

On Pandit Pran Nath (1918-1996)

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There is a short glossary at the end of the first section. Names of scale tones are in caps. Western note names assume C as the tonic, e.g. C D E F G A B c. Appreciation is due La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela for overseeing the musical knowledge here (not to mention sponsoring Guruji in New York).

When the ragas are starred, specific recordings are referred to. There is a discography after the glossary.

In the early Seventies, Guruji's usual vocal tone was round, completely unforced in the lower range (only occasionally raspy); only occasionally cutting as he rose to high SA. His intonation, vocal quality were beyond compare.

He would pour the raga out like a physically massive storyteller; his production was speech-like, not colorlessly pure. It was always earthy, not precious—a certain roughness of speech.

Visceral qualities of the music had an effect. Guruji's occasional dwelling on tones in the low octave, as in Malkauns. A visceral sense of grounding or foundation.

Guruji told Young, you can't learn my style from records, you can't learn it unless I teach it to you. The technique and thought of his performances—some recollections.

1. the unforced vocal production in the low range comes from developing the voice at full strength and then easing off.
2. Guruji had absolute pitch — in a master class at Harrison St., he sang *a capella*, then brought the tamburas in, and they were on the SA he was on.
3. in a descending melodic shape, a descending *mind*, accenting the beginning of a descending slide — a technique especially used in Kirana — *Darbari *alap*

4. exposition of the raga: the pitches are successively involved in the melodic shapes in ascending order — Guruji hides the tone to be introduced in the melodic shape at first use, so that the audience has heard it before they are aware of its use — discrete change across the perceptual threshold
5. in Hindustani music, the first note is supposed to prefigure the entire performance, which unfolds from it — in our terms, the way SA is produced and ornamented.
6. resting on a scale tone, usually in the lower octave, SHUDDH NI below SA, shaping melody as if to tonicize NI, then revealing the tonal center as SA (*Yaman, *Todi)
7. ascending as expected to PA, but passing right through it to KOMAL DHA — the surprise
8. the yodel-like upward break at the end of an intense sustained high tone, SA — *gitkiri*
9. the use of the lower octave, gliding like a rudra vina and dropping to *kuraj*, conveying a visceral sense of being completed or grounded — Malkauns
10. I heard him run the descending scale as if it were being strummed on sympathetic strings — Harrison Street, Multani, 1980?
11. a late morning performance at Harrsion St. — Guruji sang a drone (tambura) pitch, SA or PA, in a way that gave the impression of resonance like a sarangi, a shimmer — a microtonal *andolan*? — I associated the sight of silver with it (around 1980)
12. in live performance, an ascending *mind* would make you feel like it was lifting your virtual torso from where you were sitting. two examples from *Darbari: in the lower octave, his ascending *mind* in *ahkar* from MA to SA — in the middle octave, his ascending *mind* from PA to upper SA
13. In the *drut* he would demonstrate just enough tricky syncopation to show that he could do it.

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*Bhairava 19 V 1974

Guruji draws entirely different moods as he brings MA, PA, DHA, NI into the melodic shapes. He conjures up

—joy

—pensiveness, sublimated moroseness

—a “zingy” flavor

When he introduces NI, the theme descends to GA or RE — the “zingy” flavor of Ab, F, E, F, Ab, B, c, B, Ab, F (C/G drone).

[the flavor reminds me of Ram Narayan’s descending theme in the *gat*, *Todi, from SA to RE — although the intervals are quite different]

Singing on the pentachord from PA to SA: GA, MA, PA, lullaby-like, vulnerable, intimate joy [Indian writers say tender adoration — the shape not typical because DHA is the vadi of Bhairava] — then descend to SA through KOMAL RE, the touch of the exotic or macabre. Near the end of the performance.

Hindustani music, an inexplicable inspiration. The carefully thought-out techniques to make the music intimate, uncanny, cosmic. (Resonance and scale choices.) Conjuring up joy, offering the vicarious experience of [or vicarious return to] grief, a pensive emotional flavor, a zingy emotional flavor.

To experience the emotions of an occurrence at one remove from it.

