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Who is a Fundamentalist ?

The fundamentalist has his own version of history, his own definition of culture, his own interpretation of religion and his own brand of nationalism. Behind all the pretensions of defending culture, religion and nation, the real agenda is to legitimise an unjust and an exploitative outdated socio-political system...

To make a feudal system viable it is necessary that all civil liberties be denied to the people. And to justify and legitimise undemocratic system, you need religious fundamentalism. This use of fundamentalism is also evident in those Muslim countries where a few control all national wealth, and no civil rights exist. Fascism and fundamentalism (theocracy) have one thing in common : both believe in the total usurpation of the basic rights and civil liberties of citizens. Given half a chance, like the Taliban, the Sangh (Hindu) Parivar will also start putting women in their place.

Javed Akhtar

(The Hindustan Times, July 15, 2003)

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The Nonviolent Imagination: Trickster Gandhi Revisited

Kwabena P. Slaughter

Power is always on display in any act or system of communication. "Every style embodies an epistemological decision," writes theorist Susan Sontag in her essay *On Style*, "an interpretation of how and what we perceive."¹ Dhirendra Sharma, in *The Negative Dialectics of India: A Study of the Negative Dialecticism in Indian Philosophy*, introduces the Buddhist logicians approach to a negative/negating statement, which is that a negation can also be thought of as a "complex of affirmative judgements". In the chapter entitled "Negative Dialectics of Non-violence" Sharma examines *ahimsa*, non-violence, as also a dense "complex of affirmative judgements"; among these there is the statement that violence is bad but along with that is a statement that fighting violence with violence is also unacceptable.² In an encounter with such a "complex of affirmative judgements" many things are communicated and perceived in a fraction of an instant.

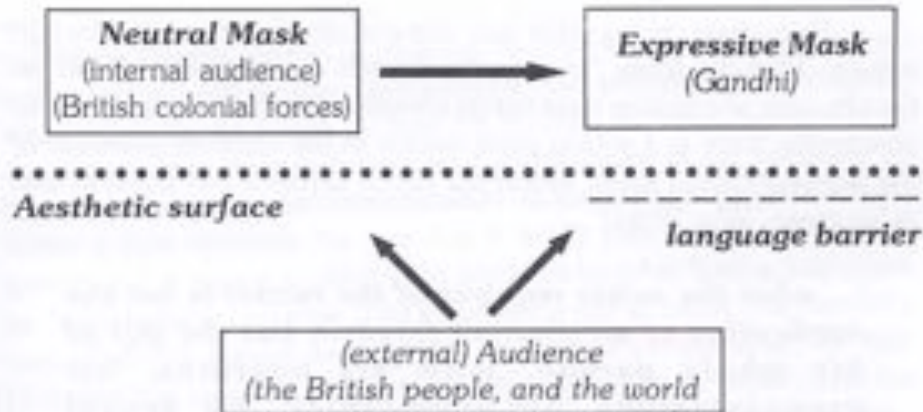
In order for power to be exercised, that against which it is exerted must offer some force of resistance. "A mere belief in *ahimsa* (nonviolence) will not do. If intellect plays a large part in the field of violence," Gandhi writes, "I hold that it plays a larger part in the field of nonviolence."³ The principal behavioral oddity in the events known as the Salt March are the letters that Gandhi sent to the Viceroy (and the publishing of the names of the marchers in the newspaper). More than declarations of war, these are declarations against obfuscation. By eliminating secrecy, eliminating enmity, eliminating weapons, and eliminating *violent retaliation* in his struggle for Indian independence, Gandhi takes away all possible causes that the British could use to excuse their violent treatment of the Indian people. This practice of non-resistance offers us a certain insight into the terms of engagement

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necessary for a game of strategy; namely, that these games are dependent upon either not knowing what one's opponent will do or knowing what one's opponent will do while they do not know that you know. Although Gandhi does not know what the British will do, he does know that the British know what he will do. In this way he has introduced into the game of strategy a new state of being. Having discovered new territory within the limitations of this game, Gandhi has made obsolete the traditional violent battle plan.

