

GARUDA INDONESIA, REGISTERED TRADEMARK*

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Statue of Vishnu (Narai) standing on Garuda, Bangkok

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Abstract

This essay examines the restrictions imposed on the use of images. It contrasts forms of transmission of images with contemporary transmission. It begins by focusing on the traditional image of the Garuda or Krut, and its function as a royal and state symbol in South East Asia. It then moves on to examine the philosophy of intellectual property and the manner in which private factions claim a new forms of sovereignty through the restrictions associated with information and images. It finally examines the fragility of corporate sovereignty and the phenomena of intellectual piracy.

I have been called here, through electronic mail, through electronic cables, their metallic life encased by rubberized skin, snaking their way towards portals, computer screens, optic nerves blossoming into mechanical eyes ... with organic eyes steadily staring in response.

I have come from the sky, like a Brahman, carried by Garuda Indonesia, registered trademark,...

... riding in the cabin of the plane, encased in layers of aluminum, plastic, and fabric covered seats, surrounded by the noise of compressed air and the mechanical whine of the engines...

... while far below, the Gulf of Thailand, the hazy land and water are faintly visible through the clouds, and I am always astonished, how such distance can be covered in such a short time, how something so weighty like the earth, can appear so distant and ephemeral, its density lost in the milky haze...

... and yet, the plane lands, and again, here it is, solid land, the falling of rain, the flowing of water, the kinetic chaos of the landscape.

This also reflects a dichotomy which I struggle with in my personal life.

I stand caught between the expectations of my profession to profess some kind of knowledge, and the blind rhythms and impulses of my everyday life ... between the desire for some perspective and insight,

and my embeddedness in the environment in which I move ... between the frozen timelessness of a piece of writing, and the flow of time burning me away like a fuse.

And the ideas and images which cross my own mind swim within the same pool as those which move through the city-scapes. Some are ancient and sacred, and some are new, and copyrighted, registered, and regulated by international law.

But what are these things that pass through me? What loyalties and debt do I owe them? What rituals of sacrifice? What are the restrictions connected to ideas, names, and images? What are the difference between traditional images and their transmission and contemporary images? And how does one think these ideas and images, speak about them – as a philosopher?

And this subject is haunted by time. It involves a reckless and accelerating push into a future and a reaching back into the past. The philosopher often feels he or she has succeeded in something when they point to a problem, a balance, a moderation, a resistance, and yet, these sandcastles seem to be swiftly washed away again by the momentum of contemporary global culture.

If I am divided and at odds with myself, it makes sense that such a project will be eclectic in nature. What is to be understood, is not something unified like a single idea or a conclusion, but a series of struggles and tensions which constantly undermine a certain sense but create certain relations which hold together into a theme.

I will use the title – Garuda Indonesia, registered trademark - to organize my reflections. Not according to the sense of the words, but the spaces between them.

So allow me again to take flight...

Garuda

Chinese : jinchi niao

Hindi: garud

Japanese: karunra

Javanese: garudha

Khmer: khрут

Lao: kut, khut

Myanmar: galon

Thai: krut

Tibetan: gNam-mKha'-lDing

(from Kam, Garrett. *Ramayana in the Arts of Asia*. P. 14)

Garuda is the divine bird-man who is the vehicle [vahana] of Vishnu.

One version of the story begins with two sisters. Kadru desired many offspring and so laid a thousand eggs which quickly hatched into Nagas or snake deities. Her sister Vinata desired only a few offspring and so laid only two eggs. The eggs took so long to hatch that Vinata became impatient and opened one egg in curiosity. The boy in the egg was only half-developed. He had an upper body but as yet no lower body. He became the sun-god Anruna, who put a curse upon his mother for her impatience. For 500 years, she would be the slave of her sister Kadru whereupon she would be freed by her son. And so, Vinata waited another 500 years before the second egg hatched and this became Garuda.

Garuda now desires to buy his mother's freedom. To accomplish this he must enter a whirling wheel of blades, defeat the gods – including the great warrior god Indra - guarding the amrita or soma (the liquor of immortality), and carry it back to his Naga cousins. Roberto Calasso has an elegant way of telling the end of the story...

