General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

From the mid-seventies through to the mid-eighties, Urgyen Sangharakshita led many seminars on a wide range of texts for invited groups of Order members and Mitras. These seminars were highly formative for the FWBO/Triratna as Sangharakshita opened up for the still very young community what it might mean to live a life in the Dharma.

The seminars were all recorded and later transcribed. Some of these transcriptions have been carefully checked and edited and are now available in book form. However, a great deal of material has so far remained unchecked and unedited and we want to make it available to people who wish to deepen their understanding of Sangharakshita's presentation of the Dharma.

How should one approach reading a seminar transcription from so long ago? Maybe the first thing to do is to vividly imagine the context. What year is it? Who is present? We then step into a world in which Sangharakshita is directly communicating the Dharma. Sometimes he is explaining a text, at other times he is responding to questions and we can see how the emergence of Dharma teachings in this context was a collaborative process, the teaching being drawn out by the questions people asked. Sometimes those questions were less to do with the text and arose more from the contemporary situation of the emerging new Buddhist movement.

Reading through the transcripts can be a bit like working as a miner, sifting through silt and rubble to find the real jewels. Sometimes the discussion is just a bit dull. Sometimes we see Sangharakshita trying to engage with the confusion of ideas many of us brought to Buddhism, confusion which can be reflected in the texts themselves. With brilliant flashes of clarity and understanding, we see him giving teachings in response that have since become an integral part of the Triratna Dharma landscape.

Not all Sangharakshita's ways of seeing things are palatable to modern tastes and outlook. At times some of the views captured in these transcripts express attitudes and ideas Triratna has acknowledged as unhelpful and which form no part of our teaching today. In encountering all of the ideas contained in over seventeen million words of Dharma investigation and exchange, we are each challenged to test what is said in the fire of our own practice and experience; and to talk over 'knotty points' with friends and teachers to better clarify our own understanding and, where we wish to, to decide to disagree.

We hope that over the next years more seminars will be checked and edited for a wider readership. In the meantime we hope that what you find here will inspire, stimulate, encourage - and challenge you in your practice of the Dharma and in understanding more deeply the approach of Urgyen Sangharakshita.

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhisthana Dharma Team

Sangharakshita in Seminar

Seminar Discussions Based on the Windhorse Publications Book
***"The Religion Of Art"* by Sangharakshita**

Held at Madhyamaloka, Birmingham, UK, in the Spring of 1999

Those Present: Urgyen Sangharakshita, Padmavajra, Padmavijaya, Ratnachuda, Kovida, Chintamani, Manjusvara, Suriyavamsa, Indrabodhi, Subhadassi, Shantigarbha, Padmakara, Paul Hatton.

[**Transcriber's Note:** *There were no voice prints made at the beginning of the tapes, and speakers did not announce their names before speaking (one of which is usually done on every seminar) so it has been very difficult at times for the transcriber to accurately identify who is speaking and at times I've guessed!. There may also be one or two people who are not named above who were present for the discussions. I hope this doesn't cause any difficulties with your study of this material* - Silabhadra]

[Day One
Tape One, Side One]

Sangharakshita: Ah, so what have we here? The wiring up's all been done I take it. I am going to start off with the longest question, because probably it is going to get the shortest reply! *[Laughter]* That you'll have to see. We may have supplementaries of course. It's from Chintamani, who says:

"At a recent university art faculty open day that I attended, the head of the faculty informed the assembled visitors that when preparing for an interview there prospective students should remember the motto: "No Dead Artists". By this he meant that whilst one could learn from the past, one's chief source of cultural inspiration should be contemporary artists, and he and his colleagues were not really interested in students who lived too much in the past. As he put it, "Impressionists and Post-Impressionists died a long time ago." Would you comment on this contemporary obsession with contemporariness, with the ideology of being true and relevant to one's time, and generally where you think this attitude might eventually take the culture?"

Well, in a way I am lost for words *[Laughter]*. I think the attitude of that - who was he? - head of faculty, really quite appalling. Mainly because he says "'**should** remember the motto: no dead artists" and "chief source of cultural inspiration **should** be contemporary artists". So how can one prescribe somebody's source of inspiration? Whether it's their chief inspiration or perhaps a subsidiary inspiration. I would have thought that inspiration, by its very nature, comes from almost anywhere, and that you can't lay down in advance from what, or which, source it will come. So it seems almost a sort of totalitarian approach. To say that, "Your inspiration shall come from such and such, otherwise you are not going to be taken seriously as students. We don't want you. Unless your inspiration comes from sources of which we approve, or which we think appropriate." And that seems to be absolutely shocking. Because well it is not even a question of your inspiration coming from artists, it might just come directly from nature. Sometimes artists are inspired directly by nature, at least sometimes. So how can you really lay down what the student's sources of inspiration should be? Whether in the visual arts or anywhere else. You might as well say to the novelist, "Oh, you mustn't be inspired by George Elliot or Jane Austen, you have to be inspired by" - well who is the latest - Anita Bruckner or somebody like that. Preferably female of course *[Laughter]*. So I think this is really quite shocking, the prescriptive nature of the statement. And also that he says "he and his colleagues were not really interested in students who live too much in the past." So this suggests, which I suspect is true in other departments or faculties, that the faculty members use students in order to follow their own particular agendas. They are not interested in the student himself, his interests, potential, of course his particular inspiration. They are interested in using the student to pursue **their** own particular agendas. So certainly it doesn't seem to be a student-oriented art education in this case. It seems to be a faculty-

oriented art research project probably, where the student is perhaps just a regrettable necessity. You teach as a means of earning a living while you get on with your own work. So your students have to be subordinated to your project. So I'm really lost for words. Oh yes, there is another point here, "One could **learn** from the past but one's chief source of inspiration should be contemporary artists." So there is a sort of distinction being made here between learning and being inspired by. Can you really **learn** from an artist by whom you are not at least moved, if not inspired? It suggests that learning from another artist is just a question almost of technical expertise. Or have I got it completely wrong? *[Laughter]*

Chintamani: I think probably what he meant was that one could draw on general lessons from the past. But it wasn't that clear actually, but I think the underlying assumption is that we are of a particular time and therefore in order to be relevant to that time and to express that time one has to learn from people who are also more or less in that time; that people who went before, whilst interesting might/may be purveying general lessons, or of the previous times, are no longer relevant to our time.

Sangharakshita: Because I say it is not just a question of learning general lessons from them. If they are great artists, even of the past you are inspired by them if you are at all sensitive. The fact that you are inspired by great artists of the past doesn't mean that you can't use that inspiration in such a way that you are relevant, if relevancy is required, to the contemporary situation.

So if anyone continues down along that road, well getting more and more contemporary and less and less inspired by the past, and losing all sense of tradition, well I am afraid you will end up with a rather dreadful cul-de-sac. In fact I think some contemporary artists are already there, very much so, from what I can judge. Those that I read about in the papers anyway.

Kovida: It seems also a very narrow view of the teacher as well. Ibsen said that an artist is always fifty years ahead of his time. So how can one be relevant for one's own time if one is actually being inspired in a way that means you're ahead of.....

Sangharakshita: Yes, I think you are more likely to be ahead of your time if you are inspired by the past, paradoxically. Yes. Any comments on this whole issue from those who have some experience of art schools?

Padmavijaya: I would have thought that his point was rhetorical rather than literal. I would have thought he was just making the point that we don't want people coming in painting Expressionist paintings as though nothing has changed since the 19th Century. Which is what at A level or O levels of education you do get taught styles from this period or that period, and so when people come into higher education they come in with the sort of idea of how art should be made, which is conditioned by, or which is determined by what was done in the 19th century or the 1920's. I think the point is a fair one although overblown, that you should make work that does reflect the fact that you live in this society now.

Sangharakshita: But that doesn't mean that you can't derive your inspiration from the past.

Padmavijaya: No, no.

Sangharakshita: And he seems to be precluding that, quite literally.

Padmavijaya: But I wonder if it's perhaps a mistaken point, that he is just saying "don't paint like the Impressionists"'.

Chintamani Why not? *[Laughter]*

Padmavijaya: Has it just had its time?

Sangharakshita: Why should one be contemporary? Or what is contemporary? Does contemporary mean what is produced now or does it mean what is produced in a certain style which has been labelled contemporary in the sense that it has no precedent in history?

Padmavijaya: I would have thought one of the reasons why you wouldn't paint as an Impressionist is because if you did you tend to reflect a certain kind of escapism. I think that the idea if you paint in a certain..... Like the Pre-Raphaelites. It is almost as though they didn't want to face the issues of industrialism in **their** time and instead of addressing the whole kind of question they just lived in a fantasy...

Sangharakshita: But does the artist have to address questions in that sort of way, necessarily?

Padmavijaya: But you yourself have said that the Pre-Raphaelites weren't successful in the sense of they tended to be decorative so their concerns ....

Sangharakshita: Yes, sometimes they were decorative but, well, sometimes they produced, I won't say **great** art but very good art.

Padmavijaya: I agree. But .....

Sangharakshita: But of course I am also very suspicious of this whole idea that if something is escapist, well, it's necessarily wrong. Was it wrong in the Victorian period for some people to try to escape from the contemporary world, from industrial civilisation, and to depict another world which was for many people more inspiring? Do you have to depict a Lowry sort of world, all factories and little stick people? That has a place, no doubt. But is there not room for dreams and visions in art?

Padmavijaya: But what I always thought as a more creative response would be to envision a world which was possible. So the sort of idea of the Pureland, you make representations of the Pureland, even if it may not be literally possible, you can imagine a world that you could sort of strive towards as the kind of embodiment of ideals.

Sangharakshita: Yes, but did anybody in the Victorian period, even the Pre-Raphaelites, believe that the world that they were representing in their paintings, their typical paintings, represented a world which was achievable or did they not mean it to represent a world which existed in some other dimension and it represented an **ideal** in a very general sort of way, in a way that transcended time? But they surely didn't think that, well they ought to go round clanking in suits of armour and all that sort of thing.

Suriyavamsa: The Pre-Raphaelites were an integral part of industrialisation, weren't they? Part of the 19th Century, part of the industrial period. And even a central part of that whole process. You get those collections in most industrial cities.

Sangharakshita: Well, you can give a sociological reason for that because that's where then the money was and Pre-Raphaelite paintings were going cheap. And they were contemporary *[Laughter]*. Because they were nice and colourful, so I mean the industrial magnates who bought them didn't necessarily have a refined artistic appreciation of them. The iron masters of Birmingham for instance. Maybe their wives and daughters did but they spent good money on them anyway. So then they got them pretty cheap. They couldn't afford the Old Masters, that was also a point.

Manjusvara: It seems to me that what's underlying this is this, what I call - it is not just me that calls

it - a progressive view of history. That if something is new then it must be better. I mean, when I was at music school that was definitely something I was imbued with. And in some ways I believed it as a composer, that Stockhausen was better than Bartok because he was more contemporary and more relevant. He may have been, he may not have been. I think that ultimately art transcends its own time and that Bach is no more or less relevant than Bartok or anyone else. But that sort of the tone of this is that there was this progressive thing and Warhol must be better than Monet because he is more modern. And I think it is partly to do with scientific technology that, because we think cars are better now than they were 50 years ago, which perhaps is debatable anyway, but in some ways technology does improve, that all things must improve. You see it in political life as well I think, that politics is better

Sangharakshita: New Labour.

Chintamani: But as regards the Impressionists, as I understand the Impressionists what they were concerned with was optical reality, being true to optical reality, and why should that date? It seems that there is still a lot to explore in that area.

Padmavijaya: Right. *[Laughter]* Well they were a bit kind of involved in science, weren't they? But I think they misunderstood the science of the time. You know, as the kind of artistic exploration. I think art reflects the values of the time. I think that is partly. So I think ...

Sangharakshita: And of course sometimes it reacts against them, the values of the time, as the Pre-Raphaelites did.

_____: but that art, the Impressionists.

Sangharakshita: But also I think why should not artists adopt a particular style regardless of the period to which it belongs in order to achieve a particular effect or purpose.

Paul Hatton: Yeah, there is something else. That to be dismissive of the past is to be dismissive of the tradition that defines the discipline that you are practising. So I think. I mean, I am sort of comparing that sort of statement of what we might say to a student and we are very much more interested in their engagement with the discipline. So if they were to come with an interest in, it could be Pre-Raphaelites or Impressionism, as long as they knew or understood what they were doing when they were practising like that, there wouldn't be a problem. And if part of their dialogue was engaging with their tradition because it defined their discipline and their interest, there cannot be a problem with that. Well, I wouldn't want to suggest that there was a problem with that.

Sangharakshita: Well, of course there is such a thing as blindly following contemporary models rather than engaging in that sort of dialogue with them.

Paul Hatton: Because that could be more meaningless to emulate Damien Hurst or whatever, than to emulate Giotto. There is no reasonable way of making a judgement about what source you are using. However historical it might be, it's not adding or detracting value from it. It is part of the tradition.

Sangharakshita: Was there any response to this statement by this head of faculty, or was he just speaking *ex cathedra* as it were?

Chintamani: No, prior to taking the party around the local studios, he gave a little talk about the college, about how you apply, and the sort of things you should remember when you apply. I was with a friend who was thinking of applying. And it was just a little talk. I didn't really have the opportunity to make any comment.

Padmavijaya: Which college was it, by the way?

Chintamani: It was the University of Hertfordshire. Which is supposed to be, supposed to have a good reputation. The art faculty is supposed to have a good reputation.

Paul Hatton: Is that in Saint Albans?

Chintamani: The actual faculty is in Hatfield. But it is spread around Hertfordshire.

Paul Hatton: And then it may be political for that institution, in that it has had an art department for some time but it has only recently achieved the status of University, and it may want to make up aspirations to be at the cutting edge, or whatever.

Sangharakshita: It will have to produce students at the cutting edge.

Paul Hatton: hmm?

Sangharakshita: To produce students at the cutting edge.

Paul Hatton: Or supposedly has.

Sangharakshita: Regardless of the interests of the students themselves.

Suriyavamsa: ..... the Saatchi chequebook.

Paul Hatton: That is an aspiration for lots of people. You get in with Saatchi and you have got money in your pocket. That's it.

Sangharakshita: This raises very big but very different questions about the, well, the relationship between the artist and the market. The whole commercial issue. Perhaps that would lead us too far afield.

Manjusvara: Is there a Buddhist view on this? It's a vague question. What is the Buddhist perspective on.....

Sangharakshita: Could you first explain to me how there could be a Buddhist view. Or what you mean by a Buddhist view?

Manjusvara: Well, OK, I suppose what I am asking is this idea that things can get better just because of time passing. It strikes me.....

Sangharakshita: Well the Buddhist view, if anything, would be the precise opposite.*[Laughter]* Taking it more broadly that things go in cycles.

Manjusvara: Sure.

Sangharakshita: But that's the Buddhist view. Even Buddhism itself as, let's say organised religion, does decline over the centuries but from time to time we see revivals, even revivals within a cycle of decline. So Buddhism certainly doesn't believe in a sort of linear progression with things getting better and better and better. I think it's well known that that view of the linear progression and the significance of history and all that sort of thing comes very much from the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the Islamic tradition too. That history has a definite starting point, that is to say, the creation of the universe by God. And a definite conclusion with the last judgement, the coming of the Messiah. And

the intervening period is a period of history.

Paul Hatton: So your, the model of human evolution is not infinite?

Sangharakshita: Well, from a scientific point of view we don't know. Because we don't know that there aren't going to be higher forms of life than the human developing in the future and we don't know whether the whole evolutionary process on this Earth may or may not come to an abrupt end. We don't know.

Indrabodhi: I sometimes think we get a bit confused. I've had this confusion in a Mitra group about our triangle of the Higher Evolution, imagining that we are at a certain point now and that humanity is going to continue up that.....

Sangharakshita: **No**. Humanity isn't. No, I have never said that humanity....

Indrabodhi: No, no I realize just having said that...

Sangharakshita: It's the **individual** who can continue, yes, from a certain point. Where the individual, so to speak, parts company with the group. The individual within this lifetime can complete, or complete so far as we can see, that higher evolutionary process. But that doesn't mean that the human race itself is going to go on and on, much less still that the human race collectively is going to reach that omega point. I hope our Mitras **aren't** getting confused about this.

Indrabodhi: I just had it recently with the group I was in.

Sangharakshita: Oh, well it must have been a very new Mitra then. *[Laughter]*

Suriyavamsa: The wheel, the wheel into the triangle so that the group can come back down again.

Sangharakshita: Well, if one believes in karma and rebirth in the traditional Buddhist sense then of course there's a possibility of rebirth on some other planet, in some other world. But, I mean, that is traditional Buddhist teaching. We can't say that we know. But, to come back to a previous point, what we do know is that the, as Manjusvara said, there isn't a parallelism between technicological progress and artistic progress or cultural progress.

Padmavijaya: Is there not a problem, just returning right back to the sort of beginning. You could set up a dichotomy between the past and the present. It's almost as though the tendency of discussion... You could lead the discussion and think 'Oh, it is better to look to the past as though you can't look to the present'. It's almost as though.....

Sangharakshita: Don't forget I began by saying that one should not prescribe where inspiration should come from. So inspiration can come from the past, it can come from the present. Past artists, present artists. It can come from nature. It can just come from, well, you don't know where, just from within yourself.

Kovida: It's the source of inspiration you're safeguarding isn't it.

Sangharakshita: Yes, that's the main question. It is my main point in response to the problem posed by this question. You can't predetermine the source of inspiration and I think it is quite wrong that any academic authority in this particular area to try to do that.

Chintamani: Actually, the technicological point is quite interesting in this context because he spent not very much time talking about the more what one would call hands on techniques. He referred to

the metalwork department as metal bashing. But he spent a lot of time talking about computers and computer imaging. So he was obviously..... as if that was the future of things and it would be good. He said "we don't try" - he was very diplomatic - "We don't try and influence but we would like students to be aware of what is happening now."

Sangharakshita: But he did say that he and his colleagues were not really interested in the past.

Chintamani: Yeah, he was full of contradictions. He was very charming but every so often one of these absolutist statements would emerge.

Paul Hatton: There was a little irony here as well because it is the University of Hertfordshire that set up the bronze casting course that I went on. And what would an institution be doing setting up a bronze casting course and then talking, extolling the virtues of computers. So I think there is some different agenda going on.

Sangharakshita: Would all that come under the same department then? Under the same head?

Paul Hatton: Presumably it would have come under the same umbrella.

Sangharakshita: I think it would almost get schizophrenic, wouldn't it? *[Laughter]* Computers on the one hand and bronze casting on the other.

Paul Hatton: That is what I mean, it must be a different agenda that is not quite clear there. They may be looking and thinking 'Saatchi' *[Laughter]*

Chintamani: They have just acquired new premises, brand new premises, brand new workshops. Maybe there was some sponsoring there ...

Sangharakshita: Anyway do you want to pass onto something else or any other comments?

Padmavijaya: I did have a last *[Laughter]*

Sangharakshita: The last word as you are the practising artist!

Padmavijaya: I was thinking that, just to sort of make a point in a way. I was thinking of Kukai, for instance. He was widely respected in his time for being a genius in all sorts of areas and what I think is that as practising artists now, Buddhists should seek to, well, achieve excellence. And I think that excellence is recognised by people who are not Buddhists, and it has been. But I think that it is just a challenge for us to meet and make an art that is recognised as valuable and is significant both by Buddhists and by non Buddhists. I think that is possible. I don't think it's only Buddhists who recognise good art. That is ridiculous. So I think that if good art is made by Buddhists then other people will recognise that irrespective of whether you derive your inspiration from the past or the present, or something else.

Chintamani: That begs quite a few questions.

Ratnachuda: It's opening a big can or worms. Is the art maker about increasing his own sensibility and transforming himself or is he trying to create something excellent that will be appreciated by a wider audience? Look at Aloka's paintings which come off the board and are rolled away. And the value in Aloka is what he communicates of himself. Very few people see his paintings.

Chintamani: Which I think is a very big shame.

Ratnachuda: Well, Aloka at the moment would probably say that what he is trying to communicate is himself.

Sangharakshita: But doesn't he perhaps just need an agent who .....*[Laughter]* nothing to do with his art at all. And he can't do that himself obviously and get on with his own work.

Padmavijaya: Well, according to Bhante's definition, art should be about the communication of an artist's values and so on. So that I think that if it's about communication, if it's about values, then. I think the whole thing. Art is, it forms part of a dialogue with culture more broadly. It's not a personal subjective thing. You don't make your own language up. This whole thing about engaging with tradition is engaging with a kind of cultural discourse. I think.

Chintamani: Then you get this aspect of contemporary culture which is very referential. So for instance, I was talking with Maitreyabandhu the other day and he suggested that once upon a time a very sound practice was to copy other paintings. And you still see this in the Prado in Madrid, you will still see students with a big canvas. They don't allow this in English galleries but I see them copying an old master. It might be a good way to learn technique. Maitreyabandhu made the observation that were you to do that now, were you to copy another painting it would be taken as some sort of ironic comment. So do you see what I am saying? So if you were to work in a pre-existing style that would be taken as some sort of post modernist ironic comment on that style, and that is all.

Padmavijaya: I think it's really important to be inspired by the past and I think that people in art institutions think it is important to be inspired by the past, generally speaking, but not to copy it. I think the nature of creativity is such that styles and languages evolve out of interaction. I think if you are to be really creative I don't think you are likely to use, to repeat somebody else's style.

Sangharakshita: But what do you mean by repeating someone's style?

Padmavijaya: Copying, copying.

Sangharakshita: But do you mean can you copy a style as distinct from copying a painting?

Padmavijaya: Well, you could do both or neither.

Sangharakshita: But what is the distinction?

Padmavijaya: Well, copying a painting is training because, like training to develop your own style. And that is why it was done in the past. People copy paintings in order to learn how to make paintings in order to then develop their own style.

Chintamani: Well I don't think there is ever really a question of developing one's own style - in the sense you can't help but. If you work a lot you can't help but develop your own style. But for hundreds of years, not just in this culture, as I understand Japanese painting, certainly in Japanese calligraphic painting, you learnt how to do trees, how to do pine, how to do water, how to do rocks, and also you looked at nature and you looked at the great works of previous masters. And that was your training and then you engaged in your own way and by the nature, the fact that everybody is a unique collection of samskaras, if you like, they inevitably produced something that was different. You can't help but do. If you had an element of genius in you then you might produce work that further students could take inspiration from and so the tradition proceeds down the centuries.

Padmavijaya: I think this disguises issues by talking in such general terms because the issues that people do copy, people do produce work inauthentically, people do actually do that. So you can actually make work that isn't a pure expression of your own samskaras. And quite often the lesser

artists are the ones that derive a lot from other people's styles.

Sangharakshita: I am only laughing because I am thinking of this recent case of art forgeries. An artist who copied, you know, I forget who, Van Gogh and others, and the experts were deceived and these were found hung in art galleries. So when is a copy a copy? *[Laughter]*

Manjusvara: It's about the uniqueness of the artistic vision, the signing. Something becomes significant because it's signed by Picasso. I think it's to do with art as commodity as much as anything. This attitude. I mean the reason why composers aren't writing in the style of Mozart is because they couldn't get their music performed if they did. It just wouldn't be acceptable to the people that commission new works from those ...

Padmavijaya: I think that is cynical. I think it is pessimistic to sort of think in terms of the past being good and that, well, things like that. Well, Mozart didn't produce music in the style of somebody else. Not because he couldn't sell it but because he was who he was..

Manjusvara: Oh no. I agree. I mean my discipline was slightly different. Being a composer in the music world you have got, I was surrounded by 600 musicians who hated anything beyond 1920 probably. And six composers who were trying to create a language which was post 1970. And there was a very much a disjunction between those two worlds. So at that time, when I was very angry and saying 'the musicians aren't playing contemporary music'. I suppose now I just feel that they are both wrong views really. That ultimately art is timeless. If someone writes something that has value, it will communicate regardless of the style it is written in.

Sangharakshita: I have heard an explanation of why orchestras don't like to play modern or very contemporary music. They don't enjoy it....

Manjusvara: No. Most musicians don't.

Sangharakshita: ..... and they not just don't. They feel psychologically disturbed at the end of the performance.

Manjusvara: Well, often they are just expressing not very uplifting mental states.

Sangharakshita: Anyway, with that observation let's see what else we have.

I have glanced at these questions already. I thought the first one could be probably dealt with quite short and sharply but there you are. *[Laughter]*

I am trying to get together some sort of sequence. *[pause]* Two or three questions overlap in fact. *[pause]*

Yes, these are more directly concerned with "The Religion of Art".

"How did you come to write the essay, "The Religion of Art"?"

And a related question from somebody else:

"Why the need to write on art at that time?"

I did write it a long time ago. I wrote it in '53, which is before some of you were born, I think. So I can't remember exactly what led me to write it. I remember the circumstances under which I wrote it very well. I was living of course in Kalimpong, I was living at the 'Hermitage' as it was called. And I

think I had a certain amount of free time. I think that was a quite important factor. More than I came to have in subsequent years. But I came to write the essay, "The Religion of Art", I think mainly for quite personal reasons. Inasmuch as I felt a need to reconcile, if that is the word, or to establish, or to ascertain, the relationship between my involvement with Buddhism on the one hand and my interest in the arts on the other. Especially my interest in literature, in poetry. I say especially in literature and poetry because that was the only art I was able to actually to practise. Even though I had been very interested in the visual arts earlier on. And I think you may know that I have written about different friends of mine taking different views about these two interests of mine. I remember, for instance, when I was in Benares staying with Jagdish Kashyap - I think I have told this story somewhere before - and of course I was writing articles on Buddhism. I was also writing poems. I was publishing both. And one day I got two letters from two different people. These letters came on the same day. One was from a Sinhalese monk whom I knew, whom I had met in Singapore, and he wrote to the effect that, "when you can write these fine articles on Buddhism, why do you waste your time writing poetry?". And the other letter was from a woman Buddhist in Sri Lanka, the same country, she said, "well, when you can write such beautiful poems, why do you waste your time writing these dry as dust articles?"*[Laughter]* So this was my dilemma, this was my conflict. I wanted to do both. So at various sort of times in my career, especially in those days. I had to ask myself 'are they really compatible?'. If I am spending my time writing poems I ought really to be studying Pali or at least meditating, well, was it right, was it wrong? On the other hand I sometimes thought 'well, you know, is it right that I should be suppressing this natural urge which I have had for some years to write poetry. Is it really something so completely different from Buddhism?'. So that is how I started writing on these sort of issues. And of course about the same time that I wrote "The Religion of Art" I wrote those two other essays which were included in the volume now published as "The Religion of Art". One was "The Meaning of Buddhism and the Value of Art". And I think it quite significant that I spoke at that time of the **value** of art. If we come to consider my definition of art later on in the week, the significance of that phrase, the **value** of art, may become evident. So for me it was very much a sort of personal question. This wanting to find out the relationship between Buddhism on the one hand, or spiritual life on the one hand, and art, creativity, on the other. And that's how I came to write these particular essays. As I say, it was a long time ago and I have been surprised from time to time to find that people, some people, not just in the FWBO, still find them relevant. Because I know the **style** is quite dated, I am quite aware of that. It is a very, as it were, Victorian style and it's not a style I write in now. But I don't think the ideas are as dated as I did think some years ago. Quite recently I have been reading and rereading a book by, I forget the name of the author, but it is called *"Philosophy of the Arts"*. And I find he is discussing all sorts of questions that I have gone into in "The Religion of Art" and some of his conclusions are very similar to my own. So I thought 'well, I am not really quite so out of date, theoretically, as I had begun to think I was'.

But the main point I am making is that my interest, the fact that I wrote, well, those three essays was very much as a solution to a personal problem or personal dilemma. And of course I do know that within the FWBO other people have experienced this, even if it's only in terms of **time**. If you are a Friend or you are a Mitra and you have asked for ordination, well, you have got all these courses to do and you have got all these retreats to go on, you have got all sorts of texts that you are supposed to study, you have got your Kalyana Mitras to see, and all the rest of it, not to speak of weekly classes. Well, it doesn't leave much time for the practice of art. And so there is a question of time if no other. And I know people who have sometimes felt a tension between these two demands, these two interests.

But in some ways, perhaps as regards time, it remains a dilemma because if one has more than one real interest, well, there going to be a dilemma. Well, if for instance, you've got a very demanding job and at the same time you've got a family, well, there's going to be a dilemma there too. You might like to spend more time with the family but you can't, you've got to spend the greater part of your time and energy with the job. You have to sacrifice the one to the other, to some extent. Or hold them in an uneasy balance. So it's not the sort of situation that's peculiar just to the sort of tensions between, well,

spiritual life on the one hand, so to speak, and the arts on the other. And as I say, spiritual life on the one hand and arts on the other, but obviously I don't see the pursuit of art as necessarily being inimical to, or not part of, being the spiritual quest itself.

Has anyone got any comments on these sort of issues?

Paul Hatton: Is the Philosophy of Art that you have been reading. There is a book by Herbert Read called Philosophy of Art.

Sangharakshita: It's not philosophy, it's.... what's it called?

Kovida: It is called *"Philosophy of the Arts"*.

Sangharakshita: This one. Yes, this is the one I have been reading. Yes.

Paul Hatton: Ah, right.

Sangharakshita: I find it very useful and ..... It says someone who has a lot of experience actually teaching, so it's very clearly laid out. Yes, it is by Gordon Graham. Herbert Read's book is a very much older book which I quote in "The Religion of Art". Has someone been reading this then?

Kovida: It's on my *(unclear)*

Sangharakshita: Yes, any comments on this?

Manjusvara: I was going to ask if writing these essays helped resolve ...

Sangharakshita: I suppose it did. At that time I certainly wrote probably more. Those two or three years I probably wrote more poetry than I had done in the whole of the succeeding period. But it's partly because I had leisure. I think that is important. Because if you have any sort of creative interest or tendency and you find yourself with leisure, I think, other factors being equal, you will create, you will write something, you will paint something.

Indrabodhi: It is very different to find leisure..... *[Laughter]*

[End of Side One - Side Two]

.....because the movement is so demanding and the needs of centres are so demanding. How does one do that?

Sangharakshita: Well, I don't know. It depends what the various calls on one's time and energy are. Because, well..... the spiritual commitment to Buddhism, putting that into a separate compartment for the sake of discussion, which it isn't really, then they might have their involvement with the FWBO. They might have a job as well, and they might have a family. So you have to apportion your time and energy between these things. And it depends on the relative strength of the different interests and so on, and the nature of the different objective demands.

Kovida: At some point one has to prioritise.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Sometimes you can't help. I remember reading a few years ago a biography of Paul Scott, who wrote "The Raj Quartet". And it took him quite a few years to, I think seven or eight years or more, to finish "The Raj Quartet". And he isolated himself from his family. He had a wife and children, and it created very, very severe strains within the family and led eventually to, well, the

breakdown of the marriage and so on, because he was obsessed, that was really the only word for it, from a psychological view, with this four part novel. And well he placed that, he knew what he was doing, he knew how it was affecting his wife and his children, he knew that, but he just had to work on that novel. He shut himself away at the top of the house. Not. I am sure he didn't sort of consciously sit down and say "well, look, this is what I am going to do". He couldn't help it. And with some people, well, the creative urge is as strong as that and they sacrifice everything else. For others, well the concern for your family would be stronger, or your interest in some other kind of work, or your spiritual life would be stronger. So the prioritization would be different.

Chintamani: So creating leisure time could be an objective need?

Sangharakshita: Yes. Taking leisure time out of **what**? Suppose you have got a very demanding job where you feel you haven't got enough leisure time. Where do you get that? - there's only twenty four hours in the day. Sometimes it's not a question of sort of creating leisure time in an easy way that fits in with everything else. Sometimes you have got to sacrifice other interests. And it is a real sacrifice.

Kovida: I suppose the difficulty comes if the urge to create isn't as strong as with him. If there isn't that very strong, I means if it is an interest that one gets pleasure from but you don't feel that overriding obsession.

Sangharakshita: If it isn't very strong then probably you're ill at ease that you're not going to be a great artist! *[Laughter]*.

Chintamani: Do you think there was ever a time, Bhante, in the history of Buddhism when the exposition of Buddhism was as creative, in the sense that we have been talking about, as the practice of an art. In other words, the distinction between practice of the arts on the one hand, the sort of the practice of the arts that we understand on one hand, and exposition of the Dharma on the other, wasn't quite so polarised as it might appear for some of us.

Sangharakshita: I think you had different people for different purposes. I am answering this a little bit off the cuff because I haven't really thought about it. In India of course you had the caste system and artists - that is to say, well, let's say image makers - would have belonged to a particular caste. So that particular work would have been left to them. You would have been an image maker because your **father** was an image maker. So if you were really interested in the spiritual life you presumably would have become a monk, or a very serious minded lay practitioner. So it wouldn't have been a question of one person trying to fulfill those different functions, it was much more likely if there happened to have been a situation within society where different people performed those different functions. And society was organised along those particular lines. Of course, monks who wrote books, sometimes in verse, may have been sometimes quite good poets. But that would have been, as it were, incidental. It is very doubtful whether they would have tried to be good poets, they would have, well, poetry to use the term, would have been mainly didactic anyway. So I think it's a quite different situation, a different conception of art, not our contemporary conception of art. Art was seen more as what we would call just a craft.

Suriyavamsa: That's more *(unclear)* in China and Japan than here.

Sangharakshita: Yes. In Japan it may well have been different. It **was** different because within the Zen tradition you had monks who were calligraphers and painters and poets, especially haiku poets.

Chintamani: I suppose what I was groping towards was the idea that, I think you might have referred to this sometime in the past. I can't remember specific instances, but that poetic truth is perhaps closer to the heart of things than a normal, as it were, rational exposition.

Sangharakshita: I must say that the Indian Buddhist literature that has come down to us does tend to be rather scholastic. There is hardly any literature in the modern Western sense. That is to say, literature which is not specifically religious but imbued with deep spiritual values. And if, for instance, you look at, say, the Pali literature of Ceylon, Sri Lanka, that is, literature which was produced in Sri Lanka itself, it's very, very scholastic. There is nothing that is really inspiring. Some monks did write poetry. In fact the chief classical poet was a monk. He was in fact the Sangharaja, in the 18th Century. But he was one of the exceptions. On the other hand you find quite a lot of sculpture of quite high quality that seems to have been produced by guilds of lay artists, not by the monks. So again, you get this sort of division of labour. From a purely technical point of view, if you wanted to be an artist, if you wanted to make images, well, it meant an apprenticeship. And it would have been out of the question for someone who was, say, a monk to go and learn to be a caster of images. You normally would just learn that sort of thing by being born into that sort of family. You didn't cross those sort of lines.

Kovida: Presumably, the people who were casting the images then, if they were very fine images, must have been inspired. I mean they must have been imbued by Buddhism.

Sangharakshita: Well, some of them were. Well, inspired in a very general sense. As in the Middle Ages, they produced what they were asked to produce. We are pretty certain that in the Indian Middle Ages the same artists would produce either Hindu gods and goddesses or Buddhist Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, whatever the customer asked for. Of course some were better than others. I mean, a lot of the Buddhist images one finds in India in museums, and in museums in the West today, were mass produced. They're not artistic masterpieces. A **few** are, but not very many.

Kovida: So for it to be a masterpiece then, would. How would that arise then? I mean would the individual...

Sangharakshita: That's I think the individual genius, for want of a better term.

Kovida: But then surely they personally must have been inspired then by religion or by....

Sangharakshita: Well, where does inspiration come from?

Kovida: I was hoping to ask **you** that! *[Laughter]*

Sangharakshita: Because I can remember when I was in Kalimpong I used to go up to Gangtok from time to time, and I had a friend who was the chief secretary to the government, who was Sikkhimese, and he told me about the leading artist. Actually he got him to do a little painting for me. I am afraid it's lying back in India in Bombay. Anyway, he said this lalipad, this artist, was definitely the very best in Sikkhim. He produced beautiful work. But he was a drunkard and a ne'er do well, and it was difficult to get him to paint sometimes because he was so drunk. But the work, those Buddhas and Bodhisattvas were so beautiful! *[Laughter]* So it didn't **appear** to have come from his personal spiritual devotion. Where does it come from? You know, sometimes the artist is a very mixed up sort of person *[Laughter]* with all sorts of contradictory aspects to his character. And I am sure there that were some good worthy pious artists producing thangkas which weren't nearly as good as his. But it seemed to be accepted. I mean, my friend the chief secretary, since he was the chief secretary, a man of some importance, he could summons the lalipad and say "look here, I want this painting, keep sober, you do it!". But not everybody was in that position. I met him once or twice, the chap, he was a real scamp. He was Sikkhimese, not a Tibetan.

Chintamani: Schaeffer's play "Amadeus" has a similar theme.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Suriyavamsa: *(unclear)* questions onto that culture, sort of the inspiration, or the term we have for an artist as being inspired belongs to how we use art. The art that you were talking about, you were talking about Medieval guilds were painters, guilds were the same painters who painted shields for knights and as it were the guild ...

Sangharakshita: Even some of the greatest Renaissance artists sometimes did that sort of work.

Suriyavamsa: But you don't hear people talk about inspired mechanics, or inspired *(unclear)*.

Sangharakshita: Sometimes I think inspiration comes when you forget about yourself and forget about art and just do the job. So if it is there, so to speak, it comes.

Kovida: But you have talked about it in "Art and the Spiritual Life" and in lectures, as being a contact with, I mean you talk about the artist as being on the triangle of the Higher Evolution, as being in contact with higher states of consciousness.

Sangharakshita: It does seem that he is, or maybe state of consciousness isn't quite the right term, but there is some sort of insight, some sort of understanding. But he is not able to sustain it and embody it, you know, on the level of his personal life for various reasons.

Indrabodhi: Do you think his drunkardness was due to a kind of fleeing from that ...

Sangharakshita: I don't now. I have no idea. Drunkenness of course was pretty common in Sikkhim anyway, even among the monks.

Chintamani: There was a book, written called "Witness to the Fire" by *(unclear)*. It is a study of addiction in the lives of creative men of the last two centuries and she suggests that addiction, whether to alcohol or drugs or gambling or romance, is a sort of..... What the person concerned is after is the same sort of intoxication of an experience when they are inspired. They can't stand the bleakness of not being inspired so they fill it with a sort of near enemy type of intoxication. It was quite interesting.

Sangharakshita: Could be.

Padmavijaya: I mentioned this morning Dogen in relation to this. He seemed to experience a conflict between poetry and the practice of Buddhism. He wrote poetry, some of which was Buddhist poetry, and some of which was apparently, symbolic nature poetry like *(unclear)*. But at some point in his career he wrote a passage to his monks saying "don't waste your time trying to learn flowery words", you know, meaning don't learn poetry, don't bother trying to learn poetry, get on with practising the Dharma. In terms of ...

Sangharakshita: Perhaps he knew they didn't have any talent anyway *[Laughter]*. There weren't all Dogens perhaps.

I think there is a question of - we're going off on a bit of a tangent - I think there's a question about that. Yes, here we are.

"You stress in "The Religion of Art" the value of people doing a certain amount of art and even suggest that they might get greater satisfaction from their own attempts, than that of works by great artists. However, you have also expressed at times a wariness of people dabbling. How do you distinguish between the two?"

