

THE CONCEPT OF DESIRE

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Pinwheel

The lover is the pin in the wheel for a poet, and represents the desire for love. Each colored plastic curl is a love metaphor from the poet. The composition of color is held together by desire, theme of lover. Without desire, the beautiful pinwheel could not be constructed. Though the pin is lost centrally amongst colors, we must not forget that it is separate as an object of its own. Loosen it, and curls go flying. Without desire, beauty could not spin in the form of a wheel.

Desire is the pin that ties things together, hair, wheels. For Aristotle, desire is the overarch to good life (eudaimonia). For St. John Klimakos, it is the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* one must climb in order to reach noesis. Without desire, neither eudaimonia nor noesis could be achieved.

The pin not only serves as a metaphor for the function of desire but also illustrates its quality of shimmer (aiolos): glistening, tremulous, capable of swift mutabilities, decisive in matters of life and death.

... but also those desires
that glistened in eyes for you,
trembled in the voice...
(Kavafy, *Body Remember*)

The quality 'of desire' exists within the Aristotelian category "quality" and can thus be applied to elements of the category "substance" as qualifications, like colors. Desire could be *said of* or *in* body parts (eyes, voice), substances, just as white could be *said of* or *in* the body, a substance (Aristotle, *Categories* 2, 1a26-8).

An Aristotelian species-genus tree could be constructed for the quality 'of desire'. The most worldly and individualistic of desires, such as those for specific items, 'desire for hairbrush', would populate the bottom. These would be derived from more transcendent species, like 'desire for love'. Desire for love, light, music, would in turn derive from the overarching 'desire for eudaimonia', marked by the pinline dash of broadest genus. Such pyramidal ascent parallels the climb up Klimakos' *Ladder* to noesis.

To understand desire as a quality is to be able to treat it like a color. The impressionist painter Twachtman assigned white to four oyster boats, but also a species of desire, as indicated by the wild brushstrokes. Ambition *in* the red-checked squares of a tablecloth. Passionate flowers of Van Gogh.

Such acts of metaphor allow one to distinguish the quality of desire from the substances that desire qualifies. To be able to apply this distinction well is to be able to rid one's self of the quality of desire and achieve a self

that no longer possesses the quality of desire. To be able transfer ambition to the red square, ‘desire for love’ to the oyster boat, and eventually ‘desire for eudaimonia’ to artwork itself. This final transfer can only be made once the artist has spent all subspecies of desire in art so that the broadest genus, ‘desire for eudaimonia’, is all that is left. However, the artist clings to artwork because it truly is the culmination of all past dependencies.

(As more colored curls are collected and pinned, the composition grows more beautiful, increasingly glorious, and thus desirable for its own sake. Desire for lover expands to become desire for pinwheel creation.)

... rose was the intoxication color—
of such intoxication that color rose
after so many years, I write
in abandoned home,
such intoxication, felt as before.

(Kavafy, *One Night*)

Noesis is achieved once the artist is able to detach from art and no longer desires indulging in it. To be able see art as a substance, like a hairbrush or oyster boat. This allows for the artist to dispel the ultimate genus of desire through the final metaphor of art as body, both vessels of desire.

To overcome the desire for art is to let go of the vision of a Canon by completing a body of art. To finish off the

collection of colors and let curls fly to the wind in circles of noetic thought. The silence of the whirl and the stillness of no-more-collecting is the Orthodox state of hesychia.

The artist observes the composition as though it were another inanimate. Eyes no longer glisten with colors in succession. Voice no longer trembles in the aiolos of awe. The lover let-go of, shimmering and pinned to foreign post. Post-poetic, noetic.

One of the reasons why we do not attain it is a reason of ghastly simplicity. We do not desire it. We desire desperately certain external forms of pleasure. We desire power, glory, money, health, reputation... (Powys)

Pin used up. Future creations, more beautiful, swept away. Undesirable this state of un-desire.

Ladder of Poetry

The figure of un-desire stands quietly illumined under green exit lights at three in the morning. A party of passerbys screams in horror, then mocks in pity.

Desire to share the man's magical serenity? Never for a moment! He would pity the poor devil. He would think to himself: "There, save for my superior cleverness, should I be going about?"
(Powys)

In order to complete the translation of *Ithaca* however, nightlong hours are required. A dark, empty, building is necessary. Total silence is crucial for songs to ear-worm through undisturbed.

Desert Fathers pursued such conditions through self-imposed solitary confinement in order to reach hesychia. External silence and stillness were considered necessary to reach that state of internal silence and stillness. This emphasis on material surrounding is a paradox in the Orthodox path to transcendence.

