

In this, the third essay on the theme of *Re-enchantment of the World*, author **Pam Stavropoulos** offers an approach that you may find intriguing. She talks about *cultivating receptivity* as a path to re-enchantment. *Cultivating* receptivity! Intriguing! Receptivity as a cultural attainment! That sets my imagination going, how about yours? I am reminded of John Keats's *negative capability*:

I mean, when a man is capable of uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any reaching after fact or reason. In other words, the condition itself is the penetralium (the innermost secret).

Note here that Keats brackets off a section, which interrupts continuity. You will find the "voice" in Pam's essay often "brackets off" thus breaking the continuity of the "official narrative". This literary device itself serves to bring us up sharp, to interrupt the smooth flow of "comprehension" that prevents depth opening up for us. Derrida goes as far as to suggest we turn the brackets around and let the digression become the main text. You may want to try that here, see if you can cultivate receptivity.

Let me know what happens.
John Woodcock Ph.D.

Re-enchantment of the World: is it possible and how? Pam Stavropoulos

Intrigued by this question, and by the circulated responses to it to date, I feel the strengthening of my own nascent reactions. Extension of the submission deadline is a positive portent, as I'd wanted to formulate some sort of response earlier, but 'everyday life' intervened (as it does!) Now the way is cleared for me – unexpectedly, serendipitously.

And that fortuitous combination of circumstance (product of contingencies outside my control) itself seems a kind of re-enchantment; indeed, and on reflection, to suggest one possible definition of what 're-enchantment' might mean. How often are we side-swiped by delay and complication; by the thwarting of our expectation (still intact, despite the ongoing challenges to it!) that things should transpire in the way, and often the order, we would like? Only to find subsequently (when it had seemed 'too late') that something else has opened up or become apparent; something which, if we can just reconfigure our perception, might even have been preferable all along? ('If' being the operative word!)

We live in a culture of competing demands. One is that we plan and (attempt to) control, so that when the fates have something else in store for us (as, again, they often do) we feel cheated and powerless, rather than reminded that our individual agency is but one of the elements that shapes our existence (and not necessarily the most important, as depth psychologists and others remind us!) If we can relax the expectation of how things 'should' be (difficult amid everyday imperatives, even when we 'know' better) in favour of really apprehending what *is*, how different might the quality of our lives be?

Part of the challenge, of course, is that we're simultaneously subject to the 'opposite' advice (life in liberal democracies is nothing if not contradictory). That is to 'go with the flow', to just 'chill' – which may seem to describe the attitude I'm talking about, but which I think is actually something different. 'Chilling' and 'going with the flow' seem to me to have the flavour of passivity; of a kind of wilful *surrender* to circumstance rather than active *engagement* with it. The title of Mark Epstein's wonderful book *Going to Pieces without Falling Apart* (which

describes that elusive - but also attainable! – equipoise between relaxing and dissolving) comes to mind. So, too, does a lovely quote from Lewis Hyde in *Trickster Makes this World* - ‘If only preconception does not block the avenues of sense, accidental finds are all about us’ (1999: 129). ‘If only –’ not in a regretful, pessimistic sense, but in a receptive and whimsical one.

It is not only preconception which blocks our sensory experience, or at least not solely in the sense of habitual attitude. Life being what it is (multivariate, overdetermined) there are any number of reasons for, and sources of, blockage of awareness. Sometimes (and quite apart from, say, major depression, into which few shards of light can penetrate) we are more vulnerable and less receptive to the pageantry of existence, which, in its myriad and ceaseless flow, can threaten to overwhelm us.

I am also very far from contending that whatever the outcomes (for while life is a journey and process, there are still outcomes) they are ‘all good’, to use that fatuous phrase (which, in light of David Finkel’s rendering of Colonel Ralph Kauzlarich in *The Good Soldiers*, can henceforth perhaps only ever be used ironically in any case). Sometimes the bell tolls definitively (Walter Benjamin at the French-Spanish border in 1940; the death of a child anytime, anywhere). But if we can actively cultivate receptivity – and precisely because of what it is subject to, it needs cultivation! - re-enchantment surely awaits us.

It’s a constant balancing act, and sometimes a high-wire one – negotiating the tension (in our culture, in ourselves) between attempting to control and ‘master’ our destiny, and abrogating exactly that attempted control (to ‘let things transpire’; to see/say ‘what then?’)

In the fleeting moments when we achieve this, isn’t it good, and isn’t that re-enchantment?

Pam Stavropoulos

Epstein, Mark *Going to Pieces Without Falling Apart: A Buddhist Perspective on Wholeness* (London: HarperCollins, 1998).

Finkel, David *The Good Soldiers* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2009).

Hyde, Lewis *Trickster Makes this World > Mischief, Myth and Art* (New York: North Point Press, 1999).