

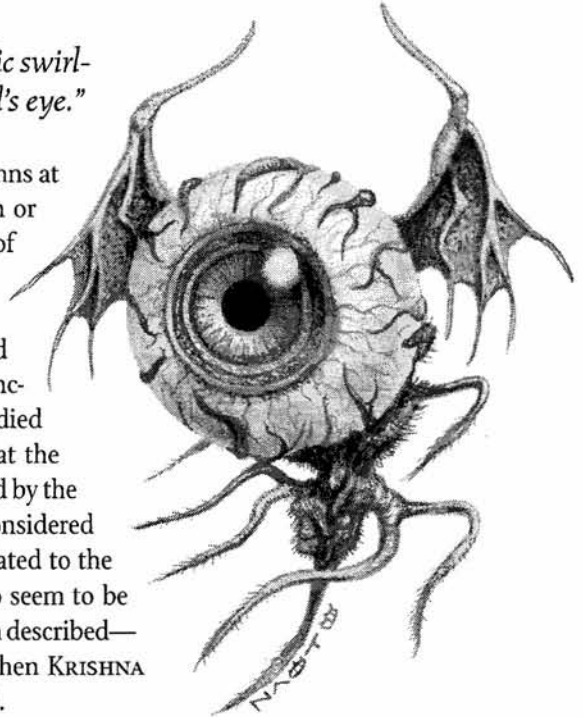


DISEMBODIED EYES AND DIVINE VISION

by JON HANNA

In my youth, I remember having been told that the psychedelic swirling puddle of oil on asphalt after it rained was called a "God's eye."

It has been "proposed that the 'disembodied eyes' [carved onto columns at Teotihuacan in Mexico] represent the visionary sight of the shaman or participant in an agape involving ingestion of a potion compounded of entheogenic mushrooms, morning glory seeds, or other plants with allied effects. This interpretation is based on the occurrence of mushrooms, flowers, and seeds in juxtaposition with the 'disembodied eyes'..." (OTT & WASSON 1983). The same article, perhaps less convincingly, presents a similar interpretation for the depiction of a disembodied eye on a gold ring from Crete (circa 1500 B.C.), by speculating that the Minoans might have had entheogenic rituals similar to those practiced by the Greeks. Artistic depictions of disembodied eyes have largely been considered to represent the "eye of God." Such vision may indeed be closely related to the experience produced by entheogenic plants, which can allow one to seem to be viewing the world through the eyes of God. This vantage point has been described—with psychedelic overtones—in Chapter 11 of the *Bhagavad Gita*, when KRISHNA allowed ARJUNA to see the world through his divine eye (see side-bar).



A CONTEMPORARY SYMBOL OF GOD'S EYE

Such a disembodied eye—referred to as "the eye of providence"—is included in the Great Seal of the United States. Created between 1776 and 1782, this symbol has the Latin phrase *Annuit Coeptis* above it, which has been translated to mean "It has favored our undertakings." The "It" referred to is symbolized by the eye, which is quite clearly the eye of God. At www.greatseal.com it is pointed out that the "[u]se of the eye in art forms as a natural symbol for an omniscient and ubiquitous deity was a well-established artistic convention in the eighteenth century (quite apart from the symbolism of any particular group)."



The DEFENSE ADVANCED RESEARCH PROJECTS AGENCY's Information Awareness Office—an Orwellian project of the U.S. government that spies on citizens under the guise of protecting us from terrorists—recently adapted the Great Seal in a disturbing manner. The eye, now casting a probing beam across the entire planet, is transformed from the eye of God into the eye of a snooping government. Below this is found the Latin phrase *Scientia est potentia* (knowledge is power). Big Brother is watching. After critics lambasted this oppressive logo, DARPA removed it from their web site.





ARJUNA SEES WITH THE DIVINE EYE

Excerpted from *Bhagvad Gita*
Chapter XI: The Yoga of the
Universal Form

[...]surely you cannot see Me with these gross eyes of yours; therefore I vouchsafe to you the divine eye. With this you behold My divine power of Yoga. ...Sri Krishna, the supreme Master of Yoga, having said thus, then revealed to Arjuna His supreme divine Form. Arjuna saw the supreme Deity possessing many mouths and eyes, presenting many a wonderful sight, decked with many divine ornaments, wielding many uplifted divine weapons, wearing divine garlands and clothes, besmeared all over with divine sandal pastes, full of wonders, infinite and having faces on all sides. If there be the effulgence of a thousand suns bursting forth all at once in the heavens, even that would hardly approach the splendor of the mighty Lord. Arjuna, then, saw in the person of that supreme Deity, comprised in one limb, the whole universe with its manifold divisions. Then, Arjuna, full of wonder and with the hairs standing on end, bowed his head to the divine Lord and with joined palms addressed Him...

