The Picture of Language in Seeing the Nature of God in Kabbalah and Tantra

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Abstract

In this paper I aim to show how a meaningful correlation can be made between the two mystical traditions of Kabbalah and Tantra by drawing upon ideas from the philosophy of art and aesthetics, especially as it relates to the intersection of images and words. A common leitmotif is that both of these traditions nominate a perception of God which through its manifold expression can be realized as a work of art. It represents a creative response to envisioning or “seeing” the divine realm, one that is renderable by the artist-writer on the material support of the enunciation. As an intentional account of his experiential consciousness of being with God, the artifact is aesthetically designed for the edification of the reader. A comparative connection between the two traditions can be found in this depictive and linguistic endeavor.

Keywords

aesthetics – depiction of God – Kabbalah and art – pictorial representation and mysticism – Tantra and art

1 Introduction

The Jewish and Hindu traditions have a rich history in the art of painting and pictorial decoration (Sed-Rajna; Beach, Fischer, and Goswamy). It is equally so in regard to the art of the written word, as it is conveyed in venerable religious and philosophical texts. The two forms, image and word, are surely entwined, and this interrelationship is on display in the art of illuminated manuscripts, a genre that was widely deployed in the European Middle Ages (De Hamel;
Panayatova). While the presentation of this format in Christian works is well known, the Jewish community also produced illuminated manuscripts as an enhanced means of communicating the Bible and sacred works, although these materials have suffered from heavy losses over time (Epstein; Offenberg). In the Hindu arena miniature or small-scale paintings have often been utilized within literary settings as part of contemplative and devotional outlooks (Goswamy 499–533; McInerney). If we were to treat Jewish Kabbalah and Hindu Tantra as artistic enterprises we could then apply relevant criteria from the history of aesthetics to assess their comparative merits.¹ Idel writes that masters of Kabbalah who innovated a hermeneutic of the Torah—men such as Abraham Abulafia (1240–c. 1291), Joseph Gikatilla (1248–c. 1305), and Moshe de León (c. 1250–1305)—“should be envisaged as ‘artists’ of Kabbalah, who transformed it into an art rather than a store of traditional teachings” (“Transmission” 154). It can likewise be said of adepts of Tantra such as Vasugupta (c. 875–925), Utpaladeva (c. 925–975), and Abhinavagupta (c. 975–1025) that they were artistic creators of a new interpretation in the Śaiva āgama (tradition).

This reciprocation of images and words will be a useful point of departure for exploring the consciousness of the divine realm as it is demarcated in the two imposing mystical traditions of Kabbalah and Tantra.² A common leitmotif is that both these traditions nominate a perception of God that, through its expressive realization in the enunciation, can be appreciated and evaluated in terms of a work of art. In the first section I shall consider the integral role that is given to language in the cosmic activity convened by God, by adducing

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1 In Western history, “aesthetics” as an independent discipline only arose in the eighteenth century (in the so-called “Age of Taste”) through the work of English, French, and German writers (see McQuillan). However, issues relating to the conceptual and sensible experience of art and nature, as well as the understanding of beauty (mundane and spiritual), have been the subject of particular studies and remarks in general works on philosophy and theology since ancient times (Tatarkiewicz). In his treatise on Indian aesthetics, Pandey assumes a metaphysical approach in defining aesthetics as the “science and philosophy of fine art” that necessarily has a spiritual aspect (Comparative Aesthetics 1). The definition by Guyer (1:1), that the “core subject matter” of aesthetics is “the study of the nature and value of aspects of the human experience of art and (sometimes) nature,” will prove sufficient for my purposes here. I take it that this experience can include that of the maker as well as the observer.

2 While the interaction between images and words in the visual arts has a long history—whether that is to do with the artifactual inscription of words in pictures or with the discursive interpretation of pictures as something that can be “read” (see Hunt, Lomas, and Corris)—in my approach here I want to examine the role of affective and thoughtful expression in the space of the imaginary and its realization in the pictorialized field of the text. I believe that the comparative treatment essayed here is intrinsically interesting as a speculative exercise, but it can also shed light on interdisciplinary understandings.
some salient passages in the major texts of (medieval) Kabbalah and Tantra. These show how the creative work of the divine reflects an artistic consciousness which is displayed on the tableau of the world. This mode of divine action and thought is paralleled in the human work of realizing the perception of God in a graphical style of knowing, which often ends in the making of a textual artifact. In the second section I shall consider the artistic and aesthetic ramifications of this recognition of the functional nature of God within the scope of reality. As the language that is inflected by a special consciousness of the divine realm induces the experient to paint a picture in words, it characteristically appears as an artistic work and marks a pictorial representation (depiction) of the theosophical imaginary. It is an event that has general aesthetic import. I conclude that although Kabbalah and Tantra may differ in the way they configure their apprehension and comprehension of God, they nevertheless evince a certain similarity in demonstrating their artistic and aesthetic consciousness.

2 Perceiving the Linguistic Picture of Divine Realization

According to the Sefer Yeṣirah (Book of Formation) God carves out the universe through the means of “thirty-two wondrous paths of wisdom,” which are made up of ten “numbers” (sefirot) along with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The Zohar takes over this account in its hermeneutic of the creation of the world, explaining moreover that the world was created by God’s gazing into Torah: “And when the blessed Holy One wished to create the world, He gazed upon Torah, upon every single word, and formed correspondingly the artistry of the world; for all things and actions of all worlds are in Torah.” In the order of creation, the letters presented themselves before God, “from last to first,” to offer their service in fashioning the world. Ultimately God decided on the letter ב (bet) for this gift—hence the first word of Genesis, Be-reshit, In the
beginning, which is identified with Wisdom and the second sefirah, Ḥokhmah. (The letter א, alef, was made one and used to actualize union.)

The world is said to subsist by the Wisdom of God (Ḥokhmah), upon whom was engraved the six days of creation, that is sefirot, from Ḥesed to Yesod. Ḥokhmah as wisdom is the divine key to Understanding (Binah), which is a hidden resource and treasure-house with fifty gates (1: 2b–3b). This palace is called Elohim, the Divine Mother, who is empowered in her generative function and from whom issues a melodic suite of letters (consonants) and vowels that shine in unison.5 Binah is a “mighty voice”: “This voice is inward, inaudible, and unrevealed, as the larynx wells, whispering ה (he), flowing incessantly, tenuous, internal, eternally unheard” (1: 50b). She is thus a subtle and lucid radiance whose voice is one of “sheer silence” (2: 81b). Binah is the storehouse that is fabricated by the wisdom of divine thought, in which the letters of becoming are deposited and from which a voice emerges, namely Tif’eret, who conducts his consort, Shekhinah, and who is known as the divine speech (1: 145a–b, 246b).

In the context of a homily on the need to pray silently—in a whisper—Rabbi Abba interprets Tif’eret as the “audible voice” (Qol) and Shekhinah as the “inaudible voice” (qol) (1: 209b–210a). Shekhinah is regarded as a placeholder for the voice of God, and she is therefore “a voice of words” (qol devarim) (3: 261a). She moreover comprises all the letters, and as the “body of Torah” her consonantal being is inspired by vowels (i.e., nequdei, vowel points); together, these forms constitute the entirety of creation, including the human. Besides this, the letters are typologically regarded as male and female, and they are intermingled, reflecting the conjoint erotic activity of Tif’eret and Shekhinah (Zohar Ḥadash 73a–74d; in Hecker 506–534).

