DANCE DANCE like
freaks—the Xian lady calls you—
like sideshow Indians
animals
can glide along
the earth o you reptilian
gods you twisted faces scraping
those turtle bodies
(rattles)
down longhouse floor

Clayton Eshleman

ARCHAI

They came,
my mother and father
were pressed into their vaginal folds,
today they appear to be
the entrance to a cave called Niaux,
they are
what is behind the French Bank on Wilshire Boulevard,
their life
is mixed in what is most present, ephemeral,
and what is behind
being old, a child with several layers of skin,
I can see through the black
parking-lot attendant reading Frank Yerby,
in the spine is Aime Cesaire
and if we could open Cesaire full circle
an animal clock would appear,
my time could be told
by the amount of minutes in the balls,
by what has run down
through my eyes into my lees,
my wine cellar, where my mother and father
still alive grow until they are opened—
if as a wound they will evaporate,
if as Carry a dream increases in my flesh,
the dream of a cave where the animal visions are
enchaste in stone the grandparents of stained
cathedral glass. They made the cave,
before them the earth
was compact, a looking-glass, unenterable.
They saw through their reflection,
they bit the dust mirror, slowly
they began to climb into their skeleton,
a worship, a place of worship, words
then were two feet thick
like the walls of the Staronova Synagogue in Prague,
windows were hesitant,
narrow and deep-set eyes,
rainbow was what they did,
what fell through them
bubbled on the floor—if there was a floor—
sometimes there was ocean,
sometimes there was origin,
a dark red soundless glare,
orgasm was the morning hiked
and behind aurora’s veil
the sprint of maggots felt like a splint,
something strong, thin, a kind of wince
that could be bound to pain,
levels of pain were compost
and they actually fucked where they sowed,
Death had not yet disappeared
so in its house they spent their afternoons,
its structure was sunset
wholly carnivorous, eating flora
as night’s mouth closed, vaginal-anal,
virginal, fresh. I see them
at times in the double eyes in chance
or in woodwork, or in flowers,
or in clouds, or in anything
that does not seem to intend seeing.
What did they do? They came,
with the most elaborate head-dresses,
their minds trailed behind them nearly
to the ground, their minds
were braided so they could braid
the manes of the powers, thunder
and lice, or open sore

and sor-row, the Noh
ghost hears them at times repeating
wot
his
sor
row.
But then rows away, a wave-man like us,
endless, prolegomenon.

ARCHAI LINK

Shape in
the cyclone at
ox-rib. A scratch,
A core meandering.
An acorn, forced,
Let me open is still our cry
as if we are back of the sun,
I’m not bitter. It’s just that I am still at
ox-rib. A nut-like flavor
where I think I should yield
mass. Or glory. Starting
41 years ago
4000 years too late,
With the anger of three zeros,
with historical need
to see myself backwards, as if I
were a line
vegetal-certain
but which ended with a root,
As if my shape
grasped my condition
instead of merely responding
as if there were a center
yoked to
the material around it,
cutting into, thus with walls,
securities, deposits,
a quarry out of which
my figure is specific, meander,
but with a core, as if I could not
merely travel
a line in stone, a tiger forehead
finding its way through Les Combarelles
is linked to stallion, a stalled lion, snake, since the forehead line is crossed by a bearclaw, a hut is made, nothing in mind goes on and on, leaves lay Persian on colorless ground, passionately I appeared with Cary to step toward the entrance under trees shit themselves upward, then relaxed chips, the man they stamped me with, father, the center of clarity, there would be a grail chips, the forehead line is crossed, since the crunch was getting to the hole, in which I saw arms, like a ring about a coffee-cup, linked, love, the word, is so burned out it starts like a ring about a coffee-cup, linked, inhalation, there is a grail was and is a lie, and the only parts we are shown now star man.

Harold Cohen

THE MATERIAL OF SYMBOLS

Karin and Sherry are seven year-old twin sisters. They are both in the habit of carrying large bags of colored pens and pencils with them wherever they go, and at every possible opportunity they sit down on the floor and start to make drawings. Those illustrated here (1,2) are entirely typical of their work. Their output is certainly well above average in quantity, but the drawings themselves are in no major respect typical of the sort of drawings which most Western children might make at some period of their development.

