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**FOUNDATIONS OF THIN AIR**

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**Our revels now are ended. These our actors  
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and  
Are melted into air, into thin air;  
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud capped towers, the gorgeous palaces  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on; and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.<sup>1</sup>**

Architecture here serves as an antithesis for the idea of spirit. These two notions are juxtaposed throughout this verse. The architecture of reality plays off its counterpart; air, thin air, which can be metaphorically understood as the immateriality of reality.

Architecture, signifying the material, is treated two-fold; on the one hand as the *baseless fabric* of reality, on the other as *this vision* of reality. The *fabric* of the vision, to my mind, refers to the objective structure of the world *as such*. The *vision*, hence, is the *experience* of said object from a subjective point of view.

Both fabric and vision behave synonymously, as two aspects of a single movement, indicated by the recurring *decomposition*. The structure dissolves, the story fades. The temporal quality of existence is highlighted by its persistent melting into thin air, which contrasts the full, visceral and vibrant depiction of its worldly inheritance.

Spirit acts as material stage and spectacle of earthly experience, as the unconscious building of nature and likewise all life that passes through it. The natural world parallels an inanimate architectural body, which is ultimately realized only in the shifting realm of perception it elicits.

### **Foundations of Thin Air**

#### **Aether**

Viewing matter in terms of architecture alludes to the composition of nature. Ancient Greece envisioned the cosmos as being a finite construct of distinct elements, each characterized by the rudimentary geometry of their most basic components. Nature's building is presented as an architectonic object, a single entity that consists of its entire anatomy of interrelated parts.

"The architectural importance of Timaeus exists in its specific conception of space, that all entities are finite wholes that can be subdivided into mathematically proportioned parts, as a subdivision of an architectural structure into a totality of smaller spatial units." <sup>2</sup>

These elemental bits or particles were named “atomos” and thought of as tiny, indivisible shapes. Four discrete kinds of tiles, each arranged tightly into a dynamic, three-dimensional mosaic. Together all these pieces constitute a whole, forming an overarching organized structure.

“The construction of the world used up the whole of each of these four elements, for the creator constructed it of all fire, water, air and earth available, leaving over no part or property of any of them: a whole of complete parts.” <sup>3</sup>

Monumentality embodies ideals of stability and permanence. The cosmos as a totality of constituent parts is compared to a most durable and resilient design, unaffected by the passage of time. This emphasizes its solidity as being a physical structure built upon invulnerable foundations.

This reliability of the cosmos was exemplified in the consistent setting and rising sun, the regular cycling seasons and formal continuity found in the motion of heavenly bodies. The sun, moon and stars were thought to be embedded in layers of crystalline spheres, rotating like clockwork around the earth.

Pythagoreans believed that the repetitive interplay of these celestial spheres orchestrated an inaudible symphony. They associated the circling heavens with the strings of a lyre, each tuned in proportion to each other, creating a universal harmony that enveloped the cosmos. Stars swinging round the earth sang material into shape, maintaining balance between conflicting elemental forces.

“The two elements one might identify as space, namely air and cosmos, are both endowed with a geometric solid structure...” <sup>4</sup> “Whereas the body of heaven was visible, the soul was invisible and endowed with reason and harmony” <sup>5</sup>.

These spheres perform choreographic patterns and their chorus is related to this dancing in unison. The encompassing harmony is established within the continual interdependence of its differing elements. Stability in cosmic construction is founded on this unbroken unity rooted in the ratio or relation between its distinct parts.

“One can interpret Plato’s cosmos as a harmonic composition of spatial units, the Soul, in which the seven planets revolve with uniform motion. Plato does not mention the spatial quality of the Soul as such; he only explains its mathematical structure. The proportions of that structure are based on harmonic ratios and the body of the world was given a geometric ratio. Both ratios were borrowed by Plato from discoveries made by Pythagoreans about two centuries earlier.” <sup>6</sup>

Platonic cosmology envisioned space as forming the outer spheres surrounding the mortal world, securing the heavens and elements in their path. Aristotle identified cosmos as being a fifth and quintessential element, lighter than air yet firmer than diamond. Classical elements were capable of changing into each other and being rearranged throughout linear time, while the quintessence or aether moved in repeated patterns and remained uninvolved in the erratic transformations of the world. The aether then is associated with an unwavering wisdom and truth, as an excellent example of the fundamental framework on which the changing world is based.

