

Fear of reality

As I sit down to write, the streets of Sydney are cordoned off to make way for world leaders and their entourages. In the name of national security, international negotiations and world peace Sydney-siders have been walled off from the political process and our best harbour restaurants. Some years ago Melbourne was host city to delegates for the World Economic Forum. The streets were charged with protest as the forum began its deliberations at the Crown Casino. Consider this as an image. Men and women whose task is to manage much of the world's financial dealings; the flow of global capital, the allocation of investment funds, the redistribution of wealth and the restructuring of business and enterprise, the organization of work, wages/salaries and the design of product and production had gathered together in a building designed and dedicated to gambling. On the streets, protesters, many young and bold, and hundreds of Victorian police, many young and bold, faced each other, staring in a kind of mutual defiance. Angry, precisely at what? The Melbourne protesters both inside and outside the casino were claiming, as their cause, the righteousness of 'inevitability'.

Remember Y2K, that high point of global anxiety at the turn of 21st century? Almost a decade later there is some embarrassment as we turn away from the memory but it serves to remind us of the huge unease that has constructed itself imaginatively in the psyche of contemporary western society.

Inevitability has become a necessary process and it takes many forms; globalisation is inevitable, greater prosperity is inevitable, the Islamic brotherhood is inevitable, the emergence of China is inevitable, the loss of jobs and environment is inevitable, a global market place is inevitable, the loss of local traditions is inevitable, the recovery of local traditions is inevitable, political democracy is inevitable, wide spread prosperity is inevitable, poverty is inevitable, a global pandemic is inevitable and an undifferentiated anxiety is inevitable.

Jeffrey Sachs called his 2007 Reith lectures *Bursting at the Seams* because as he says the world may well burst at the seams. He describes unprecedented challenges including global warming, terrorism, extreme poverty and disease, and of course the unmistakable fact that many of us have much more than we need in the way of CD's, DVD's, bathrooms, dishwashers, air conditioners, leg waxes, Vitamin supplements, cruise controls, qualifications, and soft toys.

I live in a part of my city that divides between the haves and the have yachts.

Recently I watched an *SBS Insight* programme on happiness. There was a Buddhist nun, a very reverend Uniting Church minister, professors of happiness, professors of

philosophy, survivors of tragedy, grandparents, an advocate for consumerism and a mixed bag of happy enthusiast. What is compelling us to make such an industry of happiness? Earlier on this year (2007) a number of us possibly went to *The Happiness and its Causes* conference. Almost every weekend newspaper's magazine of late has an article that touches on this anxiety. We can read about the "happiest man in the world", or the problems with adult ADHD, we are told over and over again that there is a spiritual crisis in the west. Islam is on the rise, our faith has been tested and found wanting and despite the great advances in all manner of cultural and material things we are no happier or content with life than were our grandparents. To some we appear to be living through disenchanted days while all the time hungering for intimate communication with an unguarded soul.

Behind this, some say, it would seem is a religious imperative, an assumption that our various social and psychological crisis are at heart religious predicaments. I am not certain whether this is the best description for our times but given that it may be it would be wrong, categorically wrong if academics endorse, or even turn a blind eye at any return to an unreconstructed fundamental religious position as seems to be argued for by Sydney Anglicans, Cardinal Pell's Catholicism, a wide Islamic rhetoric and the broad reach of Pentecostal revivalism.

Jung toyed with the idea of *conflict* between religion and science, hoping I suspect that religion might win out. In the last of his *Zofingia Lectures* he longs for the return of a mystical approach to religion, even if this entails 'the possibility of social and scientific indifference and call[ing] into question the further progress of civilisation' (Jung, 1896-99, par. 290). But on most points of direct confrontation and conflict between religion and science, Jung always recognised that science was likely to prove the victor. 'The imposing arguments of science,' he acknowledges, 'represent the highest degree of intellectual certainty yet achieved by the mind of man.' (Jung, 1957, par. 543). 'My subjective attitude,' he wrote in 1933, 'is that I hold every religious position in high esteem but draw an inexorable dividing line between the content of belief and the requirements of science' (Jung, 1973, p. 125).

And so before one considers how this religious predicament might be attended to, at least in the University (and in particular as to whether what has gone on at UWS in the analytical psychology degree, is a spiritual practice), it is really important that 'we' acknowledge the incredible efforts and great successes of so many over quite a few centuries now. These efforts have fashioned for us the largely successful infrastructures of health, education, democratic politics, social peace, the rule of law and managed economies that we each easily take for granted.

