

ETERNITY

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Great mountains such as Fujiyama and Kilimanjaro are recognized as being sacred places. In myths they are often inhabited by gods, living in eternity far above the secular life of human beings. In this article the psychological background of the images of eternity is traced, defining a transcendental experience of the mountain landscape as a creative source. A phenomenological description of a personal experience of the mountain range in the Grand Teton National Park is analyzed with the background of four different definitions of the transcendent experience. It is put forward that visual and emotional qualities, relating specifically to the experience of mountains, are origins of the images of eternity in myths and pictures of art and these images, as well as the mountain landscape itself, provoke personal integrity within an existential theme of eternity.

One instant is eternity;
 eternity is the now.
 When you see through this one instant,
 you see through the one who sees.

Wu-Men

Living most of my life in a country where the highest point is only 173 meters above sea level I presumably do not have much to say about mountains. Knowledge, especially acquired through professional studies, is always based on continued and careful observations. Some experiences in life never conform to the norms of professional studies, thus, they remain as peculiarities or metaphysical occurrences. These experiences are characterized by their sudden appearance. Their duration is usually very short, and there is no known strategy to evoke them. Nevertheless, they are known to all people and are usually recognized as being very important to their existence.

These experiences appear in many different situations, for example in front of works of art, during ritual activities, and in social interactions and they are called by different names such as the aesthetic experience; religious, spiritual, or mystical experience; and love at first sight, just to name a few. In this case I prefer to talk about them as *transcendent experiences*, because they transcend ordinary experience in daily life, and later on we will see that they are also transcendent in a deeper psychological sense.

A View of Eternity

A few years ago I drove across America. When we arrived at the Grand Teton National Park I had a breathtaking view of the mountain range. This prototype of a range rose dramatically from the flatlands and had such an impact on me that I will never forget it.

The magnificence of the mountain is only partly defined by its bulk. The rocky mass seems to be grounded deep in the earth. The solid shape against the transparent blue sky creates an image so powerful that it goes far beyond what is defined formally.

A magnetic power attracts one's perception and consciousness to the mountain and from the first moment it seizes a permanent place in the consciousness. Whatever one is doing and wherever one is located in relation to the mountain, it is always there, somewhere in back of the mind, as constant as one's own identity. Even without looking at it, it is present on the horizon of consciousness, and looking up, it will always appear in the focus of perception. Its power is so absolute that it leaves an empty space behind it. The mountain is the center and the end of the world, and only the pragmatic mind can force up the pictures of what is behind it. As a newcomer to Grand Teton National Park, I was spellbound by the view, continuously turning my eyes towards this Platonic idea of what a mountain range should be. I watched the sunshine and shadows play their game on the flanks and the pallet of transparent colors fade in rain and radiate in the sun. My eyes followed even the smallest changes with a heightened awareness as if it was a sacred cathedral.

Mountains easily recall a meditative state of mind where visual perception directs all consciousness out into the landscape. The view becomes endless and undefined by following the flank towards the peak. The eyes shift from spot to spot without grasping the totality, transcending gradually into an infinite journey. Reaching the peak with one's eyes does not stop this blissful flight; it is as if the peak continues, transcending into infinity.

I was deeply engaged in the effects this mountain had on me and was suddenly moved into black emptiness; my mind was without pictures, in-



tentions or light. I saw only the black silhouette of the mountain as a transparent shadow vanishing into the infinite; being there intensely without being there at all. It was as if I was disrobed, all that was me was gently peeled away. The place I belonged to, my job, relationships, and the feeling of knowing who I am, vanished. Everything relating to mundane life, limited by birth and death, disappeared. For a moment I was beyond being, beyond the instance of life. I picture the experience as being like the stone slowly ground down until the specific moment where it finally loses its own identity, turning into one of the numerous grains of sand. The stone loses its uniqueness but it is still there.

This scary feeling filled up my body and I was shivering. The darkness filled me up with a fear of being totally engulfed by something great and infinite, without form, limits, or structure. There was only darkness with an imperative force of attraction. At the same time I was imbued with a feeling of being freed from the burden of secular life.

Afterwards, the sun went down and the mountain remained there as a black silhouette against the sky on fire. I was still shivering but filled with a feeling of relief and purification.

