

# Imitation in Architecture and Music: So Many Roads

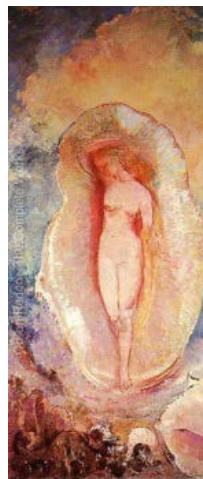
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## Introduction

Think of a painting, *The Birth of Venus*, perhaps. Do you think of Botticelli's, or Bouguereau's, perhaps Cabanel's impressionist vision, or something a little more evocative like Redon's or even contemporary like Sayhoun? Perhaps, even, we think of another story told by Pliny the Elder, of a lost masterpiece of Apelles representing *Venus Anadyomene* (*Venus Rising from the Sea*) from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>1</sup>. Which is the original, which is more authentic? So much can be asked about any great painting, of any great work; it is not a new argument. But, what is the story of Venus anyway? Where does she come from, and why is she worth painting? Why is the story relevant hundreds and possibly thousands of years later? I suggest that the message is so powerful, so sublime, that there is a compulsion to recreate and reinterpret the narrative in contemporary language, from any historic perspective. It is true with all great works. I suggest that these ancient tales – metaphors of the imagination - expressed in the symbols and iconography of the times allows a work of art, even a reinterpreted piece, to manifest as an original, authentic piece; allows, as they say, the word to become flesh.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apelles>

<sup>2</sup> See John 1:1-14

Again, this is not a new argument, it is a metaphoric cliché meant to suggest that each work of interpretive art represents a segment of a vast expansive network of ideas and images which connect history with the art, the artist, the perceiver, and the spirit of the times (*Zeitgeist*). In other words, I suggest that each work of art is a semiological narrative, a recounting of history told through the stories and images of contemporary parlance. In this way art is anthropological<sup>3</sup>. It is a map of humankind and our representation upon this Earth. It points to some thing, idea or phenomenon beyond itself. It points to the sublime. Similar to metaphoric symbolism, this semiological narrative transforms the literal meaning of the work into an open-ended allegory. The following study examines a work of architecture, the *Krematorium Baumschulenweg* in Berlin by Schultes Arkitekten, and the lyrics to *So Many Roads* by Robert Hunter as performed by the Grateful Dead, in support of this phenomenon.

### **While My Guitar Gently Weeps**

Most art is in essence imitation. There are very few inventions of new styles, colors or compositions. Most are simulations of a previous work or artist. We seek to emulate Rembrandt's light, or Kahn's silent spirit, or the slow slide of Robert Johnson. And yet, we find Truth in every work. By Nature or hallucination, art represents the imagination and the skill of the artist. There is no art that does not go through the mind first, to be interpreted and translated by the body as a true creation. It is a sensual act that connects the artist with the spectators, and when done right, to a higher order of being. Every spectator will have a different understanding, an absolute perfect interpretation, based on their knowledge and previous experience with the kaleidoscopic nature of the piece. Through the recruitment of memory, this "extended experience" - one that opens up conceptual space and allows for the unfolding of meaning

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<sup>3</sup> Gell (1998).

marginally free of previously established ideas and images - allows for a deeper understanding of the piece, places it in a historic context and sublimates a story beyond the piece itself.

However, this begs a further question, a deeper semantic question, whether originality must be free from all forms of imitation for it to remain authentic. Let us here define what is meant by originality and authenticity and perhaps the answer will present itself. To be original, I suggest that the work must be free of the ethical confounds of any formal or semantic replication; the work must not have directly copied the meaning or significance of the original piece. If I use the phrase “while my guitar gently weeps” in a poem about early blues guitar players, I may still have an original poem, but if I use it to write a love song about weeping guitars, then I border on the ethical domain of stealing. I suggest that this borrowing to connect a previous idea with a new idea is an authentic act. Authenticity does not require a work to be non-imitative; it only requires it to be free of the deleterious effects of direct replication or duplication as I stated above. To carry the semantic argument further, imitation is different from emulation in which the work produces a similar emotional effect upon the perceiver but is not a direct copy. Imitation signifies a synthetic relationship outside the perceiver, while emulation induces an effect of perception. Until... we breach the threshold of cliché, and beyond to the point of kitsch. Most metaphor verges on being cliché. Cliché is a trite distortion of both originality and authenticity. It is the ready-made over-used expression of a previously identified idea. I use it all the time; unfortunately my head is full of them. It is the Corinthian column cap; it is the recycled phrase or idea. It is most of what we see today in the arts. Unfortunately, it is a simple predictable escape from a complex unpredictable situation. It is easy to think in terms of cliché, and easy to use it to describe our experiences, but it does not help us clarify this idea of the

extended experience, the metaphoric experience, or the semiological narrative, “for originality becomes an organicist metaphor referring not so much to formal invention as to sources of life.”<sup>4</sup>