Indeed I think that modern secular thought, most recently developed (but not entirely so) in liberal bourgeois democracies has provided us with a particularly useful tool to deal with certain intractable dilemmas; dilemmas that we continually try and understand, anticipate and adapt to. But still the course of events is so complex they are often beyond our capacity to readily understand. Not just in matters cosmic, the eleven dimensions of nature and counting, but those much closer to our human endeavour; politics, economics, the environment, relationships, society, identity; all we can do is incrementally respond and adapt. And I reiterate that modern secular thought is the best option, although not necessarily the most popular means by which we can attend to and design this incremental adaptation. At the risk of over blowing this, I would contend that since the European Renaissance there hasn't been any significant social reforms initiated by religious institutions save Luther's ultimatum and its impact on individualism. The move towards a humane society has been carried forward by secular interests alone; abolition of slavery, poor reform, penal reform, housing reform, public education, sexual reform, family reform, health reform and so on and this same reforming momentum continues; land-rights, indigenous reconciliations, refugee safety, multicultural agendas, and the so-called political correctness's. Opposition to reform has invariably come from conservative religious lobby groups. This isn't to suggest that men and women from all of the different religious organisations haven't been involved, indeed they have and many at the forefront of these reforms.

I certainly am not apologising for what Noel Pearson calls soft headed left agendas nor do I applaud the culture of coca cola and beer that Nuggett Coombes was so scathing of. But the call by people such as Professor Gary Bouma that we should, in line with strident religiosity, abandon our sophisticated secular institutions, like public universities and I presume therefore academic critiquing debates and hand over our world to a theocracy is intellectually criminal.

I acknowledge without hesitation that madness both big and small is part and parcel of our community's daily affairs. It gives me no pleasure to say, as Carmen Lawrence so elegantly put it that the majority of my fellow citizens were right to oppose the illegal invasion of Iraq, that the war is at a stalemate, thousands of innocent bystanders have died or been seriously injured, bloody suicide bombings remain common enough, to point out that 'we' told you so, isn't comforting (Sydney Morning Herald Sept. 15-16, 2007 p 39).

Nor do I mean here to excuse the excesses of inhumanity that took place across this land as Aboriginal tribes came across wondering Europeans. Still it is important to remind ourselves that along with the dispossession and murder there arrived different art practices, other ways of co-operating, new languages and a greater cultural variance. These qualities were present early on in our modern history. And yes, such qualities can

prove discomfoting when we think of the stolen lands, the stolen generation, the stolen resources. Yet there is something in these qualities that helps me know we are meant for better things. A depth to our presence in this place takes on slowly, and holding on to it, living with and through it as an imaginative state of affairs calls us to engage here and now, with the blood on our hands and our feelings uncertain. Imagination isn't just as etymology would suggest, the faculty of forming images of reality; rather it is a gift that enables us to go beyond reality and to sing reality. Veronica Brady, in a recent ABC radio national broadcast, *The Wisdom Lectures*, speaks of her experience with friends in Southern Spain, of how despite the long and bloody turmoil that is their history, pleasure remains a principle, a matter of principle, in the way they identify as a people living in and with a place. These are a people who *mixed* with the sword, their blood and their spunk.

What is the work here for academics working with analytical psychology?

I don't underestimate that many people who engage in therapy can be depressed and desperate. Fear is real and abuse of all kinds is common enough. But some therapies, like cognitive behaviour modification, and even forms of psychoanalysis/therapy, never leave the simple subjective self. These therapies concentrate only on introspection. In therapy of this type an individual might make up their mind about some aspect of themselves but it doesn't get down into the world of imaginative reality. For this to happen, self-absorption isn't enough. Reality while tied culturally into ideas about rationality and truth is better appreciated psychologically if our imagination is matured and sophisticated. Coming to terms with reality is therefore a process in which to truly know ourselves, to unfold ourselves, we need the extended biographical history of the person and their lived in space – community, society and their cultural stories.

Working with the complexity of the anxieties that accompany our affluence James Hillman suggest we might look to certain *Principles* that hopefully transcend particular cultures, and are not determined from the West, principles that in themselves are poetic and at heart religious. He names them *Justice, Beauty, Destiny* and, I would add *Humour*. They are each recurrent in time and each can be recognized in terms of their presence and by their absence

In keeping with Hillman it is important not to literalise these while it is useful to open each into more extensive stories. Hillman suggests that psychologically these concepts can be known through their absence. When justice is absent, for example, one reacts with anger at its lack. Similarly one recoils from ugliness and too, one can show despair at pointlessness. While a relaxed, amused perspective on our flaws, laughing at our follies gives nourishment to our humanity and in turn an amused beauty enhances the world.

