

Cultic / Ritual Light-Shadow Games and Today's Cinema

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DeepL translated

The origins of the moving image, the colored shadow play, can be found far back in pre-Christian times in Asia. At a time when mankind did not yet experience itself as strongly in the physical realm of the earth as it does today, and perceived even less the three-dimensional space, the surface, the two-dimensional, had a different, more real meaning. Then, when the physical, the earthly plastic space, gained more and more importance for man, the surface became an image, a memory, a reflection of the divine home. - The moving and illuminated image, which contained the polarities of light and shadow, represented the area where heaven and earth met, where gods and men spoke to each other.

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Centuries later, this fact has been characterized and even today in India the following story is told about the origin of the shadow play: A dervish, who had to make important decisions, was in serious worry for days and tried to connect with his deceased ancestor, so that he would help him. When he did not succeed, he went out to the sea in despair and caught a fish, skinned it and dried it. Then he cut the figure of his ancestor out of the fish skin, and when he held it against the moonlight at night, the figure began to live and spoke to him. - In this way, people had real conversations with the dead and with the gods,

In the ancient Chinese and Indian cultures, the colorful shadow play was in strict cultic contexts. The dalang, the priest who performed the acts, had to be prepared and practiced for a long time. It is said that an apprenticeship of at least seven years was required before a dalang could perform in the temple. The figures were made from the skin of sacred animals - buffaloes, camels, donkeys, sheep_or fish - and in ritual action the skin was made into parchment. Then from this parchment were cut out flat figures, whose limbs were sometimes even movably joined together and provided with sticks for guiding. Depending on the character and meaning of the figure, it was artistically painted with delicate muted, translucent colors and, if necessary, decorated with gold. - A canvas or white silk was stretched vertically on it and a fire was lit behind it at an appropriate distance or oil lamps were set up. Between the light source and the screen - as close as possible to the silk - the dalang could act with the wayangs, the figures and props. It took not only tremendous skill and dexterity to play the figures, but above all an inner mastery of the texts and actions. The contents of these temple plays were in each case the great folk epics of those times and countries: Mahabharatan, Bhagavadgita, Ramajana, Mahanataka, etc. Music was an essential part of the whole, so a gamelan orchestra played between the scenes and also to underscore the texts.

It was to be strictly observed that only prepared audience was allowed to sit in front of the screen and see the course of the drama in the picture, to have the "show". The others could only sit on the side of the dalang and witness the sober craft part of the wayang play. One must imagine that in this early game, gods and demons fought with each other. It is only later that humans are introduced into the plot.

In the course of the centuries the content of the cultic games changed, they got also medical-therapeutic character. In India, for example the image of the white snake appeared and was of comprehensive importance. It was shown "way and method to overcome the earthly The wayang game, by bringing people directly to the world of the gods, was called a kind of "miracle power" and "elixir of life" This was evident from the fact that the games were held in the temples from dusk until dawn without interruption, and those who attended them were fresh and invigorated, as if they had slept well. - The modern Indonesian poet Nato Suroto wrote in 1924/25 with reverence, looking back on the great ancient culture of colorful shadow plays:

Lord, let me be a wayang in Your hands. I can be a hero or a demon, a king or a lowly one man, a tree, a plant, an animal --- but let me be a wayang in Your hands. Then I, may I be great in battle or kelin like a child playing among the waringins, will speak your language. This life of mine on earth, it is filled with toil and strife, and my enemies, of whom there are many, laugh at me, their scorn flies faster to its target than feathered arrows; their words strike sharper than crisis. My battle is not yet fought. And soon you will take me away: I will lie with the others, whose game is already played out. I will be with the thousands in the darkness.

And my battle was not yet over - still my enemies dance. Lord let me be a wayang in Your hands.

Then, after a hundred years or a thousand, Your hand will give me life and movement again,

Then one day, when my time has come in Your eternity, You will receive me again, and I will speak and fight once more,

And one day my enemies will be silent, and the demon will lie on the ground.

Lord let me be a wayang in Your hands.

(From Wayang Songs)

Little by little, the shadow play became more widespread and accessible to other classes of people, which, however, caused it to fall more and more out of the cultic context. It became known from Asia via Egypt and Greece and via Turkey in Europe. Still in Egypt one tried to keep the strict cultic rules. It is said that a Pharaoh's daughter, who was a priestess engaged in

shadow play, invented during this activity the so-called "Laterna magica" by having a light in a clay jug and moving figures in front of a small opening of the jug, which were then projected large on a cave back wall, but since for the viewers what they saw on the back wall of the cave was only a reflection of what was performed behind them in front of the opening of the jug, people felt cheated in their perception and recognized the process as "mystery betrayal"; the priestess was sentenced to death.