I think it revolves on this question of satisfaction. I think people can get sort of satisfaction from their

dabblings but they have to be recognised as dabblings. And so the satisfaction is just psychological. I don't think it has any sort of artistic value or significance. And there's a lot of dabbling in the FWBO. Mainly literary I think. No, maybe visual arts as well. But of course it is easier to scribble a few lines of poetry, alleged, than to paint a picture. I get lots of it *[Laughter]*. I opened a special file for the poetry I get. Occasionally I get a good poem, it is not very often, it is usually very, very... well, I don't know how to describe it! *[Laughter]*. It's so weak and so insipid. It doesn't even rise to greetings card level. That would be quite **sublime** in comparison *[Laughter]*. But I am quite happy for people to write this but it doesn't amount to poetry and they shouldn't really think of themselves as writing poetry. They might be able to write poetry if they took it all much more seriously and approached it in, so to speak, a more disciplined sort of way. But I think most of them don't wish to do that. And it gives them a certain outlet, a certain psychological satisfaction. Sometimes of course they like to think that they are creative people. Of course actually they are not, but perhaps it wouldn't be kind to disillusion them. So do you see the distinction? Is it a valid one, do you think? Should they be encouraged or discouraged?

Manjusvara: This is the, well as you know, this is the issue for me because I am a poet, part of the problem *[Laughter]*. No, I mean through the workshops. I mean it's something that I am always, some people who have been, I outraged the last workshop I did when I said "great poets are born, they are not made". And I said that because I was trying to make that point that, you know, we can find dabbling and scribbling or whatever, useful and precious and valuable. But we should be honest enough to acknowledge where it stands in the great scheme of things. We are not Shakespeare, we are not Milton, we are not T S Elliot, probably. And, you know...

Sangharakshita: Shouldn't even mention their names in this connection *[Laughter]*.

Manjusvara: Quite. So I don't know. It is a dilemma for me. Because I see people gaining some very profound, well perhaps insights, into themselves.

Sangharakshita: Therapeutic.

Manjusvara: So, well, the distinction .....

Sangharakshita: They are doing therapy.

Manjusvara: It's art as therapy rather than as art as.....

Sangharakshita: Well, just therapy let's say.

Manjusvara: It's what?

Sangharakshita: It may not even be **art** as therapy.

Manjusvara: No, it's just therapy. *[Laughter]*

Sangharakshita: *(unclear)* think of it as doing art rather than as doing therapy.

Manjusvara: Yeah, sure.

Indrabodhi: There is the thing of them appreciating the great arts through their making those attempts, isn't there.

Sangharakshita: Do you think that people make that connection?

Manjusvara: Well, yeah, I think. Not to be unfair to what we do. Because people do. I think we can, as it were, raise people's appreciation for the **great** poetry or literature through realising how far there is between what they are doing and what there is. I have seen that happen.

Chintamani: The problem here is that to distinguish between the art and a craft. Increasingly we are in a culture where the craft element is negligible in comparison to quote unquote "expressing oneself". Whereas if you had a situation where people were encouraged to learn a craft they would, just to get a grasp of **that**, then they'd see the craft element in a great work of art. Appreciate that and also then appreciate how that craft element has been used to express profundities.

Manjusvara: Absolutely. One of the ways I temper that is just to suggest to people that their first draft might not be their best draft. That maybe they need to do more work on what they produce. And some people find that clearly very shocking. They fear that they're going to lose inspiration *(unclear)* will ruin this masterpiece. You know, just to encourage people to go away and rework things or just be critical of what they do, I think can be very challenging. Which is sort of making the distinction that the craft element is *(unclear)*

Sangharakshita: Do you give people exercises in prosody?

Manjusvara: Sorry, exercises in?

Sangharakshita: Prosody.

Manjusvara: Um. Well you know, yes and no.

Sangharakshita: Because all the poetry I get is in very, very free free verse *[Laughter]* Sometimes it's verse only in the sense that well it's cut up prose.

Manjusvara: Well, I think free verse is a misnomer. I don't think there is such a thing as free verse, even verse that doesn't rhyme has a lot of discipline and structure. Certainly we try and approach that. I don't write in rhyming couplets myself so I tend not to teach that.

Sangharakshita: But presumably one should be able to write in rhyming couplets.

Manjusvara: It's a good discipline, that is for sure. It's.....

Padmavijaya: It guarantees not much though, does it. I can write in rhyming couplets. It doesn't guarantee very much to be able to do it.

Manjusvara: No.

Padmavijaya: I was going to say about the born artist or not question that I sort of, I would be cautious about that because some people find their creativity late in life and some find it early. And I think that if you get into sort of having a doctrine that you are born as a great poet or something.

Manjusvara: I didn't say when though, did I.

Sangharakshita: Being an artist doesn't mean that you start as **soon** as you are born *[Laughter]*. You start at six like Mozart or you could start at 40 or 50. Even at 80 odd whether it was, like Grandma Moses.

Padmavijaya: But if you say you become an artist in your life it leaves, I feel *(unclear)* it leaves open, leaves the possibility more open than if you sort of say you were born with it.

Manjusvara: I suppose I am wary of that because I do think there aren't many artists in the world. There are not many composers...

Sangharakshita: It depends what you mean by artists. I mean you could say, you can certainly in the course of your life, if you wish, acquire modest artistic skills. But whether you are able by taking conscious effort to be a real artist, that is probably a bit doubtful.

Indrabodhi: Is it theoretically possible that you could recreate yourself?

Sangharakshita: I think you can spiritually. I am not sure that you could do it artistically. I think that's open to debate.

Paul Hatton: So it depends when you got the inspiration that you were talking about I suppose.

Sangharakshita: I suppose in the same way that a sinner can turn right round and become a saint. Perhaps in the same way a completely philistine person can turn right round and become a great artist.

Chintamani: I doubt whether that is possible without craft. And that, say you get a group of half a dozen people and they agree to start drawing classes and they are taught drawing in the way that art isn't taught these days but in the traditional manner, and there is a whole procedure that use, you start with a particular medium and progress through certain mediums. They were all learning the same skills **but** whoever has got the genius, wherever it resides it will out eventually regardless of that, **but** the craft will give the genius a medium for expression. But without that craft how is that genius going to express itself? And that is why I was suggesting that, rather than if, OK, as regards your passage in "The Religion of Art" where you suggest that it is useful for people to engage to some degree in an artistic discipline, it would be the craft element. It would simply be learning to draw or learning to sing or learning to play a musical instrument, or whatever, rather than becoming preoccupied with expressing and so on. When Aloka went to art college he said that the staff said "look, you come here to learn skills, this doesn't guarantee that you will be an artist, that is up to you when you leave, but your business here is to learn skill"'. That is not taught any more, that approach.

Sangharakshita: And there is also a question which really has come up. We've touched on it but we'll go back to those other questions in a minute. The question is:

"What is genius? How does it fit with a Buddhist perspective, presumably it's not a gift from God."

[Laughter]

So what is genius? There have been all sorts of definitions, haven't there. I remember one was an infinite capacity for taking pains.

Where does the word come from? Does anyone know or remember?

_____: *(unclear)*

Sangharakshita: Your sort of guardian spirit.

Suriyavamsa: The genius of a place.

_____: Or the genius of a family, sort of the guardian spirit of a family.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes. I don't know if this is just a guess, it may be connected with gens which is

family.

_____: I think so, yes.

Manjusvara: Greek, is it?

Sangharakshita: Latin. Something that sort of hovers over you, as it were, and sort of inspires you. So genius seems to suggest it's someone who is inspired from a source higher than that of his conscious personality, one could say?

Indrabodhi: So why should that be? Why should somebody be inspired in such a way and others not?

Sangharakshita: Don't know. I was reading - this is on a slightly different tack but it a parallel tack - I was reading recently the biography of St Catherine of Sienna who seems to have been almost born a saint, in the sense that she was saintly and ascetic ever since she was a small child. So I thought, why, we can explain this within Buddhism in accordance with the teaching of karma and rebirth. But I don't know whether **genius** can be explained in that way. Perhaps sainthood, that you can carry over. Spiritual samskaras, but can you carry over, so to speak, the samskaras of genius, even supposing you accept karma and rebirth.

Manjusvara: Well, you said somewhere about Mozart and rebirth, was it....

Sangharakshita: Ah but he had, it seems he had the **skill** from that very early age, he could apparently play the piano. Though of course, I suppose on the other hand it's the fingers, the hands of **this** life.

Padmavijaya: Kant has posed the question of genius, interestingly in "The Critique of Judgement". I'm not sure if I can discourse at length on it from the top of my head. But what the impression I was left with from what he writes in there is that he seems to compare to nature, so the way that natural forms emerge from nature in this kind of ongoing unfolding process. He seems to sort of talk about genius as a faculty of mind which is comparable to the way that nature gives forms, genius gives expression to artworks. So it is a bit like as natural objects are to nature so artworks are to genius. I think.

Sangharakshita: But how does that explain the difference between a work of art, which is say a great work of art, and a work of art which is just a product of technical skills?

Padmavijaya: It's quite complicated in a way a bit, but it seems that, there is something kind of, there is a kind of renewal that genius brings. It's not just technical accomplishment. I don't know if I'm up to [...]

Chintamani: I was very struck by that in Florence. That they could all, they all knew their skills, all the artists, all the painters, they could all do it beautifully, they could all paint flesh and trees and so on. But some works were obviously works of genius whilst others weren't. In fact some of the works of genius were in some ways less technically confident, or less technically elaborate, than others.

Sangharakshita: You find it within the work of the same artist, or certainly the same, say, poet. Because if you read, as I have done quite often, the collected works of a poet it can be quite a disappointment. Because you may read those collected works because you have been so impressed and moved by certain poems, so you almost unconsciously expect the whole volume to be up to that level but it never is. Usually nine tenths, if not a higher proportion of the volume is, well recognisably by the same poet but not inspired. So you find that difference in the level of inspiration, so to speak, very much within the same poet, poems **by** the same poet, what to speak of works by **different** poets or

different artists. It's quite recognisable, at least in some cases. There seem to be very few borderline cases.

Suriyavamsa: Delacroix in his diaries. Delacroix mentions this in his diary. He talks about two types of artists. There is the more classical one who is consistently good. And there is others who sort of feel *(unclear)* way beyond. A sort of mixed bag. Maybe more in writers.

Indrabodhi: Is there a problem in seeing the genius qualities as being a karmic thing that they have inherited?

Sangharakshita: Well, what **kind** of karma?

Kovida: It seems to imply an element of the unconditioned, doesn't it? Genius. Because in a way you can't predetermine, you can determine the skill but you can't determine the genius or the inspiration, so....

Sangharakshita: You have to have a sort of samskara, sort of karma, which is open to that sort of influence even though you can't sort of inherit that influence karmically. If it **is** of an unconditioned nature.

Padmavijaya: So when you talk about genius in art in that way, who are we talking about? Because we could name probably some work, those artists.....

Sangharakshita: Well, before we do that let's perhaps make a distinction, which has been made I think since the early 19th Century between genius and talent. So if one thinks of geniuses in literature, one at once thinks of, in the case of English literature, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and you can think of quite good poets that aren't geniuses in that sense. I suppose, yes, there is the same within the visual arts.

Padmavijaya: I suppose the Pre-Raphaelites were good, in some ways.

Sangharakshita: Yes, some people, I have been reading a little bit about Millais recently. Some say that he was a genius when he was young but not in his later work.

Manjusvara: It's interesting that we in the arts talk about the muse, this idea of the muse, which is something coming from outside which you are receptive to. So, I mean, certainly when I work there are times when I'm more inspired than others. It's very hard to say what the difference is but I, some of the poetry I write is just keeping the technique going really. I mean perhaps one should have the grace to keep it to yourself as well, but occasionally something just descends. That's how I experience it. I open up, I become bigger, and something other than me is doing the writing. And that seems to be a common way of describing the process. Perhaps the genius is someone who is open to that all the time. Mozart seems to....

Sangharakshita: To a greater extent.

Manjusvara: To a greater extent.

Chintamani: That means genius can be a question of degree. You can all be geniuses to some degree?

Indrabodhi: Or maybe there is a point where it tips over into genius. We are all inspired to some extent but...

Sangharakshita: Well we all have bright ideas *[Laughter]*

Chintamani: At the risk of being *(unclear)* couldn't you break it down into a number of elements. First of all there's mastery of technique or sufficient mastery of technique to do the job. Then there's response to a particular situation. I am thinking of more, when somebody gives a very, very good Dharma talk. They are very eloquent, they are in touch with the Dharma and they are in touch with the audience, and the three work together. If you see what I mean. So it's not unbalanced towards just the subjective preoccupation, it's not just as it were - I am getting a bit lost here. Perhaps I will just stick with those three elements. Yes, that's right. Identify with one's audience, in touch with them, but not to the extent that one is lost in them. And there is also one has mastery over one's medium, I mean in this case language. And also completely in touch with the Dharma, and yet also choosing the right words, the right words for the situation and true. If you see what I am saying

Sangharakshita: You don't wave your arms all over the place *[Laughter]*.

Chintamani: Yes, something like that.

Manjusvara: It just occurred to me as a question that would a Buddha, would an Enlightened being be perpetually inspired in the terms that we are using? Can you make that kind of connection between... If we. I think Kovida was saying it is a degree of the transcendental coming down, so presumably if you're in touch with the transcendental all the time, you could say you were perpetually inspired.

Sangharakshita: In a sense, except that it wouldn't be a question of something coming down because you were there where it came down from.

Manjusvara: Sure.

Indrabodhi: It doesn't necessarily mean you would be a great poet.

Sangharakshita: No. Because there are verses in the Pali Canon which are attributed to the Buddha but no-one would say they were great poetry.

Kovida: I mean, does the artist and the spiritual discipline, the disciple.... I mean I've been walking on different paths. Because you can't talk. I mean you could talk. We talk about Going for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma and Sangha, the Three Jewels which are the highest. So can one talk.... You can't Go for Refuge to art in that sense, can you? I mean one can use art and one can practise the discipline of art and one can hope to be inspired in the process of working out one's going for Refuge as a Buddhist.

Sangharakshita: I am not sure that there's a true parallel, because you talk of going for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha but you don't talk of going for refuge to Buddhism. *[Laughter]* So you wouldn't talk in terms of going for refuge to the arts but you might talk in terms of going for refuge to **that** which is the object of art ultimately.

Kovida: Ah.

_____: *(unclear)*

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Padmavijaya: Presumably you can sort of give a different slant and you could think that in a way spiritual practice is only a set of things that you do. Do you know what I mean? One thing is called meditation, another thing is called devotion. And there is no reason to think that there can't be many

other different ways of behaving and acting that are spiritual practice.

Sangharakshita: Well, in Japanese you get the word the *'do'*. And, well, meditation is a *'do'* and flower arranging is a *'do'* and the tea ceremony is a *'do'*, and so on.

Kovida: But what I was trying to get at was whether there are conditions that one could set up to enable one to become a better artist. You go into it a little bit in the Poet, the essay "Advice to the Young Poet".

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Kovida: I suppose at the end of the day it comes to what is the call.

Sangharakshita: Yes. And I think that at the end of the day also so much depends upon what can only be described as your innate potential. And however supportive conditions may be and however good your skills, whether you are a really good or even great artist would depend on something innate in you as it were, in you at least in **this** incarnation. Not innate in you in a more metaphysical sense.

Padmavijaya: I find it interesting that we often discuss **great** artists as though that. It seems interesting that great artists get discussed as though that is the only thing that you could say about art. It is almost as if, what about good art? I mean in this day and age good artists would be, would be pleasant to see. So in a way what's

Sangharakshita: I think perhaps we should be thankful if we get good artists. Personally, talking in terms of literature for a moment, I thoroughly enjoy minor poets. In fact I have written a poem about the minor poets. Because we are not always ready to meet the great ones. We can't always be reading the Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth, much as we enjoy them at times and however great we feel they may be. I thoroughly enjoy the minor poets of the last century. They are good but I wouldn't say that they were great but they had their place. And I imagine it's the same with artists, the visual artists. So I can enjoy the Pre-Raphaelites, even those which I just recognise as good and not great. And I can enjoy minor watercolourists. They don't have to be great to be enjoyable. And sometimes, well, you are not sufficiently prepared fully to enjoy the really great people. So, yes, I think there shouldn't be an over emphasis on the great artists as though they are the only ones that you can enjoy or that have a place at all.

Manjusvara: Also, things arise out of conditions. C P E Bach, one of Bach's sons, was a great teacher and influence on Mozart. Without him you could have said there would be no Mozart. I don't think there's any argument that C P E Bach was as great a composer as Mozart, even as his father. But historically in some ways he was crucial. So the lesser artist can be creating the environment for the great artist

Sangharakshita: They keep the tradition going.

Manjusvara: Keep the tradition, keep the craft alive.

Sangharakshita: So we are going to get back to questions which followed on from the one about how I came to write "The Religion of Art". So there are two more questions:

"When did you become interested in Neo-Platonism?"
and:
"How does Neo-Platonism relate to Buddhism?"

Well the first one is relatively easy to answer. When did I become interested in Neo-Platonism. So

switch our minds around a bit. I became interested in Neo-Platonism when I was in my teens. I remember reading - this is long before I went to India - I remember reading Dean Inge's "Philosophy of Plotinus". I also read Whittaker's "Neo-Platonism". And I did read a bit of Plotinus in Thomas Taylor's translation at that time. But I didn't carry it any further. I can't remember following up that interest in India. But I did, I did come across in Calcutta, of all places, in a second-hand book stall, it wasn't a shop it was a stall on the railings outside the Cenotaph Building in the public square. I used to browse there regularly. I found four battered volumes of an old American translation of the Enneads. One volume was missing, there were five volumes. Anyway, I got the four. And I still have those. And I dipped into those a bit. But it was only after I came back to England that I started seriously looking into Neo-Platonism. And over the years, especially this last ten or twelve years I have *(unclear)* got together quite a collection of books on Neo-Platonism. But that is the easy one.

So, how does Neo-Platonism relate to Buddhism. That's a very big and complex question. I am not going to even try to go into it. I will just say a few words about why I consider Neo-Platonism of importance and why I am interested in it. I am interested in it mainly because I see the Neo-Platonic tradition as really the most important, the **leading**, spiritual tradition of the West, and I see Buddhism as the leading spiritual tradition of the East.

[End of Tape One,
Tape Two Side One]

I think it is therefore natural in a way, if one has this comparative sort of mind that one should want to compare the two, especially if one is interested in both of them. The Neo-Platonic tradition is a very ancient one. Of course, Neo-Platonism is a comparatively recent term. Neo-Platonists themselves didn't use that term. They thought of themselves as faithful disciples of Plato. And of course they interpreted Plato in their own way and they incorporated elements from Stoicism and from Aristotle and even other sources, and perhaps some Eastern sources. But Neo-Platonism fed into the more philosophical and mystical aspects of Christianity and Islam almost down to the present day. So it's a very important spiritual tradition indeed and I have some views, tentative views, about similarities **and differences**, as between Neo-Platonism and Buddhism. I had hoped to write something about that once upon a time, whether I will be able to do it I just don't know. It's a question of time. One can't do everything, as we remarked earlier on. But there is a Mitra somewhere who is doing Greek at university with a view to doing a PhD on Neo-Platonism and Buddhism. Do you know who that is? I am afraid I have forgotten his name, but he did write to me some time ago and I encouraged him. I encouraged him to follow that path. So he is doing it properly. He's doing classical Greek so that he can read the text in the original Greek *(unclear)* his thesis on the comparative study of Buddhism and Neo-Platonism. If I hear from him again I will make a note of his name. I think I heard from him about a year ago so he must be on his course by now.

Any comments on Neo-Platonism? Plotinus, by the way, just in passing, he disagreed with Plato's theory of the arts as nemesis or imitation. Plotinus, very roughly speaking, did see in the arts some sort of reflection, so to speak, of reality.

_____: I do have a question actually. This is a bit second hand but Padmavajra, when we were studying, when were learning the six element practice, he said that you favoured a Neo-Platonic approach to the six element practice. This is his recollection of what you said.

Sangharakshita: I cannot remember. I may have said it but I can't remember if I did say it what I meant by it.

Yes, a different tack.

"All fear is basically hatred of death." This is a quote from "The Religion of Art". *"I find this difficult*

to relate to. If all fear was a hatred of death suicide would be unknown. This strikes me that all fear is basically a hatred of pain, either physical or mental, emotional. Could one not say in fact that all addictions to drugs, alcohol, etc. are the desire for death in form oblivion from life."

I think when I wrote "all fear is basically hatred of death", I didn't mean hatred quite in the literal sense. I think, hatred in the sense of aversion. That death is something that we shrink from naturally, something we don't want. And it's perhaps significant that traditionally capital punishment means death. That's the worst that society can do to you. That is the greatest threat, so presumably, otherwise people, that is the greatest fear, that you will have to die, that you will be killed. In the case of suicide, well, clearly there the question of pain does come into it because you feel that, well, death couldn't be worse. Or perhaps you don't even believe that there is anything after death. You think that death really is the end and, well, if you are not there to experience the pain, well, you won't suffer it any more.

Indrabodhi: I suppose my feeling is that people actually choose death because of pain and the pain seems to be what people fear most, either psychological or emotional.

Sangharakshita: But people are prepared to suffer pain for all sorts of reasons, well, clinging onto life and also for the sake of their ideals. So it's as though escaping from pain is not necessarily the ultimate consideration for everybody for whatever reason. But, yes, I think I would substitute aversion for the word hatred. Hatred is, so to speak, too active a word.

Oh well, we are getting to the end of the questions.

Oh, yes, coming back to why I wrote about "The Religion of Art".

"Why a will now to revisit the issue of art?"

I am not quite sure. I think it's partly because there are quite a few artists and writers in the Movement and they do ask questions from time to time. And also of course I am concerned in a more general way to sort of update my thinking, or develop my thinking, because I suppose within the sphere of my thinking about art there is a development in the same way that there is a development in my thinking within the sphere of Buddhism. Because there's been much more development of my thought within the sphere of Buddhism than within the sphere of art because I have been much more concerned with Buddhism for perhaps obvious reasons. And also of course, as I said earlier on, it did strike me that very likely my thinking in "The Religion of Art" was quite out of date. But actually, as I said, I found that to a great extent not to be the case. And it does represent, I mean, a permanent interest. I do go to art exhibitions and visit art galleries and look at works of architecture whenever I get the opportunity.

Manjusvara: Can you say briefly in what way you thought it might be out of date?

Sangharakshita: Oh I just thought it was written so long ago it must be out of date *[Laughter]*. Maybe it was, maybe it was this heresy of the muse creeping in *[Laughter]* but I found, well, it wasn't perhaps the case. I know that the language is dated. I wouldn't try to rewrite it. I mean if I was to write something I would write something quite new and quite different.

Manjusvara: "The Religion of Art" was the very first thing of yours I studied. I was fairly new to the London Buddhist Centre then, and did it with Dhammarati. At the time I was very much a modernist, avant-gardist even. But what struck me about your definition of art was that it actually side-stepped that whole issue and now my position.....

Sangharakshita: Which issue?

Manjusvara: Well, of being conned, the whole modernist progressive thing. The definition is actually

timeless. I have reflected on this a lot because as my own views have changed I found I still accord with your definition of art. So.....

Sangharakshita: Because don't forget I think it was an advantage to me in a way to be so isolated in Kalimpong. I am going to touch upon that from a somewhat different point of view in the lecture I am giving on Tuesday. Because I was quite isolated from contemporary influences. I was just left with my ideas and certain books, a small range of books. But it meant I did much more thinking than reading. And I very rarely discussed any of these issues with anybody. Well, sometimes that can be a disadvantage. But it did mean that, well, my thinking could develop without any regard for being contemporary or up to date. To me all the great writers and thinkers were contemporary. You can look at it like that. Or you could even say all the great works of art are contemporary, in the sense that they all have relevance to you here and now and move you in the here and now.

There is a question here about:

"Could you say a little about your statement in "The Religion of Art" that poetry is the most fully developed form of art."

I think we will leave that until we go into the definition that I give. I'm sure that is going to come up, isn't it? And that may well occupy us for a whole afternoon I suspect. So let's deal with it within that context.

Padmavijaya: I wonder if we might pick up on the Platonism question again if we

Sangharakshita: Yes. I have only got one more question so we can certainly pick up on the Platonism.

Padmavijaya: You are saying it's the major spiritual tradition of the West.

Sangharakshita: The Neo-Platonism.

Padmavijaya: Neo-Platonism. Sorry, that's what I meant. I was sort of quite interested that you wrote the essay on the Burial of Count Orgaz and, well, Michelangelo's poetry is very interesting in his sonnets in relation to the very little that I know about Neo-Platonism. I wonder if you might say a little bit about how Neo-Platonism and the arts have interrelated.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Well, you mentioned Michelangelo's sonnets. Well, he of course lived and worked in Florence and in Rome. And at that time of course Neo-Platonism was very much in the air. Through the work of, through the translations of.....

Padmavijaya: Ficino.

Sangharakshita: Ficino, yes, and who else was it?

Padmavijaya: Pico.....

Sangharakshita: Mirandola, his writings in general. But through the translations of Pacino mainly. And the academy set up by Lorenzo the Magnificent in Florence. So I don't think that Michelangelo made any close study of Neo-Platonism or had any, perhaps, very clear ideas about it. But it was, so to speak, very much in the air. And it was in some ways a sort of alternative to Christianity for many people, although they didn't sort of explicitly repudiate Christianity. But their Christianity, or their understanding of Christianity became infused with a sort of Neo-Platonic feeling and idealism. And that seems to have been the case with Michelangelo. He just caught something of Neo-Platonism from

the surrounding atmosphere. It has been said, as far as I remember, that Michelangelo was not fairly much in sympathy with the rather worldly Catholicism of his time, despite working for Popes and so on. Somebody even suggested his spiritual tendency was Protestant rather than Catholic, inner rather than outer, and, well, to that extent also he was moving in a somewhat more Neo-Platonic direction. It's as though he didn't have so much faith in, or reliance on, external ceremonies or the sacraments but more on prayer, contemplation, and so on. And that, again, was more, so to speak, Neo-Platonic. So I don't think there is any very explicit sort of Neo-Platonic doctrine in his sonnets, but certainly an influence of something of that sort. Perhaps it also has, but this is quite speculative, something to do with the tradition of sort of courtly love coming down from Dante. He must have read Dante, I am pretty sure. But of course it is well known that Botticelli was influenced by Neo-Platonism and there had been writings to that effect which I remember reading some years ago. Some of you may know about those. Who is that author who has written about Neo-Platonism in the work of Botticelli? It begins with a 'P'. What is his name?

Padmavijaya: Panowski? *[Transcriber's note: Not 100% sure of the name here]*

Sangharakshita: Panowski. Yes. So, yes, it was very much in the air in those days.

Padmavijaya: Some of those sonnets I find very inspiring because the way he talks about divine beauty being made manifest through the appearance of the lovers.

Sangharakshita: Yes. But that of course goes right back to Plato in the Symposium. But that is dwelt upon very much by Plotinus. He continued that sort of thinking.

Chintamani: Would you say sort of in general that a Neo-Platonic approach could be characterised by the goal, seeing the goal in terms of beauty, and seeing the path in terms of love of beauty?

Sangharakshita: Plotinus does seem to see the path very much in those terms, much of the time. But he also speaks very much in terms of contemplation. But he does see sort of sensitivity to beauty in the original Platonic sense as very much a sort of path going to reality. As Plato does in some of the dialogues.

And you get that tradition continued in English literature in Spenser particularly. Especially in his four Hymns, well, "Hymn to Heavenly Beauty" and "Hymn to Heavenly Love". And you get a bit of it in Rossetti's sonnets. Though it is not quite so purely mystical there.

Padmakara: Does Plotinus talk more in terms of finding an image for beauty? Does it remain as more of an abstract thing?

Sangharakshita: I think it does, well, he passes rather quickly from the human embodiment to the, as we would say, abstract ideal behind the human embodiment. He doesn't linger over the human embodiment quite so much as Plato does perhaps. Plato is perhaps closer to the facts of ordinary human experience in this respect. But you know, Plotinus personally was a quite ascetic sort of person, he led a sort of semi-monastic life.

Padmakara: I was trying to find some link with that progression from embodiment to the pure beauty and the idea of sadhana and creating an image as a route to that beauty.

Sangharakshita: No. As far as I remember Plotinus doesn't take quite that approach. His thinking, from our point of view, as I say, would be regarded as quite abstract. He talks very much in terms of Beauty with a capital 'B'.

Padmavijaya: Does that have an experiential correlative though? The abstract beauty?

Sangharakshita: Oh yes. I am sure that for him it did. But to us it would normally seem quite abstract in the, in the theoretical or intellectual sense.

Padmakara: Does he talk of method to do that?

Sangharakshita: Yes. But his method is the Platonic method of going from beautiful objects and beautiful people to the ideal of abstract beauty, so higher and higher.

Chintamani: That is presumably his emphasis on art that you mentioned earlier on, that art is able to act as a mediator.

Sangharakshita: Yes. But as far as we know he doesn't go very much into this.

Anyway, there is one more question.

"What do you think we can learn as a Buddhist tradition from the approach of Rudolf Steiner to the spiritual in the visual arts? I am particularly interested in how the followers of Steiner seem to be very influenced by his views on form and colour so that paintings, sculpture and architecture today have his imprint which is quite distinctive. For me it is questionable whether it communicates a real deep inner experience be it from a prescriptive formula."

This last year I have been reading quite a few of Steiner's writings. This was really for **two** reasons. The first reason is that, as you probably know, the FWBO has a connection with the *Triodos Bank*. And the *Triodos Bank* is of course a Steiner institution. So I thought, well, I might as well look into the ideology behind it. Another reason is that anthroposophy, the movement that Steiner founded, is quite influential and quite big in fact in Germany, though it existed in quite a few other countries too. And one of our Friends in Berlin who works in a Steiner hospital, was asking me a number of questions about the relationship between Steiner's teaching and the teachings of Buddhism because he was feeling torn between the two. So from that point of view also I have been looking into Steiner's writings. And, well, they are mainly in the form of lectures, and although there are scores upon scores of volumes I have read about ten or twelve. I'm afraid I haven't yet got round to reading those on art, on form and colour, but I do know he has his own very definite views in the subject. This year Dhammaloka and Anomarati and myself are planning to visit their headquarters in Switzerland when I next do a German tour. Because there they have what they call the Goetheanum which is their headquarters building which has been constructed architecturally in accordance with Steiner's ideas about architecture. So that will be quite interesting. But I can't say anything about his views on form and colour because I haven't yet got around to reading about them. I don't know if anybody does know anything about them.

Chintamani: I have visited the Goetheanum in Switzerland quite a few years ago now. And the main building is more or less a theatre, and in the theatre they perform Eurythmy. And there is a system of interrelation between the various arts so that one was able to dance a piece of music, that is to say that the different notes have corresponding movements, and likewise colours, different colours correspond with different movements, and so on. I saw some Eurythmy people perform there with different coloured costumes and different lights being shone upon them. Oh yes, that's right, you can recite poetry and move to the poetry. But the whole thing is very rigidly structured. And I found rather chilling and very unemotional funnily enough. The movement, the Eurythmy was very rigidly structured. And in fact as a child I was sent to a Steiner Sunday school for a while where the painting was taught. There the entrance to the, the doorway to the Sunday school was carved in that characteristic style where there are no right angles. The Goetheanum as far as I know has no right angles in it.

Sangharakshita: The first one did. The first one that was burnt down was almost all angles. But the second one is all very organic shapes, almost like a great mushroom.

Chintamani: Just on a intuitive level I didn't find it attractive and it seemed to me that the painting style was quite interesting but it by no means covered all possibilities, if you see what I mean.

Sangharakshita: Because Steiner in his earlier days had contacts with Theosophy and the Theosophists, well, mainly Annie Besant and Leadbetter, they did what they call research into the sort of emotional values of different colours. And there are books by them showing auras, allegedly of people, coloured differently according to their emotional states. And that work of theirs was quite influential it seems in the case of some of the Continental painters. I mean people like Kandinsky and others were quite influenced by that trend within Theosophy though they weren't necessarily Theosophists. There were two or three others whose names I can't recall.

Paul Hatton: Mondrian.

Sangharakshita: No. there was another one. Yes, but there were several of them. So some of those ideas may have entered into Steiner's thinking. I don't know. But he had those contacts, he was part of the theosophical movement. I mean anthroposophy originally was the German branch of the Theosophical Society until it broke away.

Suriyavamsa: There is statement of Robert Hughes, I think, says in maybe "The Shock of the New", his history of modern arts, he points out I think Klee, Mondrian and Kandinsky were either Theosophists or heavily influenced. They are all major figures in modern art. There has been no comparable figures in the Christian *(unclear)* at this time which is interesting.

Sangharakshita: It's quite sort of feasible that certain colours may correlate with certain emotional states or moods, but it can't be prescriptive. I think that is the point that is being made here. I was just recalling that I think several of our Friends and Mitras, in Essen have been anthroposophists or had some association with it. I remember two or three of them telling me on one of my visits that they had attended these Eurythmic sort of performances but didn't seem to think very much of them at all, weren't very impressed. But they didn't go into any detail.

Ratnachuda: For a short time I was going to a course last autumn. Two things. I did some Eurythmy for a few mornings. The thing that struck me about the course. I think Steiner's colour theory comes from Goethe's colour theory.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Ratnachuda: It is based on Goethe.

Sangharakshita: Well, he edited Goethe's scientific works including the works on colour.

Ratnachuda: Now, when we were introduced to - it was a very, very slow progress - introduced to various colours the emotional states that Goethe or Steiner had associated with those colours, we were expected to have. And I put my flag up at the beginning of the course and said 'I am a Buddhist' and that then started coming out. Because if I am feeling angry today don't tell me because I am going to be painting a green exercise. - that is what's going to happen. What you associate with green. There may be something quite deep inside me which is going on. Don't expect that just looking at green or painting green is going to naturally change that. Psychiatrists waiting rooms have been painted green for many, many years and there are still a lot of ill people around. And so I think it is very, very prescriptive one sees. In the Steiner approach to painting is to take on the emotions associated with those colours. Which may or may not happen. It is interesting but they are very, very prescriptive.

Sangharakshita: I think his correlation of emotion with colours does come more from Theosophy than from Goethe.

Ratnachuda: Right.

Sangharakshita: Because I think Goethe's theory of colours is something different. But as far as I remember Goethe developed his theory of colours in opposition to Newton's. As far as I remember. I am not very well up on Steiner. Newton showed that if you passed a beam of light through a prism it broke up into the seven colours of the rainbow. So it is as though, well, the seven colours of the rainbow were the product of light. But Goethe believed - well his point of view was different and sometimes he said that his theory wasn't a theory of light in the Newtonian sense - but he said on the one hand there was the light, on the other hand there was darkness and there were colours which partook more of light and there were colours which partook more of darkness and they met, so to speak, in the middle. That was his theory or explanation. I can't quite remember the point of that because I have only seen reference to this in passing.

[End of Side One Side Two]

As far as I remember he didn't associate any emotive value with any particular colour. I suspect that Steiner was probably influenced by Theosophy. Though I think he probably would have claimed that it was a matter of his own direct perception. Because he did claim to have this sort of super sensory perception and he could perceive super sensory realities going right back into the history of the cosmos.

Padmavijaya: Because isn't there in one of your lectures, on the Tantric Path, you talk about colours and their qualities.

Sangharakshita: Yes. But that's following of course Buddhist tradition. But it does seem to me to some extent culturally determined.

Padmavijaya: I suppose white and black. Associated with death, black, death. But not so.

Sangharakshita: And black. Well, black associated with darkness, which was no doubt very fearful to primitive man, living in his cave.

There is also this, isn't there, of warm colours and cold colours. I mean, is that subjective? Or is that conventional or natural or what? Red and yellow and orange are warm colours, and. Well, according to Goethe the warm colours are those which partake more of light and the cold colours are those which partake more of darkness, the indigo, the violet and the blue.

Indrabodhi: Isn't it just simply to do with temperature, like flames and the sun and therefore we associate .....

Sangharakshita: But white hot is hotter than red hot.

Indrabodhi: But white hot doesn't turn up much in nature. You know, flames, fire.

Sangharakshita: Because in the Indian tradition, including Buddhist tradition, well, we think of earth as yellow, don't we. But the Egyptian, for the Egyptians earth was black, because the mud of the Nile was black.

Chintamani: You have a sequence of colours here. In that he speaks of the colour of the earth being

red and the natural form that it assumes is the cube. So it is similar to the stupa symbolism only red. And yellow is the colour of fire in the triangle.

Ratnachuda: Kandinsky, in the book up here, talks about the way the colours move, are quite different, in horizontal movement and vertical movement. It is quite technical the way he goes into it. And that comes out very much in his paintings.

Sangharakshita: I was talking of Kandinsky last year, well, I think I mentioned it in Articles Shabda, that I saw an enormous collection of Kandinsky's paintings in Munich. I was astonished how many they had. I think four or five hundred easily. And you could trace the whole of his development from, right from the beginning to the end. It also had some of his three dimensional work, painted objects, which were quite interesting.

Paul Hatton: The composer Messiaen describes his music as being coloured. His chords. He says this is a silver one and violet.

Manjusvara: He had that, I don't know what it is called, but when he heard sound he saw colour. There is a word for that.

_____: Synaesthesia.

Manjusvara: Yes. He had that.

Sangharakshita: All right then, that's all. Unless anyone has any final comment. Not any final questions but final comment.

Anyway we have got off to a good start. See you at dinner.

[Day Two
Tape One Side One]

Sangharakshita: There aren't very many written questions but I thought before I started on those I would like to go back a bit to yesterday's discussion with regards to the Pre-Raphaelites. I hope you're not bored with the Pre-Raphaelites. But what I thought was that I think in the course of the discussion we didn't sufficiently recognise that there were Pre-Raphaelites and Pre-Raphaelites, that they weren't all the same by any means and what was said about them being sort of dream-like and into dreams and visions applied perhaps more, no doubt applied to much of, say, Burne-Jones, but hardly applied to Madox Brown or Holman Hunt. So the Pre-Raphaelites do seem to have covered a wider range of styles and subject matter than in the course of the discussion we gave them credit for.

I was thinking, among other things, about Charles Dickens' notorious review of Millais' painting 'The Carpenter's Shop'. What was the main point of his criticism, apart from the fact that he thought it blasphemous? Well, he thought all the figures were so ugly. Yes, yes. And he described them in very extreme, well, describes their ugliness in very extreme terms. He didn't like the painting at all or I think he thought it blasphemous partly at least because he thought that Millais hadn't depicted the Holy family in a sufficiently beautiful manner. He depicted them in, well, a very naturalistic manner. Like Saint Joseph looked like a poor Jewish carpenter and Mary just looked like the wife of a rather, sort of what shall I say, well worn with housework. Then there was Jesus himself with sort of gingery hair. And then there is John the Baptist, about the same age as Jesus described as a run-necked boy, or something like that. But there was the symbolism. Because in the painting Jesus, the boy, had cut his hand on a tool, and that was a sort of prefiguration of the Crucifixion.

_____: He cut his hand on a nail.

Sangharakshita: Something like that.

_____: The nail being significant.

Chintamani: It's strange, isn't it, that how remarkably people of that time had an image of lowliness, the poor family, Jesus born in a cattle stall and so on, and at the same time they wanted them to be idealised so that it seems a strange contradiction somehow between.....

Sangharakshita: Well, it is a contradiction inherited from the whole of European artistic tradition. The Bible says, well, that they were poor, but look how they are represented in art. Look how the crib is represented, certainly in Renaissance art. Look how Mary's surroundings are represented. When the Archangel Gabriel arrives she is usually sitting in a sort of palace, reading a book. If she did exist she probably couldn't read. Apart from the fact that it is usually a modern style book, anyway. Not a scroll of the law, or anything of that sort, as it would have been, if she had been reading, I think. But I think there are other aspects of the work of the Pre-Raphaelites which are comparatively realistic. I was thinking of Rossetti's painting 'Found', which deals, as it were, with a social problem, in a way. That is to say, the country girl comes to town and goes astray, ends up as a prostitute.