Vicarious

To aestheticize the emotion, detach it from the jolting occasion.

Sublimated

The whole question of artistic use of the eerie, uncanny, sombre, morose, morbid, macabre — which is central in Hindu mythology. It is involving, not estranging, if it is sublimated [done with *acceptance*] — excluding resentment and ridicule.

Why does the vicarious encounter of grief conjured up with tones have a healing, remedying effect? [this function is intended in traditional music, characteristically]

Our emotion makes us real, and deep, and we want to re-experience it as a re-commitment to our depth. (And as a way of mastering or absorbing a loss or injury.)

The evoked joy is elicited, is real, not aestheticized.

A joy that heals despair and grief.

In *Asavari, Guruji's performance is profoundly mastered in terms of system and technique. Yet he stays close to the intonation of speech, chant, the storyteller. An ancient sound. He never turns himself into a musical instrument. He never leaves the intonation of speech, chant, storytelling.

His *ahkar tans* are usually offhand. But he drives it in the *drut* of *Todi.

It's about developing the feelings, so that there is a reserve in other aspects. He shows the boogie beat or groove and then drops it. He doesn't want getting in a groove, propulsion by instinct, to be what it is about. His intelligence is always on.

Guruji had many strategies of melodic exposition which made his sound subtle and uncanny. But what really mattered was beyond the definable techniques.

Glossary [bracketed is pronunciation]

gharana *family, style, school*

drupad "*chanted*" performance

khayal "*imagination,*" improvisation which develops the raga

Purabanga [*purvanga*] lower tetrachord

Uttaranga [*utterang*] upper tetrachord

kuraj [*courage*] any SA; lowest SA; lowest octave

Mandhra [*mandra*] lower octave

Madhya *middle octave*

Tar *upper octave*

lay *tempo*

arohe [*aro*] *ascending scale*

avrohe [*avro*] *descending scale*

vadi *melodically dominant scale tone*

samvadi *melodically supporting scale tone*

Sargam *solfeggio*

asthayi [*astay*] *first verse of song, lower tetrachord*

antara [*antra*] *second verse, introduce upper tetrachord, and express the inner feeling of the raga*

alap *first section of performance*

unmeasured beginning of alap nom tom style (drupad); avahan style (khayal, sung in ahkar)

slow measured alap vilampit

madhyalay [*madyalay*] *later section, measured medium tempo*

drut *last section, rapid*

gat *in instrumental music, measured later section*

ahkar *melisma on "ah"*

mind [*meend*] *sliding*

lehak [*layhok*] *winding*

andolan *swinging between tones*

gitkiri *voice break*

tan *a pitch sequence in tempo, or "run"*

sargam tans *tans on sargams*

ahkar tans *tans on "ah"*

bol tans *tans on tabla mnemonics*

unpublished

19 V 74 NYC

Pandit Pran Nath

Raga Bhairava

K. Paramjyoti - tabla

discography

Earth Groove (Bhupali, Asavari) Douglas SD784 (1968)

Pandit Pran Nath (Yaman Kalyan, Punjabi Burva) Shandar 10007
(1972)

Ragas of Morning and Night (Todi, Darbari) Gramavision 18-7018-7
(1986)

Masters of Lahore and Bengal from the 1930's and 1940's [label
unknown]

inde du nord (Ram Narayan—Shuddh Todi, Marva) disques BAM LD
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I was beside myself for days after hearing *Bhairava 19 V 1974.

Once one has been seized up
Without a part left over,
Not a toe, not a finger, and used,
Used utterly, in the sun's conflagrations ...

What is the remedy?

Sylvia Plath

The sense that there was this supremely intelligent strategy in back of his invocation of your appreciation of poignancy and exaltation.

For his students, who were career musicians, the question was how was it musically possible. My question is, how was it humanly possible?

Pandit Pran Nath was more fully realized than blues musicians—no less honor to them—but he had an advantage of context. He did not have to practice an “illicit” music while situated socially below a hostile majority. (Although his parents threw him out at 13 for wanting to be a musician.) He was “at home,” in his own country, his own tradition, and the musical vocation entailed a comprehensive “yogic” discipline which is not expected in the West. The European modernist project of annulling tradition was not an issue in his landscape.