THE FLIGHT OF DISEMBODIED SIGHT

Artist and mechanic KENNY "VON DUTCH" HOWARD, who pin-striped cars and motorcycles in the 1950s, is widely credited for introducing the "flying eyeball" into American art. According to VON DUTCH: "The flying eyeball originated with the Macedonian and Egyptian cultures about 5000 years ago. It was a symbol meaning 'the eye in the sky knows all and sees all.' I have always believed in reincarnation, and the eyeball was tied to that." (HAGERTY 2001). The symbol remains an icon of the 1950s and 1960s hot rod crowd. It has appeared in countless versions since then, reincarnated in the now infamous 1968 rock poster painted by RICK GRIFFIN for THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE performing at the Fillmore, and later used as a T-shirt logo for the absurd theatrical metal band GWAR, to name a couple of places that it has turned up.

Photographer ROBIN EDGAR believes that the "winged eye" is a composite that combines the "eye of God" symbol (said to represent solar eclipses) with the "winged disk" symbol (said to represent the streamers of the sun's corona that can appear during particular eclipses). EDGAR notes that the Egyptians, Mayans, Aztecs, and other ancient cultures all developed their own versions of the "winged eye" symbol (EDGAR 2003).

My whole body is covered with eyes:

Behold it!

Be without fear!

I see all around.

— Eskimo poem

PSYCHEDELIC EYE-SIGHT

There is no arguing that the entheogenic mind state can sometimes cause a psychonaut to feel as though he or she has the vantage point of a disembodied eye. R. GORDON WASSON remarked of the bemushroomed state:

"What I was seeing was more clearly seen than anything I had seen before. At last I was seeing with the eyes of the soul, not through the coarse lenses of my natural eyes. ...It is a curious sensation: with the speed of thought you are translated wherever you desire to be, and you are there, a disembodied eye, poised in space, seeing, not seen, invisible, incorporeal" (WASSON 1980).

And a 19-year-old psychonaut commented:

I got stoned on grass, and as I was about to go to sleep, I came completely awake and aware of my surroundings ...I felt as if my body were covered with eyes and I could see in all directions (TART 1971).

This writer goes on to describe what might be characterized as an out-of-body experience, with the deity-like vision of a disembodied eye floating away from the planet, out into the universe, and beyond. With regard to this state of mind, ketamine researcher KARL JANSEN has remarked:





[...]Some physical boundaries are arbitrary. One explanation is Bell's theorem which involves a hyper-space where all realities exist at a single point. If entry can be gained to the quantum sea, a person's awareness—the 'disembodied eye'—might travel through different 'realities' without the body itself going anywhere (JANSEN 1999).

The disembodied eye (or flying eye) has appeared repeatedly in modern psychedelic artists' works, including the art of JOHN W. ALLEN, L.J. ALTVATER, GOODVISION, ALEX GREY, NAOTO HATTORI, MARTINA HOFFMANN, MATI KLARWEIN, CAROLYN KLEEFELD, STEVEE POSTMAN, BRIAN MORIARTY, FREDERIC PARDO, and many others. The disembodied eye is not always depicted hovering in the sky (with or without wings). It has also been frequently shown with flames surrounding it, and less commonly floating in water. In whatever form it appears, it is clearly a prevalent symbol. But how often is the actual image of a disembodied eye seen while one is on a psychedelic, and what are the reasons that this might appear?

