

SUFISM, MYSTICISM, STRUCTURALISM: A DIALOGUE

T. Izutsu and H. Landolt*

T. Izutsu: Well, since it is rather a formal occasion, I would like to say formally — "Welcome to Japan".

H. Landolt: Thank you, Professor Izutsu.

T.I.: You are my dear old friend, who happens to be one of the leading authorities on Sufism in Europe today and it is my special privilege and of course great pleasure to have this occasion to interview you. But not only will it be my personal pleasure alone, there are at present many young intellectuals in Japan who, as you may have observed, are getting interested in this kind of thing and it will be a good chance for them to learn from you. Now, whenever I think of you in your absence, the word which comes to my mind is, strangely, Structuralism. For how many years by the way have we been friends with each other?

H.L.: I think some twenty years.

T.I.: Twenty years! As I recall, it was indeed twenty years ago when we were together in snow-covered Montreal, that you introduced me to the splendid world of Lévi-Strauss, urging me to read his *Pensée Sauvage*. It was my first encounter

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with Lévi-Strauss. I found his thought-world at first very strange and difficult to understand but it had a very queer charm for me. I felt myself dragged into that world immediately and since then I have never left the kind of thinking he represents. For your initiation I am greatly grateful to you. Since that time I have followed the development of Structuralism to the point that I am now facing post-Structuralism. Now in connection with this very interesting situation, the first question I will ask you is: in what sense, in what way is Structuralism connected with your special field? I think you are almost unique among the Islamicists with regard to the intense interest you have entertained in Structuralism. How does Structuralism come into your studies?

H.L.: Well, Professor Izutsu, I shall first of all return your very kind compliments and at the same time make it very clear that I don't deserve the ones you just expressed. I remember those days in snow-covered Montreal with deep gratitude, and I am so happy to have this opportunity to be again with you — this time in your own country of the rising Sun! As far as your question about Structuralism is concerned, perhaps I should say at the outset that it was not directly my interest in mysticism that led me to Lévi-Strauss. While I was studying Islamics, I was also studying Ethnology and it was from that angle that I was drawn towards Structuralism as a scientific method of investigation, as opposed to the more historicist trend that had been prevalent particularly in German anthropology. I was not so much interested in why a certain culture would have developed or by what historical process it would have been influenced to become what it was but rather what was behind the culture as such, what were the inner forces that kept any culture together to form a whole. Maybe one can see a certain connection between this interest and the interest in mysticism, for no doubt mysticism — one of the many definitions of mysticism that one can give — has to do precisely with the "inner forces" that keep the world together, as it were. Since the time we met — I was actually just fresh from University at that time and I was still very much under the influence of Lévi-Strauss and in the meantime contrary to you, I have not really followed post-Lévi-Strauss developments except marginally. I became a bit critical of Lévi-Strauss particularly as applied to the study of mysticism which I tried to do myself.

T.I.: That is a very interesting point for me. Why have you become a little bit critical of Lévi-Strauss when you tried to apply it to Islamic mysticism?

H.L.: Well, I think there are a number of reasons to that — one I would think is that I perceived it as too rigid a formalism, reducing every phenomenon, to almost mathematical, abstract elements supposed to be basic. Lévi-Strauss also says himself that what he wants is to establish a science, almost, I think, in the sense of natural science. Although Lévi-Strauss of course has always been searching, since his *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, what is between nature and culture, I have the feeling that in the end he reduces the spiritual — qualitative — element in culture to an almost mechanistic — quantitative — one.

T.I.: So you are no longer interested in him — you say?

H.L.: That was one reason. The other reason of course is the influence of Henry Corbin, who is also perhaps a kind of structuralist in a sense, that is to say that he is entirely opposed to historicism, but he himself calls himself a phenomenologist rather than a structuralist. I think this means looking more at what one might call the "vertical dimension". From the point of view of Corbin, Lévi-Strauss's structuralism is reductionism, reducing phenomena to the purely phenomenal, purely horizontal dimension, and actually refusing to recognise such a "vertical dimension".

T.I.: I agree. Whenever we try to apply the structuralist method, particularly such as has been developed by Lévi-Strauss, we are sure to get into that kind of difficulty, no doubt. In spite of all that, I am grateful to you for having introduced me to his work, for, by coming into touch with that particular thought trend, I have acquired a kind of particular sense of direction in the labyrinthian world of contemporary scholarship. I am not particularly interested in directly applying structuralism to Islamic studies — it's impossible and it's ridiculous — but following the development of structuralism up to post-structuralism has given me a keen sense of what the contemporary world is in need of, in whatever field of study it may be. As you know, Islamicists are mostly philologists, primarily at least. There are of course exceptions

like Corbin and others, but many remain till the end philologists, and as philologists, they are not interested in Lévi-Strauss, Structuralism, Derrida, and the like. But philology, on reflection, turns out to be a kind of text reading. In Islamic philology, as a matter of fact, we have to read at least classical texts written in Arabic and Persian. The problem that naturally arises is: what is text and how we should approach a given text. In dealing with these problems, Structuralism proves to be very much relevant to our study, particularly the post-structuralist approach. But let us go back to our main topic, Sufism as Islamic mysticism. Do you agree to translating Sufism as "Islamic mysticism?"

