

Every Gondola Is a Shrine

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I think of every gondola post as a shrine. People on the Internet come together to appreciate them in an almost spiritual way, much like how primitive humans used to pay their respects to holy objects like an awe-inspiring mountain or a tree, believed to house gods within. I think this ability to project magic into the world evolved very early on in human history, and continues to influence the way we perceive everything, even art and memes.

Gondola “embodies the Taoist principle of wu-wei,” the seminal cypypasta on gondola claims. “The valley spirit never dies / Call it the mystery, the woman” (Tao Te Ching, Ch. VI, trans. by Ursula K. Le Guin). The philosopher Adorno said that “art is magic delivered from the lie of being truth.” According to the psychoanalyst Otto Rank, “the child lives in a world of magic, where no logical or rational—that is, man-made—laws govern, but where the irrationality of nature herself, of which the woman is still so much a part, predominates.”

Using the metaphor of femininity reminiscent of the Tao Te Ching, Rank argued that we ought to learn from children. They are connected more deeply with the world and with love, and their naivete is exactly what offers them a deeper perspective. The popular author and Soto Zen monk, Shunryū Suzuki, said as much about the “beginner’s mind”, as did many philosophers beginning with the likes of Jesus.

So, every time I see or make gondola, I imagine I am visiting or building a shrine. It makes me thankful for what memes have shown they can become, if only we could return to the beauty and mystery we once saw in the Internet.

P.S. Silent Observer was the inspiration for the little bird.