

## I

# To Be Caught in Indra's Net

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If meaning were not central to the human experience, if it were a specialized subject of study like the kinds of meaning we call “philosophy,” “religion,” or “the natural world,” then we might be justified in turning it over to specialists. As it is, so much has been written about meaning from the standpoint of language that it might be worth our while to consider a comment on language from that of meaning. Victor Zuckerkandl was perhaps unique in his ability to locate meaning in music, an art that gives away nothing to referentiality. His view of language is worth noting:

The limit beyond which words cannot go is their own delimiting activity. The limit of language is its being-a-limit. However broad or narrow the limits it may trace, there is one thing it never reaches: that which is delimited. This is not the unutterable. . . . It is not mystical in the sense of being infinitely remote, utterly hidden: it is what is closest to us, most manifestly present in everything that is not an intellectual or a linguistic fiction.<sup>1</sup>

What Zuckerkandl has done is to apply Wittgenstein's phrase “the limits of my language” in an intensive sense—not simply in terms of what combinations of words and categories, or what possibilities of these, it permits but as a matter of what limits the fact of language it-self imposes. How is language itself limiting? The limit of language is language's “being a limit”—it limits, demarcates, draws boundaries around that which it references. Anything it accomplishes *as language* is done through this fact. By the same token, language does not *describe* the elements it demarcates save in demarcating them, nor does it make those elements immediately meaningful as a result of demarcating or

referencing them. Language, in short, cannot access or convey the experiential concreteness of its referents. The nice precision that music makes of our thoughts and feelings is, to paraphrase Zuckerkandl, just precisely too much inside or outside of language to be touched by linguistic reference. Music sings the delimited; language limits: visual, kinesthetic, or even verbal art figures the delimited, language delimits the figures.

It is only in those instances where language “describes” itself, demarcates or delimits its own possibilities by intending or anticipating, equating one word with another, that a precision like that of music is realized. Demarcation thus achieves the abstract effect of “meaning” in being compounded upon itself. But it does so, paradoxically, by conveying a sense of language’s concreteness or identity with itself, as if referencing or signification could be shown to have a solid core, to be “about” something real at precisely that point at which its meaning is most abstract. This fundamental irony of “language usage,” a conflation of abstract and concrete, is frequently treated as the origin of the symbolic in language, the point where language “catches” or touches the meaningful and the subjective.

But a most significant implication of its irony is that this conflation can also be treated as the inception of language in the symbolic, language’s legitimation in its being “caught,” in turn, by the meaningful and the subjective. Abstraction is a metalanguage that is crucially dependent upon words, a language of languages that inevitably analyzes and reconstructs itself as a further example of language. Its own beginning points, its epistemes like the “sign,” are themselves prepackaged exemplars of linguistic self-reference. They become the language that describes language and that renders language’s legitimacy in doing so self-evidential in the process.

Abstract as the meaningful may be, necessarily displaced from whatever conventions one might choose to represent “language,” its abstractness is inevitably compromised through the double implication of demarcation necessary to its own expression. The limit of language, the degree of its vulnerability, is obscured in an infinite regress of using language to witness, define, and evidence its own capabilities.

If anything we might say or think about language is already *informed* or predicated by language in the process, then its self-evidencing is essentially subjective in nature. Subjective awareness is necessarily an awareness of what *kind* of awareness it is. Pain, for instance, is at once the character or quality of the perception and the “thing” perceived; it

must be “referred,” if only in a very general sense (and of course *as* a sense), in order to be perceived. Thus language disguises its limit by merging with its own perception in thought, becomes the very “informing” or “referral” by which the perception takes place. A grounding of language in subjectivity identified through the “referral” or informing of subjectivity by language marks the fundamental character of trope.