Suriyavamsa: He was one of the first painters to use photographs of his models. He worked from photographs. The early Pre-Raphaelites. *(Unclear)* I saw something in a book, in a picture of a photograph, with a model and him painting from the picture, with all the graphic detail. Working directly from some of the first photos.

Chintamani: There was a strong socialist element in some of the Pre-Raphaelites.

Sangharakshita: Yes, well, Burne-Jones and William Morris, if you class him as a Pre-Raphaelite. Yes.

Chintamani: There is that painting 'Work', isn't there.

Sangharakshita: Though again, there was that sort of, I think, inconsistency in a way in the sense that his hand made products were so expensive that only the rich could buy them. And there is also Madox Brown's I think, famous picture 'Work'. It isn't, it doesn't exactly deal with - well, I suppose it does in a way deal with industrial development because the workmen are digging a ditch, as far as I remember it is for a pipe. So it must either be water supply or gas or sewage or something of that sort.

Chintamani: That's Hampstead High Street which looks much the same today as it did then.

Sangharakshita: Oh yes. You can recognise the place and the painting was of Carlyle and F D Morris looking on and F D Morris was the founder of Christian socialism. Well, of course, Carlyle had his own ideas about progress.

Chintamani: I think also on the wall on the left there is a poster for Ruskin's Working Men's College in Camden Town.

Sangharakshita: Yes. We mustn't forget that, that Ruskin's involvement with the Working Men's College, and Rossetti's. Apparently Rossetti was very popular with the working men and got on with them very well, despite his, what we might describe as extreme aestheticism.

Anyway, that is just a sort of footnote to yesterday's discussion, that the Pre-Raphaelites were not always dreaming or seeing visions, not all of them anyway.

Padmavijaya: I think there was a similar criticism of Constable. A similar criticism of Constable has been made of ignoring the social realities of the time. I remember reading one essay which complained of the fact that he chose a particular site on a river where, only a few sort of yards further up there was the sort of signs of growing industrialisation, yet he chose to show the countryside as it probably had been for several hundred years previously. Nevertheless he is not criticised for making trivial art or poor art, even though he is criticised for ignoring social realities. So it is interesting to contrast him and the Pre-Raphaelites who are criticised for being trivial or dreaming or whatever.

Sangharakshita: But doesn't Yeats say 'in dreams begins reality', or something like that?

Chintamani: There was a quote in the Burne-Jones exhibition in the City Art Gallery about him painting angels. I can't remember it exactly. It was as if he would paint angels regularly as a protest against increasing urbanisation and industrialisation.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes. The more industrialisation continued, the more angels he would paint, or words to that effect. So it was in a way a restoration of a balance. And the fact that you are trying to restore a balance suggests that you are aware of what is going on in the world around you. And that is your response to it.

Indrabodhi: That point that you were saying about escapism. You maybe do need to escape from harsh unpleasant realities.

Sangharakshita: In order to be able to deal with them, more effectively.

Ratnachuda: Bhante, are you aware of the women painters in the Pre-Raphaelite period?

Sangharakshita: The which?

Ratnachuda: The women painters in the Pre-Raphaelite period.

Sangharakshita: **Yes**. There was an exhibition of their work in Birmingham last year. I wasn't able to get along to it because I was in Germany at that time. It didn't receive a very good press. But there are one or two quite good Pre-Raphaelite women painters.

Ratnachuda: Yes, I looked at a book, there is a book of them. I haven't seen any of them in life, but it struck me that they, certainly, weren't showing ideals. They seemed to be showing closer to reality, quite significant paintings I thought in this period.

Sangharakshita: But those I have seen, I must say, were closer to Burne-Jones than to anybody else. They were somewhat decorative, in fact very decorative.

Ratnachuda: This wasn't my impression, the ones I saw, I can't.....

Sangharakshita: I have only seen a few in, I believe I saw one or two in, it may have been the National Gallery of Scotland.

Padmavijaya: There are some in the Birmingham Art Gallery. Evelyn DeMorgan.

Sangharakshita: Evelyn. Oh yes.

Padmavijaya: There were one or two. I can't remember their names.

Sangharakshita: She is probably one of the best, if not **the** best, I think.

Padmavijaya: She looked like she was quite influenced by Botticelli.

Padmakara: Did Christina Rossetti paint ever?

Sangharakshita: No, she didn't. But Rossetti's wife did, under his tuition and, while she is certainly not a very good painter, I think her work is regarded as interesting. Ruskin thought that she had talent as far as I remember. In fact, I think Ruskin encouraged her quite a lot.

Padmavijaya: Ruskin's response to Whistler was interesting, wasn't it?

Sangharakshita: Yes. Which shows perhaps that even the greatest art critics have their limitations. So those of us who aren't even great art critics have to be very careful what we say, *[Laughter]* how we express our appreciation or lack of it.

Chintamani: Was he protesting against the paintings or would it be Whistler's ideas about art for art's sake?

Paul Hatton: He was protesting primarily against the way in which these things were painted. He thought it looked like the paint was thrown on the canvas. "Throwing a pot of paint in the public's face" is what Ruskin said.

Sangharakshita: Yes. He thought his workmanship was slapdash.

Chintamani: I suppose that was at a time when the brush stroke could not be shown. That was his personal taste, that you should not show the brush stroke.

Paul Hatton: Yeah, I am not sure what it was about. Because you can see brush strokes in Turner. Brush strokes is not a problem there. I think it's more there's a sort of simplification of form and a simplification of the structure of the painting. They for Ruskin, didn't look very well worked, they looked amateur.

Padmavijaya: That's the landscapes influenced by Japanese art that I think were particularly at issue. Because his portraits, I think, he's a brilliant painter, Whistler. I can see, though, that those landscapes would seem strange at the time compared to other work.

Sangharakshita: I get the impression from what I have read recently that he, nowadays, isn't very highly regarded?

Padmavijaya: There was a big show on at the Tate three years ago of his works. Perhaps that is evidence that he is still looked at. *[pause]*

Sangharakshita: Anyway, to the questions. There are not many of them, as I said, but quite a lot can arise out of even a single question.

I am not sure that I understand this question:

*"Is the aesthetic **the** necessary condition for art?*"

Presumably by the aesthetic the questioner doesn't mean aesthetics.

Kovida: It arose out of your second sentence of the "Religion of Art".

Sangharakshita: I am being quoted against myself. *[Laughter]*

Kovida: The first sentence says "Art and religion overlap". Then you go on to say "Just as there is in religion an element which is aesthetic, so there is also in art a constituent which is religious".

Sangharakshita: I think here that I am using the terms, art and the aesthetic, very loosely as equivalents. Just so that I avoid using the same words twice, for purely stylistic reasons.

Paul Hatton: We talked for so long about it! *[Laughter]*

Sangharakshita: If you read my writing carefully you notice that I am rather fond of what is called the elegant variation. I don't like using the same word twice if the use of the same word twice makes a sort of awkward impression. I like to sort of vary the wording. I think it is really no more than that. Read the sentence again and let's see.

Kovida: I think that is what we came to. But we also went into the issue of, well, the question of aesthetics and beauty and all that. "Just as there is in religion an element which is aesthetic, so there is also in art a constituent which is religious".

Sangharakshita: Yes. Here by aesthetic I clearly mean something that appeals to the same faculty, so to speak, to which art appeals. That is to say, I mean I notice this especially in my last years touring Germany. You go into a big Baroque Church and what do you see? You see sculptures and paintings and decorations of every kind. And if you stay long enough you might hear music too from the choir or the organ. So there was very definitely an aesthetic element in religion in that sort of way. And similarly of course in art there is, in the greatest art, if one can use that term, there is something that appeals to, well let's say a faculty within us which traditionally it's the work of religion to satisfy.

[Break in recording which is remedied later in the seminar when Bhante's goes over some of the material again]

So, as the diagram illustrates there is a sort of common area between the two.

Paul Hatton: Would you say that egolessness was aesthetic? I mean, is that.....

Sangharakshita: Of course you must perhaps not insist too much on my terminology at that time. I think at that time I was rather taken with the idea, even the experience, of egolessness. It was quite important to me. I don't think I would nowadays put it quite in that sort of way. I think egolessness is probably not only quite abstract but for many people rather off-putting. I think I would tend to speak nowadays more in terms of a certain kind of understanding. A certain kind of understanding of life, human life, the universe, and so on, which one can get from art in much the same way that one gets it from religion. So I don't think I would use that sort of expression now, that sort of terminology. Though it is pretty clear what I mean from the context. But I don't think I am very happy now with the word itself. In some ways it is too Buddhistic, you could say, too conceptual.

Padmavijaya: I think partly the question came out of a discussion, later discussion, about developments in art in the 20th Century and we discussed Marcel Duchamp's work. I don't know if you are familiar with....

Sangharakshita: I have seen the, what is it *(unclear)* down the staircase or something like that.

Padmavijaya: 'Nude Descending a Staircase'.

Sangharakshita: 'Nude Descending a Staircase', and the fur lined cup. Things of that sort, yes.

Padmavijaya: Well, for instance his work, but also quite a lot of other people's work in more recent decades of not being concerned with aesthetics as such. For instance, conceptual art, which is something that lasted for about fifteen years in the 70s.

Sangharakshita: When you say not concerned with aesthetics, do you mean not concerned with beauty. Or is that too much of a paraphrase?

Padmavijaya: Well, I think that in a way it sort of calls into question what is meant by the aesthetic for a starter. That assuming that if you meant beauty in that case a lot of contemporary art really isn't concerned with beauty at all. But there is even a question of whether it's concerned with pleasant aesthetics in any sort of pleasurable sense. So we just discussed that and the Indian system of eight rasas came up for discussion and so on. So the question seems to me to arise out of well if some art doesn't concern itself with either beauty or even possibly pleasurable visual experience, it may be only concerned with ideas and sort of, yeah, there's no sort of visual element. What, anyway, do you think of that? Do you think that visual pleasure is a requirement?

Sangharakshita: Well, it seems to me that some people **do** get visual pleasure from, or pleasure at least, from Duchamp's work. I think some people would say that they enjoy it even. I mean, not perhaps everybody would.

Padmavijaya: Clearly, some people do get pleasure from work which is even considered as anti aesthetic. I think that it does mean, in a way, against the traditional aesthetic of beauty.

Sangharakshita: But just to refer to the Indian rasa theory. Well, as you mentioned there were eight, I can't remember all the names of all the eight. But one is the horrific. So that would seem to recognise that the experience of the horrific in art can be what we would call an aesthetic experience. Take for instance, a Shakespeare tragedy. In a sense you couldn't say you get pleasure from it. But in a way you do enjoy it. It leaves you with a feeling perhaps of profound satisfaction, perhaps a satisfaction of having understood something or identified with something or even just **experienced** something. So I think it is probably not easy to speak in terms of a work of art, especially a complex one, as being a source of pleasure or not being a source of pleasure. I think comparatively simple forms of art can be a source of quite direct pleasure. I think for instance of, say, pottery. Take a Chinese Celadon vase, well, when you look at that you get, well I would say almost inevitably a pleasurable experience. The colour is intensely pleasurable, the form is pleasurable, the combination of the two is pleasurable. It's not problematic. But if you say are confronted by a painting by one of the great, say, Renaissance masters you wouldn't necessarily be able to say well looking at it was a pleasurable experience. Say a depiction of the beheading of John the Baptist, there would be unpleasant elements in the painting. So your reaction or response to it would be not be one of unalloyed pleasure. But it would still be a work of art. So this would seem to suggest that pleasure in the sort of straightforward sense is not necessarily even an ingredient in a work of art, much less still the only ingredient or only possible ingredient.

Padmavijaya: I think the word pleasure particularly came up because it forms a part of your definition of art.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes, indeed! And some pleasure is part of some art.

Indrabodhi: So art isn't always pleasurable.

Sangharakshita: Art is not always pleasurable in a straightforward sense.

Chintamani: There are degrees and layers of pleasure and one of these is pleasure of meaning.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes.

Paul Hatton: Certainly art can give you a greater understanding of life or some aspect of life.

Sangharakshita: Well, I am thinking really of some *(unclear)* people who are more experienced in art and, will get intense pleasure from the contemplation of how skilfully an artist has handled perspective. That's a sort of almost abstract geometrical sort of thing. And that's an element. It might be an element in a painting, other aspects of which are rather painful. So you get a quite complex experience.

Manjusvara: I was thinking of someone like Samuel Beckett who is very bleak, although I personally would regard that as art.

Chintamani: Likewise Francis Bacon has been a much debated painter in the movement and I was struck at the exhibition of his work recently that, whilst I found the world that he lived in and depicted rather horrific, the way he handled paint was extraordinary. So there is a strange.....

Sangharakshita: So presumably you can enjoy his handling of paint without enjoying the painting?

Chintamani: I would say yes, yes, yes.

Sangharakshita: Well, I mean from my point of view which might be a limited point of view, if the only thing you can enjoy about it is his handling of paint, well, it doesn't suggest he's one of the greats, except in handling paint perhaps. Well, Jackson Pollock was very good at letting it drip *[Laughter]*.

Ratnachuda: I think with Francis Bacon, there is a real challenge coming out to the viewer. It has taken me a long time to appreciate him and it was at that retrospective that time. I went with a painter, and had my eyes opened. Undoubtedly the way he handled paint, is very significant, but there's more, he is saying much more than that.

Sangharakshita: Well one would imagine so because something that occurs to me is, well, isn't there a series of paintings of him of Popes. And don't they, as it were, parody classical paintings.

Padmavijaya: Velasquez.

Sangharakshita: So there must be a reason for that. Is it something, is he trying to say something about authority, about religion, about portraiture. I don't know.

Suriyavamsa: There is a series of Victor Sylvester interview *(unclear)* a book and it has got a lot of pictures and incredible photographs of work from the stills from the Battleship Potemkin. *(Unclear)* If you asked him what was the connection he would say it was just a form he was using. *(unclear)*. *[Transcriber's note: Suriyavamsa speaks very softly and it is hard to distinguish what he is saying. Apologies for any inconvenience this may cause to your study.]*

Sangharakshita: Well, very often painters don't like to talk about their work. Turner didn't. I think he told Ruskin once not to bother explaining his art. *[Laughter]*

But to come back to Bacon. Does anyone have any ideas as to **why** he was doing what he was doing in that series of Popes?

Chintamani: I can only guess that he was born and raised in Ireland and maybe there is some

connection with Irish Catholicism, maybe it's a personal blasphemy of some kind.

Sangharakshita: So he wasn't just sort of handling paint. There was something that he was trying to say which may be acceptable to some people and not to others. Because why the Pope? Why not the king or not the queen or why not anything?

Padmavijaya: He was trying to say things. I mean, the other paintings..... form and figures, studies for the figure at the base of the crucifixion, those ones. Sort of heads with mouths and so on. I have seen his paintings for years and then recently a film came out called, what is called?

_____: Live with the Devil'

Padmavijaya: 'Live with the Devil', which was a kind of story about one particular aspect of his love life. And it came as no surprise, the really grey and frightening sort of life that he lived and he was a kind of very strange sort of person. And I don't really know about his life, but having seen his painting, having seen the film, the two seem to kind of make sense. Very strange. So when you look at the paintings it's difficult to appreciate the sensibility which is encapsulated in the work.

Sangharakshita: But I think one can perhaps appreciate the sensibility up to a point, because there clearly is a sensibility being expressed but what bearing his life, the events of his life have on that, or to what extent do you need to know about the events of his life to understand that fully is perhaps not clear.

Ratnachuda: I have been reflecting a little bit about Bacon and his life. I have looked at it a little bit and he was clearly unskilful to himself, that sort of lifestyle he lived. And I wonder, and I also wonder with Rothko and his committing of suicide, whether either of them had a sense of seeing into the nature of reality in their painting, but they had no context in which to handle it and therefore they in different ways drifted into this unskilful way of living. They just didn't have a context to be able to handle what they were seeing with their paintings.

Sangharakshita: The comparison which comes to my mind is Bosch. So Bosch depicted all sorts of extraordinary things, much more monstrous perhaps than Francis Bacon. But he had a context, he put them in hell. And, yes, there was a hell, and there was a heaven, and there was earth in between. So he had an overall context.

Chintamani: I think part of what Bacon was trying to do was to debunk that sort of belief behind which people hid from the basic brutality of life. He called the term 'The Brutality of Fact' which is. Yes, he was concerned with a certain kind of reality, life in the raw, so to speak, which he believed most people lived. Yes, and that they shielded themselves from - behind belief, religion, and so on. And he wanted to show that brutality in his work. It was a kind of attempt to be honest about life.

Padmavijaya: It seems to me it's about as honest as Hardy's representation of life which is.... Hardy was accused in his novels of over emphasising the difficult aspects of life. He said that it was merely because that was what he was good at writing about. But I don't think that's sufficient really. I think that Bacon's work depicts a particular side of life.

Chintamani: Cecil Collins said of, whatever one wants to make of Cecil Collins work, but he said something quite interesting, that Francis Bacon portrays hell, and hell is a very popular subject today in the arts. One sees it everywhere. He said, the police court news, he mentions other sources, but he said that paradise is much more difficult to portray because, and this is his quote, "In paradise there is a rebuke". In other words it puts one on the spot and it challenges one to ascend to that level.

Sangharakshita: Well this connects with a point that I've made before and you may or may not have

heard it, with regards to Tibetan thangka painting. That very often the more demonic figures, the wrathful deities are represented with great vigour and convincingness, whereas Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are often very insipid, as though the artist was more at home with the demonic.

Paul Hatton: Easier to relate to. Closer to.

Chintamani: In fact I think you said that in the seminar on the Tibetan Book of the Dead, that the peaceful deities, when they appear, are actually more terrifying than the wrathful deities, because there is less to connect with in a sense, and therefore they are more aloof.

Manjusvara: Well it goes back to Rilke's "revise your life". If we are pretty hellish anyway, then we haven't got much to change to join the demons, but have got a lot to change to join the gods.

Chintamani: It also applies to Rilke's "all angels are terrifying".

Manjusvara: Yes, all angels are terrifying. So does great art have to be beautiful?

Sangharakshita: So it does seem that great art **doesn't** have to be beautiful in a sense at least that it doesn't have to be **all** beauty. Because that raises the question of what is beauty and that's a very fruitful question.

Manjusvara: I was going to ask you that. *[Laughter]*

Sangharakshita: I recently read some reference to Kant. Well **you** are probably going to be up on this, on Kant's 'Critique of Judgment'. And he as it were considers all the sort of variety of works of art, well they are all said to have something in common called beauty. But at the same time they are also different, and there were different standards of beauty. So as far as I remember he comes to the conclusion that beauty, the experience of beauty, is something subjective. It's not so much that beauty is in the object but it is in the experience of the subject. But he goes on to ask, well what is it in these different objects which gives rise in the perceiver to the experience of beauty. There must be something common in them. And that leads him of course onto his theory of teleology and, well, into a quite different branch of philosophy. So it could be that the whole notion of beauty, though yes it is a traditional Neo-Platonic notion, is a bit of a red herring? And well, Indian aesthetics bypasses that with its theory of the rasas. It does have a notion of beauty but it's not the, as far as I remember, it's not the leading idea in Indian aesthetics. There are certainly words for beauty. Beauty is usually a matter of ornamentation. The Sanskrit word for what we call aesthetics is alankarashashtara. Alankara means ornament. It's the shashtara of the ornamented. So aesthetic language is ornamented language. So as I say the Indian aesthetics bypasses this question of beauty.

Indrabodhi: How does it do that?

Sangharakshita: Well, it has this idea of rasa. Rasa means the literally taste. But it's the experience of what they call the rasaka, who is the experiencer. We could translate it as the aesthete but it has got, rasaka has got a quite different connotation. So it's the person with the cultivated artistic taste, who can relish the quality or the essence of a taste. Rasa means all of those things, of a particular work of art, whether it's painting or literature.

Indrabodhi: Isn't that just a taste of beauty?

Sangharakshita: No. It's a taste of the pathetic, the erotic, which comes **near** to our notion of beauty. The horrific, the grand, the peaceful. There are eight of these rasas.

Indrabodhi: And they are all of equal standing, are they?

Sangharakshita: All of equal. Well, that's a great discussion! *[Laughter]* in Indian aesthetics, whether they are all on the same level. There are different views. The **Buddhist** aestheticians, as one has to call them, maintain that shantarasa was the supreme one, the rasa of peacefulness. But that was a minority view.

Suriyavamsa: What would be a good thing to read?

Sangharakshita: I have a small collection of books on Indian aesthetics. One doesn't usually find them in England. But there are. I mean there is an essay of mine in, what is it?

Kovida: The Priceless Jewel.

Sangharakshita: The Priceless Jewel, yes. That gives some references. But well, you are going to be talking about Japanese aesthetics aren't you?

Padmavijaya: Hmm.

Sangharakshita: So I think it is not a bad idea to have a sort of comparative study of Western aesthetics, Indian and Japanese. They are all quite different.

Padmavijaya: There is actually a book. It is not very good, it has to be said, but there is a book which does do a comparison between ten different aesthetic systems, one which is Indian, one is Japanese, one is Western. And there are lots of other ones, African and so forth. It is called "Calliope's Sisters". Who is it by? I can remember the title, not the name of the author.

Kovida: Is it a modern book?

Padmavijaya: Yes. Maybe the last 15 years.

Sangharakshita: Well, that's dead! *[Laughter]*

_____: Bhante, you said, you said about the Neo-Platonic question of beauty being a bit of a red herring. So is it the question of whether beauty is objective, whether there is an objective quality to beauty.

Sangharakshita: Well, it does appear from what I remember of Plato that he believes that there is a form of beauty, doesn't he? And he conceives of the forms as having objective existence and that the particular objects are beautiful because they participate in that form. Now, the notion of participation is a very complex one. And Plotinus' view of participation is not quite the same as Plato's. So one would have to go into that in looking at the question of what was meant by something being beautiful. But certainly it does seem - I can't remember all these points - but it does seem that, for instance, Kant's view is not in line with Plato's inasmuch as Kant regards beauty as subjective. Though it does at the same time recognise that there must be something common to all the different objects which give rise to a reasonably identical experience.

Padmavijaya: Just by the way, the author of that book was Richard L Anderson. Kant, moving on, his discussion of beauty with regard to nature is sort of slightly clearer because it's a lot simpler than his application of it to art. And I have really, really thought about it. It's still quite difficult to quite see exactly what he is saying, but he talks about, apparently you need to see Kant's aesthetics in the context of the two kind of poles which were present when he entered the arena of debate which I think were Leibnitz and Hume, one of whom claimed that there was an objective standard of beauty which you could apply. And the other claimed that beauty was completely subjective basically. And Kant

criticised both those positions and then engaged in his own analysis of the experience and he refers to nature and to art but the discussion on nature is slightly less complicated and he asked the question, "well what is beauty, is it in the object, is it a subjective thing?" And he talks about something called the formal finality of nature.

Sangharakshita: That's where the teleology comes in. And it's more straightforward in the case of nature than it is in the case of work produced by human beings.

[End of Side One Side Two]

Padmavijaya: But what he seems to say is that well, the experience of beauty is an experience of pleasure, which is brought about by, which is coincident with the free play of the imagination and understanding in the act of perception of the natural form.

Sangharakshita: Well, then not just the perception of it but its perception of its fitness for the purpose....

Padmavijaya: Yes.

Sangharakshita: ....for which it was, so to speak, created.

Padmavijaya: Or which it seems to have been created.

Sangharakshita: Because he has read in the previous critique positive god.

Chintamani: So, in the Indian system having these eight rasas.

Sangharakshita: Rasas. Eight is the usual number, but again there's a dispute about that. Some say there were ten or twelve, but usually it is eight.

Chintamani: What would then be the yardstick for a fine work of art. The degree to which it penetrated to the quintessence of that particular rasa and captured it?

Sangharakshita: Well, of course a particular work of art, say a drama, could include more than one of those rasas. Yes, and I must also mention - this occurs to me - that it's not just that the horrific is a rasa but even the horrible. And maybe from the point of view of our discussion of Bacon that might be of interest.

Paul Hatton: What made it a great work of art if it was horrible or horrific? Is it that it would give you an understanding, a great understanding of *(unclear)*.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Paul Hatton: So a violent film

Sangharakshita: But of course it wouldn't necessarily be the sole ingredient, any rasa. For instance, especially if, well you take the example of an epic poem. Many works of Sanskrit literature are epic or narrative poems. So if you are describing a demon well you make it really horrible. So when you are reading that particular description that is the rasa that you experience, but it's just part of the overall epic poem. Well you get that in Shakespeare, in Spencer and in Milton, in any extended work of literature.

Chintamani: We spoke of the element of aesthetic distancing and that Shantigarbha read some of your

interview in 'Urthona' where you spoke about a work of art needing to have that sense of distance and not actually, as it were, involving you directly in a reactive sort of way in the experience but allow you to both see and taste the quality of it but at the same time giving you space to contemplate it aesthetically.

Sangharakshita: Yes. This is I think a quite important idea. I don't think I have followed it up very much. I think it derives, perhaps not consciously in my case, from Kant. This element of disinterestedness. I think Schopenhauer goes into this as well, follows up that particular line, that the work of art as such does not subserve any personal end. Any sort of personal end in a narrowly subjective sort of way.

_____: For whom?

Sangharakshita: Well, for the viewer. And I suppose that this is the one of the cruxes of the distinction that can be made between, say, the pornographic and the erotic.

Padmavijaya: What do you think the significance is for a Buddhist practitioner of disinterestedness in that sense that you have just talked of?

Sangharakshita: Well, I suppose - well to go back to this word that I have as it were disowned - the egoless. That if you can, if the work of art enables you to detach yourself from your personal concerns, well to that extent it is a sort of experience of egolessness. If you just sort of forget all about yourself, you are so immersed in the work of art, it isn't fulfilling any, as it were, material need or subjective psychological need. In a way, yes, it is fulfilling a need, but for want of a better term it's a need of some higher part of yourself. Where you transcend your usual self. This is perhaps part of its function.

Ratnachuda: Could your walk in Kalimpong which some of use in our talks, where you saw the tree, and your colleague, you saw the beauty of the tree and your colleague saw the firewood, be a good example of that?

Sangharakshita: Yes. Right. I think I saw the beauty of the tree but he certainly.....

Ratnachuda: You certainly didn't see firewood!

Sangharakshita: But then doesn't this link up with something that I can't remember where Kant says it but he says somewhere that the appreciation of natural beauty is the sign of a good man.

Padmavijaya: It is in the Critique of Judgement.

Sangharakshita: And well the goodness resides perhaps in the disinterestedness. Because I mean if you can appreciate, say, the beauty of a cloud, I mean to use the term beauty for the time being. Well then there is no particular advantage to you. You can just go out of yourself, you can be disinterested and, well, that is the sign of a good man, that sort of capacity.

Padmavijaya: I don't know how well he establishes that argument though, in the Critique of Judgement.

Sangharakshita: Yes. I don't remember the arguments at all, I'm afraid.

Padmavijaya: I was really hoping to find a solid and rational justification for aesthetic experience as having a kind of definite moral dimension in that critique. But I didn't come away with.....

Sangharakshita: Well he veers off into teleology, and that is associated with theism, with the

practical theism he has already established in the previous critiques.

Kovida: If you are now questioning the use of beauty, how does beauty as truth, truth beauty. I mean.

Sangharakshita: Well, there's been endless discussion over what Keats meant by that.

Kovida: Yeah, but I was just thinking, are you now saying that when one experiences a work of art what one experiences which we formally termed beauty, is an experience of truthfulness or something. In the sense of this disinterestedness.

Sangharakshita: Well again, it raises the question of what do you mean by truthfulness, truthfulness of what or to what. I remember there is that medieval definition of beauty which is in a way a subjective one that the beautiful is that which, when seen, delights. But of course that would seem to widen the notion of beauty itself because, I mean there are other things that delight apart from beauty in the narrow sense.

Padmavijaya: There are things which aren't visual as well, which you could say are beautiful.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Chintamani: Could you say that a work is beautiful when it facilitates a voyage or a step from the temporal and specific to the archetypal, so that in the sense of the rasas, going back to that, and again, referring also to what you said about pornography and the erotic, pornography seems to be very much about the specific - about you and about your personal taste and predilections and arousals and so on - whereas the erotic seems to be something much more archetypal and standing for all time in human experience. So if a work of art, dealing with one of the rasas or a number of them, allowed you to see the essence of a particular human mood rather than specific incidences then it would, yes, be classed as a great work of art. If you see what I mean.

Sangharakshita: I think you don't need to bring in the concept of beauty necessarily, not as one that explains everything so to speak.

Chintamani: Richard the Third is not a beautiful character but is a deeply archetypal character.

Sangharakshita: I think, well, the language of archetypes is again a very ambiguous one, *(unclear)* developed one.

Indrabodhi: This taking you beyond yourself, that is the significant thing that I can hear you saying. That if it takes you beyond yourself, your own ego concerns, to something.....

Sangharakshita: Yes. You can speak of that as constituting a deeper or broader understanding. That might be more useful.

Manjusvara: I wonder if it has got something to do with sensation and imagination. To use the example you were doing, like the erotic and pornographic. Pornography is just about sensation. Eroticism is bringing in the element of the imagination, and I think you can see that in cinema. To me anyway, an artistic film is more than just giving you a lot of sensations, it is actually stimulating your own imagination. So you could perhaps say that works of art are those which stimulate the imagination and not just the sensations.

Sangharakshita: But the question arises, well how do they stimulate it and of course one of the ways at least in which they do it is through symbols, through images.

Chintamani: By archetypal what I meant is that a great work of art will give, will provide you a myth in which you can participate and find your place, rather than just telling you a story about particular individuals at a particular time who in a sense are no better than you.

Sangharakshita: But what about portraits then?

Chintamani: Well, there are, yes, well the great portraits surely penetrate to a condition which the subject of the portrait participates in to a certain extent, but by no means exhausts. So that the sitter is, as it were, a gateway to a particular human condition in which he participates.

Sangharakshita: No, I wouldn't have put it quite like that. I would have said that the successful portrait enables you to see the **uniqueness** of somebody, not as a sort of example of a particular condition or this is how a sad man would look or this is how a happy man would look.

Manjusvara: Seeing **their** uniqueness would remind you of your own, wouldn't it. So you would have that ...

Sangharakshita: Maybe. I think we are getting a bit speculative.

Ratnachuda: Surely the portrait painter or sculptor is trying to see the essence of the sitter and portray that in whatever form he can, or she can.

Sangharakshita: It may be that it is difficult to tell what the particular mood or *(unclear)* is. Well, think of the Mona Lisa, and who knows what she is thinking about! *[Laughter]*

Chintamani: It's a very inspiring painting, even though it's *(unclear)*

Sangharakshita: It has become rather hackneyed unfortunately through over reproduction. Not to speak of Duchamp's *(unclear)*.

Indrabodhi: I remember when I saw the film "The Deerhunter", it is quite a violent film and I don't usually get on with violence at all well in films, but I found that a very inspiring film because it portrays friendship and fidelity and those sort of qualities, and I wonder if that is an example of the horrific taking you in a way beyond your own ...

Sangharakshita: Well, I suppose it's not horrific as such but it's the film as a whole in which the horrific is just one element. And then if you are to show heroism, well it has to be heroism in the face of certain obstacles and they can be of a horrific nature in some cases.

_____: I felt that in "Ran", Kurosawa's film. Very horrific. Deeply moving as well.

_____: King Lear.

Chintamani: The universe before him(?)

Padmavijaya: Henry the Fifth, there is the great speech and that is noble, inspiring, uplifting. But it's misguided in a way, isn't it. Particularly in that, because it's in the name of God, king and country, that they go and kill lots of *(unclear)*

Sangharakshita: Well he believed he was only claiming or reclaiming what was his by right. It's a very complicated story.

There is something more. Well that all arose out of that little question.

I think to some extent we have already dealt with this question but, well touched on it.

"Do you think sensuous beauty is universal in either of the two following senses. That all people endowed with appropriate faculties will agree on what is beautiful. That all people who have cultivated their aesthetic sense will agree on what is beautiful."

Ah ha! It depends on the definition of beauty, doesn't it. Let's just start with very basic things. Would it be true to say that all people, of whatever race or culture, like bright colours?

Chintamani: In what context? Clothing or.....

Sangharakshita: Just whatever. Whether in clothing ...

Padmavijaya: People seem to like bright colours and light.

Indrabodhi: Yes, I think so.

Sangharakshita: Of course, bright colours do form part of some paintings, don't they. In fact some paintings consist almost entirely of bright colours, like medieval miniatures or some of Titian's paintings. So that would suggest that some paintings, at least as regards their colour content, would be appreciated by all people. So that there would be a common element.

Paul Hatton: Mondrian.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Padmavijaya: Not all people like straight lines though. *[Laughter]*

Sangharakshita: Yes. I was just thinking. Well, I was thinking that most people, perhaps most men, like curved lines rather than straight ones. *[Laughter]* But that may be regarded as, what shall I say, gender conditioned, who knows. But I'm just trying to, as it were, work from the bottom upwards, something really basic. So I mentioned a little while ago about pottery, ceramics, that you just have this combination of three dimensional form and colour. This is in a way, well I was going to say the simplest form of art but really it isn't because, well anyway, you could say that is the simplest form of art. Or at least it would be the simplest if it wasn't representational. I say the simplest form of art in a way would, or an example would be, say, Turkish tiles or Moorish tiles, and some of them are really very beautiful indeed. And it's only, well it's usually straight lines and colours. So you can as it were build up from there. I think that is what I do in my definition of art. It is not really a definition in the logical sense.

Padmavijaya: I suppose also with the beauty of nature, flowers and fruit, again the teleological thing comes in but it is almost as though they are fitted for the consciousnesses of beings.

Suriyavamsa: They are aren't they, because their purpose is to attract, the purpose of fruit is to be eaten, and the purpose of flowers is to attract *(unclear)*.

Sangharakshita: Well, this is very teleological isn't it. *[Laughter]*

Chintamani: I wouldn't say all people like bright colours. I think it's a question of bright colours in harmonious combinations, because one can....

Sangharakshita: Ah, but people have different ideas about harmonious combinations. You look at the

dress of some Indian women. We would say that the colours clash but they don't feel it like that. Perhaps they don't have the idea of a harmonious colour combination.

Ratnachuda: I have been trying to imagine the culture or race that isn't subject to bright colours. And the Eskimo springs to mind. I wouldn't have thought there was much colour in Eskimo's lifestyle.

_____: A lot of grey.

Sangharakshita: Suppose you, suppose you brought the Eskimo into an environment where there were bright colours. Wouldn't he see the Aurora Borealis?

Kovida: He can also distinguish ten or twelve different kinds of snow.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Kovida: So presumably his perception of snow is graded greater. We just see white, but they see so many different types....

Padmavijaya: They've got to have names for all the different *(unclear)*.

Sangharakshita: And he kills seals, so he would see red blood.

Suriyavamsa: Blue skies.

Sangharakshita: Blue skies. And yellow blubber. So you have got the primary colours! *[Laughter]*

Suriyavamsa: There are areas without snow where there are flowers.

_____: There's also their needlework *(unclear)*.

Paul Hatton: I am not going with everyone liking bright colours. At all. Just because bright colours exist doesn't mean that everybody likes bright colours. I was just thinking of this morning, we talked about the Mona Lisa, where are the bright colours? There are not bright colours and yet that's something which generally we thought of as a great masterpiece, one of the great works of art. Rembrandt, I think Rembrandt paintings are not an awful lot of colour. Lots of black, grey.

Chintamani: But that's not the point that is being made. Whilst they may be widely acclaimed as great works of art, that's not the point. The point is that generally do people like bright colours? It is not that great works of art have bright colours in them.

Paul Hatton: But is that not where this was trying to move towards?

Chintamani: No. *(Unclear)*

Padmavijaya: Beauty, beauty is where we are trying to move towards .

Indrabodhi: Different sort of *(unclear)*.

Padmavijaya: But, I mean, I think everybody likes to see flowers in spring. We know flowers. They come out and they are colourful aren't they?

Kovida: Unless you've got hay fever! *[Laughter]*

Sangharakshita: But that is an association, that is just an association again.

Indrabodhi: But isn't **all** appreciation to do with an association?

Sangharakshita: I was saying of colour just as colour. Apart from the, well, symbolic associations, cultural associations.

Indrabodhi: Can we never have an experience outside of those associations? Do those colours actually represent something to us?

Sangharakshita: I think that often they do, and that differs from one culture to another.

Indrabodhi: And even your bees and your animals, they associate certain colours like *(unclear)*.

Sangharakshita: But I was just trying to get down to something which is basic and possibly *[Laughter]* common. Take for instance, children. Children like bright colours usually. But this is not to say that, I mean, by the time we get to great works of art that bright colours therefore necessarily play a part. That seems to represent in some cases a stage which is very much further on. You go from the bright colours, the bright yellows and reds and blues to very subtle tints.

Padmakara(?): I was wondering if the, why a bright colour is ..... that all human beings require stimulation and the brighter the colour there is a stimulation, although it may be on quite a sensory level. It is a stimulus and there is more life in that stimulus.

Sangharakshita: But this also ties up with the second part of the question 'that all people who have cultivated their aesthetic sense will agree on what is beautiful'. But this whole idea of cultivation of the sense, and also whether your senses are healthy. Does **that** come into it? Because you could have, say, a liking for a particular shade of yellow for quite neurotic reasons. But well we have seen I think that beauty can be regarded, or the perception of beauty can be regarded, as something subjective, rather than the perception of something which is an object. So in that case it would be very doubtful whether, even with appropriate faculties, everybody would agree about what is beautiful. It suggests in a way the category of beauty isn't really quite adequate. And maybe the Indian eight rasa theory is more helpful.

Chintamani: But I was looking at, say, manuscript illumination, European medieval *(unclear)* a certain kind of Chinese work apart from the enamels. Going back to the bright colours there is something in common in this area

Sangharakshita: Because you mentioned the case of Rembrandt and I have sometimes wondered about Rembrandt in that connection. You know, why does Rembrandt use such dark pigment? I have sometimes wondered whether there isn't some psychological reason for that. Or even, if in, say, the history of art you change from the use of very bright colours, say, in medieval art, especially in the illuminated manuscripts, to darker and darker hues, say, in the 17th and 18th Centuries.

Paul Hatton: But there is a technical reason why things get darker. Because painting with, fresco paintings on plaster using a particular type of paint, you could have a bright colour. Oil paints tended to rely on there being a lack of bitumen underneath which bleeds through it so that darkens the pictures. To what extent there has been a discolouration I am not sure but that is a proposal that ...

Sangharakshita: Then it suggests that people used those materials partly at least perhaps because they wanted to produce that sort of effect.

Paul Hatton: Yeah, that would be a ...

Suriyavamsa: About the same time as the Dutch still lives of fruit - very colourful.

Sangharakshita: Well you get a contrast because, sometimes in the still lives of flowers, the flowers are very bright and the background is very dark. So there is the contrast. So the dark background makes the brightness of the flowers all the more conspicuous. But there's a good example either of this sort of thing even in the work of Rembrandt. There is 'Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer'. And Aristotle wears a baldric, the whole painting is very dark. It's browns and blacks and greys and it is very, very uniformly dark but this baldric stands out. Reproductions don't bring that out. I have seen the original and the original actually seems to glitter. But it glitters, as it were, all the more because of this dark surround. But nonetheless I have often wondered, well, why is it that Rembrandt's pallette did tend to be so gloomy as it were. Was it for psychological rather than a purely artistic reason?