The Snakes had arranged themselves in a circle to await Garuda's return. They saw him coming like a black star, a point expanding on the horizon, until his beak laid down a delicate plant, damp with sap, upon the *darbha* grass. "this is the *soma*, Snakes. This is my mother's ransom. I deliver it to you. But before you drink of this celestial liquid, I would advise a purificatory bath." In disciplined devotion, the Snakes slithered off toward the river. For a moment, the only moment of tranquility the earth would ever know, the *soma* was left, alone, on the grass. A second later Indra's rapacious hand had swooped from the heavens, and already it was done. Gleaming with water, aware of the gravity of the moment, the Snakes could be seen returning through the tall grass. They found nothing but a place where the grass had been bent slightly. Hurriedly they licked at the *darbha* grass where Garuda had laid the *soma*. From that moment on the Snakes have had forked tongues. (Calasso, Roberto. *Ka*. p. 16)



Portrait of King Erlanga, as Vishnu on Garuda. c. 1043 A.D.
Photo from *The Art of Southeast Asia*, Philip Rawson

The struggle between the forces represented by sun and moon, bird and snake, are almost universal. Garuda would then be connected with the sun and with the cosmic order. The more numerous Nagas, would represent less differentiated and fluid forces of nature, with the moon and with the feminine. Coomeraswamy, in his essay “Rape of a Nagi,” explains it as follows:

The primordial serpent or dragon – really the Godhead, as distinguished from the proceeding God – is described as “omniform”, or “protean,” in accordance with the exemplarist doctrine of the first principle as being of a single form that is the form of very different things. There is accordingly something more than a simple position of the solar-angelic and lunar-titanic powers of light and darkness. Beyond the concept of an alternate procession and recession, beyond the contrast of exterior and interior operations, there lies the “Supreme Identity” (*tad ekam*) of both divine natures, of mortal Love and deathless Death, ... as well known texts express it, “I and my Father *are* one,” “the Serpents *are* the Suns”; now Soma *was* Vrtra”; Agni *is* outwardly the household altar Fire, and inwardly the Chthonic Serpent. Because of the temporal form of our understanding, we think and speak of the one as proceeding from the other, and of an eventful division of “the light *from* the darkness” (Genesis), or of Heaven *from* Earth (Vedas, *passim*); and thus regarding the Supernal Sun, Eternal Avatar, or Messiah, as having most effectively cast off all adherent potentiality and as wholly in act, it is inferred by analogy that it lies within the competence of every separated creature to effect in the same way a riddance of evil, “just as the serpent sheds its skin.” (Coomeraswamy, *Selected Papers*, p. 334)

Just as the Solar principle emerges from the Lunar principle, the consumption of the Naga by the Garuda is a return to unity.

We see then, in what sense a death at the hands of God is also a felicity and consummation most to be desired. If the Eagle, *noster Deus consumens*, really devours the Nagi ... this is not merely a consumption, but also an assimilation and incorporation; if the act of solar violence is a rape, it is also a “rapture” and a “transport” in both possible senses of both words. (Coomeraswamy, p. 336)

The Garuda imposes order and justice. In one story, he demonstrates his role in killing a giant tortoise and elephant who are fighting, while simultaneously rescuing twelve Brahman sages who are clutching the branch of a tree. He is also the principle of creativity. In some stories

he is praised as the devotional hymn to the sun itself. In Calasso's account, Brhaspati, chief priest to the Gods, says to Indra...

“Garuda is not made of feathers but of meters. You cannot hurt a meter. Garuda is *gayatri* and *tristubh* and *jagati*. Garuda is the hymn. The hymn that cannot be scratched.” (Calasso, Roberto. *Ka*. p. 14)

Finally because of his strength and loyalty, the Garuda is asked by great god Vishnu to be his vehicle. Garuda becomes the servant of supreme power and sovereignty.

Traditional Transmission

The transmission of early symbols, artistic images, myths, religions and languages, was through the early Indian traders. They passed on to the early cultures of South East Asia, not only religion but also the Pali and Sanskrit languages, which opened up a new world for these cultures. And yet each culture accepts this cultural gift, absorbs it into itself, and makes it their own.

