The therapeutic alliance, kundalini, and spiritual/religious issues in counseling: The case of Julia

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Mark Waldman

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To individuals: $24.00 per year; $12.00 either issue.
To libraries and all institutions: $32 per year or $16 either issue.
Overseas airmail, add $11 per volume, $5.50 per issue.

Back volumes: Volume 24 (2 issues) $24, $12 per issue.
Volumes 15-23 (2 issues per volume) $20 each, $10 per issue.
Volumes 1-14 (2 issues per volume) $14 each, $7 per issue.
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Order from and make remittances payable to:
The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, P.O. Box 4437, Stanford, California 94309.

The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology is indexed in Psychological Abstracts and listed in
Chicorel Health Science Indexes,
International Bibliography of Periodical Literature,
International Bibliography of Book Reviews,
Mental Health Abstracts,
Psychological Reader's Guide, and beginning in 1982
Current Contents/Social & Behavioral Sciences
Social Sciences Citation Index
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All manuscripts, and an abstract of not more than 150 words, should be submitted in triplicate, double-spaced to the Editor, 345 California Avenue, Suite No. 1, Palo Alto, California 94306 (with a postage-paid return envelope enclosed).

Send to Editor, 345 California Avenue,
Suite No. 1, Palo Alto, California 94306.

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Editor's note

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In what the author, a ministerial counselor, considers a “failed case,” this issue’s opening article presents a picture of a troubled client with a complex history of psychological/spiritual/religious difficulties. The case Mark Waldman offers, in a session-by-session narrative, is commented upon by therapists Jonna Lannert, Seymour Boorstein, Bruce Scotton, Lynne Saltzman and Ronald Jue, all from various perspectives. Their comments range over cultural/religious background issues, Self-Psychology interpretations, transference and counter-transference dynamics, Gestalt approaches recognizing a kundalini process, and distinctions between transpersonal context and transpersonal content.

Whether the core of the self is troubled or functions well, it is influenced, David Loy argues, by a fundamental problem—a sense of groundlessness, a subtle lack, a “fear that ‘I’ am not real.” Examining spiritual, psychological, philosophical and religious factors, he shows how this lack can be, paradoxically, the way to freedom.

The troubled self sometimes can manifest as multiple personality, a diagnosable condition in which two or more distinct personalities control the same body. A similar phenomena appears to occur during trance channeling, and the question arises whether this is another form of disorder. Dureen Hughes’ clinical research deftly clarifies the similarities and differences.

Unusual states of consciousness need not be tied to a troubled personality. Lucid dreaming, a dream state in which one knows one is dreaming, is increasingly being researched and cultivated as a way to increase awareness. As Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan show, lucid dreaming, and the strategies for developing it, now have significant transpersonal implications.

Implications also abound in Warwick Fox’s article on “transpersonal ecology,” first published in the 1990 JTP. While recognizing the significance of Fox’s contribution, Homer Stavely and Patrick McNamara now see limitations in several of its key concepts. Their critique and alternative approach reveals yet another way to see our global situation from a transpersonal perspective.
THE THERAPEUTIC ALLIANCE, KUNDALINI, AND SPIRITUAL/RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN COUNSELING: THE CASE OF JULIA

THE CASE OF JULIA

Mark Waldman
Woodland Hills, California

REFLECTIONS ON “THE CASE OF JULIA”

Mark Waldman

COMMENTARIES AND DISCUSSION

Jonna Lannert
Culver City, California

Seymour Boorstein
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This paper describes a case history session by session, which is followed by a commentary by the attending counselor. Five invited clinicians then analyze the case, bringing into their discussion a variety of approaches and perspectives.

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Many years ago, I received a telephone call from a woman I shall call Julia. She had been referred to me by the Spiritual Emergence Network, a psycho-spiritual helpline in California. She told me that she had been meditating when she suddenly began to hallucinate. Terrified, she voluntarily hospitalized herself for several days. After she was released, she continued to have disturbing dreams and visions, and could not return to work.

“A friend of mine said that I may have had a kundalini experience, and that I should talk to someone about it. I realize, too, that I need to resolve a number of things that happened to me when I was a child.” She asked me if I could help.

I explained to her that I was a ministerial counselor, with an analytic orientation, and although I had worked with a variety of spiritually related issues, my knowledge of kundalini was limited. I offered her the names of several transpersonally-oriented therapists who might be more familiar with such experiences, but she wanted to meet with me first, and so we arranged for an initial interview. I was somewhat skeptical about the phenomenon of kundalini, but I looked forward to meeting Julia and discussing her experience in more detail. The following sessions were constructed from notes I made during and after each session.

Session #1

I was met by an attractive woman, conservatively dressed. She smiled and introduced herself, speaking quietly. I showed her into my office and she sat down on the couch in silence, looking at her hands. She seemed shy and perhaps a little frightened, and I noticed that I felt somewhat anxious and sad. I opened the session by inquiring informally about her background and history.