I suggest that the extended experience, the experience that takes us out beyond the literal meaning of a thing, the semiological narrative, acts according to the laws of complexity. As such, *the* idea is fractal, and propagates virally in a self-replicating pattern, having the schematic structure of a neural network. And here is the thesis, **this infinite branching of mutating ideas produces a level of complexity so deep it actually rearranges the schematic images and metaphor rooted in the cognitive structures of the brain. It is the skeletal structure that schematic image and metaphor is superimposed upon, and it happens within the space of symbology.** As we mine the quarries of the mind, it is within the world of symbols that we are able to express and decipher the many faceted metaphors inlaid in life, in the environment and in artistic composition. If schematic images underlie our preoccupation with reality<sup>5</sup>, and these structures correspond with natural body inclinations<sup>6</sup>, then it would seem, from the point of first cause, these symbolic images are artifacts of a more primitive operation, and actually presuppose and underpin the schematic structures. I believe this operation is a fundamental construct of our ecological emergence from the environment. Not as a separate being, awash in distance, but one which shares the blood and air of the Earth. Such is the way of cross-linked ideas and extended experience.

*Groves of Man line the potter's field,  
Names carved on ancient stone.  
Let the Warlocks of Winterland,  
Warm your Dead and buried bones.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Krauss (1985): p. 157

<sup>5</sup> Johnson (1987)

<sup>6</sup> Mandler (1992)

<sup>7</sup> Original, by the author (2011)

**Krematorium Baumschulenweg**  
Treprow, Berlin, Germany

**Schultes Arkitekten**  
Axel Schultes and Charlotte Frank



In Treprow, a region of Berlin, nestled amongst a procession of oaks and lazy headstones, a building sits upon its coiled haunches. Through the trees, we approach the main entrance, raised upon its concrete plinth; before us a journey into legend and myth, as its form and proportion remind us hauntingly of the tombs at Saqqara and the temples of Luxor and Karnak. We are immediately drawn into a story that belongs to history, inextricably tied to the past as an immeasurable lineage of humanity. Our story begins here.

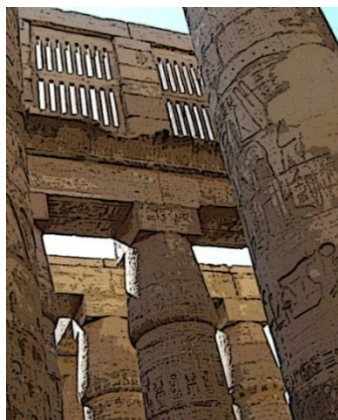


At Saqqara, the ancient cemetery of Memphis, the early capital of Egypt from about 2600 BC, we begin to foresee the mystery behind the forms and symbolic representations embedded in the architecture of the Treprow crematorium. The necropolis of Saqqara is an ancient “City of the Dead”. The first *Mastabas*, or “bench” tombs were built in the time of the early dynastic period to “simulate” the benches commonly installed at the front of most houses. In this way, even in these early times, the building began to imitate the iconography of the house, and some might say the cave, and eventually the city through which the dead could prosper. In this form and spatial arrangement, and the forms of the surrounding tombs, and especially the benches set



within the “cave” to both sides of the entrance, we begin to see the first bold strokes for the idea for the Treptow crematorium.

At Luxor, the ancient city of Thebes and the scepter of Amon-Ra, the God of gods, the first monotheistic deity, and especially the temple of Karnak, we find the images of sun and sky as templates upon which the design for the crematorium is overlaid. The crematorium sets heavy buried halfway in the earth and halfway above it. This symbolizes its dual purpose, to bury as well as to venerate the dead. Its crisp broad elevation seems to have been carved out of a solid block of stone<sup>8</sup>, or laid there by unknown forces. Its sharp elevation reminds us of the scale and symmetry of a mausoleum, and as mentioned before, of Saqqara and the ancient tombs of Egypt.



Here, stone and light are more than just materials, they become markers of a preternatural order of the senses, defining the limits of reality on the one hand, and opening the experience for imagination on the other. These limits of reality, whether by nature or man, are restructured in the memories of the participants as symbols pointing to a first cause. The symbol stretches out recursively into time-space *ad infinitum*, it never becomes what it desires to be: the original, even though it borrows from the annals of time. Even the symbols have a need for fulfillment. They demand attention here; they require that we engage them, to bear their meaning into being. And likewise, we are asked to be performers in this story too. Dematerialization and forgetfulness are addressed simultaneously in the Treptow building as expressions of impermanence, a twisted tension between that and the permanence of stone and of antiquity. It contextualizes us in the moment, as well as takes us mentally to other planes of being and opens within us a space of emergence and brings us to the “Hall of the Dead”.