By whatever name we choose to call the phenomenon of the arrival and absorption of Indian culture, it becomes so much more comprehensible if we see it not in terms of sudden and dramatic discontinuities but as a gradual and creative interaction between Indonesia's own beliefs, institutions and preferences on the one hand and the exciting opportunities offered by Indian experience on the other. There was no clash of civilizations, with one overwhelming the other. In fact, there was considerable similarity between the manner in which 'Sanskritic' ideas spread in the Indian subcontinent itself over the centuries, merging into rather than displacing the vast variety of local cultures, and the way this process extended across the seas to Southeast Asia. (Saran, Malini and Vinod C. Khanna. *The Ramayana in Indonesia*. Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2004. p. 29)

As these stories pass throughout South East Asia, from the Mahabharata, the Vishnu-Purana, the Ramayana, and the Jataka stories, they adapt to local situations. The Garuda becomes the servant of a variety of sovereign authorities.

Indonesia

Here in Java, the Garuda follows the religion of Vaishnavism and becomes the servant of the Javanese Kings. He becomes the symbol of royal sovereignty.

But Wisnuite [Vaishavite] elements, never exclusive, came up still stronger in the East-Javanese period, after the 10th century. Mighty kings were all presented as incarnations of Wisnu [Vishnu]. In the poem Arjuna Wiwaha, Erlangga the first great king of East Java, was connected to Arjuna, a Wisnu incarnate. There is a statue showing him with the attributes of Wisnu. More significant to our purpose, a sculpture of Wisnu mounting Garuda was found in his sanctuary, the Candi Belahan. Now exhibited in the museum of Mojokorto, it shows a ferocious Garuda, trampling the snakes and ready to fight. Another famous king of East Java, the king Jayabaya, the ruler of Kediri, was said to be Wisnuatmaka, or Wisnu incarnate. But the most famous king associated with Wisnu was Ken Arok, the adventurer made king who founded the kingdom of Singasari, from which originated the empire of Majapahit. In the Pararaton chronicle, Wisnu said to one of the characters: "Stop worshipping the statue, I am not there any more. I have incarnated in Java under the name of Ken Arok." Ken Arok was eventually killed by his son-in-law, Anusapati, but the Wisnuite tradition was carried on. The reliefs on the walls of his sanctuary, Candi Kidal, tell the episodes of the Garuda story. On the Western side, Garuda is shown visiting his mother while on the Eastern relief he runs away with the vessel of water of immortality. The tradition associating the king and Wisnu persisted during later reigns. (Couteau, Jean. *Archipelago*. vol 1, no. 1)

As Islam became the religion of Java, the Garuda now began to serve the Sultan.

The Javanese rulers became Sultans, indeed, heirs to the prophet and commanders of the faith. Thus they appropriated the symbols of Islam for political benefit as they had earlier appropriated the symbols of Hinduism, notably Garuda. But they did not renounce the old stories nor the old symbols. They enrobed Islam in an Hindu garb. Resilient Wisnuite influences are numerous. The biggest ceremony of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta involves a Gunungan (mountain) of rice, the Gunungan is the cosmic mountain and the goddess of rice is Wisnu's wife. Direct Garuda-

related symbols are also involved. The Sultan of Yogyakarta, implicitly a Wisnu incarnate, still rides in parades in a Garuda-winged vehicle, the Garuda Kencono. The Sultan is also protected by Garuda, as shown in the Garuda banners used in his paraphernalia. The signs of Garuda's presence in Java are too numerous for all of them to be included here. (Couteau, Jean. *Archipelago*. vol 1, no. 1)

Today in Indonesia he is a symbol of the power of the state. Garuda Indonesia Airlines is a state company, and so the name Garuda is still connected to this symbolism of state power.