On the same afternoon that these drawings were made, I proposed a game to them: I would cover sheets of paper with dots, and they would make their drawings by joining up the dots (3,4). They both took to the game with obvious enjoyment, but also with an unexpected attention to the structural constraints imposed upon their performance by these new rules, which they promptly investigated. One of them wanted to know whether it was permitted to leave some of the dots unused. The other asked whether she was allowed to use the dots as eyes, if she was drawing a face, and in due course she contrived to use the dots also as Christmas tree decorations, snowflakes, sunbeams, and a number of other unspecified objects which she said were falling from the sky (3). In both cases - and I do not believe that this is part of their normal procedure - each drawing was followed by a long verbal account of the subject matter. After an hour or so the game ended, and they returned to their habitual mode.

There are a number of formal differences in the drawings which result from the two modes which might be dealt with at some length. Their normal procedure underlies the plane of the paper to represent some sort of coherent spatial unity, corresponding very roughly to what we might call a "view". In some of the dotted drawings this practise gives way to a more elemental approach, in which the plane of the paper is used in a manner largely neutral with respect to the images, and the images are disposed upon it without regard to any concept of "natural" ordering in the real world. By the way, these results are quite consistent with the results of a more extensive set of similar experiments with a drawing class at OC San Diego. The students there were up to forty years older than Karin and Sherry, and their habitual modes involved different conventions to those of the children; but they were certainly no less conventional.)

But the more immediately noticeable differences between the two modes relate less to the formal aspects of the drawings than to the level of imagination and inventiveness which Sherry and Karin exercise in making them. When Karin decides to sign her name in a manner appropriate to the game (4), she is making a witty comment about the nature of drawing at a level of insightfulness we might not expect from a seven year-old. If we compare the bird in one of her dot-drawings (5) with the drawing of a duck made just half an hour before by the fact that she is evidently capable of rather acute observation, although it required the setting up of unfamiliar challenging circumstances to allow her to exercise that capability. What becomes clear, in fact, is that there is a significant difference between an image of a bird, and an image of an image of a bird. The earlier drawing is less a duck than it is a toy duck, less the result of observing what the real world is like than it is the result of learning what drawings - of the world - are supposed to look like. It is conventional in the precise sense that its conventions are the common property of that sub-culture we call children, where their stability is maintained both by the children's desire to conform and by the adult desire that they should.

Fig 5

I incline strongly to the view that we all spend our lives - not merely our childhood - trying to effect an acceptable and workable compromise between the internal demands for the satisfaction of our individual psychic needs, and the demands made upon us by the culture within which we live, for the sake of the stability. If not necessarily the ultimate well-being, of the culture itself. This is not to say that the things we do draw as children are devoid of importance, that they do not grow from the most fundamental patterns of the mind, but that the conditions imposed for their exercise may lead to behavioral patterns quite at variance with these deeper ones. Most children are able to build their early images without difficulty with marks which result directly from simple physical moments, just as the African sculptor has no difficulty satisfying his representational needs with conceptually simple manufacturing skills (6). The notion of representation which held sway in Europe for nearly five hundred years, the notion that the artist in this tradition is obliged to make is a striking example of the sort of compromise I am referring to.
We do not pay for our membership of the culture on a one-day-on, one-day-off basis. All our behavior is acclimatized to some degree, and any attempt to isolate a discreet behavioral node which we might think of as "natural" would be fruitless. Yet we might still find in the underlying structures of behavior aspects which are evidently not fashioned by the constraints of any particular culture, and this would be as close as we might come to a notion of "naturalness". It will be the tracking down of these aspects with which I will be concerned, knowing very well that their separation from other aspects is a theoretical one.

Much of our mental activity seems to involve complex schema of entities standing for other entities, and we would probably agree that the externalizing and manipulation of images, as such, grows directly from basic mind functions. But that area of symbol-manipulation which is directed towards communication between individuals and between groups must, I believe, obviously involve highly acclimatized performance. For a symbolic structure to stand any reasonable chance of being unambiguously understood, its maker must both have clear knowledge of the expectations which the reader will bring to its reading, and be prepared to accept the constraints imposed by those expectations. Communication is possible within a culture only because of existing agreements as to what entity is to stand for what entity, and how it is to be presented to be recognized as doing so. At an even more basic level, this implies also that all the involved parties know about the same entities: which may be true, more or less, within the same culture, but is unlikely to be true from one culture to another.