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<sup>8</sup> Eshelman, p. 11.



Not so peculiar in and of itself, the square concrete vault, the inner sanctum is spatially articulated by 29 round concrete columns placed, seemingly randomly, within the room, arranged around the center pool; the pool with the symbolic egg hovering dimensionless over the reflection of another world beyond. There is no residual space to be occupied; there is only space for grieving and observing. They remind us again of Karnak, but they are fully abstracted, except as objects they

become symbolic representations, as they pierce the ceiling of the space and allow sunlight to flood in through a circular gap at the head of the column. With these capitals of light, they express their being through the manipulation of the image as metaphor - the columns appear to support the sky.



In the Treptow, circumstances require and engage a higher order of light. Shadows fall across the concrete walls. Walls that appear to be drenched in an abstract drizzling rain seem to vibrate and evanesce as the refracted sunlight is filtered through the louvered skylights hovering over the space like a “translucent canopy”<sup>9</sup>. This effect is most notable in the interior louvered walls of the adjoining ceremonial spaces, giving the impression of other-worldliness; obscure and symbolic, we are neither shut in nor allowed to fully leave. The symbolism is unmistakable as these walls point towards the ancient temples, these walls are made to erode.

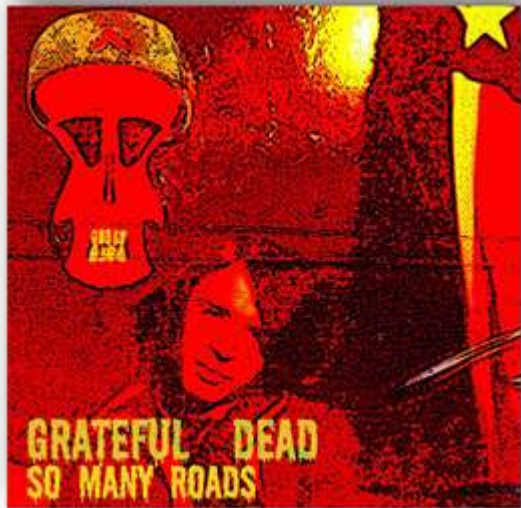
<sup>9</sup> Crematorium in Berlin, Detail.de, January 2001, p79-83

## So Many Roads

Words by Robert Hunter

Music by Jerry Garcia

Performed by The Grateful Dead



Though the Dead would tour late into the mid-nineties, their final album of 1993-94 would never be completed. *So Many Roads*, already a staple in their recent tours, became a biographical anthem of Jerry Garcia's trials and unwitting tribulations through touring, failed marriages, and years of drug abuse. Written by Robert Hunter as a sentimental account of Jerry's existential

experiences, it is laden with historical allusions and references to the band's own repertoire. Jerry reflected upon the song's origins in an interview with David DiMartino in 1992, "It's Hunter writing me from my point of view. We've been working together for so long that he knows what I know". Jerry went on to say "I can sing that song, feel totally comfortable with it. It's full of things that are part of my personal furniture from my own psyche, my own life, my own interests".<sup>10</sup> On *So Many Roads*, two main music genres are represented - blues and old-time country. It can be argued these two are the stuff rock and roll is made of. The song has two sets of verses divided by a chorus and a guitar solo.

The following are the lyrics, as they appear in David Dodd's Annotated *So Many Roads* at <http://artsites.ucsc.edu/GDead/agdl/soma.html>. The underlined phrases are annotated with descriptions and explanations following the lyrics.

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<sup>10</sup> Peters, 1999: 216-217



Thought I heard a blackbird singin'  
up on Bluebird Hill  
Call me a whinin' boy if you will  
Born where the sun don't shine  
and I don't deny my name  
Got no place to go, ain't that a shame?

Thought I heard that KC whistle  
moanin' sweet & low  
Thought I heard that KC when she blow  
Down where the sun don't shine  
Underneath the Kokomo  
Whinin' boy -- got no place else to go

So many roads I tell you  
So many roads I know  
So many roads --  
so many roads --  
Mountain high, river wide  
So many roads to ride  
So many roads  
So many roads

Thought I heard a jug band playin'  
"If you don't -- who else will?"  
from over on the far side of the hill  
All I know the sun don't shine,  
the rain refuse to fall  
and you don't seem to hear me when I call

Wind inside & the wind outside  
Tangled in the window blind  
Tell me why you treat me so unkind  
Down where the sun don't shine  
Lonely and I call your name  
No place left to go, ain't that a shame?