Julia was a thirty-two-year-old unmarried woman. Born in Arizona, of Hispanic and American Indian descent, she moved to California with her family when she was five, married when she was twenty-one, and divorced at twenty-nine. She had a sister, Lisa, who was one year older, and married. She had been employed as a medical practitioner up until the time of her “breakdown,” which was the term she used to describe her hallucinatory experience. She reported that when she was nine, her mother also had a breakdown. After her release from the hospital, she moved back in with her parents. She said that she would like to move into an apartment, but she was still too frightened to do so. She said that
she had never experimented with drugs except marijuana, which she tried once or twice. She attended several Catholic parochial schools until she was seventeen, when she left for college. Two weeks ago, she enrolled in art school, intending not to return to her medical profession.

When I asked her about her religious background, she replied that for years, she had been an atheist. “Then I decided to try meditation. I have a cousin who meditates—she’s an artist—and I really respect her, so I joined a group about a year ago.” At this point, her voice faltered and she began to cry. “My guru—I can’t remember his name! Talking about it—it’s so hard for me to speak!”

Julia told me that this was the first time she had talked about her experience to anyone other than her sister. “I was meditating in the group, when all of a sudden this huge burst of energy shot through me. It was like electricity! And then there were all these voices exploding in my head. I stood up and took off all my clothes and ran outside. I think I even urinated. Nobody knew what was happening. There was so much energy, I thought I was dying. I went to a hospital, where they gave me medication and kept me for three days of observation. For weeks I had nightmares and visions and hallucinations.”

For the next few minutes, she remained silent, although she continued to cry and shake. I noticed that she seemed hesitant to talk, and in response, I hesitated to question her. Eventually, our conversation turned to a brief discussion about various spiritual perspectives and disciplines. She expressed an interest in reading about the subject, and I discussed with her some of the available literature. I offered her a copy of Assagioli’s (1986) article, “Self-Realization and Psychological Disturbances,” which I had found to be helpful to others who had encountered difficulties in their psycho-spiritual development.

At the end of the hour, we discussed counseling fees and session times. Because she was in financial difficulty, we agreed to meet once a week at a reduced fee. I suggested that later, perhaps, she might be able to come more often. I asked her to keep a diary, which she agreed to do, and to spend twenty or thirty minutes each day writing about her feelings, thoughts, and impressions. I told her that she could call me anytime, day or night, if anything disturbing occurred. Clasping my hand, she thanked me for the assurance and left.

Session #2

Julia arrived very early and waited outside the office. When she entered the session room, she told me how helpful Assagioli’s
article was, and we discussed some of the questions it raised for her.

She began to tell me about her ex-husband, whom she found sexually unsatisfying. “I haven’t had any sex in years, and I’ve never masturbated, but I have these sexual dreams and I wake up feeling really satisfied. But I long to have a good sexual relationship. I want to have a real relationship.”

She paused. “I don’t know why this came to my mind, but I remember walking into the bathroom when I was little. My mother was pouring cold water over my sister, Lisa. I just shut off my mind. I don’t remember what she was doing to her.” She was trembling as she spoke. “I felt so frightened and lonely and isolated as a child. They ridiculed me for having imaginary friends. I just want to be held and be warm.”

She burst into tears, and my impulse to reach out and touch her hand was strong. It was clear that she did not want to talk about this event, and I decide to wait before questioning further. Normally, I would ask a client to lie down on the couch, but here I felt that such a suggestion would be overwhelming, particularly if there was a history of sexual abuse.

Julia sat quietly for several minutes before speaking. “I’ve been using the diary between sessions, and crying a lot.” She read me several passages describing her emotional turmoil. I told her that I thought she was an eloquent writer, and she looked at me with uncertainty. We talked about using the diary as a way to bridge the time between our weekly sessions.

Session #3

Julia seemed much stronger this day, without the sullen timidity of the past few weeks in session. She talked openly, and memories and associations came to her mind without effort. She appeared more grounded, and she seemed to be able to access unconscious material more easily, but she told me it disturbed her. She said that it was only through her drawings and paintings that she felt the confidence to express her deeper self. “Last week, for example, I made this large painting using the word SORROW, but it bothered my classmates a lot.”

She suddenly changed to the subject of her meditation experience. “During my crisis, when I was having visions, I saw my mother become a serpent. She was reading from the Bible, yelling into my
father’s ear. From time to time in my meditation group, the guru made certain sounds. I would hear good sounds in my right ear and bad sounds in my left ear.”

Another long silence began. Inwardly, I thought about her vision as a metaphor, and the story of Adam and Eve came to mind. If her mother was the serpent, I mused, was she Eve and her father Adam? Issues of sexuality came to mind, and I was reminded of the incident with her sister in the bathtub.

“How do you feel towards your parents?” I asked.

“When I was growing up, I used to feel that mom was an evil person. My father never communicated to me. Maybe my experience was somehow about that. I can’t have people over to my parents’ house. I feel ashamed.” She began to cry. “I’m afraid that people will see me as boring—ahhh, I feel like there’s a hand around me right now!”

“You must have felt terrible,” I said.

She agreed, and I noticed that she had relaxed a little more. “Lisa, my sister, was so lively. But my mother always hit her. My father was much more affectionate to her than to me, but I don’t think he ever hit me.”

“Was it terrifying to see her being hit?”

“Oh, God, yes!” She cried very hard.

