

AS ABOVE SO BELOW

by John Champion

The ancients saw the world in terms of a cosmic architecture that connected the world above and the world below through the all encompassing world tree--growing at the great cross formed by the precession of the equinoxes and the solstices. On the network of its limbs--on its form--our content could hang and join everything in a mythopoeic way uniting all the fields of forces of life in a common story. This cosmogonic architecture was often expressed simply through the ancient precept "As Above So Below."

Ancients tended to see "The Below" as something that embodies the actual current human state of being and culture--the unvarnished way we behave, individually and collectively. In contra-distinction, the idea of "The Above" was considered in a couple of dimensions. Sometimes it was presented as a real state (distinct and other, like heaven) from our current human culture--but also something truer and better--so that those in "The Below" might well seek to emulate it and try to move closer towards its truer being. Likewise, "The Above" was also seen as a projection of hope from the better angels of our nature for a better future--something to aspire to as we mature and evolve.

From gathering to agricultural to urban and technological societies, over time, the mythic forms of this broad concept likewise changed. Animistic nature societies gave way to more collective and uroboric societies of female divinities. (The snake's tail in its mouth reflected a sense of the continuum of life and death observed in women who embodies the cycle of life and death,

giving birth to everything that also dies.) These ideas were also replaced by more hierarchical patriarchal gods--reflecting increased complexity and division of labor and property.

Now we pine for a better connection with others, with the ancient link with nature, or with the feminine principle--something to rescue us from the alienated performance of our technological conditions.

But philosophy, Science, and art have not stood still and some of what they have tried to say can provide new and relevant ways for understanding--"As Above So Below"--i.e. who we are, what is our relation to others, and where are we going...in a way that speaks to conditions that match our understandings.

The philosopher Whitehead posited a unified universe that shaped us and that in our individual passing we go back to change the universe. He saw this process as proof of a connected and creative universe.

The microbiologist Margulis helped us to understand that we are not discrete entities but that we co-evolve with trillions of microbial forms (symbionts--something that we are) that are necessary for every living process to function. She also provided the intellectual underpinnings for the concept that the entire earth (GAIA) was a complex living form. In short, "The Below and The Above" are intra-connected and make up the whole of another functioning system.

In physics, the quantum theorist Bohm suggested that the universe itself was non-local, intra-linked everywhere, and provided an order of wholeness (like a hologram) to everything that appears to

be fragmented. He argued that the universe presents an implicate order of wholeness. Its explicate parts emerged from the whole--not the other way around, but the whole will creatively be changed by the apparent parts that emerged from it.

Artists too work on this great project--guided by these--but whose discoveries must be expressed from a place of uncertainty, a place of negative capability. The artist works to make ideas something tangible to hang on the living architecture of the universe as we have come to see it, something that feels what it knows as it learns to know it. This unsure place of inhabitation--where the artist resides--holds the great memory theater that speaks through the unspecialized questioning itself--an art that is both the petitioner and the oracle. Something that reflects the inside and the outside, the general and the particular at the same time.

All of us have our paths to enlarge and make sense of the path. Everyone is sympoetically involved and collaborating in the great work.

In short, together we are making the ancient phrase, "As Above So Below" live again in a new way. This may not look like the transcendental projection of the past, but more of an imminent universe of co-evolving and co-extensive forms of nested sets making one. We have just begun.