These would seem not to be very promising conditions for the exercise of imagination, inventiveness, and all those other virtues we associate with the making of art, or, indeed, for our understanding of art produced by any culture other than our own. But I think we have to conclude that art never has been devoted primarily to the cultural function of communication, and indeed it may never have been thought that it did before our own time. The more historic view within our own culture pictures the artist in communion with variously-conceived extra-human sources of inspiration and wisdom, explicitly acknowledging the fact that if he speaks on behalf of the community, he does not speak with its voice or in terms which will necessarily be understood.

Art history deals with the problem of tracking and identifying the transformations which continuously modify the significance of symbols within the changing cultural continuum. But there are other problems of a more fundamental kind which fall outside the scope of orthodox iconology. Any art theory which begins with a view of the artist as serving primarily the cultural need to formulate and transmit explicit meanings inevitably ends up viewing the whole system as a sort of noisy telephone network, in which the receiver arrives constantly to reconstruct the original message. Yet the cultural mismatch between artist and viewer must then be a major source of noise in the system, and we account for the discrepancies between what the artist "has in mind" and what the viewer thinks he understands, by the notion of "interpretation". We do not necessarily have any evidence beyond our own "interpretations", however, as to what, if anything, the artist had in mind in the first place.

This emphasis upon the specifically cultural use of symbols has left us without any account of the underlying structures of image-generating behavior more convincing than the Divine Name, and some contemporary variant of that theme usually passed for explanation. I am always a little shocked to recall that it is only about fifty years since Paul Klee declared that it is a sin against the Creative Spirit for the artist to work when not inspired. After nearly thirty years spent in making art, in the company of other artists, I am prepared to declare that the artist has no hot-line to the infinite, and no uniquely delineated mind functions. What he does, he does with the same general-purpose equipment that everybody has, and if his use of it is in any respect unusual, that very fact points to the need for a model of image-generating behavior which concentrates specifically upon behavioral mechanisms rather than upon products.

In particular, I believe we will need to adopt a view of the artist as indulging in the generation of what I will call image-rich material as a self-satisfying procedure primarily, and only secondarily involved in the manipulation of culturally stabilized symbols: performing that secondary function, moreover, in a manner more in keeping with the essentially self-seeking character of the primary one.
We know nothing to speak of about the past, or even how long ago they were made. We cannot seriously pretend even to understand their original significance, and what speculation exists is based upon evidence quite extrinsic to the marks themselves. Yet the generations of anthropologists who have added their speculations to the accumulating literature bear witness to the power of the symbols, not to communicate explicit meanings within the culture within which they arose, but to trigger and direct our own innate predisposition for attaching significance to events.

In some cases, what we find ourselves responding to comes from cultures so remote that we cannot possibly know what its original significance was. I am thinking particularly of the petroglyphs which are to be found throughout Nevada and California. If we knew nothing of the external cultural determinants to an individual's behavior, then we would have to acknowledge that we cannot possibly know any possible verification. The question would be entirely speculative, not to say gratuitous, if we could proceed only by the analysis of existing examples, for the reason that what is present for analysis is the object, not the behavior which generated it. Any plausible conclusion would be as good as any other plausible conclusion in the absence of any possible verification.

The answer seems to be affirmative, at least to the degree that most people evidently have some difficulty in believing that the drawings (8-10) were not made by a human artist: an artist, moreover, with a distinct sense of humor and a marked tendency towards narrative.