All the same, he departed the expected Hindustani practice to the point where he was alone (and not universally beloved) in his originality.

Guruji went to strange emotional places, already familiar in his native culture, which the West would call surrealistic or like an inexplicable dream. But instead of being odd in an estranging way, it involved you; he forcibly confronted you with your own appreciation of emotion, poignancy, and exaltation. It took you into yourself and showed you that you have sensibilities, and nobility, you did not know about.

A sensibility of poignancy and exaltation. Other Hindustani singers are great entertainers. Guruji’s job description was: to awaken your true self. The most remarkable thing is that he chose the path of probing people emotionally, reaching them in an earthy and basic way and yet with an underlying strategy of the highest intelligence. He channeled his incredible technique into emotional confrontation, into involving us emotionally.

Why did Guruji want to elicit our “humanity”? Where did Guruji’s capacity to elicit [awaken, vivify] our “humanity” come from?

It brings us up against the word ‘**humanity**’. The usage is colloquial. A biological metaphor for “the dignity of the person,” the object of the greatest phobia and hatred in the West. (Even as the West’s jeering

cultural leaders demand that they and theirs be treated with the utmost graciousness.) This discussion will not be grounded until ‘humanity’ has been semantically validated, or replaced with literal language.

The realm of the performance honors real emotion, honors self-respect. When a communication conveys this, it is awesome to the receptive listener. We are inherently *oriented* — so that a realm of self-respect and emotional honesty, a realm without self-masking, evokes awe. A more **valid/real** sensibility/consciousness. How do the meanings of ‘valid’ and ‘real’ relate in this context? “The truth/reality of one’s self and of one’s proper future.” When another person conveys this to me—dissolves my pretense with myself—I experience that person as having the advantage of me.

Was it Pandit Pran Nath’s achievement precisely to take people into themselves and show them that they had sensibilities and heights which were latent, which they did not suspect? The music lets you regain, revivifies, a feeling which you lost access to. Hence it is predicated on his continuity with other people. Hence it imagines that there would be *a way of life* that honors real emotion, that is self-respecting.

I was sitting in the Tishman Auditorium at the New School (fall 1970) before Guruji walked on stage. A young man was sitting next to me and I had a copy of the latest Monthly Review (Stalinism for Fabians) and may have been browsing it. We fell into a conversation, finding that we both sympathized with the publication, and he cut it short by saying “it’s impossible to think about that here.”

But if most people ideally should be serfs and philistines, what is the music’s promise? Let there be an aristocracy of people who find themselves: even these people are not aloof from society all the time, and have to be recalled to themselves. And surely there are people who are prevented from doing what they should by mundane burdens. To separate “inspiration” and “social engineering” is to condemn people to never have anything but isolated glimpses of the best of themselves.

This is America, and people don’t take thirty or forty years of unpaid leave to pursue “matters of principle.” And yet, as I try to tell my associates, you can’t understand a matter of principle by browsing it like a Sunday supplement article. You have to be engrossed in it, to work for hundreds of hours on it.

To be in Guruji's audience was to encounter that which has the advantage of you. Inspiration beyond anything you ever expected to know in your life. An encounter with something that solves a problem for you, that you would not have scripted. It opens a door intellectually, vivifies the life-tone. Being in the presence of such inspiration and dedication is humbling. I had a "take" that I must be near the end of my life since I am encountering a greater reality, something there is no precedent for in everyday life. Since I am blessed with something so much finer than the usual, something so far from the present public norm.

What is it worth to be instructed in feeling, to be opened up emotionally in a sensitive, conducive way?

What is it worth to be taken into yourself and shown that you had sensibilities and heights which were latent, which you did not suspect?

What is it worth to renew your acquaintance with joy?

What is it worth to be confronted with the degree to which you are short-changed by the world around you (and by yourself)?

How many people have a power, to heal despair (or grief), which goes beyond personal complementation, being the soulmate of one other person? Or have a power to show where the truth/reality of one's self and proper future is?

