

Ecstatic States and Visionary Art: from Metaphysical Realms to Aesthetic Creation

Estados Extáticos e Arte Visionária: dos Mundos Metafísicos à Criação Estética

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Abstract:

The primary aim of this article is to establish a connection between expanded states of perception and aesthetic activity through a philosophical analysis of Aldous Huxley's psychedelic writings compiled in the work *Moksha*, alongside the ideas presented by Laurence Caruana in the *Manifesto of Visionary Art*. The specific objectives of this study are as follows: a) To present the psychedelic experience – whether spontaneous, induced, pharmacological, or natural – as a generative principle of the creative movement among visionary artists; b) To demonstrate the principal methods that, as anticipated by thinkers Huxley and Caruana, facilitate immersion in transcendental realities; c) To discuss the constituent elements of the visionary universe, such as light, transfigurations, figures from the imaginary, folklore, and world religions, as sources of artistic creativity; d) To describe how, through an aesthetic examination of the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, William Blake, and Gustav Moreau, the transfiguration of suprasensible horizons into sensible forms is realized. The methodologies applied in developing this framework include creative writing, close reading, and phenomenological experimentation, followed by a review of specialized literature produced over the past sixty five years, from 1959 to 2024. In conclusion, the author intends to highlight the extent to which extraordinary activities of consciousness – whether ecstatic, oneiric, hypnagogic, or exceptional – are indispensable phenomena for the creation of

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visionary art throughout history, with particular emphasis on the contemporary period.

Keywords: Visionary Art. Philosophical Aesthetics. Experimental Phenomenology. Transcendental Metaphysics. Psychedelic Philosophy.

Resumo:

A principal finalidade do presente artigo consiste em relacionar os estados ampliados de percepção à atividade estética a partir de uma análise filosófica dos escritos psicodélicos de Aldous Huxley compilados na obra *Moksha* e das ideias apresentadas por Laurence Caruana no *Manifesto da Arte Visionária*. Os objetivos particulares deste trabalho são: a) apresentar a experiência psicodélica – seja esta espontânea, induzida, farmacológica ou natural – como princípio gerador do movimento criativo dos artistas visionários; b) demonstrar os principais procedimentos que, conforme previsto pelos pensadores Huxley e Caruana, possibilitam uma imersão nas realidades transcendentais; c) discorrer acerca dos elementos constituintes do universo visionário, por exemplo: a luz, as transfigurações, as figuras do imaginário, do folclore e das religiões do mundo enquanto fontes de inspiração da criatividade artística; d) descrever como se realiza, a partir de um exame estético das pinturas de Hieronymus Bosch, William Blake e Gustav Moreau, a transfiguração dos horizontes suprassensíveis em formas sensíveis. As metodologias aplicadas ao desenvolvimento desta tessitura vêm a ser: escrita criativa, leitura aproximada e experimentação fenomenológica seguidas por uma revisão da bibliografia especializada produzida durante os últimos 65 anos, de 1959 a 2024. A título de conclusão o autor pretende evidenciar, sob que medida, as atividades extraordinárias da consciência – sejam extáticas, oníricas, hipnagógicas ou excepcionais – se apresentam como fenômenos indispensáveis à criação da arte visionária em todos os tempos, com especial destaque para o período da contemporaneidade.

Palavras-chave: Arte Visionária. Estética Filosófica. Fenomenologia Experimental. Metafísica Transcendental. Filosofia Psicodélica.

Introduction: Psychedelic Phenomena and Visionary Aesthetics

The representation of psychedelic experiences or manifestations of the soul through works of art began with rock paintings of beings, symbols, stars, moons and suns, engraved on cave walls in the Paleolithic period: “Art history shows each successive wave of vision flowing through the world's artists. Like the seers and oracles of old, art sings and shouts from the axis of truth to wake us up to who we are and where we are going” (Grey, 1998, p. 8). The lithographs

found on speleological stelae made by human ancestors point to the stars of the firmament and the elements of the foundation as sources of artistic inspiration (Huxley, 1977; Strickland; Boswell, 1999; Frazer, 2002). The creations of the most remote ancestry are revealing in the sense that they present the connection between the spheres of transcendence and immanence, the fusion of horizons between the universe and nature, the correlation of forces between humanity and divinity: “Art seems to be a spark of the eternal coalesced with a distinct historic moment, driving artists to do something that witnesses their depth, that expresses their most personal and universal insights” (Grey, 1998, p. 9). The first artists of civilisation were in search of representing the metaphysical entities that inspired the creative process, they aimed to achieve the transfiguration of prophetic dreams and ecstatic visions into aesthetic creation:

Art was born around 25,000 years ago, when the subhuman Neanderthal man evolved into the human ancestor, Cro-Magnon man. Increased intelligence brought imagination and the ability to create sculpted and painted images. Architecture was born with the construction of ritual monuments. For thousands of years, accompanying the rise and fall of each civilisation, these three art forms - painting, sculpture and architecture - have embodied the longings, dreams and values of the culture (Strickland; Boswell, 1999, p. 2).