While the external silence and stillness of the translator figure give the impression of a hesychia state reached, this is not the case. The translator would not be able to stand the dark if it weren't for the sounds of *Ithaca*

moving through her mind. Conditions of solitary confinement would become intolerable without poetry.

Paradise raised me up as I perceived it,
it enriched me as I meditated upon it;
I forgot my poor estate,
for it had made me drunk with its fragrance.
I became as though no longer my old self,
for it renewed me with all its varied nature.
I swam around
in its magnificent waves;
and in the place that, burning like a furnace,
had made Adam naked,
I became so inebriated
that I forgot all my sins there.

(Hymns on Paradise 6.4)

If hesychia were considered a virtue, Aristotle would term this translator figure ‘continent’ (*enkrates*). Externally, she appears virtuous, engaged in the virtue of hesychia. But internally, rational and emotive parts of the soul are at war. Discord, passion, ebony, pearls, the body feels (Kavafy, *Ithaca*). The rational part wishes for stillness and silence, the emotive part desires motion and word (Kavafy, *As Much As You Can*).

Her dependence on poetry to withstand the conditions of external stillness and silence indicates she is merely continent, merely an artist—not virtuous, not yet hesychast. True hesychasts would not break out in

apocalyptic tears during the silences between art. Hesychasts are eternally at peace in solitary confinement.

To be virtuous one must surpass continence. Thus, the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* is truly the *Ladder of Poetry* (Kavafy) because art is the necessary measure one must take to become hesychast. The torture of art is equivalent to the necessary “grief of poverty” (Palamas p. 312). To reduce desire one must undergo deprivation, pure silence, where the rational and emotive parts of the soul clash. Art forces the figure to enter such undesirable states. It leads the artist into solitary confinement. Once the earworms finish their song, silence, dark, and loneliness suddenly torment the translator as she burns with desire for music, light, love. She experiences the grief of poverty, and turns back to poetry as a source of music, light, and love.

... while Eve’s mouth is sealed
with a silence that is beneficial
—but it also serves once again
as a harp to sing the praises of her Creator.
(*Hymns on Paradise* 6.8)

Desires once again emerge within spaces between rungs, the silences between repetitions. Art and prayer both relieve the burn of desire through narcosis, and become more desirable with every repetition.

... I seek you, Art of Poetry,

for your medical expertise,
narcosis of pain, through Word and Fantasy.
(Kavafy, *Melancholy of Jason Cleander*)

It is as though the beauty represented by desires is incorporated into art and prayer so that art and prayer eventually represent the beauty of all that was ever desired. This is seen clearly in the transformation of St. Ephrem's *On the Passions*, from despair in torment to exultation of beauty. Thus, the constant repetition of Jesus Prayer and the obsession for monasticism. To be surrounded by woods and snow like J.D. Salinger.

On the Passions

St. Ephrem of Syria

[1] This is despair, shame, grief, dishonor. This time spent chained to my desire. Because though I can break loose from these chains once and for all, I simply don't want to. I feel safe and comfortable with the demands of the passions because I am enslaved to them by my own will. A habit of passions is frightening and awful because it chains the mind with chains unbreakable that are also desirable, so that I find myself actually wanting to be chained. I am chained by habit to captivity by the Devil, and I enjoy it. Sunk to the bitterest of depths, yet I feel such pleasure. Every day the Enemy renews my chains for me because he sees that I enjoy my unique and varied chains. My Enemy is a craftsman. He doesn't chain me with the chains I want, but instead offers such chains and traps that I accept whatever he offers with much joy. He knows that whatever he offers is stronger than me and so offers whatever chain he wants me to wear.

[2] ... so I can glorify you endlessly and sing hymns with ardor for you, all my heart, voice, for the entire duration of my life. Those too bored to sing and glorify you, Lord, deprive themselves of a future full of life. Christ my Savior, grant me my heart's wish so that my voice becomes an instrument that exults in songs of your holy charity.

Ascent to Society

The concept of compassion must have been constructed by impassioned students. Young monks would have considered it an act of compassion on the part of St. John Klimakos to have descended from solitude to teach. Little would they know that noetic beings are no longer distracted by the parties or laughs, passionately longing for ascent themselves.

... you should abide in your cell and hide yourself a little until the tempest of passion has passed you. When it has passed, spending time outside your cell will do you no harm. (Palamas, *The Philokalia* p. 311)

A noetic being can be alone amongst others. To live amongst the passions is their com-passion.