Guruji challenged anyone, but probably the Westerner the most: you have short-changed yourself, the milieu has cheated you. The moment of regret or remorse for all the times you cheated yourself. The far greater consideration, how your native civilization cheated you.

Libby Flynt says that Indians think in terms of a perennial dichotomy between profane mundane life, and a person who refines self. Indians see a *perpetual* dichotomy between the profaneness of the mundane world and the inspiration and refinement of their music. The Pandit in India needs intoxication to be able to bear the mundane world—is happy only when singing.

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The individual in question has a personal intent and absorbs from elders and cohorts and is trained by mentors. There comes a point when the

mentor's mission no longer prevails; the student's intent takes over. The former student may continue to absorb from cohorts, now harnessing to a distinctive intent that which is absorbed. Acquisition from others may continue—the role of learning from others varies from case to case—but a new, distinctive intent prevails. The surfacing of the qualitatively new. (The reason we are talking about the intent or mission is not that it is “neutrally or abstractly new” but that it is valuable in the respects I have outlined above.) One may always be acquiring and harnessing ideas from others. Even so, everything is reorganized to serve a new intent, a new mission.

It starts with demanding what is noble from oneself. Not just the mechanical talent, the fast fingers. The aspiration to bring people to ennobling (or just deeper) feelings, feelings perhaps unknown to them. Even as Guruji's achievement was predicated on his continuity with other people, there was also a discontinuity. Other people would not have chosen, or found, his path of nobility, nor could they have. Here was a summit of achievement as a musical performer unreachable for anyone else.

The new, distinctive intent emerges somewhat subtly, since it emerges while the individual is being familiarized and taught, since it only gains mastery after an apprenticeship. Nevertheless, it comes to outrank the precedents and to transform what it, and the precedents, mean for us. A qualitative novelty confronts us which has the advantage of us. It is unsatisfying to explain it as the product of social influences, because it goes precisely where those social influences did not go. It does what nobody asked for.

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During his apprenticeship, Pandit Pran Nath obviously absorbed content from others, his mentors and cohorts. (i) Does there come a point where his content comes entirely from him? (ii) Does he receive energy from a (non-social) outside after he establishes himself as an original?

“The normative outlook” in this civilization—that is, naturalism-secularism—must answer (i) yes, (ii) no. The normative outlook has it that Guruji's artistic capabilities were entirely within him. They were extinguished when he expired.

The normative outlook, I must say, becomes a difficulty to itself. If we speak of *cultures*, they are a matter of the transmission of meaning. But the normative outlook has no more of an ontological analytic of the transmission of meaning than it does of the subjectivity of the subject. Transmission of meaning is a transpersonal subjectivity, and as such, the normative outlook does not and cannot acknowledge it. The only way it understands communication is as in information theory, as the physics of the notation-token.

For all that, Indian music is a collective achievement and an honorable one in the sense that any proficient performer will be worth hearing. But even if the normative outlook allowed us to invoke cultures as explanations, it would not explain Guruji. At some point, Pandit Pran Nath outstripped his cultural influences. He projected a distinctive intent which could not be explained by cultural influences.

Where do anyone's personalistic subjectivities come from? (The audience's receptivity, for example.) Not from "**being**." (Not from **what-is** labelled as a *person* or *thing*, the way we label "nothing.") Might my personalistic subjectivities derive from what-is as part of a whole which I did nothing to earn, like my equilibrium with sunlight and air? If the normative outlook is the context, it's a misleading question. For the normative outlook, what-is is the totality of things, like Thales' water or Archimedes' universe packed with sand. Personalistic subjectivities are heterogeneous with sunlight and air. If what-is is supposed to encompass heterogeneities in this sense, then we are outside the normative outlook without an explanation of how we left it.

The normative outlook cannot address personalistic subjectivities as such. (Cf. Marvin Minsky's *The Society of Mind*. The normative outlook rebuffs personalistic subjectivities with slashing contempt. Again the normative outlook is a difficulty to itself.) But the normative outlook's informal verdict must be that personalistic subjectivities subsist where they manifest—inside the individual. My subjectivities may be molded from without, but they do not live outside me. (Except in my works and in particular my communicative works? That doesn't get us anywhere, since the normative outlook rebuffs the transmission of meaning with slashing contempt.)