The aim of the kabbalist is to become righteous, which vouchsafes a perception of the supernal light. It is through engaging with Torah that he can attain this light and a share each day in the world that is coming: “He is deemed a builder of worlds, for by Torah the world was built and consummated” (1: 47a). The masters of Kabbalah are adjured to study Torah, for whoever engages with her “sustains the world, maintaining every work of creation perfectly, fittingly” (1: 134b). In effect, the state of divinity is activated by intentional study of Torah, and this involves coordinating body and mind. Rabbi Yehudah explains: “Words of Torah require intention; words of Torah must be arranged with body and will as one” (1: 72a). The righteous “Scions of Faith” rise at midnight to study and God delights with them in this dedication (3: 12b–13a); indeed, by being “immersed

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5 1: 15a–b. Elsewhere, it is said that the letters that originally form out of Hokhmah are fluid and once they pass through Binah they are concealed, whereupon they are inscribed with meaning (Zohar Ḥadash 68d; in Hecker 444).
in Torah" through jubilation a person will be adorned with “a thread of love” (3: 23b). The decrees of Torah should be assiduously contemplated, since Torah is “the supernal Holy Name, and you cannot find a word in Torah that does not contain many secrets, many reasons, many roots, many branches” (2: 55b). The kabbalist is also to pray diligently to God, “from the depth of his heart, so that his heart may be completely with the blessed Holy One and he may concentrate heart and aspiration” (2: 63b). The recitation of prayer is a yoke of commandment that impels the unification of the sefirot, and corresponds to the action of wearing the tefillin (phylacteries) on the head and arm (or hand).6 The kabbalist tries to validate the need for an awareness of the unified nature of the divine and mundane realms, and to that end he has to adopt a mantle of wisdom. While traveling it is salutary to delve into Torah, for by doing so one is accompanied by Shekhinah, the presence of God, who illumines the path of the righteous with a “gleaming light” (1: 58b–59a). In their wayfaring as they greet each other and partake in knowing discourse on holy matters, the masters can see in each other “the face of Shekhinah,” that is, a wise countenance; and in this engagement they are letting their words shine.7

The metaphysics of Tantra sees the universe as a manifestation of sound, as the vibratory mode of the perfect I-consciousness of Śiva, which appears through a phonematic mode of emanation that is mediated by the divine (feminine) energy of śakti (Padoux, Vāc 166–222). In addition, the Śaiva schools called upon the fifth-century grammarian philosopher Bhartṛhari, who propounded a linguistic non-dualism, śabdādvaitavāda, which posits that language is the essence of reality and that it is identical with all cognition (and even perception).8 The principle of language as the fulcrum of consciousness is elevated

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6 2: 162a; 3: 120b. The tefillin are two black boxes containing four passages from the Torah, written on parchment and strapped to the body, which are worn during weekday morning prayer services. The Zohar lends a mystical significance to this practice, since each passage corresponds to one of the four letters of the divine name, YHVH, which is an appellation that includes all the sefirot; and so, to wear the items is to be in symmetrical relation with God, who also symbolically puts on tefillin (1: 13b–14a; Matt, Zohar, Vol. 1, 96 n. 719). As Wolski notes: “While adorned in tefillin, the human being is perfectly aligned and linked to the divine” (398 n. 124).

7 2: 4a, 163b; 3: 25b. It may be that for the kabbalist it is the very act of uttering these discursive sentences (in a cogent and didactic manner) which lights the way for them to walk on the road out of ignorance and into heaven. The second-century BCE literary critic Demetrius aptly remarked: “Sentences are like roads. Some roads have many signposts and many resting places; and the signposts are like guides. But a monotonous road without signposts seems infinite, even if it is short” (§ 202). On the expository path traveled by the companions of the Zohar, and the spatial connotations that this has, see Greenstein.

8 On the appropriation and adaptation of Bhartṛhari’s thought to Śaivism, see Torella.
to the highest reality as the Word-Absolute (Śabdabrahman). The universe paradigmatically evolves through three levels of speech, from the “seeing” or “visionary” word (paśyantī) where language is only incipient, to the “intermediate” word (madhyamā) where linguistic mentality first appears, and finally to the “elaborated” word (vaikharī) where articulated sounds are heard (VP 1. 142). These condensing stages are known respectively as the Voice of Intuition, the Middle Voice, and the Corporeal Voice (SpVi 48; TĀ 3. 236). The Śaiva writers introduced a fourth level, above these and including them, which is the supreme word, parāvāk, and which is the verbal aspect of the supreme energy, parāśakti. Abhinavagupta comments that parāvāk is stationed in Śiva as the divine I-consciousness, as the highest mantra unlimited in space and time. Through the impetus of this creative speech, parāśakti resounds through the path of differentiation, ostensibly appearing in the guise of denotative language where meaning arises in the distinction between the word and its referent (PTV; Singh, Parā-trīśikā-Vivaraṇa 8–10).

According to the Parātrīśikātantra, the universe proceeds from Anuttara (Absolute) through the avenue of the fifty phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet, where the vowels represent Śiva and the consonants represent Śakti. This literal universe is all pervaded by the tattvas, the categories of existence. The regular grammatical order of the phonemes—vowels followed by consonants—is held in the energy matrix that is the goddess Mātrkā, for her body consists of the letters as they reside in the various stations of being in the all-inclusive universal consciousness (PTV; Singh, Parā-trīśikā-Vivaraṇa 177); by contrast, the irregular order of the phonemes, in which the consonants and vowels are mixed up, is represented by the garlanded goddess Mālinī (PTV; Singh, Parā-trīśikā-Vivaraṇa 149–150). The fundamental role of Mātrkā as the power of sound inhering in the alphabet is not understood by the uninitiated person, and it is incumbent on sādhaka to understand that this sonic force of language essen-

9 VP 1. 1. A list of title abbreviations for references to Tantric works is given at the end of this paper.

10 PT 5–9a and comm. On the Parātrīśikātantra (possibly seventh century CE), and the complex commentary by Abhinavagupta, see the interpretive study by Bäumer (Abhinavagupta’s Hermeneutics). In Kashmir Śaivism there are said to be thirty-six tattvas (categories, principles) that together make up the universe, from Śiva down to earth (prthvī). These represent a progressive contraction of the cosmic consciousness of Śiva into the individual consciousness of the human being. The sādhaka (spiritual aspirant) is expected to recognize the locus of his possible experience as really encompassing all the tattvic realms, and that it is not merely limited to the localized consciousness associated with his body but is without limit in the supreme consciousness of Śiva whose body is the universe (Chatterji 1–126).
tially spans all reality, and that it is to be recognized in the *mantra* of blissful I-consciousness (ŚŚū 1. 4, 2. 7, and comm.). As for Mālinī she is understood—not unlike Binah—as the beautiful supreme energy that contains the form of the universe, by virtue of combining seed (vowels) and womb (consonants) (TĀ 3. 233; Silburn et Padoux 195).