Padmavijaya: I wonder if economic reasons played a part.

Sangharakshita: Because what I think I am suggesting is that perhaps the healthy human sensibility likes bright colours.

Kovida: Isn't it one of the things about Rembrandt is the contrast because like in the painting in Glasgow Art Gallery of the Golden Helmet I mean it is a very dark background but the gold and the flash of light is just like pure white paint almost. It is just like a stroke of white. So if you didn't have that dark background you wouldn't have that contrast.

Sangharakshita: But not all his paintings show that contrast by any means, do they?

Suriyavamsa: The one in the National Gallery, the Feast of Balthazar has a lot of golden ornaments.

Padmavijaya: Is that the one where the Hebrew text appears?

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Suriyavamsa: The writing on the wall.

Sangharakshita: Balthazar's Feast.

_____: The Night Watch *(unclear)*

Sangharakshita: So the question is about a common sense of beauty. Whether there is a sort of sense of beauty which is, as it were, common to all members of the human race in the sense that there were certain things which everybody would find beautiful and I tried to explore that possibility in trying to locate it in a common sensibility to or appreciation of bright colour in the case of the healthy human organism, let us say. Which is not to say of course that art as it develops is always a matter of just bright colours. I suppose that is appropriate more for perhaps pottery. But that you leave that behind to some extent as you go higher in the hierarchy of the different forms of art.

Padmavijaya: I think often people find clear skin, smoothness, certain kinds of form, you know. Imagine an antelope, to take it away from sexual connotations, imagine an antelope sort of healthiness, robustness, and so on. I think they appreciate the form of animals.

Sangharakshita: But this also, to go back a way to Kant, this seems to be connected with function. The antelope's legs are for running faster, his horns are for fighting with. It is a matter of survival.

Padmavijaya: But does one appreciate the beauty of an antelope because it looks like it is going to be

good at what it needs to be good at, or is it for us a disinterested appreciation of its vitality.

Sangharakshita: Yes, a question of vitality, feeling of life.

Suriyavamsa: To eat. A healthy antelope would taste better *(unclear) [Laughter]*

Chintamani: Is it for the same reason that we like spring, summer and ....

Sangharakshita: But we also like winter don't we? There is an aesthetic pleasure.

Kovida: Are you trying to argue a teleological purpose for beauty then?

Sangharakshita: No, I'm just trying to see when it is possible to answer these two questions! *[Laughter]*

Let's read them again.

"Do you think that sensuous beauty is universal in either of the following senses. That all people endowed with appropriate faculties will agree on what is beautiful and, two, that all people who have cultivated their aesthetic sense will agree on what is beautiful".

So my line of thought is well, I don't think there is much point in saying, well, take the Venus of Milo, would an African appreciate it and regard it as beautiful, would a Chinese? Well, the Venus of Milo is a product of a very sophisticated artistic culture. So we will get right down to basics - colour, bright colours. Can we agree about bright colours? Because if we can't even agree about bright colours, we are probably not going to be able to agree about anything else. And, well, not everybody agrees even about bright colours *[Laughter]*.

Chintamani: Just looking at world culture generally. I mean I don't consider myself to be an expert but what I see, yes, there does seem to be something in that. I mean the great cathedrals were painted once. The Greek temples were.....

Sangharakshita: The Greek **statues** were painted once.

Padmavijaya: They were, in quite bright gaudy colours. Reds and oranges and yellows.

Sangharakshita: Just like Catholics paint their Virgin Marys and Jesuses, nice white skin and red lips and glossy black hair.

Padmavijaya: Sounds like representations of Dr Ambedkar *[Laughter]*

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes. Red tie and blue jacket.

_____: I am just thinking . I remember a definition of beauty as being as smallness, roundness and brightness. Is it, do you remember?

Sangharakshita: Sounds medieval to me, and it sounds as though it applies to the illuminated manuscripts. But surely there are some paintings of big, bright and beautiful, you know, like some of Titian's.

Manjusvara: It would become more complex if you went to another sense - to sound.

Sangharakshita: Hmm.

Manjusvara: Well, because, you know, different cultures and tunes....

Indrabodhi: Scales.

Manjusvara: Their scales to different pitches. So that certainly wouldn't seem to be universal. Although sound has a universal.....

Padmavijaya: Something like bright, bright tempo and rhythm, *(unclear)* might be.....

Manjusvara: Might be more to do with *(unclear)*

_____: brightness.

Indrabodhi: But it has got some rhythms, like the heart beat, which are universal because *(unclear)*

Sangharakshita: Or the breath. I mean the Greek hexameter length is suppose to be based on the length of a breath. But I just thought of gold. Leaving aside the monetary, or the value of gold, it does seem that all civilisations have very positive feelings about gold, and golden is used in many languages as a symbol for something which is excellent. So is that a common aesthetic appreciation, and does it suggest a common aesthetic sense?

_____: Could be.

Suriyavamsa: Even Rembrandt has gone into gold.

Sangharakshita: The man with a golden helmet. But I mean even if we can agree about colour and gold and all that, it seems very unlikely that all human beings would agree about what is beautiful. Though it would appear that there are some individuals who have very catholic tastes and are able to appreciate, say, medieval art, Renaissance art, Indian art, Japanese art, which does suggest that it is possible for a human being. Well, think of the Japanese who not only appreciate the Western classical music but become highly skilled executants of it. Not skilled but very gifted even, conductors, and film makers. *(Unclear)* the West.

Padmakara: Bhante, what is the actual origin of the idea of beauty?

Sangharakshita: *(unclear)* the origin of an idea. Well, let's go to the Greek language. Tokalon is the beautiful but it is also the good, isn't it. It is the good and the beautiful. So something is beautiful but it is also good, the beautiful is that which is good, in the sense that we say "it's a beautiful day" - well it's a good day to go out, it is a good day for a walk. We don't literally mean that it is a beautiful day in an aesthetic sense. Or he's a beautiful chap. We don't mean necessarily very good looking but he's a nice chap, he's is good. So it seems to have very basic ideas and responses and then as they developed the process of differentiation takes place.

Padmakara: Because I was wondering if beauty is actually not necessarily a universal thing because it is an idea that develops in a more developed civilisation. So it's something that develops with the evolution of civilisation so this means that the universal experiences are actually more to do with perhaps on an even more basic level than beauty. For example, the sun or elemental things that sustain life, those are the things that can be universal. But beauty can't be universal because it's something that develops later on in history and ...

Sangharakshita: Well this is why I'm saying even supposing everybody does for the sake of argument appreciate bright colours, well not everybody throughout the world would appreciate the

Venus of Milo. Not unless you are able to achieve some sort of cross-cultural sympathy.

Ratnachuda: Herbert Read talks a bit about pottery as the purest art form, the most original art form, that is even before pottery is fired, before the fire was used and it was just dried in the sun. It seems primitive man started decorating the pottery, it moved from the utilitarian use as he felt an inner need or, using Kandinsky's words, an inner necessity to decorate those pots. Not in a representational, there was no representational decoration, it was geometric. And you see that right across cultures, pots do go across cultures. You mentioned the Chinese but in Europe pots go a long way back as a utilitarian thing but decoration seems to come in. He then goes further and says that even religious implements weren't necessarily decorated for a religious significance, it was just habitual decoration. There was no, it wasn't to represent the religious use. It was just to make them more beautiful. Very interesting theory.

Sangharakshita: But so would that, the beauty of the decorated pot be recognised as beautiful by all people who decorate pots?

Ratnachuda: That's interesting, whether a very old Chinese pot would translate into European terms at the time.

Manjusvara: Maybe that question doesn't have to be asked, just the fact that people wanted to make the pots beautiful in their terms seems to be the impulse that's common.

Ratnachuda: This inner necessity to decorate.

Sangharakshita: Well again that raises maybe a psychological question, why does one want to decorate? And a friend of mine once in Bombay, a very good friend of mine, did say something once which sort of stuck in my mind, I have quoted it but long ago, maybe on a seminar. He said "whatever we love we adorn".

Padmavijaya: I imagine the refinement of that would be pure adornment with no thing. That is what I sort of think of the emergence of aesthetics for its own sake out of a whole tradition of adornment of things that we love. And that becoming sort of valued in itself, as a kind of..... I think that is kind of something that runs through certain aspects of 20th Century thought, is aesthetics.

Sangharakshita: But can you have, can you adorn something without there being something to adorn?

Padmavijaya: Well, I mean leaving aside the idea of imagining things, perhaps, I imagine sort of patterns sometimes for instance which what are they attached to, what are they of. I think of abstract painting. OK, you adorn a canvas but that is merely a kind of screen on which to make things visible.

Paul Hatton: That's a tricky one there. I can't remember the name of the painter, Vincent O'Brien I think, and this goes back to us talking about the ritual space, we were talking about galleries as a ritual space, who actually argues that the move towards abstraction and abstract painting is parallelled by the increasing whiteness and austerity of galleries and that almost abstract painting becomes a response to what would look good there.

Padmavijaya: I can't buy that! *[Laughter]*

Paul Hatton: I don't know. We did, we have now got art as, we were talking about art as ritual which is a response to the space and the condition in which art is existing.

Padmavijaya: I think if you're going just to tie down the evolution, the emergence of abstract art in

the West in the 20th Century, maybe you could talk about photography and other social phenomena, but abstraction occurs in other cultures, in other times, where ...

Paul Hatton: *(unclear)* a site, whether it is in architecture it is associated with a particular type of site, it is a mosaic on the floor or tiling on the floor. I think it would be difficult to produce a painting in absence of some sense of that painting being hung somewhere. How else do you visualise that painting?

Padmavijaya: I wouldn't argue that the painting is produced without any notion of it being hung somewhere. But all I am saying is that I don't think abstract painting emerged in response to the increasing whiteness of the walls of galleries *[Laughter]*.

[End of Side Two]
[Day Two - Tape Two - Side One]

_____: *(unclear)* abstract art was non-decorative.

Sangharakshita: Absolute music is like that, because absolute music isn't about anything. Program music may be but absolute music isn't. It's its own subject.

Manjusvara: It's a bit like mathematics.

Sangharakshita: Hm?

Manjusvara: It is almost like mathematics it seems.

Sangharakshita: Yes, pure mathematics.

Manjusvara: Pure mathematics was the same.

Sangharakshita: You can multiply three by three without it having to be three pounds by three pounds. It is just three by three. Ah, we get close to Platonism again here, don't we *[Laughter]*. The Form. Well that was, in a way, one of the sources as far as I remember of Plato's argument. It was an argument from geometry, that you can think of an equilateral triangle without, well, it isn't possible to have an equilateral triangle in actual fact. Because it will never be absolutely equilateral *(unclear)*. But you can **think** a perfect equilateral triangle, sorry, *[Laughter]* isosceles or whatever. And in the same way you may not have anything on earth which is completely beautiful, but you can think of absolute beauty. And Plato believed that that could be an object of actual perception and therefore a reality in the same way that the triangle was that you just thought. That was one of his points of departure. In fact, maybe the principal one.

Anyway, those were your questions. The answers appear to be rather inconclusive. *[Laughter]* But do we come to any conclusion?

Padmavijaya: Bright colours and gold could well be universally agreeable to....

Sangharakshita: The higher you go in the hierarchy of art it becomes more and more difficult to speak, at least of any generally common sense or appreciation but perhaps it can be cultivated by a few individuals.

Indrabodhi: Have you not said that anybody could cultivate an appreciation of a different culture given time?

Sangharakshita: Perhaps in **theory** but whether it would actually work out like that in practice is difficult to say because most people have difficulty enough in fully appreciating the works of art within their own particular culture and tradition.

Paul Hatton: There is an American critic, Samuel Greenberg, modern critic, who proposed that a good work of art, by which he meant a aesthetic work of art, could be appreciated by any person in any time in any culture. And that if, and how that is achieved, I mean he thought this could be broken down basically into about eight points but to achieve that the viewer needs to stand in right relation with the work. The right relation he calls a transcendent relation. If we can stand, if everybody could stand like that in front of a work of art we would have consensus about which was good or not.

Sangharakshita: Well true. It is a very big **if** though, isn't it! *[Laughter]*

Paul Hatton: Yes.

Sangharakshita: In other words if you could take a god's eye view of it you would appreciate it.

Paul Hatton: But I think it has to be that lofty to find that sort of consensus really. But he was actually proposing that we as human beings could do this and he was sort of putting himself forward as somebody who could do that and why didn't everybody else do it. But I am not convinced about what he was saying. I'm just sort of putting it in to see what you thought of that idea.

Sangharakshita: Well it sounds a very good idea but just a very good idea.

Padmavijaya: He didn't seem to work historically. The artist that he came to promote didn't really produce highly formal work, very abstract, often using quite bright colours. Just a sort of dead scene to me. Artists called Nolan, Davitsky *(unclear)*. Those people. It didn't seem to quite work. I think his project was noble. I would always say that of him though, he was trying to rescue or save high art, the idea of high art, from the sort of tired of kitsch culture which now has taken its course. In his time, the fifties and forties, it was just coming into its own, pop culture, and he was trying to sort of make a place for high art, for aesthetic experience, which offered a kind of experience more elevated than that being offered by pop culture at the time. So it was quite a noble project to offer a context for higher experience, if it is higher.

Paul Hatton: He was for something you call quality in art but whether he was actually putting his finger on what constituted quality or how it could be experienced is slightly different but you've got to admire somebody who stands for quality.

Chintamani: He was also a Marxist as I understand it and he said that he could only really talk about the form of the work of art, not its content *(unclear)*.

Paul Hatton: Yeah, well, you couldn't talk about content in this notion of there being a universal timeless art. Because content would start to pin it down and be more meaningful to one culture or one time than another. Therefore that would prevent or it would be one of the things that would prevent the universality. So you come to the conclusion that the great art would have to be abstract.

Sangharakshita: Or pottery at the most.

Paul Hatton: Hmm.

Padmavijaya: To be fair to him though, in terms of content, he didn't say there shouldn't be content but the content and form should be inextricably linked. So that content seemed to consist of the artist's feelings as he engaged with the medium, which sounds quite abstract, but the idea was that when you

look at a piece of work you don't just have an optical - there are certain contradictions in his theory - but you don't just have an optical experience which would be like looking at a coloured circle. Something of the subjectivity of that artist is conveyed by the formal relations of the painting.

Sangharakshita: And the cultural associations. Because you might say, well, if you represent a smiling human face that would mean the same thing to everybody all over the world. But in my experience it doesn't because I have found that my Thai friends smiled when they were angry. *[Laughter]* You concealed your anger by smiling. *[Laughter]*

Paul Hatton: There's a book up on that shelf, well I think it is on that shelf by Clive Bell who claims that somebody who is appreciative of art can stand in front of a painting and go away from it and have **no** idea what the subject matter was. However somebody who stands in front of a painting who is not particularly sophisticated or cultured, that's all they are going to know. And he says that subject matter is irrelevant.

Sangharakshita: But that is part of his theory of significant form, isn't it?

Paul Hatton: Hm.

Sangharakshita: But. Well, I would say in my own terms that the whole theory or idea of significant form is applicable only to a very limited range of works of art. I don't think you can ignore content.

Padmavijaya: He is absolutely dogmatic on that point.

Sangharakshita: Is he regarded as outmoded now?

Padmavijaya: Absolutely.

Paul Hatton: Yeah, well he is part of that same lineage that goes sort of Bell to the 20th Century to Greenberg, and that whole sort of theory is dismissed now.

Sangharakshita: Well we needn't discuss it then *[Laughter]*.

There are a few more questions left.

"Could you say something about what you mean by spiritual beauty. Is it the physical embodiment in people or artworks of moral values and spiritual states?"

I suppose the short answer is yes. But that one was using the word beautiful in this connection metaphorically. Well perhaps it's obvious that one is using it metaphorically. That if you contemplate moral values and spiritual states they can give rise to the same sort of delight and satisfaction that you get from contemplating certain works of art or listening to certain musical compositions, and therefore by analogy, as it were, you speak of spiritual beauty.

Padmavijaya: I remember you mentioning the work of Filippo Lippi as somebody whose paintings embodied spiritual beauty.

Sangharakshita: I think in that case I probably meant that the features of the people he depicts express very refined emotions which one can only describe as spiritual and that the work is beautiful in that sense. Or exhibits spiritual beauty in that sense. I must say that is one of the things I am greatly struck by on some of my visits to, well especially German art galleries, where there is a lot of late medieval and early Renaissance work. Sometimes the features of saints are represented in such a refined sort of way that one hardly sees even in Renaissance paintings. There is something of it in

Fillipo Lippi, something of it to some extent in Botticelli but hardly in anybody else. It's a quality that somehow seems to have been lost in the course of the Renaissance.

Padmavijaya: What do you think about Bellini, for instance? There is the painting of the boy down at the, what's it called, the Barber Institute, for instance.

Sangharakshita: I am afraid I can't remember it. Well, yes, he is refined but I think the particular quality that I am thinking of isn't quite there in Bellini's case.

_____: Raphael?

Sangharakshita: No, I don't think it is. No, there is a sort of human sweetness but there isn't that expression of spiritual refinement. It's the capacity to represent or depict a certain expression on the human face.

Kovida: Which you would get in a rupa possibly. Which might be in a rupa.

Sangharakshita: At their very best. But only at their very best. You get it in, well the Ajanta Bodhisattva. I think you have to see the original. You also get it, something very similar for that in a Giotto head of Jesus. I have got a reproduction of it. The original is slightly damaged. But the expression is one of incredible refinement.

Padmavijaya: Where would that be? The Giotto?

Sangharakshita: Ah.

_____: Florence.

Padmavijaya: Florence, hm.

Sangharakshita: It is one of the sets of frescoes that I have got a book on. It may be the frescoes in that, what is it, Scorbini Chapel in Padua. It may be that one. I think. As far as I remember that head is just over a doorway or something of that sort. It's rather badly damaged. But in a way it's a bit damaged like the Ajanta Bodhisattva is damaged but it doesn't seem to make any difference. The expression is still there. So that sort of thing I'm thinking of. I describe those artists as sort of capable of representing what I could call spiritual beauty. There's a capacity to represent that sort of emotion, that sort of feeling, that sort of experience, as expressed in the human countenance.

Suriyavamsa: *(Unclear)* Italian artists before the Renaissance?

Sangharakshita: No, I was actually thinking much more of the German and some of the Flemish ones. Perhaps. A lot of them are, well some of them at least were anonymous. That is also rather strange. But I did refer in my travel letter or whatever to, oh dear what was his name? I must admit I hadn't heard of him before but I refer to his paintings of scenes from the life of St Valentine, *(unclear)* some-body-or-
other, the painter from Ulm. They were very remarkable.

Paul Hatton: So you are a bit like Ruskin again because these Northern Europeans are not Catholics *[Laughter]*.

Sangharakshita: They were Catholics! No, this is **pre** Reformation. They were Catholics. Lots of bright colours! *[Laughter]*

Chintamani: When I went to the Ajanta caves I felt very much at home, I didn't feel culturally alienated at all. Actually it was quite an interesting experience. I didn't feel alienated there but when I went to the Kailash temple at *(unclear)* it did feel culturally alienating.

Sangharakshita: But there is only sculpture there isn't there?

Chintamani: No, there is, some of the fresco on the inside and outside of the, the stucco, it was all plastered and painted and some of that remained.

Padmavijaya: Is that Buddhist work?

Chintamani: No, it's Hindu.

Padmavijaya: Is that because though you are Buddhist already before you went there so *(unclear)*.

Chintamani: Yeah, I suppose so.

Sangharakshita: You find a very high degree of refinement in some of the, well, Persian and Indian Moghul miniature painting.

Suriyavamsa: *(unclear)*.

Sangharakshita: So anyway, maybe that's enough about that question, about spiritual beauty.

And then

"Can we usefully draw parallels between the third vimoksa - beauty - in the Buddhist scheme of the eight vimokshas and beauty in the Platonic or Neo-Platonic sense?"

Possibly. But, this of course, here we enter into a quite different realm altogether. Because in the scheme of the vimokshas how does one get to that third vimoksha?

Padmavijaya: Meditation.

Sangharakshita: But what form of meditation usually?

_____: Is it the asubhabhava?

Sangharakshita: No. Though it can be but usually it's kasina. That is to say, reflecting, I mean concentrating, on a disk of pure bright colour. First of all on a literal disk of pure bright colour, either the earth or made of flowers, and then being able to visualise it mentally and experience it. And then able to retain the experience, whatever it is, without even that visualised image. And in that way you get to the subhavimoksha. So it's as though it's beauty without anything which is beautiful. So there does seem to be a sort of analogy with the Platonic experience perhaps, though the philosophical context might be different. There is a question of experience, not a question of philosophical argument or deduction. It's analogous to the experience of metta because you can experience metta without anybody to whom you are directing it. Though you start off by directing it towards somebody but in the end you are just left with metta and nobody to whom you are directing it. So there seems to be somewhat the same in this case. You start off with the beautiful physical object and the beautiful mental counterpart which you visualise and then, just, you take away the object and you are left just with the experience **without** the object. Just as you take away the actual imperfect triangles and you are left in thought with the perfect triangle. There does seem to be a sort of analogy and it does seem

that, for the Platonist, for Plato, the triangle, which was simply thought, could be intensely experienced. It wasn't just sort of abstract in our modern sense. It was almost a spiritual experience for Plato one imagines, to be able just to think the perfect triangle or the perfect sphere, which you just don't encounter on this earth.

Padmavijaya: The sense that I've always had from reading modern commentary on Plato, not a very great deal but a small amount that I have read, they seem to import the misconception that it is a purely kind of mental abstract exercise. But I've always thought in the way that you described it that it would be more of a spiritual experience to imagine the forms.

Sangharakshita: Well, I don't know. I read a passage once from Bertrand Russell's autobiography and, I don't know really anything about mathematics, but anyway apparently when he was a child he came across some sort of mathematical or algebraical demonstration or equation or whatever and it gave him an experience of absolute ecstasy. It was so beautiful. And of course mathematicians do speak of elegant demonstrations and so on. So Plato's sort of apprehension of his triangle or his circle was of that sort of order. So it seems.

_____: But there does seem to be a complete reversal in terms of metaphysical outlook between, say, the ancient world and the sort of modern world where, in Platonic terms the more idealised, the more ideal and the more eternal something.....

Sangharakshita: The more real.

_____: The more real it was, yes. Whereas our, the modern outlook is the more down to earth, the more tactile it is even, the more real it is, you know, it's in the realm of the senses.

Sangharakshita: Well, it is a different usage of the word real altogether isn't it.

_____: Right. I think Bertrand Russell said something like "well, if you can't run it over with a London bus it is not worth thinking about" If it's not an object of philosophical enquiry, if you can't knock it down with a London bus.

Sangharakshita: Well Plato's philosophy is usually described in tradition as realism. But it is not realism in the modern sense, it's exactly the opposite.

Anyway, one more question

"If yes, is the Platonic part of beauty, as outlined in the Symposium, viable for 20th Century Buddhists?"

It seems it is! *[Laughter]*. I mean, the theoretical framework may need to be adjusted. Because it does suggest that, well it is possible to go to more and more refined experiences of the arts regardless almost of, though your theory of how and why that happens, to have a greater and greater approximation through the artist's deeper understanding of things.

Padmavijaya: Do you think his methodology is appropriate?

Sangharakshita: Yes, well perhaps it is. I was just trying to apply it to the arts. Supposing you were to look at a beautiful painting, and really studied and really appreciated something really very beautiful, to use that term. And then supposing you will try just to, well to take the painting away, just stayed with that feeling and just try to intensify it in the absence of the painting. You would be following the sort of Platonic path, wouldn't you? And maybe you would try to enrich that experience by contemplating different works of art. But then, after you have saturated yourself in that particular

work of art, well removing it and just again remaining with the feeling or the experience and trying to refine that more and more. Or deepen the understanding that the thinking had given you. Well maybe that sort of thing happened with Ruskin to some extent, you know when he compared Veronese's painting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and his experience of that Protestant service. I mean something of that experience obviously stayed with him and he must have gone on reflecting on it and getting more and more out of it and it must have given him a sort of deeper and deeper understanding of his own limitations and well the greatness of Veronese.

Paul Hatton: And it wasn't just that moment. He returns to it years and years later.

_____: Can you say more about the element of understanding. If I think of a particular painting, a particular beautiful painting, let's say, what sort of understanding would that promote, would that bring about?

Sangharakshita: I think it would depend very much on the subject matter in the broadest sense, the artist's treatment of it and what the artist himself was trying to do. Though on the other hand its effect upon you may have nothing to do with that because presumably Veronese when he painted that painting he had no idea that someone - a rather evangelical Protestant like Ruskin - would come along one day and be influenced by his painting. Veronese was being himself when he painted that, so to speak. But nonetheless his being himself through the painting did have that kind of effect. So the understanding is not just something which is sort of there in a didactic way in the painting. It seems to work... well, it is though you get the understanding out of it. Though in a way the painting nudges you in that sort of direction. It's not that the painting has a message, not as a work of art. As a work of **religious** art it may have. Well, look at Jesus's suffering from, if you are sorry for your sins, well, the painting may be saying that. But that has got nothing to do with its value as art.

Chintamani: Alberti, in his treatise on painting spoke about the various formal elements of the painting but there was something called historia of the painting, which I am not quite clear about. It is something like the moral message.

Sangharakshita: It is the theme.

Chintamani: The theme.

Indrabodhi: So it's a bit like the painting is the catalyst for whatever we need to realise next.

Sangharakshita: It can be it. And perhaps the greater the painting the more of its potential to be a catalyst for people. That is why it remains a source of inspiration so to speak, to vary the language.

Suriyavamsa: It is greater to the degree that Veronese could be himself.

Sangharakshita: Well, I am assuming that he was, he was painting in the way he **could** paint or the way he wanted to paint or the way that was natural for him. I think Ruskin from the very beginning has some reservations about the whole Venetian school because they were so sensuous, weren't they. But I can remember, well just a little autobiographical thing, I can remember the first actual painting I saw which made a very strong impression upon me, original painting, leaving aside reproductions, when I was quite young, maybe I wasn't even in my teens, but I was taken to the National Gallery, by my mother I think, and the painting that made the most impression on me, the only one which I really remember seeing at that time, was Titian's 'Bacchus and Ariadne'. And of course the colours are very bright so to speak, or rich, and it hadn't been cleaned at that time but even so. I don't think it acted as a catalyst, I just was drawn to it, I just liked that painting more than any of the others I saw. *[pause]*

Chintamani: There's a very strong blue, isn't there.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Very strong. Ultramarine.

Padmavijaya: And there is one opposite in the National Gallery, opposite that.....

Sangharakshita: They are always changing them around.

Padmavijaya: It has been like that for a few years now I think. It is, I shouldn't have opened my mouth, it is the.....

Padmakara: *(unclear name of painting)*

Padmavijaya: Yeah. That's equally rich. Well, also rich in the same sort of blue sky and is it .... did you say Tintoretto?

Padmakara: No, I thought you were going to say the other Titian which is near to it. I thought you were going to compare it because it is quite a brown painting. It is Diana shooting at a stag, a Titian one.

Sangharakshita: Yes. That is rather different.

Padmakara: It is not very colourful.

Padmavijaya: And the one with the goddess and the sky with her breasts ejecting milk.

Sangharakshita: Tintoretto, 'The Birth of the Milky Way'. That's in the National Gallery.

[End of Side One Side Two]

Padmavijaya: That's opposite the Titian, Bacchus and Ariadne.

Sangharakshita: I wouldn't, just speaking personally, I wouldn't regard that as a great painting. It seems to me more like competent decoration. Though, I mean I have seen a lot of Tintoretto's work in Venice and I did appreciate it quite a lot. But, especially in the, Oh, Scola de San Rocco. A whole series of frescos.

Paul Hatton: Tintoretto is someone else who has figured in Ruskin's top five.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. That is interesting.

Paul Hatton: If he had a top five.

Sangharakshita: There is someone that I have recently as it were discovered, though I have heard the name before but only got the chance to see much of his work fairly recently was Guercino. And I must say I like his work very very much. There were a number of works of his in an exhibition at the National Gallery a couple of years ago. Or maybe it was last year. And I saw a couple in the Scottish National Gallery. But he is not very fashionable nowadays.

Padmavijaya: When was that sort of painting, one of the sort of the Renaissance.

Sangharakshita: It is, he's well late, he is high Renaissance isn't he. Almost not, well he is not quite mannerist but maybe heading in that direction. But you don't see the brush strokes! *[Laughter]*

Anyway perhaps we had better leave it there for the moment.

[**End of Tape Two**

Day Three
Tape One Side One]

Sangharakshita: Oh, we have lost one or two people haven't we.

Kovida: We have lost three.

Chintamani: We might be getting some more in a day or two.

Kovida: We are getting possibly two tomorrow, one joining us until Wednesday. And I will just mention that we're actually being joined at supper by Cittapala and Dhiyampati. They are not on the retreat but they will just be eating supper with us.

Sangharakshita: Tomorrow we will probably be joined by Paramartha.

Yes, so a few more questions today. They all seem to revolve around my definition.

Are we ready?

"Re-reading this essay I have been inspired by your use of the term egolessness. Yet you said yesterday that you wouldn't talk in such terms these days. How has your thinking changed? Could you say more about understanding?"

A few days ago I was just sort of looking through that particular essay and it seems to me - this may of course be entirely subjective - that this term egolessness did rather sort of stick out. I couldn't help thinking that maybe the average, especially non-Buddhist, reader might find it a bit off putting. I think it was more a question of wondering how best to communicate my ideas rather than any necessary objection to the word itself. And I suppose I also couldn't help wondering whether in the ears of non-Buddhists especially it would, it would convey a negative impression. Not exactly rather than a positive one because in a way one wants to go beyond negative and positive, but I think I have said in the past that many important Buddhist terms are grammatically negative but have at least for the Indian reader a positive connotation. But that isn't necessarily the case for the Western reader that the grammatically negative term may just, just sound negative. So I was wondering how the rest of you felt about the use of this term egolessness, whether it sort of brought you up short or whether you felt it struck a jarring note or whether you responded to it positively or even, as one person apparently did, found it inspiring.

Kovida: I didn't find it jarring. I suppose when you were talking, because you go on to talk about the artist as undermining the self as it were, or causing a change, it seemed appropriate. When I first read it I didn't think I found it difficult.

Indrabodhi: Yeah, I think because you were speaking about art and beauty and it's very kind of rich, it seems to fit in very well. And I found it inspiring too. Maybe if you were talking about more abstract things like the mindfulness of breathing or something you could feel a bit more alienated or something.

Sangharakshita: So I don't have to completely abandon the term then?

Chintamani: In my leading of study and general talk around this subject at the Arts Centre I have

noticed that a number of people have found it rather daunting. 'Bracing' is the particular term in mind but often daunting as if, yes, as if in order to create worthwhile art I have to deny something. Now this may be true but in these instances it came out rather difficult.

Sangharakshita: I can understand that because, as I mentioned I think the other day, people do send me poetry and sometimes they say things like, well I am sending you this poetry because I think it expresses **me**, and **me** is very strongly emphasised. They don't think of the artistic or aesthetic experience as having anything to do with well the negation of **me** or transcending me but the affirmation and expression of **me**. Well, just **me** as I am here and now. Which is perhaps fair enough on a particular psychological level. Psychologically speaking, perhaps a lot of people you know do need to do that but expressing **me** does not necessarily produce great or even good art.

_____: Because when you said elsewhere that to transcend the self you need to have a positive sense of self to transcend in the first place.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Have I said it in this essay or somewhere else?

_____: I can't remember.

Sangharakshita: I know I have said it more than once, yes, in different contexts.

Manjusvara: I found the other term you use - unselfishness - quite inspiring.

Sangharakshita: Though that's ethical, the emphasis there it is more ethical isn't it. Whereas sometimes, the artist, in order to create, has from a certain point of view, to be very selfish. Even though the work may express unselfishness in a way. I spoke about Paul Scott, didn't I.

Indrabodhi: That is being selfish in the pursuit of some greater unselfishness perhaps.

Sangharakshita: Well analogously you get some people say criticising the Buddha's leaving home on the grounds of it being selfish. If was **selfish** of him to abandon his wife and child and just go off in search of his own liberation.

Chintamani: I think some people find the terminology of expansion, expansion out of the ego more useful than ego-less.

Sangharakshita: Well I have used that elsewhere I think, haven't I, though not in this particular essay. I think I have used it in 'Mind Reactive and Creative'.

Kovida: You were saying the other day that you began to think of the term as - well I suppose in expansionist terms - in understanding and I suppose one could substitute that. That the artist has an expansion of vision. It is **that** that he communicates through his work, so there could be a gradation of those moments in his work. So it is a deeper understanding of the world and reality.

Sangharakshita: Well the question goes on to say 'could you say more about understanding'. Well, I think I spoke more in terms of a **deeper** understanding because understanding by itself isn't really enough, because we speak in quite ordinary terms of understanding something, and it's not just that the artist understands in any ordinary sense, he has what we can only call a deeper or more profound or more comprehensive understanding, even amounting to a vision. And of course I also bring in the term 'Imagination', again not in the sense of a sort of fantasy but imagination more in the sense that say Coleridge understands the term.

Kovida: Would you say that by deeper understanding you also mean like knowing in the very deep

sense of that word?

Sangharakshita: Well, I think I have favoured the term 'understanding' rather than the term 'knowing'. Because knowing suggests something very definite that you know, something that can be quite sharply defined almost. Whereas understanding seems to have a sort of richer content. Suppose I say that I know you, and then that I understand you. Well, they do seem rather different. To know the world and to understand the world, or to know life, to understand life, these do seem to be two rather different things.

Ratnachuda: Understand has the components of reason and emotion involved in it.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes. Sympathy. If you say, well, "I know how you feel", or, "I understand how you feel". Again there is a difference.

Suriyavamsa: It's a matter of degree then. There is understanding and there is deeper understanding and then there is vision.

Sangharakshita: One could say that, yeah. "So how has your thinking changed?" I don't think my actual thinking is changed. I was just wondering whether there couldn't be a more effective term to communicate what I was getting at than egolessness. But apparently most of you seem to think that it is OK, well especially, within that particular context without other additional comments. Though perhaps not when you are at the Arts Centre dealing with a group of people who are submitting their poems or something of that sort.

Paul Hatton: I was thinking whether it would ..... because how does it fit with self expression? People think about art as being **self** expression, which seems to be countered by ego**less**.

Chintamani: That's what I like about it, because it's moving away from the *(unclear)* to the self.

Sangharakshita: I think self expression has a place in artistic creativity but I think it is only **a place**. I certainly don't think that self expression is the whole of artistic creativity. We will come to that in a minute perhaps when we go into my definition of art. And also it's a question of, well, what self do you express? Is it your ordinary everyday self or another self, even a higher self?

Kovida: I would say your self changes depending on your mood as well.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes. Sometimes it has been said, I forget by whom, perhaps more than one person, that it's quite disappointing very often to meet a great writer or a great painter because, well, you have so much admired his work, it's impressed you, he's such a this wonderful person, but when you **meet** him he seems so prosaic. I mean this was said about, say, Wordsworth, especially when Wordsworth was quite elderly and was rather staid in his ways and a bit conventional. I mean they could hardly believe that this was the person who had written those particular poems which were, say, around the time of the French revolution. But it **was** the same person in an earlier stage of his development. Maybe if you had met Shakespeare, in his days of retirement in Stratford-upon-Avon when he was trying to drive a hard bargain over the purchase of piece of land, you probably... he wouldn't have impressed you as the great poet and all that.

Chintamani: There's a quote, "Art is amongst other things or involves amongst other things expression but not all expression is art".

Sangharakshita: Yeah. Well that is similar to what Oscar Wilde said about bad poetry. He said "all bad poetry is sincere". *[Laughter]* It does express genuine emotion but it's a very poor emotion usually and, well, very badly expressed. So all bad poetry is sincere. I often think of that for some

reason *[Laughter]*.

Manjusvara: It seems to, I may be wrong about this, but it seems to contradict conditioned co-production though, that things rise out of their conditions. One would have thought that great art would, as it were, arise out of great minds, great artists. Do you see what I am saying?

Sangharakshita: Well it depends again on what you mean by a great mind. It's not necessarily a good man that has a great mind. Or one could say what do you mean by a great mind as even **distinct** from a good mind. I was just trying to think of something that I read at the beginning of a novel by E.M.Forster. I think it may have been 'The Longest Journey'. He says something like the hero, if it is the hero, and he says something to the effect that well this particular school where he was teaching there were only two first class minds. So I thought that really extraordinary that in this little prep school, I think it was, there should be two first class minds. So Forster must have had a very limited understanding of what constituted a first class mind. So in the same way, what does one mean by a great mind as distinct from a good mind. A great mind has a certain largeness of outlook, a breadth of sympathy, not just knowledge, presumably.

_____: But if one has that great outlook, surely one has a tendency towards goodness.

Chintamani: It's good in this context which *(unclear name)* is good describing goodness in a moral sense or something as a well functioning mind as it were.

_____: I was thinking more in the ordinary sense of the word.

Indrabodhi: Shakespeare and Wordsworth, were they good people as well as great minds? Would they have been?

Sangharakshita: Well, Wordsworth, in many respects behaved very well and was a very ethical person, not withstanding a certain lapse from a **certain** point of view in his early life. You know, when he had an illegitimate daughter. But recently I was reading volume two of the Coleridge biography and he, at a certain point in his later life he seems not to have treated Coleridge very well, or very understandingly or sympathetically, and that does seem to have been rather a flaw in his character. One's sympathies were very much with poor Coleridge despite all his admitted weaknesses. Because Coleridge certainly had a great mind but he had so many personal weaknesses, more of a psychological than an ethical nature.

Padmakara(?): So in what sense was Coleridge's mind great?

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Well he had a very broad, very comprehensive, outlook. He thought deeply, he was original in his thinking, creative in his thinking. He contributed a lot to the development of the romantic understanding of the nature and the significance of literature and the arts generally. And to Church/State relationships, things of that sort. Nature of the imagination. His understanding of Shakespeare really created a sort of revolution in the understanding of Shakespeare, far beyond what anybody else had been able to achieve before him. And he **knew** so much. He was a very learned man quite apart from his breadth and depth of understanding. He was a great poet.

Padmakara: So was he a **good** man?

Sangharakshita: I would say, having read, well, not just the most recent two volume biography but several others, that despite all his weaknesses he was a very good man. His weaknesses were weaknesses, they were sins of omission rather than commission. Well some of his weaknesses seem to have been due to his upbringing. He was the youngest of a number of brothers. His brothers were all older than him. He seems to have felt rather set upon. He used to rebel but not very effectively and he

had chronic self distrust, blamed himself a lot. He felt very guilty, very inadequate, especially compared with more strong minded competent people like Southey and Wordsworth. But he was very, very affectionate by nature, very kindly, never intentionally hurt anybody's feelings. He very quickly fell out of love with his wife but he was never unfaithful to her as far as we know. He was a very good father, on very good terms with his sons which perhaps counts for quite a lot. Very generous. But he had eventually of course the opium habit and, well, he was blamed for that and sometimes, well, tried to conceal it. He wasn't always completely open and honest about it. Though he was in the end, but for many years he wasn't. So I would say on the whole, despite his weaknesses, he was a very good man, a sympathetic character. And, well, some of his friends were rather too ready to condemn him, mainly on account of, well, the fact that he was not living with his wife and apparently had deserted his children, though he established very friendly relations with them again when they grew up, even before that. Wordsworth, on the other hand, although a good and upright man, doesn't always strike one as a very attractive character, not as he got older anyway. There is something rather hard and rigid about him. But, yes, certainly a very upright man.

