

Responding to Contemporary Concerns: Anthroposophy and the Media

—by Richard John Fraser Cooper

Over the last century the materialism of civil society has been accompanied by a growing psychological control. Rudolf Steiner identified naïve realism as one of the first hurdles to overcome in the pursuit of thinking. In contemporary culture this means perceiving how the work of the resistant powers is accomplished through the images that surround us. There are two kinds of potential 'imaginative' vision in the world today: one, an atavistic spiritual materialism; and the other, a new clairvoyance developed through the relationship to Christ in the etheric.ⁱ These two forms of vision are encouraged or inhibited to the degree we engage active thought. The shaping of 'public opinion' in the service of large corporations began in America of the 1920s as a form of consultancy to industry; it has since expanded immeasurably. Currently comprising advertising, entertainment and social media, in 2013, revenue for each of the top five media companies was over ten billion dollars; while the top hundred, spanning the globe, consistently record revenues over one billion. What we are presented with—as much if not more than in Rudolf Steiner's time—is the need to be aware of the esoteric complexity of modern society.

The Regression of Society

CAESAR

I should have known no less.

It hath been taught us from the primal state

That he which is was wished until he were,

And the ebb'd man, ne'er loved till ne'er worth love,

Comes deared by being lacked. This common body,

Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream,

Goes to and back, lackeying the varying tide

To rot itself with motion.

Shakespeare 'Antony and Cleopatra' Act 1, Scene 4, Page 2ⁱⁱ

Before we undertake a spiritual path we are unaware of the illusory nature of the sensual world. An imaginative appreciation of reality is not felt necessary, and so through passivity, perception slowly degenerates—the consciousness of man sinks further into matter. The fallen ethers that make up this 'sub-nature' are from the spiritual perspective, the electrical and electromagnetic influences of the inner earth. In modern society they are the same forces, beings, and images that express themselves in the culture and communication technologies that surround us. Based on the preserved influence of the Old Moon in the inner earth, the goal of the Luciferic and Ahrimanic beings is to use the elusive nature of visionary experience to facilitate a regression to a former state like that of Old Moon, when humanity could be corralled in group tasks and influenced subliminally. The Eighth Sphere, existing around the present moon, is an attempted manufacture by these beings of an artificial 'alternative' reality. Man can be deceived when he is steered away from mental wakefulness and clarity. Under the influence of the Eighth Sphere man becomes deluded: fantasies of tasks, missions, and realities are developed in contradistinction to spiritual understanding gained through healthy ego development.ⁱⁱⁱ This can be seen reflected in the world around us: in the content, stories, and messages that make up the picture worlds of popular consumer culture. Psychologically, from 'subjective' reality to the outer experience of culture and society, contemporary man is tempted to let go of responsibility—on the one hand; and at the same time challenged to learn to 'read' the world imaginatively.

Awakening to Challenges

How does the preceding inform our understanding of our place in society? Both the Ahrimanic and Luciferic impulses, when unconscious, alienate us from humanity. Potentially, as the inner life develops, Lucifer would illuminate the thinking and feeling and Ahriman would facilitate the exact perception of spiritual realities. Instead, when their influence remains unconscious, the groundwork is laid for a substitute reality—bound to the physical—that can only erode consciousness of the spiritual connection to the ego. Developing an imaginative view is helpful. George Lucaks used the metaphor 'Grand Hotel Abyss' to describe the attitude of the intelligentsia at the beginning of the 1960s:

'A considerable part of the leading German intelligentsia, including Adorno, have taken up residence in the 'Grand Hotel Abyss' which I described in connection with my critique of Schopenhauer as 'a beautiful hotel, equipped with every comfort, on the edge of an abyss, of nothingness, of absurdity. And the daily contemplation of the abyss between excellent meals or artistic entertainments, can only heighten the enjoyment of the subtle comforts offered.'

Georg Lucaks 1962 'Preface to the Theory of the Novel'^{iv}

Notwithstanding awareness of the dangers highlighted above: the unconscious will is illusory. The inner earth—sub-nature—mirrors my true intentions: it robs me of that which I will in future develop in collaboration with the spiritual world. We can pursue our ambitions in the world; however, when we fail to discriminate the motivations behind our deeds, freedom and spiritual activity ever eludes us. The consequences of such a worldview extend beyond the confines of intellectual thought to all strata of society. Theodore Dalrymple, retired psychiatrist, here describes his experience of work with criminals in 2001;

'I have come to see the uncovering of this dishonesty and self-deception (justification for illegal deeds) as an essential part of my work. When a man tells me, in explanation of his anti-social behaviour, that he is easily led, I ask him whether he was ever easily led to study mathematics or the subjunctives of French verbs. Invariably the man begins to laugh: the absurdity of what he has said is immediately apparent to him. Indeed, he will acknowledge that he knew how absurd it was all along, but that certain advantages, both psychological and social, accrued by keeping the pretense up.'