Gandhi formally embraced the idea of passive resistance in September of 1894 while reading Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*⁴; in which the author introduces the phrase "non-resistance to evil". "When I was passing through a severe crisis of skepticism and doubt," quotes the mahatma, "I came across Tolstoy's book. I was at that time a believer in violence. Its reading cured me of my skepticism and made me a firm believer in [non-violence]."⁵ In the words of Leo Tolstoy, "The business of art lies just in this -to make that understood and felt which, in the form of an argument, might be incomprehensible and inaccessible."⁶ Gandhi lists Tolstoy, along with the artist John Ruskin, and the poet Raychandbhai, as one of the "three moderns [who] have left a deep impression on my life."⁷ Gandhi's protests were more than argument in dramatic form. Argument requires the mutual acceptance of terms and the avenues of thought connecting those terms, therefore there are several stages of agreement that must take place in an argument. An aesthetic event does not require any of these. Have you ever had something very delicate that you needed to say but found it difficult to decide which part to say first? The notion of a matrix of affirmative judgements, brought to us by the "negative dialectic", points to the way that linearity tends to thwart complexity. The use of "indirect representation" invites the possibility of a more expansive vein for communication which can carry more information more densely packed at aesthetic/phenomenological speeds, which exceed the speed of linear cognition.

Jacques Lecoq, founder of the *International School of Mime and Physical Theater*; has introduced some very useful language -the



neutral mask and the expressive mask⁸ -which can help us understand how Gandhi's style of protest stages the gaze of the British (the audience).

The Audience sees (arrow indicates direction of the gaze) both the *Neutral Mask* (A-NM) and the *Expressive Mask* (A-EM). The audience is also witness to the *Neutral Masks* experience of the *Expressive Mask* (A-[NM-EM]). Comparing these three perceptions; A-EM, A-NM, A-[NM -EM]; enables the audience to locate the personalities of the *Neutral* and *Expressive Masks*. The statement is made in the writings of Gandhi's amanuensis, Pyarelal Nair, and in the words of the British colonial government, that ***Gandhi's language of honest action was unintelligible to both the British and the Indians.*** This is the language barrier in the above diagram. We can say that Gandhi has cast himself as the *Expressive Mask*. Seeing that Gandhi has done nothing violent (even though not doing anything violent is incongruent with a traditional battle plan) the world audience is better able to recognize Britain's perception, interpretation, and violent response as indicative of their own character, rather than that of Gandhi and the ***satyagrahis***. In the words of Soren Kierkegaard, "... direct communication presupposes that the recipient's ability to receive is entirely in order"⁹ In the above case, and as a style of communication, the non-violent imagination uses this indirect representation in order to attune its message to a velocity and angle more in harmony with the pre-existing momentum of the mind of the audience.

Everything on the other side of the aesthetic surface is a foreign culture. That the three "moderns" who left a lasting impression on Gandhi were all creatives must not go unnoticed. In their shared aesthetic philosophy there is a willing participation in the rambunctiousness of the free-associating mind. Jean-Paul Sartre explains this position well in his essay "Why Write?",

"... what the writer requires of the reader is not the application of an abstract freedom but the gift of his whole person, with his passions, his prepossessions, his sympathies, his sexual temperaments, and his scale of values."

The impoverished part of modernism can be seen in its reliance on the creation of a perfected viewing space and a perfected audience: in which case signifiers are developed and in their usage they do the work of exclusion that insider information is wont to do. The work of non-violence, if it is to prove its worth, must take any audience as it is, strangers or familiars.

"... being a practical man," says the mahatma, "I do not wait till India recognizes the practicability of the spiritual life in the political world. ...But it should not be forgotten that I have also said that for my movement I do not at all need believers in the theory of nonviolence, full or imperfect. It is enough if people carry out the rules of nonviolent action. (Sharp)"

The successful implementation of the non-violent imagination proves the worth of the system to all who witness it.

In Gandhi's logic "man is undoubtedly an artist and creator, and the lessons learned in the context of art, of their own accord, crossover into the rest of life. "His instinct for the artistic taught him to discriminate and to know that any conglomeration of colours was no mark of beauty. (Sharp)" Due to their high degree of choreography and staging the

term "theater" becomes an appropriate description for the revolutionary spectacles Gandhi created. In making them so he has opened them up to the discourse of theater, performance, and aesthetics. When asked, while still in South Africa, to take his method of nonviolent action to America to help African-Americans Gandhi spoke of the need first to have, in India, an "ocular demonstration" of successful nonviolent action. When a style succeeds the way that it works gets exposed; the value system of that style is instilled in its audience by what Sontag has called an "infra-didactic" process. The argument is not so much that Gandhi's way of doing things was a high art or performance art or any philosophical pandering such as that, but that it was a "style", and the values it embodied initiated us all into a nonviolent cultural¹⁰ model.

Jean Baudrillard, in the first essay in his book *Simulation and Simulacra*¹¹; posits the need for a "revolutionary simulation"; which he describes

"... it is no longer a question of the ideology of power, but of the scenario of power. Ideology only corresponds to a corruption of reality through signs; simulation corresponds to a short circuit of reality and to its duplication through signs."