The normative outlook accumulates difficulties for itself. The "gift" is inside the "gifted" individual. Then that individual has an unfathomable

advantage of the rest of us. If it all came from inside Guruji, he must be of a different order from the rest of us. Then aristocracy is a fixture of our collective existence. (The only reservation is that this aristocracy does not always enjoy success. See below.)

What about the socio-psychological axiom that says, nobody is an aristocrat by nature? Or the weaker axiom that says, if there are aristocrats by nature, they are randomly distributed? Does democracy require the former axiom? Does it require the latter—emphatically yes. If there is a systematic natural aristocracy, then democracy is at best an expedient lie, a scheme to co-opt restive masses.

All humans may be vaguely similar, but in detail, all are not the same. Some people display an incontestable, unfathomable advantage over others—although perhaps in a different dimension in every case of such an advantage. The normative outlook doesn't know what to do with incontestable advantages and their rebuke to democracy.

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Again we speak of Pandit Pran Nath as a graduated apprentice, age 31. Does his unique intent come from a non-social **outside**? **The normative perspective must give the question a vehemently negative answer. After all, if such an “outside” were straightforwardly evident, then the modern world-picture would have accounted for it in the course of the day's work. Philosophers would be able to tell us the reality-type of this “outside” without further ado, without departing from their standard themes. The point is that there is no official exposition of the demanded non-social outside from proximate evidence.**

The notion of the **outside** comes to us from exponents of religions. Religions rest on beliefs from ancient times—when people's picture of the cosmos was necessarily different from what it is now. A god: a man who sits on a chair in the sky and happens to be immortal and incorporeal. (Who was given a promotion to infinity by the Latin Averroists, one jump ahead of the Inquisition.) A god: a unique monarch of the universe whose egoic impulses define goodness.

Ancient peoples, being more helpless in the world than we are, being unable to accommodate sophisticated social legitimation, submitted to

their pictorial fantasies. Five major religions arose, Islam being the last, and then the creation of major religions stopped. People won't listen to spiritual speculation from sources other than these religions, because the legitimation of state actions rests on *the authority of familiarity*. *Political legitimation rests on locked-in ideologies*. The god-picture of religion was never a rational speculation. It was always wishful thinking.

I shall not pretend that the earth is flat and the center of the universe and that a man with a beard could sit on a chair in the sky forever and all the rest of it. To be more blunt, it is with atomic bombs that the "holy" nations of India and Pakistan menace each other. I require that we encounter modernity at its eye-level, not below it, and draw on evidence, not legend. For me, it is not acceptable to switch from physics to Hinduism and back to physics as the occasion dictates. That is equivalent to turning quaintness on and off like a light switch.

All the while, there is a profound lesson on the sidelines of this discussion. The life-world is filled with commonplaces, like personalistic subjectivities, like choice-making, like the transmission of meaning, which the normative outlook rebuffs with slashing contempt. As we said, the normative outlook becomes a difficulty to itself. We propose to open doors. The normative outlook closes them. We have to give the life-world its due: for my reflections on Pandit Pran Nath to be compelling.

What did I say above? "If such an 'outside' were straightforwardly evident, then the modern world-picture would have accounted for it in the course of the day's work. Philosophers would be able to tell us the reality-type of this 'outside' without further ado, without departing from their standard themes." **I retract that.** The normative outlook viciously rebuffs lived experience. Nothing is nearer to me than the escape route—and yet modern Western civilization extirpates it with hysterical frenzy.

As a rhetorical device, I am pretending to be more baffled than I am. I am addressing religious notions and scientific notions argumentatively because they are implanted in the respective social circles in which Guruji moved and to which his public belongs.

