

The Mystical Rhizome : Towards a Transcendent Concept of Technology

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Abstract

The overall aim of this paper is to discern a mystical rhizome in modern technology. After introducing the problem, this paper will describe a figure of the technological already in more traditional mystical cosmologies in order to locate "the technological" within the ancient mysticism. In turn, then, it will suggest that the modern technology implies "the mystical"; the mystical rhizome turns up within the depth of modern technology where human being envisages anew the divine attributes in modern subjectivistic world, where he becomes, like the mystical God visible--as invisible--in and through a world that is thoroughly his by taking over the very production or framing of that thoroughly de-mystified world, that appears in the technologies of image.

Keywords: *technology, the mystical, the technological, modern world, divinity, human being*

1. Introduction

It is commonly accepted that the modernity, through the rational and technological self-assertion, empties the world of mystical presence. In countless modern thinkers, we see a model of the modern human subject as one who, through its rational and technological self-assertion, empties the world of mystical presence. This claim implies that we live in a world which is demystified, or using Weber's words, "disenchanted" by the force of technology and by the rationalized thinking that grounds such technology; that the technologies of image reproduction in the modern world alter the limits of time and space to such a degree that they erase the very uniqueness and distance that alone might preserve the "aura" or sacrality of things. (Benjamin 1996)

This claim is however critiqued by those philosophers who try to go beyond the subject who stands behind the scientific and technological construction of reality. Perhaps the most considerable analysis of the modern time belongs to Martin Heidegger who boldly asserts that "the fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture." In speaking of this modern "conquest," Heidegger does not mean first to signal the technologies of image production that do in fact dominate modern world but rather the subject upon whom those technologies would be founded--namely, the human subject who, by representing the world to itself, positions itself as the very ground and measure of being. In the human subject's representing production (vorstellende Herstellen), "man contends for the position in which he can be that particular being who gives the measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is" (Heidegger 1977: 134,1950: 94). The age of the world as picture is the age of the human as subject who relates to the world first and foremost as ob-ject, as that which the subject sets or places (stellt) before (vor) itself through the operation of representation (Vorstellung) in such a way that the world is thereby subjected to the subject's calculative project of manipulation and mastery. When the human subject becomes the "relational center" (Bezugsmittle) of all that is (ibid 128; 88), "man brings into play his unlimited power for calculating, planning, and molding all things" (ibid, 135; 94).

A decisive sign of this struggle to conquer the world as picture appears most notably in the science and technology that make possible a manipulation of space and time. Heidegger articulates this project of manipulation, which gives way to the unthinkably massive modern systems of calculation and planning, in terms of what he calls the "gigantic" or the "immense" (das Riesige)--which emerges through the unlimited extension of technologies that master both the minute and the enormous:

A sign of this event [of the conquest of the world as picture] is that everywhere and in the most varied forms and disguises the gigantic (das Riesige) is making its appearance. In so doing, it evidences itself simultaneously in the tendency toward the

increasingly small.

We have only to think of numbers in atomic physics. The gigantic presses forward in a form that actually makes it seem to disappear—in the annihilation of great distances by the airplane, in the setting before us of foreign and remote worlds in their everydayness, which is produced at random through radio by the flick of the hand (Handgriff) (ibid, 135; 95).

Arising at the technological intersection of the atomic and the cosmic, the "gigantic" or the "immense"--which Heidegger will later understand in terms of the "monstrous"--becomes most present in its disappearance, which "takes place" to the degree that distance is annihilated and the remote becomes the everyday--without our actually noticing. This self-effacing presence of "the gigantic" is embodied for Heidegger in the global extension of technologies that are driven by "the planetary imperialism of technologically organized man" (ibid,152; 111), wherein a planetary reach emerges very literally at my fingertips: through a mere flick of the hand, its grasp extended immeasurably through the prostheses of electronic technology, spatial and temporal distance increasingly disappear. It almost goes without saying that the hand which in Heidegger becomes an index for the entire modern system of technological prostheses is tied to the image today even more intimately than Heidegger could have imagined.

Heidegger argues, then, and modern virtual culture and technology might seem to confirm, that the conquest of the world as picture occurs with the position of the human as subject; the immanence of that human subject and its rationality, in turn, would seem to imply the abandonment or negation of transcendence and its mystery--and, indeed, on Heidegger's well known view, the modern age conceives of truth no longer in terms of any revelation, religious or otherwise, but in terms of the self-certainty of the representing subject. Such a denial of revelation signals, more broadly, a "loss of the gods" that would recall Benjamin's decay of the "aura" or Weber's "disenchantment of the world"--or more deeply the death of God as it appears not only Nietzsche but already in Hegel: along with the position of the human as representing subject, along with rational

science and machine technology, the "loss of the gods" (Entgötterung) must be seen, Heidegger insists, as an essential phenomenon of the modern age (ibid, 116; 76).