H.L.: Well, as far as translation can go. I think no translation of a technical term is really giving the full meaning; but it is convenient.

T.I.: If it ever makes sense to use the expression Islamic mysticism in place of Sufism, if only for the sake of convenience, then by doing that we would be regarding Sufism as one of the various forms mysticism in general can assume.

H.L.: This is actually a very difficult point.

T.I.: Yes, I think so.

H.L.: Because on the one hand Sufism, in the literal meaning of the term Sufism, that is to say *taṣawwuf* in Arabic, does not necessarily mean mysticism. It can simply refer to a historical movement of people called Sufis, originally ascetics, organised later in certain groups in different countries of the Islamic world. Sufism in this literal sense may be a pre-condition, or may include what we call mysticism, but a Sufi in that sense is not necessarily a mystic nor is any mystic in the world of Islam necessarily a Sufi in name.

T.I.: Well, by saying that you are making yourself obliged to give some clarifications as to what you mean by mysticism. I do not ask you to "define" the word, for I know from the very beginning that it is futile and maybe a waste of time to try to "define" mysticism. In this kind of matter, definition necessarily means a stipulative definition; it is ridiculous, I know, to try to define a word like mysticism in a

non-stipulative way. But for the sake of our conversation we have to come to some primary understanding as to what is meant by mysticism, for only then shall we be able to decide whether Sufism is mysticism or not. So I would begin by asking you to tell me what you mean by the word mysticism.

H.L.: Sufis themselves gave thousands of definitions.

T.I.: Before going to Sufism, tell me what is the western concept of mysticism.

H.L.: One can start with the etymology of the term which has something to do with mystery, the Greek mystery, something hidden, something secret, something presupposing initiation, not accessible at the outset to anyone. Such terms as the Arabic *bâṭin* come to kind at first when one thinks of what corresponds to what we call in the West, mysticism, that is to say, *bâṭin*, literally translated, the "inner" as opposed to the "outer". That is to say the unseen, *ghayb*; in other words what we call a mystic would be someone who searches for the unseen — be that unseen now, the unseen meaning of a text — to come back to your question of how to approach text, or the unseen aspect of nature, or perhaps in the first place of oneself.

T.I.: "Of oneself", yes, but not everything which is unseen can be a concern of mysticism. Can it be?

H.L.: Well, I am not sure whether I understand your question.

T.I.: You emphasise the concept of the unseen. You seem to be saying that mysticism is a search for the unseen in the most general sense. But my question is whether whatever is unseen can be a concern of mysticism.

H.L.: No, it is not sufficient.

T.I.: Then we shall have to narrow down a little bit the meaning of the "unseen", in talking about mysticism.

H.L.: Well, the nature of the unseen so far as it interests the mystic, I would say, has something to do with being. In fact perhaps the very core of being. One of the questions Shabistarî

(d.740/1340), a famous Sufi mystic, raises in his poem is "Who am I?". Of course that question has been asked by philosophers as well and one might then ask what is the difference between philosophy and mysticism. Maybe it is not possible to clearly distinguish between certain kinds of philosophy and mysticism. So that's the answer. It depends on what philosophy we are talking of.

T.L.: If I am to define mysticism from the Buddhist point of view, I would say that it consists in existential realisation of the ultimate truth of being, then, following that, man's realisation of his own being, of his own self. If this provisional definition is correct then it would include praxis and theory. Praxis is absolutely necessary for spiritual discipline.

H.L.: Yes, I was coming to that. But I was avoiding the term "ultimate truth" because I am not sure if we use it whether we are not already in a way distorting it because we objectify it by saying "ultimate". We have a certain concept of the ultimate which may not in fact be adequate.

T.L.: Yes, of course, you are quite right. But I would point out at the same time that, as Derrida says, as long as we use language we can't get out of "logocentric" metaphysics!

H.L.: That's why mystics actually prefer silence!

T.L. So, when I say "ultimate", I don't mean ultimate in the literal sense, when I say truth I am not saying that truth does exist somewhere as an objective entity. As long as we use human language we have to have recourse to this kind of verbal reification. Well, you said that you were just going into the praxis aspect of mysticism.

H.L.: Yes and I think that is the second answer to the question — how can we distinguish philosophy from mysticism — although certain philosophies of course call for action, praxis, as well. I think mysticism is not just, as many Western analysts believe, the so-called experience, that is to say the so-called ultimate mystical experience. To make mysticism a pure matter of psychology is a kind of reductionism as well. Mysticism is a way, a way leading perhaps to certain forms of what may be called mystical experience, but most of it is praxis, stepping

from one stone to the next, under the guidance of a master; and I think this fact, that it is normally found, that it is undertaken, under the guidance of a master is extremely important; this differentiates it also from pure science.

