Ibn al-ʿArabī and Joseph Campbell

Akbarian Mythology and the Metaphysics of Contemporary Art

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There is something magical about films. The person you are looking at is also somewhere else at the same time. That is a condition of the god. If a movie actor comes into the theater, everybody turns and looks at the movie actor. He is the real hero of the occasion. He is on another plane. He is a multiple presence.

What you are seeing on the screen really isn't he, and yet the 'he' comes. Through the multiple forms, the form of forms out of which all of this comes is right there.[1]

When God provides someone with a love for Him that is like His love for that person, He bestows upon him witnessing and He gives him bliss through witnessing Him in the forms of the things.[2]

Indeed, how vast is the presence of imagination, wherein appears the impossible. Rather, nothing appears in it save the impossible. For the necessary existent, which is God may He be exalted, is above delimitation through images and yet manifests in such forms in this presence![3]

The fluctuations of the heart are reminiscent of the divine manifestations in various forms![4]

1. Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York, Anchor Books/ Random House, 1991), p. 20.

2. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (Egypt, 1911) IV:260. Also William Chittick, 'The Divine Roots of Human Love', in *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society* (*JMIAS*) 17 (1995).

3. *Fut*.II:312.

4. *Fut*.I:289.

The contemporary relevance of Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought has not been lost on specialists and enthusiasts alike. Works like Coates' *Ibn ʿArabi and Modern Thought*[5] and Almond's *Sufism and Deconstruction*[6] highlight the similarities between the Andalusian mystic's writings and those of various foundational philosophers and thinkers in modernity, from Carl Jung to Jacques Derrida. Meanwhile, Hirtenstein's *The Unlimited Mercifier*,[7] Morris' *Orientations*[8] and numerous other articles emphasize the continuous relevance the Shaykh's Weltanschauung has for our religious, social and political challenges in modernity.

In this article, I would like to journey into the pertinence of Ibn al-ʿArabī's divine illumination for our understanding of contemporary art and culture, especially as outlined in Joseph Campbell's seminal work, *The Power of Myth*. We will have recourse to highlight the importance of this thinker and his influence on modern film and philosophy of art in general. For now, it is worthwhile mentioning the lacuna that exists in Ibn ʿArabī studies pertaining to the relevance of his vision of *khayāl* (imagination) as a means for appreciating the sacrality of modern art and culture.[9] Harold Bloom provides an instance of this affinity by stating that 'Ibn ʿArabī and the other Sufi sages … help us to define the imaginal realm in Shakespeare'.[10]

One creative attempt by an academic specialist to engage the Andalusian mystic's thought with modern film emerges in Ogunnaike's 'Inception and Ibn ʿArabi'. As the author describes, he creatively presents Christopher Nolan's movie *Inception* and

5. Peter Coates, *Ibn al-ʿArabi and Modern Thought: The History of Taking Metaphysics Seriously* (Oxford, Anqa Publishing, 2002).

6. Ian Almond, *Sufism and Deconstruction* (New York, Routledge, 2004).

7. Stephen Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier* (Oxford, Anqa Publishing, 1999).

8. James Morris, *Orientations* (London, Archetype Publications, 2010).

9. In this regard, particular mention should be made of the contributions of MIAS-Latina and the annual Barzaj Prize they award to artists who produce works that engage the Shaykh's thought.

10. Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ʿArabi* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1969), preface by Harold Bloom, p. xiv.

the writings of Ibn ʿArabī as 'mirrors in which to contemplate each other'.[11] As expected, Ogunnaike focuses on key themes common to both Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought and Nolan's masterpiece, such as imagination, dreams, reality and interpretation. As a rare contribution in this genre, 'Inception and Ibn ʿArabi' is groundbreaking not only in its comparative analysis, but also in the case it makes for more needed work in this area of research.