As to the prime mover of these drawings - I still have some difficulty regarding myself as their maker in any conventional sense: I find myself in a curious position involving a not-too-serious parody on the notion of divine inspiration. It takes about two weeks after seeing one of the drawings for the first time for me to lose my awareness of it as machine output. I can hardly regard it as my own, because I have no recollection of having participated physically in its making, and it seems to have come to me from another time and place. We might see this as a comment on the persistence of myths, perhaps. But if romance dies hard, the facts are left to be accounted for. If we find elements in these drawings reminiscent of African masks and comets, figures suggestive of turtles and submarines (10), it is a fact that the program was made by the program. It is also a fact that the program knows nothing of African masks, comets, turtles or submarines.
A forms, all of closed form, or effect closure upon an open one. The left part of a production is able to recognize that a form is closed rather than open, just as the right part is able to produce a new closed form, or form closure upon an open one. The new combinations of conditions, the particular combinations of conditions which may arise in the world of the program, test for the pat- terns, the particular combinations of conditions which may arise in the world of the program — in this case the developing drawing — and list the acceptable responses to particular combinations of these conditions.

The left part of a production tests for the patterns, the particular combinations of conditions which characterize the state of the world at any moment. The right part of a production changes the state of the world, since all the acceptable responses act upon the world directly or indirectly. The new combinations of conditions will then be trapped by other productions; and the process continues, in this event-driven fashion, from the initial empty state until one of several world states elicits the response by which the program is to behave within that world; as characterizing — if I risk anthropomorphizing a little too far — what the program understands its world to be like.

But references to closure, to space-filling, and to repetition occur throughout the production system in both the left and the right parts. They constitute, not a set of rules so much as a set of protocols, the complex interconnecting of which elicits the entire process of its particular identity. They are best considered as characterizing the program's world rather than as controlling how the program is to behave within that world; as characterizing — I risk anthropomorphizing a little too far — what the program understands its world to be like.

Space-filling and repetition are two of several protocols which have been added to the program since its outset, most of them simply extending upon the initial ones. I mean that shading is a way of underlining the closedness of a closed figure, and the program now knows a number of ways in which that can be done (12). A recent extension to the figure-ground protocol requires the program to respect the territorial integrity of previously drawn figures. This one results in some of the more unpredictable and evocative configurations; though it is never easy, even watching the drawings being done, to keep track of what is causing what.

Adding a single new protocol to a program is more like adding a whole new conceptual complex to a human's world model than it is like adding a new behavioral rule, and it should not be surprising that the complexity of the drawings increases rapidly for each added protocol. This seems to suggest that the program structure is appropriate to the requirement of variety which I noted earlier, since it seems unlikely that human output increases in variety only at the cost of extremely large rule-sets.

I have not yet had sufficient time working with a reasonably well-developed program to reach detailed conclusions on the nature of that variety, and on how the combining of the different protocols produces it. But it does seem clear that it is the combining, not the individual protocols, which is responsible. Note, for example, that although one drawing may exhibit more sophisticated space-filling — shading — abilities than another, it will not have the same evocative force as a "simpler" drawing which exercises both open and closed protocols (cf, 10, 12). In fact, I think there is evidence to suggest that in the presence of closed forms, open forms take on a distinctly differentiated function, providing a kind of semantic connective tissue for the semantically dominant — more obviously object-like — closed forms. It is certainly the case that the spatial relatedness of the figures significantly affects their individual reading.

There is one further aspect to the program, having to do with task-oriented behavior rather than with perceptual behavior, which I should mention here. It controls the way in which the program goes about the actual production, and the physical articulation, of the simulated freehand line from which the drawings are built. I quickly came to the general conclusion, when I first became involved in computing, that human drawings are potentially interesting to human beings at least in large part because they have been made by other human beings; and that for a machine to inspire a similar kind of interest in its products it would have to make its drawings in the same sort of way that human beings produce theirs. Of course, everything I have been talking about has been an effort to elucidate what that "same sort of way" might be, but I am thinking now specifically about the lowest-level business of driving a pencil from one place to another. What seemed certain to me, and still does, is that freehand drawing involves an elaborate feedback mechanism, a continuous matching of current state against desired end state and a continuous correction of deviation, essentially like the mechanics we use to thread a needle, or drink a glass of water, or drive a car. Most of the time the feedback is required — and the artist can claim no exemptions in this regard — by the unpredictability of the equipment we use, whether that unpredictability is caused by arthritis or worn bearings, lack of muscular coordination or sloppy steering. We do not optimize in freehand drawing, and it never seemed to me that the dynamic qualities of drawing would be captured by spline interpolations. Indeed, it never seemed to me that such qualities would be reproducible by trying to mimic human appearance at all.