The experience left such an impact on me that I have continuously returned to the memories, trying to define that special feeling. Usually it vanishes out into something I cannot reach, my mental ability is stopped and a frightening conceptual emptiness blocks the flow of consciousness. The few times I have been able to penetrate this block I realized that fear is an insufficient description. There is also a quality of reverence for something greater and eternal represented by the Tetons, and a feeling of wonder for the magnificence beyond my own identity. *Awe* must be the most appropriate word in the English language to characterize the emotion of my first meeting with eternity.

Mystical States of Consciousness

William James was one of the first to approach the psychology of transcendent experiences. He (1958, 292-294) defines what he calls »mystical states of consciousness« with four characteristic marks. The first one being *ineffability*, meaning that this kind of experience cannot be described. There is no adequate description in words that can impart or transfer the experience to a person who has not had the same experience. The mystical experience is furthermore characterized by a *noetic* quality which is a sort of »insight into depths of truth« that is not accessible in discursive thinking. These two marks are, according to James, sufficient to entitle any state as mystical. He adds two more characteristics usually found. *Transiency*, refers to the short duration of these experiences, and the fact that they cannot be sustained for very long. Finally, he describes the mystical state of

consciousness which appears without one's will, as if it originated from a superior power. James calls this mark *passivity*.

James thinks that personal religious experiences have their roots and center in mystical states of consciousness and he ascribes them the utmost importance in religious life. He writes (1958, 327), »They are excitements like the emotions of love of ambition, gifts to our spirit by means of which facts already objectively before us fall into a new expressiveness and make a new connection with our active life.« He (ibid., 323) recognizes these experiences as being »absolutely authoritative over the individuals to whom they come«, but adds (ibid., 325), »that mystics have no right to claim what we ought to accept the deliverance of their peculiar experiences, if we are ourselves outsiders and feel no private call thereto.«

Peak-experiences

Abraham H. Maslow (1964, 19) subsumes the mystical illumination under the heading of what he calls the »peak-experience«. Aesthetic experiences, certain kinds of love experiences, cases of insight, the creative moment as well as others, are all moments of deep happiness and fulfillment called peak-experiences. While William James bases his descriptions on a limited number of narratives from literature, Abraham H. Maslow carries out interviews and makes his subjects write responses about their personal experiences of ecstatic moments.

Maslow (1964, 72) agrees with James' viewpoint that these experiences are essentially *ineffable*, meaning that they cannot be described in general analytical and rational language. Descriptions of peak-experiences in literatures and between people in general are typically phrased in poetic and metaphorical language regardless of what culture or context they take place in.

Maslow's detailed descriptions of the peak-experience (1963, 1964, 1968) can be summarized in five different characteristics. First, the peak-experience appears as a *unified whole*, meaning that the universe or the perceived makes up an integrated and absolute unity where all connections and references to the context where it appears is suspended. The experiencer becomes apart of this unity by being *absorbed* in what he experiences. Former qualities of identity and interests are swept away and the experiencer is fused into what is experienced. The peak-experience seems to be a momentary *self-actualization* where the person's true potentialities become apparent. Maslow (1968) describes this aspect as being unselfish, receptive, humble, without fear and anxiety, spontaneous, honest, as well as several other characteristics of discovering the intrinsic values of one's own being. This state of consciousness where the person feels elevated to a personally defined heaven is characterized by a feeling of *ecstasy*, commonly described

as bliss, rapture, exaltation, and so forth. The attention and joy in the peak-experience is so absolute and exclusive that it is a *timeless* experience and even afterwards it is difficult to estimate its duration.

Maslow (1968, 79) recognizes the peak-experience as being an end in itself. It is felt to be such a valuable moment that the experimenter considers it among the ultimate goals of living and in some cases, the peak-experience has had such an impact on the existence that it permanently changes the person. He (*ibid.*) agrees with James' viewpoint that the revelations of some acutely sensitive prophets are the very beginning and essence of every religion, but he (1964, 72) is explicitly interested in the general aspects of the peak-experiences, leaving out the direct connection between a specific peak-experience and its consequences on the experimenter's psychological constitution and creative expressions or religious revelations.