A consideration of trope need not be concerned with how the phenomenon involves, relates to, or describes the referential properties of language beyond this fact. The conditions that “trope” makes performative or operative are fundamentally inert, they “do” nothing, amount to mere “stoppages” or singularities in the familiar flow of speech. Trope’s “agency” as an ascribed or analytic property begins with the designation or recognition of trope as a *phenomenon* and then identifies the *kinds* of agency pertinent to that phenomenon—metaphor, metonym, synecdoche, oxymoron, and so forth. But the phenomenality of all this is itself a kind of interpretation, a trope that makes the trope possible as a contagion of thought, something that has “kinds” because it begins as a “kind.” Whatever operations the kinds of trope may perform upon language they do through the contagion of the initial kind; they “iconicize” language, if that is the word, by iconicizing our awareness of it.

As a “kind” of self-awareness the contagion is a self-modeling of feeling as if language could react to itself or work upon itself in that way. The agency attributed to a metaphor or a metonym, the kind of relation it would seem to perform, makes use of language to account for the way in which language is received or “embodied” in the speaker or hearer—how it subjects him or her to language. The “kinds” of tropic usage as well as the relational model of language itself designate a self-action as if it were happening within an objective medium, attributing its autoreactive constitution to some special subjecting quality of the medium. Hence the social, the mental, and the relational or persuasive share a point of pragmatic congruence in the contagious or self-constitutive contingency of human self-reaction.

The social scientist, in other words, who speaks of language “competence” or symbolic “meanings,” or of hierarchical or gender domination is speaking obliquely of the subjected condition, a kind of retroflex “agency” compelled by other influences. Thus “ability to speak,” “ability to comprehend or be emotionally affected,” “sexual receptivity,” and “socialization” characterize ways of being effective through subjection.

What should be called the “Cartesian fallacy” is a case in point, but an extremely important one. The fallacy is that of assuming, as Descartes did, that subjective autoreaction is embodied *physically* within the neural and biological organism. The sort of contagion that “metaphor” attributes to language and receives in linguistic form was identified by Descartes as the condition of a mind subjected by the physical body, a body’s mind. Thus language in one case and the physical body in the more general one are empirical receptions of a pragmatic reality or objectivity and share the equivocal character of pragmatic embodiment in being at once conditions of enablement and limitation.

It is both the purpose and the trick of pragmatic embodiment to make trope appear as an effect of language and subjectivity in general as a condition of the physical body. Language and organismic embodiment are not evidence of *how* it may work but rather of *why* it is pragmatic to our impressions of “working.” There is a contagion between the thing imagined in this way and the ability to imagine it that is neither empirical nor subjective, and not perceptual but re-perceptual. It is this condition of mental embodiment (a mind’s body) rather than embodied mentality that Hindu tradition speaks of as the “subtle body” and that is known in traditional Chinese wisdom as the *chi*, the body’s energy.

Whatever pragmatic demonstration anthropology might choose to make of its knowledge—the archaeological site, the pungent trope of an indigenous understanding, the fossil find—anthropology is itself the subject of another demonstration. As a literature or an academic discipline anthropology bears the irony of a comparison with the ideal knowledge of humanity imagined by philosophers from Immanuel Kant to Jean-Paul Sartre. Another philosopher, Martin Heidegger, summed up the dilemma in these words: “Anthropology is that interpretation of man that already knows fundamentally what man is and hence can never ask who he may be. For, with this question it would have to confess itself shaken and overcome. But how can this be expected of anthropology when the latter has expressly to achieve nothing less than the securing consequent upon the self-securing of the *subiectum*?”<sup>2</sup>

To the extent that it may *compel* knowledge, rather than merely explain or interpret it, in other words, the science of the human is compelled by its own demonstrations. The science of humanity’s capabilities and limitations is after all carried out by human beings, who become their own self-demonstration in the act of carrying it forth. Thus it is difficult indeed to escape the irony of becoming one’s own example, of

being compelled to make a ritual of studying ritual, to make a myth of the myth or avoid betraying one's own kinship with the "kinship" under study. And so it is not so much a matter of anthropology's pragmatic exemplars being inadequate to its tasks as it is of the discipline being completely swallowed by their potency. The irony is that theory is both something of a fetish and an object of deep suspicion in anthropology because it is "second best," merely evocative of the demonstrations that underlie it.