T.I.: And maybe from philosophy as well. There are many different forms of praxis that have come down to us: *dhyāna*, Buddhist meditation, Hellenistic *theoria*, Arabic *dhikr*, etc. The Indian counterpart of *dhikr* may be the utterance of the sacred word *Om*. These and other different methods of meditative praxis seem to aim at something essentially the same.

H.L.: At something that might be called transformation of consciousness.

T.I.: Exactly. Could you elaborate on what you call transformation of consciousness? How can our consciousness be transformed and into what?

H.L.: I think part of it consists of losing part of one's day-to-day consciousness and gaining another kind of consciousness.

T.I.: In connection with what you have called the unseen, invisible?

H.L.: Yes.

T.I.: That would imply that if that dimension of consciousness is opened up then what has been invisible to the ordinary consciousness will in a certain sense become visible.

H.L.: Yes, or audible or in some way realised.

T.I.: So, if that aspect of being becomes visible, audible, or more generally, perceptible, then on that very basis philosophisation can begin. I think the main difference between ordinary philosophy and a particular kind of philosophy which is based on mysticism lies exactly in that — that is to say, the latter kind of philosophy owes its very existence to a philosophisation of what one experiences in the face of the ordinarily invisible, be it *gnosis*, *vijñāna*, or *ḥikmat*.

H.L.: Yes, I would fully agree.

T.I.: It is clear, then, that we share at least some rough ideas as to what kind of thing mysticism is. If, understanding the word mysticism in that sense, we agree that Sufism is a kind of mysticism, the next question that naturally arises is: what are the characteristics of the Islamic variety of mysticism. From among many different forms of mysticism, what in your view characterises the Islamic one?

H.L.: I don't know but what comes first to mind is of course related to the Islamic religion, which means a monotheistic religion, with a very heavy emphasis on the notion of will.

T.I.: Can we start by making a basic distinction between monotheistic mysticism and non-monotheistic, or rather a-theistic mysticism for the sake of convenience?

H.L.: That would probably be important to begin with.

T.I.: In terms of this distinction, Islam is of course monotheistic.

H.L.: Is monotheistic and located, if you can say so, in not only monotheistic but prophetic religion, which pre-supposes a prescribed way of life as laid down by the Prophet and his followers. So the mystic faces a situation where what we referred to before as the ultimate truth, or in other words God, as the religious would call it, is perceived as the unique distant source of the prescribed way of life; and especially in Sunni Islam, where there is no intermediary between man and God, the only way to approach Him according to the official version of Islam being to obey the divine Law. Whereas the mystic actually wants to approach this ultimate truth not just by obeying the Law, but by understanding, coming closer to it, in the end perhaps being similar or identical in a certain sense; an approach which seems to be very difficult to reconcile with the official version, and that is why mysticism has always had a certain flavour of suspicion in Islam among the orthodox. It is a tragedy that gives it a very particular cultural flavour which I think is less a problem if you go further East.

T.I.: Do you mean Far East?

H.L.: I would even include India.

T.L.: Oh yes, of course.

H.L.: But it is the same problem in Judaism and in Christianity to an extent.

T.L.: Exactly the same problems are involved in these three religions, because of what Derrida calls logocentrism: Allah or God. But, as you have just said, Sufism differs from ordinary Orthodox Islam.

H.L.: Yes, in that it finds, shall we say, a minor tradition. If the *Sharī'ah*, the Law, is the major tradition then Sufism has its minor tradition, called *Tarīqah*, which is the Path, which is theoretically conceived of as being implicit in the *Sharī'ah*, or being its "secret". And then the third stage distinguished by traditional Sufism is *Ḥaqīqah* (the Truth). But I think there are other characteristics which are perhaps of a more positive nature than what we have said so far.

T.L.: Yes.

H.L.: Perhaps the very same monotheism also suggests the concept of a person, and it may be for this reason, as many others have already pointed out, that mysticism of, shall we say, the West, and that includes Islam, emphasises the personal nature of the ultimate, whereas if we go further east, of course, we have more an "it" mysticism rather than a "he" or "she" mysticism.

T.L.: That's right. At that point, I think, the problem of Bâyezîd Basṭâmî (d.261/875 or earlier) most cogently comes in.

H.L.: Which is indeed very reminiscent of Indian mysticism.

T.L.: From my own point of view, I would distinguish between two types of mystical experience in Sufism. One of them is — well, it is commonsense — what is usually referred to by the term *unio mystica*, which I think is rather problematic, I mean this terminology; but we somehow understand what is meant. This is the mysticism of love. I mention this particularly because from our Buddhist point of view, this is a very strange form of man's relationship with the Absolute. Not only strange, but inconceivable. How can man become enamoured of God and how can there be a love affair between

man and God? But in fact this is the representative form of mysticism in Islam. Another type is what is sometimes called *deificatio*, self-deification, transforming man into something of a divine nature, as typically exemplified by Baṣṭāmī, and maybe Ḥallāj (d.309/922). Since, however, you happen to be far more conversant than I am in these matters, I would like to take advantage of this occasion and learn from you. Tell me something about love mysticism in Islam.