The normative outlook becomes a difficulty to itself in another way. Rejection of a non-social outside implies that "the judge" of one's

solitary endeavors is inside oneself. It is all about **one's counsel with oneself**. But then we trip over the normative outlook's commitment to mundane sociality. If the person judging me is merely myself, the normative outlook appraises "the judge" to be reclusive, schizoid, trivial and transitory.

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What the normative outlook answers negatively would have been answered affirmatively by Pandit Pran Nath. My deliberately vague formulations might have annoyed him, because he had no reservations about being antique intellectually as well as musically. **He said that one sings for God. He said that he could not have performed as he did without the blessings of the saints.** Because Pran Nath's circle puts traditional notions of a God and saints into play, I have to reply in ways which I would say are concessionary in other contexts.

Pran Nath could believe what he did because he never set himself the task of confronting modern science. (And because his native culture did not drive him to the brend critique—see the note at the end.)

Pran Nath thought his music worshipped God. Very well, J. S. Bach would have said the same thing. And so would Hindemith. Pran Nath believed that music possessed an absolute truth. Then J. S. Bach's music would be an absolute truth.

The catch is that I have no respect for J. S. Bach. Or for Hindemith. At best, common-practice music constitutes a poisoned experiment. Common-practice music was Pran Nath's mortal enemy—if he had only known what I know about musicology! Pran Nath only had to learn good things. I'm from the West, and from an avant-garde center; I had to learn European serious music and modernism.

One doesn't "create" for God. It is preposterous that an infinite god would be concerned with human pastimes such as music. The notion that human ears would matter to the infinite god (why not a dog's ears?) is preposterous. And how would this infinite god sort out Pran Nath and Bach? Pran Nath's music was intersubjectively significant because it awakened dignity among those whose "emotional faculties" were human. (It sublimated that which was human). To have "wider

significance,” Pran Nath’s music needs a palpable audience, not a divine audience.

Why did Pandit Pran Nath have the advantage of us? Perhaps someone will say, because the god favored him. But does that explain anything? Presumably Pandit Pran Nath rubbed shoulders with many people who wanted the god’s blessings. Why did the blessings go to Pandit Pran Nath? He exhibited not so much the mandate of a religion which everyone shared, as *a personal willfulness which remained controversial*.

I admire anyone who is as unusual as Pandit Pran Nath was and manages to avoid a tragic life. Pandit Pran Nath was comfortable, lionized, known around the world. But it wasn’t all glory, not by a long shot. To date, he has three records. He is known only to a thin layer of the cognoscenti. And he was overtaken by severe illnesses, beginning with the heart attack of 1978, so that he could not give the best account of himself in the last phase of his career.

If the path of nobility carries penalties, the explanation that the god mandated those penalties for Pandit Pran Nath is not satisfying. If what he did was good, why does the god arrange it so that it remains obscure? What good purpose did Pandit Pran Nath’s decline serve?

I don’t want to be this concessionary. Why does the **outside** have to be a man on a chair in the sky who is immortal and unique? (Recall that Pran Nath was a polytheist.) Astrophysics: our universe is probably an experiment by a committee of extra-terrestrial scientists. Why can’t the controllers be a committee of extra-terrestrial scientists? As somebody said, at least the committee of extra-terrestrial scientists could become a testable hypothesis. The infinite man on the chair in the sky is scientifically worthless. But as long as there is not a shred of positive evidence for any of it, none of these speculations are worthy of being argued here. (I leave the debate over the extra-terrestrial scientists to the astrophysics journals.)

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The myth for children is that everyone succeeds precisely in proportion to his or her submitted contribution. In fact, when an applauded public figure lives in good faith and genuinely contributes, I consider that extremely atypical. If a person is famous and actually has something to

say, it is extremely atypical. Pandit Pran Nath, above all, exemplified that it can happen.

Part of Pran Nath's specialness was that he was a *naga* in a cave temple from age 26 to age 31, "singing for God." In the West, successful people campaign for success their entire working lives; they don't have long episodes of refusing success. In 1949, Pran Nath's guru Abdul Wahid Khan instructed him to go back into the world, and he did. His contribution wouldn't have been the same without the public dimension. It wouldn't have been a participatory occasion, a celebration. His native culture didn't think in terms of making home recordings and storing them for decades. It's a little like being a dancer; you can't write a dance and put it in the drawer for posterity. If a dancer is not seen live, then the dance was not realized. Success (limited as it was) was a constituent of Pran Nath's contribution.