The reality that is unfolded along a phonematic gradient from Śiva is a luminous vibration, and the yogin means to become harmonized with this resonate light; that is, he would establish himself in consonance with the phonic energy (*vākśakti*). The concatenation of this movement in the form of goddess Kūndālinī is a pulsating force in the universe, and hence the body, since the two are mirrored in each other; to experience this attenuated sound is to enter into the state of the Transmental (*unmanatva*). As the *Vijñānabhairava* puts it: "He attains the supreme Brahan who is deeply merged in the Brahman-that-is-Sound (*śabdabrahman*), which is vibrating within, without striking and is perceived by the ear; this sound is uninterrupted like that of a waterfall." The yogin is required to expand his own consciousness so as to include all reality, and in doing so he will pass into that plane of consciousness where Śiva is sovereign as Lord of the Wheel of Energies. In the happening of this realization, he is "constantly attentive" to the awareness of unity of the inner and outer being (SpKā 28–30; SpVi 28–30).

As a general rule, the process of identifying with a deity involves taking the awareness of unity itself as an object of meditation, and the yogin is to apply "conscious intent" (*saṃkalpa*) in visualizing the deity that is embodied by a *mantra*; he must act to install the lustrous letters and syllables onto his body so as to make it divine. Writing in his summary text, the *Tantrasāra*, Abhinavagupta explains that in order to acquire knowledge of one’s own innate nature (*svabhāva*) it is necessary to follow “the course of meditation (*bhāvanā*), preceded by right reasoning, study of appropriate *āgama* texts, and instruction by a teacher” (Chakravarty 67). He thus extols the benefit of reflective study and

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11 Dyczkowski refers to the "gradient of cosmic and microcosmic principles" (*Journey* 48).
12 VBh 38. This is the “unstruck” (*anāhata*), perpetual sound, which is the underlying element of all the phonemes (Padoux, *Vāc* 99–100).
13 SpVi 31. A relevant correlate is the kabbalistic recitation of the *Shema*, a daily prayer that is intended to arouse the unification of God through the joining of Tiferet and Shekhinah (2: 13b–134b). The 248 words that comprise the *Shema* are said to correspond to the 248 limbs of the Jewish male’s body (referring to “joints or bones covered with flesh and sinews”), and by this proclamation the kabbalist is imprinting the unified divinity onto his own body. The prayerful praxis is intended to effect assimilation with the body of truth that is divine unity (*Zohar Ḥadash* 48a, 77d–78a; in Hecker 73–78). See also note 6 above.
sees his work as instilling a “secret lore” that can “serve as a guide for all for the attainment of (the nature of) Śiva” (PTV; Singh, Parā-trīśikā-Vivarana 271). He is favored by the abounding grace of Lord Śiva who moves about in the domain of his heart emanating the “goddesses full of streams of ardent delight” (PTV; Singh, Parā-trīśikā-Vivarana 271). The revelatory teaching of the Spanda Kārikās is praised as wonderful speech, whose words and meaning are marvelous, and “it is the boat that carries one across the fathomless ocean of doubt” (SpKā 52). Kallaṭa glosses that he is “inspired by the aesthetic flavor (rasa) of (the blissful) vibration of the one consciousness, (luminous with its own light)” (SpKāVṛ 52).

What this brief overview of thinking in the kabbalistic and tantric traditions epitomizes is a view of reality that is often designated as linguistic or phonic mysticism, which speaks of and to God. The pure ground of being that is the concealed and perfectly full God—Ein Sof (Tishby 1: 232–242) and Paramaśiva or Anuttara (Kokiloo)—is revealed in its glory by dint of recovery into sensible awareness. Here then, an idea common to Kabbalah and Tantra is that while there is a concept of God as transcendent to human experience it can qual- ifiedly be made immanent to human consciousness. To see into the network of (divine) reality a linguistic arrangement of being is to retrieve God from its formlessness in absolute space and define it through a structure of meaning. So far as this realization is certified in a recognition of the nature of divine being, it is reliant on a (spiritual) perception that is primed by imagination and understanding.

If we were to adopt Kantian terminology then we could say that the knowledge admitted for the transcendental subject that is God, as it is captured and controlled in its manifold appearance by the mental powers, is to be found in a unity of consciousness (apperception) and a consciousness of unity (cognition). In other words, the perceptions granted through a spiritual sensibility are self-consciously configured in imagination and brought together by conceptual understanding; that being so, the concepts of sefirot and tattvas may be understood as a means by which God can be cognized as an object of experience.14 Presumably as the kabbalistic and tantric practitioners schematically

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14 In the “Transcendental Analytic” Kant argues for the a priori grounds for the possibility of experience: that which is apperceived in the manifold of intuitions has to be synthesized by the action of imagination brought under concepts of the understanding, in the transcendental unity of self-consciousness, and so judged in accordance with the categories of quantity, quality, relation, and modality (Critique of Pure Reason §15–§27; 245–266; see Allison 327–432 for a detailed analysis). Kant succinctly states: “We cannot think any object except through categories; we cannot cognize any object that is thought except through intuitions that correspond to those concepts” (CPR B165; 264). Hence the kabbalistic and tantric practitioners can only think of the endless or unsurpassable God through
represent the appearance of God in the world under the rule of their understanding, they are constitutively doing so through the art of the imagination. From this, it can be seen that in becoming apparent to consciousness and thus liable to the constructive power of imagination, the manner of the master’s or adept’s understanding is dependent on a “pictorial” interpretation. As a whole, the manifold of spiritual intuitions that is received on gazing into the province of God is composed and designed in the imagination and understood to be conceptually available in the textual enunciation.

If we agree that the traditions of Kabbalah and Tantra are linguistic mysticisms, then they can also be endorsed by analogy as pictorial mysticisms. There is the idea that the universe as a formative emanation (or partitive evolution) of God is made through the enunciation of divine sound and speech, which is embodied in the synoptic force of letters and words. This gesture of divine creative work may be understood as like painting a linguistic picture, with its realization in the universe of beings (things and events); it is a capacity that is available to the kabbalistic and tantric artist-writer, since he sees himself as a microcosm of divine being (Zohar 1: 90b–91a, 2: 23b; ṢPK 4. 1. 9–10, 14, 15).

Just as the appearance of God in reality is distributed by the force of divine utterance, so the appearance of the world to the human experient is gathered by the power of enunciation. In this statement of phenomenality, to articulate is to enumerate. For the kabbalist the Hebrew letters are reckoned to have numerical values, which facilitates the analogous combination and correspondence of words; and such manipulation through mathematical permuting can deliver interpretive and invocatory power (Idel, *Kabbalah* 97–103). In a similar vein, the tántrika assembles the letters or phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet into semantic or non-semantic formulations, which are repeated in quiet or silent recitation and which energize the referential inculcation into the divine (Padoux, *Tantric Mantras*). Both Hebrew and Sanskrit are regarded as holy and

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15 In her thesis on the role of imagination and imaginary in perceiving the world, Lennon argues, after Kant, that the productive imagination in actively bringing the manifold of intuitions to concepts of the understanding, which then gives form or shape to what is perceived through the generation of a schema, is the image that constitutes an art.