In this regard anthropology becomes more than just something that has happened (as "culture" or "ethnicity" has) to history, for history has happened to itself in this way too. If notions like "experience" do as little to explicate this condition as "fact," "reality," or "meaning," consider Nietzsche's diagnosis of "the historical sense" in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "The revolting vapors and closeness of the English rabble in which Shakespearian art and taste has its being disturbs us no more than, say, the Chiaja of Naples where we go along our way, willing and enchanted, with all our senses alive but quite oblivious of the cesspool odors wafting up from the lower town."<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, the source of this bedazzlement is that "measure is foreign to us—let us admit it. The stimulus that tickles us is the infinite, the immeasurable. Like a rider on a forward-charging horse, we drop our reins when infinity lies before us, we modern men, we half-barbarians."<sup>4</sup>

Since the tragedies and histories of Shakespeare, the exemplars of neoclassicism, and the excesses of romanticism, history has been under a tremendous pressure to happen, or perhaps happen again. It has been dramatized, preserved, restored, dug up, naturalized, understood as a thing in itself. And the "happening" of history outside of its time, as drama, restoration, understanding, its happening to persons other than its actors, is as essential to its being thought of as history as the happening of culture outside of its context is necessary to its conception as culture.

What must be given to Nietzsche, however, the insight behind his cascading phrases about "measure" and "half-barbarians," is that this desperate pressure for happening, this subjectivity that dazzles and destroys the modern imagination, is neither history nor culture. As a trope, a self-substantiating movement of feeling or meaning happening to itself, it is merely correlative with another, perhaps equally destructive pressure for "happening" itself to become history or description. The news, the spectacle, the rhetoric, or the performance is perhaps the manner in which Nietzsche's half-barbarians seek the solace of measure.

To force the conjunction of a never-ending quest for happening and an ever-accumulating happening of description into something like a believable history or culture is well-nigh impossible: theory makes poor theater, and even the best theater is poor theory.

This is perforce why we have the social sciences, but also why the social sciences seem always to be doing nothing, or, what is worse, pretty much the same old thing. To the half-barbarian spectator, anxious for the self-substantiation of “happening,” social science looks like the incrementing of descriptions into languages. But to the connoisseur of arguments and logics, contemporary notions of “history” and “culture” look like unsubstantiated claims for *sui generis* happening. If a history, or that particularity of historical happening called a “culture,” is a fabrication of memory through textual means, an organized recollection, then the projective component, “mind,” “cultural ethos,” or “intentionality,” is fabricated anticipation. Hence the social sciences have a vested interest in objectifying or substantiating what is really only a subjective distinction, making a happening of description and a description of happening.

Most of what happens in what we call “communication” or “relating” happens too quickly, demands too immediate a response, to have an actual correspondance with any of the descriptions that might be made of its “meaning.” The meaning of the expression or relational act, it is generally assumed, happened earlier as “intention” or will be recovered later in the synthesis of “memory.” But of course the “earlier” and “later” moments of resolution or synthesis are subject to the same conditions of prospective or retrospective postponement as the original expression or act, as memory and intentionality are themselves but differential “takes” on the same basic description.

One word or thing is taken, expressed, considered through another, on behalf of another, or made identical with another in a sequential operation that is variously understood as memory, cognition, “cause and effect,” “narrative discourse,” “intentionality,” or “motivation.” If it has not escaped social science thinkers that the modes and faculties implied in these rubrics are fundamentally, even reflexively, interrelated, what seems to have eluded their attention is that the interrelation is far more insidious than notions like “deep structure” or “the human mind” would imply. An observer who did not share the bias of their subjective displacements could only conclude that the same thing is being done in the same way over and over again and called different things each time.