Hindustani music is an honorable community. So is rhythm and blues. Any proficient performer will be worth hearing. But it may happen that the master resides in a milieu in which crowd-pleasers and hustlers predominate numerically. Another regrettable neighbor is inflicted on the master by modern art, namely the hollow intimidator. But Pandit Pran Nath lived in the midst of a disaster in New York which is of a different order—although he never seemed to be aware of it, being sheltered by his hosts as he was. A culture which derides dignity—a contest to see who can be the most sordid and degraded. Up the street, the Ramones were singing "beat the brat with a baseball bat."

From my vantage-point, the person who has something to say and is also a success is a thoroughly baffling manifestation. All the more so if that person can be impervious to the chorus of derision, the immersion in the sordid, which came after flower power in New York.

Pandit Pran Nath could disregard punk as long as his sponsors were able to assemble audiences for him. If there were those who viewed Pandit Pran Nath and punk as interchangeable entertainments of an evening, that is troubling—but Guruji could remain unaware of it.

If "enlightenment" is utterly discontinuous with everyday life, then presumably everyday life crushes people. Guruji did not address this problem: outside of professional musicianship and the reminder which a performance furnishes to the passive audience.

As for the masters known to us, how do they manage the conjunction of greatness and success? How can a master be cheerfully impervious to the milieu? They pour themselves into specialization. They play to an identified role. The role is already there, and they step into it. They offer themselves to the public in a single dimension. In fact, the combination of accomplishment in one dimension with worldly status is what is meant by being “an adult.” All the while, these figures block out most of the challenges implicit in the culture.

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The myth for children is that everyone succeeds precisely in proportion to his or her worth, but as I said, it is thoroughly baffling to me when anyone who has something to say gains success. I want to speak about how matters appear from my vantage-point. It is outside my personal experience to be rewarded commensurately for doing something worth doing. I speak for a social debris whose “creating” does not translate into public reward or even a cogent public identity. Of course, there is an easy reply: that we the debris have done nothing worthy of reward.

It was not Gururji’s problem; but he had answers for the question “why?”—and we may ponder our problem in that light. If one has something worth doing, if one has something to say, and one cannot gain recognition for it, should you do it, and if so, why? Gururji would say, you do it for God. Again, to respond, I have to be concessionary.

Wittgenstein wrote one of his posthumous books, *Philosophical Grammar*, for God, he says. (Wittgenstein did not have the concept of one’s counsel with oneself.) Is “doing it for God,” a slogan which we find in sophisticates like Wittgenstein and Rahner, prefigured by religious petition and sacrifice? It starts as an irrational destruction of produce to gain a favor from Heaven, and ends as a far more vague offering to a *judge* who is outside me and outside humanity. (Actually, sacrifice is far more grim than that, there is a mortal spilling of blood to expiate sin—we don’t have to pursue it that far.) For the normative outlook, this offering to the god is absurd, as it was absurd of the Egyptians to build pyramids for the next life. That leaves the judge of one’s solitary endeavors as oneself. But (as I said) if the person above myself is merely I, the normative outlook appraises “the judge” to be reclusive, schizoid, trivial and transitory.

Marx wanted to overcome solipsistic encapsulation in the 1844 *Manuscripts* by saying that what seems to be the most private and idiosyncratic quest proves to be the most important for *society*. As always, Marx rotates the payoff from life after death to the reality-types “society” and “future.”

But what is the point of saying that my work will be found vitally necessary by people a thousand years from now? Other people regard my claim as presumptuous and preposterous. And how do I know that I want to do the people one thousand years from now a favor? Pandit Pran Nath said, don't release my records in India, they don't deserve them. As for Marx, he was a humanist-fetishist; he did not conceive the option of siding with attacking Martians. But we can—you can do it for the committee of extra-terrestrial scientists, for example. But how do you know what impresses the committee, where do you go to get your grade?