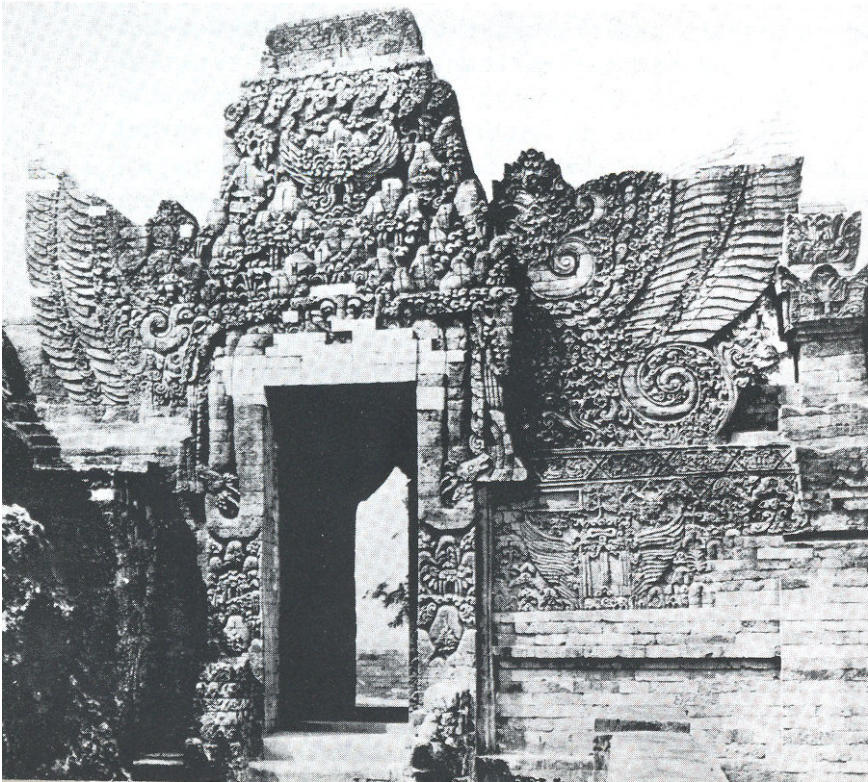
Thailand

Today, in Thailand the Garuda is both the state and royal symbol. This is based upon the identification of the Thai king with Narai or Narayana, the Thai version of Vishnu. Since Narayana is always accompanied by the Garuda, he became witness to the acts of God. Royal commands are thus certified by the image of the Garuda. The image of the Garuda now becomes fixed as a seal connected to the king.

As there was no dry and fixed rule how the posture of Garuda should be, King Rama VI realized that it should be of advantage to have it fixed. He finally selected the "Krut Ram" or "Dancing Garuda" posture to be the permanent official symbol. This posture is called in full "Phra Rajalancakorn Phra Khrut Phah" which simply means "The Seal-Mark in the form of Garuda the Vehicle". The Act on the State Seals of Siam, issued in his reign specified that this state seal should be permanent. (*Garuda*. p. 193)

The use of the Garuda symbol is highly restricted and controlled. It can only be used by businesses and banks that have demonstrated long service to Thailand. In fact, the image is considered to have so much power that businesses adjacent to a Garuda-adorned business will often mount a mirror to deflect the powerful gaze of the Garuda (this use of mirrors is originally a Chinese practice).

Recently in Thailand there was an intense controversy over the selling by the Prime Minister of a satellite to a business in Singapore. One important reason, and a very symbolic one, is that the satellite has imprinted



Gateway to Mosque Sendangduwur, Badjanegara
Photo from *The Art of Southeast Asia*, Philip Rawson

upon it an image of a Garuda.

Here this brings us to the shore of a vast problem, the problem of intellectual property and the manner in which its dynamic differs from traditional cultural transmission. But so far we have found one way to navigate through this problem - the idea of “sovereignty”.

Trade-marks

Peter Drahos in his work, *A Philosophy of Intellectual Property*, attempts to characterize the phenomena of intellectual property in various ways. One is through the idea of “abstract objects”. This stresses the incorporeality of intellectual property and how it moves from being considered a thing, to an abstract expression of relationships between people (notice that this emphasis on abstraction would differentiate intellectual property from the ancient Indian practice of trade-marking more corporeal goods with the royal symbol).