Imagine the problem of driving your car off a main road, where you are facing in one direction, into a narrow driveway at an arbitrary angle to it. Unless you would proceed by planning your whole course in advance and then closing your eyes and stopping on the gas, you will probably be doing very much what the program does. Given the task of getting from one place, facing in one direction, to another place and facing in another direction, it never knows how to accomplish the completion of the task, but "imagines" a series of temporary destinations, each of which will bring it a little closer to approaching its goal from the specified direction (13). A degree of randomness is provided as an analogy for arthritic joints, and as it never had any precisely defined orientation to follow anyway it corrects for accumulating discrepancies only when they become big enough to jeopardize its chances of ever reaching its final destination.

It never knows in advance what will constitute a complete path, and it never fails to complete its path. This part of the program is non-trivial, and certainly not optimal, involving as
it does a complex series of decisions for every one of the small line segments which go into the building of a line. But I believe the simulation is a good one, and I have found it possible, moreover, to modify the character of the line - the artist’s "handwriting" - by the manipulation of such thoroughly practical factors as the rate at which sampling is done, the suddenness with which correction is applied, and the frequency with which the program sets up new "imagined" destinations along its path.

In this case the simulated perceptual mechanisms give evidence of the underlying humanness of the drawing's manufacture and the dancer's world - though perhaps any other set of reasonably low-level mechanisms would have served equally well - and the characterising process which actually takes place, and which is clearly evident in the articulation of the line, confirms the viewer's belief in the artist's intentionality.

This conclusion is not adequate to account for the more highly particularised readings which seem to attach to the drawings - notably the humor and the sense of narrative - and I do not know at this stage how they are to be accounted for.

It became evident from the questions and the private discussions which followed this paper that my use of the label "protocol" had done more to confuse than to elucidate the conceptual unit to which I had applied it. Reviewing the usage, it becomes apparent that my understanding of what the program is doing - what rules the different elements in its structure play - has shifted with time, and I have been careless enough to carry over to a slowly emerging construct a term inappropriate to it, but unfortunately still more ill-suited or inappropriate to something else. The underlying confusion has been my own, and I need to consider whether they have been presented with this opportunity to try and resolve it.

Given the choice between rewriting the paper and extending it with a post-scriptary commentary, I have chosen the latter course. This gives me the chance also to remove occasional verbal dross and to join in with particular question that is evidently quite troubling to many people.

I suggest above that what I call a protocol is best regarded as characterising what the program understands of its world to be, not as a rule which controls how it is to behave in that world. It rules, to modify the character of the line within the program by a production. A protocol is not fully expressed by a production, I would not want to change any of this except the use of the word "protocol" itself - but the problem is that nothing has been said about how it is expressed or what we might call the dynamics of the characterisation. In the absence of any overview clearly differentiated from the rule-oriented scheme to which the characterisation must obviously relate, the mere assertion that a protocol is not simply a rule is hardly sufficient to expose the sense that it is.

So be it: let me return "protocol" to the rule-oriented domain whence it came. In its place, and hopefully more fully expressive of the concept, it is meant to carry, I will use the term "protocol" as a whole evidently recognised an unarticulated distinction against crossing lines also, and unanimously agreed that these "extra" dots should not be counted as order-four junctions.

Consistent though this behavioral pattern was, it only required attention to be focused upon it for its character to become evident. It followed the making of these drawings evidently identified an as yet unformulated notion of what one might do to draw any figure, and although nothing was said about what might constitute a satisfactory behavior in wrong, broken, some powerful though unstated rule. The class as a whole evidently recognised an unstated distinction against crossing lines also, and unanimously agreed that these "extra" dots should not be counted as order-four junctions.

Examination of the drawings themselves showed that there were several other rules of a more surprising kind: 1. If a single dot is in an array it potentially becomes the junction of an array of dots; if any other dot joins it to any other dot of dots. Of the simpler cases, the order-two case denotes a dot on a continuous line; the order-one case is a dot at the end of a line, and the null case is a dot which has not been used as a rule of any particular mark or by any particular "eye" would be an example of the null case.