The first creations of the human spirit, whether they were paintings, sculptures or architectural monuments, were related to the representation of the imaginary and the worship of deities. In the iconology of the most ancient wisdom traditions, such as the Shamanic, Vedic, Sumerian and Egyptian, the artistic act is related to sacramental practice. From this worldview: “Visionary art is as ancient as the shaman's first etchings on cavern walls or the mysterious spirals carved on megalithic stones” (Caruana, 2001, p. 10). Calligraphies of an alien world in monolithic fragments; metal alloys that recall the form of divine beings; architectures erected to honor gods and goddesses; human figures in direct connection with archetypal forces; paintings of sacred plants next to bodiless eyes, among others, are just some of the indications that show the link between expanded states of perception and primordial flashes of creativity (Arnheim, 2004; Freedberg, 2013; Gombrich, 2023). From its earliest origins to

the present day, artistic creation demonstrates the evolution of consciousness, the development of the creative spirit not in terms of sophistication, but of expressive capacity driven by natural and cosmic forces: “Each of these cultural styles seemed to emerge 'fully-formed' in history, with a complete symbolic vocabulary and complex pictorial expression” (Caruana, 2001, p. 10-11). The transfiguration of suprasensible reality into sensible composition is consolidated, respectively, through mystical art in antiquity, which becomes sacred in medieval times, transcendentalist in modernity and visionary in contemporaneity. Visionary artists are those who, long before the definition established by contemporary thinkers, correlate the expansion of consciousness with the movement to create works of art: they seek to represent the constituent elements of a metaphysical horizon through the aesthetic act.

The aim of this article is to analyze and describe the visionary experience in artistic creation based on an approach to contemporary studies of psychedelic philosophy. In order to achieve the proposed goal, the guiding horizons for reflection will be the works *Moksha* by Aldous Huxley [1894-1963] and *A Manifesto of Visionary Art* by Laurence Caruana, accompanied by a vast bibliography of specialists in visionary thought and sacred art, such as Joseph Campbell [1904-1987], Ernst Gombrich [1909-2001], Terence Mckenna [1946-2000], among others. Huxley certifies that the methodologies for navigating the blissful dimensions of being, the planes of existence in which humanity approaches eternal ideas, have always been intertwined with wisdom, the arts, religion and the imaginary (Mckenna; 1993 Grey, 1998). In the words of the psychedelic thinker: “Well, here again is another indication that a great metaphysical idea, the platonic Idea, the platonic system of an ideal world, is also based upon a world of vision” (Huxley, 1999, p. 248). The Platonic vision of an ideal world that integrates with the real first and foremost is linked to the suprasensible dimension and the reality accessible through extraordinary states of consciousness, the transcendental worlds that the visionary artist has the power to transfigure through the work into sensible elements (WILBER, 1990; Larsen, 2001). Caruana notes that ecstatic and oneiric mysticism in all times is related to artistic creativity, philosophical reflection and theological

curiosity. He says: “The artist on such a 'vision quest' is not seeking images for their own sake. Rather, the images arise during his life-long journey to the Sacred, offering him entrance to a higher, spiritual realm” (Caruana, 2001, p. 5). In order to find a way to express what has not yet been expressed and to manifest what is latent in both the personal and collective unconscious, or even to manifest what exists on other levels of human understanding and make visible the essentiality that is often invisible to the corporeal eye, with a view to transforming the unknown universe into perceptual novelty, the movement of visionary artists ventures into the depths of the ocean of mysteries: “Visionary art aims to transcend the physical world, to portray visions that often include spiritual and mystical themes, or at least are grounded in such experiences” (Mikozi, 2009, p. 115). Therefore, in order to make it possible to understand the reciprocal relationship between visionary subjectivities and expansive states of mind, the main ways of accessing the suprasensible worlds will be aligned with psychedelic phenomena and the creation of works of art. The outcome of the work in progress will show, through the connection between the different forms of expression of the soul and creative processes, how the transfiguration of metaphysics into aesthetics takes place.

Methodologies for the Expansion of Consciousness

Aldous Huxley prioritizes the following means of access to the visionary world: spontaneity, induction, chemical substances and sacred mushrooms. In his 1961 conference entitled *The Visionary Experience*, he recalls that throughout history, an abundance of poets and artists have shown in rich detail in their works the phenomenological movement of going beyond the sensible and intelligible dimensions. On the one hand, all the children considered by the author have the facility to travel through the real and imaginary worlds; on the other hand, for adults who have almost died or are on their deathbed, interaction with other planes of consciousness is a very recurrent event (Horowitz; Palmer, 1999; Bisbee; Dicky; Farrell, 2018). In the words of the psychedelic philosopher: “Some people spontaneously go there; they seem to

be able to move back and forth without any difficulty between the visionary world and the workaday, biologically useful world of our ordinary experience” (Huxley, 1999, p. 248). Huxley considers the visionary experience to be a very important phenomenon in all cultures; the latter, according to their own possibilities, values and beliefs, have endeavored to create methodologies for inducing extraordinary states, such as yoga, meditation, hypnosis, prayer, fasting, circadian inhibition, sensory deprivation, prolonged silence, circular dances, traditional rhythms and so on (Horowitz; Palmer, 1999; Bisbee; Dicky, Farrel, 2018). The exceptional manifestations of the human mind have the cultural importance justified by the thinker: “The fact that visionary experience has always, at all times and everywhere been very highly valued, means that at all times and in all cultures systematic efforts have been made to induce this experience” (Huxley, 1999, p. 250). The distinction between spontaneous and induced access is based on the question of will: the first are natural and do not depend on individual choice to occur; the last are methodological and are related to the individual’s freedom of decision. In one way or another, human beings are opened up to other levels of perception, perceptual horizons that are inaccessible through an ordinary consciential process. Only experiences that completely escape perceptive normativity can be considered visionary or psychedelic.