So many roads I tell you  
New York to San Francisco  
All I want is one  
to take me home  
From the high road to the low  
So many roads I know  
So many roads - So many roads

From the [land of the midnight sun](#)  
where [ice blue roses](#) grow  
'long those roads of gold and silver snow  
[Howlin' wide or moanin low](#)  
So many roads I know  
[So many roads to ease my soul](#)

### **Blackbird singin'**

Possibly a reference to the Beatles song Blackbird, as in

*"blackbird singin' in the dead of night."*

### **Bluebird Hill**

Possibly a reference to the Fats Domino song "Blueberry Hill"; there is also a Bluebird Hill Bed and Breakfast in Utopia, TX.

### **Whining boy**

Cf. "Winin Boy Blues" by Jelly Roll Morton. Also recorded by Hot Tuna and Janis Joplin. Winin Boy may refer to a character in the Afroamerican playwright August Wilson's play "The Piano Lesson" who is the one who resolves the family dispute over the piano, by playing it.

### **Born where the sun don't shine**

Possibly a reference to "Sixteen Tons" by Merle Travis and made famous by Tennessee Ernie Ford, as in:

*"Born on a day when the sun didn't shine*

*Picked up my shovel and I went to the mine."*

### **And I don't deny my name**

More lyrics from "Winin' Boy Blues".

*"I'm a winin' boy, I don't deny my name."*

Big Brother also did a song called "Easy Rider" whose chorus was:

*“Easy rider*

*Don’t you deny my name.”*

And to further the string of references, Lorenzo Thomas, in 2008, wrote: *Don't Deny My Name: Words and Music and the Black Intellectual Tradition*. The essays included collectively provide a tour of the movement through classic jazz, bop, and the explosions of the free jazz era, followed by a section on R&B and soul. The penultimate essay is a meditation on rap music that attempts to bring together the extremes of emotion that hip hop elicits

### **Got no place to go**

Cf. “No Particular Place to Go”, by Chuck Berry.

### **ain’t that a shame?**

Cf. “Ain’t That a Shame”, by Fats Domino.

### **KC whistle moanin’ sweet and low**

Cf. “KC Moan”, traditional blues, original artist unknown.

### **Kokomo**

Again, from “No Particular Place to Go”, by Chuck Berry

*“No particular place to go,*

*So we packed way out on the Kokomo.”*

Also,

- Kokomo is also a popular Beach Boys song
- Kokomo is a town in Indiana. It was named after an Indian-- in the Miami Indian tribe of the Ohio Valley there was a local leader who named his sons after trees. One was Ko-ko-mo-ko (black walnut) who was thought to become a War Chief of the Miami Tribe.
- Kokomo Arnold was a Delta bluesman
- There is also a Kokomo, Bahamas, and a Kokomo, Jamaica, though it is not known whether Robert Hunter and Jerry would have been familiar with these places, and they don’t seem to fit the theme of the song.

## **roads**

Too many songs about the road to mention, but the GD song “Going Down the Road Feeling Bad” and Willie Nelson’s “On the Road Again” come to mind.

## **Mountain high, river wide**

Cf. “River Deep, Mountain High” by Ike and Tina Turner.

## **jug band**

A reference back to the jug bands from the 1920’s, bands like *The Memphis Jug Band* and *Cannon’s Jug Stompers*, and again seen in a jug band revival of the 1960’s with bands like *The Lovin’ Spoonful*, who on their first album had a song called “*On the Road Again*”.

## **“If you don’t – who else will?”**

Possibly a reference to the Doctor John tune “Such a Night”, as in

*“If you don’t do it, somebody else will.”*

## **All I know the sun don’t shine**

Cf. “In the Pines.” And old folk tune, as in:

*“In the pines, in the pines, where the sun never shines”,*

And seen in another standard bluegrass song, “Dark Hollow” also recorded by GD, as in

*“I’d rather be in some dark hollow, where the sun don’t ever shine.”*

## **And you don’t seem to hear me when I call**

Cf. “Can’t You Hear Me Calling”, by Bill Monroe, the father of bluegrass, as in:

*“Sweetheart of mine, can’t you hear me callin’?”*

## **New York to San Francisco**

Possibly a reference to the many times GD traveled back and forth from Fillmore East to Fillmore West, also, can be reference to “Promised Land”, another song GD covered written by Chuck Berry.