Indrabodhi: And what about Shakespeare?

Sangharakshita: We don't know, we can only infer from the plays. But it would be very difficult to imagine a narrow-minded Shakespeare. *[Laughter]* I think we can infer from the plays that he didn't like Puritans. *[Laughter]*

_____: There seems to be a critique of Puritanism, that it's repressed sexuality in his plays. Often they come to grief through their sexuality.

Sangharakshita: Well, it may not have been very conscious but that may have been his instinctive feeling.

_____: But he did tend to keep himself out of the plays, didn't he. Very much. Or it's difficult to identify him in his plays.

Sangharakshita: Well, there are so many plays, there are so many different kinds, and so many different characters and it's very difficult to say that, well, this or that character is, so to speak, Shakespeare's mouthpiece. In a way, that, for instance, George Bernard Shaw has characters in his plays who were very definitely his mouthpieces. Shakespeare wasn't writing that sort of thing.

Chintamani: And also he was writing for a company quite a lot, and definite actors.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Chintamani: To give them roles.

Kovida: I suppose to come back to your question about mind. I suppose I tend to, or I have tended to think about artists in relation to Buddhism, whereas one is actually following a path. Therefore there will be a natural, or one assumes that one's going to make improvements of moving towards, say, Buddhahood, so your mind is constantly improving. Whereas certainly in **your** writing and I suppose the more I read that the life of an artist seems to be completely random sometimes. It's not always clear that they are actually heading in a definite direction. Sometimes **they** are not very clear of the direction they are going. So .....

Sangharakshita: Sometimes you can see a definite evolution. You can see that for instance in the case of Goethe. We know so much about him from his earliest years right up until his death.

Kovida: Then there are others who seem to be inspired, that then come home and so. I think, well then

they are uninspired and I suppose.....

Sangharakshita: Well, Rilke is a famous example isn't he. Years without a spark of inspiration. Though one sometimes feels that Rilke was a bit precious about it. But you have had some writers and artists who have been almost saintly people. You can think of Fra Angelico.

Kovida: But do you think that is because the artist then decides to dedicate his **life** to art? He makes it, in a way he goes for refuge to that, he makes that his purpose.

Sangharakshita: I think in Fra Angelico's case, as far as I know he seems not to have experienced any conflict. I mean he was a monk, a friar I believe, and, well, he had the artistic gift and he felt the best way he could serve God so to speak, was through his art. And it doesn't appear that he experienced any conflict. And his brother monks were quite happy for him to function in that way. He seems to have been a very fine artist and a very good monk.

Chintamani: I was reading that he also believed that one could only make good art if one served God.

Sangharakshita: Well that was the tradition of the Russian icon painters. Because he wasn't quite correct in a way because, well, some of the great artists haven't been very godly people, have they?

Chintamani: I think he was speaking in terms of portraying the figures that he was portraying, the saints and so on.

Sangharakshita: Yes, I think there's something in that, that you can't portray an expression say on somebody's face that you haven't experienced at least to an extent, at least for a while. Because when you **imagine** it, to the extent that you are imagining it you are experiencing it. At least if just when you are imagining it. But you may not **live** at that level, which is what, say, the saint tries to do.

Do we seem to be going a bit beyond the area of contemporary art discourse?

Paul Hatton: Yeah, but that's fine! *[Laughter]*

Sangharakshita: I was just wondering what you were thinking.

Paul Hatton: I'm still toying with this idea of self expression and not simply in this context, just how often it comes up as a virtue.

Manjusvara: A virtue.

Paul Hatton: A virtue, yeah. Or.....

Manjusvara: In art?

Paul Hatton: Yeah, an assumption, I think, that there's an opportunity here to express yourself or.....

Manjusvara: I wonder if there isn't again this idea of yes, you know, God's collapsed in, heaven's collapsed down, and that's all you would have to express. In the past....

Sangharakshita: Not necessarily, you can write about anything. Even if there isn't any god. You can write about trees and flowers and so on.

Kovida: Manjusvara had an interesting idea yesterday that, since the death of God or the collapse of

God, all that we are left with is our self. So that the current society is like, the main expression of it is **self** because there is no higher power to.....

Sangharakshita: They are probably expressing themselves even when they believe in God.

Manjusvara: But the self they would be expressing would be a different notion is how I put it, just as it is for the Buddhas.

Sangharakshita: I doubt whether in practice it made any difference really. In practice.

Paul Hatton: I think I am thinking of it in that, in the sort of therapeutic context where people want to somehow purge themselves.

Sangharakshita: I think that language belongs much more to psychotherapy than it does to the arts. Certainly nowadays. And I think it may well have leaked from the psychotherapeutic field into the artistic field to some extent. Because one often hears people talking about or one reads about people writing in terms of really expressing oneself and one should express oneself, it is good to express oneself, in all sorts of ways. And art from that point of view is just one of the ways in which you express yourself.

Paul Hatton: It's quite interesting I think that when people say they are going to express themselves actually they conform to some image of what it would it be like to express yourself. So there is not a genuine self. It's performing to this stereotypical image of self somehow. I was just sort of chasing that.

Sangharakshita: Sometimes of course it takes on a slightly negative tinge. That the more negative the expression or the more negative the self, the more and more genuine it is and it is likely to be.

Paul Hatton: Yeah, I was thinking of people say they are being self expressive. It's usually pretty gloomy. It is not.....

Sangharakshita: Well the assumption seems to be that usually it's all the more genuine, all the more authentic, all the more sincere. I can't help thinking while we discussed Francis Bacon the other day that maybe some people feel like that with regard to **his** work. Oh it's so gloomy, it's so negative, it's so destructive, well it must be really genuine, he is really expressing what he **feels**. So it must be sort of great art or at least good art.

Paul Hatton: And you get the opposite when something's joyful. People think it is trivial.

Manjusvara: Or superficial.

Sangharakshita: It's chocolate boxy or it is greetings cardish.

Manjusvara: There's a quote I have I think that, you may not know it but there is an American song writer called Paul Simon, Simon and Garfunkel and someone asked Paul Simon why his songs were always sad and he said "why would I want to write songs when I was happy", which really struck me.

Sangharakshita: Oh, oh! *[Laughter]*

Manjusvara: But I think it sort of is a measure of our times that there is this feeling that if you write happy songs somehow they are not going to be as meaningful...

Sangharakshita: Yes. Or not as genuine. You must be pretending. Because Shakespeare wrote happy

songs as well as sad ones.

Kovida: Blake.

Sangharakshita: Blake. Yes. *[pause]* Well, I don't know much about contemporary poetry, in fact, very little indeed, but is there much expression of joy in it? Leaving aside pop lyrics and all that.

Manjusvara: Well, you know the poet I publish, William Stafford, was often criticised for being too positive. This was actually used against him, that his poetry expressed positive emotions and states and thus couldn't be very, somehow very profound. This was often said. So, yeah, there is certainly this school of the American confessional poets, Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath.

Sangharakshita: I suppose one could argue that sorrow is often more profound than joy. Because sorrow makes you think, sorrow makes you reflect, but joy is more often than not unreflective.

Manjusvara: It shouldn't really be the case should it? You should, if you are in moments of great joy, that should cause you to reflect on life as .....

Sangharakshita: But do you?

Manjusvara: Well...

Kovida: I suppose the question is if you are experiencing joy is there a need to communicate because you are enjoying the experience. It's when you're suffering that there's a need to try and understand.

Sangharakshita: I have said more than once in the past that if you feel happy you don't ask "well, why am I feeling happy, why **me**?". But if you are suffering, "well, why am I suffering, why should **I** suffer?" so it gives rise to more reflection and joy usually, although perhaps it need not be, usually is unreflective. Not always. I can think of literary examples where it is. For instance, Wordsworth's Immortality.

Manjusvara: Keats. I think as well.

Sangharakshita: Yes, to some extent. But with some reservations.

Chintamani: Although it seems to me there is a very fruitful area to be explored on the theme of I am feeling joy and why does not the rest of humanity feel joy? *(Unclear)* that seems to be a very interesting polarity.

Kovida: You don't often think that, though, do you. When you experience joy it's generally you enjoy it. You don't tend to want to spread it around.

Manjusvara: Well, we are talking about experiences of metta which are profoundly - satisfying isn't quite the right word, but you know what I mean - they feel very positive and yet they are in their essence not just about yourself. So I think **we** have a vocabulary which is actually allowing us to say well positive feelings can be as profound and other regarding as negative ones. I do think it's a cultural thing as well.

Padmakara(?): I think the tradition of **love** poetry is an expression of joy.

Sangharakshita: Though more often than not expressions of **loss**.

Padmakara(?): Yeah. *[Laughter]*

Sangharakshita: For instance, I have made the point sometimes that, in connection with poems of friendship, there are nearly always laments for lost friends, not the celebration of living friendship. But I did say that I thought that the reason for that probably was that at the time that one had friends and enjoyed their company you didn't appreciate what you had. Not in our culture perhaps because well it isn't given so much importance and it sort of creeps up on you. It isn't like a love affair where you plunge right in and well start writing reams of poetry if you are that way inclined, or even if you aren't! So friendship is something of a more gradual growth and you don't realise the depth that it has reached until suddenly perhaps you lose it.

Chintamani: Joy often finds expression in music, I mean not with lyrics, just music. There is a South African black jazz pianist whom I heard interviewed on the radio and he said that it doesn't matter what sort of music you **play**, it's the intention behind it that is important. He claims to be a Buddhist I believe, and he said that one's intention to play music should always be to spread joy.

Sangharakshita: Well, Haydn said that with regard to his music. I think I quoted his statement somewhere. He wanted to make people happy. Because partly because he saw that very often they weren't happy and he wanted to spread joy through his music and his music is notoriously happy and joyful and light-hearted. Even masses and requiems.

Manjusvara: He seems to be someone who didn't have that conflict, did he.

Sangharakshita: No.

Manjusvara: Just very.....

Sangharakshita: A good man. Without being saintly, but a good man. Without, well as far as one can tell, without much in the way of inner conflict though. There is a symphony which is called his "Sturm und Drang" symphony, so perhaps he did have his moments. And he was a little susceptible in love. A little bit though not, he wasn't ironic or he wasn't a Don Juan or anything like that, but he was a bit susceptible. But a happy man on the whole, a joyful man.

Anyway, let's leave that question shall we. We have got quite a bit *(unclear)* from egolessness. Yes, I can find some questions here.

"If you wrote "The Religion of Art" now would you express your definition of art differently?"

Maybe that ties up with.....*[pause]* No, maybe it doesn't.

I don't think I would give a different definition. I think I would do several things that I haven't done in that particular essay. I think I'd try to make it clear what sort of definition I was giving. Or rather in what sense it was a definition. I think I'd make it clear that I was giving a normative definition and not a descriptive one. And I think I would make it clear that it was also cognitive-ist. Apart from that I think I would go a lot more into detail with regard to each phrase of the definition. And make it much clearer that I saw these different - these successive phrases in the definition, or successive qualifications - as constituting an ascending series. And I think I would give examples to make my point clear. Maybe I could go a little bit into that.

Kovida: Are you going to say what you mean by normative?

Sangharakshita: Well, it is not that ..... I wouldn't be sort of starting with an abstract definition of art and then applying it to works of art to see whether they were art or not. I would be asking, well, what is art supposed to be doing? What is the function of art, or in the language of that earlier essay,

what is the value of art? And I would see that the value of art as leading us to a deeper or more comprehensive understanding, as being in that sense cognitive, as distinct from merely expressionistic.

So. ***Art is the organisation of sensuous impressions into pleasurable formal relations***. I think there is a question about these. Isn't there a question about these sensuous impressions? Or maybe we can go into that a little bit later.

So art is the organisation of sensuous impressions. So I start of with what might be described as the most primitive and simple forms of art. I did touch on this the other day, didn't I? That, when I was talking about, or trying to find some common element in people's aesthetic experience cross-culturally. And some common element in works of art which everybody would recognise, so to speak, as beautiful. And I spoke about colours. So first of all, ***art is the organisation of sensuous impressions***. So first of all, there were mainly two kinds of sensuous impressions that we are concerned with as regards art. First is visual impressions and the other is aural impressions. So visual impressions obviously are the subject matter, the basic subject matter of the visual arts, and aural impressions, or sounds, of those in forms of music. So what happens is that we are all the time experiencing impressions. Through the eye we are experiencing impressions of colour and form, and through the ear all sorts of sounds. But we experience them, from the artistic point of view, in a chaotic sort of way. So the artist draws upon them. He takes - let's take the example of the visual arts - he takes colour and he takes shape and he creates out of just colour and shape what we call a work of art. So the kind of work of art that is created just out of colour and shape in its simplest form, well an example of that would be, say, a Persian tile. So I regard this as a work of art because it is an organisation of visual sensuous impressions. And it is an organisation of them into pleasurable formal relations. But it doesn't go further than that.

Indrabodhi: What did you mean by formal relations?

Sangharakshita: Well, relations of, say, proportion.

Indrabodhi: I see.

Sangharakshita: Those relations don't have any sort of representational subject matter. They are geometrical. We did talk about geometric patterns, didn't we, on pottery. But the tile is sort of just two dimensional, and it can have well just pretty patterns on it. And I have seen some very, very beautiful Moorish tilework in the South of Spain in Granada and in Cordoba. So you know the sort of thing I am thinking about.

[End of Side One Side Two]

So I would regard this as the basic, in the sense of the most simple - even you could say primitive or elementary - form of visual art. The two dimensional coloured patterned tile. Of course you can go a little bit further, the patterning can be of stylised natural forms. That's going a little bit beyond. Well, like that wallpaper. That goes a little bit beyond the coloured tile which has purely abstract or nonrepresentational patterning on it. And then you can go on to pottery, because pottery is **three** dimensional. It is not two dimensional like the tile, or rather the coloured surface of the tile. So I would regard pottery, ceramics, as representing the next stage in the development or evolution of art or the next level of the hierarchy if you like. So here you have form and colour but also you have volume. So it is three dimensional. And of course you can get extraordinary effects just with these three simple things. Sometimes I have felt that you can get, well, a very, very great deal of delight from the best of Chinese pottery and porcelain, the extraordinary colours and the beautiful shapes. They are very, very great works of art on that level. And they are very, very satisfying on that level. And there are hundreds and thousands of different shapes and colours and combinations of shapes and colours. Well, you probably know if you have ever looked at the ceramics department in a museum.

And then of course there's glass. When I was in, where was it, I think it was Dusseldorf, I went to the glass museum there. I think it was in the art gallery but a very big collection of glass. And some of it was very beautiful indeed. There was a lot of Tiffany glassware there. So I feel that perhaps, perhaps pottery, ceramics generally, glassware, this has been rather underestimated. It doesn't seem to be given much attention in aesthetic writings. Though it may be I have just not come across them. But that's the impression I get. Though sometimes the pottery imitates natural forms, and sometimes originates from natural forms. But I would regard that as a stage slightly further on, because it's beginning to be representational. For instance, some Chinese pots have the form of a gourd or various kinds of gourd.

Chintamani: Why would you say that the element of representationism marks a higher stage in the hierarchy?

Sangharakshita: Because you have got a greater range of possibilities. You have got the abstract and also the representational.

Chintamani: Does that mean that when you are referring to, through representations, when you are referring to another, an item in the perceived world you are drawing on a greater range of experience?

Sangharakshita: Yes. Yes and therefore the possibilities of expression are greater. And of course you go a bit further and you get of course painted pottery though I would say that painted pottery, that is pottery which has got scenes painted on it, is probably a bit hybrid. I am not so sure I'm in favour of that, but I'm open to discussion on the point. But you see the way in which I'm heading. So art is the organisation of sensuous impressions into pleasurable formal relations. The organisation is important because the work of art is a whole. It's a self contained whole. It is not a part of something else. It's a part of the material, the material object is a part of the material world but it has an independent existence - it's a whole, it's not just a fragment. Even works which are sort of fragmentary are actually intentionally fragmentary. Because they are intentionally fragmentary they are nonetheless whole.

Chintamani: Yes.

Sangharakshita: Well like for instance in some Chinese painting, a lot seems to be just left out. But it isn't that just there's something missing, that left outness is part of the artwork as a whole. It can be sort of broken off. But a breaking off can be intentional. So therefore I say that the art is the organisation and the work of art is something organised. It's organised out of sensuous impressions **into** pleasurable formal relations. Now we talked about this issue of pleasure, didn't we? It's not very straightforward. I think on the level of the tile and the pot it probably is a question of straightforward pleasure, but as you get higher in the hierarchy of the arts, the question of pleasure becomes more problematic. Because you can get pleasure, aesthetic pleasure, from the representation of a scene which, if it is actually enacted, is a painful one, like a parting. A painting can represent two people parting. It's sad, but you get aesthetic pleasure from contemplating it, even though you may also share in the sadness that is being depicted there. So therefore pleasure enters into the experience of the work of art but it is by no means always an experience of unalloyed pleasure. I tend to think that on the level of, say, the coloured tile and the, say the Chinese vase, yes, it's purely pleasurable. I don't know whether you could experience a degree of pain in contemplating a Chinese vase - could you? - for the sake of argument. Or would it not - the colours and the shape - would it not give rise to a pleasurable experience if you were at all aesthetically sensitive?

Chintamani: Does this tie up with Ruskin's aestheticism theoria that aesthetics is, as I understand, is pleasure or derived on an, as it were, merely sensuous level. Theoria is a greater pleasure which involves the whole of one's moral being.

Sangharakshita: I think it might be better to use the word delight there. But yes that distinction would have to be made even if you did, say, well just a higher form of pleasure. It's not just a pleasure

that you get looking at beautiful colours and beautiful shapes.

Chintamani: So the inference being that the pleasure gained from enjoying beautiful colours and beautiful shapes doesn't necessarily make you a better person **but** the higher form of pleasure might well do.

Sangharakshita: Yes, you could say that. Yes, so art is the organisational of sensuous impressions into pleasurable formal relations **that express the artist's sensibility**. So here were have got two more notions, expression and sensibility. I think if I were to write this sort of essay again I think I would need to go more into the whole question of creativity. But leaving that aside for the moment, clearly art, the work of art, is someone's expression. Somebody has produced it, not just in the way that a woman produces a baby, it has been created. So we speak of it as an expression. It isn't just an expression of his feelings or emotions, though obviously feeling and emotion is an element. It can - especially what would I regard as the higher forms of art - be an expression of his understanding, his spiritual experience even. And this question of **sensibility**. Now what does that convey to you?

Chintamani: A capacity to discern differences and to make contrasts.

Sangharakshita: Hm, especially the more refined or some subtle ones. I think at **this** point we have probably pass from the tile and the pot to painting. Because I think painting offers greater possibilities for an artist to express his sensibility than producing a tile or a pot however beautiful. And I think I would associate that with painting's representational capacity. Because the artist, the painter can express his sensibility not just with regard to sensuous impressions and formal relations but with regard to objects in the natural world, nature and people. So there's an extension of his range when it comes to painting. You see what I mean? We have by the way not mentioned architecture. Perhaps I should have mentioned that. Or sculpture. I think, we probably lead on say from pottery to sculpture and architecture, where the range is increased. But normally in sculpture or architecture you don't get colour usually. We don't usually have painted sculpture.

Chintamani: Well, we have done in the past, to a great extent.

Sangharakshita: Yes. But I remember that when I was in Spain I did see painted wooden sculptures. They were very well done, but they didn't give the impression of being works of art but only sort of imitations in the way that, say, waxworks in Madam Tussaud's aren't. Though they are very faithful copies of living people, are they works of art except in a very, very minor sense? So I would tend to be doubtful, though I am not going to be very confident about this. I tend to be doubtful whether a painted, say, statue or sculpture, is as much a work of art as one - other factors being equal of course - as one that is not. And with regard to architecture, of course it's three dimensional, like the pot, but it's much more elaborate and it subserves a much more complex purpose or use. So I think they do come in between pottery and paintings so I think - I did develop a sort of hierarchy of forms of art here in the sense that at each succeeding level there are greater possibilities of artistic achievement. Because the resources become greater. So, so my definition of art is a sort of cumulative one. Say the organisation of sensuous impressions into pleasurable formal relations pertaining to, so to speak, the lower forms of art and the rest of the definition pertaining to the higher ones. Not that the higher ones necessarily leave the lower ones behind but they incorporate them. Of course this does raise all sorts of questions about **hybrid** forms of art. And you may remember that Wagner argued that music drama as conceived by him was the highest form of art because it incorporated all the arts. There was music - orchestral and vocal - there was painting because of the scenery and the back drops and all that, and well there was even, I think he argued, I can't remember exactly how, there was even sculpture and everything else. And of course the words, the words which were sung. So he believed that the music drama as he conceived it was the highest form of art because it incorporated all of them. I think that is highly arguable to say the least so we'll leave that. In the same way you could argue that the cathedral was the highest form of art because, well, at least a Catholic cathedral though not a Protestant one

perhaps, because you'd have a ritual going on there, you'd have music being sung, sung to words, sometimes words of very great poetic value, you'd even have ritual movements, and you'd have the whole place decorated with beautiful paintings.

Manjusvara: And incense.

Sangharakshita: And incense, yes, yes. Yes, I hadn't, there is something I didn't mention, to go back a bit, because I spoke about the work of art being created out of visual impressions and aural impressions but the Japanese seem to have developed scents, they seem to have played around quite a lot with, with incense. And you may remember there is a Buddhist sutra which describes a Buddha realm in which communication is entirely through scents. And I believe that there have been, there were experiments in the last century which sort of, something like a piano which played not sounds but a different scent. So **maybe** something will be communicated. And of course gourmets believe that, well, cooking is an art, don't they? In India cooking is classified as one of the arts, traditionally. But I mean it's generally agreed I think that the arts based on taste and smell are not nearly, nearly so highly developed as those based on the other senses. You could also say that there is a tactile element in sculpture because you can feel it. Though to what extent that forms part of the aesthetic experience I don't know.

Chintamani: It is for blind people. It's very important.

Sangharakshita: Yes. And I do know that in classical Chinese artistic circles a lot of importance was attached to the **feel** of things and they were very fond of feeling different kinds of jade and they used to feel them under water and definitely they could tell different kinds of jade apparently, so it is said, just by the different touch. And they developed that to quite a refined point, almost an art.

Chintamani: I believe that's also part of Indian cuisine, that the feel of the food on the hands is very important. I believe in the Puja the food hard and soft.

Sangharakshita: Is hard and soft.

Chintamani: Is to do with..

Sangharakshita: Solid and liquid. Well we talk of something as being 'chewy' don't we? It is sometimes pleasant. So you probably wouldn't like to have to all just liquid and soup like, and not all hard. It is pleasant if there is a variety, textures and resistances. Anyway, that's just going back a little bit. So the artist's sensibility. So there's greater scope for the development of expression of his sensibility when art in the form of painting becomes representational. **Perhaps** that applies to sculpture too. And then we come to communication. So there's not just that he has this refined sensibility and is expressing it in the work of art, but he's **communicating** it. Now this raises the question of the **audience**. Does the artists always paint for an audience? And I believe this has been the subject of some discussion. In some cases the artist very obviously does. If he's commissioned to do something, or say he is asked to paint somebody's portrait. Someone wants to hang that portrait, so clearly it's a communication and if you write a poem and you send it to someone well you are communicating, or if you publish you are communicating. But the question has been raised, well, supposing you are writing just without any thought of publication or without any thought of showing your, say, poetry or your painting to anybody, are you communicating? So what would you say to that?

Kovida: Yes.

Sangharakshita: Well, and in that case, to whom?

Kovida: Yes, I suppose to yourself primarily.

Sangharakshita: I suppose you could say you are having an inner dialogue, you could say that.

Kovida: Because you are making conscious to yourself in the first instance.

Manjusvara: You have got the example of Bach's B Minor Mass, in a way he obviously didn't compose the mass to be performed because it wouldn't have happened within.....

Sangharakshita: But he knew it **could** be performed.

Manjusvara: But what I. Yes, well I don't know actually whether he wrote it with that in mind but I would say he wrote that for God, which we would perhaps say was another form of inner dialogue but perhaps you could compose something for a deity or in our case a Buddha or Bodhisattva. Would that be a communication?

Sangharakshita: Well, I think in India and also in Muslim, say Sufi circles, I think music is understood, in some forms of music, as directed to God and not any human audience. They just happened to **over**hear.

Suriyavamsa: That's how you talk about the orthodox mass, isn't it. It's *(unclear)* internalised. It's not so much *(unclear)*. It's like in the Mitrata on the Eightfold Path, you talk about the Puja not being in front of an audience. It does fit in something larger.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes well the Puja in a way is directed to the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha. It is not performed as it were. Yes, this is why I wasn't too happy when some of the Tibetan lamas were going around performing for an audience which was ritual intended to be performed for Buddha.

Suriyavamsa: The clapping after it, was it very odd.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well that's also why if there's a concert, say a performance, a concert performance say of a mass, say Bach's B Minor in a church, well, the convention is that you don't clap. Which you would do of course in the concert hall. Because you recognise that the work doesn't have an audience in the ordinary secular sense, so you respect that by not clapping. But it has been said that even when you are writing, so to speak, for yourself, or painting for yourself, there is a sort of **implied** audience. Because supposing you are writing your poem in English, well it isn't just **your** language, it is the language of the speech community to which you belong. So in a way you are writing for them even though they are not actually present, they are potentially present one could say. This is a point that has been made.

Manjusvara: I suppose the only way if you wrote something and then destroyed it so no one else ever witnessed it then you could perhaps argue there was no communication.

Sangharakshita: Well you would have communicated it as a composition.

Manjusvara: Yeah.

Sangharakshita: And otherwise, well works of art get destroyed accidentally, does that mean that they never existed?

Manjusvara: Well [...]

Sangharakshita: They were never communicated.

Manjusvara: Or the other way round, aren't we, like Larkin who didn't want things published after his death and they have been.

Sangharakshita: Well some things I think that he didn't want published after his death I believe his, his girlfriend cum secretary, did destroy quite a lot of stuff after his death on his instructions. But I think usually if you don't want something published after your death you make sure that it isn't! *[Laughter]* So communication. So then the question is **what** does he communicate to this, this audience if there is an audience? A sense of values. So here we do come into the realm of understanding. So what do we mean by the artist's sense of values? We don't necessarily mean that he has a conscious articulated conceptually realised philosophy. And here incidentally I think we go to some extent at least from painting into poetry. Now I think poetry has an even wider range of possibilities than painting, though that might be arguable, it might just reflect my own greater concern with writing *[Laughter]* than with painting. So sense of values. It doesn't amount to explicit statement of belief. But that is not excluded but it is not a necessary part of the communicating of a sense of values. Because values is a very broad term. We mentioned Shakespeare, would you say that Shakespeare had a sense of values? Do you feel that he's communicating a sense of values?

Kovida: Yes, very much so.

Sangharakshita: Of many different kinds. Very positive values. And not just expressing them through the mouths of his characters?

Chintamani: Well, probably the majority of turns of phrase in the English language, as far as I know, that come from literature come from Shakespeare. And that would certainly mean that the English speaking world has found Shakespeare's words..... useful is too weak a term, but well fitted to express the values that are important to ...

Sangharakshita: So they become embedded in the language. And also there was the question of comprehensiveness. Dryden says about Shakespeare something to the effect that he had a capacious soul, a more capacious soul than anybody else. So the mere fact that he was able to create such a range of characters, such a living passion, just tells you something about Shakespeare, even though they aren't to be seen as his so many mouthpieces. He is able to enter sympathetically into **such** a range of characters and to give each one his own, or her own, appropriate expression. I mean it's been commented on, for instance, that his women are just as good so to speak as his men. It's as though he can get into their psychology just as well, just as easily, into the psychology of men and not only that he can create quite convincing almost non human figures like Ariel and Caliban. They are convincing. So sometimes he has been compared perhaps in a rather rhetorical fashion with God, you know, he has creative capacity. He can create.....

[abrupt end of recording]

[[Tape Two Side One]

Sangharakshita: So I don't know if others have any other ideas but I personally find it difficult to imagine how abstract art can communicate a sense of values.

Manjusvara: Well I think it can but I would be pushed for it, because partly through my work as a composer in the past I do think it can but I find it ...

Sangharakshita: But how would it do it and what would the nature of those values be? A **sense** of values.

Manjusvara: Well, I think like Mozart calls, calls that higher *(unclear)* somehow with Mozart you

are being asked to become a more refined emotional being.

Sangharakshita: That's sensibility.

Manjusvara: Yes.

Sangharakshita: Your sensibility is refined. So you can say that sensibility, a refined sensibility is a value but are you communicating a **sense** of values when you just give an experience of that sensibility?

Chintamani: If I understand Kandinsky correctly, in "Concerning the Spiritual in Art", and Itten the colour theorist, the German colour theorist, colours have emotional qualities or they can arouse certain emotions. They also suggest certain forms, so if you make a composition using certain colours and certain form it will communicate a certain emotional tone. Or even a certain emotional drama, if your composition is complex enough. And if one follows the emotional drama supposedly set up by these forms and colours then certain perhaps moral issues might be touched upon in that way.

Sangharakshita: But a sense of values? And also how would you set that up? Would it depend say upon certain say conventional values assigned to certain colours? In that case the reference would be outside the work of art. The work of art would be depending upon some factors external to itself.

Chintamani: So therefore it would not be fully abstract.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. *(Affirming)*

Suriyavamsa: Doesn't figurative art, say a painting, a figurative painting, won't that refer to something outside of itself too.

Sangharakshita: A which painting?

Suriyavamsa: A figurative painting. Say a Poussin, there is a whole story .....

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Suriyavamsa: That is referred to outside itself.

Sangharakshita: Hm, well that is one of the reasons, or one of the ways in which, painting communicates that sense of values.

Indrabodhi: But how would a torso of Apollo communicate a sense of values?

Sangharakshita: I suppose one would have to ask Rilke that! *[Laughter]* Actually, he doesn't use that expression though. He said that to him it says you must change your life. Well, what do you think he meant by that? As it were making the statue say that.

Chintamani: I suppose if one is in that frame of mind whereby an archaic torso of Apollo becomes a symbol for strength, nobility, dignity, and you don't feel that yourself.

Sangharakshita: Beauty.

Chintamani: Beauty.

Manjusvara: Are they not values, the things you have just listed?

Chintamani: And you feel a lack of that in yourself.

Sangharakshita: Yes. So the torso of the archaic Apollo represents a challenge. "This is what I am", the torso sings, "look at you". So the implication is, well, you should change.

Indrabodhi: But it's communicating beauty as well, maybe just an abstract painting communicating beauty can communicate to you that you should be more beautiful.

Sangharakshita: But does an abstract painting communicate beauty?

Ratnachuda: It can do.

Manjusvara: I think that it can.

Sangharakshita: Well that raises a question of what is beauty *[Laughter]* and is beauty is something in the object or in the eye of the beholder?

Indrabodhi: It can be in the object, in the Kandinsky painting, the painting can be very beautiful with colours and the usage of them, the harmony of the colours.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. But when we attribe beauty to ourselves aren't we changing the meaning of the term? Is a beautiful person, say, ethically beautiful in the sense that a beautiful painting whether abstract or otherwise is beautiful? Or is it the sort of beauty in the sense of in the case of a person used only metaphorically? Because supposing the painting is beautiful, well logically if it is telling you to be beautiful it should be telling you to be beautiful, if you take it literally, in a cosmetic sense. *[Laughter]*

Suriyavamsa: I think there is more *(unclear)* appropriateness and aptness in art. Say in an abstract painting *(unclear)* a Jackson Pollock, maybe dribbles just in the right place contributed something *[Laughter]*. There's a certain *(unclear)* in that appropriateness *(unclear)*.

Sangharakshita: Well, there's the pleasurable formal relations. But if, when a painting, say Jackson Pollock painting, expresses or is pleasurable formal relations, is that telling you anything about yourself or communicating any value to you personally?

Paul Hatton: What if the type of experience you would have in front of the painting opened your eyes to a level of experience that you hadn't previously had or led you to aspire to a type of experience you may feel. I mean there are sort of different descriptions of what an aesthetic experience might be. It could be breathlessness or suspension of belief or a gap between what you know and what you are experiencing at the time. I wonder whether that would be indicative of a value?

Sangharakshita: You could say that a positive mental state was a value. But whether, say, an abstract painting actually communicates that, I think it depends very much on how you are feeling at the time that you view it rather than, so to speak, being inherent in the painting itself. So giving a concrete example, say, I remember seeing an exhibition a few years ago of Miro's work, and it was broadly speaking abstract, let us say. There are certainly representational elements in some of the paintings but broadly speaking it was abstract. And I found his work very enjoyable indeed. Well the colours in many of these were bright, were attractive, there were quite interesting and stimulating formal relations. So my experience of it was that that painting was so to speak, you could say, communicating something joyful. But someone in a different state of mind than myself, standing in front of that painting might perhaps feel irritated. So what is the painting communicating? What value is it communicating?

Indrabodhi: But doesn't that go for any artwork?

Sangharakshita: To some extent, yes. But in the case of the abstract painting there's nothing of a representational nature, so to speak, to guide you in the right direction.

Indrabodhi: Accept that positive colours and harmonious forms would tend to bring you into a more positive state.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Or to enhance a positive state which you already had. So you could say if you were a normally **healthy** person standing in front of that painting that is how you would feel. But if you weren't you would feel differently.

Padmakara: But if you had, if one of your values was that bright colours are a good thing to have and an abstract artist used a lot of bright colours, would they not be communicating their sense of values to you through the use of the bright colours?

Sangharakshita: Yes, I think I would have my doubts personally about an abstract artist who used lots and lots of blacks and browns and greys. I would really wonder what sort of state of mind he was in and what sort of impression therefore that the painting was communicating.

Padmakara: So what I am saying is that my example is that an abstract painting could communicate a sense of values in that way.

Sangharakshita: I think one should note here the use of the term **sense**, a **sense** of values, rather than values. Because a value is not quite the same thing as a sense of a value. But in the case of a sense of values you are more aware of the values. It's something more conscious. When you are happy, well let's say that to be happy is a value, but it may not be reflected, we may not be conscious, so to speak, that you were happy, you may not be reflecting upon it. So I speak of a **sense** of values. Or the work of art communicating a **sense** of values which implies a sort of form of philosophical framework. It's not just communicating values.

Chintamani: Which might make it didactic in a rather.....

Sangharakshita: It might, though to the **extent** that it was didactic it wouldn't be a work of art. The didacticism would not be part of its being a work of art.

Padmakara: I am still not sure I have got the distinction.

Sangharakshita: The word sense itself is not a very precise word, it is a more evocative sort of word.

Indrabodhi: So are you suggesting the artist would be consciously doing this, more consciously?

Sangharakshita: In a way, in a way, not that it's sort of worked out in conceptual terms but in a way the artist would know what he was doing, not just doing it. I think that's the sort of distinction I have in mind.

_____: But can't an abstract artist be doing it?

Indrabodhi: I think Bhante is suggesting that they do it more unconsciously.

[_____: *(unclear)*.

Chintamani: I remember some years ago somebody - this was actually at the time of your Vimalakirti Nirdesa lectures, somebody, an American academic I was in contact with over a number of years, was writing a book on the Buddha image, he came to your lecture, and he must have been a confirmed modernist and he says yes that's all very well, talking about Buddha images, but surely you can have an abstract Buddha image. And he was rather, I think he was averse to representation as it were.

Sangharakshita: Well it depends what you mean by Buddha image, what you mean by an image.

Chintamani: Well, my answer was rather straightforward and probably not that interesting to him, but I said that as far as I was concerned it was important to have a human figure sitting there because you are a human being and you need that, you need your potential mirrored back to you in terms that immediately relate to you.

Sangharakshita: But of course there is, there is a sect in, I think it is in Korea, which doesn't have a Buddha image which is the Won sect. They have a circle. But that represents Buddhahood.

Paul Hatton: You couldn't have an abstract Buddha image because there are contradictions in the question.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Can you have an abstract Chintamani! *[Laughter]*

Chintamani: Well, some people would maintain - this is actually one of the questions that we submitted - that could people do that, they will expose themselves to experience in the external world, assimilate it and supposedly express that experience but not in representational terms, although they will **attempt** to express it but not in representational terms. I mean there is a painter who does that - Howard Hodgkin.

Sangharakshita: I would say that they were able to express what they had experienced only to a **limited** extent, if it was expressed only in abstract terms. I think the range of expression which is inherent in the abstract medium is more limited than that which is inherent in the representational mode.

Kovida: Is it to do with language then, because if one draws up a language for abstract forms and shapes then presumably.....

Ratnachuda: But then there's this question whether its abstract then.

Sangharakshita: In the case of language a word refers to a thing. So if you have built up this, you could build up this sort of sign language in an abstract way, but then I think you would have to depend upon some signal as it were, outside that language itself. So it would not be just abstract. You could agree that, well, a red circle represented this, a green triangle represented that. In that way you could build up a whole language. But I don't think it would be truly abstract.

Kovida: Truly abstract, yes.

Sangharakshita: Because the values would be pre-assigned or assigned in a conventional sort of way, from outside the language itself or outside the work of art itself.

Manjusvara: Music comes back to me. I mean that do the late Beethoven quartets communicate a sense of values? I think they do but maybe I am bringing that to it. Maybe....

Sangharakshita: Well, some people say they do but I was reading a book which challenged that quite

vigorously. It was by Colin Wilson actually, a book on music, and he was rather scathing about certain people's attempts to invest the final quartets of Beethoven with some mystical meaning and significance. He's, yes, as I said he was quite contemptuous of that. He seems to think it a bit pretentious.

Manjusvara: I suppose the only way you could do it is to play them to someone who had no prior knowledge of Beethoven and his music and then.....

Sangharakshita: They would have to be musically educated all the same.

Manjusvara: Well would they, I don't know? That's another issue. Is that music capable of being performed to someone from another tradition and then communicate.....

Sangharakshita: Or another culture.

Manjusvara: Another culture. Could it communicate. I mean I love Indian classical music, I'm not an Indian.

Sangharakshita: But I wonder if it communicates as much to you as it does to an Indian aficionado.

Manjusvara: Sure.

Kovida: Or even to a teenager.

Manjusvara: Hmm. To a teenager.

Kovida: Yeah, a teenage boy or a girl. If you played Beethoven to them they would just laugh. You wouldn't even get past the first...

Sangharakshita: Put it in this way. What about your state of consciousness. Supposing you listened to Beethoven after taking LSD. *[Laughter]*.

_____: Have you done that?! *[Laughter]*

S: Never mind! Yes I have done it! *[Laughter]* Thirty years ago. I have written about it in my retrospective of 1969. And it was just by chance that a Beethoven symphony happened to be on and my impression was that I found it in a way quite laughable, because I got almost a visual impression of a little man strutting along with his chest sticking out trying to be very impressive, and strange to say in this book by Colin Wilson that I mentioned he has the same impression of much of Beethoven's music. He said there is too much effort in it, too much of an effort to impress, not just in a small minded sort of way but yes to impress.

Manjusvara: You say as much in "Peace is a Fire", don't you?

Sangharakshita: It could be, yeah. That must have been a reminiscence of my experience. So again it depends, well, just on your age and all that. But well the sort of state of mind in which you listen.

Manjusvara: So let's get this clear. What you are saying because this is an abstract art form your state of mind will determine much more what you experience in it than something that was less abstract. It would be hard to have had that experience with a piece of poetry because the content of poetry would have been.....