Another is through the distinction between “negative” and “positive communities” as it has been developed by Grotius and Pufendorf. In relation to the control of the commons, laws concerning intellectual property were shaped based upon the idea of negative rather than positive community. That is, a situation where everyone competes for rights over the commons, rather than a situation that stresses joint ownership.

And finally, another way is through the idea of “Sovereignty”. Drahos summarizes the argument of Morris Cohen that private property is a kind of sovereignty over other.

Cohen’s analytical argument rests on the now accepted view that property consists of a relation between persons in respect of an object rather than a relation between a person and an object. The link between



Official “Dancing Garuda” seal, Thailand

dominium and *imperium* is accomplished by arguing, quite plausibly, that the dominant feature of property is the right to exclude others; the capacity to exclude others from things where those things are important or necessities gives the property owner considerable or even great power over others. Hence Cohen’s conclusion is that ‘*dominium* over things is also *imperium* over our fellow human beings’. (Drahos, Peter. *A Philosophy of Intellectual Property*. p. 147)

Drahos points out that this seems to be in conflict with Foucault’s very significant rethinking of the mechanisms of power. While he tries to retain Foucault’s understanding of the flow of power within a network, he also wants to retain Cohen’s idea of sovereignty.

Thus we should not follow Foucault when he suggests that we should ‘eschew the model of Leviathan in the study of power’. Instead we need to recognize that, through mechanisms of power, Leviathan changes its shape and produces progeny, which ultimately come to threaten its supremacy. (Drahos, Peter. *A Philosophy of Intellectual Property*. p. 150)

And this is important. The sovereignty of intellectual property is a mechanism where private “factions” (a word Drahos borrows from the

American statesman James Madison) come to replace the power of the state. Abstract objects are then mechanisms to concentrate power and sovereignty into private hands.

We have opted for the view that abstract objects are fictional entities, albeit highly useful ones. Our question is: what role do these entities play in the concentration of power? Our answer will be that within law they form the basis of identity judgements, judgements that ultimately determine who has access to vital capital resources. The fact that these judgements are made using fictional entities suggests that the judgements are themselves pragmatic and based on conventions. (Drahos, Peter. *A Philosophy of Intellectual Property*. p. 153)

This should also remind us of Guy Debord's definitions of Spectacle. "The Spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image." (Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. p. 24).

Capitalist Cosmologies

Kenelm Burridge, in his essay *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities*, discusses the growth of millenarian or messianic movements in indigenous cultures faced with foreign Western influence. He gives special emphasis to the introduction of money.

If money is to circulate significantly, if an indigenous community is to have a satisfactory access to money, then the community must so adapt and alter its prestige system that money becomes a basic measure of worth. Unless and until money begins accurately to assess those qualities which a people or community finds meaningful, so long will they not be able to use money as it was meant to be used, so long will they not have a satisfactory access. Belonging to, and connoting, the complex social order of those who have minted it, use it, and bring it to foreign shores, money ... demands acceptance of the dint of social ordering adopted by those who make it. (Burridge, Kenelm. *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* p. 45)

The dilemma is how to balance the traditional measure of man with the foreign monetary measure. Significant imbalances, according to

Burridge lead to millenarian cults, or cargo cults, which have become ritualized methods of addressing these imbalances.

Of course, Burridge is speaking here of traditional Melanesian, Polynesian, and Australian cultures. But we can witness this same drama in the highly developed urban landscapes of Southeast Asian cities. Southeast Asia has a long history of monetary trade in shells, silver, gold, salt, cloth and silk. In these more indigenous forms of exchange, there are complex values added to the mere exchange of money.

[The] form of a transaction must be viewed, not in isolation, but as a consequence of the monetary conventions adopted by the society and the context in which the transaction operates. The major transactional forms include direct exchange, indirect exchange, and linked transfers. Each of these becomes monetized in a different way, due chiefly to the disparate contexts in which each is carried out, i.e. how the transaction fulfills some social, fiscal-administrative, commercial, or religious obligation. The context of a transaction includes its articulation with transactions which preceded it and those which will follow as a consequence of it, as in interconnectedness of the links of a chain. (Wicks. *Money, Markets and Trade in Early South East Asia*, p. 7))

Yet the emphasis on Westernized monetary measures in contemporary global capitalism has the tendency of stripping local monetary transaction from its deeper values and rituals.