Anaximander was the first to redefine the elements in a more spatially abstract sense. Struck by the variety he found in nature, he concluded that the world must have inherent potential for infinite variation, as every thing within it is shaped to be unique and distinct in relation to its surroundings. Every rock, tree and water drop seemingly differs at least slightly from any other rock, tree or drop of water that was, is or will be. He reasoned that the common origin of these conflicting elements must therefore contain within itself the capacity to produce this unlimited variation and change.

He identified the arche or source of all these defined and particular structures as the “apeiron”, or “boundless”, which translates as the unlimited void, as well as that which is not experienced or perceived, remaining indefinable and indefinite. This primordial place is compared to an oceanic expanse or gaping chasm, described as being wholly formless and empty. Free of internal variation and conflict, it has no boundary or limitations and therefore remains indefinite until it takes on a definitive shape.

The amorphous apeiron is presented as an impersonal and inexhaustible source, an ever-flowing fountain that guarantees an on-going process of genesis and decay, governed by the never-ending separation and unison of its elements. Rotary motion within this void separates opposing elements into existence and the mutual changes between these boundaries recombine all fragments inextricably throughout time. While the formless is indestructible, the many worlds derived from it are not and eventually slip back into the darkness of the void.

" The first principle of things is the infinite; for from this all things come, and all things perish and return to this. Accordingly, an infinite number of worlds have been generated and have perished again and returned to their source. So he calls it infinite, in order that the generation which takes place may not lessen it." 7

The formless void is then not only the unborn “boundless nature” from which “all the heavens and worlds within them” have sprung, but also the yawning abyss into which all things will ultimately be dissolved.

### **Night**

Parmenides mentioned the aether in his proem ‘On Nature’:

“You will know the aether’s nature, and in the aether all the signs, and the unseen works of the pure torch of the brilliant sun... and you will learn the wandering works of the round-eyed moon and its nature, and you will know too the surrounding heaven, both whence it grew and how Necessity directing it bound it to furnish the limits of the stars.” 8

In the proem Parmenides travels to “the halls of Night”. These halls of night were previously described as “the horrible dwelling of dark night” in poems by Hesiod. In ancient Babylonian mythology this was the sun gods house, a hidden place where both day and night, personifying growth and decay, alternately reside while the other crosses the sky.

“And the house never holds them both within; but always one is without the house passing over the earth, while the other stays at home and waits until the time for her journeying comes; and the one holds all-seeing light for them on earth, but the other holds in her arms Sleep the brother of Death, even evil Night, wrapped in a vaporous cloud.” 9

Sleep and death remain outside perception and shrouded in darkness. While sleep rolls peacefully over the earth inspiring dreams and vision, death is tenacious and uncompromising. Sweeping away everything under the sun, death instils nightmares in mortals without pity, holding contempt for all life including its own immortality.

“And there the children of dark Night have their dwellings, Sleep and Death, awful gods. The glowing Sun never looks upon them with his beams, neither as he goes up into heaven, nor as he comes down from heaven. And the former of them roams peacefully over the earth and the sea's broad back and is kindly to men; but the other has a heart of iron, and his spirit within him is pitiless as bronze: whomsoever of men he has once seized he holds fast: and he is hateful even to the deathless gods.”<sup>9</sup>

This dwelling of night functions as a place of judgment where the mortal world is finally balanced in the scales of death. In Egyptian mythology this judgment was performed by the goddess Ma'at, who weighed the heavy heart of the world against the feather of truth.<sup>10</sup> She exemplified unity, balance and harmony and was tasked with establishing law that allowed order to triumph over chaos. The sun only rose once she was set in power over her nemesis, Isfet, who represents the chaotic darkness in which order must establish itself. Her truth and law was eternal life, weightless in time and thus unconstrained by the inevitable gravity of becoming.

It is then implied that Parmenides has journeyed to the realm of the dead, where the spirit resides by itself after it has been fully separated from the chaos of material existence and is no longer affected by the duality of growth and decay. In these unconscious halls of night Parmenides encounters the goddess of Night herself, who instructs him on how she maintains unity throughout creation and how mortals can recognize this truth.