When he was present it was if he was not there. And when he was not there you felt him quite close to you. (Canellopoulos, *Demetrios Capetanakis*)

St. John Klimakos spent twenty-five years in absolute solitude. So long did he remain on that last rung. Salinger spent sixty but never did eventually ascend to society. A compassionate Salinger would perhaps not be so famous.

The Pyre

Refugees are archetypes of deprivation, forced into states of un-desire. The Catastrophe of Smyrna in 1922 burned all that the inhabitants of Smyrna ever desired: home and hope. Marika, the main character in the film *Rembetiko*, burns with desire for what was lost in childhood and sings her first song with intense longing (*kaimo*).

I'm burning, I'm burning,
throw more oil to the fire,
I'm drowning, I'm drowning,
throw me deep into sea.
(*Kaigomai*)

The making of art becomes inseparable from the burn of desire. Once art finishes, desire returns. The relief art offers is only temporary.

It is a wound by knife—
Medication of Art of Poetry
can anesthetize only temporarily.
(Kavafy, *Melancholy of
Jason Cleander*)

The state of hesychia, on the other hand, is achingly sustainable. Because it is an eternal state of un-desire, the pleasure of fulfillment is no longer experienced. All

desires have been tempered into the compositional mean between deprivation and satisfaction. It is a state eternally as sustainable, painless, and pleasureless as death.

Among these three conditions, then, two are vices—one of excess, one of deficiency—and one, the mean, is virtue. (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 2, 1108b11-2)

Stuck on the *Ladder of Poetry*, Marika continues to burn years after her first song, hardly able to sustain herself, “Every morning I wake up and beg for the sun to burn me,” she tells her childhood lover while sitting by black waters.

The more art produced, the more transcendent desire becomes. The ultimate desire for art itself results in constant indulgement in art. Art no longer offers respite because art becomes the passion. Desire for art, in a sense, is equivalent to the desire for desire. After all, desire is what enabled the beauty of the art and it seems as though only desire can unlock floodgates of beauty, for more art.

The person inwardly illumined by the light... cannot endure... he has seen and experience something that is beyond nature, thought or conception... He becomes like someone suddenly inflamed with a violent fever: as though on fire and

unable to endure the flames, he is beside himself, utterly unable to control himself. And though he pours forth incessant tears that bring him some relief, the flame of his desire kindles all the more. (Symeon the New Theologian, p. 38)

The artist forces deprivation and negligence upon herself in order to feel desire and to create art and indulge in the pleasure of its relief. Thus, pleasure only comes through self-torment.

I wish I could throw off the thoughts which poison my happiness. And yet I take a kind of pleasure in indulging them. (Chopin)

This is not sustainable. Death seems to be the only salvation: it both offers relief and fulfills desire for lack (necessary for desired ascent). A pyre is longed for by the emotive part of the soul. Thus, the fatality of the tallest fall: suicide of an artist, over-fast of a monk. The mutability is swift like a shimmering aiolos, a matter of life and death.

... desire for life, and the next instant, desire for death; some kind of sweet peace, some kind of numbness, absent-mindedness... (Chopin)

To overcome the desire to live indicates that all desire of life has been fulfilled and thus the pleasure of respite is no longer felt. For the artist, such fulfillment of desire

could be equated to the end of art, as desire was required to create art in the first place. Now that the artist desires to make art more than ever, she is unable to because the passions have been quenched by art. A world with all desire fulfilled deprives the artist of art. The artist therefore hurts herself for the sake of art, which has come to represent all worldly desire ever felt: love, life, music. Through self-torment, the artist dies for the suffering of the world, or rather, in the name of world suffering.

When a person is born,
kaimo is born,
war explodes,
blood flows.
(*Kaigomai*)

Emily Dickinson instructs her sister to burn all her poems. To possess the desire to die is to have only reached the first stage of transcendence, where material existence becomes secondary to heart.

... there are two main forms of ecstatic longing...
one within the heart and the other enravishment
taking one beyond oneself. The first pertains to
those who are still in the process of achieving
illumination, the second to those perfected in love.
(Gregory of Sinai, p. 222)

Had Dickinson reached the second level, she would not feel the need to erase *herself*, and simply allow unbound

poems to fly to the wind. The desire to die is just as worldly as the desire to live. To give in to desire for absolute poverty, and to die, is to fulfill that final desire to ascend to eudaimonia rather than overcome it. To die for world suffering is to succumb to the pleasure of fulfillment, right when ascent proves most difficult.