The Western approaches to exchange emphasize individual consumption. Marshall Sahlins in his essay “Cosmologies of Capitalism” discusses the development of the unique connection of consumption and freedom in the West.

So by the time of Adam Smith, every person’s permanent misery – that is, scarcity and need – had become the premise of economic wisdom and the source of national welfare. The social and moral sublimation of temporal desires had indeed been dissolved by an oncoming capitalism. What for Augustine was slavery, the human bondage to bodily desires, was in the bourgeois view the essential human freedom ... The new rationality was based on an exquisite sensitivity to pleasure and pain, ... But, then, the capitalist economy had made a supreme fetish of human needs in the sense that needs, which are always social and objective in character, had to be assumed as subjective experiences of bodily affliction. (Sahlins, Marshall. “Cosmologies of Capitalism” p. 455)

Perhaps Sahlins overstates the sensual aspects of Western capitalism, yet I think the observation concerning the subjectification of experience and its connection with freedom and desire is significant. This capitalist cosmology is indeed a form of individualist spirituality at the deepest level. It is here that Western culture still finds itself in tension with Asian cultures.

It is not so much a matter of asking the question of “how these tensions can be resolved?” This would be a political problem. But the question I would like to address here is: “how are these tensions resolving themselves?”

Sacred Commodities

If we take a step into an urban landscape like Bangkok, we find on street level, various syncretic mechanisms which attempt to preserve the flow of cultural value within the circulations of value in global capitalism. . . namely, in the commodification and circulation of sacred images in amulets.

Stanley Tambiah has done very careful studies on the lives of the forest monks (*arahants*) and what he calls the “cult of amulets” connected to their powers. At the end of his work he attempts to understand this within a sociological framework.

The possession and circulation of amulets in Thailand represents still another semiotic code. The ascetic saint of the forest distributes his charisma as a donation inspired by compassion and loving-kindness (*metta*). He himself does not expect a return from his gift to the worldlings at large. The amulet is indexically or metonymically related to the ascetic monk and represents a materialization of his virtue, achieved by means of a rite of transfer. Amulets are made in plenty and distributed to many, for the saint’s *metta* is inexhaustible and does not diminish by sharing, provided he continues to cleave to his ascetic and meditative life and to experience the bliss of tranquil joy and detachment. But of course we know that, in the Thai instance, amulets are comparable on the basis of the differential charisma of the saints and ascetics; though donated to the public at large, they in practice become scarce and assume a commercial value. They become, at a second less obvious round of social relations, private and hidden possessions of laymen who expect to use the amulets’

potency to manipulate, overpower, seduce, and control their fellow men and women in an ongoing drama of social transactions. This there is a two-level discourse – the charisma of the saint, who in transcending the world is able to shower upon it his virtue, and the gratification of desires on the part of the laymen, for whom prosperity and fortune approach the logic of a zero-sum game. (Tambiah, Stanley. J. *Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*. p. 342)

According to Tambiah, the circulation of amulets becomes a mark of status among the ruling elite. It also represents a kind of spiritual decay of the original function of the sacred image through capitalist exchange and commodity fetishism. I believe however this is a limited reading of this phenomenon. We need not consider the commodification of amulets only as form of decay, we can also see it as a kind of resistance to the leveling of value within capitalist exchange itself.

Western capitalism is based upon an idea of individual consumption and fulfillment. But when Western consumer-culture is imported into a much older foreign culture where individual fulfillment and transformation is less important, then subtle modifications are made to the exchange principle.

We seem to see here a resistance to appropriation into full abstraction by mixing of traditional mythical symbols with capitalist exchange. Not a mere commodification but a resistance to commodification by the alteration of the spiritual aspects of exchange. The exchange of money and goods are anchored to *spiritual realities* connected to religion, royalty, and state.

