

Is Re-enchantment of the World Possible?
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First let's ask if we have ever been 'de-enchanted' with the world. I use 'de-enchanted' because 'disenchanted' with the world implies a kind of shadow enchantment. In disenchantment we think the world is not interesting, is barren, indifferent, or hostile, rather than that the world just is what it is. A world can only appear indifferent or hostile if it has the possibility of choice and intention, and that is an enchantment in itself.

Disenchantment also implies the repeated myth that somehow Western human beings have broken with a past when we had a sacred and harmonious relationship with the world. Those in this myth might disagree on when the great break occurred (blaming it on agriculture, epic poetry, philosophy, perspective drawing, literacy, the printing press, Descartes, science, industrialisation, the railway, World War I, and so on), but they agree it occurred sometime in the last three or four thousand years. Interpretations of the break differ: some see it as necessary, some see it as good, and some may see it as evil. That this transformation is usually, however, marked as a binary (before and after), makes it clear we are in mythic country and handling the opposites of the psyche. Interestingly many of these supposed turning points are associated with technology, pointing to the way technology acts as mythic symbol for us, and perhaps cannot help but do so. Even, if we see the world materialistically in terms of artefacts as, for example, as a concatenation of bouncing billiard balls, or as a giant wind-up clock, it is not a de-enchantment, but a technological enchantment which directs our attention in particular ways, making it easier to perceive certain things and harder to perceive others; like all enchantments.

These enchantments have their uses, but all of them are myths, and TS Eliot was right to all his poem on myth and modernity 'The Waste Land'. The wasted land, the dead land, the disenchanted land, is a mythoform repeated over and over again throughout history. This myth is so easy for us to think because it harmonises two great Christian myths: that of Eden, when we were expelled from Paradise into a harsh world of work, and the myth of the Incarnation in which God erupts into the world and nothing is ever the same. In both cases, if somewhat contradictorily, history falls into two halves. In the one myth we leave the enchanted place into work (leaving childhood or infancy perhaps) and in the other, with faith and conversion (rebirth), we potentially re-enter the enchanted place. This suggests a sequence in which the mythic direction of our psyche is, "We have lost enchantment in a blow", and "We must regain it now!" One reinforces the other. Never losing, we could never regain. Such is the cultural mythic dynamic, which distracts us from our current enchantments, which are taken as dry matters of fact.

In the modern world we have tried to recover enchantment through faith, reason, science, romanticism, revolution, capitalism, consumerism or conquest. All were attempts to regain that which our myth says we have lost. All failed, leaving us empty, for it was never really lost, just hidden by that myth of loss. It is hard to say if this movement is universal. We might note that in the Aboriginal Dreaming the animals spoke, creatures transformed from one thing to another, massive events occurred. Yet, in the rituals, the paintings and the teachings, some contact was maintained. Also, over thousands of years, the people learnt how to live in those myths without disrupting the ecology too much, and indeed became part of those ecological processes. Although some argue that humans, initially and drastically, disrupted that ecology – killing off the megafauna for example – there was a slow build up of unconscious, and

conscious, wisdom and knowledge, that was disrupted when others came to live on the land differently.

Sadly the myths the settlers brought, and found – about a hostile land, about our 'true being' being elsewhere, about clinging on to the land, about the virtues of working hard, about unwelcoming vegetation, about drought and water, about what we can demand from the land – were not a de-enchantment, they arose from myths of mastery, the curse of work, and of being outside the land – myths that had worked quite well in a different ecology, but not here. Perhaps the settlers treated their unconscious realms with similar contempt and fear – dreams were not worth the effort, art was a waste of time, we can't give way to feelings, tenderness is a frivolity for women and so on. Sometimes, through this avoidance, people sacrificed each other, or the land, to the Gods of Reason, who are as implacable as other gods. This mythic arrangement is not neutral; it holds a numinous fear of what lurks beneath ego and what lurks in the bush outside ego. It craves 'proper' order at all costs. Enchantment is not always a happy place.

This problem of myth is not fixed by simply deciding to have a more lively enchantment. Civilisations with a great sense of enchantment, in our normal use of the term – living in a world of gods, spirits, talking trees and so forth – in the Indus valley, in South and Middle America, also proved unable to cope with their environments, and farmed, plundered and murdered themselves out of existence, or were unable to survive outside pressure, or climatic change. Their overt enchantment did not help.

Similarly, our major crisis nowadays, that of climate change, attracts enchantment and myth. We can see Nature as a blissful Eden corrupted by humans, or we can see nature as hostile and brutish, needing to be tamed, or we can see Nature as both simultaneously. We might see the world as dead matter needing us, or God, to order it, or as a fragile organism in peril, or as both simultaneously. We might see nature as a creative and beneficent mother, or see it as a bad, constraining mother and want to slay her and escape into freedom. We might feel that we can overcome all problems through technological mastery, or we might feel that technology is the cause of all evils. We might see technology as the marker of this global climate transition in the same way as it marks other transitions. We might feel that the world soul is leading us to a millennial breakthrough in consciousness (as much through the internet as through the divine or both), or we might see disruptions of our ways of life as apocalypse, and thus either resign ourselves in hope or fear, or try to slay the evil ones who have brought down the wrath of God.

These myths, even those that frighten, also reassure because they make the world tidy and they make us the hero of the tale – in some ways they fit with our current psychological and social structures. Some of these myths may have a degree of truth, but nevertheless they are myths and, if we are not careful, those myths will seize us with their own dynamics and live through us rather than help us think, live or adapt.

Enchanting the world (whether as alive or as wasteland needing redemption, etc.) is then always necessary, always projection, and always mythic. If we see the trees as spirits we are caught in our unconscious; if we see our longings as the will of God for all, then we propelled by our unconscious shadow, if we see Reason as separate from human being or as the managing function, we are also deeply involved in unconscious fantasy. Reasoning and knowledge depend upon our background world of imagination and feeling for their axioms and sense of

truth. There is no escaping the psyche as a whole (however fractured that psyche might be) through wish fulfilment or suppression.

Given, then, we cannot escape enchantment, and enchantment can be harmful, what can we do? In realising this problem, a path opens which avoids remaining with these enchantments alone. In this mode we might consciously treat the world as our unconscious, pay attention to it, and see it as alive, as responsive and as having its own dynamics beyond us. We are open, amidst this, to perceiving our own pains, panics and melancholia. We are no longer hero subduing the world, or the star of the story, but fellow beings living with the world. For the sake of our own selves, we learn to listen to the world, listening through many myths so as not to give one myth the appearance of truth, paying attention to dreams, engaging with image, embracing and criticising our reasoning and 'mythosing', and testing our hypotheses or else all we will hear is ourselves. Withdrawing projections is endless, but it is a step towards reality. Interacting with the world is the only way we can learn anything. We can learn this from science, but expand that science to include all the features of our being, not just the myth of disembodied Reason. Being sceptical about technology's soul and intention, and seeing science as implicated in myth does not mean abandoning scientific practice, because science is still the quickest and best way we have of learning things, and we do not have the luxury of 40,000 or more years to learn the wisdom by which to live. Discovering the guiding myths of science, and of 'non-science', we become more conscious of all the myths we live. That way we become freer to attend to the possibility of new myth, and hence new knowledge, new reasonings (which don't just repeat the old), and new ways to live. In telling each other stories and attending carefully to the world, we can see what happens without using force on other bodies and souls. The answer, then, to the question of re-enchantment is: "Do not worry, the world is always enchanted, the problem is to see it and to listen to it as best we can".