

The Man In The High Castle by Philip K. Dick

“Here is a piece of metal which has been melted until it has become shapeless. It represents nothing. Nor does it have design, of any intentional sort. It is merely amorphous. One might say, it is mere content, deprived of form.”

Childan nodded.

“Yet,” Paul said, “I have for several days now inspected it, and for no logical reason *I feel a certain emotional fondness*. Why is that? I may ask. I do not even now project into this blob, as in psychological tests, my own psyche. I still see no shapes or forms. But it somehow partakes of Tao. You see?” He motioned Childan over. “It is balanced. The forces within this piece are stabilized. At rest. So to speak, this object has made its peace with the universe. It has separated from it and hence has managed to come to homeostasis.”

Childan nodded, studied the piece. But Paul had lost him.

“It does not have *wabi*,” Paul said, “nor could it ever. But —” He touched the pin with his nail. “Robert, this object has *wu*.”

“I believe you are right,” Childan said, trying to recall what *wu* was; it was not a Japanese word — it was Chinese. Wisdom, he decided. Or comprehension. Anyhow, it was highly good.

“The hands of the artificer,” Paul said, “had *wu*, and allowed that *wu* to flow into this piece. Possibly he himself knows only that this piece satisfies. It is complete, Robert. By contemplating it, we gain more *wu* ourselves. We experience the tranquility associated not with art but with holy things. I recall a shrine in Hiroshima wherein a shinbone of some medieval saint could be examined. However, this is an artifact and that was a relic. This is alive in the now, whereas that merely *remained*. By this meditation, conducted by myself at great length since you were last here, I have come to identify the value which this has in opposition to historicity. I am deeply moved, as you may see.”

“Yes,” Childan said.

“To have no historicity, and also no artistic, esthetic worth, and yet to partake of some ethereal value — that is a marvel. Just precisely because this is a miserable, small, worthless-looking blob; that, Robert, contributes to its possessing *wu*. For it is a fact that *wu* is customarily found in least imposing places, as in the Christian aphorism, ‘stones rejected by the builder’ One experiences awareness of *wu* in such trash as an old stick, or a rusty beer can by the side of the road. However, in those cases, the *wu* is within the viewer. It is a religious experience. Here, an artificer has put *wu* into the object, rather than merely witnessed the *wu* inherent in it” He glanced up. “Am I making myself clear?”

“Yes,” Childan said.

“In other words, an entire new world is pointed to, by this. The name for it is neither art, for it has no form, nor religion. What is it? I have pondered this pin unceasingly, yet cannot fathom it. We evidently lack the word for an object like this. So you are right, Robert. It is authentically a new thing on the face of the world.”

Authentic, Childan thought. Yes, it certainly is. I catch that notion. But as to the rest —

“He deals, of course, in immense quantity,” Paul said. “Perhaps tens of thousands of each item. His company controls various enterprises that manufacture for him at low overhead, all located in the Orient where there is cheaper labor.”

“Why is he —” Childan began.

Paul said, “Pieces such as this...” He picked up the pin once more, briefly. Closing the lid, he returned the box to Childan.

“... can be mass-produced. Either in base metal or plastic. From a mold. In any quantity desired.”

After a time Childan said, “What about *wu*? Will that remain in the pieces?”

Paul said nothing.

“You advise me to see him?” Childan said.

“Yes,” Paul said.

“Why?”

“Charms,” Paul said.

Childan stared.

“Good-luck charms. To be worn. By relatively poor people. A line of amulets to be peddled all over Latin America and the Orient. Most of the masses still believe in magic, you know. Spells. Potions. It's a big business, I am told.” Paul's face was wooden, his voice toneless.

Like frog pulled from depths, he thought. Clutched in fist, given command to declare what lies below in the watery abyss. But here the frog does not even mock; it strangles silently, becomes stone or clay or mineral. Inert. Passes back to the rigid substance familiar in its tomb world.

Metal is from the earth, he thought as he scrutinized. From below: from that realm which is the lowest, the most dense. Land of trolls and caves, dank, always dark. Yin world, in its most melancholy aspect. World of corpses, decay and collapse. Of feces. All that has died, slipping and disintegrating back down layer by layer. The daemonic world of the immutable; the time-that-was.

And yet, in the sunlight, the silver triangle glittered. It reflected light. Fire, Mr. Tagomi thought. Not dank or dark object at all. Not heavy, weary, but pulsing with life. The high realm, aspect of yang: empyrean, ethereal. As befits work of art. Yes, that is artist's job: takes mineral rock from dark silent earth transforms it into shining light-reflecting form from sky.

Has brought the dead to life. Corpse turned to fiery display; the past had yielded to the future.

Which are you? he asked the silver squiggle. Dark dead yin or brilliant living yang? In his palm, the silver squiggle danced and blinded him; he squinted, seeing now only the play of fire.

Body of yin, soul of yang. Metal and fire unified. The outer and inner; microcosmos in my palm.

What is the space which this speaks of? Vertical ascent. To heaven. Of time? Into the light-world of the mutable. Yes, this thing has disgorged its spirit: light. And my attention is fixed; I can't look away. Spellbound by mesmerizing shimmering surface which I can no longer control. No longer free to dismiss.

Now talk to me, he told it. Now that you have snared me. I want to hear your voice issuing from the blinding clear white light, such as we expect to see only in the *Bardo Thodol* afterlife existence. But I do not have to wait for death, for the decomposition of my animus as it wanders in search of a new womb. All the terrifying and beneficent deities; we will bypass them, and the smoky lights as well. And the couples in coitus. Everything except this light. I am ready to face without terror. Notice I do not blench.