16 While in this paper I have mainly utilized a metaphysical and speculative approach to the consideration of language and pictoriality vis-à-vis religious experience, these disciplines can, needless to say, be approached semiotically, as sign-systems. In another paper, I have sought to develop a theoretical correspondence between the textual rendition and pictorial representation, where the construal relates to the aesthetic idea of divine realization (Martin, “Art of Interpretation”).
potent languages by their users, which the writer as technician (technical artist) has knowing access to and from which he is able to craft a theological or philosophical treatise.\(^\text{17}\) In this experiential rendition, which derives from a divine intuition licensed by the power of imagination, the text represents a kind of artwork or artifactual understanding. The complementary or contrasting words of the enunciation regulate the presentation of God, and in the skillful design of the linguistic pictorial knowledge it is seen to be replete with evocations and suggestions, which can be picturesque in its style.\(^\text{18}\) This view accords with medieval poetics, where “[g]reat store was set by painterly qualities such as poetic brilliance (nitor), and the colourful, poetic, figurative language (color rhetoricus)” (Tatarkiewicz 2:120).

The nexus between linguisticality and visuality is to be seen in kabbalistic writings, especially during the period between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries when visual maps were used to illustrate the cosmographic features of the experient’s mystical consciousness. Segol argues that these represent cognitive maps for the journey into the divine spheres. In her fascinating study of the imagery associated with manuscripts of the Sefer Yeṣirah, she explains that “because kabbalistic materials are cosmogonic in nature, focusing on the creation of the world with letters, the diagrams often treat letters as graphics, so that the line between text and image is blurred at best” (12). She further writes that mystical thinkers meditating on the symbolic role of letters in bridging to the divine life have generated “mandala images, temple plans, medicine wheels, and the kabbalistic tree of life, which are intricate, often beautiful, expressions of this function” (67). Moreover, these diagrammatic models have performative value in religious discourse, and can act as a “visual ritual script” (151–152). By similar means, tantric texts gauge the understanding of divine reality through linguistic affirmations, mantras and vidyās, linked with experiential diagrams, maṇḍalas and yantras.\(^\text{19}\) The image that is registered by the maṇḍala or yantra can be rated as a cosmogram, as a visual representation that encapsulates a site of divine beings, powers, and principles, which is encoded in the manifest universe (Bühnemann). It can be abstractly or materially resolved and corre-

\(^{17}\) On the sacred power of Hebrew and Sanskrit, see respectively Idel, “Reification” and Padoux, Hindu Tantric World 29.

\(^{18}\) The term picturesque was originally applied by eighteenth-century English and Scottish writers to the “graphical” power of poetry as evocative of a picture, as well as to garden design and landscape painting (Costelloe 135–166). The twentieth-century philosopher John Dewey averred: “Prose and drama often attain the picturesque, and poetry the genuinely pictorial, that is the communication of the visible scene of things” (244).

\(^{19}\) Although the maṇḍala and yantra can be distinguished for ritual purposes, I shall treat them here as the same in effect (Brunner 156–164).
sponds to a cognitive map of the spiritual journey undertaken by the yogin on the way to God (Dyczkowski, *Manthānabhairavana-tantram* 1: 262–266).

In both the traditions of Kabbalah and Tantra language serves to chart the way to God, and there is an acknowledgment of its territorial reach, which is to be seen in the valley of verdant consciousness (Lidke; Yagel). Plate argues that letters and words have an iconic value which is set beside their semantic value, such that their appearance and style have a material presence which affects the understanding; they not only evoke images but also embody images. It seems they have a visual dimension that may in itself encourage divine realization, with a telling power that can incite awareness of the proximity of God. We can extend this to the laying down of letters and words in a determinate sequence to give meaning, which resembles the practice of laying-in colors in a picture to fulfill the significance of a subject. The mystical experient in this watchful manner is challenged to document an artful consciousness as it is marked in articulation and as it shows itself in the motif of God. It represents a pictorial emplacement of divinity. Furthermore, in the same way that the kabbalist engages with the splendid text of the Torah as the linguistic rendition of the glory of God, Shekhinah, so the tāntrika engages with the geometric text of the *maṇḍala* as the acoustic transcription of the power of God, Śakti. Consequently, the Torah is akin to a *maṇḍala* or *yantra* so far as entering into it lays out a pathway to God. And just as a *yantra* may be envisaged as the imaginary pictorial body of the goddess (Khanna), so the Torah may be envisaged as the imaginal linguistic body of God (Wolfson, *Language* 242–246). They are really two sides of the same symbolic coin.

### 3 Writing the Pictorial Language of the Presence of God

In the previous section I considered how the nature of reality as an excursion of divine being is perceived and drawn into realization by the practitioners of Kabbalah and Tantra. This all has artistic connotations which can be repre-

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20 In regard to kabbalistic thought, Idel has examined the role of color in visualizing the shapes of the letters of the divine name through the intentionality of prayer (“Visualization of Colors, 1”; “Visualization of Colors, 2”). He adverts to the phenomenological affinities between an anonymous kabbalistic diagram that exhibits the “imaginary representation of divine forces and of colors” and the *maṇḍala*, as influenced by Hindu traditions intermediated by Sufi material (“Visualization of Colors, 1” 46–47).

21 *Zohar* 3: 164b; YH 1. 9–49. In his research, Scholem pointed to a (limited) correspondence between Shekhinah and Sakti, in particular as the latter is realized in the *śrīyantra*, which is the iconic representation of divinity used in the Śākta school of Śrīvidyā (194–196).
sented in a linguistic frame but which can also be represented in a pictorial frame. In this section I want to develop these artistic features of the encounter with God or divinity, along with their aesthetic entailments. The kabbalistic and tantric experients reflectively think through the emotional and intellectual engagement with the divine realm and then expound this consciousness in a textual artifact. This rendering is a purposeful work of art, and an outstanding example of such an endeavor in late medieval Kabbalah is *Sefer ha-Zohar* (*The Book of Splendor*), adduced in the previous section, which among other things is a catalogue of figurative and profound language. Likewise there is a key text in Tantra, the *Tantrāloka* (*Light on the Tantras*), which is a forum for penetrating and sophisticated language. As a linguistic rendezvous with God such works declare a program of perceptual knowledge, which can arguably meet pictorial conditions. These conditions can include that the text, as a purported depiction of God, should occasion the seeing—the realization—of the divine function and role by the reader-viewer, and also that the artist-writer intends that the text should occasion this seeing (realization) of God. On a psychological basis, to see God, or more accurately to see God through the prism of a manifold of appearances, is to be disposed to make a judgment of taste, which is accompanied by a feeling of pleasure, and which is a predilection common to both traditions. On a phenomenal basis, to see the nature of God

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22 Hellner-Eshed. The *Sefer ha-Zohar* was first published as a three-volume book in Mantua, Italy, in 1558–1560, as a collation of various manuscript writings dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. There are critical questions for contemporary scholarship about the textual methodologies that are employed to assess this zoharic material (Abrams). On the tremendous impact that the *Zohar* has had on Jewish culture overall, see Huss.

23 Silburn et Padoux. The *Tantrāloka* (*tA*) is a commentarial gloss and manual on the metaphysics and praxis of Trika Śaivism, which was written by Abhinavagupta around 1000 CE and based on the central scripture *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* (Rastogi, *Introduction*). On Abhinavagupta’s pivotal life and work, see the wide-ranging study by Pandey (*Abhinavagupta*).