H.L.: To tell the truth, love mysticism is somewhat of a problem to me, too. But as one of my Sufi friends would say, it is because I do not really understand, that is to say, because I am trying to analyse with my intellect, and traditionally intellect and love are two opposed elements in man. Love is precisely the only way to overcome this intellect which always tries to analyse and therefore precludes what we might call the possibility of the unitive state of the mind. So love as an antidote to being overpowered by the intellect is one way of explaining it. But there are of course many stages of love as distinguished by Sufis. Just as there are stages of intellection, there are stages of love. So love experienced in the profane sense is not the same as love experienced in the mystic sense, although the former is often seen as a necessary first stage. In other words, they would say you can't really come to the truth if you have not experienced in this world a so-called profane love experience because it is what takes you out of yourself. It involves the whole person. It's a minor, first stage of what is referred to as ecstasy, *wajd*; and perhaps mysticism, in general, to add to our many definitions, has something to do with the phenomenon of ecstasy anyway.

T.I.: Yes of course, but the difference between the phenomenon of ecstasy and love mysticism consists in that the latter is essentially an "I-thou" relationship which is carried to the extreme limit of the elimination of the very distinction between "I" and "thou" when the so-called "transforming fusion" takes place.

H.L.: I think the "transforming fusion" experience is more typical of Christian mysticism than of Sufism, although it may be found in Ḥallāj — at least in Massignon's interpretation, which stresses that aspect. More typical of classical Sufism is the

overpowering experience of divine will, against which the human "partner" becomes a mere shadow (as in Junayd) (d.297/910). Or the experience of the moth being burnt in the light to which it is attracted. Later on, we have, for example, with Simnânî (d.736/1336), a real dialectic of an I-thou relationship, which culminates however, through several stages of challenge and response, question and answer between the two partners, in an elimination of the tension in pure mirroriness. And in Ibn 'Arabî (d.638/1240), each love experience ultimately reflects in its own way an intra-divine tension: divine contemplation of itself.

T.I.: In your opinion, then, love mysticism will ultimately be identical with self-deification.

H.L.: Yes, ultimately.

T.I.: Depends upon how we define the *deificatio*, but in any case, they almost come to the same thing.

H.L.: Yes, I think so.

T.I.: Would you say that, frankly speaking, "love" is a dissimulated *deificatio*?

H.L.: I wouldn't put it that strongly. But I would say that I would hesitate to establish a real typological difference between love mysticism and deification mysticism.

T.I.: I was led to this distinction because in Hinduism, love mysticism plays an extremely delicate and interesting role, although Buddhism takes the position that there is absolutely no place for love, that anything like *'ishq* and *maḥabba* is utterly inconceivable in the world of Nothingness. As for Hinduism, the religious consciousness started with Brahman, you know, as the impersonal Absolute. As long as we remain in this dimension of thought, there can be no personal love between Man and Brahman, for Brahman is strictly impersonal. As history goes on, however, we observe the Hindu mind gradually developing an idea of "personal god" until it becomes inclined to raise the personal God even beyond the impersonal Absolute. According to the older view, there could be absolutely nothing beyond the impersonal Absolute, but already in the Upaniṣadic

period, the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, and particularly Śvetâsvatara Upaniṣad, we see clearly an image of a personal god emerging gradually and putting himself beyond Brahman as *Purushottama*, the "highest Person", or the absolutely supreme Lord, so much so that in the *Bhagavad Gîtâ* this personal God reigns supreme, and in the eleventh century it culminates in the *bhakti* movement of Râmânuja and of course in Tantrism. In Tantrism, love as you know, turns into a sexual experience and love ecstasy is almost literally sexual ecstasy. In the case of Râmânuja, it's not sexual but it is *bhakti*, passionate love, loving adoration. Râmânuja also talks about man's identifying himself with Brahman. But according to him, it is only the first step in the Way, somewhat like Junayd in Islam. Becoming Brahman simply means a complete purification of man. It is a kind of preparatory stage, what comes next is approaching God and finally — if possible — going into God and this constitutes a kind of love mysticism, *Bhakti* mysticism involving a very interesting and very complicated process. In the case of Śaṅkara, too, there is Lord, God, but God is, in his case, the first evolute or the first emanation of Brahman, and as such it occupies but a second place after Brahman. Brahman is the supreme and god is the next, somewhat like Ibn al-'Arabî, in which the One is supreme and Allah comes only at the second stage. Love mysticism raises in this way an extremely interesting problem in comparative mysticism. In the case of Islam, if we take into consideration a man like Bâyezîd Baştâmî, we are also confronted with a very complicated situation, I think. How would you describe Bâyezîd Baştâmî's mysticism?

