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Moorish Weather Report

Hakim Bey

October 20, 2003

Then said the weather god to the queen goddess: ‘we must act at once! ‘we shall perish of hunger!’”

“The Hittite Myth of Telpinu” (“The Disappearing God Type’q, in TH. Gaster, Thespis (1950), p. 303

”...Apollonius replies like a pure sophister: ‘And must I think then’ – saith he – ‘that the world is a living thing?’ Saith Jarcas: ‘Yea, verily, if you reason rightly; for it giveth life to all things.’” – Thomas Vaughan, The Fraternity of the Rosy Cross (1652)

If the Earth is a living being, what constitutes her skin? The hermetic “Natural philosophers” elaborated the Hesiodic cosmogony whereby Chaos, Eros, Earth, and Old Night, make up the original pantheon of becoming. The hermeticists understood that we live and walk on the pelt of an animate body — just as Chinese mythographers called humans the fleas or lice on the body of the cosmogonic chaos-figure, Pan Ku. We are Earth’s symbiotes — or parasites — or (Allah forbid) her germs.

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The old Hermeticists also seemed to believe that atmosphere pervaded the entire universe if they envisioned flights to the moon or stars, for example, they never imagined the need for “spacesuits” to protect them against a Vacuum. Air was everywhere. Cyrano de Bergerac dreamed of a way to reach the moon by attaching to his body many sealed crystal vials of dew, which was believed to fall from and return to the moon. Unable to escape from the vessels, the dew would lift Cyrano on rays of lunar attraction. Thus weather itself was — at the very least — sublunar in scope.

Meteorological phenomena or sky-events, from rain to clouds to comets, were not seen as parts of Earth’s body, but rather as evidence that the universe itself is also alive. Thus every culture perceives a mating of Earth and Sky — an erotic reciprocity with the universe — which fecundates the planet. Weather spirits or deities belong to that sphere which is precisely not the Earth Sky or “heaven”, which includes what we call “space” — the aether which fills the universe and is also alive — expresses its sexual relation with Earth in the form of weather. For the early agriculturalists weather is the sperm of the spirits. One of the signs of this meteorological Eros is the mushroom which (as John Allegro pointed out) has no seed but is planted direct from heaven by lightning bolts -an almost universal belief.

Charles Fourier described the Aurora Borealis as the flickering remnant of a once-great “aromal ray” whereby Earth in former times held sexual congress with other planets and stars. Unfortunately due to the malign influence of Civilization, which has degraded even meteorological phenomena, the “Northern Crown” no longer serves its proper function. If we could overcome Civilization and establish social harmony, we’d see the Boreal Crown shoot forth a coherent laser-like 1000-hued ray of pure aroma, or stellar jizm, and simultaneously we would receive similar rays projected at us from other planets, like sunbeams but even more concentrated and fruitful.

Thus from the Stone age up to our great “demi-messiah” Fourier, the adepts have seen weather as outside the earth. No matter what “science” tells us, this viewpoint will remain valid to the extent that weather, as a sensuous event, really does come to us from “outside”. Looked at this way, the skin of Earth is her dirt-surface, her water-surface, and her stable biota such as plants (her “hair”, etc.). The motile biota constitute an in-between zone or ambiguous third term between Earth and Sky-Humans, the upright pivots of this intermediate realm, are precisely the mediators between Earth and the weather, controlling rain by sacrifice or dance, and interpreting the falling stars. The Etruscans catalogued eleven varieties of lightning as auguries; — weather has meaning, but the meaning is vaporous and evanescent as weather itself. The Taoists saw pictographic characters written in the clouds — but for the most part only spirits could read them Even in modern meteorology the weather retains an uncanny ability to express itself in mysterious glyphs which seem to hover on the edge of meaning, like the Lorentz “Butterfly Attractor” which describes the ultimate unpredictability of weather in the form of a mathematic “writing” in the shape of a butterfly. In some way, weather always appears to us as an “Other”.

However, science no longer believes that dew rises to the Moon and falls again with moonbeams. Earth is surrounded by “hard vacuum” (a nice paradox) which may be virtually universal. We’ve seen photographs of the Earth which seem to recreate the visions of shamans in flight, and we have noticed that weather is a very local phenomenon. At first it might seem that the weather (clouds, blue sky, etc.) makes up Earth’s cloak, a kind of close-fitting hallucinatory opalescent kinetic garment of atmosphere and moisture. But on further contemplation a more accurate metaphor occurs: — weather is not the cape but the skin— the peau sensible — of the living Earth.