Can one “catch” meaning from language, or language itself from meaningfulness, as the first speakers might have caught on to the idea of it back at the beginning? Or are the limits of language and the languages of limit, its propositional logics, caught in such a contagion that we cannot tell one from the other? The archetypal “first language” principle that could translate any or all of the human languages that could ever have existed perfectly into one another would have made its mark in that way. It was so compact in its expression that it had no need of grammar, syntax, segmentation, or phonology, and for that reason need never have existed at all for us to understand perfectly well what we mean by it. To the extent that language has become *linguistic*, that is, relative to its own usage, it has become holographic in spite of itself and has had to incorporate as much diversity within its boundaries as outside of them. Then the very separation of language itself from anything one might say in it, or know through its usage, is at once causal to, and consequential of, the contagion of language and limit.

If, properly speaking, the twinned ideas or oppositional concepts that bracket and so inform our ability to say what we know or know what we say *internalize* its limits as the essence of language itself, then contagion underdetermines the language that would speak of it. Then the linguistic facility has caught its own virus and is in league with itself, twinned *against* the antecedents, or objects and objectives of its discourse, rather than matched with them, as a proper symbolism might be. Effectively, then, past and future have nothing to do with time, but with peculiar echo-effects of their own misconception, past’s future and future’s past. Mind and body are not the psychological or physiological indices we might take them to be, but interstitial paradoxes of an antipodal countertwinning—mind’s body and body’s mind. And just as the “dimensions” of our spatial experience owe their whole reality to the self-relativity of each with respect to the others, so the sensory “faculties” by which we experience them owe their whole evidential reality to the differences among them.

Symbolic or representational reality works at cross-purposes to the languages of its construction. We are in fact confronted with a depth of illusionism that is, like the *maya* of Hindu cosmology, virtually infinite in its deceptional potential, and that can only be represented as meaningful by pretending it as metaphor. But if the metaphor in question is a “back-to-back” (viz., Fig. 6) rather than a belly-to-belly engenderment of feelings or sex of ideas, then the contagion is more real than the meaningfulness pretended for it. It is the incest taboo of iconic representation.

Confusion between what such a metaphor means and how it is set up, or thought to mean, can as easily be mistaken for a referential facility of language as the technologies by which nature is observed and understood can be taken to inform or motivate the natural world itself. If “nature” owes its phenomenality to the instrumentalities by which we “sense” it, then language has objects, the “things” of speaking, for want of a real subject. “The limits of my language,” Wittgenstein might have said, “are the real language of my conceptual limitations,” speaking the differences among things as though they were similarities, and the similarities as though they were differences.

Something other than mere barbarism—the atavism that has justified anthropology’s cultural convictions—would have to bear the brunt of Nietzsche’s accusation against the historical imagination. And something bigger than anthropology itself would have to answer to Heidegger’s criticism about universalizing one’s own subjective focus. The search for a criterion of measure or limitation at the roots of subjective capability brings us to the same variety of causal enchainment or postponement that we find in the reception of trope as linguistic icon or metaphor. If one can only do justice to the sense of a metaphor through the office of another metaphor, and if the “performance” of what it may mean is always *another* performance, as distinct from the original, then the contagion has no practical limits. The idea that a metaphor could “cause” or provoke another metaphor is, however credible, itself another metaphor—that of telling the one from the other.

Or that of telling past from future, if each of these comparatives is dependent on the other for its very definition—past as a sequence of crashed futurities, future as the anticipation of past similitudes—then only an antipodal countertwinning or progressional chiasmus could restore the sense of a present limitation. Does will make the difference between them, or does memory? “Volition is to memory,” one might say, “as future’s pastness is to past’s futurity.” One does not metaphorize the divisions of time but that one divides the metaphor itself, and against itself.

The “negative” of metaphor is the virtual opposite of what symbolic construction or interpretation would have to mean; it is the negative capability of cognition’s imitation of experience. The use of thought’s or language’s limitation in things to tell about itself instead, *say* what it cannot mean by referencing the imagery of saying backward, is antithetical as well to what is called “deconstruction” in that it begins with an episteme, like that of a pun, that is already deconstructed. The es-



sence of Shakespeare's *métier*, making the *unthinkable* the secret of its own articulation, divining the nonfortuitous trajectory of chance, undercuts the absolutism of the post-Newtonian world as the insight of its latter-day counterpart in Wittgenstein undercuts the worlds of physical and cultural relativity.