This "loss," however, constitutes a peculiar "phenomenon" insofar as it signals--much like "the gigantic" of which it is an essential dimension--the presence of an absence. In the culture of the modern subject who would master the world according to the logic of representation and through the technologies grounded in such a logic, which seem to overcome the very limits of space and time, the mystery of transcendence can indeed seem to "appear" only through its sheer absence. Such a culture, then, would appear to be a culture of absolute immanence or even "total presence," a culture de-mystified by a subject who, most notably in the technologies of all-consuming light and image, seems to comprehend all.

Because the culture consumed by such an epidemic is one where all can indeed seem to be made manifest--and thus available, calculable, and manipulable--it can seem to afford no recess of darkness or mystery, no distance or transcendence, and in this sense it could very rightly be termed an "apocalyptic" culture of "total presence." One may insist, such an apocalyptic totality would be defined by the deepest anonymity of God, which is itself answered by a new anonymity of the human. The human subject who was the center of a uniquely Western self-consciousness, the subject who comes to birth as a unique, interior "I" only in relation to the "pure otherness" of its God, has been eroded under the impact of the modern realization of the death of God. Thence it has disappeared in our late modern imaginative and conceptual enactments, and is now becoming truly invisible in a new mass consciousness and society. In a culture that embodies the death of God anonymity befalls the human through a dissolution of the unique, interior subject, and such anonymity would come to expression in the new "universal humanity" of modern mass consciousness and society.

This attitude can be supported by Heidegger's analyses of the "collective," which, with the "gigantic," comes into force through

modern humanity's liberation from revelation: "Certainly the modern age has, as a consequence of the liberation of man, introduced subjectivism and individualism. But it remains just as certain that no age before this one has produced a comparable objectivism and that in no age before this has the non-individual, in the form of the collective, come to acceptance as valid" (ibid, 128; 88). The modern liberation of the human subject from any god or revelation, which occurs in and through the rise of distinctively modern, totalizing systems of calculation and planning, would be tied intimately to an objectivism and anonymity of the collective. Such objectivism and anonymity, in turn, would go hand in hand with the technological imperialism for which "uniformity becomes the surest instrument of total, i.e., technological, rule over the earth. The modern freedom of subjectivity vanishes totally in the objectivity commensurate with it" (ibid 152-153).

The totalizing force of the objectivism and collectivism that Heidegger notes in modernity's technological imperialism goes hand in hand with the erasure of human interiority that itself corresponds to the death of God. The death of the transcendent God implies a death or dissolution of the interior self, and such a dissolution would be spoken most fully by the anonymity of modern mass culture which comes to light most notably in the all-consuming culture of technological image, where distinctions between surface and depth, exteriority and interiority, immanence and transcendence, are themselves unsettled. Such anonymity, then, would be the anonymity of an "electronic humanity," and it would be tied to an unrestrained polyonymy; "Everyone" and "no one," the endlessly named and finally unnamed, the all and the nothing, coincide here in the new universality of a mass society, a universality that collapses the distinction between transcendence and immanence and becomes actual through the light and power of electronic technologies.

As already in Heidegger, Benjamin, or Weber, these technologies are defined by the transcendence of space and time themselves: Time as total presence finds now its very body and life in the polyonymous anonymity of an electronic or virtual humanity through a electronic

simultaneity in which time itself is a wholly abstract or simulated time, and space is omnidirectional, without any actual direction or perspective. Within the electronic simultaneity and ubiquity that Heidegger explains, any discreet place or location (spatial or temporal) is finally dis-placed or dis-located, and in light of such spatio-temporal displacement, one may glimpse a hint of the mystical God whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere. At the same time, however, he will want clearly to distinguish this modern ubiquity and simultaneity, which arise only with the modern realization of the death of God, from those of any "traditional" mystical God who might be identified as such. I want here to resist this overly clear distinction by stepping back a moment toward some of the mystics themselves.

2. The Mystical World and the "Technological"

There is a dialectic of immanence and transcendence in those traditions of illuminative mysticism that derive most notably from the ancient world and that prove central to the imagination of the Other as light. However, in a world consumed by technologies of image and light, one might gain perspective on that world through a comparison of it with the cosmos of mystical light and image that emerges in the mystical traditions.

Much as modern technological virtualization implies dialectic of everyone and no one, of the endlessly named and the finally nameless, so can we find in mystical traditions a dialectic of immanence and transcendence according to which God is both all in all and nothing in anything, named infinitely and infinitely nameless, everywhere and nowhere, illuminating all and beyond all in a brilliant darkness. As developed by the ancient mystics this dialectic seeks to indicate that God is distinct precisely by his indistinction, different thanks to his indifference, absent in his presence--in short, transcendent through his incomprehensible immanence.

To elucidate this dialectic here, I'll focus on the grand figure of Islamic tradition, Ibn Arabi,[1] who is decisive for developing thoroughly and systematically the speculative mysticism. The core

dialectic of Ibn Arabi's system stands very clearly in line with the Illuminative scheme of divine procession, return, and remaining. According to that dialectic, the super-essential cause of all things moves and appears through all things as immanent to them and stands beyond all things as transcendent of them. The divine is all in all--and so addressed, metaphorically, by affirmative theology (tashbih); and at the same time, the divine is nothing in anything--and so most properly addressed by negative theology (tanzih)(Ibn Arabi 1964, I,194-95).