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well yes, in the case of music it's notorious. You can listen to a piece of music

and well different people can associate all sorts of different things with one and the same piece of music. Someone might say on listening to a piece of music, oh it just reminds me of beautiful waterfall, you know, peaceful country. To another it sounds like the sound of London traffic. It reminds me of the town in which I grew up. So you could have all sorts of different impressions. Whereas if something is representational as in visual arts or as about something, say, as in poetry, well your mind is guided in a particular direction and that is where the possibility of understanding comes in.

Indrabodhi: But you do say in this earlier article than "The Religion of Art" that, coming back to Beethoven, Beethoven's music is spiritual as well as artistic.

Sangharakshita: I said that, do I.

Indrabodhi: Yes.

Sangharakshita: I'd forgotten. *[Laughter]* You must remember I was writing that in Kalimpong in, well '53 I think it was, and I hadn't heard any Beethoven for quite a few years, and I certainly **was** moved and stirred by Beethoven when I was in my teens, and I can still enjoy some Beethoven now. But even though I don't know of this purely under the influence of anything *[Laughter]* Some of Beethoven does seem a little bit like that. Not all, by any means.

Manjusvara: Well, I don't think, I think, I agree with your comments about Beethoven but I am not sure specific composers make or break the argument. I mean it's the classic thing of the people apparently at Auschwitz who would come back and play Mozart quartets. One of the people said how could they do it. Well, what does this say about music and Mozart? It would suggest that there **are** no values there apart from the ones we bring to it.

Sangharakshita: Well that is quite interesting because I don't know if you remember but you must have heard of Philip Kapleau and he was a shorthand reporter it seems at the Nuremberg trials, and that reflection was what turned him on to Zen. "Culture is not enough". Culture is not enough. So I suppose, you know, in my language he might have been saying well, music, well I think he did mention music and Mozart, doesn't communicate a sense of values and doesn't change one's life. One could just listen to it and enjoy it. I wouldn't altogether agree as regards the music of Mozart, though because he isn't all just orchestral.

Manjusvara: Kapleau's "culture isn't enough" would be the first part of your definition, wouldn't it. If you left off the sense of values that can transform your life.

Sangharakshita: But you see, to come back to the definition as a whole, you see the sort of hierarchy that I'm trying to establish, because Buddhist thinking is hierarchical, the spiritual path is hierarchical. And I am therefore trying to establish a hierarchy within this definition, the successive clauses being further steps on in that hierarchy. And I tried to correlate that with some degree of success, but perhaps not with complete success to the different art forms so that they also form a hierarchy. So I think if I was to write the essay again I would spell this out in much greater detail and with actual illustrations. If I was giving a talk I could even illustrate with slides of different works of art. But you get the general idea, leaving aside the controversial points.

Kovida: You don't mention, just for completeness you don't mention the novel or prose within this, presumably.

Sangharakshita: Well, I regard poetry as the highest form of literature. But of course, yes, the novel is an important form of literature. And the drama, although the drama is slightly complex or even hybrid because it combines movement. Well, I haven't mentioned dance, dance could be. Though of

course, though yes dance is more ... I haven't mentioned film, and well the question of where film comes in the hierarchy. Is it an artform in its own right or is it a hybrid? And there are different views about that.

Chintamani: Well the question of theatre is quite interesting because theatre is in may ways seen as the progenitor of many other art forms, particularly music and dance. There would have been a time, well for instance dance as a separate artform, as opposed to a folk artform, is relatively recent. As I understand it dance would have normally taken place in a temple or in a Greek theatre as part of a greater whole rather than as something in its own right.

Sangharakshita: Well it seems that ritual is the origin of all this, they all grew out of ritual.

Manjusvara: You mean dance as in ballet.

Chintamani: Dance as in ballet or contemporary dance.

Manjusvara: Well it grew out of masques presumably.

Chintamani: Out of court masques.

Manjusvara: Court masques which led to opera and dance in that sense.

Kovida: I suppose from our point of view given your definition, there needs to be, well I suppose like Howard Blooms, I was going to say 100 best tunes *[Laughter]* 100 best works of art. Because in a way what you are saying is that one needs to develop quite an understanding of both experience in the world but also of art to be able to appreciate art. I want to devise a course in a way to enable people to .....

Sangharakshita: One of the things I have noticed, I noticed it some years ago in connection with some of my friends, but recent writers have drawn attention to it, that nowadays people are increasingly unable to fully appreciate a lot of traditional art, which is of course largely representational, because they are unacquainted with the subject matter. For instance, the subject matter is very often drawn from the Bible, drawn from classical mythology, and nowadays people grow up quite ignorant of these things. Well, the same applies to literature, especially to poetry. I mean you can't really read Milton's 'Paradise Lost' without some understanding of classical mythology and what I would call Christian mythology. And so when I went on my tour in Italy and Greece more than 30 years ago with a friend of mine, he was even then completely at a loss to appreciate most of the paintings we saw. He didn't even know the names of the different Saints and didn't know the different Bible episodes. He was brought up without any religious or Christian background. He didn't know the Bible. So he just, well he could appreciate the **formal** relations but if you are sensitive to those things anyway, but, maybe a certain amount of human interest but you need very often to know what the painting is illustrating or what it is about.

Kovida: I found that with the Burne-Jones exhibition *(unclear)*.

Sangharakshita: Well, with the Pre Raphaelites very often you have to know something about the Arthurian legends, Merlin and King Arthur, Vivian Le Fay, the Lady of Shallot.

Chintamani: I notice in the Tate Gallery these days that when they change the pictures round quite a lot but with the labelling of the pictures now they even get, what I am going to say is a bit of a caricature but it's almost like this, say if there is a painting depicting a character from Shakespeare they will say something like, 'King Lear is a character in a play by William Shakespeare, a well known English playwright'. And that is almost the way they are presenting the work.

Sangharakshita: Well, it's much the same with annotated editions of, you know, older English poetry where when if there is a reference to Hercules, oh, 'an ancient Greek demigod who performed various labours'. It's assumed by the editor that the reader will not know who Hercules was. Or if there's a reference to Jupiter, well, 'the king of the gods in classical mythology, usually represented holding a thunderbolt', or something like that. Whereas a few generations ago those sort of annotations wouldn't have been necessary.

Manjusvara: Do you think..... I take it you are saying this isn't a good thing.

Sangharakshita: I am afraid I'm saying it is a very bad thing! *[Laughter]*

Manjusvara: So do you think that for us in creating our Western Buddhist culture we need to address this.

Sangharakshita: Oh yes, very much so, yes.

Chintamani: So is the answer to promote cultural education in that sense within the movement or is it simply to acknowledge the gradual darkening of the culture and to try and, through our own work, create a mythology or an array of figures that in some way, or an array of work, an array of dramas and so on, that says the same thing, the same sorts of things, but in terms that a comparatively ignorant audience might understand?

Sangharakshita: Well, I think the two are not mutually exclusive. But I think if one is to appreciate the great works of art and literature of the past you have to have some knowledge of, and therefore some education in, the kind of language in the broader sense that they use and I think, well if you are to create anything worthwhile of your own it probably is going to help if you know and understand and appreciate what has been created in the past. I don't say that it's **impossible** to create something completely de novo without knowing much about it. I think that is possible.

[**End of Side One Side Two]**

But I doubt if it would happen very often. I think all the, as far as I know, the best and greatest poets and artists have always been quite rooted in tradition, whatever that tradition may have been. It's significant that all the great English poets have been very well read. Some of them have been very learned men. If you think of Milton and think of Coleridge and think of Tennyson. Even if they weren't learned they were usually well read. Even Keats, he wasn't a highly educated man but I mean he read widely in the old English poets, such as Spenser.

Kovida: That makes the communication easier doesn't it, if you can refer to a figure with a history behind it, and don't have to try and spell all that out yourself.

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes. And, well, T S Eliot, though he is a modern, he has a very wide range of cultural reference in his poetry. But there's also lots of footnotes and he writes a lot of notes himself because he knew that everybody wouldn't be able to get it immediately.

I think we had better leave it there. Though I think there were some points left over for, well, the day after tomorrow and, well, today we have mainly gone into this, this definition of mine which I think is still serviceable? Maybe needs a bit of revision or updating or contextualising. I'll leave that there for you to look at.

[End of Side Two
Day Four Tape One Side One]

Sangharakshita: There is something left over from the previous session. The question is:

"Your description of the effects of the ennucleating ego tells a story of a fall which might leave one with the sense that by virtue of being embodied one is inherently wrong. This would seem to get close to a conception of original sin even though it might be true. Are you now happy with this passage and would you now try to communicate the point you were trying to make through different terms?"

When I read the question I was a bit alarmed actually! *[Laughter]* I had to consult the original passage, which I did. But actually I'm afraid it's really quite simple. I think I'll just have to explain that in those days my language, my style, was very, very figurative, and I think here the figurative language has been perhaps a bit misleading because I say *"Since ideas themselves are things (not in the sense of being material objects but in the sense that they are capable of producing tangible effects) the idea of separate individuality does not remain ineffectually floating about in the ether of consciousness but descends upon the earth in a storm of consequences"*. I think all I am trying to say is that a concept, even the concept of the ego, is not something that exists apart from some concrete embodiment. Does that make it clearer? That there's no such thing as a sort of abstract idea of the ego so to speak. That is all I am really saying. But I am saying it in such a figurative way that perhaps the meaning has been obscured. It is really no more than that. I am not sort of really positing a sort of ego descending. That's only part of the figure of speech, not part of what I am actually trying to say.

Chintamani: You do then follow that by saying *"The first of these effects is the attraction and aggregation of material particles into a human body endowed with sense organs through which the ennucleating ego will be able to gratify that craving for individual existence,"* etc, etc.

Sangharakshita: But I don't think at that time I was thinking of an ego has having **descended** in that literal sense. But once you get, what we call the ego there, well, it does act as a sort of centre of attraction, so to speak, for the senses and sense experience and so on. But, as I said, I notice that my style in those days was a very figurative style and, well, sometimes that is a good way of communicating. Sometimes also perhaps what you want to communicate isn't quite as clear as it might be.

You see, later on I speak of egoism as a centrifugal tendency and then I go on to speak about something *"absolutely outside the orbit of its own being. If a new experience appears comet-like in the sky, it eagerly abandons its own planetary system"*. You see, the language is very, very figurative indeed and I don't employ that sort of language to that extent now. If I am figurative nowadays it is much more consciously and deliberately.

Anyway, there is a little question. A new one:

"What are the implications for artists in the FWBO of your definition of art?"

I'm not quite sure of the thrust of the question here. Because, after all, I did write that paper and I did write that definition before there was any **thought** of the FWBO. So I'm not quite sure what the thrust of the question is. "What are the implications for artists in the FWBO of your definition of art?" So, well, there are artists in the FWBO. Perhaps we have got some of them here. Not necessarily just visual artists. So what do **they** think the implications of the definition are for them? I would like to hear that perhaps first. Or whether the definition **has** any such implications of a practical kind. Maybe my definition is just a theory. Maybe it doesn't have any bearing on actual practice. So what do the artists have to say?

Chintamani: Was it your question?

Kovida: No, Manjusvara's.

Manjusvara: It was mine.

Sangharakshita: But what do you mean by implications here, practical or theoretical or commercial *[Laughter].[pause]*

Manjusvara: OK. *[Laughter]* Your definition of art, as you pointed out a few days, is hierarchical.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Manjusvara: And that, we have been discussing. That goes against sort of current trends in many ways.

Sangharakshita: Well, I am sure it does! *[Laughter]*

Manjusvara: So, thus a lot of people come into the FWBO and are likely to have been conditioned by a culture that is tending towards being non-hierarchical.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Manjusvara: So, speaking personally, when I first came in contact with your definition 18 or so years ago it was very challenging to me because it did contain this notion of hierarchy. Yes, so in a way I just was interested if you had any further observations. I mean, it did act as a challenge. The sense of values that can transform your life, particularly that. I mean I think much art doesn't concern itself with that. So we as Buddhist artists are being asked in a sense to rise to that, the challenge of your definition.

Sangharakshita: Well, I suppose inasmuch as one is a Buddhist at least trying to embody certain values in one's life, one will also quite naturally, one expects, seek to embody those values or give expression to those values or communicate those values through your work. Not necessarily in a deliberate and, as it were, didactic sort of way, but something must surely percolate through. But of course it's not a very easy matter. And I think it might be possible for someone to, to take my definition as being very sort of strong or even rigidly prescriptive and try hard to produce works of art along those sort of lines or bearing all that in mind, but I don't think that will be quite the right way. I think you would need just to get on with your Buddhist life and try to imbibe Buddhist values and try to express them in your life generally and, as it were, see how that worked out in terms of your art. But it's also a question of doing not necessarily what you want to do but what you **can**. Everybody knows that I have written a fair amount of poetry, some of it has been Buddhist poetry but I can't say that I've been able to express through the poetry that I have written Buddhist values to the extent that I would like to. And that may be just due to some extent to my sort of technical and other limitations as a poet. You have to work within your own limitations. That also has to be borne in mind. You might want to create the most beautiful Buddha image. You might be a quite skilled sculptor but you may not be able to produce that Buddha image of your dreams. So it's more a question of just trying to deepen your own experience of Buddhist values and express them in your life and carry on with your artwork and hope and trust that your sense of values as a Buddhist will somehow find its way into your work. It can't be a deliberate process, though it can be an **aware** process. But it can't be deliberate in the didactic sort of way. And no doubt when you are engaged in your artistic activity you are not consciously thinking about Buddhism, even perhaps if you are making a Buddha image. Nor should you be thinking about it in that sort of way at that time. It will probably be a hindrance. But I can well understand people - artists - coming into the FWBO from a conventional artistic background and having all sorts of ideas about art which are not in harmony with the ideas that we or which **I** have about art, you know, finding it quite difficult. Well, that's nothing strange, they find **Buddhism**

difficult, certain aspects of it, don't they? They find spiritual friendship difficult, they find some of the **ideas** of Buddhism difficult. Years and years ago people used to find the non-theism of Buddhism very, very difficult. How could Buddhism possibly not have a personal god? So it's not as though this would be the **only** difficulty that people would come up against. I mean some come up against difficulties more than others. Some take to the Dharma like ducks to water as they say. But others require all sorts of artificial aids. *[Laughter]* They require flippers! They require many people swimming on either side of them sort of bearing them up so they don't sink and drown. Well one can extend the comparison, can't one? So, you know, people's, any artists' difficulties with my definition of art would just be another aspect of difficulties that they might have with Buddhism in any case in one way or another.

Manjusvara: That touches on something that we talked about, that you get into Buddhism and you start to find, like, your ethics are being questioned and so on, and there is this tendency in our culture to see art as something separate and you sort of keep that - this is a point that Chintamani makes.....

Sangharakshita: Well perhaps it's, you know, connected with the idea of taste, well tastes differ and you can't challenge somebody's taste. So it is a purely subjective thing and how can you say that, say, Rubens is better than Andy Warhol - it's just a question of taste. Well, people have even said to me "well who are you to say that such and such is not art". Well, who am I **not** to say. If he is free to challenge my appreciation of art well surely I am free to challenge his! *[Laughter]* Sometimes you feel it isn't supposed to work both ways.

Chintamani: We had quite a long discussion about it on the question of the notable figures of 20th Century art and at times the very strong affect that their works have had on people in this room. And Manjusvara expressed ... well he expressed a great reluctance to jettison the experiences he had had in front of, say, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Schoenberg, and so on, even though they didn't apparently fit in - well their work and their aesthetic did not apparently fit in with the definition that you outlined.

Sangharakshita: One can't jettison experiences **as experiences**, but one may in the course of time come to understand them differently or put them in a different context. But as experiences you can't jettison them. An experience is an experience is an experience. But you can value them wrongly or you can change the context.

Manjusvara: The issue, I mean it has to be said I last looked at Jackson Pollock, well, before I became a Buddhist but I did find his work, as a composer, to be very inspiring. It seemed full of music. And the issue is can such abstract work as Pollock's communicate a sense of values? This is where I now would have trouble measuring it with your definition. I could argue it fulfils the first part of your definition, though that is to some extent a matter of taste, I do find it pleasing. Perhaps someone else wouldn't. But can abstract art communicate a sense of values? Well, we touched on this previously, but the problem is that it is ambiguous.

Sangharakshita: And also of course I think we have to take into account the fact that perhaps we **bring** a sense of values with us when we look at the work of art. We may not derive them directly from the work of art, though we may think we do. Well, that's the case with formally religious paintings fairly often. We may think we find a religious painting very inspiring, buy maybe it is because in some cases we are already inspired by the idea or the doctrine or the episode in somebody's life that that painting represents. So we bring the inspiration with us.

Indrabodhi: Do you think there is a case where almost the fabric of the painting or the fabric of the artwork is imbued with a certain energy, refined energy, from the artists which you are picking up on?

Sangharakshita: I think that can be the case. Though.....

Indrabodhi: At times it would be difficult to know which was which.

Sangharakshita: Yes, or where do you draw the dividing line. What was objective coming from the painting and what was subjective coming from you?

Chintamani: Sometimes, I mean I was at the Barber Institute yesterday and there is a painting by Gauguin, a landscape painting with some buildings, and just the way the paint was applied I found very moving because it was so precise, full of energy and conviction, and that seemed to be a value in itself. In other words, the formal elements of the painting communicated values as well as the subject matter.

Sangharakshita: Though of course we are often influenced by other people's opinions. There are all sorts of jokes about that. They are looking at a painting and say "Oh, isn't it, it's really a wonderful painting, isn't Rubens a wonderful artist". And then someone comes along and says, "well, no, it isn't by Rubens, look you haven't read the label properly". "Oh, this is not such a great painting after all!". And all the people who go round the Louvre and they look at the Mona Lisa, well, they're spellbound by its reputation usually, aren't they. I think you very rarely can get close enough to have a good look at it and evaluate it for yourself. In fact you may well have read so much about it that you probably wouldn't be able to evaluate it independently anyway. So we also have to look at the assumptions and influences that we carry with us when we look at a painting, especially one that is very well known, or by a well known artist.

Indrabodhi: It's a problem with authority in general, isn't it.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Indrabodhi: Even with regard, say, to what **you** say.

Sangharakshita: Yes, exactly. Well, whatever one does one mustn't deny one's own genuine feelings. If you don't like something, well, you have to stick to that and you might even think well maybe I **should** like it but the fact is I don't. Or I like it even though I know I shouldn't. *[Laughter]* You can't deny feelings as feelings, or experiences as experiences. So that's why I sometimes say in other contexts, well, you have to stand by your experience and even if it doesn't quite accord with Buddhism, and work out the theology of it afterwards. You may have a meditative experience which doesn't seem to fall quite within the orbit of Buddhism but you can't deny the experience. Perhaps you have to enlarge your understanding of Buddhism to accommodate it.

Indrabodhi: Yes, in my own experience sometimes I feel I need permission to like something. Something I am beginning to realise that I don't actually trust my own judgement enough.

Sangharakshita: Yes. I must say that I don't think that is something I have ever suffered from! *[Laughter]*

Indrabodhi: I don't get the impression...

Sangharakshita: As regards likes and dislikes. But I may admit that, well, some of my likings and dislikes, maybe quite sort of subjective or prejudiced or whatever, but I'm in no doubt about them. *[Laughter]* In no doubt about my right, if it is a question of rights, to have them. But I do know lots of people are very apologetic sometimes about their likings and disliking, even in the field of art and feel they need some sort of permission.

Indrabodhi: If Bhante likes abstract art then I can like it.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well I mean I don't expect everybody to share my tastes in art and literature. I would be very surprised if they did. And I don't expect everybody to enjoy the writings of Doctor Samuel Johnson. If they do I'm **pleased** but it doesn't bother me if they don't, and I can quite understand it in some cases. Unless they're, say, teaching English literature, I'd find it rather difficult then to understand why they should be teaching English literature if they don't understand one of its greatest writers, but, anyway, that's another matter. But people in the movement don't have to share my personal tastes by any means. But maybe some people feel they ought to, but that's not really necessary. You don't have to like the Pre-Raphaelites. *[Laughter]*

Manjusvara: That's partly why I asked the question. I'm aware that all of us will pass away and these ideas will remain and I felt it was important, well in a way you said what you have just said. I mean, it's probably obvious. It's certainly obvious to you I am sure, but I think people do suffer from feeling they have to conform to certain ideas, and ...

Sangharakshita: There's the idea of conformity. I think agreement is one thing, especially agreement after thought and consideration, say. Well, so-and-so knows something about that subject and therefore we have to take what he says seriously and think about it and, well, if you arrive at agreement, well, that's good. But that's quite different from **conforming** just out of sort of group or herd instinct almost.

Manjusvara: But because many people don't trust their own deeper judgements, there is that tendency to conform, isn't there. That's one of the things.... Well, it's lack of individuality.

Sangharakshita: Or sometimes people don't even think in terms of their own deeper judgement. So much of our life, our social life, our cultural life, is a matter of conformism anyway. So it's not surprising that people carry that over into other spheres where it doesn't really belong. And a certain amount of conformity, social conformity is probably required. You don't want to be the iconoclast and non-
conformist all the time. It just makes life difficult, doesn't it. It makes social life difficult. *[Laughter]* So in situations or areas where no great matter of principle is involved, well, you can conform to others, but you don't have to sacrifice your own opinion or judgement in important matters. Well in London at present everyone is flocking along to that Monet exhibition but one or two voices I gather have been raising, well, some of his paintings are not all that good. But so many people just go along, they just flock along, and while it's all so crowded I gather you haven't got much of a chance to look at the paintings properly. Someone suggested it might be better just to go and look at the National Gallery's permanent collection of Monets and study them at your leisure. There is such a thing as having to look at too many paintings in too short a time. That's why when I go to exhibitions I find the small scale exhibitions much more satisfying. Even they you need sometimes to go and see more than once. When you have got two or three hundred paintings to look at within an hour and a half it's really too much, isn't it.

_____: You get visual indigestion.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Manjusvara: It occurs to me that art is one of the areas where we can.... how can I put this, it's like the laboratory for us to develop our own individual response. Because it's relatively harmless. If I end up deciding I like a painting and you don't....

Sangharakshita: Well, it depends on the painting. I mean *[Laughter]* Some paintings I think are far from harmless *(unclear)* ...

Manjusvara: Can you give an example.

Sangharakshita: Well, I'm afraid I was thinking of Andy Warhol! *[Laughter]* That isn't altogether fair. But I might, well, just for another example , you know, supposing you had a liking for the paintings of the crucifixion or the martyrdom of John the Baptist. I would **wonder** about that. *[Laughter]*

Manjusvara: But that would suggest it's to do with that part of your definition about the sense of values because, in the sense that those values could start to transform your life in a way that as Buddhists we wouldn't particularly like.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes. *[pause]* But it isn't a question of just an aesthetic free for all. Sooner or later one has to arrive at certain standards of judgement and evaluation.

Manjusvara: Which comes back to the opening really. You are suggesting there is a hierarchy?

Sangharakshita: I do believe there is, yes. But I think, coming back to the FWBO, I think, well those within the movement who do understand something about art could well help others who are sort of interested in it but don't know all that much about it to develop a more sort of critical appreciation. I mean sometimes it is helpful to go round an exhibition with a practising artist because they can often point out things which are quite important and suggestive which you as a non-practising, just appreciator of art, would just not have noticed.

Kovida: I suppose one of the points that was made this morning was that you wrote that as "The Religion of Art" because at that period in the West there was a decline of Christianity and there was no Buddhism and it was seen as a method for spiritual development, but I suppose now that we have the FWBO or the WBO, we have a path of Buddhism. So in a way we do have a path to follow so we don't actually need "The Religion of Art" so much. We can actually as Buddhist practitioners use art as part of our practice.

Sangharakshita: Yes, that's true. Yes, we don't so much need the religion now but we need **art**.

Kovida: We need the Buddhism and art.

Sangharakshita: Yes. I was talking about this in a way in my talk last night where I spoke about Western Buddhists having a Western cultural heritage which they should not disown and which of course includes the arts. And of course within the Buddhist movement in the West there are some quite extraordinary views. I mean outside the FWBO, expressed in this connection and some Western Buddhists want to be, well, almost Tibetan Buddhists or Japanese Buddhists and just follow **that** culture, which I think psychologically is very difficult. Others sort of repudiate the place of culture and the arts and artistic appreciation in the life of the Buddhist altogether. Wasn't it you who came across an example of that sort of that sort of thing years ago, when you asked a Bhikkhu about, the place of art?

Padmavajra: I think it was Kuladeva.

Sangharakshita: It was Kuladeva.

Padmavajra: It was in Shabda, yeah. He asked Ajahn Sumedho

Sangharakshita: Ah, that's right.

Padmavajra: About, what about art and what about *(unclear)* and he said he had a look at, when he

was in Paris he went to a gallery he thought it was all sensual indulgence and...

Padmakara: All craving.

Sangharakshita: *(unclear)* greed, hatred and delusion.

Padmavajra: And Kuladeva said what about Michelangelo and he, well he couldn't answer.

Sangharakshita: So that's an extreme view but it is a view current in some quarters and, well, I don't think it is really very helpful.

Subhadassi: I have a friend who was training to be a monk at Harnham Buddhist Monastery, Ratnagiri, and he was, well, was and is an artist and he ended up leaving and one of the main reasons was that he felt that his artistic practice couldn't be integrated within his spiritual practice so he ended up leaving.

Sangharakshita: One has to be careful or one ends up with a very dry, arid sort of understanding of the spiritual life.

Padmakara: So when you wrote this did you sort of envision it as a real possible, possible alternative path? To take it literally, you could...

Sangharakshita: I think I almost did. I think I almost did. And also of course, well since coming back to the West I have read quite a bit in this sort of area and one of the things I've come to realise and I think it's brought out very strongly and clearly in the writings of Middleton Murray that, what shall I say, well for about, say, two hundred to three hundred years ago religion in the form of Christianity lost its spiritual value for a lot of people. The Church was no longer a medium for the transmission of spiritual values and spiritual life for a lot of people. So what happened? They had a need for that spiritual life and spiritual values and they came to find expression through the arts. And the arts - literature and the visual arts - became the bearer of those values within Western civilisation which formerly the Church had been the bearer of. This is perhaps the significance, from a certain point of view, of the whole Romantic movement. And so we inherit that. And so you end up with people getting their spiritual nourishment, to give just one example, not by going to church on Sunday morning but by going to a concert on Saturday evening. This illustrates that sort of shift. And I think nowadays for many people it is the arts rather than orthodox traditional religion, it's the arts - well I'm talking perhaps very recently - that were bearers of values. I say until very recently because with post Modernism and all that the situation has rather changed, at least in some areas.

_____: So given that we now have the FWBO would you still have the same vision? I mean, would it be, presumably I was thinking that, well, that wouldn't be necessary now, that now what we would have is a religion of art within the framework that we already have but.....

Sangharakshita: Yes. I don't see myself as a sort of missionary going outside Buddhism altogether on certain occasions and preaching "The Religion of Art", even though I do know that the little book has found its way into art departments in different parts of the country, to people who have no connection with Buddhism and they found it valuable. I remember some years ago it found its way to Sussex University and I got some enthusiastic letters from someone who was I think an assistant or associate editor of the journal "Aesthetics". And he was very keen on "The Religion of Art", but he had no connection with Buddhism. But that was an isolated example. But well now that we have the FWBO with its particular attitude to Western culture and the arts, well, we don't need "The Religion of Art" in that sense, though we need the arts. And within the general framework of Buddhism, yes, our appreciation of the arts functions as a sort of religion of art in the sense that the arts are for us within the framework of the FWBO the bearer of values which are in harmony with the values of

Buddhism. That is art as I understand it at least. I think this is one of the very important characteristics of the FWBO. I think we are almost on our own in this respect among Western Buddhist groups.

Kovida: One of the things we talked about this morning was the need to, in a way, provide institutions to help the FWBO, creative institutions to follow the Dharma. But one of the areas that we haven't developed institutions very fully yet is to help particularly with the arts. It is something we haven't... there are more institutions to help specific Buddhistic activity but not to further the arts.

Sangharakshita: What do you mean by, say, institutions?

Kovida: Well. I hadn't really thought it through yet but I mean like you were saying bringing critical awareness of what is good art and maybe that is something that could be developed by doing tours or giving lectures and talks on particular artists. I mean that one side could be developed. That it is something that hasn't been addressed fully yet. We have had the Arts Centre in London where things were done but I suppose there is much more that could be done to enhance that.

Sangharakshita: And of course a lot of people including artists are very busy. And sometimes of course artists just want to get on with their own work. They don't want to waste their time lecturing. Sometimes that's their attitude. And often I think we have to get away perhaps from the popular sort of workshop style model where people just go along and they dabble a bit in this, that or the other and feeling that they are being very creative and think of themselves as artists and I think you have to counteract that sort of thing also which is associated more with therapy than with the arts. I think we talked about that also once didn't we. Whereas I said at the time that art can act as a therapy but that is not its main purpose, certainly not low level therapy.

Indrabodhi: But it is good for other people to have that experience, to have some experience of art at the same time, don't you think?

Sangharakshita: I don't know. Maybe if it helps them appreciate art. If they understand or have some idea of the technique and how things are done. It may contribute to their understanding. Say with music, I mean I personally enjoy music a lot but I don't know anything about it technically, I haven't had time to learn I think. But probably if I knew more about music technically, about harmony and counterpoint and all that sort of thing and more about - I don't know what they are even called - you know, tone signatures and all that sort of thing, I would probably understand or appreciate the music even more than I do. But I do appreciate it and enjoy it quite a lot anyway so I suppose that has tended to make me a little lazy, not to bother about the technical side of things especially as I don't have time for everything.

Padmakara: I was wondering if we could have an institute for "The Religion of Art".

Sangharakshita: Ah haaa!

Padmakara: Except we would have to change the title because IRA is not going to look good! *[Laughter]*. But within it we would have critical faculties and study of philosophy, aesthetics as well as practical art.

Sangharakshita: Good idea. Yes

Manjusvara: Another idea we have touched on was of a sort of artistic kalyana mitrata where my experience of artists befriending, taking on, disciples.

Sangharakshita: Well, it is the old apprentice.

Manjusvara: Yes, this is what we talked about. Because this seems to have disappeared again in our culture to a large degree.

Sangharakshita: Because, in the West at least it's more within the visual arts but in India, in the Urdu poetic tradition, poets take on apprentices so to speak. That's partly because there is a lot of technique to be learned and of course in modern poetry there's not much attention to technique in the traditional sense *[Laughter]* In the more general sense of prosody and rhyme and meter and that sort of thing, very, very free. Have I put my foot in it? *[Loud Laughter]* Or feet!?

Manjusvara: Sometimes I *(unclear)* because I *(unclear)*

Sangharakshita: It's very convenient. *[Laughter]*

Manjusvara: Come on one of our workshops! - for teachers.

Sangharakshita: I did teach rhetoric and prosody in Kalimpong because IA students and intermediate art students have to learn it and I had a class of intermediate art students in English, an evening class. So I mugged it up. *[Laughter]*

Manjusvara: That was very important to you because you realised you were teaching, I can't remember what poem, but ..... Shelley was it.

Sangharakshita: Yes, it wasn't when I was teaching rhetoric and prosody but when I was teaching the poetry selections. I think it was Shelley's poem "The Cloud", I think that was the one that I particularly remember in this connection.

Chintamani: Bhante, in your interview for Ollie Mallander you spoke about the aesthetic absolute and the religious absolute and that you contrasted Salman Rushdie on the one hand and the Ayatollah on the other and you said that the time had come you felt that such absolutes were no longer appropriate. And then you said we need a new sort of person who synthesises the two and that Lama Govinda in your opinion was such a person. Could this have some bearing on what we have just been talking about?

Sangharakshita: In what way?

Chintamani: Well, we've been talking about art on the one hand and Buddhism on the other and that there are those who - well certainly from my experience at the Arts Centre are trying to promote the sort of activities that you mention, a series in, well, that Kovida mentioned, a series looking at and analysis of a particular artist or composer, whatever, and so on and we had the workshop type things as well but we also tried arts appreciation and most people.... we'd struggle to get people along to some very good events but they were very poorly attended. And as the result of a questionnaire that we handed out at the LBC we found that most people were too busy with their, quote, "mainstream" Buddhist activities and we always tried to emphasise that this **was** part of the mainstream Buddhist activity but the perception was that still that there was Buddhism on the one hand and art on the other, and I wondered if you saying what you said in that interview constituted perhaps a whole new approach to Buddhism in which at least the appreciation of art was an integral part of practice and not just for a few.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Perhaps one should also say that not everybody perhaps needs the arts in the same way or to the same extent. I am thinking perhaps of people who are - well, as I have mentioned yesterday evening - were faith followers, whose emotions are very developed and who love Puja and worship and making offerings and so on. They may not feel the need for the arts to the same extent. I think also there is another consideration that especially in a place like London the arts are easily

accessible outside the FWBO. People go to films, they go to plays, they go to exhibitions. So I think they don't feel so much, probably, the need for sort of arts event just within the movement. They satisfy their interest in arts in that sort of way, many of them. Which is not to say that they might not also take an interest in arts events within the FWBO, especially if those events did show them how they could integrate their appreciation, their serious appreciation, of the arts, with their spiritual life. If they just go and see a film or go and see an exhibition they may be thinking of it in terms of, well, just a sort of extra, even though they do enjoy that very much. But perhaps it is largely also a question of time. You could go and see a film at your own convenience, it may be on for months and months and you can pick your evening. Whereas if it's an arts event well you have got to sign up for it at a definite time, a definite week or weekend, which may not be convenient to you. One of the arts we haven't mentioned of course is the drama, the theatre. I think *'Madhyamaloka'* is very well placed in that respect now and there are several keen theatre goers within the *'Madhyamaloka'* community. And we go off to Stratford every now and then and on the way back and afterwards there is usually quite a vigorous discussion about the play, the performance and the production and its merits and demerits and what Shakespeare might have meant by this or what he might have meant by that. I think this is also needed. I think the theatre, especially the theatre in the sense of Shakespeare and the other great dramatists is also a very important part of our artistic life. And of course we have had dramatic ventures within the FWBO. We have had some by Kovida and I think one or two by other people too.

[End of Side One Side Two]

Chintamani: At the LBC towards the end of last year there was what was called a Mandala Play which was a play along the sort of medieval mystery play lines in which as many people as possible within the LBC mandala did something or other and it was predominately on a folk level one could say. But it was done for a Buddhist festival, for Sangha Day. It was tales from the Sangha, and it took place over an afternoon and an evening in a promenade style. It was very, very successful even though some people found it rather reminiscent of a church nativity play. Some slightly cynical elements thought it was of that kind of .....

Sangharakshita: Well, having never seen a church nativity play and perhaps many of you haven't either, so it might not have those sort of associations. Little boys and girls in white gowns and wings. Because, as I said, lots of people go to see films. We even have a few film makers in our midst. Well it does seem that nowadays film making in some respects is a quite easy business, almost anybody could make a film *[Laughter]* in a sense. I mean in a sense that almost anyone can write a poem or paint a picture. It may not be very good one, it probably isn't, but they can do it. Because a few weeks ago I had a little experience myself in that connection because Paramartha came to see me and he pulled out a, I think it was called a camcorder, and he showed me how it worked, and he was using it in connection with his professional work, because he had to study people's movements and suggest better ways of moving and doing things with their bodies so as to avoid injury. And I discovered that one could just take film on the spot and see what you were doing and play it back to yourself and just for a moment I was tempted to *[Laughter]* go out and get one. *[Laughter]* But I thought, well, no, what will people like Moksapriya, think of my amateurism! *[Laughter]* One can't compare oneself with the real professionals. So I must say I was tempted. Well, it's not impossible that eventually I succumb to temptation. *[Laughter]* So I thought, well, yes, it is interesting, it seems even for someone like myself who is technically quite incompetent, well it seems quite easy to handle. And you can use the same film again and again. So it doesn't in the long run cost you very much. So, yes, quite interesting and, well, I was wondering what I might like to film, and I thought probably in the course of my tours maybe buildings, because you can get round them and show them from different angles. I don't think I particularly want to film people, not that I have got anything against *[Laughter]* people. I think, well, I don't know, I think I would probably just concentrate on buildings and trees and interesting things like that. We'll have to see. It is quite hypothetical at the moment.

Anyway, is that enough about the artist, artists in the movement? Because I am really trying to work

my way to getting into these bits and pieces which were missed on the previous tape recording and I can't sort of go into them cold as it were.

Kovida: Is it working now? *[Laughter]*

Sangharakshita: But I will try and deal with the future questions as a way of sort of warming up. This question to some extent we have dealt with already;

"How would you delineate the path of the artist within the FWBO/WBO? What place would discipline have in this path? How would you define discipline?

Well, how would one define discipline in connection with the arts? Not discipline in the sort of authoritarian sense? Discipline involves steady conscientious work. It means sort of learning how to use your tools, whatever they are. Acquaintance with your materials and then their limitations, their possibilities. It means all that sort of thing.

_____: So it's the craft aspect.

Sangharakshita: I think it is the craft aspect, yes. Genius can't be taught of course, skill can be taught. I think in, say, connection with poetry, I don't think one can teach people how to write poetry. You can teach them how to write verse.

Manjusvara: I heard that! *[Laughter]*

Sangharakshita: Whether you would think it **desirable** to teach them verse is another matter but you can teach people to write verse. And it is up to them whether it becomes poetry. If there **is** any poetry in them, well, if they're taught how to write verse, well at least they'll have a vehicle for the expression of their poetry. It need not be the **only** one because you can have non-verse forms of poetry obviously. So that is how I would define or describe discipline. And 'how would you define creativity and the creative process?' Well, I have got several books on that subject and they haven't really left me any the wiser. But I think creativity I distinguish from productivity. I think in creativity something **new** enters, something that wasn't there before, perhaps something that you weren't aware of before, or perhaps **nobody** was aware of before if you are a very greatly creative person, a great poet or a great artist, something which comes like a revelation, perhaps even to you. Maybe that's where inspiration comes in, that's where the **genius** comes in. I think this word 'creative' is vastly over used these days. It's one of the words that I could have mentioned yesterday as being so hackneyed that, well, it becomes a term that you have to apply to almost everything to make it clear that you look upon it positively, that it's a good thing, it's creative, creative this and creative that, creative everything. And it's really unfortunately in common speech lost its meaning. 'Well, he's a very creative person.' He doesn't actually **do** anything! *[Laughter]* He's a creative person!

"The gods who delight in the creations of others inhabit a higher devaloka than the gods who create (unclear)*. This contrasts with religion of art, page 102, where creating is said to be higher than appreciating because it is more active engagement. Could contemplating be higher than creating?"*

No, I still think creating is higher, even though it does seem inconsistent with what the Buddhist texts say about these particular gods. I have been thinking about this actually for quite a long time, I haven't yet come up with a solution that reconciles the two but I'm hoping to! *[Laughter]* It might require quite a *tour de force* of interpretation. But, despite those gods, I can't bring myself to believe that contemplation of a work of art ranks higher than the creation of it. So, let's try to fill those gaps.

"A sense of values that can transform their lives. You mentioned your example of Rilke's archaic Apollo which says to the poet you must change your life. You also mentioned that it was an individual

experience and contrasted it with a woman school teacher showing her group of girls around a gallery."