Aldous Huxley considered chemical substances to be keys to accessing the visionary world. From his perspective, in various historical periods, psychoactives such as mescaline, hashish, LSD, psilocybin, DMT, among others in natural form, are considered to be capable of generating mental alterations that make it possible to immerse oneself in other realities (Ruck, 1992; Mckenna, 1992). The dimensions accessed by those who venture into the antipodes of the mind through the conscious use of certain drugs have always been recognised as being part of the imaginary, folklore and religiosity. In an assertive manner, the thinker says: “Virtually in every religious tradition, both civilized and primitive, use has been made of mind-changing drugs used for the purposes of inducing visionary experiences. Every kind of chemical substance has been used for this purpose” (Huxley, 1999, p. 254). Since metaphysics is a

sphere of philosophy that is near to religion, by affirming that in order to access other possible worlds, the most distinct traditions of mysticism have made use of consciousness-expanding agents in their rituals, Huxley suggests that perception-enhancing drugs are instruments that make it possible to investigate the metaphysical universe (Wasson, 1993; Hofmann, 1999). In addition to the aforementioned pharmacological approaches, the psychedelic philosopher identifies Mexican mushrooms – as well as other creations of nature, such as Ayahuasca in South America and the Peyote cactus in the south-west of the United States – as tools that facilitate access to perceptive spheres that go beyond rationality: “These biochemical methods are, I suppose, the most powerful and the most foolproof, so to say, of all the methods for transporting us to this other world that at present exist” (Huxley, 1999, p. 256) In other words, even if not all the paths to immersion in visionary horizons are considered safe, despite the risks that some of them may present to the traveler, if they are chosen wisely they fulfill the decisive function of opening up the possibilities of understanding concepts that were previously unintelligible. Thus, representing the universes accessed through the expansive processes of the spirit via works of art means transfiguring metaphysical structures into aesthetic creations.

In *A Manifesto of Visionary Art*, Canadian philosopher Laurence Caruana reflects on the foundation of a contemporary art movement. This innovative manifestation of art aims to express, for the most part through a visual language, elements that do not belong to the reality of ordinary perception: “The history of Visionary art is characterized by the attempt to find a new visual language - a language that may overcome the inherent contradiction (of seeing what cannot be seen) and express in visual form the 'supra-visual'” (Caruana, 2001, p. 4). In the work in question, the author who follows on from the ideas presented by Aldous Huxley differentiates between surrealist artists and visionaries. In Caruana's view, while the former sought to explore the unconscious through dreamlike journeys, but without enjoying the use of psychotropic substances, the latter are willing not only to dream, but to use whatever is necessary, even if there may be risks, in order to gain access to

extraordinary states of consciousness and manifest in the world, by means of a phenomenological experimentation, the contents belonging to oneiric and ecstatic processes in the forms of artistic expressiveness. Expressed in the words of the philosophizing artist:

Where Surrealists tried to elevate the dream-state into a higher reality (and opposed the use of narcotics) the Visionary artist uses all means at his disposal - even at great risk to himself - to access different states of consciousness and expose the resulting vision. Art of the Visionary attempts to show what lies beyond the boundary of our sight. Through dream, trance, or other altered states, the artist attempts to *see the unseen* - attaining a visionary state that transcends our regular modes of perception. The task awaiting him, thereafter, is to communicate his vision in a form recognizable to 'everyday sight' (Caruana, 2001, p. 4).

In other words, artists qualified as visionaries are those who seek to appreciate dreamlike and ecstatic states in order to express through their works what goes beyond ordinary perceptions. There is an ongoing enquiry among them into the mysteries of nature, the universe, divinity and totality, which is expressed by means of creative action (Grey, 1998; Larsen, 2001). According to the author of the manifesto, there are different ways of experiencing the expansion of consciousness, such as dreams, visions, ecstasy, trance, madness, reading, insights and the use of psychedelics: “The aim of these experiments is to bring alternative states of consciousness to reality. Or rather, to bear witness to other realities which are made evident in alternative states of consciousness” (Caruana, 2001, p. 5). All the alternatives for accessing the psychedelic experience that have been mentioned can enable the revelation of new perceptual dimensions, the unveiling of the metaphysical meaning of archetypes, overcoming the limits of ordinary reality by connecting the individual soul with universal consciousness (Mckenna, 1993; Richards, 2016). In short, by proposing the development of new languages through creative action, by opening the portals of thought to the meaning of the extraordinary, it becomes possible to realize the ideal of the visionary movement, which consists of the transfiguration of metaphysics into aesthetics, or making the invisible visible via work of art.

As observed by Laurence Caruana, the immense variety of forms created to enable the manifestation of non-ordinary states of consciousness

highlights the importance of the psychedelic experience in the world's most diverse cultures. Indeed, it is worth noting that visionary ecstasy does not necessarily depend on the use of mind-bending drugs to be achieved (Mikozs, 2009; Freitas, 2021). As Aldous Huxley expressed earlier, meta-sensible visions can occur both spontaneously and induced, whether through the use of psychoactive substances or mystical practices. In this sense: “one may be easily misled into thinking that hallucinogens are the visionary's prime means of image-exploration. Nothing could be further from the truth” (Caruana, 2001, p. 43). According to the ideas presented by Caruana, although psychedelics fulfill an important role in aesthetic creation, experimentation with the alternative states of mind necessary for the artist's creative process can be enjoyed through the contemplation of art, or by means of the spiritual exercises found in the traditions of mysticism (Mikozs, 2009; Freitas, 2021). In other words, regardless of the key used to access the realities that go beyond the five senses, especially the dimensions that are beyond sight, the purpose of oneiric and ecstatic phenomena is to serve as a source of inspiration for visionary artists. From the perspective of the aforementioned thinker:

The sources of Visionary experience are many and varied: dreams, lucid dreams, nightmares, hypnagogic images, waking dreams, trance states (brought on by exhaustion, deprivation, or the rhythmic repetition of prayer or song), hypnotic states, illness, near-death experiences, shamanic vision-quests, meditation (whether with eyes closed or focused upon a sacred image), madness (be it temporarily - due to life's traumas - or permanent), day-dreaming, fantasy, the imagination, inspiration, visitation, revelation, spontaneous visions, psychedelics, reading, and - let us not forget - the metanoic experiences brought on by Visionary art itself (Caruana, 2001, p. 43-44).