In his treatment of this dialectic, Ibn Arabi argues not only that the divine manifests itself in all things, but indeed that it actually creates itself in and through that which it creates: who "is the manifester of all things and He is themselves"(ibid, II, 459). For Ibn Arabi, this self-creation of the divine--and it alone--gives the very subsistence of creatures: "For when it is said that it creates itself, the true meaning is nothing else but that it is establishing the being of things. For the creation of itself, that is, the manifestation of itself as the world, is surely that by which all things manifest" (ibid, III, 457). Creation itself, then, the whole of the intelligible and sensible world, is for Ibn Arabi the self-creation and the self-manifestation of the divine.

Such a self-manifesting self-creation occurs in a two-leveled descent of the divine--"from itself into itself, as though from nothing into something" (cf. Ibn Arabi 1975, Fass Ishaqi)--which structures the overall dialectic of procession, return, and remaining. In a first moment (fayd aqdas), the superessential God descends into the intelligible causes of all things, which God generates within himself through his Word, which is the beginning of all Essence, Life and Intelligence, and in a second moment (fayd moqaddas) God descends into the effects created through those causes within the world that is both intelligible and sensible; because all things issue from the incomprehensible simplicity or Nothingness of the superessential God, all things actually remain in and return to that simplicity or Nothingness. Descending from the superessentiality of His Nature, in which He is said not to be, He is created by Himself in the primordial causes and becomes the beginning of all essence, of all life, of all

intelligence, and of all things which the gnostic contemplation considers in the primordial causes; then, descending from the primordial causes which occupy a kind of intermediate position between God and the creature, that is, between the ineffable superessentiality which surpasses all understanding and the substantially manifest nature which is visible to pure minds, He is made in their effects and is openly revealed in His theophanies; then He proceeds through the manifold forms of the effects to the lowest order of the whole nature, in which bodies are contained; and thus going forth into all things in order He makes all things and is made in all things, and returns into Himself, calling all things back into Himself, and while He is made in all things, He does not cease to be above all things and thus makes all things from nothing, that is, He produces from His Superessentiality

essences, from His Supervitality lives, from His Superintellectuality intellects, from the negation of all things which are and are not the affirmations of all things which are and are not (Ibn Arabi 1964, III, 683; 1975, Fass Idrisi).

Thus, interpreting the cosmic dialectic of divine immanence and transcendence as divine self-creation, Ibn Arabi can see all of the cosmos as an infinitely varied showing or appearance of God.

Within this theophanic play of the cosmos, where God's self-manifestation is actually self-creation, Ibn Arabi very powerfully emphasizes, further, the fundamentally co-creative interplay between Creator and creature: "we ought not to understand God and the creature as two things distinct from one another," he insists, "but as one and the same. For both the creature, by subsisting, is in God; and God, by manifesting Himself, in a marvelous and ineffable manner creates Himself in the creature" (Ibn Arabi 1964, III, 263). Ibn Arabi insists that God realizes himself in and through the creature, just as the creature finds its subsistence in God; God achieves self-consciousness in and through the creature's consciousness of God. It is in these dynamic, co-creative terms that "the Creator of all things" is "created in all things"--which means that every creature is at

bottom a paradoxical theophany, from the celestial essences down to the very last bodies of the visible world. All of creation offers a field of luminous appearance that makes manifest the inaccessible darkness of the super-essential (ibid, P, III, 41ff).

Operating according to the paradox of God's brilliant darkness, wherein the invisible becomes visible, the logic of "dissimilar similarity" is sponsored by Ibn Arabi and thus it proves equally theocryptic; For everything that is understood and sensed is nothing else but the apparation of what is not apparent, the manifestation of the hidden, the affirmation of the negated, the comprehension of the incomprehensible, the utterance of the unutterable, the access to the inaccessible, the understanding of the unintelligible, the body of the bodiless, the essence of the superessential, the form of the formless, the measure of the measureless, the number of the unnumbered, the weight of the weightless, the materialization of the spiritual, the visibility of the invisible, the place of that which is in no place, the time of the timeless, the definition of the infinite, the circumscription of the uncircumscribed (ibid, I, 194-5; 1975, fass Nohi).

In sum, the theophanic self-creation of God constitutes a movement from the transcendence of super-essential Nothingness, which is absolutely simple and incomprehensible, into the manifold immanence of all created things, which can be known; that immanence, however, is always an immanence of the transcendent, and it can therefore ultimately signal only the impossible appearance of the inapparent--the limited and knowable determinacy of God's absolutely unlimited and unknowable indeterminacy.