Ecstasy

At the same time Maslow made his registrations of peak-experiences, Marghanita Laski (1961) carried out a similar survey based on interviews, literary and religious texts. Laski (*ibid.*, 5) calls these states of mind »ecstasies« and defines them as »a range of experiences characterized by being joyful, transitory, unexpected, rare, valued, and extraordinary to the point of often seeming as if derived from a praeternatural source.«

Natural sceneries, art, and sexual love are the most frequently mentioned »triggers«, as Laski calls them, where the ecstatic experiences appear, indicating that they are release-mechanisms without providing sufficient cause. Religion, creative work, childbirth, and exercise are also mentioned as circumstances that trigger ecstasies.

Her descriptions of ecstasy are based on what people actually said about their experiences and she (*ibid.*, chap. 2) classifies their descriptions into three categories. One category of statements refers to the feeling of losing difference, time, place, limitation, worldliness, desire, sorrow, sin, self, words and/or images, and sense. Another category is the feeling of gaining unity and/or 'everything', timelessness, an ideal place (such as heaven), release, a new life or another world, satisfaction, joy, salvation and perfection, glory, contact, mystical knowledge, new knowledge, knowledge by identification, and feelings of ineffability. The third category of statements refers to quasi-physical feelings, and Laski (*ibid.*) sums them up under the following headings: Up-words and phrases such as »a heightened awareness«, »a floating sensation«; inside-words and phrases such as »an enormous bubble swelling inside the chest«, »full of force«, and so forth. Light/heat-words and phrases refer to »wonderful enlightenments«, »flash of an idea«, and »burning with ardent love«. Other descriptions refer to feelings of enlargement and improvement; to pain such as »so intense in its

joy as to be almost painful«. Words and phrases describing a feeling of liquidity such as »bubbling up inside«; and finally to peace and calm in words like »sensations of silence and of rest« and »complete peace«.

Laski's studies are purely empirical going no further than establishing some descriptive generalizations without theoretical dialectics. She establishes from the reports that ecstasies have important effects on people's mental and physical being and they give rise to ideals and values, but she does not elaborate on a psychology of such influences.

Great Experience

In Erich Neumann's later writings on the theme creativity he (1989, chap. 3) names the meeting with the unitary reality, the »Great Experience« (die Grosse Erfahrung). The unitary reality, which is our original state of existence, as children experience it, is repressed to the unconscious by the ego, excluding us from its greater reality. Breaking through the conscious mind to the authentic and greater reality, which is within the capacity of every human being, creates an experience of *wholeness*. The surrounding world and the experiencer's psyche become a living integrated whole, giving the experiencer an impression of being absorbed or confronted with a world animated by a soul. This state of deep involvement seems quasi-mystical because it transcends the conscious existence, and Neumann (*ibid.*, 180) finds it difficult to describe this aspect without giving the experience mystical connotations. Freed from fear and constricting narrowness and confronted with redeeming power gives this experience a quality of the *super-real*. Neumann (*ibid.*, 189) writes, »We find ourselves confronted with the ineffable magnificence of something which can never be grasped, but which animates everything that is real as a crowning, super-real essence.«

The great experience is also characterized by a *profound emotion*, described by Neumann (1989, 188) as »a process of being gripped and stirred to the depths by archetypal atmospheres or 'moods', which throb through the world of archetypal contents; or alternatively, the experience can take the form of a mood which is felt as such, in its own right.« Even if we are confronted with destructive forces, in pictures or in real life, the great experience grips and fascinates us as if it belonged to the order of a sublime reality. Neumann does not elaborate on this emotional aspect of the great experience, but he seems to advocate a general emotional profundity, characterizing the different moods provoked by different archetypal images. He does not talk about a general state of ecstasy as Laski (1961) and Maslow (1964) describe it, but rather gives it a superior quality of emotionality which in some cases will be named ecstasy. Neumann (1989, 190) is aware that the demonical, morbid, grotesque, and so forth, are legitimate dimensions of the archetypal world and they are met with emotional profundity different from what we usually associate with ecstasy.

Finally, the *eternal dimension* is a general quality of all great experiences. Neumann (1989, 194) writes, »The eternal dimension of the 'Great Experience' does not in any way depend upon whether it takes the form of mountain or flower, animal or man; in every case it is something transcendent which leaves mere reality behind it.« Everything met in the great experience appears to be something more than the same thing recognized through the conscious mind; it transcends the mere appearance as if it belonged to an eternal world. In Neumann's theories the archetypes actually have an eternal dimension since they are universal to all people always. As predispositions they make it possible for us to perceive the world and our self. The confrontation of the unitary reality represents a liberation of our personality by which we are transformed towards becoming an integrated person. James (1958) and Maslow (1964) claim that the transcendent experience is important to the personal religious belief; Neumann (1989) on the other hand, explains how these experiences are decisive for personal growth in general, including religious life.