Justice transcends colour and creed, and to live fully, one embraces with necessity the sense that life is mythically encoded and in the main delightful.

At times it does seem easier to know the world through the absence of what should be. In an age and time where almost any 'thing' can be had without having to take heed of the inherent way it may be placed in the cradle-to-grave matrix of existence; we may just be beginning to notice that something is missing from this bounty? Hillman keeps returning to the necessity of an embedded poetics. To come at this poetics intelligently however, it is necessary to recognise the rational and scientific, otherwise we make the same mistake of over literalising and in turn over romanticise.

The central tradition in the western canon since the Greeks, at least the tradition that runs from Aristotle through Aquinas and on to the beginning of the modern period holds the view that the cosmos is intelligible and imbued by spirit. The claim that our modern adventure has de-spiritualized this cosmic nature, disenchanting the world, remains for me an open debate; I don't close off pessimistically while still I contend that there can be no return to a past inhabited with sprites and nymphs: well at least not literally.

This secular cosmopolitan society exists as it does because it is the product of rational scientific humanism. Religions and spiritual practices of all sorts abide contentedly within this system and they have some contribution to make; some people find them reassuring, some seek solace and guidance in their teachings, they often pick up a portion of the mess left behind in the wake of change and they can articulate identity for believers. Yet we cannot hope to revive our spiritual heritage by putting on the robes of an alchemist magician, pretending that we have found an alternative means of salvation. The argument that 'we' are spiritually bereft and depressed as a consequence of life today seems deceitful in the face of a time when we, here in this country at least have never known a greater political peace, never been more healthy, never more educated, more wealthy and in the matter of death more accommodated. We live longer, and when sick, which we rarely are until terminally so, we go to hospital or a nursing home.

The plurality of religious and spiritual philosophies that we easily include in our diverse social order in no way represents a failure of modern consciousness (as Gary Bouma insists in his book *Australia Soul*) because I think, the Australian temper is deeply and comfortably secular. With this in mind the depth psychology poetics, that Hillman suggests, and hopefully what happens at UWS has to be marked by a very local thumb.

The work at the University of Western Sydney has tried to stay relevant to the 'contemporary moments'.

What is the meaning of this 'contemporary moment'? In what myth do we live nowadays? The modernist experience of the last 300 years involves a progressive and partial negation of the past; pulling away human experience from religious metaphysics and shifting myth from the social and collective to the individual. Ginette Paris (Pacifica Graduate Institute) says of this that a 'wonderfully erotic seduction has taken place' and we have so very easily fallen in love with our own individual myths. One gets attached to the myth of *Me* and of course to the symptoms of being an individual. The human mind has a predisposition to renew itself and together with contemporary image making technology we easily invent and construct for ourselves, and then reconstruct, whatever takes our fancy. Of course there are those who caution against this supermarket of endless choice. The individual can easily be fooled and there may well be no choice, that in shifting away from a broad and complex social myth, from the complexity of religious knowing, one is left with the potential of ambivalence.

Postmodernism describes a process mostly constrained within cultural spheres; literature, science, visual art, architecture, fashion, life style, e.commerce, flexible work arrangements and so on. This contemporary geo-political order involves both local and global reorientation and is a phenomenon peculiar to many and various societies; societies not always or necessarily determined as nation states, for example, large global corporations and fund management schemes and as well some NGO's, Green Peace for example. This historical shift is both multifaceted and agonising. Massive shifts began in the 1960's, primarily in Western Europe and the European New World; the USA, Australia etc splitting apart various formal social structures that had characterised European societies. The failure to secure hegemony in Vietnam, and more recently Iraq, the emergence of a global youth culture, a sexual liberation that was both personal and public, a decline in the birth rate, firstly across Western demography's and more recently a global decline, changes in the nature and participation at the workplace, different types of industry, a freeing up of currency and wealth generation, the liberalising of educational standards; all these and more have spread far more widely than most social regimes could have imagined just fifty years ago.

It is not possible for these changes to have spread so quickly and not leave behind a sense of loss, even failure. Even where the changes have been clear and worthwhile the consequence is still confusing. Who could have imagined that Italy would today have one of the lowest birth rates, and highest divorce and a young population unprepared to take up marriage? Just thirty years who would have thought that the gay Mardi Gras would be a defining aesthetic festival for the city of Sydney?