In this light, by comparing Ibn al-ʿArabī's vision with Campbell's *The Power of Myth*, my objective is not to engage the Andalusian mystic's thought with any single film or art work, but rather to use it as a lens through which modern art generally can be appreciated as a resurgence of the pre-modern 'sacred art' and genuine medium for engaging divinity through *ʿālam al-khayāl* (the imaginal realm). In turn, this attempt will hopefully furnish the theoretical foundation for a later, more extensive, comparative study between Akbarian metaphysics and specific instances in the fine, moving and auditory arts of our time.[12]

For many, the notion of a sacred modern art might seem absurd, or even contradictory. This sentiment is expressed succinctly by René Guénon in *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*:

> All art is in its origin essentially symbolical and ritual, and only through a late degeneration, indeed a very recent degeneration, has it lost its sacred character so as to become at last the purely profane 'recreation' to which it has been reduced among our contemporaries.[13]

11. Oludamini Ogunnaike, 'Inception and Ibn ʿArabi', in *Journal of Religion & Film*, Vol. 17, Issue 2 No. 10 (2013), p. 44.

12. This, in fact, is my ultimate objective behind writing this article: to briefly explore the theoretical pertinence of the Shaykh's writings as a lens through which to appreciate the sacred nature of modern art. In this light, the research presented here will be an introductory section in a larger monograph where Ibn al-ʿArabī's concepts are compared with specific examples from contemporary media productions. These include film, music, video games, poetry, painting and sculpture from both eastern and western cultures.

13. René Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* (New York, Sophia Perennis, 1995), p. 149.

And yet, we are reminded of the fascinating anecdote involving Ibn al-ʿArabī, mentioned by Claude Addas in *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, wherein the Shaykh states: 'I was carrying something disgusting in my hands … a foul stench of salt fish was emanating from it.' Once reprimanded by his peers for carrying such a foul thing that contended with his 'social rank', he responded by saying: 'I saw that God, in spite of His Greatness, did not disdain to create such a thing. How then am I to disdain to carry it?'[14]

Addas correctly presents this anecdote as proof that, for the Andalusian mystic, 'there is not one single substance (*jawhar fard*) in the entire universe – at however high or low a level – which is not linked to a divine reality (*ḥaqīqa ilāhiyya*)'.[15] How can modern art, then, which often contrasts with its pre-modern counterpart in its non-religious – sometimes even sacrilegious – content and style, akin to the foul object the Shaykh carried, be perceived as something 'linked to a divine reality'? As Ibn al-ʿArabī enjoins us always, the key to such an insight resides in liberating our appreciation of contemporary art from the contending forms, or even the varying intentions of the artists, and focuses instead on the underlying spirit which hearkens to the same *tajalliyāt* (manifestations) appearing then and now.

In order to provide an example of such an appreciation, I would like to recount a personal experience while visiting the Art Institute in Chicago during the summer of 2010. While there, I stumbled upon a large biographical work on Henri Matisse and his philosophical approach to painting. Included within was a dialogue between Matisse and one of his students. The master and disciple seemed to disagree on the proper way to approach an object of painting, which in this case was a fish – an ironic homage to Ibn al-ʿArabī's anecdote above. Matisse wanted his student to master the fish's spirit by painting it according to his own imagination. Meanwhile, the student wanted to stand aloof, as an observer, and hearken for that moment when the

14. Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur* (Cambridge, UK, Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p. 48.

15. Ibid.

fish reveals its true self to the artist. In other words, he wanted to be a listener and not a voice who speaks on behalf of life.

After a lengthy debate, Matisse sought to inculcate in his student a powerful message that circumvented their relationship as teacher and student. He informed his disciple of Cézanne's recommendation to any beginning artist: that they should visit the Louvre and stand solemnly at each and every work of art and listen respectfully until the deceased spirit of the artist speaks through the traces of their works and accepts the seeker as a student. This mystical anecdote was enriched by my having recently read of the passing of Leonardo da Vinci, who was embracing his masterpiece 'Mona Lisa' at that moment. The king is said to have instructed his guards to keep the painting close to the artist's bosom, at least until the latter's spirit was fully transferred to the art work.