None of us can escape this new world view. Even though as individuals we continue to experience weather coming to us from

Outside, we must now superimpose on this symbolism another and perhaps complementary symbolic structure.

In this second view, we humans are no longer precisely the ambiguous pivots between Earth and Sky. Our relation with Earth has become much more intimate. We are inside her skin. We are part of the Weather itself, her kinetic flesh, her kaleidoscopic nudity. Now we ourselves seem somehow much more permeable, such that clouds and blue sky, rain and lightning, might well move in us and through us, as much parts of our skin and organs and in turn are parts of the skin organs bones of Earth. We are ourselves meteorological events, not unlike rain or falling stars.

Looking at weather from this point of view as well as from the traditional point of view should help us to overcome the rather exclusive duality of “earth and heaven” which became so exaggerated in the agriculturalist religions (see note 1). The calendar is the first ideology, an attempt to reconcile the messy organic year of the seasons with the crystalline precise year of the stellar sky; and thus it is the first attempt to regulate “the world” (human society) on the basis of an abstract idea. Those who claim to “control” (i.e. know) the calendar, and can predict sky-events, can also control the fecundating activity of the sky, its spermatic fertility. Eventually the masters of the calendar can become more stellar (less organic and messy) even in their own relation to the Earth. They can begin to control (i.e. predict) the weather and thus to control the Earth’s fecundity. They can invent agriculture (see note 2).

The violence to the earth which this invention demands creates the sensation of an immense imbalance, a final break with the original “order of intimacy” (as Bataille calls it) of the old Gathering way of life, the way of humanity before tool-making and hence prior to symbolic and abstract systematization. Religion per se now comes into being to restore this imbalance through yet more cruelty (human sacrifice, cannibalism, etc.). The old duality between Earth and Sky gradually deepens into dualism, the Gnostic hatred for the organic, the nostalgia for pure stellar perfection (and eventually

-and Earth buried in concrete like a corpse. Medieval peasants angered over calendrical “reform” rioted and demanded “Give us back the lost eleven days!” We however must demand Give us back the entire lost year. In this reading of the almanac, in which both the year of order and the year of chaos will receive their due honor, we shall have to give up certain lingering manichaeic attitudes about the weather. Television weather shows — those poverty-stricken parodies of the almanac — assure us that the weather is “good” or “bad”. “Weathermen”, washed-out ghosts of once-great priests of Stonehenge and Tenochtitlan, smirk or grimace to give us our cue. “Accu-weather” is treated like a commodity; “climate control” and weather-management are posited as high values. Nature in wilder moods now appears only as “emergency”, and is measured in millions of dollars of damage ... ; no longer seen as portent of the deaths of kings. But our calendar will be glad to hear the winds howl And the wolves come back, just as glad as it is to see the sky blue and wildflowers bloom in the ditch. Our almanac will be based on that old zen saw, “Every day is a fine day.”

At midnight a low mist hangs in the trees on the hillside above the lake, lit from above by the Moon, making our suburban maples into a Grimm Bros. forest — in the Samhain season — in the air of the Real World our almanac advises us to live like the weather. Rain or shine — embrace the skin of Earth.

supra- -stellar disembodiment), pure spirit — which from Earth’s perspective is nothing but death (see note 3).

Now our new understanding of weather as Earth’s skin might in a sense help to repair the lost order of intimacy which eroded so drastically with the invention of the calendar. In our new view of things, Earth and Sky (the weather-sky, not the stellar sky) are really parts of one and the same living being, rather than opposing principles. We understand weather as a form of chaos (if such an expression makes any sense) which relates itself intimately with the ordered chaos or “Miraculous” negentropy of life itself. Weather and biosphere are now seen as two different densities of the same substance — the Hesiodic kaos. The distinction between a human being (or a mushroom) and a lightning bolt no longer seems so clear — or so important.

For us then the problem which presents itself is not the deconstruction and disappearance of the calendrical ideology, but rather the reconstruction and re-appearance of a more primordial pre-calendrical epistemology. Day and night, summer and winter, earth and the stars are no longer to be seen as making up any categorical dualism’s, but rather as constituting a spectrum of dyadic energies (not too different from Taoist yin-yang five-elements theory). This would not involve a total return to some hypothetical Pleistocene pre-calendrical non-system based on pure spontaneity, but rather the synthesis of our new “chaos” understanding with ALL the old lunar, solar, and magical calendars.