H.L.: Maybe the experience of the void. He has some very interesting accounts of his own experience — at least, well it is not his own words, but as purported by tradition — in which he distinguishes between several stages, each of which is a further step into nothingness, which he identifies with *tawhîd*, the Islamic idea of the One, eliminating in the process everything else.

T.I.: Do you think *tawhîd* in this context means becoming one?

H.L.: Yes. I am not sure even there whether we can call it a process of deification. It's rather a process of elimination of everything — all veils that are between the subject and the object including

the veil of thinking that there is a veil. But he never says what this last absolute behind the last veil is, so I would not call it deification. I would call it the experience of the void.

T.I.: I see. But the problem is whether we can exhaust Baṣṭāmī's mysticism with the experience of the void. Last night in preparation for this conversation, I was reading again the *shataḥāt* of Baṣṭāmī. I came across many sayings of Baṣṭāmī or attributed to Baṣṭāmī indicating something which I would describe as deification, such as *anā huwa* "I am he"; "I am thou", or more monistically "I am I", etc. In one case he says, "I am not I, I am I, or indeed I am he, I am He." The "glory to me!" is a famous one.

H.L.: "How excellent is my state!" —

T.I.: When I compare these expressions with the Upaniṣadic expressions describing the Yogi's Brahman-experience, I must come to the conclusion that if we are to describe his Sufism in one word, the best word will be *deificatio*, for "I am he" is exactly Upaniṣadic *aham asmi*. No less significant are expressions such as *aham Brahmā'smi* "I am Brahman", and the more famous one *Tat tvam asi*, which would correspond to Baṣṭāmī's *anta dhāka* "thou are that". I won't directly connect these expressions with Upaniṣads, as Zaehner did. I think it's not right to derive all these utterances directly from Upaniṣadic sources, but there is a structural resemblance there. There can be no doubt. Becoming-Brahman would be becoming-God in the case of Baṣṭāmī, and in that sense the word *deificatio* or self-deification has, I think, some meaning.

H.L.: Except that I don't know what "*deus*" means in this case, for, if we use the word *deificatio*, this includes the word *deus*.

T.I.: I do admit, it is a problematic term, but since it is often used, I used that word as a matter of convenience. If you have a better suggestion I would most gladly adopt it.

H.L.: Hellmut Ritter uses the term "*Ich-Erweiterung*".

T.I.: But I think that is too wide, isn't it?

- H.L.: It is also problematic, yes, because then we have to define what I is meant, what *Ich* is; so I think we agree basically as to what we mean, but we are not sure about the term to be used.
- T.I.: Yes. The final problem is: how are we to connect this aspect of his mysticism with what you said at the outset about nihilisation.
- H.L.: That nothing else remains, all that is not it, is eliminated in the end, that is all. As "God" says to Basṭāmī in one of his *shatahat*: *Da' nafsak wa-ta'âl* (leave yourself and come!). That's all. Also he is very critical of any objectification of *Deus*, for example, when he was asked what is the greatest name of God, he answered *ḥubz*, bread, which is even reminiscent of certain Zen stories. So I agree he is reminiscent of non-typical Islamic experience whatever we may call it, deification or something else. Of course, I do not like to use such terms as natural mysticism as opposed to theistic mysticism either, because that implies the dogmatic pre-suppositions of Zaehner whom you mentioned, and a number of other preconceived ideas.
- T.I.: The very fact that Basṭāmī very often uses personal pronouns, I, he and thou, means that at the very beginning in any case, it is personal and not impersonal.
- H.L.: Yes, but I have the impression that even the thou is eliminated in the end. There is only some kind of I.
- T.I.: That is right, for at the final stage he says "I am I". In that case "I" means divine I, nothing else. The same I would say, applies to the famous Ḥallâjīan expression *Ana'l-Ḥaqq*.
- H.L.: Yes, one would think so, although Massignon has a different interpretation. Well his interpretation, I think, is very much influenced by his Christian background. He thinks that Ḥallâj means really a kind of love consumption between I and thou, between God and man, a kind of incarnation experience as prefigured by Christ and, of course, the external facts of Ḥallâj's life may have induced him to think that way. But the traditional interpretation in Islam of Ḥallâj is not quite so "Christian". It is closer to Basṭāmī. But coming back to

the difference between impersonal and personal mysticism and which one comes first, so to speak, you mention that in India certain schools consider the impersonal experience as the ultimate, but preceded by a personal experience, while other schools, the other way around.

T.I.: Well, it is not exactly schools but the Upaniṣadic tradition itself, changing gradually from the impersonal Brahman to personal God.

H.L.: But in the case of Śaṅkara, the impersonal experience is the ultimate, somewhat like Ibn' Arabī.

T.I.: Yes.

H.L.: Now I think in Islam what is perhaps best comparable to this is the distinction between *waḥdat al-wujūd* on the one hand, of course represented by Ibn 'Arabī and his school, and on the other hand what is referred to as *waḥdat al-shuhūd*.

T.I.: Could you expand on that?