### **To take me home**

Cf. "I Will Take You Home," by Brent Mydland, keyboardist for the Dead, comes to mind.

Returning home is a major theme in old-time and bluegrass music.

### **From the high road to the low**

Cf. "Loch Lommond", a quintessential Scottish folk song, as in:

"you take the high road and I'll take the low road and I'll be in Scotland afore ye"

### **midnight sun**

An oxymoron, though one which is actually applied to arctic regions such as Scandinavia and Alaska (the land of the midnight sun), and could possibly be a set up for the next phrase "ice blue roses". Compare with a line from another GD song "China Cat Sunflower", also written by Hunter and Garcia, as in:

*"Look for a while at the China Cat Sunflower  
proud-walking jingle in the midnight sun"*

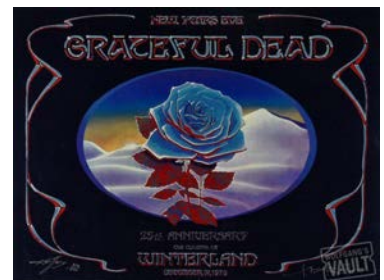
On a further note, the lines of connection do not stop here, as *Sunflower*, might refer to the Allen Ginsberg poem "Sunflower Sutra", dedicated to Neal Cassidy, one of the original Merry Pranksters on the bus *Furthur*, upon which were conducted the acid tests. "*Proud-walking jingle in the midnight sun*", also parallels another GD song, "The Eleven", written in 11/4 time, which has the line:

*"Six proud walkers on the jingle-bell rainbow".*

### **ice blue roses**

Possibly could be reference to the poster for the closing of Winterland in 1978. Possibly a reference to another GD tune "Dark Star", as in:

*"glass hand dissolving to ice petal flowers revolving"*



Ice is also a recurring theme, as is roses, in many GD songs, not less than 19 times,, as in:

*“if you plant ice, you’re gonna harvest wind”*, and

*“carve your name, carve your name in ice and wind”*.

Also, *Ice Nine* is the official GD publishing company.

### **roses**

It would be impossible to talk about the Grateful Dead, without mentioning roses, whether ice blue or red, red, they epitomize the GD experience. Not less than 28 times is the rose mentioned along with another 24 times in which roses are mentioned in GD songs. The rose, and perhaps the skeletal figure represent the essence of the Dead. I believe, as others do, that the rose symbolized a state of excellence, a state of purity, perhaps the organic nature of blossoming into being, into a transcendent state. Perhaps it is the psychedelic state. This theme is relevant as it portrays a parallel with similar issues contained in the crematorium.

### **Howlin’ wide or moanin’ low**

Possibly a reference to the traditional gospel spiritual song “Rock-a My Soul”, as in:

*“So wide you can't get over it*

*So low, you can't get under it”*

Also, "Moanin' Low" (possibly by Howard Dietz and Ralph Rainger, 1929) was a song done in the 30's by Billie Holliday. It could also mean a howlin' low moanin' train. Another common theme in GD music.

### **so many roads to ease my soul**

We miss you Jerry, and hope you found the road to take you home.

## Conclusion

Within each thing, and in this case the building and the song is a thing, an infinite regression of memories and allusions to a historic past can be stored and articulated. These “things” carry the weight of their purpose but yet expand outwards into nothingness. At Treptow, the aoristic columns, the peculiar casket-like niches, the egg; each “thing” represents more than what it is while staying what it fundamentally is. The column supporting heaven remains a column even though it reminds us of a tree, and alludes to other historic structures such as Karnac and Saqqara. This is the nature of abstraction. It attempts to resolve the dilemma between man and nature by making nature something that can be reduced. Only the abstracted inference remains embedded in the form.

We may agree or disagree with Gehry, who states that “*architecture never falls into the trap of fiction, and it never indulges in simulacra*”.<sup>11</sup> This is our ideal as architects and musicians, to have that one original thought. We do well to resolve both of these endlessly recursive states using metaphoric schemes and psycho-historical symbols. Metaphors are by their nature replications of themselves. Phenomenologically, they mean nothing. It is the weight of the building and the light that address the desires of the body, it is the metaphor that address the desires of the mind. The tales call forth the past; from the rays of light slicing though the grove of heavenly pillars, rain swept and daunting, to the sand dunes of Egypt, the marshes of the delta where the icy blues call forth the low moan of a North bound train, each piece touches us. The concrete, stone and sand ask to be touched. The light, on the other hand, asks to be breathed. And in the finality of death, and the popularity of the Grateful dead, we are witness to our own rebirth into the rose beds of eternity.

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<sup>11</sup> Moneo, 260

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