What I have called 'theater' Erik H. Erikson, in *Gandhi's Truth*¹² refers to as a "revolutionary kind of human ritualization". Erikson's "revolutionary ritualization" and Baudrillard's "revolutionary simulation" are similar in that ritual and simulation both displace the usual motivation of an action. To disrupt the thread between *motive* and *action* is the primary wisdom of a mandalic consciousness. When the world is arranged as a mandala, polar opposites naturally appear. Just as when the world is arranged into binary-opposites day will be opposite from night and male opposite to female but the mandala is also concerned with questions such as: "will woman be closer to day than girl?" Where 'mandalic consciousness' is operating there necessarily arises a multitude of angles of approach toward anyone thing (girl can be located by its relationship to day as well as to woman).

The mythological figure known in the west as the *trickster* is shared in Hindu mythology primarily by two persona, Krishna and Ganesha. In 1926 Gandhi gave a series of talks¹³ about the *Bhagavad Gita*¹⁴. From the transcripts of these talks *The Gita According to Gandhiji*¹⁵ was published. We can look to Gandhi's commentary on this conversation between a *trickster* (Krishna) and a warrior (Arjuna) for insight into his thoughts about conflict and communication. Speaking about human life as a prison, Gandhi says in his Gita,

"We take pleasure in this slavery because it is a part of our existence, but in truth it is a state in which we cannot rest in peace even for a moment. Even then, this prison is a house through which we can win our freedom."

We must focus on the use of the word "through" in Gandhi's commentary. Madan G. Gandhi makes the statement, in her essay "Gandhian Aesthetics"¹⁶, that "[Mahatma] Gandhi's aesthetics is the logical extension of his metaphysics."

In many South American countries and in Spain the *trickster* character is called the *duende*. Manipulating expectations and the trajectory of interpretations "the duende takes it upon himself," writes the playwright Federico Garcia Lorca, "to make us suffer by means of a drama of living forms, and clears the stairways for an evasion of the surrounding reality... To a higher degree than the muse or the angel, the duende seizes not only the performer but also the audience, creating conditions where art can be understood spontaneously with little, if any, conscious effort." Again the words of Susan Sontag are relevant here,

"Art is seduction, not rape... But art cannot seduce without the complicity of the experiencing subject."

The *trickster's* principle tool is an understanding of how sentient beings interpret, learn from, and take action based upon, their

experiences. In the trickster stories from Africa in particular we can watch the trickster play-back this process of historicizing. This is well exemplified in a story from west Africa that for simplicities sake we will call **"The Man with the Red Hat Green Hat"**. In this story there are two people who are very good friends and neighbors. The trickster persona, decides to play a game to test the loyalty these two friends have for one another. Putting on a hat, the left side of which is green and the right side of which is red, he walks in between the two friends while they are working in their gardens. One of them sees the trickster wearing a fine red hat, the other sees him wearing a me green hat. The neighbor walks on by, greets them both and continues on his way. As the story progresses the two friends, while discussing the hat, their friend and neighbor was wearing, get into an argument over the color of the hat. The argument progresses into a feud in which the friends declare they will never speak to one another again. Hearing this declaration, the trickster walks between the friends in the other direction, thus exposing the other side of the hat to each of them. *The trickster then asks them to examine the true depth of their friendship if it can be destroyed by so petty a difference. Rather than going up to them and saying "how good of friends are you really?", or simply expressing his doubt, the trickster casts in the role of the interpreted, as the Expressive Mask, and allows their perception of him to lead the three of them to the goal.*

Jokes and humor have been employed throughout history as a means for non-violent conflict resolution. **The jesters of medieval Europe were often the only court members able to speak uncomfortable truths to the ruler, because they did so using their clown art. The trickster teaches us that certain goals are not attainable without the conscious decision to wear a mask or play a game.** author of *Gandhi As a Political Strategist*, records that, "Gandhi told students in late 1947 that he had all along laboured under an illusion. But he was never sorry for it. He realized that if his vision were not covered by that illusion, India would never have reached the point which it had today." Gandhi's use of omniscience might be understood as a total lack of strategic ability, when *infact it is his best*

disguise. The difference between Gandhi's work and the tricksters we read about in the stories is nothing more than a matter of scale. Their art is in creating situations in which the range of options for their opponents are so limited that any move at all means relative self-destruction.