From the beginning, as we know, human beings have sought a connection with the sacred through mysticism, religions, dreams, imagination, epiphany, theophany and other extraordinary states of consciousness. For visionary artists, the purpose of the proximity relationship with the sacredness is to manifest the essence through the appearance, the apparent as that which appears to the spirit during the psychedelic experience, in other words, metaphysics transfigured into a work of art (Wilber, 1990; Larsen, 2001). In this way, through aesthetic activity, the artist brings out what was submerged in

the depths of the personal and collective unconscious; from his creative impulses, originating in the expansion of consciousness, the visionary makes it possible for elements that have mostly disappeared from the field of ordinary perceptions to appear: “visionary artists have contributed to this impetus - offering a rich array of imagery from the darkest depths of the unconscious and leading their beholders, unexpectedly, to the light” (Caruana, p. 50). The guiding purpose of the movement presented in Caruana’s manifesto consists of the transfiguration, on the basis of the aesthetic act, of transcendental dimensions into everyday reality; expressed in other terms, the materialization of the immaterial, the sensible representation of archetypal and ontological images seen only by meta-sensitive eyes. The artistic externalization of sacred interiority takes place in all periods of time and circumscriptions of space, in all cultures both East and West, each in its own way (Arnheim, 2004; Freedberg, 2013; Gombrich, 2023). All the peoples of the world in some way seek to unveil the mystery that exists in the correspondence between nature and the universe, the manifestation of what is hidden between immanence and transcendence in the most diverse pathways: this includes painting, sculpture, architecture, drawing, poetry, all forms of art as vehicles for expressing the spirit of each age.

The Elements of the Metaphysical Worlds

When discussing the landscapes that make up the distant continents of the mind, accessible through extraordinary states of consciousness, Aldous Huxley observes that such visions and territories can never be fully dominated and explored (Horowitz; Palmer, 1999; Bisbee; Dicky; Farrel, 2018). From their perspective, the dimensions of the microcosm correspond in equal proportion to those of the macrocosm, so that in both the former and the latter the individual can encounter all manner of fantastic creatures, superconscious beings with an existence independent of humanity, intelligences that are beyond the cognitive capacities attributed to the human species: “What takes place in them follows patterns as logical internally as are the things seen in the

antipodes of the external world. They are strange, but with a certain regularity” (Huxley, 1999, p. 90). In the visionary spheres, the intrinsic meaning of things intensifies, a colorful luminosity unfolds over all perceptions: geometries in motion, mandalas, fractals and kaleidoscopes, brilliant colors manifest themselves in a three-dimensional way to both open and closed eyes (Mckenna, 1992; Shannon, 2003). The intensification of illumination highlights the correspondence established between the significance and the constituent essence of each element in the world, a consensual phenomenon that awakens reflection on metaphysics, or rather, that opens up thought to the meaning and truth of being: “In a paradoxical, but (to those who have experienced this heightening of intrinsic significance) an entirely self-evident way, the relative becomes absolute, the transient particularly universal and eternal” (Huxley, 1999, p. 94). For Huxley, there is a magickal force - from the perspective of the relationship between magick and image - in some works of art that makes the viewer remember, whether consciously or unconsciously, the metaphysical realities that visionaries are able to access when they wish, but which the vast majority of people only access through hypnagogic methods or the effects of psychoactive substances (Horowitz; Palmer, 1999; Bisbee; Dicky; Farrel, 2018). The transcendental worlds appreciated by the psychedelic philosopher are represented in various cultures through the arts, whether visual, poetic, literary, sculpted or architectural: divine abodes overflow with a beauty that surpasses rationality, a sublimity that can only be presented to human beings through artistic language.

The main elements identified by Aldous Huxley as belonging to the nature of the visionary world are thus three: light, visionary figures and transfigurations. These components can occasionally be accessed spontaneously, and often through expanded states of perception (Horowitz; Palmer, 1999; Bisbee; Dicky; Farrell, 2018). As far as the manifestation of luminosity is concerned, as well as having a primordial symbolism in the mystical experience, it can appear as either sublime or grotesque, whether infernal or celestial, even differentiated (which appears in objects and people) or undifferentiated (which appears in all things), depending on the existential

reality of each individual: “This quasi-sensory experience of light is something which has run through many, I think one can say all, religions and has become, as I say, the primary symbol” (Huxley, 1999, p. 260). With regard to the figures that appear in extraordinary processes of consciousness, whether induced or spontaneous, these can be understood as the simplifications of a transcendental principle. Archetypal beings, ancient spirits, unknown faces, hybrid creatures, alien humanoids, entities that combine the conscious and dormant contents of the psyche, are part of the imagery that unfolds in the visionary journey: “it is most extraordinary that there is something in our brain/mind [...] which uses the memories of visual experiences and recombines them in such a way as to present to the consciousness something absolutely novel” (Huxley, 1999, p. 260). Regarding the phenomenon of transfiguration, Huxley considers this to be the movement responsible for connecting the states of dream and ecstasy to the creation of the work of art, in other words, the indispensable element that makes it possible to convert metaphysics into aesthetics, a creative overflow of interiority into exteriority (Mckenna, 1992; Horowitz; Palmer, 1999). The description of the transfiguring event is present in numberless religious, folkloric and mythical narratives, in which the protagonists demonstrate a radical transformation of the perceived world, whether for good and beauty or for evil and ugliness. This metamorphosis is self-evident in countless artistic compositions: “there is also wonderful art which is essentially visionary art, which is the product either of the artist’s vision, so to say with the eyes closed, of what is happening inside his head, this extraordinary other world; or else a vision of the external world transfigured either for the good or for the evil” (Huxley, 1999, p. 262). The contents processed by those in search of transcendental visions can be qualified as metaphysical, since they do not belong exclusively to sensible reality, but mostly to suprasensible dimensions. From the encounter with the unimaginable forms that emerge on a horizon beyond vision, those with the courage to venture into the unexplored territories of consciousness can find inspiration, an immaterial treasure of monumental proportions made up of all sorts of marvelous elements, necessary both for planning and for building a new world.