The epiphany I had upon contemplating my interactions with da Vinci and Matisse was that a museum is essentially a modern reincarnation of the mausoleum complex, a place where seekers go to communicate with the spirits of saints and search for a type of identity. Engseng Ho assigns this precise purpose to the shrine complex of Zanbal, in the valley of Ḥaḍramawt, Yemen. There, *muwallad*s (descendants of the interred saints) return, from the Indian subcontinent, to perform a pilgrimage at the tombs of their ancestors, a journey that 'deepens [their] ancestral and religious identity'.[16] Interestingly, Louis Ruprecht highlights in 'Caught between Enlightenment and Romanticism' that a similar discourse on 'national identity' 'was housed most effectively in modern public art museums'.[17]

Ruprecht recounts the 'pilgrimages' of poets like Keats to privately housed antiquities, such as the Elgin Marbles in London, whereupon he had 'a kind of spiritual awakening that takes him

16. Engseng Ho, *Graves of Tarim* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006), p. 231.

17. Louis Ruprecht, 'Caught between Enlightenment and Romanticism: On the Complex Relation of Religious, Ethnic, and Civic Identity in a Modern "Museum Culture"', in *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*, eds. Carl Ernst and Richard Martin (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2010), p. 214.

very nearly to a place beyond words'.[18] In such places, Ruprecht contends, 'pilgrims … inevitably fall into a state of worshipful, ecstatic inspiration and Romantic epiphany'.[19] With this eloquent description, Ruprecht delivers us to Campbell's doorstep, who describes 'the myth' as '[that which] brings us into a level of consciousness that is spiritual',[20] 'clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life'[21] and – most pertinent for our discussion – 'teaches you what's behind literature and the arts'.[22] Campbell may as well be reiterating Ruprecht's poetization of Keats' visit to antiquities with his description of the mythology of Native Indian hunting rituals, as 'mystical journeys … in another world … [where] there are special shrines that represent stages of mental transformation on the way'.[23]

Campbell makes the intimate relationship between mythology and art clear throughout *The Power of Myth*. He tells us that mythology is 'the homeland of the muses, the inspirers of art, the inspirers of poetry'.[24] However, he also emphasizes the social agency of this spiritual consciousness of mythology by stating that 'to see life as a poem and yourself participating in a poem is what the myth does for you',[25] a fitting homage for a poet like Keats and his embodied poetic journey to housed antiquities. Campbell elaborates further on the interconnectedness of art and mythology within an individual's search for meaning by referencing Shakespeare, who 'said that "art is a mirror held up to nature" … The nature is your nature, and all of these wonderful poetic images of mythology are referring to something in you'.[26] Ultimately, this is because 'the myth … gives you a line to connect with that mystery which you are'.[27]

18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Campbell, *Power of Myth*, p. 19.
21. Ibid. p. 5.
22. Ibid. p. 14.
23. Ibid. p. 17.
24. Ibid. p. 65.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid. p. 68.
27. Ibid.

We already perceive in such statements an Akbarian spirit and reference to one of the most frequently recurring threads in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings, pertaining to the identity of the human being's inner microcosm with the universe's larger macrocosm. This is clear in one, among countless, excerpts from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, where the Shaykh tells us that 'the human being is *al-kalima al-jāmiʿa* [encompassing word] and *nuskhat al-ʿālam* [copy of the world]. For everything that is in the world is already a part of him/her, while the inverse is not true'.[28] He also explains in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* the intimate purpose of this mirroring in light of the human being's rank as the objective behind divine creativity: 'He founded the world in its entirety as an undifferentiated bodily form, without spirit like an unclear mirror. Then, Adam became the essence of that mirror's clarity and spirit of that form.'[29]

Although we are able to perceive here threads of communication between Ibn al-ʿArabī and Campbell in their reliance upon similar motifs and images, such as the 'mirror' and the human being's inner mystery, we still need to decipher the extent to which the latter's notions of 'myth' and 'art' exist and have currency in the Shaykh's vision. A possible entry point for this investigation is through the vast gate of Ibn al-ʿArabī's understanding of *shiʿr* (poetry), which Campbell provides as an instance of art, and the Shaykh's use of the myth, as spiritual consciousness, to help the reader appreciate the *ḥaqīqa* of poetry:

> Indeed, poetry is from speech. Thus, it belongs to the category of *al-anfās* [breaths] … For this reason, let us return to *al-nafas al-raḥmānī* [the merciful breath] from which emerged the letters of living entities and words of this world, according to the various ranks of the pronunciation of letters from the breath of the human being who breathes; the most perfect of all created things in this world.[30]

28. *Fut*.I:136.

29. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (Beirut, Dar al-Kitab al-ʿArabi, 2002), p. 49.

30. *Fut*.II:394.

If the myth, as Campbell tells us, is a 'mystical journey in another world', then Ibn al-ʿArabī has taken us in this excerpt on a majestic iteration of such a saga. Likewise, the Shaykh's analogy between the human and divine breaths goes to the heart of Campbell's definition of the myth as that 'which gives you a line to connect with that mystery which you are'.

More than that, this vast mythologized vision of Ibn al-ʿArabī, to which this excerpt is a mere allusion, actually provides more details than Campbell does of the specific role that poetry, as an instance of art, plays in the mythologized world of the spiritual consciousness. For the Andalusian mystic, *shiʿr* (poetry) is an emblem of *kalām* (speech) and, in turn, *nafas* (breath). It is the constant movement of *shahīq* (inhalation) and *zafīr* (exhalation) that characterizes the tones of human breaths, and from which emanates the symphony of poetry, that the Shaykh is able to draw the intimate analogy of *al-nafas al-raḥmānī* (merciful breath), or *nafas al-raḥmān* (breath of the most merciful), as the incessant series of divine exhalations and inhalations that animate the universe.

Ibn al-ʿArabī further enriches this portrayal of poetry while discussing an ancient mythological journey, the *miʿrāj* (ascension), in a third-person narrative. There, the Shaykh associates some aspects of *shiʿr* with the figure of Jesus and second heaven:

> [This heaven] is the presence of *khiṭāba* [eloquent address], *awzān* [poetic meters], *ḥusn mawāqiʿ al-kalām* [the beautiful stations of speech], *imtizāj al-umūr* [the mixture of affairs] and *ẓuhūr al-maʿnā al-wāḥid fī-l – ṣuwar al-kathīra* [the appearance of one meaning in many forms]. He [traveler] also obtains the *furqān* [clarification] in regard to the level of *kharq al-ʿawā'id* [breaking of the habits].[31]

Campbell would most probably agree with Ibn al-ʿArabī's association of poetic meters with 'the appearance of one meaning in many forms', for that is how the former also explains the magic behind films: 'Through the multiple forms, the form of forms out of which all of this comes is right there.'

31. *Fut*.II:274.

And yet, the Shaykh's ability to draw the mythological dimensions of poetry and its harmony with the human composition does not end here. Elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt*, he reveals the secret of this affinity, which for him revolves around the figure of Jesus, who is the custodian of the second heaven:

> Know that the existent things are *kalimāt Allāh* [words of God] that do not cease. God, may He be exalted, said regarding the being of Jesus, peace be upon him, that he is: 'His Word which He sent to Mary' which is Jesus, peace be upon him. It is for this reason that we said that the existent things are the words of God. This is from the aspect of *al-dalāla al-samʿiyya* [auditory proof], lest people do not believe us in what we claim to have been revealed to us or through divine instruction.
>
> Moreover, the words known in human custom form via *naẓm al-ḥurūf* [the assemblage of letters], which takes place through the breath that exits disconnected from the one who speaks, according to *al-makhārij* [pronunciation places]. It is in this way, according to these disconnected breaths, that the essences of letters appear in special measures and words come into being.[32]

In this way, Ibn al-ʿArabī embodies the sacred role of speech, and implicitly poetry, in a creative and layered approach. First, he tells us that the existent things are the words of God, a fact that, when combined with his portrayal of speech as emanating forth from breaths, means that the entire universe is a result of divine exhalations and inhalations. Second, not only is Jesus son of Mary one instance of these *anfās* of God, dressed in a body, but he himself also embodies and performs this divine movement by blowing breaths upon birds of clay and dead bodies in order to bring them back to life.