24 I am adapting Newall’s definition of a painting: “A manigraphically produced surface, X, depicts Y if and only if (i) X can occasion non-veridical seeing of Y, and (ii) the picture-maker intends X to occasion a non-veridical seeing of Y” (*What is a Picture?* 61).

25 Kant famously argues in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (hereafter *cpj*) that a judgment of taste relates to a disinterested satisfaction taken in the representation of an object, which is not grounded on or directed to concepts, but is rather indeterminate, that is to say, aesthetic. In other words, the feeling of pleasure gained in apperceiving what is construed as a beautiful object is subjectively dependent on the mental faculties, where this “taste of reflection” involves a “free play” or harmony of imagination and understanding and so is meant to be universally applicable (*cpj* §§1–9; see Ginsborg 15–224). Correspondingly, the mystical experient in disinterestedly apperceiving the nature of God in the mere con-
as it crystallizes out of the solution of feeling and thinking, and as it refracts in
the interpretive field of the textual composition, is artistically emblematic and
subject to aesthetic judgment.

On the Jewish view, which disallows the pictorial representation of God, there
is nevertheless recourse to mental images in visualizing the incorporeal and
invisible God, as Wolfson analyses in some detail (*Through a Speculum*). He
argues that Jewish mystics through the ages have employed their "symbolic
imagination" in ruminating on the vision of God as it is fostered by the
hermeneutical act of reading the Torah. On the Hindu view it is explicit that
the visualization of images is a critical facet of the engagement with the divine
as it is imaginatively and conceptually acquired through the blend of mind and
body (Timalsina). Now it appears that the exponents of Kabbalah and Tantra
are inclined to see reality as pervaded by the being of God, and they are com-
mitted to canvassing their superlative intuitions of the divine as symptomatic
of a delightful yet knowing response to the presentation of divine being (*Zohar
1: 156a–b; TÂ 1. 61b–63, 1. 66*). In reifying the picture of their imagination, they
are materializing a state of artistic consciousness and can reliably subscribe
to an aesthetic judgment. The total realization of God as it is pictorially rep-
resented in the text shows a gestalt of understanding. Just as a visual artwork
composed of parts (colors, lines, etc.) stands in relation to the unified subject
it is supposed to depict, so the text as a mystical composition made up of parts
(grammar, syntax, etc.) stands in relation to the unified idea of God as subject-
ively represented.

Generally, in communicating their esoteric knowledge of God in written
form the kabbalistic and tantric experiencers are betokening an objective work
of art. Behind that though, so far as the enunciation is derived from a specu-
lative assignment in the mind, this is where the actual work of art (if not as
a semblance) might be said to reside. As such, the material version is just the
explication of the scenario conceived in the mental realm. There is some affin-
ity here with so-called expression theories of art. In Western history, the ancient
and medieval notions of art generally did not accept that it is expressive of the
artist's psychic state; however, this view did become prominent for a while in
the twentieth century.26 So if the experient in contriving imagistic thoughts

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26 Tatarkiewicz 2: 299; Guyer 3: 128–233, 265–366. Notable philosophers in this regard were
Benedetto Croce (1866–1952) and R.G. Collingwood (1889–1943), who both advocated ide-
alist theories in which the principal or real work of art is an internal phenomenon. For
Croce aesthetic experience involves the quality of intuitions, which are gleaned from
about the divine realm is, as it were, painting a picture in his mind, then it is confirmed in the showing of the writerly mural. The notion of mental pictoriality, however, can only be a metaphor, or rather an analogy, for images are to the mental realm as pictures are to the physical realm. While images are procured by insight through introspection and memory, painting is executed by sight through observation and perspicuity. Kulvicki states moreover that mental imagery is an internal representation, and it is not possible to perceive one’s own mental states in the way that one can perceive the external world (157). That said, it is useful minimally to correlate putting an image on an immaterial (imaginary) support with putting an image on a material (sensible) support. It is indicative of how the expression of feelings and thoughts can be transferably shown in the content and design of the motif, where the metaphorical properties of color, line, and shape of the mystical psyche are instantiated in the use of allusive, creative, and rhetorical language. Indeed, one writer has helpfully suggested that the bhūshās, or characteristic elements of Indian painting—namely line, shading, decorative design, and color—function similarly to alāṅkāras, or figures of speech in literature.

Although Jewish theology does not permit the depiction of God, the Jewish aesthetic does allow the depiction of natural and human forms, and indeed it

feelings (sensory impressions), and which are revealed by expression (be it verbal or non-verbal) as objects of contemplation or artistic vision; and for Collingwood it means the ability to attend to and express a creative state of mind with its associated emotions, through the modifying filter of imagination. Around the same time, the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952) wrote that art is important to the movement and rhythm of life, where experience is a continuity of perceptions saturated with meaning, arising from past and present interactions with the environment. In this dynamic mode of expressiveness there lies an aesthetic quality, as it is realized by transformation into consequential acts that are colored by emotions. He opines that the intense involvement with works of art, in the “unlimited envelope” of feeling, is akin to mystical experience (201).

According to Meyer, rhetoric “is the negotiation of distance between individuals, the speaker (ethos) and the audience (pathos), on a given question (logos)” (9). In that case it can relate to the effort of the mystical writer to bring the reader closer to the representative idea of God.

Sivaramamurti 123, 126. Sivaramamurti refers to a passage from the Chitrasūtra, or “The Rules of Painting,” a section of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, written possibly fourth century, which states: “The ornaments of painting are, O Best of Men, to be understood as the lines, line-rendering, decoration and colour” (1.11. 10; translation in Dave Mukherji 161). A correspondence between the art of painting and the art of rhetoric is given in an opinion by Judah Messer Leon in his celebrated fifteenth-century treatise on the art of rhetoric, Sēpher Nōphet Ṣūphīm (The Book of the Honeycomb’s Flow), namely that just as paintings are adorned with different colors because it is pleasing so should the content of speeches be varied (bk. 1, chap. 14, para. 14).
can tolerate and even positively evaluate the visual arts and the role of artists (Mann). The milieu in which Kabbalah developed and thrived in late medieval Jewish Spain was one in which the production, use, and enjoyment of visual images was prevalent. As for the Indian aesthetic, it substantiates the importance of visual images and routinely exploits them for divine and mundane purposes, in various formats including painting (Guy; Nardi). It is certainly amenable to the idea of art as expression of some sort or other, given that a central philosophical concept is *rasa*, which is about the perceptual and sensible experience of works of art (in the broad sense) as it is associated with or predicated on emotional factors and effects. Ānandavardhana, in his treatise *Dhvanyāloka* (c. 875), knew *rasa* to be the primary locus of poetry, the emotional force of which could only be “manifested” or “suggested” through *dhvani*, which is implied meaning. In a “hermeneutical turn,” the early tenth-century Kashmirian author Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka argued that *rasa* is “actualized” in the sensitive reader or viewer, and this becomes a relishing or savoring of one’s own consciousness as it is colored by emotional states. Moreover, the sense of wonder incurred in the aesthetic realization is correlated with that experienced in the felt integration with God, making this mode of awareness adjacent to that of mystical rapture (*camatkāra*). It is remarkable that over time the elucidation of *rasa* theory shifted in respect to literary works from a linguistic to a psychological modality, as Pollock explains. On that basis, the exponent of

29 Bland. More recently in the twentieth century there were a number of renowned Jewish artists who worked within expressionist schools of art; for example, Marc Chagall (1887–1985), Barnett Newman (1905–1970), Lee Krasner (1908–1984), and Lucien Freud (1922–2011). See besides and furthermore Baskind and Silver.