So, too, the essence of any human feeling or emotion is the *next one* that takes its place and informs on its predecessor, capturing the whole stretch of imaginative possibilities in an inevitable outcome. The secret of a perfectly transparent musical art, like that of Mozart or his teacher, Johann Christian Bach, is that sound can inform on meaning better than meaning can inform on sound, imitate the *sense* of a logic so perfectly that it need make no other kind of sense. The musical prodigy is the grandfather of meaning, regardless of age; the pun is the godfather of language.

*Anaphoresis* is the art, whatever its medium, of the non-load-bearing pun, lucky enough not to get all the meaning it pays for. Literalized, annotated, in the way that one notes down the sound of music into a score, it becomes "an aphorism." The *chiasmatic* expression of a proposition like "the pun of a meaning is the meaning of the pun" is self-subjecting, makes a volte-face of the limitation that language imposes on thought. I have reason to suspect that the internal objectivity trait is genotypic in the cat family, and phenotypic in the human, and accounts for the remarkable similarities in their respective genomes. We have opposite trajectories in encompassing the perils of space-time: the cat, with its no-fault center of gravity, can survive a fall from an incredibly tall building; the human being, with its no-fault illusion about progress, can actually survive the need to build one.

The idea that one metaphor might be used to decipher another, given that each is a key to its own formulation, makes a subjective fantasy of the contagion of language and limit. The place where all the metaphors would come together, form the trope of metaphor itself, is the time when all the people come apart. It is the library of babble, and the joke of it is the joke that brings the library down. Part and whole, individual and collective, or person and world are as unreliable in their mutual interdependency as past and future, or body and mind. Thus the notion that all the atoms, atomic particles, creatures, or ideas formed an unseparated whole in the beginning of things, and have come apart to "evolve" the history of time, and the contrary proposition that they will all come together at the end, are fantastic corollaries of a single contagion. They "deserve" one another for want of an objective limit be-

tween them, like the cat and the human being, or like the anthropologist and the people he has come to study.

The belly-to-belly metaphor of human mental or physical conception, the “reproduction of the species,” is, properly speaking, a picture of incest, a foil for the meaning of meaning that blocks its own understanding. The back-to-back version, that brings the outer limit of human conception within its means, is no longer a metaphor but a negative capability of the species itself. The human hologram is the objective address of the subjective or self-subjecting condition, our place in the universe as a function of the universe’s place in us. A concrete expression of our scale in things, it makes the point that natural science nearly always misses, that “scale” is almost never drawn to scale. The kind of understanding that insists on magnification, changing the scale of things to get the details right, has used the thing it needed to see, and “seen” the thing it needed to use. The conviction that atoms and molecules or life processes and carbon reactions are things that make us up is based on the fact that we have made them up.

The very human need for divinity is a case in point of this, for the invention of supreme being is almost as useful a fiction in restoring human proportions that are too close to be otherwise detectable as the idea of “primitive” languages or peoples, or of human evolution. Gods *must have* created us, for who else would be able to think them up? Human beings must certainly have evolved from simpler organisms, for where else would they have gotten the genes for divine simplifications like the wheel? The secrets of physics, chemistry, and biology must certainly hold the keys to our existence, since we hold the key to theirs. Nothing as absurd as human beings could have arisen by natural means, and nothing so wise from purely cultural strategems. We need not have invented ourselves and our world, but only invented the invention of them.