Putting together these two aspects of speech, breaths and their relationship to Jesus, in the *Futūḥāt* leads us to the following reflective query: if all of creation consists of nothing but God's words that 'do not cease', and it emerges from the incessant divine breaths and moves between the eternal inhalations and exhalations according to the specific *aqdār* (measures), or to

32. *Fut*.II:390.

use the Shaykh's term: *isti'dādāt* (dispositions), allotted to each Word, then can we not also say that Ibn al-'Arabī would consider all of creation expressions of divine poetry? If the entire universe emerges from *nafas al-raḥmān* (the breath of the merciful), the *tanfīs al-karb* (release/alleviation of a calamity) which was bestowed upon creation as a performance of unveiling *al-kanz al-makhfī* (the hidden treasure), wouldn't the Shaykh also concur that human creativity is nothing but an intimate mimesis, that highest form of flattery, of the divine creative process?

Ultimately, we can describe the creative process exactly as Ibn al-'Arabī describes the emergence of speech – and poetry – as a formed expression of the meanings that reside in the soul of the artist. In this regard, both the Shaykh and Campbell would agree that this cosmic art, both inside and outside the human being, is a matrix of metaphors that alludes to the 'spiritual consciousness'. The latter makes this conviction vivid in statements such as: 'the myths are metaphorical of spiritual potentiality in the human being, and the same powers that animate our life.'[33] However, it is also at this point that Campbell and Ibn al-'Arabī part ways, for their perceptions of the reality of the metaphors and what resides beyond them is clearly disparate. This is clear when Campbell is asked: 'So, there is no such thing as the Garden of Eden?' to which he responds: 'Of course not. The Garden of Eden is a metaphor for that innocence that is innocent of time, innocent of opposites.'[34]

In contrast, Ibn al-'Arabī would probably agree with David Brown who sets out in his masterful work *God and Mystery in Words*: *Experience through Metaphor and Drama* to prove the tagline in the heading: metaphors in religious – and for our purposes cosmic – literature are not merely allusions to the divine experience, but actual paths to it. This is eloquently stated by the author in the following excerpt concerning the Christian sacraments:

33. Campbell, *Power of Myth*, p. 28.
34. Ibid. p. 59.

> Symbols are but enacted metaphors, and so body and blood could be viewed under either heading. But that does not mean that they are just metaphors or just symbols. They are the means whereby Christ's human presence is mediated to the believer once more, and for that to be experienced it is important that the richness of such imagery be allowed its full force.[35]

Thus, unlike Campbell's metaphor, which serves a temporary and illusive purpose in the seeker's journey towards the meaning or mystery that resides beyond it, Brown views it as a crucial window through which the meaning or mystery is mediated and channelled, from the ineffable to the expressible.

Meanwhile, the Andalusian mystic further extends the importance of the metaphor beyond facilitating the divine experience, and regards it as an indispensable component of its spirit. Concerning the role of the metaphor, or as the Shaykh would term it: *ʿibra* (expression), in mediating the journey to God, Ibn al-ʿArabī states in the *Futūḥāt*:

> And so, I have opened up for you the *iʿtibār* [taking heed] according to the *sharīʿa*, and it is the passage from the form which manifests its property in the sensory domain to what is interrelated in your essence, or at the Side of the Real, from among that which signifies God. This is the figurative meaning of *iʿtibār*. It is like 'You have *ʿabarta* [crossed over] the valley when you have forded it and traversed it.'[36]

> This is why He made this life a *ʿibra* [example], or bridge *yuʿbar* [crossed]. This means [in reality] *tuʿabbar* [to be interpreted], just as dreams that human beings see while sleeping are interpreted.[37]

As is expected, the Shaykh poetically converges the etymological intimacy between *ʿubūr* (crossing over) and *taʿbīr* (interpretation) to render the kaleidoscopic forms of creation as paths

35. David Brown, *God and Mystery in Words*: *Experience through Metaphor and Drama* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 9.

36. *Fut*.I:347.

37. *Fut*.I:207.

which can and should be traversed, via interpretation, to their ultimate meanings, *fī janāb al-Ḥaqq* (at the side of the Real).