From the perspective presented by Laurence Caruana, the metaphysical elements that appear in works of visionary art are not only part of a primordial style, but also open up space for a journey of consciousness through timeless horizons (Mikozs, 2009; Barreiro, 2020). All visionary artists bring with them the determining characteristics of their time; however, what can be seen without exception when contemplating their creations is the presence of the sacred, the quintessential element of a creative procedure that is re-signified through the ages: “As such, while the history of Visionary Art may be traced throughout different lands, epochs, and cultures, a more ancient, primordial, indeed eternal style of rendering silently underlies all periods of its development” (Caruana, 2001, p. 9). Although the artistic movement defined as visionary is recent, idealized by Huxley and expressed in a manifesto by Caruana, the practice of representing sacredness through the aesthetic act can be considered a novelty of many millennia. Throughout its multimillennial history, creative phenomena driven by immanent and transcendent forces have made it possible for the extraordinary to manifest itself in original ways (Furst, 1976; Eversole, 2009). The originality identified in visionary compositions, accessible through ecstasy, dreaming, trance, the expansive states of the spirit, which since prehistoric times has maintained itself in continuous fluidity, is justified for the artist by the multiplicity of symbolic combinations, a rapprochement between the horizons of the world's most diverse cultures:

The proper subjects of a Visionary work include: the Creation, Paradise, the Fall, the Flood, the Triumph of Death, the Apocalypse, Heaven and Hell, the after-life journey, illumination, death and rebirth, the *hieros gamos*, ancient heros, mythic beings, monsters, cyclops and gargoyles, androgynes and hermaphrodites, madness, dreams, the distant future, the remote past, ideal cities, ancient ruins, lost civilizations, buildings never to be built, buildings built with no purpose but the sheer triumph of architecture over matter, towers, temples, pyramids, all manners of Gods and demons, angels and elementals, the cosmos and its many diagrams, models, and means of representation, the zodiac, the animal world in its primordial state of being, animals imagined as well as real, unicorns, basilisks, chimeras, sphinxes, bizarre but harmonious combinations of existing objects or qualities, melting pocket-watches, burning giraffes, the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table, esoterica of all sorts, allegories, false anatomies, fantastic inventions and machines, alchemical retorts, tarot cards, arcane symbols, sacred geometries, light-reflecting jewels, passages, refractions of light, spirals, labyrinths, mandalas, portraits of the artist in light of his

memories and dreams, inner landscapes, the interior of the mind and, above all, those invisibles not yet recognizable in our visual language (Caruana, 2001, p. 9-10).

The thematic framework of visionary artists, as shown by Laurence Caruana, goes beyond the elements presented by Aldous Huxley. In the midst of so many inspirational references that manifest from extraordinary states of consciousness, the number of possibilities for creating works of art is truly vast (Wilber, 1990; Grey, 1998). Since each theme can be presented in isolation, they can also be combined by the artist to generate even more admiration: “Each manifest, at one and the same time, a distinctively epic or monumental quality and, transcending this, a more universal and timeless quality” (Caruana, 2001, p. 11). In other words, the manifest components of the visionary world are timeless, as they appear portrayed throughout all periods of history, as well as being identifiable in the most varied cultures, which makes them somewhat universal (Pennick, 1980; Liben, 2008). However, what may sound most attractive to psychedelic thinkers is the fact that the overwhelming majority of the elements described above are not to be found in sensible reality: they mostly belong to the meta-sensible dimensions, the parallel universes that visionary arts aim to represent.

The structures identified by Laurence Caruana as belonging to meta-sensible reality are directly related to the oneiric and ecstatic experience: they are all part of the vast set of mystical visions that the artist seeks to transfigure into aesthetic creation (Colombo, 2015; Richards, 2016). In order to express the impressions of dream and ecstasy in an entirely new way, based on his journeys into a supra-visual world, the visionary’s task is to decipher the messages hidden in metaphysical mysteries, enigmatic symbolisms, sacred geometries, kaleidoscopes of fractals, religious images, archetypal figures and the correlations between all created things: “How difficult it is - to describe or depict this vision of oneness - and yet it underlies all that we are. It is that which lies beyond the bound of our vision - the supra-visionary, *le sur-visuel*. It is that which we seek to reveal through a new image-language” (Caruana, 2001, p. 31). Caruana considers as supra-visionary everything that is part of other worlds beyond the sensible, that is, the indications of a path without footprints

that cannot be traveled by consciousness in an ordinary state, but which can only come to be observed with the phenomenological expansion of the perceptual faculties (Barreiro, 2020; Freitas, 2021). In the words of the philosopher-artist, the sacredness manifested in the higher spheres of understanding goes beyond the individual perspectives of culture and religion, which allows the observer of pure forms to contemplate life from a higher angle:

In the process of beholding the Sacred as a timeless and eternal Unity, the visionary artist frees himself momentarily from his inherited spiritual tradition, its particular symbols and style of expression. During that momentary epiphany, his vision partakes of the universal, sans cultural perspective: it acquires a stilled, more timeless, even eternal way of seeing (Caruana, 2001, p. 33).

