

or with grand plans to defeat them, then we simply maintain the gulf between them and us. We become more entrenched in our ways, and they have more work to do. An alternative is to listen attentively to their disturbing messages without romanticizing them or naively turning blind to their ugliness.

William Morris had a similar thought. "I think myself that no rose-water will cure us: disaster and misfortune of all kinds, I think, will be the only things that will breed a remedy." Many today are turning to "rose-water" as a way of dealing with the increasing ugliness of modern life. I fervently hope that my suggestion of enchantment will not be mistaken for rose-water; for though it is a romantic notion, it is not a superficial one. It requires courage, intelligence, and daring, as well as the willingness to appear foolish, eccentric, and out of step in the eyes of the modern world.

The shocking, disturbing, and yet fascinating paradoxes in *graffiti*—art and destruction, beauty and ugliness, form and effacement, love and hate—invite us to imagine a world less divided, a world of honesty and simplicity in which every person has a chance to live a human life and in which we will have restored order, beauty, and grace because we are in love with the things of the world.

## The Divination of Certainty

THE MODERN way of making life decisions is to trust the intellect—make thorough and practical investigations and then "make up your mind" quickly and firmly. You might consult experts or someone experienced in whatever it is you're deciding, and then weigh the pros and cons. Indecisiveness is considered a serious fault. The problem is that more than the mind is involved in every decision, even the most ordinary, and the other considerations—emotions, values, thoughts, vision, influences, passion—often stand in the way of clear, logical analysis and conclusion.

This is another area where I feel out of step with my times, because it often takes me a long time to arrive at a decision, and sometimes, especially in the most serious matters, circumstances in the world force me into a choice. I have the classic Libran ability to see fully the merits of both sides of an argument, and I can remain blissfully immobile before a display of options until one by one they rot, leaving no choice for me but the one remaining.

My innate distaste for logical, quick decision making has led me to take careful note of my intuitions and to trust them, and I have found that this kind of guidance feels more interior, brings up a wealth of imagination and memory, and keeps me closer to the area of life where the choice lies. At the same time, the decision-making process is slower, and its particulars are difficult to spell out.

### Contemplative Decision Making

The word "intuition" comes from the Latin *intus*, meaning to go in, contemplate, or protect. When we are in an intuitive state, we look

carefully at what is going on and gain the kind of knowledge that doesn't arise from logic. When I stand gazing at the options before me, I'm contemplating, starting up my intuitive engines, hopeful that they will lead to an eventual decision.

In our culture, we relieve the anxiety of our decision making by building up layers of reasons, explanations, tight syllogistic sequences of logic, and rationalizations. We believe that our decisions have to be correct, or we will have been failures. Some people go to therapy to gather reasons why they should make a particular decision, or to assure themselves about past choices. They grade themselves on how effective their choices prove to be, and they carry considerable guilt when their choices turn out to be the wrong ones.

This disenchanting way of getting along in life appears sophisticated and mature, but it is full of anxiety. An alternative might be to leave behind the illusion of maturity and adopt a more naive posture, the "beginner's mind" of Zen, and make choices in an atmosphere of unknowing, from a deeper place in the imagination, which has its own rules.

At one time, and even today in some cultures, people faced with tough decisions consulted astrologers or psychics. They could receive guidance from diviners, who read the sound of thunder, the entrails of animals, or the flights of birds for meaning and insight. I had an aunt who enjoyed reading tea leaves left in her cup, until one day she proclaimed that a stranger would come to the house and, within minutes, an unfamiliar man knocked at the door. She was so shocked and, I think, in her fervent Christianity so startled by the effectiveness of her "pagan" pastime, that she never read another tea cup in her life.

The technology of intuition, practiced all over the world in myriad ways, is known as divination, a quest for information in which the diviner or seeker turns to a ritual or image on which to meditate and then finds the answer to a question. The ingredients of divination usually include a rite that may appear magical, the presentation of material for reflection, and possibly a conclusion about what to do or how to think. The ritual—its ceremony and its objects—may be simple, like my aunt's teacups. The material to be read may also be simple—the tea leaves. Finally, there may or may not be an

interpretation offered (my aunt concluded that a stranger would knock).

I'm more interested in applying the fundamentals of divination to everyday life, softening some of their esoteric and exotic elements, than in practicing traditional divination, although many old systems are still valid and practical. Learning from the traditions, I try to read the sudden appearance of a bird, the distant roll of thunder, or an unexpected wind. More important, I use these traditional forms as a way of educating myself in intuition, so I can rely on it more and more in daily life and thereby follow the rudiment I get from Rainer Maria Rilke—live from a deeper place.