Significantly, Ibn Arabi seeks to elucidate the logic of theophanic self-creation, where the something of creation, which we can know, issues from the self-negation of the divine Nothingness, which we cannot know, through the "example" of our own human nature--and at this point, the indispensable and very powerful anthropological dimension of Ibn Arabi's mysticism becomes quite clear:

For our own intellect ('aql) too, although in itself it is invisible and

incomprehensible, yet becomes both manifest and comprehensible by certain signs (ayat) when it is materialized in sounds and letters and also indications as though in sorts of bodies;(ibid,IV, 68) and while it becomes externally apparent in this way it still remains internally invisible, and while it breaks out into various figures comprehensible to the senses it never abandons the incomprehensible state of its nature; and before it becomes outwardly apparent it moves itself within itself; and thus it is both silent and cries out, and while it is silent it cries out and while it is crying out it is silent; and invisible it is seen and while it is being seen it is invisible; and uncircumscribed it is circumscribed, and while it is being circumscribed it continues to be uncircumscribed. (ibid, I,92ff, II,114, III, 21ff).

The theophanic God, who through self-creation makes manifest his uncreated invisibility, is mirrored in the human intellect, which, in itself indefinite and invisible, defines and shows itself through its self-expression, all the while remaining indefinite and invisible. In both cases, Ibn Arabi is finally pointing, to the incomprehensible ground of creativity itself, the very mystery of creation ex nihilo or else that of ever-lasting recreation.

Now, this human "example" is not really just an example, since it is based in Ibn Arabi's core understanding of the human subject as incomprehensible image of the incomprehensible God. While every creature constitutes an appearance of God (a theophany), the human creature alone constitutes an image of God--and it constitutes an image of God not simply to the degree that the human intellect, like the divine, becomes self-conscious in and through its own self-expression but, even more, insofar as the human intellect, again like the divine, ultimately proves through that very self-consciousness--or in the deepest ground of that self-consciousness--to be incomprehensible to itself. The human image of the divine is distinctive in that it is both self-conscious and incomprehensible to itself, or indeed incomprehensible in its very self-consciousness. Ibn Arabi's mystical anthropology, insisting as it does on the incomprehensible image of the divine in the human, here comes to play a decisive theological role, for in knowing the deepest

incomprehensibility of the human, we come in fact to know the true incomprehensibility of God. In both cases, the divine and the human, such incomprehensibility is at the same time the very ground of self-consciousness, for it is, precisely, the incomprehensibility of a Nothingness which is the ground of that creation in and through which alone self-consciousness is realized.

Here, Ibn Arabi's mystical anthropology powerfully complements his mystical theology: neither God nor the human subject created in His Image can comprehend what they themselves are--even as they achieve, through their own self-creative self-expression, a self-conscious awareness that they are: For the human being does know itself, and again does not know itself. For it knows that it is, but does not know what it is. And it is this which reveals most clearly the Image of God to be in man. For just as God is comprehensible in the sense that it can be deduced from His creation that he is, and incomprehensible because it cannot be comprehended by any intellect what He is, seeing that He is not a what but superessential, so to the human mind it is given to know only one thing, that it is--but as to what it is no sort of notion is permitted it (Ibn Arabi 1975, fass Adami).

Ibn Arabi wants to insist not only that the human cannot comprehend God, nor even simply that the human created in the image of the incomprehensible God is itself incomprehensible--but also, in full consistency with these first two principles, that even God finally cannot comprehend himself. In light of such thoroughgoing divine ignorance Ibn Arabi can insist that "the human mind is more honored in its ignorance than in its knowledge" (Ibn Arabi 1964, I, 126)--for in that ignorance above all the image of the divine in the human achieves its perfection. And so it is that "the ignorance in it of what it is is more praiseworthy than the knowledge that it is, just as the negation of God accords better with the praise of His nature than the affirmation..." (ibid, 288-9).

Ibn Arabi's mystical celebration of ignorance here is intended to mark the manner in which both the divine and human substance ultimately

exceed or transcend all ten of the categories or "predicables" delimited by that "shrewdest of the Greeks," Aristotle whom he called "ignorant" (ibid, III, 382). One of those categories, however, assumes two particular importance: that of place, and that of time. In seeking to articulate the excess of the divine and its image over the categories, Ibn Arabi emphasizes above all the impossibility of locating either the divine or the human substance, (ibid, II, 464, IV,57) and he does so because it is above all place and time that mark the kind of limitation, circumscription or definition that alone make knowledge (or discourse) possible: the Divine Likeness in the human mind is most clearly discerned, Ibn Arabi insists, when it is not known what it is--precisely because if it were known to be something, then at once it would be limited by some definition, and thereby would cease to be a complete expression of the Image of its Creator, who is absolutely unlimited and contained within no definition because He is infinite, beyond all that may be said or comprehended, superessential (ibid, I, 90,118-19). The super-essential God who remains beyond all that can be spoken or understood is a God beyond the definition or circumscription of any place or time; indeed, He is for Ibn Arabi the placeless place of all places, "present to all things by his immeasurable circumambience of them" (ibid, II, 459)--and thus in that very presence to things beyond all things to which it is present. Since knowledge for Ibn Arabi implies the definition or location of the object known, the unknowable God and its human image alike stand beyond all location.