Yes. I think the point of the contrast was that she was trying to get her group of girls, well, she was trying to induce in them a sort of collective response from a sort of feminist perspective and she said 'well, look, look at that painting, tell me how many women you can see in it'. And of course there weren't **any** women so this was meant to be an example of male chauvinism and discrimination against women because that painting showed only men in a certain situation, didn't show any women, so she was trying to evoke a collective response from that group of girls based on purely feminist ideological considerations, regardless of whether they were right or wrong. She wasn't trying to get each individual girl to look at the painting as an individual. She was just trying to evoke a collective response. So, well, I contrasted that with the way in which Rilke looked at that archaic statue of Apollo and responded to it in the way that he did. And I may not have mentioned this but I will mention it now, that so far as Rilke was concerned that statue was saying "change your life". And I think we discussed why it should be saying that, or why Rilke should feel that it was saying that. Perhaps it made Rilke feel, well, how unbeautiful his **own** life was, he couldn't help contrasting his own life with the life which that archaic torso seemed to be expressing. So sometimes when you contemplate the ideal, howsoever embodied, it can be a biography of a very holy person, you think oh how different I am, I have got to change, I have got to be more like that. So a beautiful work of art can present you with that sort of challenge, especially if you confront it as an individual. I think that is what I was saying. And also:

"*Where does music stand with regard to the definition. You pointed out it's notoriously difficult to say what emotion music evokes or expresses.*"

I think one of the things I mentioned was that the visual arts organised visual impressions and music of course organises aural impressions and I pointed out that I thought perhaps there was a sort of paradox, even a contradiction, that I regard abstract painting as not being as highly developed as figurative representational painting because the range of possibility that it expresses is more limited. Whereas in the case of music most music critics would seem to agree that absolute music, that which is not programme music, music which is not about anything, which in a sense is abstract, is the higher of the two. Which is the reverse to the situation, according to me at least, with regard to the visual arts. So that I think I said was a contradiction that one would have to leave at least for the time being unexplained. And I think it's also perhaps problematic whether absolute music, music which is not programmed, music which is not about anything, it doesn't reproduce any recognisable natural sounds, can really communicate a sense of values, as distinct from a mood or an emotion. Because even the mood or the emotion communicated is by no means always certain, because different people can give rise to different to different feelings when they're listening to the same piece of music, certainly within certain limits.

Subhadassi: Is that not also the case with a poem then?

Sangharakshita: Well, yes and no. Supposing you read a poem, the words and sentiment of which are very joyful, well, normally that will communicate a sense of joy, but if you are in a very depressed mood it may just irritate you that somebody else's joy can be expressed in a joyful poem. But that wouldn't, I think, be regarded as another reading of the poem itself, just as a purely subjective reaction.

Subhadassi: So the poem has a kind of a clear metaphysic whereas the music doesn't.

Sangharakshita: It doesn't it would seem. But, of course as I said, within limits, because there is music which is of a solemn nature and music which is of a quite different nature and you can't read just anything at all into any piece of music. There are some limits. I was thinking for instance of the

overture to Wagner's *'Tannhauser'* where you have got those two themes, two developments, one associated with the procession of the pilgrims, which is very solemn and religious, and the other which is associated with Venusberg, which is erotically charged and you get the two sort of weaving in and out and in conflict and the more solemn religious one eventually winning, triumphant. So you couldn't confuse these two. You couldn't read solemnity into the Venusberg theme or eroticism into the, into the..... well I shouldn't think so *[Laughter](unclear)* music.

Manjusvara: That's, to some degree programmed music, though, because it's the overture to an opera, so you have already got that identity.

Sangharakshita: But nonetheless I think it's absolute in a way. I think you would get that same feeling of conflict or the sense of what the conflict was about even if you knew nothing about the opera. That's my personal feeling.

Manjusvara: I agree, which is why personally I have always found that those programme pieces less because they are over working, in trying to tell us stuff. I **do** believe music can tell a story in a symphony.

Sangharakshita: Well you have, well you certainly have conflict within *(unclear)* but there is a resolution of conflict. Of course you may interpret the nature of the conflict differently, different people may have different interpretations. For some it may be reason and emotion or love and duty or man and nature or god and the soul, then you can interpret that one and the same conflict in all sorts of ways.

Have we filled in the gaps?

_____: Yes.

Sangharakshita: Good. Yes. But just to go off the track a little bit, only a little bit, some days ago we were talking about the Pre-Raphaelites and then later on I mentioned that perhaps we hadn't done full justice to the Pre-Raphaelites as a whole because they didn't all try to depict dreamlike, visionary sort of imaginations. But for some reason or other this morning I was thinking about Tennyson and I thought, well, Tennyson's earlier poetry is pure Pre-Raphaelite isn't it. His pure poetry in a sense. I personally think it's among his best poetry. I was thinking especially of 'the Lotos Eaters' and I just went and read it just to check. And it really is, and it's a perfect expression of the escapist mentality, it's absolutely perfect from that point of view. It couldn't be better done. He's done it, as it were, once and for all in English literature. That, air of enervation, of not wanting to make a further effort, just to be a lotus eater, just to sit down on the sand and eat or drink the lotus, and forget all about making an effort. It is - what is it -, the lotus, it's almost like the Arabian magic carpet, it's almost like taking cannabis and getting into that sort of state, a dreamlike state. You just don't want to do anything. So I thought well, yes, Tennyson depicts that very, very well. And he also depicts it from a slightly different point of view in other poems, well known ones, like 'the Lady of Shallot'. 'The Lady of Shallot' is - what shall I say - a warning poem. What will happen to you if you go outside the world of the dream? What will happen if you look down to the real Camelot instead of seeing it in the mirror? The curse will come upon you. Don't leave the dream world, the real world is dangerous, you will die, as she does in the poem. And then there's the poem of 'Marianne in the Moated Grange'(?). So this is quite a theme of Tennyson's in his early poetry, and it is, as I say, I think it's amongst his best work. It's not **great** poetry, it's very, very good poetry.

Manjusvara: Why do you say it's not great?

Sangharakshita: I suppose, well, it's great as an expression of that particular mood but I think it can't be the greatest because its content is not great.

Kovida: It goes very much on mood, doesn't it.

Sangharakshita: It is a mood of, well, it may be a long lasting mood for many people of just, well, not wanting to make **any further effort**, just to sit and be passive, not to bother even about your wives and children *(unclear)* Just weary of it all. And of course in the poem Ulysses and his sailors have been wandering year after year on the sea after the battle of Troy and it doesn't seem they're getting any nearer home and then they come to the land of the lotus eaters and they start eating the lotus and the *(unclear)* sit there on the shore, just want to stay there dreaming. And of course there's the reference towards the end of the poem to the gods looking down on the world, just as they are depicted in 'the Iliad' and, well, they want to be just like that, just sit at their ease and look at things, not **do** anything. So, yes, that is a mood that people may get into sometimes. The poem gives us a perfect expression to that. And I think, yes, it is in a way **the** Pre-Raphaelite poem if any poem is. So it's a very good example of that sort of attitude. He must have written it about probably 1830. It was about the time, I think, when the Pre-
Raphaelites were beginning to get going. And also, talking of the Pre-Raphaelites, there's a review of the exhibition in the National Portrait Gallery of Millais' portraits. And there's a portrait of a mother and daughter done when he was 19, there is a very interesting analysis of it. Maybe I can provide some *(unclear)* and bring it along in the evening. Because the mother seems to be a quite rigid unsympathetic figure and the little daughter is standing in front of her and she's not touching the daughter and she seems not to want to. She seems, according to the writer of the article, keeping the daughter at a distance. And on the wall in the painting there are paintings of Raphael's Madonna and Child where the Madonna is **hugging** the child as though Millais, whether deliberate or not, is pointing out the contrast between the warmth of the Italians, as represented by their Madonnas, with regard to their children, and, well, the relative coldness of the Victorian mother. And the child, the little girl, is dressed like a little doll in a frilly frock and she is just kept at a distance and the mother is rather severe and Millais has not prettified her. So the writer of the article seems to think quite highly of this painting, done when Millais was 19. It seems quite an incredible performance for someone of that age. Well, of course, the writer of the article goes on to say that - well it's the general view that - Millais declined thereafter and became somewhat commercial in his attitude to his work, but did still sometimes do very fine work. Are you familiar with that painting?

Paul Hatton: I can bring it to mind but I don't know much of it.

Sangharakshita: I forget the title of it. The woman is wearing a dark dress. It's only a black and white reproduction in the paper. She is wearing a dark dress. I gather that the tones of the painting are predominantly dark, blacks and greys. The little girl, though, seems to stand out, perhaps her frock is more brightly coloured. But, I mean, Millais does seem to be saying something, doesn't he, in the painting, whether deliberately or consciously or not. There are these Raphael reproductions on the wall on either side of the *(unclear)* almost a sort of commentary on the attitude of the Victorian mother. Anyway, that's rather by the way.

Paul Hatton: And it's Raphael paintings at the back?

Sangharakshita: Well, this is what the writer of the article said and I think I recognise them. I think they are well known ones, where the Madonna is clasping the infant Jesus sort of quite close to her.

Paul Hatton: There must be something else going on because it is Pre-Raphaelite, pre **Raphael**.

Sangharakshita: Ah, could be.

Paul Hatton: Raphael and post Raphael is when art gets contrivances and art for art's sake and

Sangharakshita: So perhaps there's a **double** message.

Paul Hatton: Yeah, there must be something else in it.

Sangharakshita: The human message seems to be different from the painterly message. That's interesting, yes. Yes, I am pretty certain it's Raphael. Though on the other hand it could be almost any Renaissance painter, there are so many Madonnas and childs, but I am pretty certain it is Raphael. Of course perhaps the **Pre-Raphaelite** but it isn't to be taken too seriously.

Paul Hatton: No.

Sangharakshita: Not too literally then.

Paul Hatton: It might not have been invented at that time, no. That was very much Ruskin's term.

Chintamani: I thought they were called the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood.

Paul Hatton: Yeah, and I don't know who coined that phrase. Ruskin certainly talks about the demise of art with Raphael, it's like finished, once you get the contrivances. One point perspective *(unclear)* when it becomes, there become numbers of devices used within art which take precedent over subject matter so it becomes art for art's sake, that the artist is more interested in how the work is **produced** than in what the work is depicting or the message of the work. I wouldn't say with any certainty that it was Ruskin's title but he certainly says **that**. And I am not sure where this term Pre-Raphaelite, when in the terms of the timing of the movement, when that label became attached to it, because sometimes labels are attached not in retrospect, but once it's going, the recognition of something.

Sangharakshita: I remember reading somewhere that what became the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood were very inspired by some prints or engravings that they saw - I think it was engravings - of the frescoes or murals in the Camposanto in Pisa, which of course are quite a bit earlier than Raphael. Unfortunately they were very, very badly damaged during the war. I have seen them and there is not really much left. Yes, they were quite a bit earlier than the Renaissance. So definitely pre-Raphael, and they seemed to draw a lot of inspiration from the engravings that they happened to see of those paintings. I remember the Last Judgement and lots of figures of hermits in the wilderness and also the party of revellers that met the three dead bodies. But mentioning perspective, that reminded me of a question that I was asked, or that came to me, but which I didn't answer, about the binocular perspective. We had all thought that had led on to materialism. I am not so sure whether it led directly to materialism in the philosophical sense but you mention about the predominance of, well, the technique over the content of the work of art and, well, that perhaps does represent a movement in the direction of, well, something very like materialism in the long run. Or movement in the direction of **technology**.

Indrabodhi: Yes, because apparently they had reverse perspective in some early paintings *(unclear)* which was higher.

Sangharakshita: And of course in Persian and Chinese painting you get quite different systems of perspective. You get a sort of stacked one above the other. I don't know how you describe that. And of course we don't see things binocularly. It's as though, well, if we have binocular perspective it is as though the painting is meant to be seen by one eyed people. *[Laughter]*

Indrabodhi: Cubism was an attempt to get round that.

Sangharakshita: But I get the impression from the bit I have read about art history that when this perspective was discovered, artists were absolutely **thrilled** by it and it was like a new toy that they

wanted to play with. They were very, very interested. And you can see that in some paintings, well, that device is subordinated to the painting but in others it seems to have become the reason for executing the painting.

Paul Hatton: There are lots of pictures where architecture is chosen as the main subject so that you can play with the different planes.

Sangharakshita: Yes. And sort of groups of figures in front of a piece of architecture.

Paul Hatton: And they start playing with all sorts of compositional devices, not just to do with perspective but where things are in focal points and all sorts of other tricks. We don't think of them as tricks now but at the time they were new toys.

Sangharakshita: So what are today's toys?

_____: Video.

Sangharakshita: Video, Ah.

Paul Hatton: Yeah.

_____: Computers.

Suriyavamsa: Three dimensional graphics on computers. *(Unclear)*

Sangharakshita: So, any further questions on all this? I think we have covered quite a bit of ground.

Chintamani: There is a question, Bhante, about something that you said about the beginning, about sensuously given elements. There was a question about sensuously given elements and in the text you say that they were, it is quite near the beginning, you say "*the materia prima, the stuff and raw material that an artist subdues and adapts to his creative purpose is compounded of outlines, colours, masses, words, and sounds with which all men are familiar"*, and this is the point, *"and which are indeed themselves products of the rudimentary artistic activity if not of humanity, at least of an important section of the human race"*. I could see how that applied to words but not to other sensuous impressions.

Sangharakshita: I think what I **may** have had in mind, I can't be completely sure of this, is the view that perception is not a purely passive process, that the perceiver, even on the most basic level, contributes something to the perception. I think this is probably what I had in mind.

Chintamani: So, following on from that, could this mean then that the perception that we have today is in some way influenced by the way our cultural forebears saw things, even down to.....

Sangharakshita: Yes. I think so. I think there has been quite a bit of research and discussion recently about the extent to which perceptions are learned from, well, in childhood. And there have been some quite interesting experiments or observations with regard to blind people, and I was reading fairly recently a book in which it described how people who had either been born blind or had become blind very, very early in life, had their sight restored and found it very, very difficult - almost impossible in some cases - to find their way around the world as a sighted person. And in some cases they preferred to go back and be blind again. Because, well, it's as though you have to learn as a child that if you put your hand out like this, well, you touch things, so it's a certain **distance** from you. It's as though all that has to be learned. And if you haven't learned it at the right time it does seem you can't learn it subsequently. That would seem to be the thrust of those observations. So it's not that if you have been

blind and your sight has been restored you suddenly experience things in the way that normally sighted persons do - no, not at all. You have to learn, and it's a very difficult and painful process if you have to do that later on in life, if your sight is restored to you.

Paul Hatton: I suppose as a child you are not consciously learning it, you are absorbing it, but if you....

Sangharakshita: But I have observed small children and I have seen how they learn things in that sort of way, learn that, well, things have resistance and, well, for instance, to give an example, a baby in its cot, it throws something out of the cot and it doesn't see it. As far as the baby is concerned that thing has ceased to exist. It has to **learn** that it is on the floor and that if it bent over it could pick it up. That has to be learned, from experience. It doesn't know it automatically. So I think we perhaps don't realise how much real learning is crammed into the first year or so of life.

Chintamani: What that suggests is that learning in that way is also a sort of lesson in objectivity.

Sangharakshita: Hm, yeah. And also apparently it was similar with regard to speech. I mean it's beginning to be discovered, or at least believed, that it's almost as though there was a speech gene in human beings, and well, you learn to speak at a certain age, that ability sort of comes into play. But if you don't learn to speak at a certain age it may be that you never learn to speak properly. If you have been, say, shut up for some reason, maybe in prison or something like that, you haven't learned to speak at the right time. It isn't that it's as easy when you come out as a relative adult to learn. In some cases it may be virtually impossible.

Indrabodhi: Some children speak very late in life. There is a friend of mine whose boy, he was about four and he still only spoke very few words.

Sangharakshita: Well I had a nephew like that, or great nephew actually.

Indrabodhi: It is very strange. Because the mother was very articulate.

Sangharakshita: But he became all right subsequently.

Indrabodhi: Yeah, I think so.

_____: I think Einstein didn't speak until he was 4 or 5.

Manjusvara: Sometimes children.....

Sangharakshita: Ha, Ha. He must have been thinking! *[Laughter]*

Manjusvara: Sometimes they don't speak almost like full sentences and there was this period of them just listening *(unclear)* perhaps he **was** thinking, containing.

Sangharakshita: I was quite interested in studying Prasannasiddhi's little boy and seeing how he learned to construct sentences. It was quite interesting to see how, and how quickly he picked things up. It's quite amazing. If you could no doubt learn the language as quickly as that it would be wonderful.

Indrabodhi: Like blotting paper.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Indrabodhi: Because my boy is learning German as well from his mother. He is now teaching me German words at the age of four.

Sangharakshita: I found if in conversation with Prasannasiddhi I used a rather long word the little boy would say, "what word was that?", and I would repeat it and he'd be using it shortly. The vocabulary grows so quickly and easily. And he remembers the names of Order members. No problem whether they're in Sanskrit or Pali, he picks them up at once. *[Laughter]* Because, what does he know of Pali or Sanskrit, there is no sort of preconceived idea that Pali or Sanskrit is difficult. So there's no barrier, no hindrance, to picking it up. Whereas in our case perhaps there might be. And of course, well, there are all sorts of artistic conventions that are learned, aren't there. They're a part of our culture.

Paul Hatton: In fact it's difficult to know what **isn't** learned. I think you were saying about the child drawing a house or something. That's a code that they've learned, it is not a naive drawing. So I don't know before what stage you would say that is a child's drawing.

Sangharakshita: I remember - I must have been no more than five - I remember at school we had a drawing and painting lesson and we had to draw a house with chalks, or crayons, and I remember that I drew a house in the way that a child does draw a house and I remember distinctly that it was red roofed, or rather I had a roof which was tiled. So what I did, I divided up the roof with black lines to indicate all the different tiles and then I filled in each one separately in red. But then there was another little boy in the class who did it a different way, because he filled it in all red first and then he drew the lines. *[Laughter]* I regarded this as cheating! *[Laughter]* It says something probably about my temperament, but I do remember it quite distinctly that I regarded this as cheating, I was quite annoyed about it, because he finished his drawing much more quickly that I finished mine. So what do you make of that? Is it a Virgoan characteristic?! *[Laughter]*

Chintamani: I suppose you could say you were giving attention to each tile.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Chintamani: And he wasn't, he was ...

Ratnachuda: That's where the figurative started, each tile was probably individual rather than abstract.

Kovida: There was recognition that each tile was individual rather than he just saw a mass of red.

_____: Yeah.

Sangharakshita: So it's attention to detail, which is supposed to be a Virgoan characteristic, isn't it. For better or worse! You can get lost in the details.

Anyway perhaps we will leave it there for this afternoon. What's happening?

Kovida: Chintamani's giving a talk.

Chintamani: A semi-informal talk.

Sangharakshita: And tomorrow?

Kovida: Tomorrow we are going to have a poetry reading, just kind of .....

Sangharakshita: So one will be expected.....

[End of Tape]

[Day Five Tape One Side One]

Sangharakshita: So what have we today? I will start off with two questions which seem to be somewhat interrelated.

"*Why is there greater poetry within the Islamic and Christian traditions than Buddhism?"*

"Why, when we talk of great art, are the majority of references to Western rather than Buddhist work?"

Anybody got any ideas on this? Has anyone ever thought about it?

Chintamani: We talked about it at some length this morning.

Sangharakshita: Did you arrive at any conclusions or bright ideas or ?

Kovida: One suggestion was that Buddhism, the purpose of Buddhism, is to produce Enlightened beings and the other, so that is where people's energy goes, rather than in a way creating works of art, and it was suggested that possibly in the Sufi religion or Christianity well that was their **goal** to some extent.

Sangharakshita: Yeah, I think there's something in that. Though I wouldn't say it **quite** in that way. I was thinking - well to approach the subject a bit indirectly - I was thinking of Russia. Russia in a way is sort of neither Eastern nor Western. I was thinking of the old traditional Russia. And Russian religio-
nationalists used to point out that Russia, well the church in Russia, which is of course the Orthodox Church, had never undergone either a Reformation or a Renaissance or an Enlightenment period. So something analogous to that happened only to some extent in the last century in Russia. It didn't have a Renaissance in the 15th and 16th Century, they didn't have a Reformation in the 17th Century, nor did they have an Enlightenment, except to a very limited extent in some areas of life under Peter the Great in the 18th Century. So that meant that life, spiritual life, flowed exclusively within Church channels. But when as a result of the contact of the Russian intelligentsia with Western and West European ideas, the spiritual energies of a minority of the most intelligent and educated people could no longer flow in those channels, then you had the great outburst of Russian literature, especially in the novel and poetry. So it ties up to some extent with what I was saying a few days ago about the arts having become the main bearers for many people in the West, of spiritual values. So because in the Buddhist East Buddhism itself was the principal bearer of spiritual values for the Buddhist peoples, art was very much subordinated to religion in the way that it had been in the Middle Ages and earlier in the West. But, yes, where the individual artists sort of happened to be inspired, well you did get a good or even a great work of art, but it's as though very few people put **all** their energies into art. Usually their energies went much more into religion and the religious artist was usually more or less just a craftsman providing religious artifacts and that does seem to be why so much of Buddhist art in the East is, well, by no stretch of the imagination, great art. I mean there are some good and even, perhaps, great works but not very many as compared with the West. And literature is in a way very meagre. There are some exceptions. I'm thinking of China and Japan, and even India to **some extent**, because in China you did have the tradition of the scholar, Confucian scholar, or Taoist hermit and well they sat rather loose to traditional Chinese religion anyway and their interest in Buddhism was often as much literary as it was strictly spiritual. So you do get some quite great works of Chinese art and literature, especially. But they're by no means always specifically Buddhist. I am thinking of, well, the

great poets, which were to some extent influenced by Buddhism, some of them were sort of Buddhists, but Buddhism doesn't figure very prominently in their poetry, but it's great poetry. As though the greater part of their spiritual energies just went into their poetry. I am thinking of Li Po, Tu Fu, Po Kui - I'm not sure how you pronounce these in modern Mandarin, but that is how they are spelt more or less. The three, the great three of the Tang dynasty. And of course the landscape, the paintings were often landscapes, but a lot of the visual art of that period has of course been lost, there are just a very few examples surviving mostly in Japan. We've got apparently some sort of late copies of masterpieces, some of which are specifically Buddhist but by no means all. But it's probably the landscapes that one thinks of when one thinks of the traditional classical Chinese art. And it is perhaps much, to some extent, the same sort of situation in Japan where someone like Ryokan could write poetry which sort of sat very loose to traditional Buddhism and perhaps as much of his energy went into his poetry as into his meditation practice. In fact, one gets from the story of his life and some of his poetry the impression that, well he wasn't very far advanced on the path of meditation, although quite an attractive personality. He had quite extreme emotional ups and downs it seems, even at the end of his life. So it seems as though he had a sort of foot in both camps.

Chintamani: That begs a question Bhante. If we're trying to really promote Buddhism and establish a real Sangha, a tradition, can we sort of look forward to the end of art as we know it, in the sense that those energies will flow and more, and perhaps should flow more and more within exclusively, within the channels of spiritual practice rather than in cultural pursuits?

Sangharakshita: Hm. There is a thought that just came to me which I had earlier on that I'll go into first and into what you say in a round about way. I think there can be a religion of art as I described it in my essay only on the basis of an understanding of art along the lines of my definition. Because that definition presupposes that art is a bearer of spiritual values. But can you say that much modern art is a bearer of spiritual values? So we seem to be in a situation in the West generally, certainly in this country to a great extent, where religion is no longer a bearer of spiritual values for most people and neither are the arts. So you have nothing virtually, certainly in any formal or perhaps institutional traditional way for many people which is a bearer of spiritual values. So in other words, we really **are** in the wasteland. Because if you..... well I was listening to a book discussion on the radio this morning and there was somebody called Eric Volksbaum *(unsure of previous name)* expressed some rather extreme views and he was in discussion with a lady who seemed to be connected with the Tate Gallery, I'm not sure, maybe she might have even been a director or something like that, and, well, that point came out very clearly from that discussion. She was talking about installation art and that sort of thing and she clearly seemed to think well, that that was art though she made no attempt to say what she thought art was. She thought that a completely valid development. He was very critical of that approach. And certainly installation art generally speaking at least, can't be regarded as a bearer of spiritual values. So to come back to, what was your point, go over it again?

Chintamani: Yes, that if one is to look at Buddhist history as you have just done, where spiritual energies flowed more or less exclusively within the context of direct spiritual practice, and that perhaps, well, in the West, say in Europe, spiritual energies flowed, could flow, within the arts because perhaps the religious context could not contain them, was not satisfactorily broad or deep enough to contain them; in that we are trying to establish Buddhism, establish a Sangha, establish a traditional Buddhism, can we therefore look forward to the decline of art in the Western sense and maybe .....

Sangharakshita: You mean what is currently regarded as art or in the traditional sense?

Chintamani: No, in the traditional sense. And those spiritual energies will in future as regards our movement flow more and more directly within the channels of spiritual practice rather than.....

Sangharakshita: Well, I don't know, because in a way that begs the question because some people would say that, well, their practise of art is itself a spiritual discipline and therefore in principle

Buddhistic. And also one has to say that one's principal goal is to get the spiritual energies flowing in a particular direction and the channel in a sense doesn't matter very much, whether it is the channel we call Buddhism or the channel we call the arts in the more traditional sense, and perhaps the one can reinforce the other. And perhaps **some** people will find their spiritual energies flowing mainly, or even exclusively, quite satisfactorily within the channel of Buddhism and others will find that they flow more easily within the channel of the arts. But I think it's very helpful, even for someone whose energies flow within the arts, if you can have a sort of philosophical underpinning from a spiritual tradition like Buddhism. And, well, if one thinks in terms of the individual one finds that, well, some people do say that they find works of art, great works of art, more stimulating than, say, Pujas and rituals. And some people get a **lot** out of Puja and ritual and it suffices for them. But not everybody, and they seem to somehow, sometimes to get emotional nourishment more from works of art, or from creating works of art. So I don't think we can be too hard and fast about this.

Kovida: I can't quite remember it, but your argument in 'the Glory of the Literary World' was that the highest literature was literature which expressed the Dharma, or communicated the Dharma was that?

Padmavajra: Brought people to Enlightenment, didn't it. When you quote from Vangisa's 'Prayer to the Buddha', of the Buddha's speech being amita vacha, deathless speech, and went on from that to talk about....

Sangharakshita: When I say the real deathless speech is poetry at its best and greatest and ....

Kovida: The content need not be Buddhist then?

Sangharakshita: No, right. I think the..... well, I mentioned a few days ago that verses in the Pali Canon which are attributed to the Buddha, I mean though they are **verses**, they are not particularly good poetry. The Buddha spoke in verse, it was easy to do in Pali or whatever his language was. Well, in the first of my talks I spoke about Atisha spontaneously producing Sanskrit verses as he moved around the temple and bowed to the different images. Well, it's relatively easy to do that in Sanskrit as, for instance, in Italian. In Italian you get what they call improvistatores who can improvise, because the Italian language lends itself to that sort of thing and has an abundance of rhymes which we don't have in English. English is very poor in rhymes in comparison. Something that struck me when Devamitra - going off at a slight tangent - when Devamitra showed his slides of Borobodur I got the impression that those Buddhas, though quite fine, were sort of almost mass produced. You got the impression that the workshop was just turning them out, dozens and dozens of them. They were good but there was nothing very inspired about them. And the features were not particularly expressive. But perhaps that wasn't possible in that sort of medium, that kind of stone, anyway.

Chintamani: The impression one gets from a lot of that Buddhist art is it's basically very refined decorative art, and that the overall impression is very harmonious and elegant and stylish but there's a lack of the sort of individual feeling that one would get in say the baptistry doors in Florence, individual feeling for the individual object.

Sangharakshita: Well therefore the individual insight almost.

Padmavajra: Isn't it though, is that part of the issue with this is to do with the instrumentality, if you like, of Buddhist art. That in a way they are like icons, aren't they. In a way they're not - well I hazard to say this - not to be appreciated in themselves as works of art.

Sangharakshita: No, they were meant to remind you of something.

Padmavajra: Yes, and if you like the **real** object of contemplation was the visionary form and maybe that.... do you think **that** has an effect on the development of Buddhist art? In a way it's to do with

pointing beyond itself.

Sangharakshita: Of course, yes one could say that. I think that's true in many cases but also it's a pointing beyond in just a devotional way, just reminding people about the Buddha, not necessarily pointing to a Buddha as it were existing on some higher plane and directing people's aspirations there.

Padmavajra: It always struck me how, on a different level, the pictures of Doctor Ambedkar in India. It's almost as if people are not seeing that. I mean if you actually look at the kind of official imagery, they are very, very unaesthetic to my eyes, but it strikes me that people put garlands on them but in a way they are not referring to that, it seems to me. It's almost as if that is something in their imagination that they actually have in mind. That's much more important.

Chintamani: Isn't it like putting wreaths on war memorials. In the West there's a parallel there that it doesn't matter what the war memorial looks like, there's a collective mentally held institution, for lack of a better term, that is the glorious dead of the wars. And that is a very important and emotive object of contemplation for those who remember the wars, and that's wreathed. And the war memorial is just the occasion for that sort of thing.

Sangharakshita: Well images and war memorials are sort of symbols in the mathematical sense. They don't express anything - they stand **for** something.

Suriyavamsa: They don't represent.

Sangharakshita: They don't. They don't sort of represent or embody anything. They're just a sign of something.

Suriyavamsa: You get that with the Tibetan drawings of different teachers.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Suriyavamsa: All the faces look very much the same but you are recognising the hat or hand gesture or a type of book in front of them.

Sangharakshita: The busts of Doctor Ambedkar often represent him wearing a bright red tie, but I am sure he never wore a bright red tie.*[Laughter]* Judging by his photographs he had reasonably good taste in clothes. But generally in the statues there is the bright red tie and bright blue suit.

Chintamani: Actually that raises a question I've been wanting to ask for some time, and that is to do with our Refuge Tree, the Western Buddhist Order Refuge Tree, and it seems to me that there are two conventions in there. There is the older convention which is the convention that you were talking about, whereby you don't have historically accurate portraits, you have symbolic portraits of various teachers recognisable by hats, colour of robes, and so on, and maybe a general indication of whether they were young or old, and nothing more specific than that. But then the teachers of the present, including images of yourself, these are based on photographs, which is a more, as it were, naturalistic portrait. And these are two very different conventions and they communicate in a sense very different things, and I wondered if that apparent inconsistency had been addressed.

Sangharakshita: Well I think some of the teachers of the past we know about from portraits. I mean I think there were images of Tsongkhapa. We know apparently what his features look like and all the images of Tsongkhapa, the decent ones in temples, reflect those. We know what Shinran looked like it seems. And some of the Zen masters, because there **was** portraiture in medieval Japan. So I mean there is that inconsistency, so to speak, there is that with regard to the teachers of the past. And of course with regard to teachers of ancient India, well we don't **know** what they looked like. So if we are to

represent them at all and not just write their names there we have to create some sort of image or figure. So in those cases the images are just signs, whereas the others are quasi-portraits.

Chintamani: I wondered if there was anything in the whole question of whether there was anything said within the Buddhist tradition about portraits according to fleshly appearance on the one hand and portraits according to symbolic status on the other. I mean like, for instance, I heard that there was within the Tibetan tradition an image for the first Jamyang Khyentse but it was completely symbolic, he was portrayed as a yogi with all the accoutrements - with a meditation band and the skull crown and so on. And this was considered the correct way to depict the teacher rather than a portrait in the flesh so to speak.

Sangharakshita: Well he very likely **wore** those accoutrements at some point. I have seen a photograph of Dudjom Rimpoche wearing those accoutrements, which he didn't wear every day, but he wore them on certain occasions apparently. And that was a photograph we saw in, it must have been in Kalimpong. So you can understand from all this why we tend not to have great artists in a fully traditional society. We have them in a non traditional society, broadly speaking. And that is why we have great Western artists and not so many perhaps great Eastern artists. There are a few exceptions. Well within the Chinese and Japanese traditions. And another point I was going to make that in India and this may *(unclear)* in China and Japan too sometimes you got a secular culture centred on the court. Say in Sanskrit poetry in the middle ages was often court centred and it is sometimes called 'Court Poetry'. Kalidasa's poetry is sometimes called 'Court Poetry'. Because the inspiration seems secular rather than religious, even though there's maybe the salutation to Ganesh or Shiva at the beginning of the epic, but the values are not Hindu spiritual values necessarily, even though it's a mythological subject.

Padmavajra: Do you think Ashvagosha is an interesting case because they apparently had somebody who, I mean I don't know Sanskrit obviously but it's supposed to be great Sanskrit poetry.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Padmavajra: And yet it's dealing with either the life of the Buddha in the Buddhacarita or the that poem he wrote about Nanda, the Sundarananda. Do you think there you have got the example of someone who is a Buddhist practitioner, a Buddhist teacher, and yet produces something which is great art?

Sangharakshita: It is great, it is, I am not so sure that it is great **art**.

Padmavajra: Right.

Sangharakshita: But the **artistry** is great. He apparently, by all accounts he is a very skilled handler of the Sanskrit literary language. And he seems to be influenced by the Ramayana - many of his allusions and comparisons come from Hindu epic and Koranic sources which Western Buddhists might find even a little off- putting and I suspect some of our Indian Buddhist friends might find him a bit off, because sometimes the comparisons are quite systematic. The Buddha is compared with this Hindu god, well one after another, not just one or two. As for instance when it describes the Buddha's birth from his mother's side, it is just as such-and-such god was born from his mother's thigh and another one from his mother's chest and another from her back, in the same way the Buddha was born from his mother's side. There are a whole string of comparisons of that sort at many different sort of stages of the Buddha's career. So I think it's in a sense a bit of a hybrid work, clearly it is the work of a devout and learned Buddhist who is a great literary artist but whether it's a great poem - don't forget we have only got half of it - is not so clear. You see what I mean? This also raises the point, well, whether that kind of poetry, this ornate poetry, Court Poetry, really can rise to the heights. It raises that question also.

Manjusvara: The poet laureate's example would suggest that.

Sangharakshita: Hmm?

Manjusvara: The example of the poet laureate here would suggest that.

Sangharakshita: Which poet laureate?

Manjusvara: Well technically it is always, certainly of late, it doesn't bring out the best work.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Well, it seems the way I'm thinking of other traditions, apparently in, in the Islamic tradition which has been mentioned, being a poet laureate of a king or sultan brought out your best. There was a special type of poetry, the panegyric. One of the great classical forms of Arabic, and I think perhaps Persian poetry too. So the fact that the king was going to enjoy your work and you were rewarded with lots of gold volumes and a robe of honour would have spurred you on to do your very best.

Ratnachuda: In my reading of Irish history I think there is a similar thing where the second person in the kingdom - Ireland was split into many kingdoms for a long time - the troubadour, the artist, was the second person in the kingdom to the king or the queen. And it still continues, the attitude of the Irish to the artist.

Sangharakshita: Well yes. I gather that in the Republic of Ireland writers and artists are not taxed. *[Laughter]* They produce. Well fair enough.

[End of Side One Side Two]

Manjusvara: I suppose if the king or queen symbolizes some higher value for them.....or other

Sangharakshita: Of course in a traditional society that is the case, and in Islamic and Sufi literature the king often stands for God, and your devotion to the king is a sort of reflection to your devotion to God, and sometimes, judging by the language of the poetry there's no distinction between them. Well, there is, well, so many of the Persian poets refer to Mahmoud of Ghizni and..... Aziz, is it?

Padmavajra: Aziz, slave and *(unclear)* Mahmoud.

Sangharakshita: And, you know, Aziz becomes the devotee and Mahmoud of Ghizni, the terrible Mahmoud of Ghizni becomes god. Because on the way to becoming god so to speak he is the ideal Muslim, the very, very devoted and religious person who slays the infidels and smashes their temples.

Padmavajra: But he softens with Aziz.

Sangharakshita: Well, in the poetry anyway.

Padmavajra: Yeah, in the poetry, not in real life!

Manjusvara: I don't know if this is one of the questions or not but we touched on this. If you have got an actual embodiment of the ideal, is it perhaps more likely to produce that sort of response? Is that clear?

Sangharakshita: I am not **quite** sure what you are saying.

Chintamani: It's a human being, as in the case of works in troubadour poetry, the beloved, the distant lady, who is there as a tangible reminder or inspirer of.....

Manjusvara: But even god, you know

Sangharakshita: Well, in the case of Jalladin el Rumi there was *(unclear name beginning with S)* And Dante had his Beatrice. But that brings us to another question in a way, doesn't it.

"*In the Buddhist tradition the path to Enlightenment is described in terms of purity, freedom and so on. Could one also articulate the path in terms of beauty, ie. In terms of a progression from lower to higher levels of beauty. If so could you suggest the stages of such a path?"*

Well, clearly one can refer back to Plato and the Symposium and we did touch upon this a few days ago actually when you weren't here. And I spoke about the kasina practices and how the kasina practices lead up to the subha vimoksa, the beauty liberation you could call it. And I described how in the practice you first of all concentrate attention on a patch of beautiful bright colour which is physically present. Then of course the next stage you close your eyes and you reproduce that mentally or imaginatively, become absorbed in it. And then you remove even that mental image, which you can experience very powerfully, and you are just left with the experience of beauty, so to speak, without any object. And then if you could go on refining and refining that. Now this is, I think, a sort of safe way. Because if the beauty is that of a living person with whom you are in contact, especially if they are of the opposite sex, well the dangers are that you get diverted from your purely spiritual path. The enjoyment of that object or that person as object becomes a **sensuous** enjoyment. And therefore, I mentioned Dante, it's significant perhaps that by the time he wrote his great poem Beatrice was safely dead and in any case she had married somebody else. So that created the necessary distance. So she could remain just an **ideal** object like the reflex of the kasina which he could ponder upon and then, as it were, remove and remain just with the feeling and the experience and out of that create his idealised image of Beatrice in his poem.

Padmavajra: I remember you have spoken I think fairly warmly of the Sufi practice where the Sheikh kind of engineers the disciple to fall in love with somebody then as soon as that happened before any contact, whisks the disciple away.

Sangharakshita: Do I speak about that? I can't remember.

Padmavajra: Yes, that is where I got it from it. He got them into solitary retreat and they meditate on Allah.

Sangharakshita: And then you see the disciples that have got to have great faith in their teacher otherwise they just protest, they just won't go into retreat. He regards his teacher as his worst enemy, advised to keep him from the enjoyment of this beautiful object.

Chintamani: This is sort of what the Nanda episode is about.

Sangharakshita: Yes indeed. Yes. I was sort of, well yesterday I was sort of brushing up on my Ruskin, I was looking through a biography of Ruskin. There is the one by Peter Quennell, which is very readable indeed. And I got as far as his ill-starred matrimonial adventure and, well there were some other little episodes before but it seems that Ruskin fell in love with an idea he had of a particular person, well in this case the one he actually married, and that when he was actually married, well apparently he experienced a contradiction between the image of her which he had formed in his mind and the flesh and blood woman by whom he was confronted. And the difference, the tension, was so great that, well, the marriage was never consummated and of course the marriage was annulled eventually. But it seems as though Ruskin didn't have a very clear or deep understanding of himself or

what was happening and certainly no philosophical framework within which to accommodate it all. So he was to some degree a victim of his emotions. Some of them were sort of transferred onto nature and works of art, but he doesn't appear to have been **completely** satisfied. And of course years and years later he had another misadventure with a very, very young girl whom he hoped to marry and whom he idealised over may years.

Paul Hatton: On his first marriage there is some thinking that he was convinced that he was in love by his parents who wanted him to marry.

Sangharakshita: Well, according to Peter Quennell this was a story that was put about by his friends to cover up his failure to consummate the marriage. But according to Peter Quennell that's contradicted by the evidence and apparently many letters from him to his fiancé have survived. They were found apparently beneath the floorboards at Brantwood many, many years later. And he definitely was in love. And Peter Quennell makes the point that the further away the lady was the more love he felt. The nearer she came the less he felt, and when he married her of course that was disastrous! And he didn't really understand what was happening.