The supravisionary world precedes and succeeds the space-time in which civilisation is found. Just as the Vedic peoples had their *Paradesha*, the Sumerians their *Dilmum*, the Avestans their *Pari-daeza*, the Egyptians their *Sekhet-aaru*, the Greeks their *Olympus*, the Celts their *Mag Mell*, the Norse their *Valhala*, the Hebrews their *Eden*, the Islamics their *Jannah*, the Yoruba their *Orum* and the Guarani their *Yvy Marã E'ỹ*, visionaries also have what can be understood as metaphysical paradises – the latter accessible by both natural and artificial means – transcendental realities from which they draw the inspiration needed to compose works of art (Cotterell, 1996; Taliaferro; Marty, 2010; Campbell, 2011). Even though they can often only be glimpsed in oneiric and ecstatic states, these are the mysterious dimensions that appear in visionary journeys: “This is the higher world - visible to all of us once (before the creation), and to be witnessed again (after the apocalypse) - a paradise presently hidden, a world which visionary artists have sought and seen - if only in stolen glances” (Caruana, 2001, p. 34). Indeed, it is worth emphasizing that the super-visual elements are not structures belonging exclusively to paradisiacal and luminous realities. The latter can also be visualized in the counterpart of paradise; in the realms of antimatter; in the lands of oblivion; in the abysses of hell; among the ruins of worlds destroyed by divinity; in the labyrinth of nightmares that freeze the human soul (Cohen, 1989; Rosen, 2008; Matthews, 2010). Shadowed places of the imaginary in which monstrous-beings

dwell, such as vampires, theriomorphs, cryptids, zombies, mummies, demons, imps, specters, ghosts, apparitions, cenobites, among other unnamable abominations, creatures whose sight can result in the questioning of mental sanity, are also part of the set of elements of visionary art. In short, in the process of transfiguring metaphysics into aesthetics, light and darkness are two equally important horizons that complement each other in the work of the visionary artist.

The Transfiguration of Metaphysics into Aesthetics

Having analyzed the ways of accessing the psychedelic experience and described the constituent components of the visionary universe, the same will now be done with regard to the process of transfiguring metaphysics into aesthetics. The metamorphosis of art, which allows the invisible to become visible, is simplified by the artist Alex Grey. In his artistic reflections, collected in the work entitled *The Mission of Art*, he says: “If metaphysical truth is a virtue of greater art, then the artist’s creative receptivity or spiritual attunement to inspiration must be developed as conscientiously as any skill with clay, pen, or brush” (Grey, 1998, p. 79). To begin with, one can affirm the fact that consciencial expansion, or the journey through the spheres that transcend ordinary perception, realized with or without the use of psychoactive substances, comes to be an indispensable phenomenon in the activity of transforming meta-sensible structures into sensible reality:

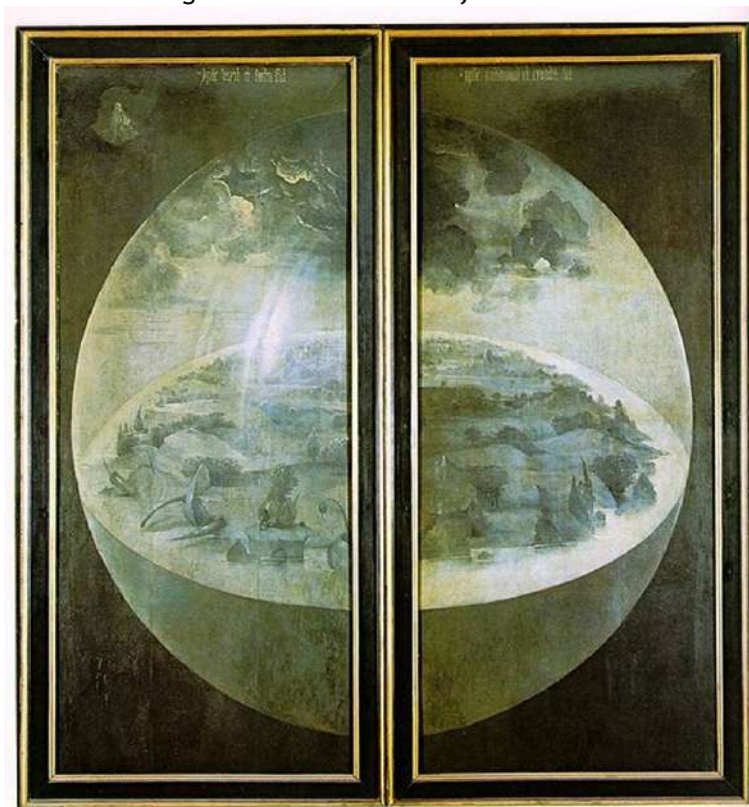
The almost magical power exercised by certain works of art springs from the fact that they remind us, consciously or, more often, unconsciously, of that Other World, which the natural visionary can enter at will, and to which the rest of us have access only under the influence of hypnosis or of a drug such as mescaline or LSD (HUXLEY, 1999, P. 98).

Only by opening the doors of perception, as Aldous Huxley would say, is it possible to visualize the invisible; and only by visualizing what cannot generally be seen, as Laurence Caruana would say, does the artist bring the elements of a supra-visual world into visibility (Mckenna, 1992; Richards, 2016). In other words, the creation of visionary art is intrinsically related to expansive states

of mind, without which it cannot be consolidated. Ecstatic, oneiric, hypnagogic and trance processes, or psychedelic experiences, are indispensable phenomena in the creative movement of visionaries in all times and spaces (Freitas, 2021; Romero, 2022). So, in order to show the extent to which the transcendental worlds or metaphysical realities accessed from the most different consciencial manifestations are transfigured in artistic expression, some reference works in the visionary movement will be analyzed and described.