At the same time, such definition or location is the very condition of all creation. Thus, insofar as self-creation implies definition or location, even as it issues from--and returns to--a nothingness that cannot be defined or located, we can see in the movement of self-creation an interesting intersection between self-awareness and ignorance of self. That is: the creative intellect (human or divine) must define or locate that which it--only thereby--comes to know, and in that which it comes to know it achieves its own self-consciousness or self-awareness, indeed its very subsistence; at the same time, however, the same creative intellect necessarily exceeds or stands beyond that which it creates, and to that degree it remains beyond all

location and thus incomprehensible--even to itself. The ground of definition and knowledge is itself indefinable and unknowable.

This interplay between the self-consciousness and self-ignorance of creative intellect, between knowable creation in all its multiplicity and the unknowable simplicity of creation's ground, comes to light most forcefully in Ibn Arabi there where the divine and the human are most essentially united--in the word of God (kalamatollah) as Reason or Cause of the universe: As God's vicegerent (khalifahtollah) the word of God (kalamatollah) which is the perfectman (insan kamil, haqiqah Mohammadiyah) is the creative Reason and Cause of the established universe, simple and in itself infinitely multiple; simple, because the universe of all things is in Him an indivisible and inseparable One, or rather the indivisible and inseparable unity of all things is the word of God since He is all things; and not unreasonably understood to be multiple because He is diffused through all things to infinity, and that diffusion is the subsistence of all things. For He spreads mightily from end to end and sweetly disposes all things.

By "speech" (bayan) (55:4) Quran meant the naming power on the authority of the word of God which runs swiftly through all things in order that all things may be. For its multiple and infinite course through all things is the subsistence of all things (ibid, II, 114).

As the very self-expression of God, the Word creates all things and is created in all things (ibid, I, 94). The dialectic of immanence and transcendence here comes to expression through the Word that is the center of God's self-expression: the God who as Word runs through all things and is their subsistence at the same time remains transcendently simple in Himself. The God who manifests through all things to make them be is also the God who creates and sustains all things by presenting all things in himself--and himself in all things. As maker and made, the God who expresses himself through his word is at once most present and most hidden, all things in all and nothing in nothing (ibid, I, 65). The ineffable intellectual light present to all but contained by none, He is, in short, the placeless "place of all places" that can be defined neither by itself nor by any other intellect, the placeless place from which all things proceed and to which all things return.

In this light we can situate the end of Ibn Arabi's entire vision: the unification (vahdat) of the world with God in and through the human subject implies a deification achieved only insofar as the human creature, in perfect likeness with God, transcends all location through "the ascent beyond places and times" (ibid, II, 646), for those "who participate in the eternal and infinite beatitude will be encompassed neither by place nor by time" (ibid, IV, 98).

Now, I want to emphasize that the human subject who would be capable of such transcendence over place and time is not only the subject who proves incomprehensible to itself; it is also--to the very same degree--the subject who comprehends all of creation, which it can transcend thanks only to that comprehension. In this regard, a significant conjunction emerges in Ibn Arabi's anthropology between the ultimately unknowing subject, on the one hand, and a certain all-knowing subject, on the other hand--the subject, precisely, made in the image of the incomprehensible God who himself sees and comprehends all by his presence. I want quickly to highlight this conjunction because I think it may eventually shed some interesting light on the technological subject of modern culture.

The fact that the human mind is created in God's image (ibid, I, 216) means for Ibn Arabi not only that the human mind is ultimately incomprehensible to itself but also that the same human mind, like the divine, contains within itself all of creation. God has created in man all creatures visible and invisible (ibid, III,457) and he equals the world; rather he is more than it since the world and all the creatures in it appear through man. (ibid, I, 118) It is this comprehension of all creation that signals the distinctive transcendence of the human who is created in the image of God.

God wills to make every creature in man, Ibn Arabi argues, "because He wished to make [man] in His image and likeness, so that, just as the primal Archetype transcends all by the excellence of His Essence, so His image should transcend all created things in dignity and grace" (ibid, I, 216). The incomprehensible transcendence of the divine that

contains all things within itself is imaged, then, in the transcendence of the human creature who comprehends all creation even as it remains incomprehensible to itself. This means, in short, that the mystical or unknowing subject in Ibn Arabi is also an all-comprehending subject.

One should also note here that the mystical subject who comprehends all creation is a subject who, by means of that comprehension, comes to dominate over (velayat) and name (tasmiyah) that which it comprehends. For how could man be given dominion over and name the things of which he had not the concept? For his dominion over them would go astray if he did not know the things which he was to rule? In a strange kind of resonance with the modern subject analyzed in Heidegger (or embodied in Hegel), man here rules creation through the knowledge that grasps or takes hold of it.

*Even further, this domination (velayat) is achieved through a knowledge (m'arifah) that is understood above all in terms of sight (basirah)--and in terms of the speech (bayan) power that Ibn Arabi can associate with sight. (cf. *ibid.*, I, 213ff; 254; II, 114) Notably in his exegesis of the Cow 2:31-3, where Adam sees and thereby names every thing, Ibn Arabi emphasizes that Qoran uses the verb "to see: to know" ('ilm) because sight signals the power of understanding which alone gives rule or dominion over that which is understood, a rule or dominion itself enacted through the power of naming. Just like God who "sees" all things in Himself and Himself in all things, so the human subject "sees" all of creation in order to comprehend, name, and dominate it.*

The emergent model here of an ultimately unknowing subject who at the same time comprehends and dominates all creation--through sight and speech (bayan)-- implies that the created subject who proves incomprehensible in the very manner of its Creator is also a subject intended by that Creator to dominate the world through the comprehension of sight, the rational power of naming--and finally, the technological self-assertion that proves both possible and necessary only for a subject of naming who sees and comprehends all.