H.L.: *Waḥdat al-wujūd* literally, "unity of being" or "unity of existence", "oneness of the vertical dimension of existence", one might say. Some would prefer to call it transcendental oneness, I am not so sure about that term. But it certainly is an option.

T.I.: Yes, but it depends upon how we understand the word transcendental.

H.L.: Exactly. *Waḥdat al-shuhūd*, or "unity of contemplative experience" on the other hand, likes to insist on a certain twoness rather than a oneness, although the two ultimate ones reflect each other like an image is reflected in a mirror. There still exists a shadow of duality, considered in fact to be superior to *waḥdat al-wujūd*, by such Sufis as 'Alā'uddaulah Simnānī; he claims to have gone through the stage of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, in the sense of being completely identical with anything in nature, only to arrive later, at a higher stage in his view, to an experience of personal mirror identity with the ultimate person. So he comes back to the person.

T.I.: That is quite natural, from the Islamic point of view, I think he is completely right as long as he wants to remain a Muslim.

H.L.: Yes of course, that is true; but on the other hand, we have in Islam also mystics who considered themselves as Muslims and who go so far as even considering an experience of absolute space as the highest. There is one mystic whom I have in mind here, a contemporary of Ibn 'Arabî, by the name of Maḥmūd-i Ushnuhî, who has written a treatise on several different kinds of space, from dense space to a medium kind of space to absolutely subtle space, in which everything may happen simultaneously, so to speak. This is of course a rough way of putting it. And he identifies this most subtle space with the absolute. So we find on the one hand, certainly typical for the general pattern of Islam, the concept that personal mysticism is higher but it pre-supposes (with Simnâni) a passage through impersonal mysticism, while on the other hand, even in Islam, in spite of its "personalist" pre-suppositions, we find also quite radical expressions of the other idea that personal mysticism, experience of a personal approach is fine but it is not the ultimate. The ultimate is impersonal presence in empty "subtle space".

T.I.: That is extremely interesting from the Buddhist point of view anyway, because in Buddhism that which was in Hinduism Brahman becomes Nothingness, and the Brahman-experience becomes Nothingness-experience. Nothingness or Emptiness, but in a very particular sense somewhat like Ushnuhî's concept of space.

H.L.: It is at the same time fullness.

T.I.: Unfortunately, I have not studied Ushnuhî and I have no clear idea as to what kind of thinker he was, but what you have just said is quite enough to give me a clear idea of him.

H.L.: He was probably influenced by 'Aynulquzât-i Hamadâni (d.525/1131) about whom you yourself have written many important articles and who of course also was perhaps a precursor, in a sense, of Ibn 'Arabî.

T.I.: Baṣṭâmî's case represents a very bold and daring movement in the properly Islamic context, and many people have tried to save him; I think one of them was Junayd, the most important one.

H.L.: He actually criticized him.

T.I.: Yes, criticized him, but I think he did not criticize him away as a heretic.

H.L.: No. He just said that he is a little bit immature.

T.I.: Or mad.

H.L.: Imperfect.

T.I.: But it may have been just a pretext.

H.L.: In order to save him from the wrath . . .

T.I.: Yes. As a matter of fact, I have a question about Baṣṭāmī. In spite of his daring adventures, he was not persecuted as seriously as many other mystics who were less daring. I have not seen any record of his having suffered from an orthodox Inquisition, although, it is true, he was exiled several times from Baṣṭām. But he was not in danger of his life, was he?

H.L.: No comparison to Ḥallāj. Yes, this is a very interesting question, especially for historians. I suppose that one answer to that question would be that he did not live in Baghdad, not in the capital of the Muslim caliphate. He lived in the province of Khorasan, where it might have been easier to say certain things which were not for all ears. More importantly, perhaps, Ḥallāj travelled and propagated — he was actually a missionary — and felt it was his duty to convince everybody else of his kind of ideas, while Baṣṭāmī preferred secrecy, lived very much in seclusion and had only a few disciples around himself.

T.I.: Well, how would you describe Junayd's position?

H.L.: Well, Junayd was basically by training a jurist, a *faqīh* and an intellectual of mysticism. He is perhaps the first to formulate several stages of mystical experiences in terms understandable to the Muslim intellectual of that time. Whether or not he was in doing so influenced also by translations of Greek philosophy, which had occurred at about the same time, or a bit before, I don't know. His vocabulary does not

seem to allow such a conclusion. It's Quranic and traditional Islamic vocabulary; but on the other hand, of course the translations were there and I think it is a mistake to assume that only what we find in our texts has existed.

T.I.: Well, I asked you that particular question because I don't understand why he is considered so great. I don't see in him any particular mark of greatness. He may be orthodox and a very pious Muslim with some training in mysticism, but as a mystic he is not at all original. That is my impression. If I am wrong, correct me.