I thought about how overwhelming it could be to watch another sibling being struck. Such children may become quite passive and pleasing, or retreat into fantasy. Others may completely withdraw from the inner world of feeling. Julia seemed to fit the latter pattern.

After a few minutes, Julia’s crying subsided. “Dad used to say that mom favored me when we were little. I remember a birthday party I had when I was five. Lisa was full of hate or jealousy. Why? Why was she so angry at me? What had I done? She’d had her party. A friend gave me a silver dollar, and she had to have one, too. I never asked for anything; I was so withdrawn and in a fog. Sometimes I wonder why I wasn’t autistic, and yet I often think it was Lisa’s love that saved me. I was always a very good girl, in order to avoid the beatings, and I slept a lot. Then I could be the heroine in my dreams. I often fantasized that I would be kidnapped by Sinbad and we would sail away together. I was a queen. Oh, I had such a boring childhood.”
I thought about the pun within the myth: Sinbad, sin and bad.

Throughout this dialogue, Julia had been staring at her hands. Then she looked at me and said, “I’m afraid of this session, and I don’t know if I should be telling you these things or not. I’m very worried.” She told me that her bouts of depression had increased.

I assured her that it was very important to talk about these things in session, and that she would eventually find it beneficial. But I, too, felt confused and somewhat lost, and I suspected she sensed this. We discussed her feelings of depression, and then concluded the session.

Session #4

We spent most of this session talking about her ambivalence towards art school. “I think the other students are disturbed by me,” she said. “They intimidate me. But art is the first thing that I knew I wanted to do, and I’ve never done what I wanted. You know the story, ‘Father Knows Best.’”

She began to shiver and cry, and she told me how much better she feels when she cries in session. We talked about her difficulties with teachers, and of her interest in Navajo art, yet I did not get a sense of any connection to her Indian heritage. I shared with her my own past involvement with tribal and primitive art, and showed her an old portfolio of work.

She told me that doing art is a spiritual experience, and I responded saying that I would love to see some of her work. She seemed happy but somewhat hesitant at my suggestion. I noticed that she was very comfortable when talking about Native American spirituality, but the subject of Christianity and Eastern religion made her nervous and apprehensive.

Session #5

She brought in several pieces of art she had recently done. One of them was a large ink drawing of a woman, but the face had been cut out and replaced by another drawing, much finer and more detailed. The cut out drawing was not her own. There are two people here, I thought to myself, and one of them is hidden.

She told me how much she hated her looks. “I don’t really think I’m attractive. All my life I’ve felt unloved. The woman’s face, here, is who I want to be. This is the me I want to become.”
I told her how much I liked the piece, but she seemed surprised and looked at me closely. She told me that strong feelings of depression and sorrow had been overwhelming her. “I feel so restricted at school, like I can’t draw what I feel like drawing, that I’ll be intimidated by the other students. I don’t feel I can share these things with them.”

“Do you have any friends?”

“No. But I would like to. I’ve never had any friends.”

*Session #6*

Julia began to talk about her meditation practice and experience. “Before I met the guru I had this dream. I saw a green eye. There wasn’t a pupil, no sclera—just the white part. There was no depth. When I woke up I still could see it. And once, in high school, when I was sleeping in bed next to the window, I felt a presence and I screamed. My sister saw the same thing that I saw, a man-figure by the window.”

I asked her if she knew anyone with green eyes.

“The only person I can think of was a friend who lived down the street—oh, and a cousin, too. Ah! Now I remember one of the visions I had during the crisis. I was in hell, but I had to save some people, and I had to have sex with my father. I didn’t know if this was wanting to be away from mom or what.”

“Do you think that your father ever touched you?” She said she wasn’t sure and so I said to her, “Ask your body.”

She closed her eyes and waited. “My body immediately said yes.

My mother told me that she’s sexually frustrated, and that they rarely had sex. My father would go out drinking on the weekends, and would come home real late. I suspect that he had an affair.”

She told me about an affair she once had with a man, an alcoholic, whom she really didn’t care for. She was separated at the time, but not divorced. “I wasn’t outgoing; I was withdrawn and sex was beginning to disgust me.” She admitted to feeling guilty about having sex before the divorce was final, but when I pointed out the similarities between herself and her mother, she became quite anxious.

After Julia left, I sat back to make some notes. I felt there was a strong sense of eroticism concerning her father, and I found that it
made me feel uncomfortable. I noticed, too, that segments of the session were becoming difficult for me to recall. Rather than examine this issue, I put my notes away and left the office.

Session #7

Julia started crying the moment she sat down on the couch. “I realized this week that all my visions are metaphors. When I was young, I used to read my father’s Greek mythology books, and I remember the stories of going into hell.” Together, we explored some of these stories, including the ones she remembered from church, and compared them to her recent dreams and visions.

“It seems you loved your father very much, but he frightened you,” I interjected.

“Once, during one of my meditations, I saw a beast with huge red eyes. I realized just the other day that it was my father, with eyes so red from drinking. And my husband, he too was an alcoholic. It’s so important to tell people you love them. No one ever told me if they liked anything...She stopped abruptly. “It must be time to go. I heard someone at the door.”

“No, we’ve got plenty of time.”