Since the drawings all contained between a hundred and two hundred or so dots, it was obvious that there would be considerable variety in the number of lines joining at these junctions; in fact, we found only three cases of order-four, and only two cases of order-more-than-four, junctions, in the entire set of thirty-four drawings. Over 99.5% of the dots had three lines or less attached to them. A similar situation will be observed in the drawings of both Karen and Sherry (figs. 3 and 4).

The students were certainly unaware, until it was pointed out to them, that their behavior had been constrained in this way, and were over literally of the suggestion that they had done anything according to rules of any sort. Yet, curiously enough, there were a few cases where "extra" dots had occurred when two lines had been allowed to cross, and in all these cases the students concerned reported a strong sense of having made a wrong, broken, some powerful though unstated rule. The class as a whole evidently recognised an unarticulated distinction against crossing lines also, and unanimously agreed that these "extra" dots should not be counted as order-four junctions.

We need not go into detail here on the precise nature of the drawings now or what they might have been ascribed to by a paradigmatic instance of the program; what we can say is that they could all be described by a production-like paradigm instance of an "order-four" state of the drawing - in relation to junctionality among other things - on the left side, and following in a change of state - through the manipulation of functionality among other things - on the right side. The notion of junctionality itself would not be adequately expressed within our set of production rules, however, and it clearly exists on a "higher" level of the individual productions. It has become one of the issues which the students were to be significant in relation to the domain of drawing, and thus characterised what he believed that domain
One of the questions I was asked — not for the first time, by any means — was: am I proposing that the machine program constitutes a model of human creative behavior? Is it a sort of automatized surrogate Harold Cohen?

A full answer would go far beyond my present scope — and, indeed, my present abilities — and would involve all those other troubling philosophical questions which the existence of the computer inevitably raises. A short answer would be that human beings live in a real world, and their internal representations of that world include reference to its objects the current state of the program knew nothing of the real world or of its objects. Human beings learn from experience; the program begins each new drawing without previous experience of its own. Its performance is not merely less than, but unlike, human performance. It should be stressed, however, that these are limitations in scope — and, indeed, my present abilities do not go far beyond my present understanding of the world.

The playing out of this game produces images, normally embodied in objects, which may be valued by the culture for any of a number of reasons. For the artist, it is the playing out of the game, and thus the making of the object — rather than the object itself — which is important. If object-making is the means to an end, the end is not the object but the mental exercises in which images are held, rest upon the fundamental normality of the mental functions exercised. I mean that the basic structure of all internal model building is the assignment of associavtive references: what we might call the "standing-for-ness" principle. We would not be going too far to regard art as an endless explorative game built around the presumably universally human fact that things can stand for other things.

We are now in a position to generate a slightly more complete answer to the original question, and I think we will find that the view which the question proposed — that the program is an artificial artist capable of creative behavior — is both more than and less than adequate, the program does not develop new games unless it plays the legal moves in the current game. It says "let me tell you about my world", but rich though that world may be, this telling does not result in any further enrichment. We thus have no reason to say that the machine has any interest in the one feature I have chosen to regard as fundamental to human art-making — the continuous development of the internal representations of the world.

To this degree, it is clearly an inadequate model of human performance which is not to say that no program could ever provide an adequate one. On the other hand, it does not merely model the playing of legal moves in the game, it actually plays them, and indeed the program is a model of human performance at all. It carries out a real, and rather extensive, part of the art-making procedure, and its output is in every important respect identical both culturally and privately — with output which might result from more orthodox art-making procedures. My own view can be stated briefly and without oversimplifying too far. I believe that the artist is engaged, as he is anywhere else, in building internal representations of his world, and that his behavior is remarkable only in two major respects. First, the — and this seems to me to be a fairly common one, typical to science-doing, philosophy, mathematics, and so on, — the extraordinary regard in which images are held, rests upon the fundamental normality of their internal representations of that world.