Theodore Dalrymple 2001 *Life at the Bottom* Preface ix^v

Turning to society and culture, where can we see more artistic expression of these phenomena? Perhaps most explicitly, example can be seen in Hollywood, which is like a microcosm for dynamics in society at large. Ahriman works together with Lucifer. In terms of content, science fiction films and computer games present exotic images of technological warfare and transhumanism—the melding of man with machine or the striving after a mechanised utopia. When it comes to image, a star is dependant on their fan base to want to watch them and their studio to promote their work. An efficient system of myth making and self-reference, these images and dynamics mirror the lives, albeit less glamorously, of the audience, the public. The lower desires and drives: procreation, survival, 'fight or flight', territorial animal instinct, are the means by which Ahrimanic beings 'pull down' that which is Luciferic. Likewise, modern man unconsciously consumes the images of a technocratic utopia where his humanity is put into question: violence and stylised eroticism in the advertising industry, entertainment, and often the arts is commonplace. These dynamics have wider application than purely entertainment and illusion: underpinning the corporate world, 'public relations' channels public opinion to popular and political theme. In this respect, the 'group' within society is encouraged to identify the 'enemy' of its own ideology: assigned to 'Liberalism, Globalism, or simply 'the system' etc. The media would argue that what they broadcast is essentially the response to market dynamics. We would beg to differ; because from a higher perspective the public do not normally have all the esoteric facts to hand.

There are three levels of Luciferic beings that didn't complete their transition to the angel hierarchy on Old Moon. They now work through aspects of the human being and seek to continue their development within and through man. These classes correspond to the future planetary stages of cosmic development—reflecting mankind's developmental stages: Spirit Self, Life Spirit and Spirit Man: (Jupiter, Venus and Vulcan). In summary, we can identify three psychological influences that come from these classes of Luciferic angels: narcissism; visionary group identification; and spiritual materialism. When we look at the individual within society we can observe where the work of these beings lies. Firstly, when thinking is neglected, narcissism exerts itself in the personality: self-centredness becomes self-obsession. Secondly, when inspiration in life is not achieved, one seeks to actualise the personality in social interaction through identification with the group:—the desire for group 'belonging' takes on a utopian feel. Thirdly, when intuition is neglected, instinctive thought becomes spiritual materialism: as images and world view built through atavistic thinking—expressing itself in free associative thinking: the linking of sentiment, cliché, and subjective desire. The contrast of the Luciferic angel to the Christian couldn't be more striking. In place of a subordinate and unconscious relationship, the individual angel—as karmic and cosmic guide—leads the way to awareness of the planets, and further to experience of the starry world of the

constellations. The moon itself acts as a counterweight to the illusory spectral quality of the Eighth Sphere, and purity of intent allows the spiritual seeker to progress beyond the fortress of the moon.

Imagining History

“For just as demons can only possess those whom they have treacherously deceived, so also the rulers—certainly not honest men, but men like the demons—taught the people as true in matters of religion what they knew to be false. In this way they bound them with tighter chains, as it were, to the civil society, in order that they might possess men similarly enthralled. Now what weak and untaught person could at the same time escape the deception of the rulers and that of the demons?”

Augustine of Hippo ‘The City of God’ Book 4, p.123 Loeb Edition 1963^{vi}

The spiritual view of history identifies the resistant powers of Lucifer and Ahriman as instrumental in the development of human psychology and thinking. In the context of post-World War Two Europe, it is difficult to speak of political change because initiative for new socio-political systems is rendered quickly obsolete. When we try to think through the make-up of the world materialistically, the tendency to polemic limits our ability to study the specific spiritual elements of historical events. While the focus on political affiliation is misleading, in a more subtle way it completely obscures the facts. Ironically, corporatism and globalism have become so entrenched on the world stage that the exposure of an elite, managing historical developments, has become a largely repetitive undertaking. The overarching system we are faced with is an economic imperialism. Has the identification of this dominance inhibited the rhetoric and turned people toward alternative solutions? In many cases the description of hidden groups and lodges crosses over to popular fiction: the subject matter of Hollywood storyline—it blurs the line to the real life think-tanks and vested interests. The ‘anti-establishment’ view, significant in support for Donald Trump in last year’s US elections, in Brexit, and France, has become a powerful political force. However, anti-establishment sentiment is not, and will not be the source of new thinking. A semi-conscious desire for the truth creates a sizeable and mobilized group of voters, but the question as to whether such populism can offer truly workable political alternatives is another matter. Primarily, the boundary between politics and public relations has been eroded, and as a consequence, any movement for social three-folding and sustainable socio-political reform has to be acutely aware of the mass appeal of superficial thinking.