“I’m a little uncomfortable. You’re a difficult person, and you ask uncomfortable questions.” As we talked about our interactions, I sensed that we were both beginning to speak more openly with each other. I felt quite warm towards her, though still a little anxious.

She left, and I did not take the time I usually do to record my notes and impressions. Furthermore, I was continuing to forget certain interactions, particularly my own responses and comments.

Session #8

My first impression of Julia was that she seemed happy.

“It felt good that I could tell you how I felt about you. I never could tell anyone before what I didn’t like about them. When my father drank, he would be, ah—lecherous pops to mind—with me. He would grope me. But when he was sober he blew up.”

Suddenly I realized what I was frightened of. Julia aroused me, and it makes me feel uncomfortable.
Julia continued with her flow of thoughts and impressions. “You know, when I was eight years old my mother had a breakdown. She had to have some sort of hormonal treatment. It was at that time my sister told me that my father wasn’t supposed to sleep with me—I mean, sleep with her.”

I decided not to call attention to this important slip, for I needed more time to sort through my own reactions and feelings.

“My mother said that she could count the number of times they had sex. She told me that she was a virgin until 26, and proud of it. I’m sure my father had a mistress. During my visions, in one of the hells I was in, I was afraid that I’d have to fuck my father.”

She made this statement without any affect, and I became concerned that too much material may be coming up too fast.

“I just found out this week that my blood type is different from mom and dad. I wondered if mom had an affair, or if there could have been a mix-up with another baby, perhaps my cousin’s child. I asked her and she said that she hadn’t. Besides, she said the cousin’s baby was a boy.”

Session #9

“I’ve been up and down all week, and I felt real depressed before I came to session.” That was the first thing Julia said, and I wondered if there was a connection to how open she felt during the previous week.

“Why do artists have to be so egotistical? I’m not sure if I’m going to continue to go to art school or drop out. For me, art is something personal that is part of my spiritual growth and healing.”

She rushed through her thoughts, then suddenly changed the subject. “I’ve been wondering if I was actually sexually molested. My sister doesn’t think so, but I do have an uncle with green eyes who might have. He tried to molest one of his daughters. I had this dream that I was lying in bed dreaming that I was in the same bed masturbating myself. I woke up from the first level, into the next, and into my waking state. I knew I had had a sexual release.”

For the first time, she leaned back against the couch, relaxed. “I used to feel very close to God, but I once committed a mortal sin by not going to Mass, and I didn’t go to confession about it. Going to confession made me feel so terrible. As a child, I didn’t know what sins I’d committed so I made things up. I felt so bad.”
I thought about how withdrawn she must have felt, and how lonely and isolated and hungry for love she must have been. When I shared these thoughts with her, she cried. I suggested to her a number of simple things to do, ways of treating herself with a little kindness: a quiet walk, a long hot bath, etc. She smiled and looked down at the floor. She seemed so young and shy. I, too, felt more relaxed as I began to understand and appreciate the complexities of this woman’s life.

Session #10

“At art school today a woman was talking about the Druids and how their gods and heroes were engaged in battles. I found myself feeling anxious and upset, and I have no idea why.”

“What are your associations to battles?” I asked. She told me that during her crisis all kinds of battles took place in her imagination, but when I commented on the connection between this and the Druid story, of how many battles she had felt inside, she was overcome with anxiety. She stared at me with terror, shaking uncontrollably. I knew I had triggered something important, and I asked her to take a series of long deep breaths and to lie back against the couch. She followed this suggestion with little apprehension.

“This is what I felt during the crisis!” She told me that she was suddenly afraid of being on the couch, so I asked her to stand up and walk around the room, to take a drink of water, and to talk about something mundane, such as what she ate for breakfast that day. Doing these things calmed her down.

“You know, I went to go see a therapist right after this had happened, but she wouldn’t allow me to walk around. I feel so much better, now, thank you! I’ve been thinking of trying meditation again.”

I encouraged this, thinking that it could be helpful. I felt that she was beginning to have the strength to allow more memories of her experience to surface, and I believed that her meditation would provoke them.

Session #11

“Can you still help me?” Julia began with a tone of doubt in her voice. Although I told her yes, I again felt apprehensive.
“I had this dream last week,” she started, but then she interrupted herself. “I feel like I’m about to have a heart attack—right now! This dream—I’m sitting with other students, and there’s a multi-colored being in the room. I said, ‘You look just like the devil!’ I looked at it again and it was a normal human being. I felt a great fear from looking at him. Something worried me about it, and I tried to focus on the Third Eye. I felt that I was going to die if I didn’t snap out of it. I then focused on Jesus and I woke up.” She paused and took a deep breath. “Whew! I’m freezing cold and my heart’s just pounding! I stopped meditating after I had that dream, and I carry this rosary that my sister gave me. I’m really afraid to meditate.”

I suggested that she try to find her own pace in meditating, a few minutes, if that was all that felt comfortable. I also encouraged her to record her feelings in her diary.