I know what my answer is. Notwithstanding that we are dependent on each other, each of us is alone anyway, intractably so. If you didn't already know it, you will when the doctor tells you that you are incurably ill. As adults we discover that we have separate fates, even if we wish we didn't. When one finally meets the sensitive, aware people, one discovers to one's shock that personal perspectives do not merge. The perspectives of the sensitive, aware people remain disunited. (Seemingly because of the way temperaments play out in ideologies.)

If one “creates” and there is no public applause, that only highlights the condition we are in anyway. I will never sit across from another person who is as dedicated as I am to what I find worth doing. When I give my best, people are pointedly unconvinced by it—finding it baffling, or wrong-headed and mischievous. The work is not just boring and pointless to other people. In many cases, it would be disapproved. I have no work that is worth doing that unites me with other people. Every work that is worth doing isolates me.

For me, the problem solves itself; the answer is easy. Negligibly little in this public arena is healing or dignifying or ennobling—in fact, these ideals are derided to death in our milieu. (To be precise, the culture's high priests deride human dignity—while demanding that others extend the utmost courtesy to them and theirs.) The content which is my joy in life is rebuffed by the public, or cannot be shared with the public for one reason or another. If I confined myself to what could be popular, there

would be nothing healing or dignifying or ennobling in my life. If I refuse to hate myself and destroy myself, then I must devote myself to unrecognized work.

Nothing that is important to me, nothing I want to do, is socially applauded, at least not commensurately, not enough to provide a livelihood. If I didn't do what was not recognized, then there would be no time when I worked for my own satisfaction and euphoria.

If one made conviviality or fellowship the test of how one would occupy oneself, one would not do anything worthwhile. One must work alone—all the more, with respect to that which has to be kept in confidence. One does it for oneself, to mold, to cultivate oneself. One is self-occupied because one is not being recruited for anything worth doing.

As well, there are profound reasons for doing the best you can, for extending yourself. Even if nobody asks you to, even if you are not applauded—I do not rule out having to store work for years because the time has not come to make it public. Precisely because you go where “one shouldn't go,” you have to be able to give the best account of yourself. You cannot afford to know yourself to be a panderer, or to be careless, irresponsible. You need the self-assurance, you need to stand in confidence—you need to be reconciled with yourself.

I need to be able to say, ““I'm doing the best I can, I'm not playing to approval”—*and I hope it means something to somebody besides me.* One should try to inch one's way forward in unwelcoming circumstances—granting that the work can only be inserted in the record by insinuation, indirection, and so forth. What does it mean when one fights to get something in the record in spite of its not being understood and not being approved?

It is a tribute to the searing power of truth, to the truth that burns like a branding iron. When one utters the truth, one changes the world unilaterally. (As if one had left state secrets on a seat in the subway. The truth in that case being that the state holds those things secret.) It is quite distinct from seeking to **exchange** ideas with people. “I choose to talk at you; I do not wish you to talk to me.” Of course the renunciation of the exchange of ideas assumes the worst case—but that may be all the situation warrants.

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Postscript: the brend theory

A milieu in which art is traditional and aristocratic—which offers, for example, a vicarious encounter of grief conjured up with tones, and thereby a healing or remediation—does not push us in the direction of the brend critique. Only when the European avant-garde empties art out do we start toward the brend criticism. Only then do we notice that the value I ascribe to art depends on its pleasing me, or affording me a rewarding experience which is self-complete (never mind if it impels me to behave in some manner afterwards). Then there is something out of whack with embodying what pleases me in an object and exchanging it. There is something out of whack with pouring my imagination into inherited forms. There is something out of whack with the injunction to “purchase and consume my self-expression to be yourself.”

Because of the complexity of sociality, there are borderline cases where the brend theory comes across as rigid. (Our desire for vicarious experience. Or architecture: the inescapability of collective taste or public taste.) Nevertheless, the brend theory remains the most important lesson which aesthetics refuses to learn—and it applies to traditional art even if the application is far more tangential than it is in art whose abusiveness has reached crisis proportions.