In neither of these respects does he require special mental equipment, and indeed it would seem that the cultural value of his activity, the extraordinary regard in which images are held, rests upon the fundamental normality of the mental functions exercised. I mean that the basic structure of all internal model building is the assignment of associative references: what we might call the "standing-for-ness" principle. We would not be going too far to regard art as an endless explorative game built around the presumably universally human fact that things can stand for other things.

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We are now in a position to generate a slightly more complete answer to the original question, and I think we will find that the view which the question proposed — that the program is an artificial artist capable of creative behavior — is both more than and less than adequate, the program does not develop new games unless it plays the legal moves in the current game. It says "let me tell you about my world", but rich though that world may be, this telling does not result in any further enrichment. We thus have no reason to say that the machine has any interest in the one feature I have chosen to regard as fundamental to human art-making — the continuous development of the internal representations of the world.

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ABULAFIA'S CIRCLES

READING INSTRUCTIONS: Beginning at the marker: the outer rims read right to left; the inner rim leads to the inner spokes, & from circle into circle, right to left.

TRANSLATION / TEXT / GLOSS

(UPPER RIGHT)

outer rim: middle of the first, middle of the last, first of the first, middle of the last, first of the first, middle of the last, last of the middle, first of the middle, last of the first

middle rim (large letters): permutations of the name "72"

inner rim: it on condition anyone who takes the name for his own needs transgresses the command

inner spokes: about said name / was formed / to be / for his own glory / only thus / the prophet / said about / its secret

(LOWER RIGHT)

outer rim: last of the middle, last of the first, first of the last, middle of the middle, first of the last, last of the middle, middle of the first, first of the middle, last of the first

middle rim (large letters): permutations of the name "72"

inner rim: whatever has my name I made it for my honor formed it worked it truly & concerning this the name informed

inner spokes: his prophets (be he bless'd) / about his name / by 3 ways / of creation / of the skies / & earth / & man

(LOWER LEFT)

outer rim: last of the first, last of the middle, last of the last, middle of the middle, first of the middle, last of the last, middle of the first, first of the middle, first of the last, last of the middle

middle rim (large letters): permutations of the name "72"

inner rim: & know according to the name the one most honored is the one of Israel because the name's own portion is his people & the most honored one

inner spokes: of Israel is / the Levite & the most honored / of the Levites / is the / priest / & the most honored / of the priests / is the messiah.
READING INSTRUCTIONS: Right to left & circle into circle towards the center. Larger letters are permutations of the name "72."

(UPPER RIGHT), the rim: look here now this is the way itself
(UPPER LEFT), the rim: by which you'll understand the Gilgul metempsychosis complete
(LOWER RIGHT), the rim: the one I now write in the circle
(LOWER LEFT), the rim: the intention of the explanation
(CENTER), the rim: way that may be understood as three-fold Gilgul metempsychosis
(CENTER), the spokes: the chosen way / disclosing / secrets / of the world /

READING INSTRUCTIONS: upper rims to lower, right to left, & circle into circle.

(UPPER RIGHT): so are the letters in their true essentials & when joined to people & to books that carry them are made intelligible as wholes to world & public: forms that the lowly asses carry though their existence is eternal: so then man child you be careful that you not forget that you are working transformations of the Torah
(UPPER LEFT): making it exist inside your soul in its particulars: so turn through it o turn through it & what of it is fit for your fulfillment let your hand fulfill: do what I tell you here it is your life your length of days from which you come to know what isn't fitting that a wise man be without & then your ways will be successful
& then you will be wise: the way that you must cleave to & be strong in all your days will be the way of turning letters & combining them:

understanding what is understood rejoicing in your understandings & eternally rejoicing this rejoicing further wakening your heart to keep on turning them & understanding: joy & pleasures as you rush to turn

like one who turns the sword the flame that turns itself toward every side & wages war against the enemies around you: for the empty images & forms of thought born of the evil impulse are the first emerging into thought surrounding it like murderers to foul the gnosis of the lowly tortured man.