Although Ibn al-ʿArabī remarks, following the above statement, that this world 'is not intended for its own sake, but for its root in the divine presence',[38] Ralph Austin emphasizes the importance of the cosmic *ṣuwar* (images and forms) in the Shaykh's vision of the drama of divine manifestations, in the specific context of nature's ceremonious dress in the season of Spring:

> …when the divine munificence in nature is once more so gloriously manifest after the rigour and cold of icy winter, since both concepts have to do with the affirmation of the world, the cosmos and its relationship with its Creator, rather than with those more world-negating strictures of higher, spiritual aspiration which seek to blot out its seductions.[39]

In other words, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, it is not only the 'mystery' or 'spiritual consciousness' – to use Campbell's terms – of the presence of divine names and attributes that have a root 'at the side of the Real', but the forms and images themselves, as vessels for containing drops from the oceans of names, also perform and affirm the Essence's infinitude and *iṭlāq* (absoluteness), as they depart from *al-ʿadam al-muqayyad* (delimited non-existence) of immutability, to their temporary abode of contingent existence and then to their final residence in *al-ʿadam al-muṭlaq* (absolute non-existence), to make room for the next flood of forms emanating from the presence of theophanies.

The root of art, at the side of the Real, is nothing but this unfolding of the divine treasure in an endless play of forms on the cosmic stage. Any natural or human-made imitation of this primordial narrative, manifest in the plethora of art forms we experience, is close or far from its divine root according to the purity of its content and awareness of that origin. However, as Addas highlights above, the absence of the content's purity or

38. Ibid.

39. Ralph Austin, 'Image and Presence in the Thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī', in *JMIAS* 12 (1992).

cognizance of the divine root from the intention of the human artist does not negate its divine origin, as Campbell insists. Rather, it becomes the task of those with the aesthetic *lubb* (spiritual center) to undertake the project of *tadhkira* (reminding) human beings of the inevitable source and ultimate destination of their aesthetic *dhikr* (remembrance/memory), from which emanate all artistic productions.

When Campbell is asked: 'where are the sacred places today?' he responds bluntly that 'they don't exist', save for a few historical sites that serve as a memory of a time when such sanctified places predominated on the planet.[40] Ibn al-ʿArabī, on the other hand, reminds us that every place and person in creation, at all times, is inherently sacred and that sacrality fully blooms once they successfully remind us of the divine root. Art, in this regard, is a stage for a dramatic play where the actors are special signposts that serve as great reminders of *al-janāb al-ilāhī*, if it is approached and appreciated by the insight of the aesthetic spirit. Where art seems to function in Ibn al-ʿArabī's vision is as the window into the *ḥayra* (perplexity) of creation, in a continuous movement between existence and non-existence, *huwa/lā huwa*.

'Reality is perplexity, perplexity is anxiety and movement and movement is life … no stillness, no death. Only being and no nihility!'[41] That is the abode of art, between the suffering of distance, 'the rigor and cold of icy winter', and redemption of nearness, 'the affirmation of Spring'; both the constrictive beginning and expansive culmination 'affirm the cosmos and its relationship with its Creator'. If Campbell's preliminary outline of our 'spiritual consciousness' and its emergence in the myth of our outward existence so inspired George Lucas that he embodied it in what John Caputo aptly termed 'a reproduction of classic myth', *Star Wars*,[42] then how much more insightful

40. Ibid.

41. *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 199.

42. Bill Moyers often discusses Campbell's influence on Lucas, as a mentor, inspiration and motivation behind *Star Wars*: 'Lucas and Campbell had become good friends after the filmmaker, acknowledging a debt to Campbell's work, invited the scholar to view the *Star Wars* trilogy. Campbell

is Ibn al-ʿArabī's *ḥayra* of *tajalliyāt* and *wujūd* as a lens through which to appreciate Lucas' 'force', which Yoda describes as that which 'Life [*al-Ḥayy*] creates … makes it grow. Its energy surrounds us and binds us. Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter. You must feel the Force around you. Here, between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere!'[43]

In the *Mysticism of Sound and Music*, Hazrat Inayat Khan begins by asking: 'Why is music called the divine art? … [Because] sound alone is free from form.'[44] This initial eloquent attempt to glean the various art forms from their divine roots blooms in the mystic's later statement that 'what the art of painting cannot clearly suggest, poetry explains in words, but that which even a poet finds difficult to express in poetry, is expressed in music'.[45] This particular sentiment finds harmony in Ibn al-ʿArabī's Weltanschauung, as the latter also describes poetry as 'the abode of comprehensiveness, symbols, allusions and insinuations'.[46] In this light, Hazrat Inayat Khan's preliminary outline paves the way for us to undertake a later, more extensive, project of situating the divine root of these various art forms (painting, poetry and music) within Ibn al-ʿArabī's vision.

