development of twentieth century modern painting, most particularly perhaps in the artists Kasimir Malevich and Mark Rothko. This point was demonstrated in the experiential autobiographical writing relating to Yves Klein’s International Klein Blue painting, in the case study of Malevich’s Black Square painting in chapter 3.

The combination of transparent material and iconic shape/cultural status of an object can give it a complicated dynamic and the seductive qualities of transparent material makes it particularly potent as a fetish for the self/Self. This was demonstrated when we considered the case study of the Chanel No. 5 perfume bottle in chapter 3. Baudrillard's philosophical writings on the object and discourse on glass in particular, contribute significantly to the understanding and apprehension of transparent objects. He paves the way for further theological understanding with his description of the paradox and transcendence inherent in glass, simultaneously content and container. The seduction of a plethora of mass-produced glass and clear plastic objects, magically extruded, shiny, many-coloured, fluorescent, can unconsciously constellate a false hermeneutic of spirituality in the consumer, which ultimately is likely to confuse— an imposing of layers of meaning and mystery, with an 'I/we have made this' message from the manufacturer. Dazzled, we forget that we co-creators, makers of our own meanings, unless we consciously are aware that no-one can appropriate 'our' membrane experience.

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