Obviously we can’t lose or dump the agricultural/stellar calendar even if we wanted to. It has become part of our means of experiencing time and space; and on some level we are all still agriculturalists -rebellious peasants! (“Tierra y Libertad! ”). What we want is to supplement this Farmer’s Almanac with our Gatherer’s anti-calendar, to superimpose the two, and to arrive at new (yet somehow primordial) ways of moving through space and time.

Our anti-calendar, which spontaneously experiences each moment as new and agrees with the Sufis that “there is no repetition

in theophany”, can be compared to the dreamtime of primordial Chaos; while the agricultural calendar can be compared with the mythic figures who exemplify Order and who are, in fact, the calendrical deities. For a long time now the chaos-calendar has been suppressed, and the 11 agricultural“ epistemology of Order has been elevated to the status of an ontology or a metaphysics. The year of Order — in which theophany does repeat itself 365 times a year — has tyrannized our perception of time for a Long time, about 6000 years in fact a “long duration” indeed — though only a flyspeck on the whole time of human awareness. Finally (with the “Death of God”) Earth herself can at last be declared inert, non-organic — in fact, “dead” — and this pronouncement has provided agricultural/ industrial Civilization with its terminal excuse to “rape our mother the Earth” and pollute her atmospheric skin with our antibiotic exhalations.

Ironically the agricultural calendar itself is now forgotten, buried under the debris of thousands of later ideologies, despised as peasant superstition, lost in a meaningless past (except for a few spasms of commodity fetishism like Christmas or Halloween) — every day the same, Work or Leisure, with never a moment of true festival. And now we see that even the agricultural calendar, for all its cruelty, had great merit, compared with the soulless and mechanical year of Late Capitalism. The Old Farmers and old Moors preserved and transmitted a powerful poetics in their almanacs. Why, the almanac is a veritable occult treatise, a coding of all the wisdom of Ur and Memphis, a Hamlet’s Mill or dream-machine for the production of mythopoesis. Above all the almanac represents a religion of festivals, a pattern of points of superabundance in which the rich moments of the year are made sacred by acts of generosity and excess. No, we can’t give up the calendar; in fact we want to save it. But to do so we must surrender the calendar as categorical imperative; — we must admit that the “calendar of chaos” is yet older and more direct, and at the same time far newer and more precise. In short, we want a

synthesis or synergetic cross fertilization of the calendars of chaos and order.

The agricultural calendar maintains a system of gender duality and inequality, as well as class duality and inequality. It presents us with a dialectic of surplus and scarcity, both of sexuality and of goods (see note 4). By contrast the calendar of chaos, which characterizes a pre-agricultural and even a pre- hunting economy, offers far less scope for such categorization and stratification. It appears to be based on spontaneity and excess. It lies far closer to the “order of intimacy” which in fact is not an order at all but a chaos, a cornucopious outpouring of continual creation — “new every day on the potter’s Wheel of heaven” (Chuang Tzu).

The original perception of Earth as a living being includes a recognition of her generosity an outpouring which links space (which is full of good things) and time (which does not withhold those good things) to human consciousness in the “order of intimacy”. The invention of the calendar signals a growing mistrust of space/time, which must now be influenced and directed by a human consciousness that is separate and even alienated from Nature’s intimacy and spontaneity. However, the calendar has not yet “killed” Earth nor has it made a metaphysical principle out of “Capital”. It still reveres Earth and sacrilizes space/time. One may speak here of a “peasants” utopia — exemplified in so many Chinese myths and social movements — in which agriculture has not yet disrupted the natural harmonies nor given rise to inequality and injustice. Whatever the historical authenticity of this “stage of development”, it remains with us as an ideal and even as an ideology (as in Mexican anarchism, for example, or “Jeffersonian” agrarian democracy). Once again, for us it is not a matter of any “return TO the Stone Age” (whether Paleo- or Neolithic) but rather a return OF the stone age”. All the magical calendars are coming back — the whole palimpsest has been illuminated and become legible to us. Why? Because under Capitalism the calendar itself has been replaced — by schedules of production and consumption