Phenomenological Description

There are differences in the descriptions by James, Maslow, Laski, and Neumann, but there is no doubt that they describe the same kind of experience. Concentrating on a specific category of transcendent experiences, such as the religious in James' studies, or on a specific quality, such as the joyful bliss which is significant in Maslow's and Laski's studies, results in varying descriptions. Neumann's theoretical approach seems to question the appropriateness of Maslow's and Laski's questionnaires by pointing out that a transcendent experience is not necessarily pleasurable. Maslow (1968, 81) goes so far as to claim that »the peak-experience is only good and desirable, and is never experienced as evil or undesirable.« This is not a result of his studies but a point of departure for his interviews, which are introduced with the following sentence: »I would like you to think of the most wonderful experience or experiences of your life;...« (Ibid., 71). Neumann on the other hand is not in doubt that the dark and evil sides of existence also show up in great experiences. They will appear with an transcendent and profound quality, which differentiates them from normal anxiety, despair, and terror, and also from elevated pleasure and joy. They define the empirical field differently and they also end up with varied descriptions.

The four descriptions of the transcendent experience are generally characterized by omitting the individual aspects, thus making the phenomenological description incomplete. This does not mean that they have been unaware of the specific appearance of the individual experience, since they all rely on personal descriptions of transcendent experiences. Their endeavor

to generalize these experiences fail to see that there are phenomenological aspects which cannot be generalized; these are characteristics which should not be refused as being localisms, as Maslow (1964, 20) insists, »Whatever is *different* about these illuminations can be taken as being localisms both in time and space, and are, therefore, peripheral, expendable, not essential.«

The appearance of the transcendent experience as it is defined by the senses is an aspect which cannot be generalized. Laski (1961) talks about different triggers, meaning common circumstances in which transcendent experiences appear and there seems to be a general agreement that confrontations with nature and art, to name a few, facilitate transcendent experiences. The specific »scenery« appears in quoted descriptions, but only its formal aspects, such as 'unified whole' and 'super-real' are included in the general descriptions. Taking my experience from the Grand Teton National Park into consideration, I maintain that the view of the mountain is a conspicuous aspect of the experience and furthermore, I presume that the qualities of this visual appearance are important implements for a psychological understanding of the transcendent experience. For the present, I draw the attention to my view of the sheer bulk rising in front of me with grandiosity and independent identity and the infinity in the perception of the peak and the vividness as if the mountain were embedded with its own soul and power.

The descriptions of the emotional aspect of the transcendent experience are likewise marked by general descriptions in expense of the individual characteristics. Maslow and Laski are so concerned with the delightful and ecstatic aspect of the transcendent experience that they consequently elaborate on this as a general aspect of all transcendent experiences. They never hint at a specific emotional quality even though the circumstance where they appear are very different. Neumann's description on the other hand, clearly points out that the emotional quality varies from experience to experience. They are all emotionally »profound«, saying that the individual emotion appears with the same quality of gripping power. Neumann does not go into detail with these emotions and this is possibly a result of his belief that they are not different from emotions in general.