H.L.: No, I do not think you are wrong! He is — that is why I called him an intellectual of mysticism — he tried to formulate in a way understandable, — in fact it is not, even in his formulation, easily understandable — but he tries to formulate experience, to classify several stages of *tawhîd*, which certainly distinguishes him from an ordinary Muslim. He tries to show the way how the mystic proceeds through several stages; from ordinary profession of faith — "there is only one God" — to the idea that this One is the ground of your being. Actually, he uses the formula, in speaking about this experience, not *anta dhâka* like Baṣṭâmî, not "thou art that", but "as you were before you came into being", which is a rather interesting idea, this idea of the *mîthâq* (Covenant) as it is religiously expressed. But on the whole, I would go along with you, he is certainly far from being as attractive as someone like Ḥallâj or Baṣṭâmî, or Ibn 'Arabî or 'Aynulquzât, and even Simnânî in spite of his somewhat *sharî'at*-minded approach.

T.I.: Well, we started this conversation with Structuralism or Lévi-Strauss. It will be very proper for us to bring to an end our conversation with post-structuralism such as is represented by Derrida. I regard him, Derrida, as an avant-garde of the contemporary thought trend, and his key term — although he does not like the term "key term" — "deconstruction" (*déconstruction*) is intended to be a fierce fight against what he calls logocentrism. Now both these concepts, deconstruction and logocentrism, are extremely interesting in understanding mysticism and religion in general. In a certain sense I would say mysticism, in general, is a deconstruction movement within a religious context. Hence the grave danger it involves

for both itself and orthodoxy. As for Buddhism, since it doesn't know of any God, deconstruction raises no problem; everything goes as smoothly as anything. From the very beginning Mahâyâna Buddhism was, so to speak, deconstructed.

H.L.: I was going to say, you may not need it.

T.I.: Although in the course of Mahâyâna Buddhism's history, there appeared several times logocentric trends, on the whole it was non-logocentric, and in that sense one may say it was deconstructed from the very beginning. Of all the great world religions, Buddhism represents the unique case in which deconstruction raises no problem. In Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, on the contrary, which are conspicuously logocentric in that they are based on a belief in the absolute personal God, deconstruction easily falls into blasphemy, and in the case of Islam many Sufis died actually for this particular reason. Baṣṭâmî in this respect is a remarkable exception. For, as we have said, Baṣṭâmî came out unhurt from the hands of orthodox jurists. But in fact, I think, Baṣṭâmî was representative of a kind of intransigent deconstruction within the confines of Islamic mysticism. Perhaps Junayd can be regarded as representing a reaction against that. Do you agree?

H.L.: I am not sure.

T.I.: I am not sure, either. But he seems to have resisted Islam being deconstructed by this kind of "mad" movement.

H.L.: I would say that would probably apply to Simnânî, later on. He was trying to save Islam as he understood it. That is why he criticized Ibn 'Arabî. Nevertheless, deconstruction understood in its widest sense certainly also applies to Islamic mysticism, in the sense that we have the notion of *fanâ*, "annihilation" — or whatever translation one might want to choose for this term; it literally means "disappearance".

T.I.: Disappearance of subjective consciousness to begin with, then the objective world.

H.L.: Yes, and the objective world as well.

T.I.: A total annihilation of the world of being.

H.L.: But it's not the whole story. *Fanâ'* is always followed (perhaps with the exception of *Bastâmî*), is supposed to be followed by its correlative *baqâ'*, which means literally permanence, staying, or roughly translated "being" as opposed to "non-being". So just as the Islamic formula of *dhikr* (and part of the profession of faith) *Lâ ilâha illa'llâh* contains two basic aspects, negation and affirmation, which two-fold rhythm is being implanted into the mystic's consciousness by repetition in *dhikr*, so also his experience reflects the two-fold experience of, shall we say, deconstruction and construction. Construction is of course on another level. The mystic is coming back to the world, so to speak, constructing it again. Ibn 'Arabî calls this new construction the "second separation" (*farq thâni*).

T.I.: I completely agree with you, but I would also point out that Buddhism itself is like that. The whole thing does not end with annihilation; after annihilation, everything is to come back again, totally transformed.

H.L.: Absolutely. But then I would perhaps ask you where is the second part in Derrida's case?

T.I.: In Derrida's case, if we, in Derridean fashion, deconstruct all logos or eidos experienceable in the world, then we cannot but find ourselves in a world of the play of signs. That is, I think, the gist of his idea of "play"; well, to tell the truth, it is mainly because of this idea that I am interested in his thought. You know, the deconstructed world as he describes it is a limitless flux; nothing remains fixed, solidly fixed; everything endlessly moves around. As an ontological experience, the realization of the fluidity of things as described by Derrida is most interesting to me, because it corresponds exactly to the Buddhist image of the world of being after annihilation. In Buddhism too, after annihilating everything, subject and object both, one comes back to the empirical world, and finds all things there again flourishing, not solidly fixed, but constantly moving: an incessant play of things, or to use Derrida's terminology, the perpetual play of signs.

H.L.: But isn't that in a way, not very far from what Heraclitus already implied by saying "everything flows". As opposed to the more static view?

T.I.: Yes, that's right. It certainly echoes back to the ontological fluidity of Heraclitus as opposed to Parmenides.