There has been some degree of study related to the common structures of geometric patterns that appear while one is under the influence of a psychedelic (KLÜVER 1966; FISCHER 1969; OSTER 1966). However, there hasn't been much published that categorizes and discusses specific complex symbols—like the eye—that may be common to psychoptic visions. Some investigation on the prevalence of eyes in such visions turned up a few accounts:

I've seen an eye in a pyramid, an eye in an open book, and eyes in fire—that sort of thing—all of which lacked apparent bodies. But I've never seen *just* a disembodied eye. — K. TROUT



I had an experience years ago on ayahuasca that involved a disembodied eye. It was during an early evening experience...I felt the vibration of the huasca rising in my

body and looked outside...in the sky to see in-between the clouds a roving eye looking for something. I knew that this was the eye of providence at the time and the eye was looking for me. It made me feel special to be allowed to be in that experience at that time in my life. — C.J. BARNABY



I was spiraling in toward a white light. Although I [was] focused primarily on the light, swirling around me was a distinct pattern made of nothing but eyeballs—seemingly an infinite number of them. — D.M.



Something lives in matter, or so says 2C-B. It has eyes, and a very Aztec-like pattern about it. I saw eyes everywhere, somewhat unsettling. They were always rolling back, but they were there. — A PSYCHONAUT

In some cases, although the eyes perceived are definite "other" in nature, they aren't necessarily representative of the eyes of God. Rather, they are part of some other discarnate entity:

"We have all heard
that the eye is a
window to the soul.
This is true. The open eye
is a symbol of awareness
or consciousness.
If it is repeated
endlessly,
you have
a symbol of
infinite awareness...
When you are in
the visionary world,
anything can grow an eye,
from the sky to the
stones at your feet.
This symbolizes the
recognition of our
presence by the greater
field of presence, which is
nature and cosmos,
inner and outer space."
— Alex Grey

I noticed something new to my experience of 2C-B [combined with MDMA] on this trip—entities! I was presented with closed-eye visions of strange creatures that looked like a cross between the type of animals that inhabit the deepest, darkest regions of the ocean floor (jellyfish, luminescent eel-like creatures, strange octopoids, etc.) and sci-fi style aliens, plus beings that looked remarkably like disembodied eyes. These beings did not seem to have the same sort of urgent sense of presence associated with them that I normally experience during tryptamine-mediated entity contact, however. I also perceived a scene rendered in Egyptian motifs in which several

humanoid beings that were apparently priests or shamans performed some sort of sacred ritual around a highly elaborate, ornate altar. Egyptian style symbology is something that I often encounter on 2C-B; the bees often send visions of ankhs, pyramids, eyes of Horus, and such dancing across the insides of my eyelids. — TREY





[On DMT] I noticed what seemed to be an opening into a large space, like looking through a cave opening to a starry sky. As I approached this I saw that resting in the opening was a large creature, with many arms, somewhat like an octopus, and all over the arms were eyes, mostly closed, as if the creature were asleep or slumbering. As I approached it the eyes opened and it/they became aware of me. It did not seem especially well-disposed towards me, as if it did not wish to be bothered by a mere human, and had the impression I wasn't going to get past it, so I did not try (MEYER 1993).

ART IMITATES LIFE OR LIFE IMITATES ART?

Why do disembodied eyes—or other common visions—appear while under the influence of a psychedelic? R. GORDON WASSON has conjectured that ancient Mexican art could have been influenced by visionary images seen while under the influence of entheogens (HOFMANN 1980). Yet might it not also be the other way around? From being in the environment of Mexico and viewing the local textiles before he consumed any psilocybin-containing mushrooms, perhaps WASSON's mind was "primed" to produce patterns similar to those that appeared on local rugs, cloth, and pottery. The

"imprinting" of certain symbols on one's mind is commonly reported by people who eat blotter art that has been decorated in a particular manner, who then see similar imagery when they are under the influence of the dose. Perhaps images of jaguars and snakes on ayahuasca occur because people have *heard* that ayahuasca causes these sorts of visions? The arena of mind that we enter while on psychedelics is of course influenced by what we have seen or heard prior to entering that state, and it is reasonable to think that those who view psychedelic art depicting disembodied eyes may be more likely to see such imagery in their own visions. And yet it is also possible that there is some archetypal imagery unique to certain visionary mind states that does not originate from an individual's personal memory. For myself, the sort of visions that springs forth following a smoked dose of DMT is totally "other." There is nothing that I am aware of in my memory that could produce this imagery. Teasing out what is memory and what is local to a particularly induced mind state could well be an impossible task. But cataloguing the specific symbols that appear may be useful nonetheless, to provide a yardstick of contemporary culture's inner visions. ☉

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