Night wishes to reveal to him the fundamental nature of the aether, which she calls the 'well rounded heart of reality', described as a steadfast object in which there is left no shadow of doubt, distinguishing itself as the objective essence that necessarily anchors the wandering, diverse and changing reality in which mortals find themselves lost.

She begins by claiming that this truth must be ungenerated and deathless, neither coming into existence nor ceasing. It is conceived as being a still, motionless and featureless unity, uniform and balanced in every direction of space. Therefore its being remains undifferentiated and identical in time, independent of change yet at the same time permeating all creation, leaving nothing outside of itself.

“It is universal, existing alone, immovable and without end; nor ever was it nor will it be, since it is now, all together, one, and continuous...<sup>11</sup> Further it is unmoved, in the hold of great chains, without beginning or end, since generation and destruction have completely disappeared... It lies the same, abiding in the same state and by itself; accordingly it abides fixed in the same spot.”<sup>12</sup>

Anaximander's choice of apeiron or boundlessness as source of material manifestation was atypical to Greek thought, which since the Pythagoreans had aligned notions of symmetry and harmony with “peras” or limitation. Completeness and wholeness, finite limitations and boundaries were seen as an absolute necessity for the existence of unity and truth. If the origin of material were somehow indefinite or unlimited this would imply that the true structure of the cosmos is fundamentally amorphous and can never be fully delineated or described.

Heraclitus<sup>13</sup> muses on this same problem in his prior effort to depict the heart of reality, comparing it to a self-sustained blaze of fire. In doing this he emphasizes its nature as an on-going energetic transformation, elusive and indescribable through its constant motion and shifting appearance. He calls this eternal fire the dialogue of nature and compares its amorphous changing structure to a complex and foreign language, having its own inherent logic and coherent meaning that is experienced through the senses, yet not fully grasped by them, since they necessarily interpret and translate this objective “logos” or natural, fluctuating linguistic structure in terms of their own point of view. Heraclitus suggested mortals could get a better sense of reality by improving their perception of it and fine-tuning the language they use to interpret it, allowing them to encapsulate the true content of its message in the expression of images and symbols.

Parmenides ascribes to this logos, aether or “well rounded heart of reality” the necessity of having an absolute and definite nature. He reasons that what we inquire into must certainly exist in some form or another, and since reality as experienced through the senses is constantly shifting in and out of existence it cannot constitute its true shape. In order to perceive reality *as such*, one cannot trust solely on sensory impressions based in the material world, since particular structures created by the interplay of separated elements are themselves contingent and changing elaborations of its true nature.

Accordingly there can be no stable apprehension of forms that are subject to change. Since this constant truth cannot be sensed directly and is always described through our own experience, Parmenides holds that the reality we inhabit does not truly exist and all change and plurality are no more than convincing illusions experienced by perception.

“Whatever is must be ungenerated and imperishable; one, continuous and indivisible; motionless and altogether unchanging, such that past and future are meaningless for it. This is “all that can be said about what truly exists,” and reality is thus revealed as “something utterly different from the world in which each one of us supposes himself to live,” a world which is nothing but a “deceitful show.” <sup>14</sup>

Yet precisely because reality must be what it is, it must have a well-defined objective nature hidden behind the changes of perception and time. Since the total unity of nature is necessarily complete, he reasons its multiplicity must be contained within a single finite and perfect shape. He figuratively imagines this heart or timeless centre of reality as being a balanced, unchanging and uniform sphere.

“But since there is a final limit, it is perfected on every side, like the mass of a rounded sphere, equally distant from the centre at every point... For if it is equal on all sides, it abides in equality within its limits.” <sup>15</sup>

Similar to the concept of the boundless, the rigid heart of reality is characterized by featureless darkness, uniformity and motionlessness. Both describe the source as being a blank and deathless state of timeless potential and equilibrium from which the changing, bifurcating multiplicity of reality is derived. However the boundless material disappears into conflicting elements, transforming until its differences are absolved and reclaimed back into the void, while the rounded heart of reality is never created or destroyed, remaining intact and identical throughout its act of change as a timeless moment or unique instance that can be described in terms of its own imperishable nature.