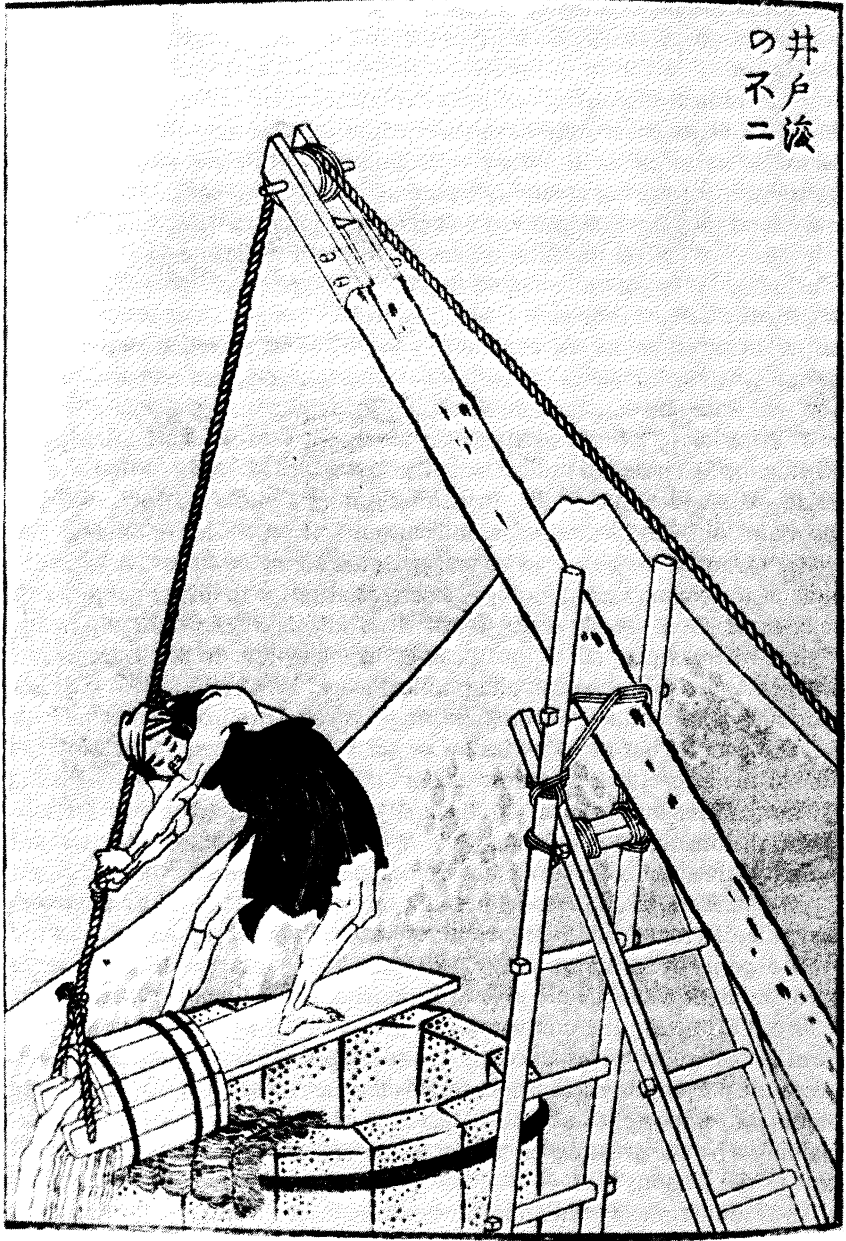
My experience in the Grand Teton National Park clearly shows that the dominating aspect is a specific feeling of awe. This is joined with a feeling of bliss, and followed afterwards by feelings of relief and purification. The latter may often overshadow the individual quality. I remember the emotional aspect having the effect on me that I kept trying to define it. I could not refer this emotional quality to something I had experienced before and it took me a long time before I could maintain that this was an emotion of awe. I now recognize in front of mountains with the grandeur that only a few possess, a similar emotional quality even if it never appears with the same profundity.

Existential Theme

The transcendent experience is generally ascribed great psychological importance. James (1958, 292) believes that the »personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness.« Maslow believes in radical aftereffects of peak-experiences. He (1968, 101) assumes that peak-experiences may have therapeutic effects; they can change the person's view of himself, other people, and the world; they can release the experienter for greater creativity, spontaneity, expressiveness, and idiosyncrasy; and they are remembered as being very important, making the person more apt to feel that life in general is worth while. Laski (1961, 371) concludes, »It is generally agreed that ecstatic experiences are to be valued not for the delight they give – which is great – but for their beneficial results. These results may be generally expressed as improved mental organization, whether this takes the form of replacing uneasiness and dissatisfaction with ease and satisfaction, or of appearing to confirm a sought belief, or of inspiring to moral action or of enabling the expression of a new mental creation.« These are radical statements primarily based on what the interviewed subjects have told. In neither James', Maslow's, or Laski's is there an empirical or theoretical indications for a specific relationship between a transcendent experience and personal change. Maslow (1970, 165) hints at a psychological typology, saying that self-actualizing people with peak-experiences usually relate to activities within art, religion, and philosophy, whereas people without peak-experience seem to self-actualize in practical areas such as social and political work. Laski (1961, 276) suggests cautiously that ecstatic experiences may be restricted to intellectual and creative people; but neither Maslow or Laski adduce a sufficient explanation of the aftereffects of transcendent experiences.