Notice that this would show the weakness of Critical Theory which condemns “commodity fetishism” in a crudely over-generalized manner. It is not a matter of overcoming fetishism, but the manner in which the fixation on objects is ultimately connected to the more stable elements of culture and community. This is the lesson of amulets.

Likewise, foreign goods cannot function in the abstract (pseudo-spiritualized) sense in which they wish. So they collapse again into mere corporeality – mere discs to be cheaply traded, mere labels which are sewn onto clothes and handbags.

Violations

Along the streets of Bangkok and at the smaller shopping malls, pirated DVDs, VCDs, and computer software are offered for sale. At one shopping center, all the DVDs are lined on the counters of small stalls ... the glossy reproductions of movie posters with famous actors and actresses ... the simple reproductions of the film encoded and burned into the cheap discs.

The problem of piracy of intellectual property is a complex one. Especially when viewed from street level. Without pirated software, many small countries would simply cease to function. Without pirated music, many musicians would not be exposed to the best and most interesting experiments in music. And without pirated DVDs, many film professors and students would not be exposed to classic cinema. Around the world, the transmission of high culture runs deepest through piracy.

Back at the shopping center, the police suddenly appear, and behind them, cameramen from the TV station. The merchants from one shop are lined up behind the counter with their illegal ware, the police lined up standing behind. A show is put on for the cameras. Then the merchants are led out, the DVD covers packed in boxes. The cameramen pack up and leave. And business resumes as usual at the other shops. The merchants spend a couple of nights in prison - punished for an extremely liminal style of trading which has been going on in Asia for thousands of years.

The violation of abstract property is addressed in an abstract way, a drama as thin as the surface of a television screen, as thin as a label, as thin as the foil on a DVD. This media drama is designed to create a sense of corporate authority aligned with state authority. But this use of illusion and force to achieve justice is unconvincing because the corporate authority is unconvincing. As Drahos points out...

One of the distinguishing features of [abstract objects] is that they are fuzzy, indeterminate objects. Their boundaries depend on the identity judgements of a legal elite. These judgements are judgements of fragile convention that may easily break down or be influenced by specific interest groups, with the consequence that they cease to serve the broader, more

diffuse societal interests to which they are meant to be directed. (Drahos, p. 158)

But just as the fuzziness and fragility of abstract objects leads to their accumulation and abuse, outside of the Western perspective, this fragility also leads to the forces that undermine the fixing of intellectual property. The dark waters of piracy continue to flow even under the electronic gaze of corporate authority.

Microsoft does not ride on the wings of the Garuda. It is merely a distant foreign corporation, a faction, an abstract body dealing with abstract objects. The gods of Gucci, Universal, and Fox, can never adequately exercise their authority because their authority is not rooted in the culture itself. Corporate authority can never be convincing in the manner of state authority because it has no responsibility to the community, and so it is as Drahos points out a “fragile convention”.

The sovereignty of corporations and factions cannot be complete because of their fragility, because they are too one-sided. Corporate mythology is not held in a holistic syncretic relationship with older traditional and state mythologies.

Re-balance

In traditional Indian mythology we always see a balance re-established between contending opposites.

Although Garuda demonstrates his power over the battling forces of nature represented by the tortoise and elephant, and preserves the wisdom of the Brahman sages clutching the branch, the power of the Garuda, that is, the power of order and control, itself must remain in a kind of balance with the forces of nature represented by his cousins the Naga.

Not only does Vishnu recline upon the great cosmic serpent Ananta, but also reconciles directly with the forces of nature in the form of Krishna. Krishna, as an avatar of Vishnu, defeats Kaliya, the great Naga king. He is addressing an imbalance where the forces of nature undermine the establishment of ordered culture. Yet Kaliya is himself divine and merely acting according to his own nature. Kaliya recognizes that Krishna is in

fact Vishnu, and explains...

“I have only acted according to my nature. As you created me with strength and endowed me with my poison, so have I behaved. Had I comported myself otherwise, I should have violated the laws laid down by you for every creature according to its kind.” (Zimmer, Heinrich. *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*. p. 85)

To which Krishna-Vishnu replies...