COMMENTARY

(1) Abraham Abulafia (1240-c. 1291) developed a Hebrew poetry of permutations (a kind of medieval "lettrism," etc.), which in the original version of the above takes the form of nearly 700 circles, consisting of a discourse on meditation, a set of instructions for specific permutations, & the permutations of the letters themselves. In the present instance the permutations work off the so-called Name-of-72, i.e., 72 three-letter syllables *based on the three verses of Exodus 14, 19-21, each of which contains 72 letters.....(II) was made up by joining the first letter of verse 19, the last letter of 20, and the first of 21, to form its first triad; the second letter of 19, the penultimate of 20, and the second of 21, to make the second triad, and so on until we have 72 three-letter terms comprising all the letters of these verses." (J. Trachtenberg, Jewish Magic & Superstition, page 94) In a similar way, Abulafia re-arranges the syllables in rows & columns, then sets them into circles, according to instructions ('middle of the first, middle of the last,' etc.), which form part of the circles as well. Thus the disciple is led into the circles, must follow their message as an act of concentration. Abulafia himself writes of the abstracting/spiritualizing process which he employs & by which the world is apprehended as language/sound: "Know that the method of tseruf (the combination of letters) can be compared to music; for the ear hears sounds from various combinations, in accordance with the character of the melody & the instrument. Also, two different instruments can form a combination, & if the sounds combine, the listener's ear registers a pleasant sensation in acknowledging the difference.....The same is true of the combination of letters. It touches the first string, which is comparable to the first letters, & proceeds to the second, third, fourth & fifth, & the various sounds combine. And the secrets, which express themselves in these combinations, delight the heart which acknowledges its God & is filled with ever fresh joy. Thus the letters—by a process called dilug (skipping)—become a basis for meditation 'on the essence of one's thought, abstracting from it every word, be it connected with a notion or not...by putting) the consonants which one is combining into swift motion." For Abulafia & others, such processes remain essentially 'oral,' in the sense of open-ended: an improvisatory meditation on a fixed base (torah, names of God, etc.) whose true meanings are not "literal" but the occasion for an ongoing process of reconstruction (revelation) & sounding. In touch with Yogic currents from the east, Abulafia's intention here seems clearly mantric; but his practice of a systemic & concrete poetry also closely resembles the 20th century letrism of Isidore Isou, the asymmetries & nuclei of Jackson Mac Low, & the blues kabbalah improvisations of Jack Hirschman, all of whom he may have influenced.

(2) "Abulafia who was never admitted into the great rabbinic canon of the Jews because in fact he was the Jews first truly modern poet / visual artist saw the abstract musical beauty of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet went for the form of the thing itself which of course was nothing but the absolute aim of the pinpoint pain of the ebolimic struggle." (J. Hirschman)

(3) The source of the circles is a manuscript edition of Abraham Abulafia's Hayed ha-Olam ha-Ba ("Life of the World to Come") in the British Museum. It is also sometimes called Sefer ha-Igulim, "The Book of Circles." The translation & commentary are from J.R.'s forthcoming A Big Jewish Book: Poems & Other Visions of the Jews from Tribal Times to Present.

EDITORIAL STATEMENT. The intention of the New Wilderness Letter is to keep-in-touch & to continue & expand the work of synthesis, etc. begun in Technicians of the Sacred, Shaking the Pumpkin, America a Prophecy, & such ongoing enterprises as Alephcore & the New Wilderness Foundation. Here the defining term is poesia: "those linguistic acts of invention & discovery through which the mind explores the transformational power of language & discovers & invents the world & itself," (D. Antin) And the proposition, as large as I can make it, is that what we do at present lays out a map of future & of past that changes as we change ourselves. The editor—a poet by inclination & practice—recognizes poesia in all arts & sciences, all human thoughts & acts directed toward such ends: the participation in what the surrealist master, Andre Breton, called a "sacred action" or what Gary Snyder defined as "the real work of modern man: to uncover the inner structure & actual boundaries of the mind." The New Wilderness Letter will therefore not be specialized & limited by culture or profession but will be a report, largely through the creative work itself, of where that process takes us. (J.R.)
NOTE. Since I will no longer be associated with Alcheringa
but leave it as a publication directed by Boston University &
Professor Dennis Tedlock, I have arranged for the initial
issues of the New Wilderness Letter to be sent to all Alcheringa
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