The object of unity in which things find their origin and destruction is presented as being an all-encompassing entity that holds all its diverse aspects to an indivisible and permanent whole. While the object of reality changes in perception it remains unchanged in and of itself. It is then not simply the origin and source of creation, but rather the original state of being on which all creation is based, universal and timeless in the sense that it entertains an uninterrupted existence, having a single unified and continuous identity as the uncreated cause of all things. This idea holds that all particular structures are conceived within and emerge from a single formal unity that underlies and fully describes the wandering ways of material.

### **Law**

Plato's conception of form was based on this formal unity described by Parmenides. Form is held to be intangible, universal and timeless, simple and elemental, in composite (uniform) of one shape, unchanging. In contrast particular structures change and are complex, divisible and comprised of many elements. Aristotle explained that for Parmenides reality is singular in the strictest sense, but also many, since reality is and always must remain a unity in relation to its own essential nature, yet simultaneously appears as a varying multiplicity in relation to perception. He redefined this original form as being more akin to an intangible principle that describes creation rather than being a material object from which creation is derived.

Abstract patterns that embellish Islamic mosques are designed through a principle of unity and diversity, as an art form preoccupied with the relation between universal themes and the lavish variety of motifs found within these boundaries. This ornamentation in the shape of geometric arabesques and mosaics could be viewed as having a secular basis, however the craftsman attempted to express an ideal of divine truth without capturing it in idols and figurative representations. Language and geometry were seen as complementary endeavours in the symbolic description of truth, linked by their common association with law and order, the melding of both disciplines found clearly in the calligraphy of the scriptures. The natural world was believed to be a ghostly approximation of the elegant truth of heaven and geometric form was thought to exemplify this perfect state of unity as it was before falling into the chaos of material and becoming obscured by perception.

Each of these mind-bending and rhythmic compositions has its origin in a single rudimentary template that can repeat itself indefinitely in seamless fashion across a surface. From the potential of this template an entire family of related patterns can be derived, each created through the systematic elaboration of this original geometric form. These templates were therefore held to be significant and associated with the original unity of creation as their constraints gave rise to a vast multiplicity of possible compositions. These many possibilities would have been regarded by the crafters as created by virtue of their source, rather than invented by them, since these many patterns already existed prior to their discovery within the potential of the template. In the finished works this implicit geometric principle still unifies and binds the patterns it has produced however it has become concealed underneath the decorative and involved variations developed upon it.<sup>16</sup>



The naked and deathless reality that Parmenides describes as being the heart or essence of reality is then seen as an abstract unified object, a fixed immaterial rule or principle that forms the foundation and true identity of all changing material phenomena.

In *Timaeus*<sup>17</sup> Plato sets out a cosmology that attempts to explain how this deathless abstract template beyond time can influence and produce the variety he finds in the natural world. He proposes that this form or model is a unique immortal object distinct from material as inherent, complete and immutable truth, goodness and beauty existing prior to manifestation. The changing realm of perception is seen as an emulation of this entity, a temporal, material artefact created in the image of its timeless ideal template. Form then is the original of which all manifestation is mere imitation, and can be seen as the shape that all particular structures strive to embody yet fall short of, implying that the truth of being is constant and immortal, while particular material structures only partake in this absolute truth of eternal life as they grow and decay.

The agency of this eternal model is then explained away anthropomorphically in the figure of an immortal being (demiurge) that is conscious of this ideal model and crafts its design into an amorphous and lifeless substance, imposing its will on chaos to establish an ordered cosmos. This deathless object or design upon which the world is fashioned is then referred to as being 'the living thing itself' entertaining eternal life and timeless wisdom by virtue of its unique nature.

The living thing or timeless design cannot replicate itself perfectly. Its challenge lies in crafting an image of itself that is bound by temporal constraints, shaped by growth and decay. Unlike the abstract model the world must be physical and tangible, hinting as to how manifestation is understood as being a copy of its immaterial model. Just as a blueprint is an abstract representation of a building and not the structure itself, the design on which the building of nature is based is not a physical being but rather an abstract entity that follows a fixed set of instructions or schematics as the original immaterial reason or motif that prescribes the features of structures that will be built.

The accurate description of reality is therefore thought to be akin to stating its true name; capturing its eternal word, commandment or meaning within a finite representation.

