

Reality is a relation between those sensations and those memories which simultaneously encircle us”
Proust.

"It is not just a question of memories themselves. They must first all get into our bloodstream. For only when their looks and gestures have become nameless and indistinguishable from ourselves can it happen that, at rare moments, the first word of a verse arises in their midst and detaches itself from them.."

Rilke

It is thus we create form, out of context; and beyond it the distillation of form that we call art. Culture relies on context and memory. Form arises out of habit-out of the familiar. Our metaphors and images, are the do-it-yourself constructions that mark our struggle to move from subjective to objective; to move from our reality to a knowledge of the eternal: the sky is like... a roof and Switzerland is like my well known English Derbyshire but bigger.

Thus we have Tang camels, African masks, Peruvian pipes and curry. Endless variations wrought out of different context and experience.

And now it is Post-Modern; the melting pot of culture- Greek columns grafted onto Le Corbusier and Indiana Jones tinkering with the Holy Grail.

I write all this because (and this is not a new story, but newly considered) a child in an inner city town was asked to draw a chicken by his teacher and, eager to

please, he gave of his best and proudly presented his creation- complete as he knew chickens, with plastic bag- trussed and supermarketed. Reality is, you see...

So, I wish to argue, culture is reliant on context of experience. We sophisticate the idea, but impoverish the experience: I stood in a dirty Paris metro and watched television and people skied on virgin snow in brilliant sunshine; the serpent's whispered promise as we bit deep of this tree of knowledge.

And what do my children of this age of miracles and wonder make of this- my obedient and hard-working classes to whom I flash shadows of thirteen century icons and speak of my oh-so-long-ago childhood of some twenty winters where there were still people who didn't leave the village- except for at Christmas to buy the gifts from far-away Nottingham (ten miles) that were changing there lives? "Yes, *but I'm going to be a car designer*".

A sweet lady comes to help me clean; she cannot read and works so that her son may have the education that she lacks. Separated from husband and son by education. She worked on Christmas day.

Here, at the end of January, I am looking for Christmas; in between the deriding of the actual, orgiastic frenzy of buying- this that is the the real experience of

twentieth century grail seeking- and the memory of a pagan tree taken from the forest, bearing a vague odour of roast turkey and accompanied by the far off voice of school carols.

Christmas has become for me the lighting of candles at midnight to the opening bars of Bach's Christmas Oratorio.

In between the Buddha and the concentration camps. In between Mecca and imported snow in Los Angeles; in between the ancient, inappropriate forms and modern disbelief; in between this modern explosion of processing and the prayer wheel. Here, after This Birthday and before Easter or Ramadan, I wish you a moment's enlightenment and divine grace through your symbols and the world tolerance and humility before other people's-

"moved as he was solely by the desire for truth, and by the suspicion- which I could see he always harboured- that the truth was not what was appearing to him at any given moment.."

The Name of the Rose

Happy year!

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