Just the favor. Get me on that fire.
Don't let the pain bend me again.
Quick. Lift me up. It's true. My labors are over...
No tears.
I want the finish of this welcome, unwelcome work
to be joy.

(Sophocles)

St. Gregory Palamas warns against passion of voluntary poverty.

... a monk who has this passion cannot be obedient. If he persists in serving it diligently, there is grave risk of him lapsing also into incurable maladies of the body... Judas in the New Testament... hanged himself in the field of blood, and falling headlong he burst his belly and his intestines gushed out... (Palamas, p. 306)

Eventually Marika detaches from art. She dies silently and undesirably. She becomes a channel of worldly sorrow through which future generations sing rembetiko and experience the torture of art, castigate "Mother

Greece” and curse pained mother's neglect, as means of overcoming it. This is Marika’s eternal legacy.

Mirror

Pinning the wheel to foreign pole is what allows for the composition to spin in circles that resemble motion of noetic thought.

... it returns and operates within itself, and so beholds itself; and this is called by St. Dionysios the intellect's 'circular movement'. This is the intellect's highest and most befitting activity... it even transcends itself... (Palamas, p. 336)

Ask the scholar why she studies. "To map the stars." Why map the stars? To understand the layout of the universe? Why understand the layout of the universe? To study. Ask the scholar again why she studies, and another circle will be drawn.

... it will go on without limit, so that desire will prove to be empty and futile. (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1094a22)

Once desire is empty and futile, every action performed is for performed for the sake of itself. No ulterior motives exist because the rational and emotive parts of the soul are in agreement. The rational part of the soul makes virtuous decisions and the emotive part follows through. Actions are inspired by intellect, not desire. Nothing is

done for gain, or for lack. In eudaimonia, desires are at the zero point between the deprivation and satisfaction, the mean is reached. Thus, the emotive part of the soul (which desires) possesses no power.

... aim is the reconvergence of all the soul's powers in the intellect... In this way they are restored to their original state and assimilated to their Archetype, grace renewing in them their pristine and inconceivable beauty... (Palamas, p. 319)

To perform actions without desire is to be a fully intellectual being. To “study” and engage in the intellect is therefore an activity that aims at no end apart from itself (). A state of constant study is self-sufficient because it is choice worthy in its own right and not for some other end (). “Hence complete happiness is the activity of study.”

... the baptism of regeneration... to paint the divine likeness over the divine image in us... (Neilos, p. 317)

To have ascended the *Ladder* is to stand on level ground. Each step resounds within its own tones, mirrors orthogonal, images Orthodox and true.

Noesis
K.P. Kavafy

Years of my youth, and a lifestyle of pleasure—
how clear their significance is to me now.

Such fruitless nothings, the regrets...

But I didn't see their significance then.

Through the rampage of my youth
sprung the congress of my poetry,
to define and establish the outskirts of my art.

Thus, the fluctuating regret.
And the decision of restraint, withheld, ever-changing,
lasting no more than two weeks, at most.

Impressions Match

Circular motions used to describe noetic thought exist in ecosystems which have propelled life on earth for billions of years. Poetry composed in noesis could resemble an ecosystem of memory: pink ribbons before sleep recall ominous flags recall purple skies recall graduation recalls pink ribbons.

impressions match days match
(Kavafy, *What's Spent in Art*)

Metaphors are constructed without passion and matchings are performed without desire. Life is a collage and memory is the endless resource.

memories uncertain I'll leave it to Her
She knows how to shape Form of Beauty
imperceptibly almost life is complete

Metaphors constructed for their own sake are driven by aesthetic. Aesthetic is therefore the "sake" of metaphor (transference, action, assignation, choice). Sake cannot be reasoned. Matchings cannot be explained. If God were eternal memory, existence would be an aesthetic of time.

Aesthetic resides within the intellect and is thus born from the moment we begin to perceive. The “first poetry of our lives” (Kavafy, *Voices*):

outlines and faces

love incomplete

Born with both basic desires and a personal aesthetic, we come to develop carnal desires—passions intellectualized as the intellect develops—that are colored and shaped by personal aesthetic. This is clear because the things we desire carnally are also aesthetically pleasing, which is why we desire them.