The God whose essence is incomprehensible is a God not to be grasped by thought. The human subject who understands its God as ultimately incomprehensible is itself the image of that God and so proves incomprehensible to itself. To the degree that the subject does not manage to know the nature of its own mind, it constitutes the perfect image of its Creator. At the very same time, however, the subject who cannot know its own nature at the same time relates to all creation through an all-inclusive vision of comprehension and dominion.

Indeed, in seeking to emphasize the full mimesis between Creator and creature, or between archetype and icon, Ibn Arabi notes that just as the Divinity sees all, hears all, scrutinizes all, man also, through sight and hearing, possesses a hold over things and possesses a power that examines and scrutinizes the universe. (ibid, IV 20). The power of sight is tied here, according to Ibn Arabi, to possession that gives a control or dominion.

Such comprehension and dominion are not unqualified, however. For while Ibn Arabi argues that God made man appear in this world precisely in order to be both the contemplator and the master of the marvels of the universe, he also goes on to indicate that the enjoyment of those marvels should give to man the understanding of the one who provides them, while the grandiose beauty of what he sees places him on the tracks of the ineffable and inexpressible power of the Creator. Here we can note a very interesting conjunction between an all-knowing, all-seeing subject and a subject for whom the ground of knowing, or the God who gives that which is to be known, is incomprehensible. The one who masters the universe in and through the contemplation of a spectator at the same time finds, through that very contemplation, a trace of the incomprehensible and ineffable. The mastery of sight here comes up against the incomprehensible that literally cannot be mastered.

In this context, it is not surprising that the human creature appears as lord and king and he does so in the very measure of his freedom, for

as autonomous and independent master of his own will, he is God's vicegerent (khalifah) who is created in the image of the God who, though incomprehensible, or as incomprehensible, is nevertheless understood to rule all.(Fusus, fass Mohammadi) The human creature here is an image of God not only insofar as the creature proves, like the Creator, incomprehensible to itself, but also, at the same time, insofar as the creature proves, again like the Creator, to be the one who commands all creation through the royal power of freedom: creation in the image of the nature that governs all shows precisely that it has from the start an almighty nature. Thus, human nature, created to dominate the world in terms of its resemblance with God, was made as a living image who participates in the archetype both in dignity and in name. Incomprehensible icon of the incomprehensible archetype, the human creature also mimics God in freedom and dominion. This is because freedom is the attribute par excellence of the human who is created in the image of the divine--and that freedom is marked primarily by the interrelated traits of self-determination and domination over the universe.

The freedom, then, that marks our resemblance with God implies a control or possession both of self and of world--and such freedom exercises its rule over others in and through a technological capacity and a naming power enjoyed only by that creature who is capable, literally, of technological manipulation.

Indeed, having asserted that man is created for the very purpose of comprehending the universe both in sight and in thought, in order there also to find a trace of the incomprehensible, Ibn Arabi's mysticism tacitly goes on to celebrate humanity's technological ingenuity and the domination it ensures. This tacit celebration is hidden in the explanation Ibn Arabi presents concerning a physical poverty that forces rational innovation: man comes into the world stripped of any natural protections, without natural arms and any tool, and in poverty, lacking everything needed to satisfy the needs of life. Lacking most notably the natural arms or tools of war that one can see in the animal's horn or hoof, claw or stinger, man is forced to innovate technologically in such a way that his power eventually

exceeds--and controls--that of other creatures. What appears to be a deficiency of our nature is in fact an encouragement to dominate that which is near us: the iron "wherein," Qouran expresses, "is mighty power (in matters of war) as well as many benefits for mankind" (57:25)

Man therefore works the iron that he uses for war: " And We taught him the making of metal coast (for battles), to protect you in fighting" (21:80). As Ibn Arabi interprets, the purpose of man's mastery over creation is realized through the ingenuity of a thinking that takes control of space and time by technological means, which, most interestingly, harness the speed of flight and thus allow man both to diminish distance and to realize action at a distance. All of this becomes possible thanks to the physical poverty or deficiency that forces rational, technological innovation.

At the same time, while emphasizing that poverty, Ibn Arabi will note that the physical makeup of man includes also both the sign and the means of man's dominion--in that which most directly embodies man's rational capacity: the hands which is proper to a rational nature because the hands make possible the rational expression (bayan) exemplified in writing (ketabah). Thus the naming subject and its speech power are made possible only through the endowment of hands, and thus the naming subject is at the same time the subject who can manipulate and rule the world technologically. As much as technological manipulation, the hands signal speech and thus the dignity and power of the naming subject who alone exercises a technological rule.