The trickster creates things so that they can be interpreted in a number of specific ways. Rather than fighting against the tendency of human perception to be constantly in motion the dialogic approach of the trickster incorporates, anticipates, and depends on it. The interpreting mind of his audience, plagued by what Nietzsche has called the "rage to know", in an effort to find one definite interpretation, experiences a crisis. The fixing of one interpretation over another will only occur via the imposition of an individual audience members bias. For that audience member to achieve their singular interpretation they must willfully ignore the contradictory elements; but seeing that this imposition of ignorance offers no authoritative solution, they are forced to remain in the gap between the array of possible interpretations. ***In that gap the trickster plays. In that gap the non-violent imagination wants to place its audience.***

Gandhi's contribution to this tradition is to expose the means by which this variation is activated. Casting himself as the interpreted and the British as the interpreter, Gandhi uses what we can call a Freudian indirect technique in order to get the British to expose themselves. "I sensed an affinity," writes Erik H. Erikson, "between Gandhi's truth and the insights of modern psychology. ... Gandhi's and Freud's methods converge more clearly if I repeat: in both encounters only the militant probing of a vital issue by a nonviolent confrontation can bring to light what insight is ready on both sides." Instead of casting themselves as the seer/interpreter/translator/medium artists can cast themselves as the one being seen. **When an audience is witness, simultaneously, to both the actions of the seer and the seen it is the one being seen who is in command.**

¹ Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation: and other essays*. Octagon Books. New York, 1966.

² Sharma, Dharendra. *The Negative Dialectics of India, a Study of the Negative Dialecticism in Indian Philosophy*. University of London. 1970.

³ Sharp, Gene. *Gandhi As a Political Strategist: with Essays On Ethics and Politics*, introduction by Coretta Scott King. P. Sargent Publishers. Boston, 1979.

⁴ Tolstoy, Leo. *The Kingdom of God is Within You: Christianity Not As a Mystic Religion But As a New Theory of Life*. Cassell. New York, 1894.

⁵ Gandhi, Mohandas K. *Gandhi, an Autobiography, 'the Story of My Experiments with Truth'*, translated from the Gujarati by Mahadev Desai. Beacon Press. Boston, 1957.

⁶ Tolstoy, Leo. *What Is Art?* H. Alternus. Philadelphia, 1898.

⁷ Fischer, Louis. *The Essential Gandhi: an Anthology of His Writings on His Life, Work, and Ideas*. Vintage Books, New York, 2002

⁸ Lecoq, Jacques. *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre*. Routledge, New York, 2001.

⁹ Kierkegaard, Soren. *Either/Or*; translated by David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson with revisions and foreword by Howard A. Johnson. Doubleday. Garden City, NY., 1959.

¹⁰ not "cultural" as in the culture of India. Here culture refers to a point of view that informs all aspects of living and communication.

¹¹ Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulation and Simulacra*; translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. University of Michigan. Ann Arbor, 1994.

¹² Erikson, Erik H. *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence*. Norton. New York, 1969.

¹³ Held at the Satyagraha ashram in Ahmedabad, India

¹⁴ The *Bhagavad-Gita*, 'The Song of the Lord', is a 700-line section of the Sanskrit war epic, the *Mahabharata*, which tells the story of a dialogue between the warrior Arjuna and the god Krishna that took place on a battlefield during a conflict that occurred some time between 1000 and 700 BCE, involving the Pandavas and the Kauravas, two branches of an Indian ruling family. Authorship is ascribed to the poet Vyasa.

¹⁵ Gandhi, Mohandas K. *The Bhagavad-Gita According to Gandhi*. Berkeley Hills Books, Berkeley, 2000.

¹⁶ Gandhi, Madan. *Studies on Gandhi*, edited by V. T. Patil. Sterling. New Delhi, 1983. □

THE SEWA MOVEMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Banaskantha and Kutch Experience

Daniel W Crowell

Independent Consultant, New York

This absorbing book is an anecdotal account of SEWA's initiatives in rural Gujarat. Focusing on the two districts of Banaskantha and Kutch, Daniel Crowell chronicles the Association's rural development programs, and its remarkable success in fostering the economic and social well-being of rural women in the informal sector despite heavy odds such as hostile weather conditions, marginal land, acute scarcity of water, an unforgiving environment, and limited access to capital. A unique feature of SEWA's programs is that they are demand-driven and need-based, so that the women who create, implement and manage them are also those who benefit from them. The author intersperses his narrative with biographies of some of the women he met.

CONTENTS: Foreword by REEMA NANAVATY/The SEWA Movement/Watershed Development/Forestry and Minor Forest Products/Dairy and Craft Cooperativism: Demand-Driven, Need-Based/Rural Micro-Finance/Health and Nutrition/Kutch and DWCRA/Women and the Panchayat/The Cyclone of 1998/SEWA in the New Millennium/A Different Kind of Deregulation/Epilogue: Earthquake: Relief and Recovery/Works Cited/Index