30 Pollock. There are eight *rasas* itemized in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, a treatise on drama from the first centuries of the common era. These are: the desirable (*śṛṅgāra*), the comic (*hāsya*), the sorrowful (*karuṇa*), the violent (*raudra*), the heroic (*vīra*), the terrible (*bhayānaka*), the disgusting (*bībhatsa*), and the marvelous (*adbhuta*) (Lidova 188–189). An additional *rasa* was later given by Rudraṭa, namely tranquility (*śānta*), the stable emotional basis of which is peace.

31 Pollock 87–97. Pollock translates *dhvani* as “implicature,” which is a term he borrows from the philosophical work of H.P. Grice (1913–1988) but which is often translated as “resonance” (e.g., McCrea). Abhinavagupta states in his commentary (*locana*) on the *Dhvanyāloka* that the suggestive power of poetic meaning reverberates from the literal meaning, like the pulsations of a bell (Ingalls 169–170). Modern literary theory has a similar view of the lingering and suggestive powers of language, for Nowottny remarks that “figurative words bring with them a diffused aura of their literal use” (64).

32 Pollock 144–154. This view was influentially adopted by Abhinavagupta (Gnoli xxxv–lii; see further Rastogi, “Quintessentiality”). Pollock refers to the “hermeneutical turn” at 156.

33 89, 189. He concludes that a historical transformation in the language of aesthetics occurred between the time of Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta (ninth and tenth/
kabbalistic and tantric practice can each be called a *rasika*, for he desires to experience the taste of divine nature and is prompted to enunciate this affective and thoughtful condition in the performative rendering that is the text.

The reduction of the experient’s consciousness to the form of the text represents the concrete expression of the work of art that is signed in the imagination, and it highlights a certain talent for “painting” the visionary knowledge of God achieved through a perceptual awareness. The kabbalistic master and tantric adept may believe that they are being inspired by the Holy Spirit or Śakti, in which case this artistic realization is the product of their “genius.” According to Kant, genius is the talent or natural gift that allows original and exemplary art to be produced whose form (though not content) can be guided by academic training (*cpj* §§46–47). We might say then that the mystical experients are gifted in depicting the nature of divine reality, the form of which (though not necessarily the content) is governed by elite or specialized knowledge of the tradition in which they are embedded. In the spirit of creativity, the mystical artist is able to bring into sharp relief the profiled idea of transcendentalizing forces or realities arrayed before the mind. Kant argues that *spirit* (*Geist*) as “the animating principle in the mind” is just “the faculty for the presentation of aesthetic ideas,” which is “that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible” (*cpj* §49:192). For Kant, this mode of intuiting is most obvious in the art of poetry. The exponents of Kabbalah and Tantra can let their conceptions roam freely over the presentative nature of the divine, and this interplay of images and thoughts animates the cognitive faculties of imagination and understanding. Through being in the space of concord of realization they are able to instigate a word-picture, which shows their striving to accommodate and even enlarge prevailing philosophical or theological ideas about the nature of God.34 The recognition of God’s functioning in the world is felt and seen through the artful power of poetry and is fairly evident in the works of Kabbalah and Tantra.35 At any rate, the reception

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34 A classic example of this is seen in the case of zoharic authors as they attempt to embrace insights into the Torah by innovating novel interpretations through the playful use of language (Matt, “New-Ancient Words”).

35 Cole; Bailly. The authors of the *Zohar* dealt with the dramatic and performative power of their poetic imagination in conveying the exegetical narrative of disclosing God (Fishbane, *Art of Mystical Narrative*). For his part, Abhinavagupta opines in his commentary on the *Nātyaśāstra* that “[t]he poet is like Prajāpati, from whose will this world arises. For
of divine knowledge through the numinous story of consciousness is tastefully appreciated in the sublime mosaic of language.\textsuperscript{36}

In painterly terms, the kabbalistic and tantric experient sees the formal presentation of divinity by the light of consciousness, which may be conferred by virtue of the mind’s being reflective of the divine light or because of its being subject to self-illumination (these may be the same thing). For both traditions the sense of light is preeminent in seeing the place of God within the parameters of thinking about reality, and it enables these mystical aviators to navigate their way through the imaginary realm of divinity.\textsuperscript{37} It must be that as progenitors of fine art they are working to depict the illuminative or illuminated presence of God in the studio of the mind. They are trying to paint a portrait of the face of God that can be admired directly by themselves or indirectly by others when it is set down, enunciated there in the text. In tracing their consciousness of God by the fall of light—the direction of being—they are able to see in a circumscribed way that which lies before them, which conduces to the divine. From one view, it is under the auspices of their esoteric knowledge, which radiates a mysterious light, that the experiential artist-writer can glimpse the putatively dark God (because incomprehensible).\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36} Figal states that a poem is a distillation of a story, since a “story is, in essence, poetic, because it is only about the sense of what is said; its sense is the context of events, people, and places that are brought into clarity through telling the story” (126). The so-called literary sublime was overtaken by the philosophical sublime in the eighteenth century, and thereby developed by British and German philosophers. Kant notably distinguished the dynamical and mathematical sublime (Brady 58–62). In the so-called mathematical sublime, there is a tension between the capacity of the imagination to be able to grasp the full measure of what is absolutely great (“beyond all comparison”) and the power of reason to conceptualize what amounts to the idea of an absolute whole. Unlike in the feeling of beauty, where imagination and understanding are in subjective play, in the feeling of the sublime it is imagination and reason that are in subjective play \textit{(cpj §§25–27)}. The kabbalistic and tantric conceptions are mathematically sublime the extent to which they represent an attempt to reach into the aw(e)ful infinite idea of God and to comprehend this advancement in a total realization. Interestingly, according to the \textit{Sefer Yeṣirah} God builds the universe on a factorial basis (§40; Hayman 135), which neatly suggests a dispositional consciousness on the part of the writer(s) that is mathematically sublime.

\textsuperscript{37} Muller-Ortega; Wolfson, “Hermeneutics of Light”. I have dwelt on this understanding elsewhere (Martin, “Comparative Realization”).

\textsuperscript{38} Kabbalistically it is a “mysterious” (or “secretive”) light because the numerical value of the consonants of רוא, \textit{light (or),} is the same as רז “mystery” (raz) (\textit{Zohar} 1:140a; in Wolski, 423 n. 79).
gerian terminology, it appears that the kabbalistic and tantric imaginary is the open space in which mystical Dasein is brought to an ownmost consciousness that the obscure God may be eventfully disclosed in the time of understanding. Or put another way, the kabbalistic and tantric imaginary is the existential clearing in which the situated consciousness is already thrown open to the possibility of realizing that the obscure God may be discovered as meaningfully present.\textsuperscript{39} The experiencents habitually care to be led through the forest of words to the glade of recognition by the authentic sound of light; for it is said that the bells of the Holy Spirit resonate with the effulgence of knowledge, while the rhythm of Śakti that vibrates in the mind is the light of poiesis (pratibhā).\textsuperscript{40}

From an artistic standpoint, if the divine realm is seen as though in a pictorial space—in a light-filled environment that is suffused with the principles of being (sefirot and tattvas), which is all invested with alphabetic energy, and which is calibrated in enunciation—then it is surely renderable on the wall of the mind.