Houses of worship are mostly conceived as dwelling places for this supernatural law that guides nature according to its own logic. They are designed for intangible emperors and kings, consulted as they reside on their empty thrones shaped as altars.<sup>18</sup> The authority that is welcomed and addressed is then the author of creation, the creative spirit or common immortal identity that transcends particular mortality in the form of eternal truth. This unified foundation or essence of reality is then envisioned as an absolute and eternal rule or law that remains fixed and independent regardless of perception while it governs material manifestation, dictating and describing the changes within it.

This causes a wide chasm between the nature of the original creator and the natural artefacts it creates, as form retains its unique identity and existence as distinct and separate from the changing worlds fashioned in its image. This distancing of temporal manifestation from the original that manifests is then presented as being the formless, elemental chaos in which truth becomes embodied and materialized as particular forms that are bound to decay.

The presence of divinity is thus expelled from perception and placed wholly outside of the natural world as the pinnacle of being, since any embodiment or apprehension of it can only obscure its unity and cause it to fall into disarray. Reality is then categorized as being either absolute truth or that which deviates from it, as its true nature remains constant while its perception wanders eroding realms of material.

"The nature of the ideal (being) was eternal. But to bestow this attribute altogether upon a created thing was impossible; so he bethought him to make a moving image of eternity" <sup>19</sup>

### ***Rule***

The perfection of its nature is also related to its pointlessness; being whole and complete in and of itself it has no end or purpose beyond its own being and therefore can inquire into nothing but itself. This idea finds a symbolic representation in the Egyptian image of the Ouroboros, depicted as a serpent in endless pursuit its own tail. The emblem acts as a metaphor for wholeness and unity and represents a self-sustained recycling in which the immortal snake remains blissfully unaware that the life and nourishment it spends eternity pursuing is exactly that death and decay it wishes to avoid. There is then a sense in which the snake is a single entity that no longer recognizes this unconscious unity between its head and tail, thereby deceiving itself into forever pursuing its own end.

"Life lives on life. This is the sense of the symbol of the Ouroboros... Everything that lives lives on the death of something else. Your own body will be food for something else. Anyone who denies this, anyone who holds back, is out of order. Death is an act of giving." <sup>20</sup>

The indigenous Nahua people of the present Mexico worshipped this eternal being in the form of a feathered serpent they named Teotl, and gave it the image of a transcendent organism, adorned with a swirling, fiery plumage of vivid colours. Even though this source or essence of reality is presented as a personal being or living creature, Nahua philosophy would not necessarily equate their image of divinity with its actuality. While they entertained a great plethora of gods in imagination, all these were said to be the same sacred entity appearing within many forms in perception.

"The multiplicity of gods" was simply "divinity already separated, as it were, by the prism of human sight, into its many attributes". The many gods were depictions, personifications of its manifold talents, or fragments of its corporeal form." <sup>21</sup>

The ruler or heart of being is described by the Nahuas as a process of self-transformation, characterized by its self-moving essence by which it endlessly generates and re-generates itself. It is then better understood as a single all-encompassing life force that runs through reality, shifting the shape and contents of its experience as it generates and decays. This sacred or divine life-giving source is seen as simultaneously transcending reality and being immanent in nature, as it penetrates deeply into the utmost detail of the particular structures it inhabits while likewise never being exhausted by any structure it manifests.

"The real meaning of [teotl] is spirit -- a concentration of power as a sacred and impersonal force." <sup>22</sup>

Although its true form is viewed as being the flowing procession of its own nature rather than a static entity or permanent rule, Nahuas believed that this being was blessed with an innate stability, tending towards its unified essence throughout all overarching structures and balancing itself within a precarious and dynamic dance of life and death.

Mesoamerican pyramids were constructed as a house of worship and the symbolic ceremonies held there clarify this dynamic between immortal and mortal life. These monuments were built with the sole purpose of interacting with immortal spirit and illustrating its creative power and authority.

The temples of stone are designed to evoke a notion of the ancestral realm or immortal afterlife, but their permanence and immobility refers to an instance in time rather than a particular place. These pyramids reflect the eternal present that immortality necessarily inhabits, described as a petrified centre at the heart of all motion and change. The point at its peak is flattened, creating a raised platform. This was seen as a sacred sanctuary that bridged mortal and sacred realms, acting as the empty stage where spirit appears in a theatrical display of its many forms.