Neumann, in accordance with the analytical psychology, recognizes contact to the unconscious as being decisive for individualization and personal integrity; thus, he is very much in agreement with James', Maslow's, and Laski's assumptions on personal growth, but his approach to the great experience is different from theirs. He does not examine the appearance of the great experience for its own sake, he (1989, 180) states that the experience becomes great when we are able to experience the unity and wholeness of reality. Contacting the unitary reality in the depth of the unconscious in form of the archetypes is a necessity for developing a harmonic balance between the person's consciousness and his unconscious. The great experience become an important and active factor in Neumann's theories, thus, explaining why the great experience appears and why it appears at a certain time in the persons life.

The mountain as visual appearance is also influenced by the archetypes, forming the experience in correspondence with their universal conceptions. Neumann uses pictures and stories from mythology to gain insight into the



nature of archetypes. He (1963, 99) writes, »The original throne was the mountain, which combines the symbols of earth, cave, bulk, and height; the mountain was the immobile, sedentary symbol that visibly rules over the land. First it was the Mountain Mother, a numinous godhead; later it became the seat and the throne of the visible or invisible numen; still later, the 'empty throne', on which the godhead 'descends'. The mountain seat as throne of the Great Goddess, of the Mountain Woman, is a later stage of development.« He continues, »Later the throne becomes the sacral symbol of the Great Mother who has receded into the background, and it is on this throne that the king sits.« Isis, the great Mother Goddess of the early cults in Egypt, is actually pictured with the king sitting on her lap.

Neumann focuses on his theme of the Great Mother, but his descriptions establish at the same time the mountain as a symbol of the female godhead, appearing with sublime and sacred power. He recognizes the mythological motifs as images formed by the directing forces of the archetypes and consequently establishes the sacred appearance of the mountain as a universal human tendency.

I assume, that a transcendent mountain experience is a result of personal life experiences facilitated by the visual appearance of the mountain, as opposed to an inborn tendency. The experience of the Tetons was not my first mountain experience. When I was sixteen years old I saw my first mountain in Austria and since that time I have occasionally been confronted with mountains. Low and accessible mountains have always tempted me to climb them, whereas steep and rocky mountains, like the Swiss Alps, have induced in me a feeling of unrest. The experience in the Grand Teton National Park has no similarities to previous experiences with mountains and even if the view of this mountain range is extremely spectacular I dare to maintain that it is not the mountain as such which caused the experience. It is only possible to understand my transcendent mountain experience by including my existential constitution at that time in my life.

Being occupied with one's own identity, as an essence of being human or a unique person, is a common matter. Questions about identity are intertwined with death and ideas about a life after death, forming an *existential theme* general to all people. It should not be necessary to go into detail about my personal relationship to this theme to see how a manifestation of eternity as an existential theme is met by corresponding characteristics in my transcendent mountain experience. The importance of this experience was not clear to me for a long time afterwards, but I gradually realized that a complexity of emotions, images, ideas, and beliefs about my own identity in light of eternity were dissolved, leaving a new confidence in my temporal position as a mortal human being.

These observations, even though they may remain unique, give me a psychological understanding of the transcendent experience that during our lifetime we are occupied with many questions essential to our existence.

Some of these questions relate to the same existential theme. Each theme is constituted through the person's own experiences and thereby characterized by his own images and emotions. New experiences may bring new complexity to the theme and get loaded with mutual incompatible images and emotions, demanding a »qualitative leap« as Søren Kierkegaard (1980, chap. 1) talks about, to bring a new consistency in the existential theme. The transcendent experience is such a leap where the essence of an existential theme is manifested in a momentary experience. Previous experiences attached to the theme are still accessible through memory, but they will no longer exert the same influence on the person's existence. They are like steps left behind which were necessary for getting there but afterwards are of no use. Life continues after the leap, and experiences add new complexity to the present constitution, demanding a future leap to preserve personal integrity.