It is no doubt the case that the practitioners of Kabbalah and Tantra seek to experience the realm of divinity by living within the purview of light that shines around their mind (soul), which will make their diffracted involvement with the world of beings appropriately colored. On that note, if the spatio-temporal form of God is discernible by the light of intuition, then the content of this representation in imagination is filled with pronounced colors. It is known that color perception is due to electrochemical activity occurring in the retina which feeds into neural and mental processes that garner representations of the world (Kuehni 23–49), and so by analogy the interpretations that are placed upon the sensible intuitions received in the mind’s eye are represented in a colorful spread of knowledge. Metaphorically here, the mind is a canvas where the palette of imagination has a range of colorful pigments—emotions and thoughts—that can be applied by the brush of understanding.\textsuperscript{41} This metaphor

\textsuperscript{39} I am adapting Sheehan’s interpretation here, where he explains that Heidegger argued that the origin or source of being is the clearing (die Lichtung) as one is “thrown open” or appropriated by the world of possibilities and finds meaning in the practical encounter with things.

\textsuperscript{40} The Zohar states that “bells of the Holy Spirit” ring in those giving innovative readings (3: 188b), and the Dvanyāloka (kā. 1. 6) states that Sarasvati (a type of Śakti) as power of speech bestows the flavor of genius (pratibhā) upon poets (in Ingalls 119). (On pratibhā as the power of poetic imagination see Sreekantaiya.)

\textsuperscript{41} It is pertinent that colors are ascribed to the rasas (and recall that rasas are modifications of sundry emotional states): “the erotic is blue-black, the comic is white, the tragic is gray, and the violent red; the heroic is golden, the fearful black, the macabre blue, and the fantastic yellow” (Pollock 52). Sivaramamurti enumerates a slightly different list, but adds
is relevant because the exponents of Kabbalah and Tantra often resort to the idea of colors in envisioning the divine realm. If the imaginary perception is colorful then it follows that the material enunciation will be colorful; that is, the artifact will have descriptive color, which in this case is displayed by the letters, words, and sentences, as they are extruded from imagistic thought. This shows that the text as a discourse or narrative has a meaning that is constituted by a “manifold of correspondences” as the variegations of language are dyed into a fabric of realization. It is like the interconnected relationship among colors, where the properties of pigments depend on the context of their appearance. Thus the linguistic rendition in exhibiting a world of pictorial meaning is awash with color in that it imparts a tone of inquiry to the exposited ideas and as such it signifies the tint and shade of an artful consciousness. This notion of linguistic color may readily be seen in its attribution to language that utilizes figuration and symbolism, but it may also be applied to unadorned philosophical language, except that here the chiaroscuro of consciousness employs monochromatic coloring, which is built up of light and dark tones, as in a grisaille painting.

From a pictorial perspective, the kabbalistic and tantric experient sees God through a perceptual weave of consciousness. If the exegetical aim is to realize the imaginary or visionary knowledge of the divine realm in a holistic com-

that “Śānta [tranquility] is given a special place again and described as natural in colour and not distinctively red, white, dark etc.” (130).

42 Consider for example how the zoharic section Rav Metivta includes a vivid description of the heavenly Temple or Garden of Eden, which is pictured as having filamentous lights and gemmate colors, with lattices of sparkling grapevines, all of which is fashioned by the Master of the Universe (Zohar 3:165a–b). Similarly, the Kumārikākhaṇḍa (39.2–12ab) describes the marvelous heavenly place of Kuleśvārī and her attendant hosts of divine beings, including accomplished yogis, in “a pavilion made of wonderful pictures,” which is also decorated with beautiful jewels and surrounded by trees and creepers (in Dyczkowski, Manthānabhairavatantram 13: 201).

43 Figal states that a poem is constituted as a “fabric” since it is “determined by a manifold of correspondences” (123).

44 Even a painter as steeped in the value of color as the Russian abstract painter Vassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) had to acknowledge this fact. Early in his career he wrote of the innate or natural properties of color in his famous essay Über das Geistige in der Kunst (On the Spiritual in Art) but later came to appreciate the relationality of color and to understand “that the properties of any one color are dependent upon the specific context in which it makes its appearance” (Florman 86).

45 The first or third-century Greek rhetorician Longinus advises in his seminal treatise Peri hypsous (On the Sublime) that the art of figurative language in the service of rhetoric is like the highlights and shadows in painting, where the grandeur of writing ought to occlude any rhetorical devices that are used (chap. 17).
position, as one that has a particular design and that is made in regard to the color, line, and shape of consciousness, then in the deft handling of the tool of scribing the kabbalistic master and tantric adept are painting a picture in words of what they perceive in the nuanced disclosure of being-with-God. They are finely attuned to the need to transfer their panorama of awareness of reality made divine into writing, through the application of pregnant and vibrant language.

The outlook of the French painter Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) is germane here, since he was famed for his keen perceptual sensibility and the topical values he afforded the modulations of color, which he explored as the subject of representation over against the plain view of the object (Eiling). Figal writes that Cézanne’s action in painting *Montagne Sainte-Victoire* (1882–1885) shows that “[h]e wanted to see the texture of what is perceivable and to translate this into the painting,” and that it is actually through a patient gaze that the world takes on a certain hue: “By seeing color as such, vision arrives at itself, as it were. Seeing is the seeing of colors” (176). It is likewise for the mystical experiencer as he would perceive the texture of divine realization and translate it into the pattern of writing upon the documentary support, where the gamut of consciousness is inscribed by the use of allusive, creative, and rhetorical strokes of knowledge.

This is precisely the linguistic facture that demonstrates the presence of God through the “rough” or “smooth” technique of applying the pigmented words. If there is a crossover between the literate and the painterly (words and images), then it may be in the way that interpretation is a vital force in the manner of inventing, or the compositional laying out of the picture. The continuum between “thick,” figurative, and “thin,” non-figurative, language can correspond to the passage between an impasto technique and a refined technique. Besides this, the perception of the recognizable presence of God as the imagined subject of a pictorial representation may be “imbricated” with the features of the articulate brushwork, as it is materially rendered. This suggests

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46 Facture is a technical term that refers to the texture of the finished surface and how this comes about through the application of pigments and technique of brushwork (Gifford, Metzger, and Delaney; Newell, *What is a Picture?* 146–150). In the early twentieth century the Russian avant-garde movement emphasized the aspect of facture relating to the process of making the artifact and the virtue of *faktura* as a working of material (Gough). So, we could relate facture to the manipulation of language and thought, that is, the cognitive material out of which the artifact is being made.