Subhadassi: A similar thing is said about Hardy in his relationship with his wife, isn't it, that it was only after her death that he was able to write love poetry about her and how idealised it was. The actual flesh and blood relationship they had was far from ideal.

Sangharakshita: Do you think the same thing has happened with Ted Hughes? Well, I have read the reviews and comments and I...

_____: *deep sigh*.

Subhadassi: I wouldn't say that he idealises the relationship in that way. And also the poems are written over quite a long period of time, from her death up until a couple of years ago. And it seems to be more that he is actually, if anything he is drawing himself into the reality of it rather than idealising it. The converse seems to be the answer in that work**.**

Manjusvara: I think she idealised him more than he did her. That's my impression.

Kovida: It is very earthy stuff. It's interesting because it is like you get her version sometimes of an event, her poem, and then you get his comment of the same event. It sounds like you have got a diary, he has kept a diary and he has worked those up into a poem. And you get two different versions of the same event. It's quite interesting from that point of view, this kind of contrast, sometimes quite stark contrast, between his experience of the event and her experience and interpretation of the event. But it's not, I wouldn't say there was any idealism *(unclear)* between them.

Subhadassi: I found it quite shockingly frank in a way.

Kovida: Yeah.

Subhadassi: You know, it makes you realise in a way what can happen when two people, when it's an ill-starred, and his was very, very ill starred.

Kovida: I mean you do get the impression that there was - maybe it is a bit strong but at some point - hatred between them, there is I think a quite strong tension between them, and that comes through in ...

Sangharakshita: Well sexual love and hatred are very closely connected. You can see that. I mean, you notice that when the question of betrayal and jealousy arises, how quickly the so-called love can turn into hate in a matter of minutes.

Subhadassi: It did almost seem like there was something demonic between Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath. That's my sense of it from the poems.

Kovida: Yes, there is that, this very unconscious evocation in her, very earthy kind of chthonic images.

Sangharakshita: So that suggests..... we talk about sublimation and all that but it isn't such an easy matter, and it does - I am not speaking just in their case but in the case of people generally, even people who are keen on sublimating - and this is **perhaps** where the arts do come in. Perhaps for many people it is easier to achieve a measure of sublimation with the help of the arts than, that by relying say, exclusively or almost exclusively on meditation.

Manjusvara: What do you mean by sublimation? Putting a focus for your energy.

Sangharakshita: Well, not focussing on..... focussing your emotional energies on a more refined object and in that way refining the emotions themselves. But I mean we use this word sublimation and obviously I'm not using it quite in the Freudian sense, but it's an easy word to use but it's not something that is easy to do.

Chintamani: In a book called, I think it is the "Theory of Romantic Love" by Johnson, the book is essentially a commentary on the Tristan/Isolde story, myth. And he points out that in the story there are two Isoldes, there is Isolde the Fair and Isolde of the golden hands. And he says that one represents the ideal, almost the, yes, the imaginal ideal, and the other, Isolde of the golden hands, represents the actual woman. And because of Tristan's.... basically because of his confusion between the two, because of his overlaying of the poetic ideal, the imaginal ideal, onto the actual woman this is where the disaster takes place and he can, in a sense, he can benefit, if one can benefit from it, he can benefit from neither. But he doesn't.....

Sangharakshita: So what is a man to do? I mean is to have a wife and a mistress?

Chintamani: Well no, the point that Johnson makes is that it's important to have a proper outlet for spiritual energies, and that if you want an outlet for your earthy energies well so be it. But not to try to get one out of the other. That's when disaster sets in.

Sangharakshita: That is why I said, do you need a wife so to speak and a spiritual mistress.

Subhadassi: A muse.

Sangharakshita: A muse.

Chintamani: Well, possibly.

Sangharakshita: Of course if she is a living one, well there might be problems with the wife! *[Laughter]* Even though it was a spiritual relationship. The wife wouldn't be happy about, well your emotions, your more spiritual emotions going towards her. The modern idea seems to be that everything must go towards the sexual partner. Well this is where spiritual friendship comes in. Though I'm afraid for many men, and probably for women too, even that is not always an easy option or solution in this respect. Because the pull towards the sexual partner is so strong.

Padmakara: Can I just clarify that Bhante, you are saying you can have a non sexual living spiritual mistress? *[Laughter]*

Sangharakshita: We talk about 'mistress' in single inverted commas. I am using it only in the sense that the young knight would regard his lord's lady as his mistress in that sort of sense.

Padmavajra: There's going to be some wonderful "Bhante says" after this *[Laughter]*

Suriyavamsa: Fancy going for a coffee because Bhante says.

Sangharakshita: Hmm?

Suriyavamsa: You can say to some young woman, "do you fancy going for a coffee because Bhante says..."*[Laughter]*

Manjusvara: Robert Graves got into a lot of trouble with this I believe.

Sangharakshita: Did he?

Manjusvara: Because he tried, he was married and he would then find his muses but he then sort of turned them into sexual partners as well, which was very difficult for his wife. But also it seemed like it was pretty disastrous for the young women.

Sangharakshita: Carson did that. I think of Shakespeare also as well, in one of the sonnets - what was it, "two spirits that suggest me ill". Well one is a women coloured ill, the other is a man right fair.

Kovida: I suppose the question you mentioned - difficulty of the kalyana mitrata, I mean kalyana mitrata tends to be between someone of the same sex and if you are drawn to a woman you are not going to be clear what you are going to be getting from your kalyana mitra.

Subhadassi: Do you mean if you're drawn to a woman as a kalyana mitra?

Kovida: No, no, if you are drawn to a woman for sexual... If that's your wife as it were, using that terminology. So your mistress, it would be difficult for a man to find the man as a mistress if you see what I mean.

Sangharakshita: Well, that's to say it is difficult to invest much emotional energy in the friendship because usually those sort of emotions are tied so closely to the sexual relationship.

Padmavajra: Ibn Arabi managed it.

Sangharakshita: Hmm?

Padmavajra: Ibn Arabi.

Sangharakshita: Ah, yes.

Padmavajra: He wrote that

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Padmavajra: He wrote that divan to a young woman. He then had to write a very elaborate commentary on it to show that it was all above board and thoroughly Islamic. But one of the things I find interesting about this sort of discussion, it seems that there is a very very powerful, very strong, emotion - it's the old, old, point of harnessing those emotions and yet it seems that you need somehow to do that with, well perhaps approach it in other ways. One of the things that struck me about Sufi

poetry is the imagery that's used is the imagery of beautiful tresses, eyebrows, eyes, skin, the beauty spot, and yet apparently they are talking about god or whatever. But they are using imagery which is erotic or very sensual, and - what am I trying to say here? - that it sometimes seems to people that it's either a very gross embodiment, which they get caught up with craving in terms of love, or an ideal that is sort of so sort of pure that it's - or they have a particular notion of purity - that it's kind of empty of anything they can have a response to. What struck me about that, that kind of poetry, is that it seems to bring together the highest aspiration with a quite vivid sense experience.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. I wonder, sometimes I get the impression reading some of this poetry, well admittedly in translation, as though the language of the eyebrow and what it signifies and the ear and what it signifies, and the mole and what it signifies, all becomes a bit artificial and mechanical.

Padmavajra: Sure, yeah. That's true.

Manjusvara: That happened really didn't it with Persian poetry *(unclear)* stylised.

Subhadassi: Talking about Ashvagosha and the Buddhacarita, again you get some very, very quite strong sensual imagery. It's very, you know, there are erotic passages I would say in the Buddhacarita or certainly strongly sensual ones.

Sangharakshita: Yeah, when he is describing the occupants of the harem when Siddhartha leaves.

Subhadassi: Yeah, yeah. You certainly got a sense that Ashvagosha had a feeling for those things. He knew what the Buddha was leaving in some way.

Sangharakshita: Well perhaps **he** had left something like that.

Subhadassi: Well maybe.

Sangharakshita: So he could put some feeling into it.

Subhadassi: Yes.

Chintamani: Earlier on Bhante you said that, you spoke of Ruskin feeling more love at a distance than when he was close to his fiancé. Well years ago I remember you putting in a letter to me that - the quote was 'distance dissolves the incidentals and leaves only what is essential'. In the light of that, if it's true, would that sense of unalloyed affection necessarily just be to do with your own internal idealisation of the person or could it be that you have a sense of more what is truly human at a distance. I'm not saying it's either one or the other necessarily. One has to obviously assess each, each.....

Sangharakshita: Well if you are living very close to someone on a sort of day to day basis, the trivial things can occupy the forefront, as it were, if you are not careful. And you can almost, well lose sight of the wood for the trees, lose sight of the person on account of all these sort of little details of day to day living. Some of their little habits may irritate you even though you are very fond of that person and you admire them even. But some of their little habits may irritate you. Or you may not always feel like being with anybody, even with that person. If they are around all the time it may irritate you a bit.

Chintamani: And you think this can apply within the area of, well, broadly speaking relations between the sexes or within the romantic arena so to speak.

Sangharakshita: Well I have always said that it is very unwise to spend all your time with the same person even if you are in love with them and not to have breaks. I think it's very very rare that you

don't want a break from someone, but if you are in love very often you're afraid of losing, you are afraid of letting the other person out of your sight, there's possessiveness, which obviously isn't love in a more spiritual sense. And well, you make the other person almost your prisoner, which means you become their prisoner. Because, I mean, the jailer has always got to be on duty. *[Laughter]* So in love and in friendship there has to be trust and freedom. Shelley has something to say about this in Epipsychidion, doesn't he. I can't quote the lines, I remember the sense of them. "Chained to a jealous foe and the dreariest and the longest journey go". He's referring to marriage. Chained to a jealous foe. You are chained. I mean you chain her but you chain her to yourself, which means that you are chained to her. Well, you are no longer friends, you are almost enemies.

Manjusvara: Didn't Forster use that?

Sangharakshita: Hm?

Manjusvara: The title "The Longest Journey" comes from ...

Sangharakshita: That's right, he took that as his title.

Subhadassi: Some of the imagery as well is from Meredith's *'Modern Love'*. He also talks about what people try to get, the "what a dusty answer gets the soul when hot for certainties in this our life".

Sangharakshita: Yes, it's a very interesting series of poems. Yes. And it was modern love in the middle of the Victorian period.

Subhadassi: Very strong imagery there.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Subhadassi: Stark.

_____: You have got Hardy in 'Jude the Obscure' where marriage seems to be the ruin of the relationship between Jude and his beloved. It seems to be a tragedy.

Sangharakshita: Well, well I don't remember the details of the story but clearly he's been in love and he's projected and when it comes to marriage or living together, well, you see the other person more realistically. And also, as I said, there's the whole business of living. Maybe you're dreaming how beautiful she is and wanting to write a sonnet and she comes in and says could she have some money for the housekeeping, which strikes the wrong sort of note. And, going back to Ruskin, it seems that in the case of the lady he married they never really knew each other before the marriage. They'd met but only well chaperoned usually and all that sort of thing.

Manjusvara: Do you think in a culture, like India, where there is arranged marriages, does it mean that people find, they sort of develop a muselike figure beyond *(unclear)*.

Sangharakshita: Hm. I mean I am told by my Indian friends and books I have read that in the case of the arranged marriage the idea is that the wife at least - well, maybe the husband too sometimes - falls in love **after** the marriage. Falling in love **succeeds** marriage, it doesn't precede it. Marriage is not based on love, it is based on other firmer and more long lasting considerations. And that in some ways would appear to be more sensible. Because after all, love comes and goes, doesn't it? You fall in and you fall out. And especially if there is no children to create a common interest, then the relationship becomes very shaky. Anyway.

The question:

"*Could Neo-Platonism with its emphasis on the beautiful have some influence on the development of Buddhism in the West?"*

Well, I don't know. It could do I suppose but then it, that presupposes some people **studying** Neo-Platonism and knowing something about it and being able to relate it to Buddhism. Neo-Platonism is not an easy study. The texts of Neo-Platonism are quite difficult, though there is one Mitra who is going to do a thesis, going to do a PhD thesis on Buddhism and Neo-Platonism who is studying classical Greek with that in mind at university. I am afraid I forget his name but he did write to me about a year ago. So we will have to wait and see. *[pause]*

"*Yesterday you said that the faith type wouldn't use or need "The Religion of Art", the arts. I would have thought that the faith type, one who is emotionally led rather than intellectually,* ***would*** *engage with the arts. Could you say more about your comment."*

Well, if the faith type, the faith follower is engaging powerfully with ritual and worship he'd feel less need for the arts. That is not to say that he or she wouldn't enjoy them and engage in them but they would have two strings to their bow, so to speak, instead of just one. Whereas for the person who was sincerely involved with Buddhism but who had no feeling for ritual and puja, the arts would become almost a necessity.

"*Also do you see any correlation between the artists type and Buddhist types -; faith; doctrine; body-witness."*

I wonder if the question means different types of artists and different types of Buddhist. I don't know whose question it is.

Subhadassi: It was mine. I was just interested in if you did see that there was any correlation between the artistic temperament and any Buddhist types, if you know of any ...

Sangharakshita: Well, what is this artistic temperament. Because artists have been of quite different temperaments. So think of the poets, well Shakespeare and Milton, judging by their writing, seem to have different temperaments. Shelley was different from Keats and different from Byron, *(unclear)* was different from Tennyson. And what is temperament, I could also ask that.

_____: I suppose you could say that one thing that is common with all artists is that they spend a lot of time alone. They tend to live in order to..... producing works of art is a solitary activity isn't it, generally.

[End of Side Two
Tape Two Side One]

Sangharakshita: Yes, depending on the Nature of the art because one does read of artists in the Renaissance working on the frescoes with their students, with their pupils. Poetry is a solitary pursuit. And well, one reads of the novelists like Scott, writing his novels in the midst of his family, not at all bothered by children shouting and playing and dogs barking. He just carried on writing. But not all of course are like that. Proust shuts himself up in his cork lined room, yes. Apparently Proust was a great admirer of Ruskin and translated, I think, some of his writings. I have a book in fact called "Proust and Ruskin", which I haven't yet read. And of course, I remember when Schopenhauer, well this is philosophy but he was greatly annoyed by the cracking of whips in the street outside. *[Laughter]* So I don't know. I don't know whether it is possible to generalise in this way. Because, I mean, very few poets are, as it were, intellectual types. Well, one can't say that they were just one-sidedly emotional, it was imagination which was predominant. Though some were men of powerful intellect like Coleridge

and Milton, and Goethe perhaps.

Manjusvara: What sort of writer are you? Do you need a cork lined room?

Sangharakshita: Pardon.

Manjusvara: Do you need a cork lined room to write in?

Sangharakshita: Me, no, no. I prefer to be reasonably quiet but I am not bothered by someone being in the room because when I was in Padmaloka I did a lot of my writing with Prasannasiddhi sitting and studying and studying for his BA in the same room. And down in London Paramartha was studying for his osteopathy examinations and it didn't bother me in the least. Of course they were both **quiet** people *[Laughter]* They didn't..... well they did sometimes interrupt me but they did it mindfully. So I was never bothered by having someone around. Whether I would be, well yes, also in Kalimpong. Yes, I was being interrupted all the time. I remember now. *[Laughter]* When I wrote my *Survey*, you know, that should be obvious from my memoirs. I had to drop what I was doing and engage with visitors and deal with this and deal with that, and then I'd just return to what I was doing. I seemed able to do that then. I doubt if I would be able to do it now. I think I would find it more difficult. Maybe because the flow of inspiration isn't so strong as it used to be.

Anyway, a couple more questions.

"*How relevant should works of art be?*"

Well I am afraid I don't like this sort of usage of the word 'relevant'. It is a bit like using 'conducive'. Conducive to what? Relevant to what? So perhaps we could be told first of all, you know, relevant to what.

Chintamani: We had a fair amount of talk this morning about the way that in the current cultural atmosphere relevance to the current times in which we live is seen as a great virtue in an artwork and almost this is the pre-eminent yardstick for judging the worth of a work of art, that it is relevant to and speaks about the times in which we live....

Sangharakshita: I would make a distinction. In order to be relevant to the times in which we live you don't have to have the times in which we live as your subject matter. I mean, just a rough example, I mentioned I think a few days ago about Norman Mailler's novel 'Ancient Evenings'. It's all about ancient Egypt, but according to one account of it which I read it has some bearing on or relevance to modern American life. I couldn't personally see it, but perhaps if I had looked close enough and know more about modern American life I might have found so. Certainly there was a lot of sex in it, so perhaps the point of resemblance or relevance was there. But anyway, as I also mentioned a few days ago in the case of the Pre-Raphaelites, those Pre-Raphaelites like Burne-Jones who depicted dreams and visions, they were not irrelevant because their depiction of dreams and visions was an outburst, a protest, so therefore was **relevant** to contemporary conditions.

Subhadassi: And similarly the converse is very much true as well, isn't it, that you do get a lot of contemporary art which is desperately trying to be relevant in this sense and it's a mere kind of reproduction of ...

Sangharakshita: Of much of the same.

Subhadassi: Yeah. It is just a rearrangement of cultural .....

Sangharakshita: So what does it mean to be relevant? One has to look at that.

Chintamani: Arthur Miller's, 'The Crucible' is a case in point.

Sangharakshita: That it was relevant, yet it was about the 17th Century witch craze, witch hunting craze in Salem Massachusetts, but it was relevant in a way to the contemporary situation with McCarthyism, though of course, as someone pointed out, there weren't any real witches but there were real communists at work seeking to subvert democracy. So one mustn't forget that.

_____: It's said that the ancient Greek tragedians chose myths, chose to write plays, tragedies, about myths which had some relevance, some political relevance, to their time. They would home in on something which could be understood mythologically but also had political ramifications.

Sangharakshita: So I think this idea of relevance has to be looked at very closely and mustn't be used uncritically. You could even, if you wanted to, put it in a extreme form you could say that a modern work of art which completely ignored the contemporary world would be very, very relevant. *[Laughter]* Do you see what I mean? Yes. Because it says what do you **think** of the contemporary world.

Kovida: It would give a sense of values that everyone wasn't valuing this.

Sangharakshita: I think this is the last question.

"*You say in "The Religion of Art" that art stretches the mind beyond the limits of its own rationality. Would you give an example of this from your own experience.*"

I was trying to think of one but I was finding it actually rather difficult. And well then I thought that well every great work of art or even a reasonably good one, whether in the field of visual arts or literature, does stretch the mind beyond the limits of its own rationality inasmuch as it calls the **imagination** into play. You are **always** stretched. But of course when you encounter a great work of art for the first time which is usually when you're young it stretches the mind much more. And I think as you get older it becomes more and more difficult to come across masterpieces which stretch your mind in that sort of way, not just because they're great but because they're **new**. So they give you a sort of shock. So one can go back to great works of art which one enjoyed when one was young and enjoy them again and again and see more and more in them but perhaps they don't quite stretch your mind, say, beyond the limits of its own rationality quite in the way that they did the first time that you encountered them. Well, I can remember when I was in my.... I think my mind stretching in this way was done mostly when I was in my teens, when I read, well Milton and Shakespeare and Shelley and some others who are still great favourites of mine. I still **enjoy** them but there is not the same impact that there was then. So that's one of the advantages of being young, all sorts of things to discover and new works of art to enjoy. *[pause]*

Chintamani: I smoked cannabis. *[pause] [Laughter]*

Sangharakshita: Instead of enjoying great works of art!

Chintamani: Oh yes. I smoked cannabis and listened to alternative rock music.

Sangharakshita: Well when I was in my teens I had never even **heard** of cannabis. I think very people had in those days.

Padmavajra: That reference to shamanistic rites in "The Religion of Art"!

Chintamani: No, I was just casting my mind back to my own, I suppose misspent youth, and thought

well what did I do at that time, and I smoked.....

Sangharakshita: But can anybody remember what was the first great work of art, whether visual or literary, which really struck them when they were young.

Ratnachuda: Yes. I read James Joyce's *'Ulysses'* when I was 16 and I tried to read it recently it hasn't had the same effect on me but it was the poetry, it did a lot for me.

Sangharakshita: Because sometimes you outgrow poets. Because I can remember when I was in my teens I was greatly impressed by some of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry. I tried to read it more recently and I found it just awful, but it did move me at the time. I remember some of the poems, 'the Lay of the Brown Rosary' for instance, that really **thrilled** me at the time. But Milton whom I read at the same time still thrills me, that is the difference between perhaps the greater works of art and the lesser ones.

Padmavajra: Deathless speech.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Padmavajra: *(unclear)*.

Chintamani: Actually I should qualify what I said. I think, I mean I did study theatre design and I think for me it wasn't so much any particular play but it was just the more in depth encounter with Shakespeare as the result of having to design for his plays as projects that had a very profound on effect on me.

Sangharakshita: Any more personal confessions or have you forgotten?

Manjusvara: Coming from essentially a culturally impoverished background, I didn't have any contact with arts. When I heard Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue' it was actually profoundly moving to me because it was the first piece of orchestral work I had ever heard.

Sangharakshita: Well that is the first piece of orchestral work that **I** ever heard. I remember being **very** impressed by it, my father had a gramophone record of it. Yes. I remember hearing, when was it

Manjusvara: About '26.

Sangharakshita: I must have been very young then but my father had a few records, mostly of romantic ballads but he had this one orchestral record. We had this big old gramophone. I remember it so well and I still can enjoy it. But later on, well I mention it in my memoirs, the work that really struck and impressed me was Bach's 'Toccata and Fugue' which I still enjoy, the louder the better! *[Laughter]*

Padmavajra: There is a kind of divine urgency to that.

Sangharakshita: Well in the case of Rhapsody in Blue I had a sort of visual impression of an aeroplane taking off and soaring up in the sky.

Manjusvara: That clarinet solo that opens it.

Sangharakshita: Yes, that was a very strong impression.

Manjusvara: In a way works like that are still, they are like teachers, you know, they are very

important to you and they may not be the greatest scholar of the time but actually they open the door to the artwork.

Sangharakshita: Well, the classic example almost is that of the young Coleridge who was bowled over by the sonnets of the Reverend Bowles, whom I don't regard very highly nowadays but they opened the door for Coleridge. He was so enamoured of them he used to make hand-written copies of them and distribute them among his friends. Well doing that, of course he himself eventually was a hundred times better poet than Reverend Bowles. You don't need Bowles nowadays except a few lines in the biography of Coleridge. But Coleridge as a boy was overwhelmed by these sonnets. They are quite good as sonnets go, but nothing really remarkable, but there was something in them that appealed to Coleridge very deeply at that time.

Subhadassi: Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' was the thing. That was the first poem that really connected with me. *(Unclear)* I was really incredibly taken by that and some other of Wordsworth's poems. I still am.

Sangharakshita: I think I also mentioned a few days ago that the first great painting that really impressed me was Titians's 'Bacchus and Ariadne' when I saw it in the National Gallery. Though of course in more recent years I was greatly impressed by the work of El Greco when I saw it in Spain, especially by 'the Burial of Count Orgaz', about which I have written. Then of course, yes, reminiscing a bit, I will be writing about these things in my memoirs I hope, when I visited Greece in '66 I was very impressed by Greek archaic sculpture more than by the classical, especially in I think it was Olympia. But also in the museum, the National Museum in Athens. And of course in Italy I was greatly impressed not just by the painting but by the mosaics. These made a very strong impression on me, especially the mosaics in Ravenna in San Vitare.

Chintamani: When you say archaic does that mean that, say, the Delphic charioteer is too late?

Sangharakshita: I am not sure if that is archaic. It is a bit archaic perhaps, if one can use that expression. I don't think it is one of the great works. It's not, though I remember it very well or have seen reproductions too but it's not that that I'm thinking of.

Chintamani: Those are those quite hieratic kuros figures.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Chintamani: The one with the smile, the archaic smile.

Sangharakshita: I am think of something perhaps a little, a little closer to the classical than that, though the time span involved is quite short.

_____: Can you say what it is about those particular figures that inspires you or have been significant to you?

Sangharakshita: I find it very difficult to say. I suppose, well one element anyway was perhaps, and I am speculating here, that they weren't quite naturalistic, whereas classical Greek sculpture is more naturalistic, isn't it. The archaic Greek sculpture doesn't try to reproduce every sort of muscle and sinew accurately at the same time. And I have always admired Egyptian sculpture very much. Anybody else have any....

Paul Hatton: I've got two. One probably doesn't seem very correct, an exhibition of American abstract painting and sculpture that became called 'minimalism', this was in the Tate Gallery. I can remember it was unlike anything I'd seen and it just opened up another set of possibilities. I think it

was just the element of surprise. And the other thing is the Assyrian reliefs in the British Museum which just still are a major influence on me. Yes, sometimes I go to London thinking I'll go and see some art and I end up in the British Museum looking at them instead, because I am sort of guaranteed to like them. So quite different things.

_____: I had one at school studying *(unclear Latin name!)* in Latin. There was a particular poem, I mentioned this before, when I was about 13 or 14, and it was actually a what is called a *(unclear name)* which is the lament of a lover locked out from his beloved. So he is standing outside the front door of his beloved and she won't let him in, and it's kind of a stock theme for Latin love poetry. So anyway I read this poem. Gradually I think either in the lesson or when I was at home when I was looking at this homework, I sort of gradually realised that he was a real person and that he'd really had these emotions of being in love and this experience of separation from his beloved and not been able to get in, not being able to have, have contact with his beloved. And I just gradually realised that although he lived 2500 years or 2000 years ago he was actually a real person with very, very similar emotions to me at that time. So I sort of made a link back down to him in some way. So it was kind of a **human** experience. A humanising experience mediated through the arts.

Sangharakshita: Shall we have the light on?

Chintamani: I haven't seen it in the actual paint but when I first saw a reproduction of the Grunewald Risen Christ at the Isenheim altarpiece, that had an extraordinary effect on me.

Sangharakshita: I have only seen it in reproduction, It's a very striking work isn't it?

Suriyavamsa: Someone with white hair and white beard?

Chintamani: Yes, and his, the wounds have become jewels, *(unclear)* rising up and there is the winding through the *(unclear)*.

Sangharakshita: I think on my next visit to Germany I may be going near the church where it is. I think it's still in a church as far as I remember.

Suriyavamsa: I think for me it was Mahler's Fourth Symphony. I joined one of those record clubs, and strange classical music, this strange music kept coming through each month. And seeing Kenneth Clark's 'Civilisation'.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. You mean the original TV series?

Suriyavamsa: The TV series. Just that kind of view of the whole breadth of culture, European culture.

Manjusvara: I probably read less than you, I'm not a fast reader, but I only discovered E M Forster last year. I was staying at Aryatara to do a workshop and the room I was staying in there was a copy of 'Room with a View' and I ended up sitting up most of the night, I literally couldn't put it down. And I just went back home and just started to acquire and read all those. I particularly found 'Howards End' absolutely... it moved me as much as I could have imagined any work would at any time in my life. So it's never too late!

Sangharakshita: Well I came to E M Forster relatively late. I didn't read him until after I came back to England which meant I was already in my 40s if not my 50s. I very much enjoyed the one you mentioned and also 'Where Angels Fear to Tread'.

Manjusvara: I haven't read that yet.

Sangharakshita: Very enjoyable. And some, **some** of the short stories.

Manjusvara: Whereas I tried to read Kerouac's 'On the Road' probably too late *[Laughter]* Everyone assumed I would have read it because of I have a love of American culture but I didn't ever read it when I was young and I tried to read it maybe ten years ago and I just couldn't.

Sangharakshita: You remember Truman Capote's famous comment on Kerouac's writing, don't you?

Manjusvara: Whose.

Sangharakshita: Truman Capote's. Well, he was asked what he thought of, in a TV program what he thought of Kerouac's writing, and he said, "it's not writing, it's typing" *[Laughter]* You haven't heard that one. Yes, it's one of the classic put downs. And of course yes he did bang away at his typewriter hour on end, day and night.

Padmavajra: And he never revised did he, he never revised his work supposedly.

Sangharakshita: Then again Lawrence never revised. Well he just rewrote the whole thing didn't he. *[pause]* Yes, I tried to reread 'On the Road', having read it, well, quite late in my 40s at least and I found it almost unreadable. I think more from a literary point of view.

Suriyavamsa: The comment you made was quite sly in your talk about not all first thoughts are best thoughts...

Sangharakshita: Well, it's a ridiculous, well what do you mean by best, best for what? It might be best from the point of view of psychotherapy but some of the greatest poems are revised and revised again and again, so it's absurd to say the first thoughts are **always** best thoughts.

Padmavajra: It is a Ginsberg thing isn't it?

Sangharakshita: No, I think it was Trungpa. I think he did say it with reference to poetry.

Padmavajra: There is a volume of poems I think *"First Thought, Best Thoughts"*.

Subhadassi: You have also got the kind of workshop culture, the poetry workshop culture in America you certainly have people who talk like that, particularly Natalie Goldberg.

Manjusvara: Can do, although that has the opposite effect as well. Some people just keep..... you could say over work, they drain all the life out of an idea through workshops. I think you can't legislate poems, I think it's just part of being an artist. It's knowing which is the best. I'm slightly embarrassed because *(unclear)* the paper I gave it happened that those two poems I did very little rewriting. I am not claiming they're great but other poems, it was one I worked on last week which I have been working on for two years.

Sangharakshita: Well I've found that it is not the same with regard to each verse in a single poem. There are some which come easily and you never change at all and others you work on and change dozens of times over a long period. So it is difficult to generalise. It's wrong to say it is general rule that first thoughts are better thoughts.

Manjusvara: Absolutely.

Sangharakshita: Sometimes they are, sometimes they're not! *[Laughter]*. Well very often they are not. For instance if you think, for instance of Fitzgerald's revisions of Omar Khayam, the later revised

editions are generally agreed to be inferior to the first.

Manjusvara: That is said of Wordsworth as well, isn't it.

Sangharakshita: Though opinions differ.

Subhadassi: There's the same about Auden as well, isn't there, because he was always revising his work.

Sangharakshita: And Yeats of course revised a lot. There's a story about Keats, the first line of Endymion he wrote first of all "a thing of beauty is a constant joy", that was his first thought. But then he thought again and wrote "a thing of beauty is a joy forever", which is quite different. *[pause]*

Chintamani: I'm almost ashamed to say it but in my early teens I read the 'Lord of Rings' 16 times and I think that's had quite a profound effect on me because of a general fascination with ancient north European cultures, dragons and all that sort of thing.

Sangharakshita: Very healthy. *[Laughter]*

Paul Hatton: It's full of great myths and archetypes and everything.

Subhadassi: That's real commitment, that, isn't it. Sixteen times!

Chintamani: Often when I had finished it I would read it again. I think it was escapism but it was such an absorbing world.

[End of Side one Side Two]

Sangharakshita: Well I must confess that I have read it twice. The first time was when Ananda lent me his copy and, I must say I wasn't too **keen** on reading it but he strongly recommended it. This must have been maybe even before the Order was started because I remember he lent it to me just before Christmas and I was on my own that Christmas, so I - he had the original three volume edition hardback. So I read volume one on Christmas Eve, and volume two on Christmas Day and volume three on Boxing Day. I thoroughly enjoyed my Christmas! *[Laughter]* I particularly liked the Elves and the Ents. I must say I wasn't too keen on the Hobbits. I wasn't ever very fond of the Hobbits. I used to read over those and I thought they were rather gross little creatures with their five large meals a day. *[Laughter]* That didn't appeal to me.

Ratnachuda: I have just been having a rather bad experience reading volume two. I read volume one a year ago when I was still at Rivendell and of course Rivendell felt very comfortable in some ways but quite... Just six weeks ago I struggled through volume two and I found the darkness and the **killing** - I don't whether I'm much more sensitive but there seemed to be mass murder going on in parts of the book - it and I just found it very unpleasant and the whole tone of darkness. And Mordor I just found very, very difficult to handle. And I have got volume three and I have said I'm not going to read it, I'm not ready for it at the moment, maybe I never will. Interesting.

Sangharakshita: Well Tolkein does seem to belong to a group of a people - I think they were called the Inklings - and they included C S Lewis, the Christian apologist and I think they were very preoccupied with the whole question of evil.

Padmavajra: Charles Williams is another one.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Padmavajra: His novels have got that brooding ...

Sangharakshita: It isn't surprising. This century of ours which is about to end.

Ratnachuda: Am I right in thinking that Tolkein lived not very far from here on the other side of Moseley?

Sangharakshita: Yes, in his early days he did. Did you know exactly where it was. On the road towards.....

Kovida: Yes, it's the top part of Moseley where.....

Ratnachuda: Where that bog is.

Kovida: The bog is, yeah. Apparently, according to Simon, if you know the "The Lord of the Rings" you can actually see various locations of "The Lord of the Rings" in the local geography **here** perhaps of things that you've described.

Ratnachuda: I can see it in Shropshire as well.

Sangharakshita: But of course there have been a lot of housing developments since it was first published, which was nearly a century ago. Because I can remember my father telling me, with regard to South London that when he was a boy there were green fields on one side of the Tooting High Street. Well there aren't any green fields now for quite a few miles. I remember seeing when Morden was being built, that was all countryside when I was a child and one of my father's friends moved into one of the new houses that had been built there. It was right at the end of the Northern Line. Originally it merged into countryside, now it's all built up.

Chintamani: Just by the by, I drove through Tooting High Street last year. It's almost completely Indian.

Sangharakshita: Yes, I know.

Paul Hatton: There are a lot of Friends who live there.

Sangharakshita: When I was a child you didn't see a single black or Asian person ever. So it is symptomatic of the demographic changes that are taking place. And also a few years ago I drove up the street where I used to live in my childhood. No one in that street had a car. But when I drove up it this time the cars were parked solid on either side. So another change.

Anyway, we've more or less come to the end of the questions. Anybody got any further questions? Oh, yes, there **is** one more, yes.

"*Is there a suspicion of sense experience within Buddhism that renders it and art indulgent and viewed with suspicion?*"

I suppose yes and no. In the kasina exercise I mentioned you are concerned with sense experience, your experience of that coloured disk, that's your initial starting point for the exercise, but you are preoccupied with that coloured disk, you are concentrating on it for a spiritual purpose, with a view to being able to reproduce it mentally and then proceed into dhyana states. So sense experience is not necessarily bad in Buddhism but obviously sense experience is very closely connected with the klesas. So one needs to be very, very careful. But I don't think that Buddhism condemns sense experience as

such, what one might describe as pure sense experience.

Chintamani: In the seen only the seen.

Sangharakshita: Yes. It depends what it is a point of departure **for**.

Padmavajra: I was talking with Chintamani about, as far as I remember, the myth of the origin of Buddhist figurative art. The story of Upagupta. I think it's Upagupta who Mara presents a vision to or something like that of the Buddha, or turns up as the Buddha, and he knows it's Mara but thinks. "oh that's very lovely" and makes a copy, I think this is how the myth goes, of the image presented and that then becomes the origin of the Buddha image, or the Buddha painting I suppose according to some traditions. In relation to this point of sense experience, is there a moral there in some way that perhaps Mara represents sense experience which is usually ensnaring and it can be?

Sangharakshita: Well, Mara is also called Kamadeva, don't forget. Kama being passion. It's also the, another aspect is the Indian cupid. Kamadeva figures in Hindu mythology, but in Buddhism too he's called Kamadeva.

Padmavajra: So what would be the significance of that in relation to that particular story?

Sangharakshita: I would be personally doubtful if Mara could **really** assume a convincing likeness of the Buddha. *[Laughter]* I would be very doubtful of that. He might try and just produce certain externals, but could he really reproduce the Buddha's **expression**? This reminds me of a film I saw, in fact I have seen it twice, it's one of my favourite films, it is a short by Bunuel. What is it called? It's about Simon.....

Chintamani: Simon of the Desert.

Sangharakshita: Simon of the Desert. Do you remember? That there is Simon out there on his pillar and is being tempted by the devil. And Jesus appears and Jesus says, "Oh Simon I feel so sorry for you, you don't really need to torment yourself so much like that. Give yourself an easier time". And of course Simon's quite touched by that, Jesus's solicitude and compassion. But then you can see there is a change of his expression, "oh look out, there's something odd going on here and then he **looks** at Jesus and of course it's Mara who's disguised as Jesus. He very obviously **is** disguised. He has got these ridiculous little curls *[Laughter]* and so artificially innocent. Well of course it isn't very difficult for Simon to see through him. He can't really make himself look like Jesus. It's a crude imitation. And I think it might be rather like that. Maybe he's seen Mara trying to look like the Buddha. But that it is the tradition, but it is a fairly late one.

Kovida: But you could interpret that differently as well, couldn't you? You could interpret the fact that you **cannot** represent the Buddha, so therefore do not be taken in by a representation because it is false. Sounds like you could use it as a technique but don't be... in a way it's a bit like mistaking.... or carrying the raft with you rather than using it as a means.

Sangharakshita: Don't take it as an end in itself. Well the same with any sort of sense experience. There is that point of departure for something beyond. It doesn't **deny** the sense experience but it is not limited by it.

Padmakara: So how important is the visual image in meditation?

Sangharakshita: Well it depends on the kind of meditation. In some, well in the kasina practice it's very important and in the Tantric and Vajrayana visualisations it is very important. But it doesn't have a place in **all** forms of meditation. But talking of sense experience I was suddenly thinking of the

attitude of the Puritans. The Puritans deeply distrusted sense experience, didn't they, and therefore the arts, and perhaps in rather extreme reaction to this proliferation of images and decorations in the Catholic Church which had become admittedly very corrupt. They reacted against it very violently, made a clean sweep of images and paintings in say Holland and Switzerland and to some extent in some parts of England. And of course in the case of Islam, where they are against images, as is Judaism. They are against any attempt to represent the external world, well from a rather different point of view, simply because you are just imitating God. It's only God who can create living things, not human beings, so you are sort of usurping God's prerogative. Though of course not all Muslims have kept faithfully to **that**, especially in Persia, where they're not strictly orthodox in a sense anyway.

Chintamani: A recent English art historian, Andrew Graham Dixon, has argued that Puritanism and its distrust of representing God's creation is one of the factors that gave rise to abstraction and distrusting the represented image that he said prior to - there was a series on television I saw one and there was a book published from it - but prior to the Reformation, English culture, I am not sure whether he said English or British but certainly English, was as richly visual and symbolic as say Italian or the southern cultures. But then with the Reformation, and then later of course with Oliver Cromwell, there was a shock to English culture which he argues we have never fully recovered from and that in the visual arts English painters permitted themselves to paint the landscape, still life, the domestic scene, which I suppose is in accord with the Protestant view of the pious layman or the world of the pious layman, but nothing more than that.

Sangharakshita: They've got it in Holland too.

Chintamani: Yes. And so there was a distrust of the sort of Catholic approach, well as we saw with Ruskin. And then of course the Pilgrim Fathers went to America, who were Puritan and they took that ethos with them and then later on you had the influx of Jews from Eastern Europe and the pogroms and so on, and they obviously were very intellectual people. And in the 20th Century one finds that all of the major art historians in America were Jews, certainly Greenberg and others. And he argued very forcefully for the jettisoning of all irrelevant reference in a work of art and that a work of art was essentially about formal values and nothing more than that. And also a number of these abstract paintings do have Biblical names as if it was only through abstraction that the divine could be portrayed. So I found that very interesting that there is that whole trend right from the Reformation and other quarters that led to that development of Western art. There may be other views but I found it quite convincing myself. *[pause]*

Sangharakshita: Well I think that's about it then. Unless there are any final questions. *[pause]*

Kovida: Thank you very much, Bhante. *[Thanks from many voices]*

Sangharakshita: Oh we are having a poetry reading aren't we? A soirée.

End of Discussions

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