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Primitive Experience, Modern Mind

David Sparenberg
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David Sparenberg is the editor of *The Orphic Lute* and author of numerous essays, books and poems.

DWELLERS IN MODERN URBAN-INDUSTRIAL societies have drastically despoiled and depopulated archaic interfacements with alternate or imaginal reality, and erected barriers between ordinary and non-ordinary fields of experience. Two of these barriers or closures, as they may be differently termed, result from the exclusivity of the Promethean will, which constructs a "can do" ideology around its voracity for power, and the predominance of technological efficiency, consequenting a techno-idolatry and a hyper-dependency on self-justifying machines. This latter now supplants participatory reliances on natural habitat and inhabiting spiritual personae; such reliances having evolved mythospheric value systems and a metaphysic of sustainability among mature pre-industrial cultures.

What disincarnate vestiges of primitive holy event remain for the modern urbanite are termed mysticism. And this is generally approached as a theoretic subject, or an imaginary release, experientially reduced to psychological phenomenon, yielding an envelope of curious symbols, hopefully helpful in obtaining insight into identity formation and personality complexes.

However, what we call "mysticism" was regularly, in former and differently structured societies, the veritable skeleton and nervous system of sacred tradition, ritual and ancestral continuity. More, the fruits of intercourse, through ecologically particularized modes of communion with that more extensively personified and accessible alternate, were not symbols of psychology, but "power, grace and blessing".¹

Impoverished by our delimiting extravagance, the symbolization and psychologism of modern *reductionary mysticism* leads to the provision of an interesting conversation piece, exploring in disguise the embarrassment over experience, or, at best, motivates to introspection, with the intention of yet fuller self-disclosures.

Further along the spectrum of human possibilities, traditional experiences of contact with alternate or imaginal reality (interfacements equating to revelations and infusions of shared power, grace and blessing) normally resulted in intensified, incarnate "awe" and a post-experiential orientation back toward the tribe, clan or village; that is, outward, in the direction of the people and their habitat.

Put roundly, the act of numinous or luminous encounter empowered community activities and established the great ordinary as a reality sphere within the configurational ecosophy of the human condition.

To clarify the differences in these two modes of consciousness and possibility,

an unusual and, perhaps, superficially unexpected parallel is remembered. On one hand, the latter day visionary and holy man of the Oglala, Nicholas Black Elk, in early life beheld a vision of six cosmic grandfathers and an ethereal *rainbow* lodge. This lodge was seen as the ideal image of a condition to be physically worked toward, wherein and whereby the ordinary would enter an age of harmony and renewal, bringing cessation to racial hatred, greed and environmental degradation.²

On the other hand, among the labyrinths and myriad wonders of the *Zohar*, a Kabbalistic text composed in Aramaic in 13th century Spain, can be found a passage envisioning the revelation of an uncanny *rainbow*, the brilliance from which will shine over the planet announcing the messianic event, wherein and whereby peace and wisdom will be universally planted.³

On one hand as on the other, the visionary encounter, far from being confined to introspection, exteriorizes as a labor in the world as yet to be performed. And in such exteriorization, where the body is accepted as ecosophic (that is, spiritually and contextually awakened to significant work), resides a difference of inestimable implication between primitive, sacred experience and the theoretical psychologism of the modern mind.

Notes

¹*Ecstasy, Ritual and Alternate Reality*, Felicitas D. Goodman (Indiana University Press, 1988).

²*Black Elk Speaks* as told through John G. Neihardt (University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

³*The Messiah Texts*, Raphael Patai (Wayne State University Press, 1979).

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