“The platform at its summit represents the sacred space where the dance of the gods unfolds, a creative game of motion and thus of time itself... This dancing place is also the place of sacrifice.”

<sup>23</sup>

Immortal spirit uses this open space as its playing field or arena where it materializes before a sacrificial altar. Since it is timeless, its only occupation consists of playing with time. Being immortal, its self-annihilation is seen as the creative act that produces change. Streams of blood running down the stone face of the pyramid were believed to fuel the sun in its motion, and the spilling of mortal blood within this space was equated with the destruction of eternal life, which in turn ensured its life-giving transformation.

The instant the silence of this timeless unified space is broken marks the birth of creation, as a motion or dance evoked in its image. Death then is held as the true form and nature of life, as the sacrifice of its immortality is its living in particular, temporal and mortal forms. Since it has nothing to lose its macabre, experiential reality is regarded as its play or poetic expression. Mortals strive through change willing to retain their familiar form from decay, while eternity recognizes this changing guise as its true lifeblood and vitality.

This suggests an intimate bond between the playing spirit and its mortal sacrifice, since they are related, as it were, by the blood that runs through the entire tree of life, back to its common source. As such mortal worlds are regarded as the reproduction of their origin, and described as its offspring or progeny. Just as power is passed down through a lineage of royal blood, this divine power of immortal life is viewed as inherited by authority of its divine source, as a common relation that is shared by all mortals.

Emperors and kings are seen as partaking in this power, using death to maintain obedience to their law, enforcing their dynasty and bloodline through sacrifice, ensuring that this concentration of power and influence remains a stable and permanent fact. Yet death reins over them all as their true ruler, and no palace, praying or playing god can shut out its final verdict. As such the real king is the grinning skull they leave in their passing, along with a faint echo of eternal laughter.

The rule and law that upholds civilization dies out without the willing sacrifice of power by the subjects it wishes to govern, Whether it is coerced through violence, manipulation, attention or affection, the people or body of society must be convinced to align their will with a binding common identity, object or mind, which is maintained and dictated by the leader to ensure the cohesiveness and survival of the group and those who inhabit it.

Conflict between identities of groups and individuals is a test of their durability as the onslaught of time forces them to adapt or strengthen their resistance to change. This cooperation and communion between humankind is then seen as the key to overcoming the conflict and decay within nature, by collectively building a structure that ascends toward immortality.

In similar ways, spirit or pure power is naked and singular without its separation into many elements, sharing its eternal life in mortal form. Its truth and law only carries weight within the diversified and changing context of creation, since without it there is (still) nothing beside its immortal self to govern or experience. The timeless point at the pinnacle of the pyramid forming the foundation of creation is then inseparable from the changing realm surrounding it, since it shares a common destiny with its manifestation. The inert eye within the storm of growth and decay is the same eye that perceives its motion, being the constant identity and source of action we hold over our changing self. Hence while the transcendent is addressed as lord and master, the true content of its name was thought to be 'I am' (that I am).

### ***Flow***

The immortal ruler is conceived in an artistic sense, as being the creator of material artefacts or the inspiration behind creation. The Nahuas regarded its creative process of transformation as being its 'flower and song', which referred to the composition of ornamental song-poems that it performed to entertain itself.<sup>24</sup>

Its artistry is then associated with its craftiness, as a trickster that enchants reality with convincing and captivating illusions. This craft, trick or mechanism by which it deludes itself is held to be magical but not supernatural, since eternity fools and impresses itself in exactly the same way as humans are impressed by their misperception of slight of hand; the scheme is so simple that it escapes comprehension while hiding in plain sight.

In this way the identity of nature conceals itself within appearances, and what mortals perceive is the unified unconscious nature of their being experienced from a particular point of view. This transformation of death then appears as its disguise or self-deception, since its structures only attain apparent stability in the form of changing imagery.

"Reality, nature and experience were nothing but multiple manifestations of a single unity of being... both the one and the many... Since the divine reality was also multiple, fluid, encompassing the whole. Its aspects were changing images, dynamic, never frozen but constantly recreated and redefined." <sup>25</sup>

This flowing nature of reality was a recurring theme in Nahua poetry, which reflected on the vulnerable nature of mortal structures and lamented their sensitivity to change. In his poetry Nezahualcoyotl<sup>26</sup> for instance compared the mortal world to a house of paintings, referring to the fragile papyrus they used as canvas to depict pictures and stories, since images made upon them would fade over lifetimes. The imagery that spirit creates on its blank canvas are said to be equally evanescent and transient, and since its composition disguises its true form, the Nahuas held that nature's building had a dreamlike and ephemeral quality."