In contradistinction, there are a number of thinkers in the course of the last century to present, who have developed thought and perspective to contemporary concerns. France saw a wealth of philosophers and cultural analysts having a stimulating effect on cultural and political commentary. Jacques Derrida’s (1930-2004) close ‘emphatic’ reading of the text, and identification of western culture’s hermeneutic Egyptian heritage is a potential source of enlightenment of the Fifth-Post-Atlantean epoch’s relation to the third: the Egyptian; as well as an important contribution to awareness of the process of thought in analysis of historical and philosophical texts. Gilles Deleuze’s (1925-1995) analysis of cinema and exposition of ‘the image of thought’—likewise, presents an insightful phenomenology of the observation of philosophical thought. Giorgio Agamben, in 2001, described a ‘Coming community’: an attempt to formulate and provide an imagination of an emergent, future-oriented social system. Further developed from Cybernetics, Richard Bandler and John Grinder through NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming) have developed a system of meditative thought, meta-thought, and framing, that has had a significant influence in many professional trainings in contemporary life, most notably the National Health Service in the UK. Ken Wilber’s synthesis of spiritual streams has a considerable following and makes valuable contributions to new visions of society and thought. When it comes to numerous New Age spiritual movements, the most varied research takes place into reincarnation, astral travel and dream: core anthroposophical themes that were some of Rudolf Steiner’s most urgent concerns. What is socially and culturally possible in the relationship between intellectual thought and political action?

New beginnings

The Fifth-Post-Atlantean epoch is the mirror of the third, the Egyptian. In the middle we have the fourth, the ‘turning point of time’ when Christ was crucified on Golgotha. Either side of the Greek epoch, we have the Egyptian cultural age: the descent into physical matter out of the perception of eternity; and the fifth, our own, in which mankind ascends from the physical. The pyramid, pharaoh and hieroglyph are seen reflected in our hierarchic-corporate system within a technological environment. Esoteric control of the society is achieved through manufacture of the imagery under which the culture lives. How does man find his relation to Christ in the etheric in the modern time? Within the dominant ideologies of the culture, we can learn to read in an anthroposophical sense about how the resistant powers work in the world. The spectre of Marxism hung over Europe of the early twentieth century. The task now, is to recognise how this impulse has changed through the course of the century. The resentment of the masses living under oppressive regimes such as the Tsars

of Russia or the industrial economies of the West had previously led to the desire to redress the inequalities of human society. Yet the spectre of Marx has transformed since the advent of the post 1945 'New Age'. Since the failure of the communist experiments the world over, globalism has raised a new phantasm for the masses: expressing itself as the addiction to subjective experience—to self—to illusory entertainment. We are called to awaken to our historical vantage point: The Berlin wall fell in 1989, to be closely followed by the new spectre of terrorism around the iconic image of the two towers in New York 2001, and the repeated financial crises, post 2008. Yet, time will not of its own accord clarify how we interpret these events or provide their solution, for the intellect is increasingly earth-bound. In consolation, understanding grows through seeking to fathom historical and cultural realities. One hundred years after Rudolf Steiner's 1917 exposition of social three-folding, the question is: Can a new esoteric movement develop an imagination strong enough to unite the disillusioned?

I originally graduated in Historical Studies at Portsmouth University in the UK in 1996, followed by Psychodynamic Therapeutic Childcare at Caldecott Community – a residential home for children in the UK, in 2000. I went on to study Storytelling and Poetry at Emerson College UK in 2002, before moving to Switzerland, where I studied anthroposophy at the Goetheanum, and briefly eurhythmics at the Zucconi School in 2002. Between 2004 and 2010, myself and a group of anthroposophically inspired thespians toured with a puppetry production of Twelfth Night by Shakespeare in German. I have, since 2004, taught English to adults in Basel; and graduated in Fine Art from the Neukunsthochschule Basel in 2012.

ⁱ Sergei O Prokofiev **The East in the Light of the West** Temple lodge First Edition 1993. Includes: The Luciferic temptation of the premature development of the higher principles: Spirit Self; Life Spirit; Spirit Man; Christ in the Etheric; atavistic thought, and related esoteric and political themes— with reference to, and quotation from Rudolf Steiner.

ⁱⁱ **Samuel Coleridge Taylor**: "Of all Shakespeare's historical plays, Antony and Cleopatra is by far the most wonderful. There is not one in which he has followed history so minutely, and yet there are few in which he impresses the notion of angelic strength so much;—perhaps none in which he impresses it more strongly. This is greatly owing to the manner in which the fiery force is sustained throughout, and to the numerous momentary flashes of nature counteracting the historic abstraction."—Taken from: **Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher**, by Samuel Coleridge Taylor 1811-1819.

ⁱⁱⁱ For further on the Eighth Sphere see Rudolf Steiner **The Occult Movement in the Nineteenth Century GA 254 1915**

^{iv} **Georg Lucaks** 1885-1971:—Hungarian Marxist philosopher, literary historian and critic.

^v Theodore Dalrymple **Life at the Bottom: The worldview that makes the underclass**. 2001 Ivan R Dee Chicago.

^{vi} **Augustinus of Hippo (354-430)** In his writings can be found many pretexts to the karma of the present time: His defence of Christianity against the pagans; his description of the decadence of the Roman Empire in its decline; and his particular identification of the corrupting influence of the 'stage plays' on the morality of the masses; bear witness to a city state we have yet to consciously transform.