

OSCILLA
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An oscillum is a mask made of marble or terracotta. Worked in relief on both sides, it was suspended from the bough of a sacred tree, or the ceiling of a home, as an offering to the *Mater Larum*, or the mane of silence. From oscillum emerged the verb *oscillo*, meaning to swing. As the wind gently swung the mask like a polynose it produced a sea wash verb—now known as oscillation—a word alchemical in its harmonic fertility.

Swinging was among the bodily exercises practised by the Ancient Romans, and was one of the amusements at the *Feriae Latinae*. Free of haste or fluster, the pigeon-toed cupids of the gymnasium would circle, pummel, and drip as they attempted to throw their agonists to the ground, their sweat congealing with the goldweed of oil (a nimbus of olive, terebinth, opopanax and citron) and dust that was applied to their bodies, creating *gloios*.

Sweat collectors would harvest the seaware odour of this coagulate substance from the floor of the gymnasium, scraping it off the axial tussocks of wrestler's bodies, like halictid bees, with the ancient and twibill lines of a strigil. A sound like the stridulation of insects in the afternoon sun, bouncing off the walls. In this fashion, sweat collectors would harvest a revenue stream that paralleled the obsessive cultivation of ambergris.

Konis—the dust athletes used to dry off after they were finished exercising—is etymologically related to so-called ear-dust, *ot + konis*, or what is now known as otoconia. These are the bio-crystals of the inner ear, the molecules with which gravity intones. Otoconia begin to spin whilst we are still in the womb and slowly degenerate throughout a life, until eventually, they come to a halt, eaten by motile forces.

These little faces guide us through turning one thing into another.

The meaning of the oscilla was defined or enhanced by the very act of their votive suspension, a sort of language ritual that was an offering to the air, making mythology a kind of primitive meteorology. They symbolised respect for the nature of the threshold and preserved a mantic function that could assist in negotiating and navigating periods of transition.

The sounds of these apotropaic masks span out—a perfect vertiginous agape, a noise that possessed the land—echoing the rattling arms and beating feet of the Korybantes as they clashed their pots and pans. Stamping on bruised balm-leaves and honey-wort, red cows standing in the morning shallows, the dancers would guide swarms of white and black bees to a new hive.

Many of the masks depicted the face of Dionysus—to whom bees were sacred and from whose thyrsus honey dripped—and represented in part, the cultivation of the grapevine and the need to understand its life cycle. The eye's response to light like the stomach's response to wine and barley, the world breathed with us.

Another name for Dionysus, the other side of the mask, was Briaeus, which is said to be derived from *blittein*, to take honey. Dionysus was instructed in the art of beekeeping by the nymph, Brisa, and was claimed by Ovid to have discovered the first natural beehive, wherein swarms of bees were attracted to the obstreperous clamour of his attendants, the satyrs, and were then guided into the ringless trunk of a hollow tree.

The contingency of maskless masks simultaneously gaze at us and beyond us, shedding as if accumulating. As we spin we also must stir, exciting a dendritic patina of contradiction and reality. Signification alone cannot summon such a trance. These sacred objects spun on short cords—perhaps vestiges of hypnotism—creating possessive aeolian pitches of pulsing tympani, the instrument of the maenads in the midst of screaming sparagmos.

Disembodied sounds scatter a retina of bees, a pomp amidst the erect brain sand of the pineal gland—Cybele's alchemical organ—the celestial vault above the hollow tree.

Arbor infelix

Wet nests of awns
Crane masks
Spools of wasp limen
|
We bellow
To remember
Ghost opposites

Arbor felix

Holes weave
Their faces
From the citrinas
Churn of hinges

Maniae

River
Horse
Slow
Mirror

Ficus navia

Bees seal
Immolation
Boundaries
Of grunting lares
|
Throats of tamarisk
Giant moths &
Cardiac stones
Empty the gut

Ficus ater

Bullfinch
Dancing
Red mildew
|
To be Orphic is
To be resonant
Bug slop

Ardor

Votive stumps of pitch
Torch the tympana
Thyrsi rooted in
Brain mercury

Bucrania

Apple Ox
Apoplex
Oxagonal
Lift the
Pale pole

Arbor infelix

Chicory lobes
Hum fox panic
Ocular Pleiades
|
Brackish monads
Mane and dart
Bardo coma

Ardor

Your head
Is a wave
Ilex
Mid-air

Pilae

Echo
A rye
Harp
Star