In *The Creation of the World*, a triptych by the Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch [1450-1516], all the decisive elements in the constitution of visionary art can be identified. Let's take a look:

Figure 1 - *The Creation of the World*



Source: www.hieronymusbosch.org

The painting in question can be seen both closed and open, like the opening and closing of eyes. Seen in the closed version, the earth inside a transparent sphere symbolizes the fragility of the universe; the shades of gray, white and black correspond to the absence of the sun and moon, as well as the union of

polarities: for while the latter colors are the antipodes of the chromatic scale, the former represents the reconciliation of antinomies; the threefold division of the work represents the divine trinity, completeness and perfection, since the number three unifies in itself the beginning and the end (Cinotti, 1969; Rooth, 1992; Belting, 2005). Seen in the open version, also known as *The Garden of Delights*, the painting is divided into left, center and right panels. Let's see:

Figure 2 - *The Garden of Delights*



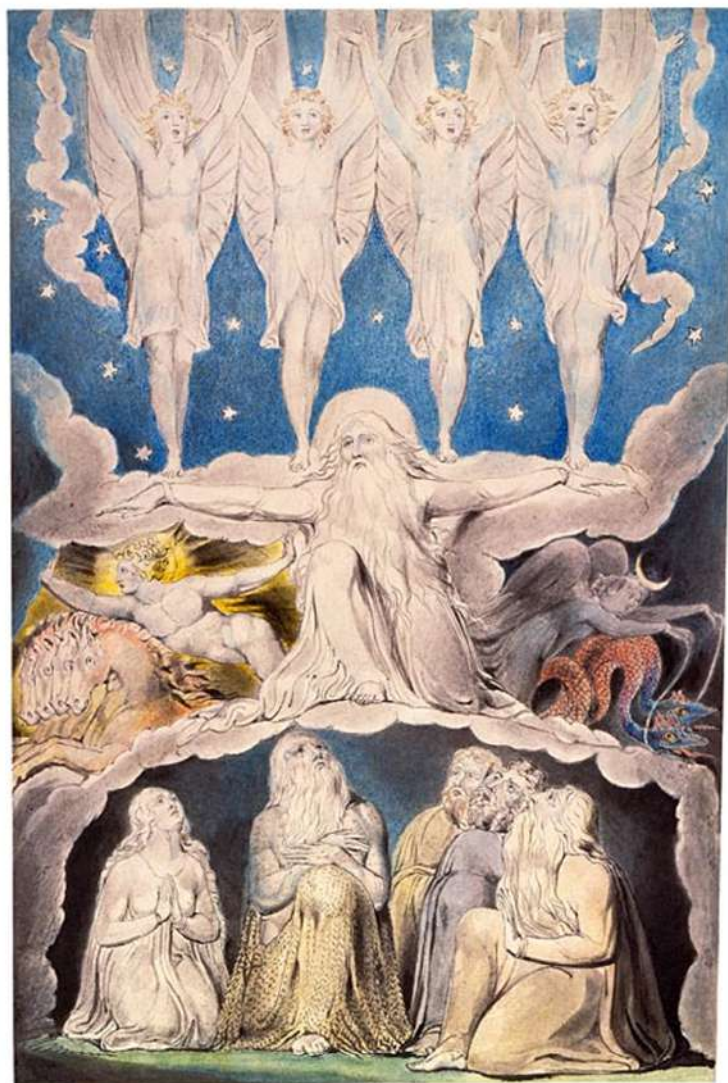
Source: www.brittanica.com

In the first panel, called the *Garden of Eden*, you can see the last day of creation, the beginning of time, the source of life, the first human beings, the forbidden trees, divinity personified, nature in its primordial state and earthly paradise (Cinotti, 1969; Rooth, 1992; Belting, 2005); in the second panel, called *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, mythological beings can be seen, fantastic architecture, sexual extravagances, colossal foods, insects that look like fruit, animals that look like people, all sorts of excesses and the unruliness of all the senses (Cinotti, 1969; Rooth, 1992; Belting, 2005); in the third panel, called *The Inferno*, you can see monstrous creatures, tortured souls, a lake of blood and tears, sulfur-tinged clouds, gigantic parts of the human body, diabolical perversities, beasts in the clothes of the ruling class and the disharmonious orchestra of demons (Cinotti, 1969; Rooth, 1992; Belting, 2005). All the aforementioned metaphysical visions are transfigured by Bosch into works of

art, which shows the consistency of the movement to make the invisible visible. To put it another way: the action of transfiguring the constituent structures of realities accessible only through extraordinary states of perception, whether spontaneous like dreams or induced like ecstasy, makes Hieronymus Bosch a true visionary.

In *When the Morning Stars Sang Together*, a watercolor by the English painter William Blake [1757-1827], all the evidence that typifies the creation of visionary art can be seen. Let's examine:

Figure 3 - *When the Morning Stars Sang Together*

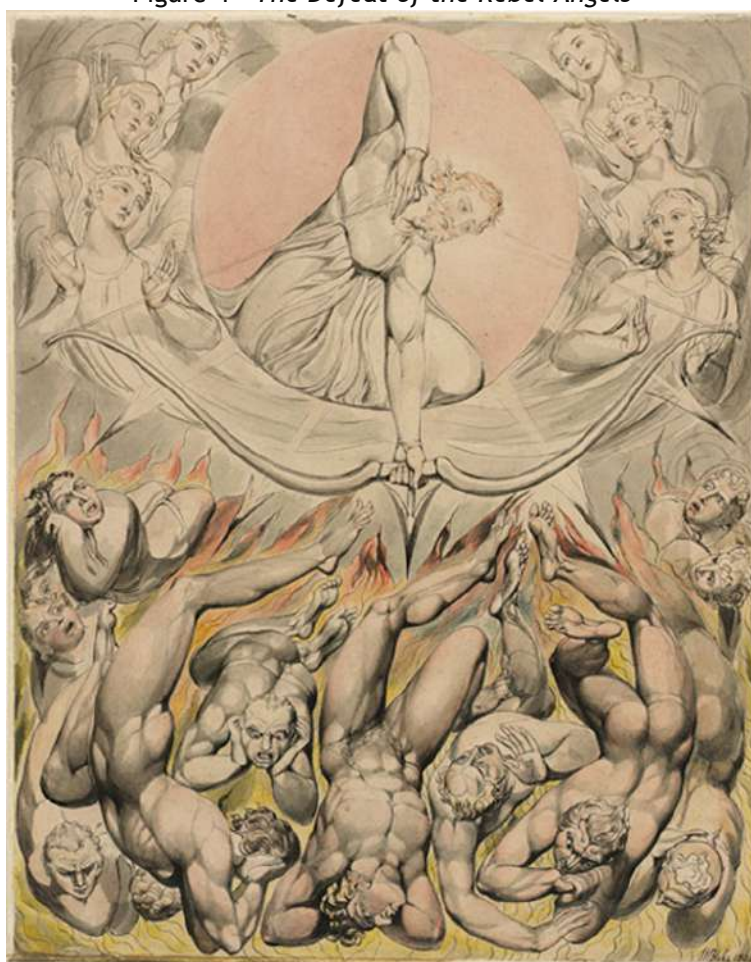


Source: www.themorgan.org

The work in question shows a strong contrast between light and darkness, star angels singing with their arms open to the sky, the centralized divinity re-

enacting the composition of the world, the sun on the left and the moon on the right as the two great lights described in the *Book of Genesis* (Blunt, 1959; Garnett, 1971; Paley, 2003). At the same time, on the canvas appear the polarities of good and evil, biblical characters representing the passages contained in the *Book of Job*, the mysticism of the interaction between the universe and nature, which are all elements from a metaphysical world, present in Blake's painting (Blunt, 1959; Garnett, 1971; Paley, 2003). In *The Defeat of the Rebel Angels*, another of William Blake's etchings, the artist once again emphasizes the attributes that qualify his works as visionary. Let's analyze it:

Figure 4 - *The Defeat of the Rebel Angels*



Source: <https://blakearchive.org>

The work in question identifies the balance of antagonisms between luminosity and darkness, the coexistence of angelic and diabolical intelligences in the cosmic order, the marriage established between heaven and hell, the fine line between prophecies and hallucinations, the power that irrational forces

trapped in the subconscious can exert over humanity, the journey traveled by the mystic from the underworld to the overworld, the unification between the spark of the soul and Divine Providence, among other references that define a visionary work (Blunt, 1959; Garnett, 1971; Paley, 2003). As is evident in Blake's paintings, in order to express visually what can only be perceived through ecstatic, oneiric and hypnotic processes, the metaphysical visions contemplated by the prophets through mystical union are transfigured into an aesthetic creation. In other words, the transfiguration of the constitutive structures of meta-sensible reality into sensible forms in William Blake's paintings places him in the category of authentic visionary artists.

In *The Victorious Sphinx*, an oil on canvas by the French artist Gustave Moreau [1826-1898], the constituent structures of a visionary work can be identified. Let's take a glimpse:

Figure 5 - *The Victorious Sphinx*



Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

The painting in question features a hybrid creature from Greek mythology, with the body of a lion and the head of a woman: the Sphinx. In a majestic manner, the legendary figure sits atop a rocky hill, with wings spread and a long tail, which emphasizes the grandeur of its presence (Lacambre, 1999; Cooke, 2014). The Sphinx is arranged in an exuberant and dreamlike setting, among plants and flowers that seem to grow luxuriantly; the vegetation seems to have been painted in vibrant colors in order to contrast with the dark figures in the painting: in this way, the intense luminosity of the sun highlights not only the Sphinx, but also the people she defeated in the mind games (Lacambre, 1999; Cooke, 2014). The pigments produced by the technique applied allow for a wide variety of colors, as well as subtle tones, precise details, idyllic atmospheres, rich textures and realistic complexity: all of which can be seen in the visionary artist's work. Moreau was known for his symbolic, mysterious and enigmatic paintings, many of which were inspired by his experiments with psychoactive substances during the golden years of the *Belle Époque* (Lacambre, 1999; Cooke, 2014). Thus, *The Victorious Sphinx*, as well as exemplifying with distinction the artistic style, mastery and creativity of the symbolist painter who posthumously came to be recognised as one of the most expressive influences within the visionary arts, can also represent the transfiguration of the imaginary into reality, that is, of metaphysics into aesthetics, based on a brilliant interpretation of one of the most famous myths in ancient history.

Conclusion: Flashbacks of a Psychedelic Journey

Throughout the text it has been shown that only by means of extraordinary states of consciousness, or psychedelic experiences, can the visionary reach transcendental planes; and that only through access to realities that go beyond ordinary perception can the artist obtain the strength of inspiration necessary to create visionary art (Huxley, 1999; Caruana, 2001; Freitas, 2021). In other words, visionary works are those that express to the field of everyday vision content that can only be observed through methods that

expand perceptivity, that is, through experimentation with psychedelic phenomena (Mikozs, 2009; Barreiro, 2020; Freitas, 2023a). It has also been noted in this paper that without consciential expansion there can be no access to the suprasensible worlds, and without immersion in dimensions that are beyond sensibility, the visionary arts cannot exist (GREY, 1998; HUXLEY, 1999; FREITAS, 2023b). In this way, the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, William Blake and Gustave Moreau fulfill the function of highlighting, based on the monumentality of their respective symbolic universes, the process of transfiguring metaphysics into aesthetics consolidated through creative expression (Blunt, 1959; Cinotti, 1969; Cooke, 2014). The artists in the spotlight, like all legitimate visionaries, transform visions belonging to the meta-sensible world into sensible reality, that is: through the most diverse methods used to awaken transcendental clairvoyance – be they spontaneous, induced, pharmacological or natural – as well as from the contemplation of elements belonging to the metaphysical spheres, the horizons of the imaginary, the narratives of folklore and the fields of mysticism, the visionary can make the invisible become visible through the work of art at all times and especially in contemporaneity.

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