The Editor of *Shisô*: You have talked about structuralism vs. post-structuralism, especially its latest phase, deconstruction, but in my view, your discussion hasn't led to the problem relating to language. If possible, could you please talk a little bit about Semiotics, as represented by Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, especially the distinction made by Kristeva between two types of signs: *le symbolique* and *le sémiotique*. Professor Landolt does not seem to agree with Lévi-Strauss with regard to his later theoretical development, especially his realism lacking in spirituality. But cannot we possibly regard Kristeva as having tried to reinstate spirituality under the name of semiotics, in the very process of the formation of signs.

T.I.: Very interesting suggestion! But going into Semiotics in the present context would lead us too far afield.

H.L.: Well, I am not very familiar with Semiotics, but I would simply say that it is a scientific method, like structuralism itself, and should therefore be distinguished from philosophy or mysticism. Like any science — even philology! — it can of course be useful for the study of mysticism. Semiotics in particular could be useful for a clearer understanding of the nature of mystic *paradoxa*, those "strange" *shatahât* about which we talked earlier, and their relationship to "ordinary" language. But I doubt that it can reproduce the inspiration of those *paradoxa*, just as I doubt that a scientific analysis of the brain can reproduce consciousness.

T.I.: But in that sense the whole movement beginning with structuralism has nothing to do with mysticism, I should say.

H.L.: No, I agree.

T.I.: But the point is that we can re-interpret the mystical experience in terms of the concepts developed by those people. That's all.

H.L.: Yes, and, in that sense, of course, the very fact that people like yourself are attracted to both would show that there

is something. There is potential in this kind of approach but it depends on who is doing it.

T.I.: When the world of being is deconstructed, then we will have what we would call "signs", or "traces". In an ontologically deconstructed world, Derrida recognizes only "traces" of things, in place of the things themselves.

H.L.: Which may mean anything!

T.I.: The main point will be that in such a world there will no longer be any real things. In mystical terminology, we might describe the ontological situation by saying that everything is a dream, that we are all living in a dream world. From the very beginning the world was a dream and every thing, each single thing was a dream object but we were not aware of that. Through mysticism, we came to know that they were dreams. Derrida and those who are around him know, without going through mysticism, that things are ultimately dreams. But they do not say so; instead, they speak of "traces". No substances but only traces.

H.L.: But isn't the trace always a trace of something.

T.I.: Yes, of course, but that something is never graspable, never becomes fully "present". There is no *eschaton*. That's the point. No matter how far we may go in search of the "thing" itself, we can never reach it, we are always left with "traces". In semiotic terminology these "traces" are signs, and, or more strictly, "*signifiants*". So the world is full of "*signifiants*". It's a flux of *signifiants*.

H.L.: It's very Islamic in a way.

T.I.: In what sense?

H.L.: Well the world is full of *āyāt*, "signs", and you can't actually grasp the One who in Islamic terms made those signs. But I think there is still a difference, if Derrida doesn't have to go beyond — leaves it as that, so to speak. The mystic also considers the things as just signs, but it is because maybe he does not know, but he has confidence that somehow,

something is behind, which he will in one way or another grasp even if he cannot name it.

T.I.: Maybe! A kind of Derridean eschatology!

H.L.: That is very interesting indeed.

T.I.: But eschatology in Derrida's vision will never be fulfilled, never reach the point of actualization.

H.L.: This is very interesting from a mystically Islamic point of view as well. 'Azîz-i Nasafî (d.ca.700/1300), for example, insists that all we can distinguish is the "face of God", i.e., the "signs", and the "soul of God", i.e., existence, but no "essence" of God. Absolute anti-essentialism. Derrida's deconstruction is also of course an anti-essentialism.

T.I.: Yes, no doubt —

H.L.: But then, on the other hand, my critical question remains. If we find that two things are not 'A' does it necessarily follow that they are both 'B'?

T.I.: What do you mean?

H.L.: Let us say we have three things. If A is not B and C is not B, it still does not follow that A and C are equal.

T.I.: What are you driving at?

H.L.: That is to say, I am a bit skeptical in comparing two things of which we perceive first of all that they share in a negation. To give an example that is closer to my field, if we find Sufism and Ismailism to a certain extent negating the relevance of the *Shari'ah*, it does not necessarily follow that the two are the same. They may relativize its importance for different reasons. Or the "deconstruction" of peripatetic philosophy, the famous *Tahâfut al-Falâsifah* of Ghazâlî (d.505/1111), may have very different motivations from those which animated Suhrawardî (d.587/1191) to do the same thing in the first part of his *Hikmat al-Ishrâq*. And therefore the deconstruction of the mystic and the deconstruction of Derrida may also be done for different reasons.

T.L.: Of course I agree. All I wanted to say is that by going through structuralism and coming to a post-structuralism culminating in something like Derridean deconstruction, we may come to re-realise the contemporary relevance of many old things, including mysticism.

H.L.: In that sense, of course, I also agree!