Soon the strict laws relaxed, so that the shadow play was successfully exploited also for political events, e.g. in Arabia! Finally, it was not far to use the shadow plays also for the entertainment of the population. In the 11th and 12th centuries, the first secular plays were found and cheerful texts were created: Karagöz became known as a character, Nasredin, the Turkish Eulenspiegel, brought comedy to the shadow play. For the festival of Ramadan, performances included fervent cult of the senses, supposedly for the purification of the soul. In the 18th and 19th century the literature for the shadow play also swelled strongly in Central Europe. Here, in terms of performance technique, there was not much left of the delicate colorfulness of the differentiated art of the East, but more pure black and white, the silhouette is represented, Now the shadow play was in princely houses of Italy, France and Germany, but also already found in pubs and backyards. Eventually degenerated into obscenity, this art was officially banned in the 19th century. What had come from the East, from high culture, through the ages to the West and here came to the tragic death, should be taken up again in the West in another form.

At the same time that the traditional shadow play was coming to an end, various painters were independently striving to revive painting, which had reached a certain perfection in naturalism, by adding a new element. They wanted to give the static picture new life and dynamics. (Already in the 16th and 17th centuries, attempts had been made in monastery churches to project images of saints into rising smoke in order to achieve apparent liveliness of the same. The pure light image was known for a long time in the glass pictures of the Gothic churches). Now, in the last century, projection was learned to handle, and photography took its beginning. It replaced naturalism in painting. On the other hand, the Impressionists had already made a breakthrough into the dynamic world of color. Other painters tried to transform pure pictorial processes into motion sequences. By painting continuously on running strips of paper and later celluloid, the beginning of the animated film was made and thus the beginning of film in general. The naturalistic feature film, which was determined by photography, initially drowned out this first event, but soon after, the animated film reasserted itself. The film developed tremendously fast and exercised widespread fascination. Whether it is educational films, commercials, or feature films of an informative, light-hearted, or dramatic nature, film is of absolutely international importance in the present day in all its scope. Television expands this still further. Today, film and television completely take the place of the moving, two-

dimensional image. In the Far East, where the feature film has been enthusiastically embraced by the young in recent years, it is again called Nang and Wayang, as if it were the same as the earlier shadow plays. Only the old people in India and China, the few who know about the deeper connections of the past temple games, say that nowadays one would find oneself in a spiritualistic session in the cinema every evening, without having any suspecting which gods are leading the game. The statement can make us think. Is today's film perhaps nothing more than the extraordinarily skillful, now technically perfect continuation of what in Egypt the pharaoh's daughter had begun and had to pay for with her life as a betrayal of the mysteries?

What do we have in front of us when we sit in the cinema to watch a movie? In front of us is the white screen on which 1. images, 2. movements and 3. actions appear, through which we are mentally engaged via our perceptions. 1. these images in front of us are caused by those which are on the filmstrip and are projected onto the screen from behind over our heads via an optical system from the film room. The cause of what our eye sees in front of us is therefore to be sought in the opposite direction - namely behind us. (In the case of television, there is no image at all, but only a point of light scanning the screen with variable brightness). 2. the movement, which we believe to perceive on the screen, is not present at all with closer investigation. It is feigned by the fact that single still images follow each other in a certain tempo (18 - 24 per second), separated from each other by dark pauses. Due to the speed of the sequence, the single image is no longer detectable for our eye, so that for our consciousness the impression of a movement arises. Movement, i.e. something that changes continuously in time, is not objectively present here and is thus compulsorily added to by the viewer.

The film's attempt to create a moving image is in fact unsuccessful. The simple shadow play is superior to the film in this respect, since a real movement takes place on the play screen. Moreover, the cause of what we see on the game screen, light and the acting characters, etc., is actually present in our line of sight.

The aspiration to create moving images as well as to insert colored light as a design tool in painterly processes was the starting point of the work of the Colored Light and Shadow Play, stage Boelger-Kling. Non-objective color moods, similar to the glass paintings, but in a temporally changing sequence, were the first studies. Behind a frosted glass surface, lamps and colored translucent materials were moved. Soon fairy-tale moods were created in this way, which offered the incentive to include figures. In this direction fairy tale games were created. Through the occupation with fairy tales, the demand arose for the work to let certain figures appear not as shadows, but according to their character as light figures. In order to realize this demand it was necessary to look for and follow new paths of a real light play. In addition to the fairy tales, colorful light-image metamorphoses were worked out in interaction with modern music and modern poetry. With this kind of newly developed colored light and shadow play, it

proves necessary to clearly recognize its phenomena in order to be able to use them in an artistically responsible way.

Today, film certainly has its justification as a technical reproduction element, e.g. for the documentation of scientific results or the like. But as an artistic means of representation, which evokes deep psychological experiences in us through sensory perception, it is questionable. It becomes clear that by misleading our senses, a hollow space is created between us and the object "film" or "television", in which, independent of the plot content of a film, unpleasant forces become effective. Here it becomes understandable that the mass media of film and television have a pathogenic effect on people. The subconscious is influenced in such a way that restlessness and fear arise. Rudolf Steiner's call, instead of the film, instead of the

Rudolf Steiner's call to create a moving, colored image of light and shadow with genuine artistic means instead of film, instead of the perfection of an apparatus, becomes recognizable here in its central meaning.. Thus - with the task of overcoming "fear" - a counterweight to film and television is formed, The latter two have distortedly anticipated a development that is actually to be found in the metamorphosis from shadow play to light play that is necessary for the times.