The Lord Indra was chief of the ancient Vedic pantheon of India, a pragmatic “imager” of world and divinity through the net of *maya* (illusion) cast about the world to give it a figurative form and content. Like Zeus, Indra was a hurler of thunderbolts, but, unlike his Grecian counterpart, Indra’s whole existential status, his divine primacy, was matched in this potency. He cast illusion holographically, as lightning copies its trajectory on its own movement, rives the near heavens in a sudden undercutting of their dimensionality. As a godhead, already everywhere at once in the thunderclap of his going there, he is his own invention of things, at once ancestor and descendant—the true image of a false relationalism.

So the net is an image of what holography *may* be from the standpoint of one who cannot grasp the absolute identity of part and whole. It is only a “net,” an iconic snare or entangler, if its parts are perceived as *holes*, interstices. From the viewpoint of the god on the insight, or *darsan*, of his divine encompassment, the image of the net and its contagious qualification of things does not exist. What may seem to others to be holes in a net are priceless and perfect jewels, gems that reflect one another so perfectly that “they do not know whether they are one or many.” Without the sight that makes their differences disappear, one could not know the god, or know that the net is not a net and that illusion itself has a self-scaling potentiality. Indra can only be anthropomorphized as the reflexive counterpart of his lightning configuration of a perceptual, cognizable world.

Grasped sensually (Fig. 1), Indra's likeness to his own unlikeness in things is a heuristic play on empirical reality, the *lila*, or sport of a king of the gods that would be man. Or it is the imprimatur of a child-reality in the human hologram, that which would be adult, male, exotic to its own demonstration of things through the veils of *maya*, or illusion, that its sensual formation casts about the world of perception. Indra is not an interpretive construction or a constructive interpretation but rather a perfected outcome of what we mean in using these terms—complete creation beside the point of its own coming into being—and one that renders viewpoint and artifice unnecessary to its understanding. Indra-knowledge, or even the suspicion that Indra *could* exist, makes it unnecessary to pretend that people create their own realities. One does not have to believe or know: if one merely *misses* Indra's shape (in the way that an initial missing of the punch line is necessary to the “funny” in a joke), a great deal of phenomenological writing—Husserl, Sartre, Heidegger—is rendered superfluous.

If “culture,” as it is lived or analyzed, could only exist by being pretended or invented, on whatever experiential, folkloric, psychological, or semiotic authority, then Indra's imaginal authority works in the opposite way. His reality or divine suzerainty consists in being the *bestower* of figurative conjecture or cultural “imagination” rather than its product.

The thunderclap and the retinal imprint of lightning are aftereffects, like “energy” itself, the net, or its perceptual entanglement of things, of something that has already *been* where it is just now going. The punch line, as it were, of a joke on empirical reality, like the illusion that illusion itself is another divinity, called Maya, who supersedes Indra. Likewise history viewed on the hindsight of its eventual previousness to



Figure 1. The net of Indra.

our knowledge of it is not “temporal” at all. It is simply convergent (then as now, now as then), or rather it is the simple, brute fact of convergence itself *in spite of* rather than through, or because of the separations and distinctions made to give it a sequential character, a temporal configuration.

So the reconvergence of Indra with any image one might make of him is like the shape of the wheel in time. The double imaging of an object with its own “working,” or usefulness, the wheel is present to our contemporary lives in uncountable ways, yet it is unaccountable as to its actual origination or invention. For both parts of this enigmatic “double envisioning” are implicit in the design of the wheel itself. A portion of the wheel is always moving retrograde to the direction of its application, though necessarily at the same rate, and it is that pragmatic afterlife that the wheel converts into usefulness or progression.

The pragmatic counterimage of godhead that ancient Vedic peoples called “the breaker of cities” (who else might this be but we ourselves, and what besides the wheel or its analogues like the airfoil breaks them?) belongs, in this way, to the human hologram. It is aniconic and atemporal; always at the point of its own invention, which it endlessly repeats, it simultaneously invents the form of its own repetition.