Eve, our primordial mother, is clear evidence of this: first she saw that the forbidden tree was ‘comely to look upon and beautiful to contemplate’, and then, assenting in her heart, she plucked and ate its fruit. (Palamas, p. 310, cf. Gen. 3:6)

To contemplate beauty eternally versus passingly is the distinction between love and desire. Desire is painful and cannot sustain eternal dwelling. It is the shift from desire to love that marks the change from emotive to rational control, concentration of the intellect, and thus implementation of personal aesthetic in noesis. Eternal state of contemplation of beauty is love. Thus, the term that bound noetic literature gathered by Orthodox Fathers: *Philokalia*, “love of beauty.”

Japanese Pain

To be able to perform matchings insufferably, is to be able to find beauty anywhere and endure circumstances of suffering in peace.

Solitude is essential for the mastery of personal aesthetic. Because the developing intellect is impressionable, aesthetic is pliant to foreign emotion. This can be seen by how greatly affected the aesthetics of artists are by the cultures in which they are raised. Cultural superstitions represent the emotive part of a culture's soul: they are oracles assigned arbitrarily in desperation to predict the fulfillment of desire. Thus, it is no surprise that the detailed nature of Japanese aesthetic in art mirrors the specificity of Japanese superstitions, which are assigned by color schemes of arrangements of flowers on a table (Sladen).

In a sense, the ultimate discovery is to determine what we find beautiful. To abide by it is eternal happiness.

Sapphiric Concept

Solitude is found in stillness and silence. Thus, we can only practice the application of aesthetic on inanimate objects.

“Out of my loneliness I stretch forth my spirit towards these inanimate things... towards these stones, towards this dust, towards this brickwork and ironwork and woodwork, on which the sun or the moon is shining, upon which the rain is falling or the clouds rolling, or the mist sinking down. I am in a hospital, in a prison, in a mad-house and it is the same thing! I stretch out my spirit to these walls.” (Powys)

There are two kinds of inanimates: organics and inorganics. Organics are corpses that rot, degradable matrices of carbon chains. Inorganics are crystals everlasting by the sun, fibers of glass in composites, keepable and to be kept.

Concepts are organic, coming from us organically. They are to be dispelled. It is the saddest delusion to believe you are surrounding yourself with eternal monuments, only to watch them disintegrate throughout your lifetime. To die without a legacy. Flowers wither, bulbs crush.

Philosophy on the other hand is proven inorganic, passed through many pockets. To study the natural universe is to study things that do not come from us organically. To surround oneself with diamonds and glisten all over, dead with angelic capacity.

Aristotle refers to a long period of learning before wisdom can be reached and study sustained. The crossover from continence to virtuous, the climb of the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, the detachment from art, the breakage of beautiful chains could take more than sixty years. To watch all flowers collected die, to cry for them in nostalgia. To learn is to master distinguishing inorganics from organics.

If you wish to see the intellect's proper state, rid yourself of all concepts, and then you will see it like sapphire or the sky's hue. (Neilos, p. 317)

Desire as a concept should be dispelled. The philosophy of the concept of desire is eternal and crystalline, glistening not only in eyes.

We descend from the mountain, learned in organic chemistry, after years of practicing on inanimates. In mastery, the knowledge can be applied to the souls of animates. However, in order to apply the knowledge, we must be able to discern the inanimacy within a soul. We can then apply our own insufferable aesthetic and mine the heart for precious metals to keep. Thus, the

compassionate, noetic collector builds an eternal legacy,
and fulfills angelic capacity.

Pockets full of crystal.

... the intellect withdraws untroubled into its true
treasure-house... (Palamas, p. 315)

The importance of a mentor is emphasized in the *Philokalia*. Mentors are those who have reached noesis and are able to see the golden touches within you, and thus sensitize you to silence and stillness you possess: the unshakeable aesthetic, Form of Beauty (Kavafy, *What's Spent in Art*). Mentors are crucial to remind the passionate student that silence and stillness are achievable beyond death.

The First Step

K.P. Kavafy

It was to Theocritus
the young poet Evmenes once sighed,
“Two years have now passed
and only an idyll I’ve written.
My only work of art.
From where I stand, it seems so high—
that Ladder of Poetry—so high,
on this first step, how unfortunate,
so unimaginable a climb.”
Theocritus replied, “Your words
are blasphemous and they offend.
On this first step
you must be gracious, you must be proud.
Where you stand is not low
what you have accomplished is glorious.
Even on this first step
the world is left far behind.
The mere attempt to climb
is to be of your own right
citizen of a city of ideals.
And how hard it is in this city,
how rare to be naturalized.
Lawmakers in the marketplace
no con artist could ever fool.
Where you stand is not low
what you have accomplished is glorious.”

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