The monumentality of the material world is rendered void since it is a manifestation of motion; solid forms are only a moment or organization of time, a fabrication of atomic tapestry described by the trembling activity of its constituents. Nature's building appears as a creation of time, musical in its melting away, as a moment that wilts and fades as soon as it has blossomed. Material does not remain frozen as indestructible monument but becomes animated in its act of decay, moulding and changing its malleable structure.

Heraclitus compared the composition of material to a single stream, a body of water caught up in its own ceaseless current of change. According to him interchange between elements gave the cosmos its vitality, its forward flux and variance, without which the river would cease and be no more than a still and lifeless uniformity.

"We call a body of water a river precisely because it consists of changing waters; if the waters should cease to flow it would not be a river, but a lake or a dry streambed. There is a sense, then, in which a river is a remarkable kind of existent, one that remains what it is by changing what it contains" 27

Taoists<sup>28</sup> held a similar view of nature, describing its process or motion as the 'Tao' or way, defining it as the common path or course that all things follow. Confucianism expands this idea by viewing the eternal flow of nature as a spontaneous pattern of behaviour they called 'li'. This organic pattern was thought of as highly defined, illustrated throughout the whole of nature, yet unpredictable in its motion, as difficult to follow as the circulation of the atmosphere or living organism. The form of running water was to them adequate description of this self-organizing principle, as it is always seen to be moving in perfect accord with its natural impulse. In fact, everything was held to follow its true nature in a similar way, since discernment of this stream within self-reflection is also function of its overall dynamic, even if it in part involves distancing oneself from it.

The transformations of reality are seen as a procession of fluid imagery displayed across its surface. Particular structures are not isolated incidents but a progression of involved patterns emerging in the course of its current. These appear spontaneously in the stream, described by an unbroken continuity, running seamlessly from one state into another in a well-defined direction, differentiating the past from the future. Structures are the result of this arrangement, dependent on the sequence of events that unfold, immersed in a story where the experience of every particle is passed into the next generation, and any particular patterns are the result of their trajectory in time.

Spirit is then reflected clearly in the motionless face of a lake. As perplexing and simple as water drops rolling off an overhanging branch and breaking the smoothness below, sending patterns of ripples outwards across its surface as it moves back into stillness.

"And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit (of God) moved upon the face of the waters." 29

**Anton Hewitt**

## **Closing comment to the introduction:**

“There is more to this beauty than the succession of melodious images, and the theme of dissolution does not simply borrow its splendour from the things dissolved. The truth is rather that the images, though beautiful in themselves, come to life in the act of vanishing. The poet takes away their static solidity and turns a beauty which would otherwise be only statuesque and architectural into music, which, no sooner than it has sounded, dies away. The towers, palaces and temples become vibrant, and break from the excess of life within them. To be passing is to live; to remain and continue is to die. “Unless a grain of corn fall into the ground and die, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit.” - For the poets have seen the truth that life, change, movement, and insecurity are so many names for the same thing. Here, if anywhere, truth is beauty, for movement and rhythm are of the essence of all things lovable. In sculpture, architecture and painting the finished form stands still, but even so the eye finds pleasure in the form only when it contains a lack of symmetry, when, frozen in stone as it may be, it looks as if it were in the midst of motion.” <sup>30</sup> -A. Watts.