### *Release from the Known and Familiar*

Jung is widely known for his theory of synchronicity—taking note of events that seem connected in time but not by cause and effect—which is closely related to divination and is rooted, as I read him, in his general appreciation for "primitive" thinking. In an essay on "archaic man," he makes the comment: "whims of chance seem to him a far more important factor in the happenings of the world than regularity and conformity to law." He goes on to talk about his days as a doctor in an asylum: "An old professor of psychiatry always used to say of a particularly rare clinical case: 'this case is absolutely unique—tomorrow we shall have another just like it.'" Jung comments that this kind of joke was common in the hospital and it reminded him that in an older age, people paid close attention to the singular and unusual.

In our day, of course, we don't trust the single case, or even a duplication, but trust only infinitely repeatable events. In almost every field a student has to learn how to do statistical analysis, because we rely more on repetition than on rarity. This anxiety about unique experience is another factor that makes us shy of divination, because divination doesn't depend on regularity and conformity to law. Just the opposite, it seeks out unique signs that have to be read as unique. When divination is carried out properly, you can't rely on a dictionary of symbols and their meanings for insight. Divination asks for a risky, individual reading of data rather than an appeal to quantified parallel cases.

Living Image

From the point of view of the soul, a unique event or object is of great interest, but several versions of the same thing are highly suspicious. In spite of many common themes and elements, human life presents itself in particulars and individuals. So we need a method of knowing that is appropriate to unique happenings yet provides a satisfactory degree of certainty and reliability.

Faced with a problem or a quest, in the name of enchantment we may forgo logic, forgo studies and theories, and forgo common experience. We will look for a different kind of logic altogether to give us direction and insight. What we often need is not a long path of explanations and reasons leading us directly to a conclusion, but rather a jolt forcing us out of the rut of thinking we're in. Or we may simply need a freshening of imagination, a new way of looking, a deeper perspective. Until we have had a disquieting revelation by means of divination, we may even be unaware of the shallow dimensions of our reflections.

Impediments to logic sometimes offer opportunities for fresh imagination. Feeling blocked, not knowing where to go next, reaching for experts, guidance, ideas, or just a simple lead, can all put an end to encrusted thinking and invite new paths of consideration. Of course, it's also possible to be literally stuck in an endless quest for the right way to think or the proper language to use. Divination has several means of getting us out of those closed circles of fruitless searching.

A number of years ago I was giving a series of lectures to a group of astrologers and psychologists, when a note was passed to me from a woman in the audience who was from India. When the engagement was over, I read the note carefully: "Your work is going to become well known, and you will spend more money than you have." I was startled to read the note; it had the ambience of a genuine divination. This event took place long before I published *Care of the Soul*, a book that became widely read, and my work was not known at all at the time.

Rituals of divination often include, as we shall see, a test of the diviner's credentials or ability. The test not only offers some assurance that the divination will be genuine but also serves as a small rite, initiating the petitioner into the process. I'm sure I gave more credence to a note written by a mature woman dressed in Indian

attire than I would have given to one presented by a neophyte psychic from a more familiar circle.

In my case, as the months and years have passed, I have been astounded at the astrologer's ability to forecast the spread of my writings, but at the same time I've been puzzled about the other part of the message. I know that I can easily spend more money than I should—I've never been a saver or at all smart about money—but I haven't yet fallen into any disastrous financial hole either. Maybe disaster is coming, or maybe that part of the message should be read more poetically.

We need to trust the diviner, suspending our disbelief enough to be affected by the divination. I can imagine getting good information from someone I might consider a charlatan, because diviners and psychics don't play into our cultural craving for credentials and authenticity. Some psychologists might explain my trust as a form of transference—my seeing this person as a projection of some trusted figure from my past or perhaps the projection of an ideal or a hope. Generally I don't see much value in the notion of projection under any conditions, and so I prefer to consider my trust as an aspect of my wish to find alternatives to mechanistic thinking. I know nothing about the astrologer who passed me the note, and yet I am still enchanted with her art.

My story also demonstrates that divination may give us a definite message to consider, but the reading of that message may take years to unravel. In this, divination differs strongly from rationality, the whole purpose of which is to arrive at an answer, a solution, or a decision. Divination stays with you, and the solution or puzzle that it presents may persist for years, influencing your thoughts without necessarily offering a course of conduct.

### *Edification by Puzzlement*

The gradual unraveling of a mystery, the time it may take to show itself, and the conflicting readings and interpretations it spawns are all benefits of the divinatory approach. I often compare a dream to a painting, believing that we need not demand a final interpretation of any dream, just as we would never reduce a good painting to a definitive explanation. Usually when we explain a painting precisely,

its mystery vanishes along with its value. The very point of a good painting is to keep us wondering, asking questions, offering interpretations, and contemplating. The same is true to a degree with divination: its value lies in the continuous influence it has over our thoughts—deepening them, turning them in new directions, even confounding our familiar modes of intelligence and offering surprising alternatives.