“Now I remember! About a year ago, during a meditation, I saw a beast surrounded by white light. The beast was in the shape of a large shadow that sat beside the guru. It was dark and light, huge! And it was the shape of a man. It frightened me. The guru helped to calm me by his talking. I know that, in my spiritual development, I will have to meet this beast. It’s from another realm, from Hell. I’m beginning to reevaluate my Catholic beliefs. I gave them up long ago, but now I’m thinking that I might get more involved, but I’m not sure which direction—the spiritual or the practical, the nunnery or Mother Theresa. Christ, for me, is the process of death and rebirth.”

Inwardly I was ambivalent, even somewhat negative, about her considerations towards the church. I knew that I, myself, had negative feelings about the church, and I assumed that she could unconsciously sense this. I wanted to offer advice, but everything I thought of sounded critical, so I remained silent and listened.

Session #12

She entered the session room calmly. I noticed that she continued to vacillate each week between anxiety and composure.

“I’ve decided to quit art school. I realize that my ego keeps getting in the way of what I really want to do. I’m not interested in doing work that’s for sale, but only for myself or for my friends. Christ said, ‘pluck out your right eye if it offends thee.’ During my crisis, the devil gave me a choice: I could go blind and save the world, or keep my sight and save myself. In the vision, three gurus and I were...”
capturing evil spirits, and we were going to seal them off, but I couldn’t seal it off properly. But the baby next to me could. The baby was rapidly growing larger.”

Her voice was strong and powerful, but my impression was that she wanted to close the lid on Pandora’s box, to distance herself from the disturbing unconscious elements within her.

“I decided to make a sandpainting with these themes and images in it. It had four sides and a door to the east, and evil could not come through. Doing the painting, I learned humility, and I realized that true art is an instrument to a greater consciousness, which can come through me, my ego. I became the source.”

Her comments confirmed my impression, and I suspected that she was rapidly building an intellectual defense through the use of religious and spiritual terminology. And yet it was also clear how much her art was helping her to work through certain aspects of her trauma.

“I have to do what Christ said, to pluck out the eyes.”

I felt that she was returning to the language and framework of her religious past to cover up her deeper feelings, and I thought about my own associations to her imagery of the eyes: of her father’s bloodshot eyes, the green eyes of the uncle who may have molested her, and of the Third Eye and her connection to her guru. I began to explore with Julia her own associations to the powerful and violent image of plucking out the eyes, hoping to take her more deeply into the material that had begun to surface.

“I have a sense that my path is leaning towards the direction of Mother Theresa’s. When I was in the hospital, my sister brought me this rosary from my family. It’s what grounded me and began the process of getting well again. From my experience at the hospital, I realized that others are also trapped in their own private worlds. You know, you can tell the difference between those who are struggling with spirituality and those who are just crazy. But I don’t think the doctors know. Some of us on the ward could tell who was who, and I would like to help those people. When I was in the hospital, the staff metamorphosized into creatures. The normal people were changing, but the insane ones didn’t. Why? People who are normal aren’t aware that there are different realms of spirituality. In catechism, as a child, I was questioned about the difference between the soul and the spirit. I remember that I was told that creatures from outer space would be devils. I guess that I thought that the staff were devils, and it was they who did not have spirituality.
During my crisis, I had a series of visions where I met the devil three times. The first was when I was born, with a deviated septum. The second was when I wanted to shoot myself with my husband's gun because I was so depressed. Love stopped me from doing it. The third time was during the crisis itself. I asked the devil to come back to God. You know, when I was separated from my husband, I once fell asleep and felt my spirit leaving my body. I knew that this blackness would surround me, and if I did not awake, I would die.”

It was twenty minutes before the end of the hour, and Julia wanted to leave early. I consented—an unusual choice for me—and made a note of the issues I wanted to bring up later.

Session #13

Julia arrived on time, but looked rather agitated. “The rosaries saved me when I came out of the hospital. I went to see a Jesuit priest, and for a moment he transformed into someone fully dressed in white. Men have to let the female part of them come out more, and women have to let the male side out.”

Julia started to tremble and shake, and I asked her to lie down on the couch and go with it. After approximately ten minutes the shaking subsided. She began to see that she could allow herself to go through the feeling experiences without being overwhelmed. “But when you fight these feelings,” I said, “it can make them seem much stronger.”

She changed the subject to school. “I took my sandpainting to class and everyone felt the healing coming from it. Then I saw everyone surrounded by white light. The teacher had an angelic voice, but he said that the painting had a lot of bad karma. He said that he was also on some kind of spiritual path. The Catholic church says one shouldn't be superstitious, but I think I always confused superstition with mythology and metaphor.”

The teacher’s comment angered me, and I told her so. I felt protective towards her, particularly around her art, since it was where she felt the greatest safety in expressing herself.

“Something just came to me and I have to say this. I don't know what it means: ‘The Father's will shall be done.’ It's okay, whatever the Father wills, it will be done. I need help, Mark. I feel like half of me is Christ, and half isn’t. It’s a battle with the devil.” Julia suddenly felt overwhelmed and sat back up on the couch. “There’s a battle going on inside me where Christ and the Devil are battling. I want to say that Satan is in each of us—Oh! I’ve just remembered
my guru’s name! I haven’t been able to remember him since the crisis, I’ve been so frightened of it. I feel so much better now!”