Mountain Eidola

The view of the mountain becomes important to the existential theme of eternity at the moment life experiences are provoked to form a synthesis by the view. Visual characteristics of the transcendent experience of the mountain, that I will call the *mountain eidola*, relate to the essence of previous experiences within the existential theme. The grandiosity of the Tetons for example, in the form of the size of the bulk, the height of the peaks, the consistency of the mass, appears as a natural force in simple contrast to the sky, and provokes an infinite process of perception. This is an eidola corresponding to common aspects of eternity. For the fragile human identity, it represents the everlasting and for the instance of human life it represents the infinite, and therefore, the mountain eidola becomes an visual representation of eternity.

Myths from all over the world show a continual connection between mountains and eternity. The home of the gods in the Greek mythology, Olympus, being the highest peak in the Greek peninsula, is among the most well-known. Kilimanjaro in Africa and Kailas in Asia have also been recognized as places inhabited by gods. Mountains in America such as the Tetons were also recognized as sacred places among the Native American Indians. Åke Hultkrantz (1987, 50), who has been studying the native religions of America, tells how the Shoshoni Indians respected the spirits of the mountain, »The majestic Teton peaks are powerful beings. They do not allow people to climb them, and those who try succumb. Nor do they accept being called by their right name, which in Shoshoni is 'black standing up'. If a person traveling through the Teton Pass makes use of their true name, it will cause a flood or, in wintertime, a terrible snowstorm. It is also forbidden to point at the peaks with a finger.«

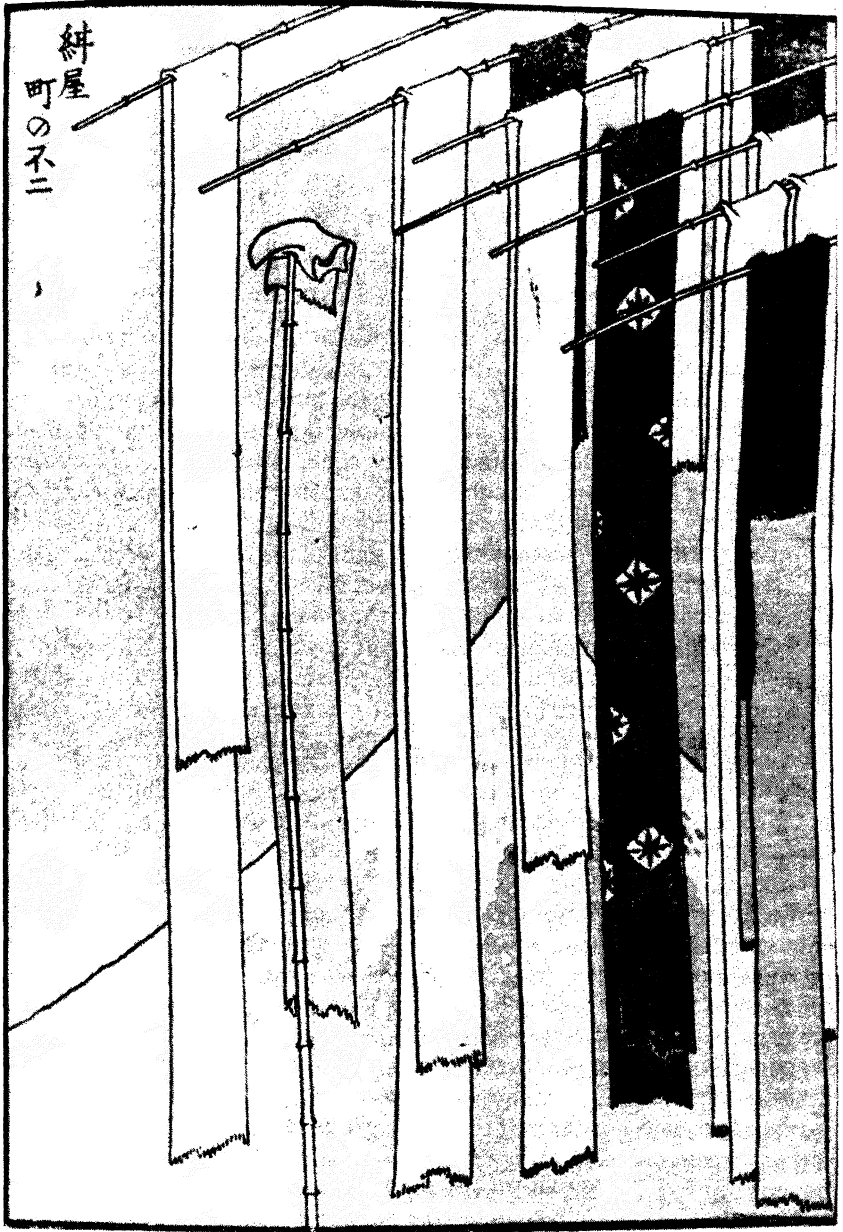
Mount Shasta in the Northern California, which is another graceful mountain structure, was also recognized to be the home of the Great Spirit among the Modoc Indians. The American poet, Joaquin Miller (1873, 235-236), who lived among the Medocs, retells their story about the Great Spirit and Mount Shasta:

The Indians say the Great Spirit made this mountain first of all. Can you not see how it is? they say. He first pushed down snow and ice from the skies through a hole which he made in the blue heavens by turning a stone round and round, till he made this great mountain, then he stepped out of the clouds on to the mountain top, and descended and planted the trees all around by putting his finger on the ground. Simple and sublime!

The sun melted the snow, and the water ran down and nurtured the trees and made the rivers. After that he made the fish for the rivers out of the small end of his staff. He made the birds by blowing some leaves which he took up from the ground among the trees. After that he made the beasts out of the remainder of his stick, but made the grizzly bear out of the big end, and made him master over all the others. He made the grizzly so strong that he feared him himself, and would have to go up on the top of the mountain out of sight of the forest to sleep at night, lest the grizzly, who, as will be seen, was much more strong and cunning then than now, should assail him in his sleep. Afterwards, the Great Spirit wishing to remain on earth, and make the sea and some more land, he converted Mount Shasta by a great deal of labour into a wigwam, and built a fire in the centre of it and made it a pleasant home. After that his family came down, and they all have lived in the mountain ever since.

Eternal Present

Myths are works of art inspired by transcendent experiences. The mountain eidola and the emotions which are stirred during the experience are important sources for creativity. People who have such experiences are often impelled to visualize and conceptualize the essence of them, because they seem to be more authentic and profound than ordinary experiences of mountains. Myths are such rare results of creative expansions on transcendent experiences, forming the pictures of existential themes. These works of art, may appear as if they are created in the imagination and without any relation to the image of the mountain itself. The chosen story expounds primarily on the theme of creation, not on the theme of eternity itself, but it is easy to imagine how the qualities of the sacred, infinite, and eternal, contrasting the temporal life of the listener, originates from the mountain eidola itself.



In the period after my experience in the Grand Teton National Park I realized a renewed interest in pictures by artists such as Bierstadt, Friedrich, and Hokusai. They are three different painters working in three different continents and all of them focus on the mountain landscape and emphasize different aspects of eternity. Bierstadt focuses on the sublime landscape as aspects of ecstasy; Friedrich, the infinity of being absorbed in the landscape, and Hokusai, the moment when secular life is reflected in the eternal. These are all pictures of mountains but they are primarily pictures of existence. As results of artistic creativity inspired by transcendent mountain experience, they succeed in reflecting different aspects of such an experience, and as great art they also succeed in provoking new transcendent experiences among their audience, called aesthetic experiences.

In *The Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* and *The One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji* by Hokusai the daily life is reflected in the eternity of the mountain. People working, fishing, and travelling, or people watching the silhouette of Fuji are depicted as a complexity of activities and these details contrast the silent simplicity of the few lines which form the peak. Close or far away, in a thunderstorm or a sunset, Fuji is always there; the same perpetual present transcending any state of the secular.

When looking at the picture, one's eyes always end up focussing on Fuji. We look through the chores of life as if they only have meaning by virtue of the eternal. The mountain in Hokusai's Fuji pictures attract the attention just as mountains in real life do; wherever you are and whatever is happening, your orientation is always turned towards the mountain. Waking up, working, eating, at a certain moment one will always turn the head up and the mountain will be there confirming one's presence. The many variations do not change Fuji, it is one and the same, rising in the background with a sublime power.

Hokusai's pictures of Mount Fuji are representations of the real mountain which has been recognized as a sacred place and a symbol of ultimate purity and beauty since ancient times. His pictures are primarily reflections of an existential aspect of eternity, the eternal present, which gives secular life a new dimension.

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The illustrations are from the *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji* by Hokusai.