In a book on African divination, James Fernandez, an anthropologist, tells of consulting a Zulu diviner who worked by conjuring spirits. He went to her hut and tested her by seeing if she could detect a coin that was hidden under a companion's leg. She failed that test, but he persisted anyway. Professor Fernandez then says that the diviner "rather quickly divined that I was far away and not in satisfactory contact with my family," particularly with his ill father. She recommended getting in better contact with him.

Disappointed in the Zulu woman, he tried another diviner, who was in a group that recommended that he sacrifice a sheep. Before going to sleep, he drank a potion of herbs, sheep's blood, and gull, and followed further advice to take note of his dreams.

He dreamed he was halfway up a ladder that was leaning against the wall of a chapel. At the top of the ladder was his father, calling him up. The next day the diviner told him that the ancestors were showing him in the dream their acceptance of him and suggested that he contribute to the repainting of the chapel and the reglazing of some broken windows. He should also call his father in America.

He didn't make the call, and when he finally got back to America he found that his father was gravely ill; he died within two weeks. Gradually Professor Fernandez came to realize that the diviner's message had been accurate and important. He summarizes it: "Spend some money on your fellow humans, and don't forget to call home." And then, in an extraordinary confession for a modern scientist, he explores some of the reasons for his skepticism about African divination.

"I focused on the recommendations contained in the divination and not on the complexities of the communication itself." "This is the modern tendency I've been noting: We're so interested in arriving at final conclusions and explanations that we become immune to the transformative power of the process. Professor Fernandez

elegantly refers to this personal transformation as "edification by puzzlement." It's a figurative, primary process, he says, that works by indirect means. He uses such words as aleatoric, inchoate, dream-like, enigmatic, and metaphorical to describe the nature of divinatory reflection. Innuendo and other forms of verbal art are essential to it as well. Because we moderns are extremely uncomfortable with the tension created by mystery and innuendo, we don't often feel edified by puzzlement, and yet this very reformation in imagination could bring back to us an enchanted life.

### Divinatory Powers in Art

Poets and artists of all kinds are intimately familiar with edification by puzzlement. The best of them will tell you that they don't know always what their work means. In their art they use words or images in ways that speak more directly and more profoundly than reason of our world and our experience. They trust the images that come to them as being rich in implication and complex in their truthfulness.

If the arts are not sources of divination to us, then it is because we are not looking to them for it, or we are training and expecting our artists merely to "express themselves" or challenge us at a surface level as critics of culture. Stanley Hopper, my professor of poetry and religion during my doctoral studies, founded his work on the premise that we need to shift from theo-logic to theo-poetics, to a recognition, among other things, that the poets touch such deep springs of wisdom and revelation that they serve a function in society that goes beyond aesthetics and into the realm of religion. As its name suggests, divination, too, takes place in a sacred and mysterious context and is far removed from the secularism of modern methods of reason and analysis.

Divination is a numinous way of knowing, a surrender of intentionality and will, and an openness to the confounding images that appear in ritual and dream. The very idea in divination is to give over one's will to the numinous poetics of ritual. Therefore, especially in times of deep change and decision, we might turn to divination to wrap ourselves in the dissolving and restructuring suggestions of its counterlogic.

Societies that appreciate divination and other numinous rites hold together because of the power of their sources of knowledge and the depths from which they are guided. We take a poll and make decisions by majority rule, while enchanted societies consult the very foundations of imagination for signs of direction and decision. Our choices are rational, supposedly, and theirs holy; ours are focused on a clear goal, while theirs piously await revelation.

I was once anxiously driving to a meeting that I feared would be full of dark emotions. I was trying to think of some way to calm myself, and as I drove up to a stop sign on a country road, a brilliant red cardinal lighted on it. I couldn't help but think of it as a sign. I thought to myself: The bird is lovely, stately, and brightly colored, maybe this signifies that the meeting will turn out fine. But then I thought: that shade of red is very close to the color of blood, which could mean that the meeting will be terrible. The meeting turned out to be even worse than I had anticipated, and afterward I thought I had learned a lesson in divination: I have to pay special attention to the message that counters my wish and my feelings of self-protection.

The sources of divination are many. We could risk our modernist sensitivities and consult a traditional diviner in Africa and South America, or among Native Americans—anyone who lives and practices where enchantment still has power. Or we could use more available and less challenging forms like the *I Ching*, tarot cards, runes, and astrology. Or less formally, we could learn to read the common signs that are all around us.

