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# Density of Coincidence

Sebastian Lockwood

(This is an excerpt from a longer piece called, Density of Coincidence. This piece uses stories, prose and poetry to reflect on death, light and coincidence.)

There is a place where people worship light.

When a boy is born the stars are studied and if the indications are just so, then it is evident that this child is destined to be a mama, a sun priest. The child is then carried to a cave high in the mountains and raised by a mama and his wife. For eighteen years the boy will not see daylight or even the light of the full moon: the boy will have no contact with fertile women. He will eat a simple diet prepared by the mama's wife, and she will only see him in the dark as she serves the food: boiled fish and snails, mushrooms, grasshoppers, manioc, squash and white beans. He will not eat salt or any foods unknown to his ancestors and will eat meat only after puberty.

The eighteen years are broken into two phases of nine that mirror the first nine months in the womb. In the first phase, he learns the songs stories and myths of the people. In the second phase he learns the arts of his craft and calling: the secrets of the great mother, the vision roads of the mind where he can travel into the dreams and hearts of people present, past and to be. At the end of this time he is ready to shoulder the divine burden.

On a clear morning he is led out into the height of the mountain with the sun pouring across the majestic peaks and valleys: until now the world has been only thoughts and stories. As he opens his eyes, he sees that the world is so much more than he could have imagined from the stories, from the fire shadows on the cave wall: he experiences the absolute reality of the light. From now on the world is magic. As priest, he is now devoted to maintaining the delicate balance of this beauty, this perfect light.

These are the Ika and the Kogi who live in the Colombian mountains beyond the Rio Donachui, and have managed, with great difficulty, to preserve their precious world.

Wade Davis describes the above story, as do many others, in his book, *One River*, that follows the adventures of the ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schulte and his student, Tim Plowman. It is a story that will convince the purest skeptic that plants have the ability to speak through shamans: after all, as Davis points out, plants eat light, so basic communication with a rather stupid species is no stretch.

The Kogi word for dawn is the same word they use for vagina.

Greece is a geography of light: white hills, stone and sea. The light in Athens may explain part of that particular flowering of thought and art.

This light in Athens, Athena's light, is the all knowing light that at its fullest blends the hills, the Parthenon, the sea, the people and the gods. In Vincent Scully's classic celebration of the obvious, *The Earth, The Temple and the Gods*, he writes of the Parthenon at mid-day, mid- summer:

There is only being and light. Time lies dead in the white and silver light of the outdoor room between the Parthenon and the Erechtheion. It dies upon the Parthenon's white and golden columns, so that Athena takes her one step forward and outward forever. Time stops when centaur and Lapith grasp each other... Gods and men alike are radiant in the light. It is the only immortality for human beings, approaching the hazard of the light with the gods. The relation of the buildings to each other and to the land fuses in the white light. What remains is beyond action, too instantaneous for reverie, too deep for calm. It is silence, the sweet deep breath taken. Time stops. Fear lies dead upon the rock.

Too instantaneous for reverie, too deep for calm. The light beneath the black anvil of the storm cloud. The fear of full light.

In the Tibetan Book of the Dead, there is the description of the forty two hallucinations of light: the Tibetans guide each other through on the last transition.

There is the first light seen at emergence from the battle through the birth canal, the last light seen in the last moment, and all the fields of light that lie between.

For the Yage drinkers in the Amazon there is the semen of the sun. In *One River*, Wade Davis quotes the anthropologist Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff describing the Tukano shaman's crystal.

The shaman's necklace is a single strand of palm fiber threaded through a six-inch quartz crystal. The quartz is seen as compressed solar energy: the penis of father sun, as crystallized semen. In the colors are thirty hues, all distinct energies that must be balanced. But it is still more. It becomes the shaman's house. When he takes Yage, this is where he goes. Inside. And from within he looks out at the world, at the territory of his people Ð the forests, the rocky hillside and streams Ð watching, and watching the ways of the animals. That's his vision. But his enemy is also there, doing the same. So they meet in the spirit world, each encased in an armor of crystal, each standing on a hexagonal shield, each struggling to unbalance the foe. It is battle at close quarters.

Amongst certain of the Yanonami the Shaman places a twenty foot blow pipe in the nose of his fellow shaman and delivers a shot of highly hallucinogenic tree bark ash. The shaman will chant, work with the sick, tell stories and then settle down to the hard work: his hekura spirits will be summoned from his chest and he will send them on spirit

raiding parties in local villages while at the same time protecting the souls of the children in his own village from incoming attacks by neighboring shamans.

In each case there is an absolute reality to the vision and the battle: as there is the absolute reality of the dream. The jungle speaks through the shaman, is manifest in the vision, and the medium of the discourse is the crystallized light.

Sun shafts over the north sea twin arms of the sand bar where we swim with the seals

Sam Barker

We met you dazed in Holt fresh from the bus, from your return from light in Italy  
that chiaroscuro light.

We kidnapped you to Blakeney and there high on the hill  
by the burning gorse and broom we looked out over the pit  
the long arms of the sand-bar holding the tide and said look at this light, the fullness and  
flow of this light  
is it not just so?

A Dutch master light, girl with candle  
or the light your father saw haunting the lake at Como.

The light that is the blue of your eye  
and each hue

has a differing cry  
as the firebird of the sun folds his burning wings to be born anew  
as those flamingo fingers reach up to touch the dawn.

Shadow of the B fifty two fish and chips at Nespelsam above Chief Joseph's grave

Yes I bowed nine times to this June moon  
why then this troubled heart?

The Rhythm of Change

The rain in Tacoma is pleasing like moss on the old oak's arms Steilacoom charms the  
Fingercup brush.

The rain in Tacoma  
a slow song on the radio just sax and piano  
drinking dark Mexican beer in the Lakewood motel.

The rain on the leaves is the rhythm of change like fingering regrets the once in future hope that long lazy last note.

At this writing today the light is gray & the sky is mat, the light is diffuse, without source: no sense of the sun. The barometer has dropped and with it the mood becomes despondent, melancholy and reflective. Joints ache. What is the meaning of the struggle... the purpose of coincidence? I notice a headline in the Times book section: a maze makes sense from above. How to achieve elevation? The power of image, the laws of the imagination.

The dream image of the day: night-stallions and day-mares.

Last night my dead step-father drove me at high speed across park land towards a manor house that I knew was a hospital. The sky was as it is today: wet paper. We are driving in a Ford LTD. I slip around in the front seat. I am happy to see Thorkild, the quality of his cheek and eye: Thorkild never drove a car. He is driving very fast. We are waved to a stop by a surly looking rugged man wearing a white chain-stitch sweater: black eyes and heavy brow. I awake.

The dream stays with me into the day. In class I talk again about the absolute concrete reality of the dream & that even though we know we are dreaming it does not effect the absolute reality & the fear; the physical knowing that I am in the car, at high speed, out of control looking at this dear dead man.

Listen:

never change screams in mid-horse,

never shout theater in a crowded fire.

Across the event horizon of the black hole light is eaten as gravity energizes until a teaspoon of matter weighs a trillion tons consuming all light.

Yes, light bends.