Eurythmy and the Post-Enchanted World:

Introduction:
There is a growing concern today among educators, artists, thinkers, and scholars regarding the experience of alienation that many people feel in relationship to nature. In January, 2008 an academic conference was held entitled “The Reenchantment of Nature” in which themes from the modern academic book The Reenchantment of the World by Morris Berman were discussed. Berman’s central argument is that human consciousness needs to be transformed in such a way that the mind of nature can again become accessible to the human mind. He proposes that such a relationship between humanity and nature once existed in the pre-scientific, and what Berman also refers to as the “enchanted”, age. In this regard Berman puts forward the hope for a “re-enchantment” of the world.

Within this conference I introduced the art of eurythmy and presented the possibility that through it one can enter into a new kind of thinking, specifically a “living”, or etheric, thinking. This new living thinking, I suggested, allows the thinker more intimate contact with the worlds of both spirit and nature. This would not be a practice of re-enchantment but rather a path to a post-enchanted way of knowing and being.

The article below is an amended synopsis of the paper I presented at this conference. The paper was originally crafted in response to specific arguments form Berman’s book, but has been modified here to incorporate additional ideas familiar to anthroposophy. The original paper includes significantly more description of eurythmy, as well as a more intricate treatment of the topics presented. Although this rendering is written with an intention to elucidate the role of eurythmy, eurythmy does not occupy the central content of the article that appears here. Instead this small piece strives to illuminate a discussion of contemporary ideas and how eurythmy is applicable within their context.

Scientific Revolution and the Birth of “I Am”:
Berman’s premise is that starting with the scientific revolution human beings fell into a state of “disenchantment” with nature. Berman defines disenchantment as, among other things, the then new ability to perceive nature from the position of objective witness, as opposed to from the position of subjective participant. Steiner agrees with Berman’s premise, but adds that with the ability to objectively witness also comes an innate ability to experience one’s own inner self-consciousness. The linking of objective reasoning with self-consciousness is understood within certain academic circles as the phenomenon of Cartesian duality.

Within this duality one must separate one’s self from the object one hopes to observe. In so doing she inadvertently experiences that there is a self that is distinct from that which the self seeks to understand. Accordingly, one gains an experience of one’s own “onlooker consciousness” (Sloan 7) as it has been called, or even more simply put, one’s own being-ness.

This own being-ness is an idea that is referred to by religious scholars as the experience of “I Am” (Sanford 308). The “I Am” is, in some cases, synonymous with the Word, or logos. Steiner indicates that it is precisely this capacity of self-awareness, this “I Am” that dwells within
the human soul, which will enable humankind to move forward toward what one might call a post-enchanted relationship with nature, which is both self-aware and participatory.

Human self-consciousness was one fruit of the scientific revolution. Steiner’s arguments suggest that humanity can now use this fruit to transform the perceived human/nature duality. Although human beings now experience themselves as separate from nature, they can awaken the logos within themselves and use it to engage in a new kind of thinking. This new kind of thinking relies on human freedom, while simultaneously encouraging an intimate unity with nature. One way this happens is through using one’s capacities of consciousness, one’s inborn logos, to think via one’s etheric body.

**Etheric Thinking:**

Steiner indicates that before the scientific revolution etheric thinking was the predominant mode of cognition. He writes:

[... up until the fifteen century, people [...] viewed themselves as submerged with their soul in the overall cosmic intellect [...] This came about because [...] human beings predominantly employed their etheric body when they engaged in thinking. It was not that they decided to activate the ether body. But what they did sense—their whole soul mood—brought the etheric body into movement when thinking occurred. We can almost say: During that age human beings thought with their etheric body. And the characteristic thing is that in the fifteenth century people began to think with their physical bodies [...] This is the great difference that becomes evident when we look at thinking before and after the fifteenth century” ([Materialism and the Task of Anthroposophy](#), 178-179)

In the pre-scientific age, while people were still thinking with their etheric bodies, humanity enjoyed the experience of “being submerged with their soul in the overall cosmic intellect”. This is precisely the enchanted connection to nature, and to the spiritual world, that Berman recognizes as having existed before the scientific revolution. This is the same connection that Berman now longs for in his cry to readers to help him discover a “modern and credible form of reenchantment” (24). Berman longs for a paradigm in which human beings can commune with the spiritual core of nature in a personal and immediate way.