Indra is the part of reality that is also, in this way, the totality of it, casting the net of deception around the world in its motion, or *as* its motion—a movement that is for us the convergent “now” of our placement and replacement in it. Wheel for wheel, earth is the shape of its own place in the cosmos, the larger design that takes its whole description and significance from the familiarities of bodily and earth-surface experience. So we would underdetermine the earth, ignore its presence to our very physical sensation of things, in forming the exaggerated sense of its placement that we turn into transcosmic reality—stellar interiors, black holes, waves, particles, and gravity. Does this “investment” of sensual form and figure carry a negative return, a sort of experiential debit structure, holes in the net, of the spaces and times imagined for it? The image of the black hole, actually an inference based on something absurdly familiar as an “event horizon,” may help. We know from our lives what an “event” might be, and we know from the earth what a horizon is. So we would know as well, if only from the experience of getting smashed in our loves and expectations, exactly what the “interior” of a black hole might be like. This is not profound, and its banality has nothing to do with what space and time might be like. The reality of the net comes down to the simple fact that you can only

get “into” it—psychological depression or a black hole—by trying to *think* your way out of it. Not “feel” or “experience,” believe or postulate, for these are mere by-blows of a causational backlash, but *think*, reckon, configure the knowing-what-you-know part of it.

Pragmatic objectivity is the precise *humor* of explanation or understanding, the way in which no physical fact or subjective state, no natural process or work in art or science is any better than the means of its description. Most of the energy expended in technology, in human relationships, and even in the work of thinking about them is used to run its own description. It “works” the way that we design or imagine its working. But the way in which this takes place, the precise humor that juxtaposes subjective and objective descriptions, is not accountable in ordinary subjective or objective terms. The very practical “edge” it puts on objects and feelings, or better *between* them, is missed with surprising fidelity in the tropes or figures we use to think of it, and most especially in the trope we make of trope itself. It is *overdetermined*, subjectified or objectified, in the separations made to fix and substantiate its underdetermining character. It is *not* metaphoric, metonymic, syntagmatic, or paradigmatic, and if its very significance or usefulness elides particularities of that sort, it is not the trope or figure we imagine it to be.

It is the true image of a false relation to itself, like Lord Indra, sustained as the wheel is, or the lightning bolt, in a “just now” transit to its point of origination—in and as its pragmatic afterlife. In this consideration we are dealing with the shape and purpose of the net, the deceptiveness of imposing measurements and separations (intervals) as “space” or “time,” or as our means of knowing and thinking them, and then living their configurations in terms of those measurements.

Another “detail” of the Indra-net turns out to be more significant than the whole, or at least the fantasy of totality that is pretended in it. As one approaches this condition of absolute or divine holography in the ability to grasp, understand, divine the principle of it, the idea or image of wholeness becomes less and less necessary to its definition or perception. Each detail, however insignificant, defines the principle of its being there simply through the appropriateness of its placement or perception, takes over the totality as a subset of it. Hence the irony of the figure-ground reversal that turns the lacks or empty spaces of the net into “jewels” is compounded by another that matches the anthropomorphism of the net’s divine inspiration. Each “jewel” or detail takes on the cognitive or reflective quality of the subject who is trying to un-

derstand it, turns subjectivity inside out. It cannot “know” whether it is one or many.

It is hardly a wonder that many Indian people regard the Indra-net and the image of divinity it projects with deep suspicion, often profound distaste. For as a *darsan*, an “image” of the god bestowed as the subject’s very act of perceiving him, this one makes a joke of faith, “belief,” and the very act of worshiping itself. The most prescient conception of godhead the human mind could imagine turns out to be the patron, because the patronizer, of the way in which human beings humor themselves in reality. He is the Father of the most original joke of all, necessarily male in detaching himself from his conception (the *bharat* or “universe,” the university) once the act of conceiving is completed.

So it is also less than a wonder that Indra was demoted ages ago by a people who wanted to keep their connection with divinity, and that, for the same reason, India is the great hoarder and admirer of the world’s most precious jewels. To know the net as a net, see it as a net, grasp or perceive it in any way as a net, is to get caught in it. To *not* know it as a net, humor oneself, and go by the counsel of perception alone is to get positively entangled.