We could incorporate the fundamentals of divination in the way we think generally. For example, we could read the signs in front of us and shape our life and work more by intuition than by logic. We could live an astrological life, to one degree or another, using the moon as a guide to the waxing and waning activities in our own lives or, following Ficino, initiating important projects in the spring or at the beginning of the week. We could turn to poets and artists, not just for beauty and entertainment, but for direction, especially for the depth of vision in which they can educate us, for their educations of puzzlement.

This brings me back to Stanley Hopper, for whom theo-poetics is

profoundly deeper than theo-logic. Certain arts, he says, are closer to archetypal consciousness than to intellectualizing theories, and so they have an extraordinary degree of reliability. Eastern religions appeal, he says, because they place us so close to our souls, as do the mystical traditions of the West. He cites Augustine: "Thou wert with me, but I was not with Thee," and Meister Eckehart: "God is nearer to me than I am to myself." But he also quotes Wallace Stevens:

There was a muddy center before we breathed.  
There was a myth before the myth began....  
From this the poem springs.

Hopper's conclusion: "What was projected in the dualistic mythological world pictures, falls back to the deep psyche and sustains us as a Presence there." Notice that he capitalizes "Presence," acknowledging the word's numinosity in this context. He also hints that theo-poetics, the category in which I would place divination, is not a dualistic enterprise. I don't try to conquer or control life, but rather I look for ways to be one with it. I don't try to determine what my life will become, but rather I do everything possible to participate in its unfolding, following the signs that lead me where my soul's desire lies and my fate awaits me.

Divination works, we might say, by placing our thoughts closer to our souls and to nature, to the way things are and operate, and out of that accomplished intimacy life decisions can be made with confidence and reliability. Yet the divinatory approach can be challenging, because we are faced not only with the mystery in our decisions and problems but with the additional mystery of the divinatory material itself.

Slow, intuitive, ritualistic, interpretive, and unique, divination differs radically from modern means of attaining knowledge. Its purpose is to affect our vision and perhaps alter the very foundations of our way of thinking. In taking us so deep in our quest, it may lead us to questions we hadn't considered in our initial search for insight, and indeed may take us in startling directions. My aunt was afraid of the power she saw only momentarily in her "game" and gave it up. The anthropologist was led to abandon certain

modern assumptions that were part of his education and method. Sometimes divination helps us ask better questions or reorients our considerations.

Divination also asks us to live more in uncertainty than we may feel comfortable doing with our modern sensitivities. Intuition, especially as it requires an assortment of interpretations, may induce false leads and mistaken conclusions. For myself, I expect that using this approach, I may be wrong more than half the time; but even as I make my mistakes, I learn the subtle rules of enchanted thought, and I get better at knowing how to live intuitively and more from imagination than reason. I also have to give up a measure of control and allow the divination to take me to unfamiliar territory. I may make a decision based on intuition rather than fact, and if my trust is still in data and logic, I may feel anxious. Gradually I may learn a new source of confidence and trust, and I may learn the lesson that it may be more important to deepen my questions and questions than always to be right.

Divination won't work if it's taken up as another tool in the modern arsenal of decision making; for its value lies in serving as a form of initiation into a different way of life altogether, one that is closer, as Hopper says, to the soul and to nature. To appreciate divination, we may have to discover a path away from the modern world, returning to enchanted life, where divination is the normal way of knowing and logical analysis an aberration.

## This Magical Life

THOSE OF US who have been brought up in a secular culture, sometimes complemented with a religious belief system, don't realize how much our lives have been impoverished by the lack of magic. Life may appear to be complete, with our fact-based education; ethical, scriptural, and theological religious practices; practical careers and workdays; politics rooted in nationalism and recent history; and entertainment aimed at numbing us to the "pressures of modern life." What is missing in all this is the penetrating enchantment of every experience that rises out of a world that is alive and that has deep and mysterious roots of power.

In many cultures, the magus speaks of magic as a means of exercising power, but in a society where power means dominance over others and personal gain, magic's goal of power may be misunderstood. For centuries, the thoughtful magus has tried to separate the narcissistic exercise of magical power from the respectful, more humble practice, labeling the former "black magic" and the latter "white magic." In his celebrated *Oratio* in 1487, the young Pico della Mirandola admitted that many practiced "demonic" magic, but in another form altogether, magic is a humane art, "the highest realization of natural philosophy." Pico's friend and mentor, Marsilio Ficino, turned the idea around, describing philosophy as an initiation into mysteries, and in his work one can scarcely distinguish the many roles of philosopher, priest, theologian, translator, musician, and magus.

For Ficino, magic is primarily an earth process, emerging out of the interactions of plants, animals, humans, and earth, as well as