## **Source Reference**

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- <sup>2</sup> Cornelis van der Ven, *Space in Architecture ch.2 the finite geometry of the universe pg.13 (Discussing the platonic conception of space)*
- <sup>3</sup> Cornelis van der Ven, *Space in Architecture ch.2 pg.9*
- <sup>4</sup> Cornelis van der Ven, *Space in Architecture ch.2 pg.11*
- <sup>5</sup> Cornelis van der Ven, *Space in Architecture ch.2 pg.9*
- <sup>6</sup> Cornelis van der Ven, *Space in Architecture ch.2 pg.9*
- <sup>7</sup> Arthur Fairbanks, *First Philosophers of Greece; Anaximandros pg.14 dox. 277. (Translation of Aetius of Antioch’s commentary on the boundless.)*
- <sup>8</sup> John Palmer, *Parmenides and Presocratic Philosophy ch.4; The Cosmology fr.10 (Translation of the tenth fragment of Parmenides proem “On Nature”).*
- <sup>9</sup> Hugh G. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod, the Humeric hymns and Homeric; The Works of Hesiod ch.5 The Theogony ll.750-766. (Translation of Hesiod’s Theogony)*
- <sup>10</sup> Anna Manchini, *Maat Revealed, Philosophy of Justice in Ancient Egypt ch.3 an actual observation of the scene p.48*
- <sup>11</sup> Arthur Fairbanks, *First Philosophers of Greece; The Eleatic School: Parmenides pg.93 (translation of Parmenides proem “On Nature” ll.60)*
- <sup>12</sup> Arthur Fairbanks, *First Philosophers of Greece; The Eleatic School: Parmenides pg.95 (translation of Parmenides proem “On Nature” ll.85)*
- <sup>13</sup> Daniel W. Graham, *Heraclitus entry in Stanford Encyclopedia, ch.3, 4 and 5 (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heraclitus/>)*
- <sup>14</sup> John Palmer, *Parmenides entry in Stanford Encyclopedia, ch.3.1 The Strict Monist interpretation.,. Citing William K. C. Guthrie, A History of Greek Philosophy: Vol.2, The Presocratic Tradition, from Parmenides to Democritus ch.1A.3 Parmenide, A central problem pg.4-5 (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/parmenides/>)*

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- <sup>15</sup> Arthur Fairbanks, *First Philosophers of Greece; The Eleatic School: Parmenides* pg.97 (translation of Parmenides proem "On Nature" ll.105)
- <sup>16</sup> Daud Sutton, *Islamic Design: A Genius for Geometry, ch.2 of Adam Tetlow's Designa: Technical Secrets of the Traditional Visual Arts.* pg.67-69
- <sup>17</sup> Donald Zeyl & Barbara Sattler, *Plato's Timaeus* entry in *Stanford Encyclopedia* ch.5, *Being and Becoming.* (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-timaeus/>)
- <sup>18</sup> Alan Watts, *Eastern Wisdom, Modern Life: Collected Talks:1960-1969.* pg.195, (transcript from lecture "Democracy in the Kingdom of Heaven.")
- <sup>19</sup> Richard D. Archer-Hind, *The Timaeus of Plato* pg.119 (translation of Plato's Timaeus)
- <sup>20</sup> Joseph Campbell, *Quote from transcript of lecture held in Chichicastenango, Guatemala. (also; The Power of Myth* pg..53-54.)
- <sup>21</sup> James Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a world in motion* ch.2.1 Pantheism pg.82 Quoting Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night: A Study of Ancient Mexican Poetry and Symbolism* pg.65
- <sup>22</sup> James Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a world in motion" Ch.1 Teotl* Pg.33 and Elizabeth Boone Hill *The Aztec World* pg.105
- <sup>23</sup> Octavio Paz, *The Other Mexico: Critique of the Pyramid* pg.81-82
- <sup>24</sup> Cornelis van der Ven, *Space in Architecture* ch.6 *Metaphysical intuition and the content of form* pg.35-42 (Discussing Space in Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauers aesthetics, (Hierarchy of the arts.))
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- <sup>26</sup> John Bierhost, *Ballads of the Lords of New Spain* pg.127 (translation of Nezahualcoyotl, *The Flower Songs.* (referring to reality as a painting))
- <sup>27</sup> Daniel W. Graham, *Heraclitus* entry in *Stanford Encyclopedia* Ch.3.1 Flux, (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heraclitus/>) based on Selby-Bigge, *A Treatise of Human Nature* by David Hume pg.256-258
- <sup>28</sup> Alan Watts, *Tao: The Watercourse Way*
- <sup>29</sup> *The Holy Bible, King James Version, ch.1:2 Genesis.* (just before the light turns on.)
- <sup>30</sup> Alan Watts, *The Wisdom of Insecurity* pg.40-41 (Closing comment on Shakespeare's poetry in Prospero's speech, *The Tempest.* used as introduction.)