“You shall not henceforth reside in the waters of the Yamuna, but in the vastness of the ocean. Depart! Moreover, I declare to you that Garuda, the sun-bird of gold, arch enemy of all serpents and my vehicle through the reaches of space, forever shall spare you, whom I have touched.” (Zimmer, Heinrich. *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*. p. 86)

Heinrich Zimmer points out that Krishna-Vishnu plays the role of the “moderator” rather than the “annihilator”. This is a theme seen through the syncretism of South East Asia. Buddhism and Islam appropriate these older images and set them in peace with one another. We see this in the Buddhism of the tenth century AD. In the *Kathasaritsagara*, there is a story of a Garuda who is ready to consume a young Naga boy. The mother Naga pleads to take her son’s place. The Garuda is moved by the mother’s devotion for her son and vows never again to eat a Naga. There are also instances in Khmer statuary of Garudas intertwined peacefully with Nagas.

I wish here to return to Coomeraswamy. Concerning art history, he stresses that it is better to read into an image than to try to read meanings out of them. And it is essential to consider the conditions under which a work is made.

No explanation of a work of art can be called complete which doesn’t account for its actual composition ... In other words, no art history can be called complete which merely considers the decorative usage of a given motif, and ignores the *raisons d’être* of the elements of which it is built up and the logic of the relationship of its parts. It is begging the question to attribute the precise and minute particulars of a traditional iconography merely to the operation of an “aesthetic instinct”; we have still to explain why the formal cause has been imagined as it was, and for this we cannot supply the answer until we have understood the final

cause in response to which the formal image arose in a given mentality. (Coomeraswamy, p. 337)

We might not be able to isolate one final cause, as Coomeraswamy suggests, but he calls attention to a problem which is important to us. It is not so much the formal image and its circulation through cultures which is significant, it is also the use and adaptation of those images, and why they arise in a given mentality.

The more “organic” situation would be an appreciation of the possibilities of transformation. This is what allows a culture to change, adapt, grow and prosper. The form is assimilated and transformed, hands work upon the material in the creation of objects, the objects work upon the mind.

And we can contrast the early transmission of language (Sanskrit and Pali), with the colonial transmission of western languages, and present day transmission of licensed computer languages. In each case there is an opening of possibilities. Yet the traditional transmission seems to be the more balanced reciprocal relationship. Colonial transmission begins to develop more controlling and oppressive aspects while still providing new possibilities of knowledge and expression, Finally, the transmission of computer languages vastly increases the possibilities for knowledge, but also vastly increases the possibilities of control. With this increasing emphasis on control and order, we are facing a situation where assimilation of influences and the natural growth of culture is obstructed.

Frozen corporate images are brittle. They are not given as a gift as in traditional cultures and so organically assimilated. They do not allow for local adaptation and expression but are merely rented. They do not represent legitimate local power (which would be in the service of humanity, nature, culture and community), but are controlled and sold by distant factions who serve limited interests and who quickly punish those who do not appropriate their cultural objects correctly. The structure of control of intellectual property is an example of a solar power detached from the lunar power. It is one-sided.

But such structures also become fragile and deep counter-currents begin to undermine them. Perhaps we are beginning to see this process now. Perhaps uncontrollable piracy is the necessary counterpart to the excessive control of languages and images of our time.

And what about these images and ideas that flow through me like blood? What is the place of my own reflection and writing? As a scholar I attempt to navigate a tradition of texts and names from the past of which I have the responsibility to formally and accurately cite. And I apply these ideas and languages of the past to contemporary situations, images from the media, and corporate and economic phenomena.

So far scholarship is relatively free with respect to intellectual property and corporate control. One still has relatively free access to information and the use of images, although this is now threatening to change. If it does, we will find ourselves in the same position as the pirates selling intellectual property on the streets. We will be practicing black-market philosophy.

But scholarship and art are pursuits which still have a relative freedom, and place themselves in the role of mediator. And in this role, they have the power and the responsibility to address the imbalances of power and conflicts in the contemporary world . . . to pass through the walls of legal restriction, and find connections to something much more timeless.

How ironic, that in this age of the greatest dissemination of traditional ideas, voices and images, the land itself is in danger of falling silent.

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