I asked Julia if she would be willing to come twice a week instead of once, and she agreed to come in three days later. She had been feeling more and more anxious between sessions and I wanted to increase the contact between us. I felt, too, that it was time to delve more deeply into these metaphors and symbols.

Session #14

“I woke up this morning at four a.m. in turmoil. I don’t want to talk about the dream that I had, but I guess I should. I was at my cousin’s house, in some room. I knew I was dreaming. I woke up in the dream and opened my eyes, and I saw a beast sitting on top of me. It looked like a monster. I said, ‘Hello,’ and chanted a mantra using the word ‘Jesus.’ This thing smiled and said, ‘It’s me, your guru!’ Way down below I said ‘Jeeesussssss!’ It poofed and I woke up. I’ve been feeling like there is some kind of presence that’s both positive and negative.

“These are my associations to the dream: The monster in the dream is like something on some music tapes I had bought. My sister told her kids that Satan was using this music to mislead them. Satan was cast out by St. Michael, and I knew a Michael when I was a little boy, ah, girl!”

“Did you wish you were a little boy instead of a girl?”

“Why, yes, I think so. I remember thinking that if I was a boy then maybe I wouldn’t feel so frightened. I was afraid of being a girl. I feel as though I was created for a special mission. Christ is showing me his childhood, through my sandpainting. During my crisis I believed that I was clothed in the sun—from the story of the Apocalypse. I was the Virgin Mary, but there was a difference.”

She paused for a moment, then continued: “It’s very difficult to talk to you about this. I feel guilty but I’m not sure why. When I was in crisis I felt like calling out to my guru, but I kept hearing my sister call out ‘Jesus.’ My guru is trying to stop me from saying something.”

“Go ahead and blurt,” I said.

“HE’S THE ANTI-CHRIST! Oh, my! I’ve been praying to Jesus to protect myself. I’ve been having weird sensations this week, like something was biting my ankle, and I’ve had intense headaches and feelings in my body. I wanted to talk to you today about my
childhood, the positive stuff. I believed God was in everybody and was good to everybody, and that’s what I saw. I was kind of autistic, I slept a lot and withdrew into my dreams and fantasies. I was cold, but people came to me and loved me. I was in my own little world to protect myself from negativity, so I hung on to this belief that all people are good to protect myself from them. It saved me from a lot of things, from being beaten by my mother, from my father, from my husband and boyfriend. But now I have a new direction in life. I’m not sure what it is but I’ve got to follow it.”

I told her I would support her in her exploration.

Session #15

It was two days before Christmas. “I just came in to tell you that I’m going to stop coming to session. I realized that I must fully put my faith and trust into Jesus to heal me, and that coming to sessions means that I don’t fully trust in Jesus. My sister’s a member of a charismatic (Pentecostal) church and I’ve been attending their classes and sermons for the past few weeks. You mentioned to me once that you thought my story could be of value to others, and I feel very good about that, so if you want to share it with others I would be pleased.”

She walked to the door, then turned to hold my hand. “May I come back to see you if I need?”

“I’m going to stop coming to session.”

“Of course,” I said.

I returned to my chair, surprised and somewhat shaken. I had not expected such an abrupt ending to our work, and I wondered what I might have overlooked. Perhaps she had gotten what she wanted or needed, but I did not know for sure. I felt saddened, and knew that I would miss her deeply.

Six Months Later

I found myself wondering about Julia and how she was faring, and I decided to give her a call. I left a message on her answering machine and she called me back a few days later. She told me that she was doing quite well, although she was still uncertain about what her crisis meant. Still, she found her involvement with the church quite calming and peaceful. “In fact,” she announced, “I’m considering becoming a nun.” I asked her if there was anything she would like to have included in the case presentation I was preparing, and she sent me the following letter:
Dear Mark: I enjoyed our conversation over the phone and have since thought more about what I would like you to include in your article. I have an increasing sense that to write about my experience would be wrong if Jesus’ healing hand is not also included. I feel that to exclude that which has mostly occurred subsequent to our sessions would be inaccurate and may mislead people. I also want to stress that I don’t wish to diminish the counselor’s role who has been an instrument of Whom all glory is due. I pray for God’s blessing on your work and thank you for your interactions with me. Thanks for agreeing to include Jesus’ role. May Jesus bless this endeavor. Sincerely, Julia.

REFLECTIONS ON “THE CASE OF JULIA”

Mark Waldman

Many years have passed since I first met Julia, and although I could, in some respects, consider this a failed case, nevertheless, it was a pivotal experience for me personally and professionally. I was very attracted to the spiritual/mystical potential that I presumed existed in Julia’s “kundalini” experience, which later prompted me to examine more fully the spiritual, religious, and transpersonal psychologies. This, in turn, led me to a deeper appreciation of unconscious processes as they have been explored within the various analytic psychologies.

My experience with Julia demonstrated something that contemporary research confirms: how a client’s religiosity will be viewed is largely dependent upon the therapist’s own religious background, training, and personal experiences (Allman, 1991; Lannert, 1991). On the other hand, those who seek a spiritually-oriented psychotherapy will bring with them the underlying religious dynamics of their past which may be in conflict with the therapeutic goal, and which may go unrecognized by the therapist (Lovinger, 1984).