Our contemporary world has experienced – and continues to experience – drastic and fast-changing developments in art forms and styles. In the realm of film alone, we have witnessed a flourishing of the 'superhero' genre, the success of which

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reveled in the ancient themes and motifs of mythology unfolding on the wide screen in powerful contemporary images. On this particular visit, having again exulted over the perils and heroics of Luke Skywalker, Joe grew animated as he talked about how Lucas "has put the newest and most powerful spin" to the classic story of the hero' (Campbell, *Power of Myth*, p. xiii).

43. George Lucas, *Star Wars*: *The Empire Strikes Back* (Washington, DC, Lucasfilm, 1980).

44. Hazrat Inayat Khan, *The Mysticism of Sound and Music*: *The Sufi Teaching of Hazrat Inayat Khan* (Boston, Shambhala Publications, 1991), p. 2.

45. Ibid. p. 4.

46. *Fut*.I:56.

should be partially attributed to *Star Wars*, a saga that continues to live in its eighth iteration. Why are the masses so fascinated and willing to pay millions to watch endless reincarnations of *Ironman*, *Thor*, *Spiderman*, *Black Panther*, *Superman* and *Batman*? Perhaps these figures are great visual signposts of the sacred human potential, as a perplexing nexus between the finitude of bodies and infinitude of the divine spirit, and our struggle against the suffering and 'rigor of the cold icy winter' of evil villainy, while striving for the redemption, 'affirmation' and triumph of goodness.

Perhaps there is also a similar reason why the motif of 'zombie apocalypse' has flourished in productions like *The Walking Dead*,[47] *Z-Nation*[48] and *World War Z*,[49] for this latter genre reminds us subconsciously, and unequivocally gruesomely, of a certain chaos in forms, the fear of their inevitable transition to absolute non-existence. This theme has likewise found other, more colourful expressions, in recent video games like *The Last of Us*[50] and *Horizon*: *Zero Dawn*,[51] where the unrelenting misery of annihilation is eventually overwhelmed by the redemption of the mythic hero who redeems their forsaken world somehow, through an act of kindness. Indeed, the medium of video games has long shed the reputation of 'empty entertainment'; this much is clear in *Thatgamecompany'*s masterful virtualization of *taḥqīq* in their game *Journey*.[52]

And so, the contemporary cultural soil is fertile for a meaningful engagement with Ibn al-ʿArabī's divine illumination. What the Shaykh can grant us in this journey is a spiritual prism through which our most revered artistic cultural forms can be unveiled and witnessed as mimesis of that primordial divine theater. This is also a call to liberate modern art from the censures of unrooted religious law, in order to deliver it to the

47. David Alpert and Gale Hurd, *The Walking Dead* (2010).

48. Craig Engler and Karl Schaefer, *Z Nation* (2014).

49. Matthew Carnahan, Drew Goddard et al., *World War Z* (London, 2013).

50. Neil Druckmann, *The Last of Us* (2014).

51. John Gonzales, Ben Schroder et al., *Horizon*: *Zero Dawn* (2017).

52. Robin Hunicke and Kellee Santiago, *Journey* (2012).

shore of *Dīn al-Ḥaqq*, where even an artistic expression as foul as the fish Ibn al-ʿArabī carried can be appreciated as a vessel of divine care and the merciful gaze. Campbell also instructs us that 'artists communicate the myth today … they have to understand mythology and humanity';[53] between him and Ibn al-ʿArabī we come to understand that the complete artist is a perfect saint, and both are portraits of the Perfect Man.

53. Campbell, *Power of Myth*, p.122.