47 Newall (“Is Seeing-in”) refers to “imbrication” as the appearance of the subject matter of a painting that takes on the textural features or properties of the brushwork, which makes the subject matter and paint seem closely connected in the same space. He offers the example of the composite depiction of hair.
that the depiction (of the idea) of God is in spatial conformity with the semiotic facture of the enunciatory work. Ideally, as the repository of wisdom, the texts of Kabbalah and Tantra are alike in that they are examples of a textured consciousness where the complex thread of seeing and knowing is woven. Indeed, it might be said that the Zohar, as a “brocaded weave,” is a tantric text in respect to its stitching of wisdom, where the narrative is stretched on a loom of understanding.48

The status of beauty is a longstanding affair in Western thought (Eco). In the medieval Jewish aesthetic, under the influence of Neoplatonism, the view of physical artistic objects as a site for appreciating beauty was subordinate to the idea of beauty as being essentially located at the metaphysical level. To this end, aesthetic images delineated by perception and imagination were believed to be a conduit, a stepping stone, to apprehending and knowing the beautiful place of God on high (Hughes 146–184). Similarly, in Indian aesthetics the attachment to beauty (saundarya) may be experienced in a variety of artistic works, but it may also deal thematically with the realization of the divine that is achieved in religious praxis (Dehejia and Paranjape).

In keeping with this remit, the importance of cogitating and contemplating the degree of beauty is acknowledged in both Kabbalah and Tantra, so far as this concerns the appraisal, or the “tasting,” of the divine and the conscious alignment of the self with the perceived nature of God (Afterman; Bäumer, “Lord”). Since the Hebrew letters are infused with divine power, right intention (kavvanah) in prayerful meditation will enable the vision of heavenly beauty, which is centered as Tif’eret, who is charged with the kingdom of God, Malkhut (i.e., Shekinah) (Zohar 2: 57a, 198b, 229b). Similarly, the Sanskrit phonemes are imbued with divine energy and the yogin who exerts effort through “attentive concentration” (nibhālana) will know his own mind as one with the path of mantra, which is ordained by the auspicious light of pure consciousness, Śiva, as reflected in the mirror of his beauty, Śakti (ŚŚū 2. 1–3 and comm., in Dyczkowski, Aphorisms 65–74; cf. Ps 103, 104, and comm.). It qualifies as a semantic vision, and for those experients who are in the state of immersive consciousness it is to be soaked in a knowing light.49

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48 I borrow the term “brocaded weave” from Wolfson, who refers to the zoharic corpus as such (Language 284). Fishbane writes that ontologically the Hebrew language is an extension, or “earthly resonance,” of the “textuality and linguistic fabric” of God (“Speech of Being” 515, 516). The same might well be said of Sanskrit.

49 In the Zohar a prevailing metaphor of mystical experience is the desire to be saturated in knowing the divine beauty (Hellner-Eshed 255–308). In the School of Pratyabhijña there
Notwithstanding that the focus on beauty in Kabbalah and Tantra is metaphysically oriented, we can easily shift it to art and aesthetics where the standards of both traditions invite a judgment of taste. In this respect at least Kabbalah and Tantra are much the same. If the imaginative realization of God’s presentative being is regarded as a thing of beauty, then its representation in the form of a text may be judged as beautiful (or as a beautiful work of art).\footnote{It would thus correspond to Kant’s dictum: “A beauty of nature is a beautiful thing; the beauty of art is a beautiful representation of a thing” (\textit{cpj} §48; 189).}
The writer is suitably motivated to render his pictorially informed consciousness onto a textualized enunciation in order to promulgate a worldview, and he likely derives a pleasurable satisfaction in producing the work at hand.\footnote{Crowther’s viewpoint is instructive here as he pragmatically argues that pictorial art psychologically completes and refines the structures of experience through its distinctive ways of evoking the transperceptual space of the beautiful and sublime.}
As well, the reader in beholding this work and engaging with it thereby gains an appreciation of its artistic value, and he may be moved to experience the nature of the divine realm himself through realizing the perspicacious images and expansive ideas. In confidently recognizing it as a beautiful work of art through the warrant of a requisite disposition of consciousness, the experiential spectator can enlist the power of an aesthetic judgment.

\section{Conclusion}

In this paper I have sketched a correlation between the traditions of Kabbalah and Tantra based on an approach that utilizes concepts and ideas from the philosophy of art and aesthetics. I began by outlining how each tradition iterates the universe as a linguistic expedition of divine being. In speaking to the world through the creative power of letters and words God is seen to be enunciating an artistic consciousness, one that the human experient is obliged to reflect and render. In accordance with this view, the kabbalistic and tantric practitioner is dedicated to contemplating the nature of divine being as it operates pervasively throughout spiritual and mundane reality. Beginning as a far-away perception of a transcendent God it is drawn near to immanent realization by a discriminating consciousness, which has some pictorial features. This experiential appearance of the divine informs an imaginary kind of artwork that inclines toward expression, with its affective and thoughtful completion in text-

\footnote{is also an urge to be drenched in the knowledge of the beauty of Śiva, through devotional enthusiasm (Rastogi, “Utpala’s Insights”).}

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\footnote{It would thus correspond to Kant’s dictum: “A beauty of nature is a beautiful thing; the beauty of art is a beautiful representation of a thing” (\textit{cpj} §48; 189).}

\footnote{Crowther’s viewpoint is instructive here as he pragmatically argues that pictorial art psychologically completes and refines the structures of experience through its distinctive ways of evoking the transperceptual space of the beautiful and sublime.}
tual form. Read as a painting by analogy, what is shown in this way is arranged and managed by the (metaphorical) color, line, and shape of consciousness, which characteristically manifests in a unique style of allusive, creative, and rhetorical language. The rendition exemplifies a genius of apprehension, which gives an inspired composition that derives from the power of a representative consciousness. It is by means of an aesthetic light that the experient is able to see and know the otherwise hidden God, and to paint a rich descriptive portrait of the sublime divine presence. What is then realized by dint of the texture of consciousness, and imbricated with the properties of the written work, is translated into a complex weave of knowingness. The placement of the imagistic and pictorially realized consciousness of the artist-writer onto the text is a distilled experience motivated by the recognition of beauty. In finally rendering his artistic consciousness of the scope of the divine, the experient of Kabbalah and Tantra may rely upon literary tropes, narrative devices, argumentation, and reasoning to communicate the aesthetic experience of seeing the nature of God. It highlights a significant event for the kabbalistic and tantric artist-writer, one that can be appreciated and evaluated by the reader-viewer in each tradition, as he focuses on the pictorialized text.

List of Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ĪPK</td>
<td>Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā of Utpaladeva</td>
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<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Paramārthasāra of Abhinavagupta</td>
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<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Parātriṃśikātantra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Parātriṃśikāvivaraṇa of Abhinavagupta</td>
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<td>SpKā</td>
<td>Spandakārikā of Vasugupta (or Bhaṭṭa Kallaṭa)</td>
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<td>SpKāVṛt</td>
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<td>SpVi</td>
<td>Spandavidṛti of Rājānaka Rāma</td>
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<td>ŚŚū</td>
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<td>TĀ</td>
<td>Tantrāloka of Abhinavagupta</td>
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<td>VBh</td>
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<td>VP</td>
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<td>YH</td>
<td>Yoginiḥṛdaya</td>
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Śivasūtra (ŚŚū). See Singh, Śiva Sūtras.


Spandakārikāvṛtti (SpKāVṛ). See Spandakārikā.

Spandavīrṛti (SpVī). See Spandakārikā.
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Tantrāloka (तांत्रालोक). See Silburn et Padoux.