In the excerpt above, Steiner illuminates that employing one’s etheric body in the act of thinking involves submerging one’s self, with one’s soul, “in the overall cosmic intellect”. He also acknowledges that thinking with one’s etheric body involves bringing one’s etheric body into movement. One might imagine therefore, that thinking occurred when the human ether body wove within the ether body of nature. Steiner’s writings indeed suggest that in the pre-scientific age thinking resulted from the interpenetration of the human soul with the larger cosmic soul.

With the advent of the scientific revolution the activity of human thinking shifted into something entirely different. In place of engaging one’s etheric body in an enchanted dance with the larger etheric substance of nature, thinking now became a process of “combing abstract logical thoughts” ([Nature Spirits](#) 165). Such thinking is understood to be an activity that takes place by virtue of one’s physical brain. Thinking shifted from an activity that engaged one etheric body, to one that now engages the physical brain.
The Descent of the *logos*:

It is possible that the descent of “thinking” from humanity’s ether body into the physical body is a picture of the descending *logos* itself. Regarding the transformation of consciousness that occurred during the scientific revolution, poet and scholar Owen Barfield writes: “the scientific revolution marked a crucial stage in that evolution from original to final participation, which is the progressive incarnation of the Word” (*Saving the Appearances* 165).

Once this Word incarnated humanity necessarily ceased experiencing the descending Word speaking into them from nature. For many this was a lonely and devastating experience. In place of a descending Word, however, the human being now experiences the Word ascending, striving upwards from within her. What the human being once heard in the *enchanted* lullaby that was spoken to her, now strives to become the Word spoken from within her out into the world. This new speaking will be an awakened song that can penetrate out from within the human being, into the physical and etheric realms that surround her. Steiner writes:
The Stars spake once to [hu]man[kind]
It is world destiny that they are silent now.
To be aware of this silence
Can become pain for earthly [hu]man[ity]

But in the deepening silence
There grows and ripens
What [hu]man[kind] speaks to the Stars
To be aware of this speaking
Can become strength for Spirit-[hu]man[ity].

Materialistic thinking itself may be the Word radiating out from within the confines of physical substance. As human beings employ the brain in analytic thinking, one can imagine that the *logos* is shining out its wisdom in the act of materialistic cognition. We have learned to think with our physical body. Humanity is now confronted with the opportunity to learn to think with our etheric body as well. Just as the Word may penetrate out through the physical body in the form of materialistic thinking, it may likewise also strive to penetrate out further through the etheric body in a form of etheric thinking. In preparing to think with one’s etheric body, one can begin by engaging in speaking with one’s etheric body.

**Speaking with One’s Etheric Body:**

The human etheric body was engaged, through movement, in listening to the Word, which resulted in thinking. To recall Steiner’s statement from above: “[…] human beings predominantly employed their etheric body when they engaged in thinking. It was not that they decided to activate the ether body. But what they did sense—their whole soul mood—brought the etheric body into movement when thinking occurred” (*Materialism* 179).

Just as the human ether body was engaged, through movement, in listening to the Word, it may now also strive to become engaged, through movement, in speaking the Word. The Word now strives to shine out from within the human soul, through etheric movement, radiating back to the Stars. In the *enchanted* world one’s ether body listened. In a post-*enchanted* world one’s ether body learns to speak.
Eurythmy:

In the art of eurythmy, as with the art of speech formation, one practices “speaking” in such a way that the etheric body is brought into movement. Learning to speak in the language of etheric movement allows for the possibility of learning also to think via the language of etheric movement. In the same way that physical speech leads to physical thinking, etheric speech may also lead to etheric thinking. By speaking the etheric Word through eurythmy one begins to enter that realm of etheric language.

Etheric language is the Word, the *logos*, of nature. The *logos*, as it is understood in its ancient Greek form, is recognized to exist as, among other things, a divine consciousness that orders and gives life to organic substance. To enter the stream of etheric movement with one’s thinking is to invite a harmony of the free and independent human thinker, with the all-pervasive consciousness of nature.

Conclusion:

Thinking via the movement of one’s etheric body is a re-Imagination of the *enchanted* worldview for which Berman advocates. By thinking with one’s etheric body thinking again becomes a living process through which the human soul engages in the larger etheric realm of nature. Eurythmy is one activity that encourages movement of one’s etheric body in speech and thought. In this way eurythmy may lead to new and needed capacities of consciousness that allow the Word to emerge from within us, and which encourage a modern and appropriate cognition for the post-enchanted world.

Bibliography