Julia exemplified this in her choice to become involved with a charismatic church. Had I been familiar with the doctrines of Pentecostal theology, I would have better understood her conflicts concerning therapy. When Julia stated, in session #11, that she was beginning to reevaluate her Catholic beliefs, her communication began to shift to religious imagery. References to Christ, Satan, spirits, and apocalyptic metaphors increased until, in the second-to-last session, it culminated in her outburst that her guru was the anti-Christ. She told me then that she had to follow a “new direction” in her life, even though she did not know what that direction was. I had presumed that what was emerging was related to historical and unconscious material, relating primarily to Catholicism. I realized later that it had much more to do with the influence of the Pentecostal church that she had just joined. One such source (in Williamson, 1992), for example, states: “We believe, teach, and firmly maintain
the scriptural doctrine of justification by faith alone.... When we believe on him as our Savior, our sins are pardoned, we are justified, and we enter a state of righteousness not our own but his, both imputed and imparted.” In other words, one must give one’s self over solely to Jesus for healing, or bear the consequences of a religious belief that affirms the existence of angels, demons, the devil, the apocalypse, and the final judgment. These themes, by themselves, were probably not strong enough to influence Julia’s decision to terminate therapy, but if you add to this her close connection to her sister, who introduced her to the Pentecostal church, and the church’s promise of salvation, she would have had little choice other than to brand her guru the anti-Christ and quit therapy. Even the letter she sent to me reflects more of the church’s evangelical style than it does her own personal thinking and beliefs.

In working with spiritual and religious issues in counseling, it is important to keep in mind that some Christian sects and individuals still consider psychology a threat to religious belief. Certain Christian values such as obedience, self-sacrifice, and the value of suffering can be seen by some as contradictory to the psychological principles of autonomy, free will, and self-direction (Lovinger, 1984). In some denominations, involvement in psychotherapy is openly discouraged by family and congregational members, since outside help can be perceived as a threat to the religious and familial authority. The act of counseling itself can be an issue of religious conflict, for to talk openly about one’s feelings and fantasies can provoke, for some clients, deep anxieties and fears, particularly in relation to sexual and aggressive impulses.

I earlier made reference to a suggestion that Julia’s experience might be better understood in terms of the spiritual process known as kundalini. As the number of reports of kundalini phenomena continue to rise (Lukoff, 1988), more and more professionals and spiritual practitioners have taken an interest in its study. A review of the current literature, however, has not convinced me that Julia had a kundalini experience, for it reflected little of the transcendent or spiritual dimensions that are part of the kundalini process. Take, for example Gopi Krishna’s (1970) popular account of his initial kundalini “awakening”:

I was no longer myself, or to be more accurate, no longer as I knew myself to be, a small point of awareness confined in a body, but instead was a vast circle of consciousness in which the body was but a point, bathed in light and in a state of exaltation and happiness impossible to describe.

In Julia’s case, these positive dimensions were entirely missing. Although some of Julia’s experiences parallel certain aspects of the kundalini process—the sudden rush of energy through her body, the onset of visions and hallucinations, and rapid mood swings—
she did not experience many of the characteristics reported by Greenwell (1990a, 1990b) and Sannella (1987): intense body movements; increased psychic sensitivity and parapsychological manifestations, powerful and continuing flows of rushing energy or sensations such as heat, prickliness, or pain; or the experiencing of mystical or ecstatic states of bliss.

For me, it makes more sense to view Julia’s experience as a somatized reaction to the sudden emergence of unconscious material triggered by her intensive meditation practice. The altered state of consciousness (ASC) produced by Julia’s meditation can, according to Tart (1971, p. 119), provoke “an extremely unpleasant, emotional reaction ... with possible long-term adverse consequences on a person’s personal adjustment.” Rather than being a sign of spiritual awakening, Julia’s reaction can be seen more simply as a response to her experiencing radical alterations in consciousness. American society, writes Tart, “considers ASCs as signs of craziness, and so usually induces great fear in people when they begin to experience them.” Tart adds that “defenses against unacceptable personal impulses are altered, and become partially or wholly ineffective, so the person is flooded with traumatic material that he cannot handle.”

Unfortunately, Julia was never warned that such experiences might occur as a result of meditation practice. Even more experienced practitioners have been deeply shaken by similar experiences, but it seems to me that those who had previously worked through personal psychodynamic issues—family histories, childhood traumas and emotional issues, unconscious processes, etc.—fared much better than those who had not (Walsh, 1977; Sannella, 1987). In the kundalini cases examined by Greenwell (1990a), she found that the more unusual or bizarre the experience, the more there seemed to be underlying psychological problems. She suggests that individuals need intensive psychological grounding to effectively integrate a process that is designed to dissolve basic personality structures during the emergence of a spiritual consciousness. This is consistent with Wilber’s (1984) developmental spectrum of consciousness and psychopathology. Still, the question remains as to whether we should consider such experiences as Julia’s a spiritual awakening, or view them primarily as metaphor for the emergence of unconscious psychological material.

