

Sacred Potential

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“All is sacred, all is sacred, all is sacred. Nothing in nature is natural, my child; remember this! When nature seems to you natural, all will be over, farewell Sky, farewell Sea! (...)Wherever your eye roams a god is hidden! And if he be not there, the signs of his presence are there in silence, or the smell of the grass, or the freshness of water. Yes, everything is holy!”ⁱ

In Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1969 film *Medea*, a centaur tells a thirteen-years old boy about his upbringing and origins, finally unveiling the functioning of the world. Placing the above words on the centaur's lips, Pasolini charges his belief in human evolution as that of a shift from a mythical to a rational age. The centaur gazes at a verdant landscape; the naked child plays with a stick on the damp and soft sand that circles a pond of crystalline colours. He grabs a crab, inspects it and places it next to his cheek. The centaur's voice is persuasive and seductively assertive in the silence. The child's reaction is read in his eyes: playfully smiling, they are interrogative and slightly nonchalant; inattentive.

This scene depicts the encounter of modern human kind with a different, ancient past, where land is perceived as an immersion in the 'holy'. Through his films, Pasolini sought to enhance the non-rational aspect of what is visible, expressing the sacred quality of life and the necessity of the union of words with things, of thought with a luminous nature and a profound sense of the human experience of reality. In *Medea* – a film that has been portrayed as a manifestation of the sacred – a shared human impulse towards mysticism confronts a secularised and homogeneous modernity that is dominated by logic.

That which is considered sacred can trace the sameness of a feeling along non-uniform paths, continuing across space and time. The sacred is a homogenous aspect found today in the spiritual lives of disciplined monocultures, as well as troublesome spaces of abnormality; within 'homotopias', the familiar and normal, and 'heterotopias', the places of otherness, the sites of difference that expand into contemporary societies. According to Michel Foucault 'heterotopias' are defined by sets or relations, by ambiguous mixtures of people and places which contest and invert the sites that constitute 'homotopia', that is 'the proper' of society, the homogenised real where true dialogue and change are denied.ⁱⁱ This time of elections, of redefining identities, of dangerous borders between nationalities – and yet of persistent movement across them – seems to be a swing between these two extremes.

In the present, as in the past, sacredness – or holiness – expresses a communal sentiment within the cosmos. It is a devotional agreement that can bring countries and histories together. It is symmetry between seemingly opposing religions, a correspondence between diverse attitudes towards the divine. The sacred and holy embody a feeling of inclusion within a community, and yet articulate a special use, the division and setting apart of something. The origin of the word 'holy' proves an allusion to unity: dating back to the 11th century, holy derives from the Old English adjective *hāl*, a term which meant 'whole', 'healthy', 'entire' and 'complete'. From the Latin verb *sacrare* and the adjective *sacer*, 'sacred' communicated something consecrated, dedicated to the gods; a thing that was removed from the sphere of human use.

These two words cause an emotional reverberation in every believer – awe. Awe is reverence of grandiosity, and it is inspired by that which is sublime. It is the fear of a wind that cannot be tamed on a desolate land, where trees are the only shelter, transmuted as they are by the blows; awe is admiration for the angles and arches created by the bent branches, for their solid weight made as light as vapour. Awe implies the will to understand the movement, the source and direction of the wind.

ⁱ *Medea*, 1969, Directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini

ⁱⁱ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', in *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité*, (1967)