In sum, then, in Ibn Arabi's mystical anthropology, we see an intriguing intersection between all-encompassing vision and ultimate unknowing, an all-encompassing vision of the cosmos in and through which the incomprehensible appears--but to a comprehending subject who, through the hand and through the rational, speech capacity signaled by the hand, masters that cosmos technologically.

3. The Technological World and the "Mystical"

As yet we tried to show here an all-knowing technological subject in unexpectedly close proximity to the mystical subject of unknowing. Now we would return to the concern adumbrated at the start of this essay, namely whether one might also see, conversely, a hint of the mystical or unknowing subject in modern technological world.

Like the totality of the mystical cosmos in Ibn Arabi, a cosmos wherein created souls endlessly desire and seek out, but never fully or finally capture, the super-essential "Cause" that reveals itself concealingly through that cosmos, so the technological world of all-consuming image today can seem to contain a subject unable to comprehend or to represent the ultimate causality of its world--a subject who seems, for that very reason, to be driven by ever renewed desire to generate and to consume (to posit and remove, to affirm and deny) ever new images in which desire never quite finds satiety. As in the mystical cosmos, where the desire for God passes through infinite layers of theophanic appearance without ever reaching an end, so in the world of technological image, the subject remains ever on the move, passing constantly from image to image, within an endless proliferation of connections, associations, and displacements.

Such an endless displacement of the desiring subject within modern world of endless technological image could be registered at several different levels, most all of which would concern some disjunction between the individual experience we can know and the incomprehensible totalities or systems (above all the technological) that we might imagine to determine the "place" of such experience. It evokes explicitly a "transcendence" in "tele-technology," because one increasingly uses artifacts and prostheses of which one is totally ignorant, in a growing disproportion between knowledge and know-how, the space of such technical experience tends to become more animistic, magical, mystical. Whereas in ancient mysticism the ultimately unknowing subject is also the all-knowing subject of technological rule, here in modern thought, the seemingly all-knowing subject of technological rule proves to be more and more unknowing--operating in a quasi-mystical space opened by the disjunction or disproportion between know-how and actual comprehension. The

*emergence of such a space, of course, was glimpsed already by modern technology: Weber already saw that, in a world disenchanted through modern rationalization, we come to rely ever more essentially on forms of knowledge we do not ourselves possess and on technological powers we do not in fact control; Benjamin likewise saw that the technologies of image reproduction become so fundamental to the very framing of our reality that we can no longer even see or comprehend them in our experience of that reality; and finally, Heidegger was already able to see that "what is gigantic" in the modern system of the representing subject, "and what can seemingly always be calculated completely, becomes, precisely through this, incalculable [zum Unberechenbaren]." He then goes on to indicate that "this becoming incalculable remains the invisible shadow that is cast around all things everywhere when man has been transformed into subjectum and the world into picture " (Heidegger, *op.cited*, 135; 95). That is, the modern system of the calculating, technological subject opens a space that ultimately eludes the subject's planning and calculation because it eludes the subject's power of representation: "By means of this shadow [of the incalculable] the modern world extends itself out into a space withdrawn from representation... [in einen der Vorstellung entzogenen Raum]" (*ibid*, 136; 95). This shadow of the gigantic prevents things from ever being put fully into their proper places, that is, being fully depicted. This shadow is not simply external to the world as picture; it is an inseparable part of it. It designates what escapes and eludes the calculating plans of total representation, of which it is at the same time the condition of possibility. Much as in Ibn Arabi, where the incomprehensible substance or essence of the human intellect is the very ground of possibility for the human comprehension of all that is, so here the space that cannot be contained by the totalizing representation of the technological subject becomes the groundless ground of such representation. Just as the all-knowing subject in Ibn Arabi turns out to dwell in unexpected proximity to the subject of unknowing who cannot be located, so the representing subject who grounds modern technology here dwells in unexpected proximity to a space that cannot be fixed, set, or placed through representation.*

In this light, the quasi-mystical space opened by modern virtual

technology, or already the shadow that emerges with the gigantic in Heidegger, might evoke sufficiently the uncircumscribable place of all places or the brilliant darkness of Ibn Arabi's cosmology to suggest that a strange shadow of the mystical subject and its God may somehow appear in the experience of modern technological subject. Such a shadow and an appearance might be glimpsed in modern technological figures of incomprehensible totality. Among those figures, one might point to virtualisation and the dominative power. Virtualisation implies an "ontological shift" (Heim 1994,xiii) ; it is the figure of an electronic and telematic light-system in which "iconic" interconnection approaches both infinite complexity and unthinkable unity--altering or even erasing the limits of time and place themselves. The dominative power of modern technology is the image of an unthinkable potential control (of nature, society, etc) whose actualization would bind us universally and instantaneously in some unknowable world. These two figures of a purely rationalized human self-assertion, two figures, one might assume, of a total demystification of the world by a self-grounding and self-transparent modern subject, might signal also a displacement or dislocation of that subject; indeed, a dislocation in which that subject would confront some shadow of the mystical.