If the psyche is structured poetically, as Hillman argues then the unconscious should work as a text, and if Lucan's argument holds, textuality is never precise, and probably

best read between the lines. And so what can one make of these changes? What is the meaning of the contemporary moment? In what myth do we live nowadays?

I cannot accept that the Copernican and Cartesian scientific revolutions which set off the modern preoccupation with individual freedoms; freedoms that champion and in turn are championed by materialistic societies are devoid of enchantment and romance. These were huge and significant intellectual shifts and the consequent discoveries and technical developments have continued to change the nature of our cosmology. There are plenty who would argue that western scientific cosmology has disenchanted the wider world replacing the deities in nature with programs of systematic development. In this way we may have lost some versions of complex psychological relationships, developed over the many thousands of years between the human soul and the animate earth. But to argue that individual freedom and the accompanying personal and social enrichment that has come to be is had at the price of separation from nature is patently false.

To empathize with Australia, with its history, with the people, with the landscape and biology, it is the modern tradition that provides the most sophisticated means. It is of course too the most honest, almost the only means through which we might observe and participate. Darwin brought our collective attention to the fact that to be alive, or to have lived on this earth means that we share in the continuous way of existence. Central in this is the dynamic of change, the energy and confusion of change, the unpredictability of change. Contrary to what many have held since the Greeks, we are not alienated from, but rather built into the laws of nature; we are quintessentially beings tuned into its laws and qualities. The wish to relate to this grounding, through both understanding and sensual apprehension is our imaginative work. Hence the hold, on our sensibilities of both science and art

It is the secular and humanist fundamentals of modernism that, I think, powerfully present the view that humans can redeem themselves. It offers freedom from the bondage of more determined and dogmatic cultural narratives. The wonderful complexity of being-in-the-world is revealed daily and resolved through our living. Narratives fail us when they cannot provide the creative possibility of interpretative power and scope. By this I mean, the tale of our lives, our own biographical account of being alive, should be able to produce new understandings which we can apply across a wide range of circumstances. Living in Sydney involves me in continually re-assembling my presence here, it's not just about now, or then but more about the contemporary moment, a contingency with time and the simultaneous occurrence of things.

Is the doubt about our contemporary world as being a hospitable and worthwhile place in essence a reaction, a conservative reaction to change that has upset the ancient regime? It is all too easy, intellectually easy to describe the text of the contemporary as wilfully

negligent of our *anima mundi*, from which the gods have apparently withdrawn and so long ago that even our memory of them begins to fade. This predisposition misses the historical fact that all sophisticated cultures maintain the stories of their Gods: ours no less than any. We can see this in almost any movie or television drama, in any of the hundreds of religious/spiritual groups practicing their faiths, in the unprecedented demand for faith based education, in the Green movement and in the self help industry. Not for a moment do I underestimate the ongoing damage that human society imposes upon the earth but so many more of us today live comfortably with the paradox of that bounty and damage, and we can live much more wisely and with compassion than did our ancestors.

Questions, common enough today, that want answers to do with meaningfulness have to be the material that academics involved with analytical psychology engage. When Hillman identifies the soul as being of the earth, in the messy ecologies and not a metaphysical entity tied to the destiny of an individual, he is inviting us to recognise that soulfulness comes forth from the living experience. This living involves us collectively with each thing in the cosmos, living it's own particular beingness.

Archetypal psychology is concerned with the image, how things (phenomenon) appear in the world. There is a particularity to things, particular knowledge is associated with things; ideas, ways of expressing the understanding embodied in a phenomenon. The interconnectedness is apparent, as one becomes more knowledgeable. Knowing about the things of the world pays tribute and respect to our forebears for all their hard work, for the insights that have been constructed into ways of knowing.

It is important to stare intently at the world and the things thereof. To notice the reality of things, how they fit together, how they evolve and change, how they are tied into a complex biological web. Noticing in detail both the scares left as well as the beautiful.

To enjoy life, the psyche requires pleasure, joy, and a fascination with the world. This seems impossible in the face of acute anxiety. It is made even more difficult if the preoccupation of depth psychology is in catering and tailoring its response to this fear about ambiguity. As an academic whose work has been primarily taken up in the field of depth psychology I take as a core idea the necessity to teach the art of not wasting the joy of life. And as well, not turning one's head from reality. I suspect that the next evolution in psychology will be concerned less with pathology, leaving that to neuroscience and will become more like a philosophical training, capable of preparing the person for the voyage in the country of paradox, curiosity, pain and joy all of which make for reality.

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