Such a shadow is permeated by our modern obsessions with sight and comprehension and systematic manipulation. Modern technology has tele-objectively ended in the intersection of the computer and the maze of the technological control. The former, entering the "miracle" of the Internet, where everybody is everywhere at once, faces the kind of pure exposure, indeed the ubiquity, immediacy, instantaneity and simultaneity, (all belong to God in ancient mysticism) known in the total presence of electronic humanity. Man is open and exposed to every connection he can make on the world wide web, and he discovers that there is no space or time out here, or in here, or wherever he is.(Levy 1995, 42-3) There are only connections. Everything is connected. All human knowledge gathered and linked, hyperlinked, this site leading to that, this fact referenced to that, a keystroke, a mouse-click, a password; a world without end.(Baudrillard 1992) Caught up in the totality of the web's endless

interconnection, which gathers all human knowledge as if in some all-seeing vision and keeps it literally ready-to-hand, man encounters a ubiquity, immediacy, instantaneity and simultaneity that seem to undo place and time. Like the endlessly multiple perspectives of Ibn Arabi's theophanic cosmos, which both shows and hides all, so here the endlessly multiple images and connections of the net draw modern man onward, leading him, through an endless displacement, into a totality that approaches the mystical. And so he can wonder, as one might of the mystical God (the mystical subject) in their relation to the mystical cosmos, whether cyberspace is a thing within the world or the other way around. Again like ancient mysticism, all things are in God and God is in all things. The intellect ('aql) contains all that it creates, and at the same time it is contained by all that creates it.

There is a presence here, a thing implied, something vast and bright. Caught in this rushing force and glow, in this presence vast and bright, implied and thus elusive, running like Ibn Arabi's God through all that might be seen, modern man approaches, through this first technological figure of totality, a second: the domiative power. (Virilio 1996, 14-5, 107-8) Everything is technologically controled; all in your computer, information and the material, every logical operation and processing function; it all culminates here in the on-screen image. The modern technological subject culminates all knowledge here, and the immediately dominative power appears here, on the screen whose bottomless light gives endless image, a screen where technological totalization, the logical consequence of Heidegger's "planetary imperialism of technologically organized man," is given as a blinding vision. Here on the screen of light where all becomes connection and connection becomes all, where every image, hyper-linked, points beyond itself within some uncircumscribable totality, some incomprehensible unity, where inside is out and outside in, here the figure of the technologized world becomes an image of blinding beauty, like that of the God who blinds with his holiness, the very God whom no one can see without annihilating (fana). And yet, like the God whose purest light is unimaginable darkness, whose immanence is transcendence, these images of technological totality can seem to signal that which would

comprehend the human subject more than the subject would comprehend it. While born of human reason and human self-assertion, such technological totality can nevertheless seem to absorb and escape us with nothing beyond.

If a strange shadow of the mystical God appears here, could that be because all creatures are indeed theophanies, or because the creative self-expression of God, which issues from and returns to Nothingness, is imaged perfectly in the creative self-expression of the human? If a shadow of the mystical subject appears here, could that be because the mystical subject who is ultimately unknowing is also a subject who comprehends all and masters all technologically? Could we truly affirm with Ibn Arabi that God is the all in all that returns to Nothing? If so, then we would have to read in a whole new light, and in at least two ways, the traditional mystical assertion that there is no other end of this world, but the ascent beyond places and times of all those who shall receive the glory of deification.

Conclusion

I tried above to support this idea that the mystical subject is still alive behind the technological veil of modern world. In one sense, human subject first acts as a subject of inquiry in relation to that modern world which can seem to be so thoroughly "de-mystified," so void of any mystical presence at all, thanks to the self-assertion of a purely human reason that, by comprehending itself and its world, aims to manipulate and master that world technologically--above all in the technologies of image that come so fully to frame our world today. Rhizomatically however, it turns to a "mystical" world within the depth of modern technology where human being envisages anew the divinic attributes in modern subjectivistic world, where he becomes, like the mystical God visible--as invisible--in and through a world that is thoroughly his. This perspective suggests that the technological and the mystical shed light on one another, insofar as we can discern not only a shadow of the mystical subject in today's technological world but also a figure of the technological subject already in more traditional mystical cosmologies.

Endnote

[1] Mystic, philosopher, poet, sage, Muhammad Ibn 'Arabi is one of the world's great spiritual teachers. Known as Muhyiddin (the Revivifier of Religion) and the Shaykh al-Akbar (the Greatest Master), he was born in 1165 AD into the Moorish culture of Andalusian Spain, the center of an extraordinary flourishing and cross-fertilization of Jewish, Christian and Islamic thought, through which the major scientific and philosophical works of antiquity were transmitted to Northern Europe. Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual attainments were evident from an early age, and he was renowned for his great visionary capacity as well as being a superlative teacher. He travelled extensively in the Islamic world and died in Damascus in 1240 AD. He wrote over 350 works including the *Fusûs al-Hikam* , an exposition of the inner meaning of the wisdom of the prophets in the Judaic/ Christian/ Islamic line, and *Al- Futûhât al-Makkiyya*, a vast encyclopaedia of spiritual knowledge.

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