Julia consciously sought out therapy in order to explore her childhood experiences and her past, and there was little indication on her part to continue her spiritual quest. But her willingness to talk about the traumatic events in her life weakened as we approached the issues of religion and sexuality. The church offered her sanctuary from these feelings and she could thus retreat from the darker and more disturbing aspects of her life. But I would hesitate to call this
resistance or denial, for Julia needed time to rebuild her inner balance. By reinstating her defensive structure, she could maintain her sense of health and continue to function in society.

What would I do differently, if I had the chance? Although I do not think that it usually matters which sex the counselor is (unless it is an issue for the client), I believe that a woman counselor may have been more appropriate for Julia. In terms of family history, she was closest to her sister and her cousin. With the information she eventually provided concerning her father, her ex-husband, subsequent male relationships, and her guru, she had had little opportunity to form a trusting relationship with a man. However, I think there is strong evidence to suggest that her mother was equally terrifying. The few comments she made about her mother were brief, passive, and emotionless, which are often signs of repressed, traumatic material. How frightened she must have been watching her sister being immersed in an ice-cold bath, a not uncommon practice for curbing childhood masturbation, particularly considering her ethnic and religious background. Such experiences can leave lasting imprints on that person (Miller, 1990, 1984a, 1984b).

It was difficult for Julia to confide in me, and I think that her statements of appreciation were a form of placation, similar to what she used to do with her parents: if she was nice to me, maybe I’d leave her alone. I think that it was overwhelming when I asked her to come in for an additional session each week. Increased numbers of sessions, like increased meditation practice, only helps to break down habitual resistances to unconscious processes, something Julia did not yet have the strength to do. In that sense, counseling itself recreated the traumatic dynamics of her past: the imposing parent, the omnipotent guru, the hospital doctor, and the counselor are one and the same, as her dreams and imagery suggest. Intensive counseling can be perceived by some as an invasion and attack upon one’s psyche. For a client to expose these underlying vulnerabilities takes great courage and strength. Julia, I think, had almost enough.

The fact that I was a minister and not a psychologist may have been beneficial in two respects: first, because she seemed particularly suspicious of the medical model of psychotherapy, and secondly, because the connotation of “minister” may have helped her to talk more openly about her feelings towards religion, which vacillated between atheism and complete devotion. However, my lack of understanding of her changing religious identification hindered my ability to empathize with her.

I later found out that her guru—who used mantras, light, and sound—claimed in his writings to be a direct descendant of Jesus. He was also highly opposed to psychotherapy. Now we can see
why Julia would be so attracted to this particular guru, where she could unconsciously remain true to the doctrines of her religious upbringing while rejecting the authority of the organized church. In this paradoxical context, though, it is not surprising that she would eventually reach an emotional impasse. The guru became, for her, the anti-Christ, and I, the counselor, would fare no better, as she herself once stated: “Coming to sessions means that I don’t fully trust in Jesus.”

The guru’s book also shed some light on Julia’s many references to battles and devils, for his writings were filled with these terms. He wrote about how there was always a struggle going on between God and one’s own devils, and that in order to remain strong, the student must stay close to the guru’s light. What might easily be seen as a warm and benevolent teaching caused great turmoil for Julia, particularly when she was considering leaving the group, shortly before her crisis ensued. Now I understood why my statement about the many battles she had waged inside was so disturbing to Julia, for I was reiterating a metaphor her guru had used.

During the time I was working with Julia, I was going through a difficult transition in work and life. Many personal issues concerning religion and atheism were confronting me, issues which would be easily stimulated by a client such as Julia. Although I was participating in a supervisory study group directed by a senior psychoanalyst, my interest was turning towards transpersonal psychology. I was traveling into unknown territory, away from a traditional analytic orientation towards the more controversial views and practices of the spiritually-oriented psychologies. I found myself confronted by a situation that fell outside of my personal and professional experience, and so I took refuge in the advice of my teachers: to be as open as possible to the internal struggles in both myself and my client; to listen without pretense; and, to remember the advice that Freud once gave to Jung (Bettelheim, 1982), that “analysis is in essence a cure through love.”

COMMENTARIES AND DISCUSSION ON “THE CASE OF JULIA”

Seymour Boorstein, Ronald WongJue, Jonna Lannert, Lynne Saltzman, Bruce Scotton

This case history was given to five therapists distinguished for their contributions and work within the field of transpersonal psychology. They were asked to comment on the case from the perspective of their own backgrounds and training, to provide commentary on the interaction between client and counselor, and to describe how they themselves might have worked with Julia. Their commentaries reflect a number of issues central to the therapeutic alliance,
As I read this case, many questions came to mind which I would want to explore more deeply. For example, what did it mean to Julia to be an atheist? What understanding of meditation did she have, and what did she hope to gain from it? I wondered what contributed to Julia’s rejection of Catholicism, for in the Hispanic culture, Catholicism can be deeply ingrained, and such a radical abandonment must be significant.

Perhaps these questions were not addressed because the client and counselor shared a mutual avoidance of these religious issues. Because psychotherapists have a history of avoiding such issues in their practice, it is important to consider their resistance and countertransference reactions to them, for significant contributions can be made by helping clients to explore their own personal religious feelings, meanings, and value conflicts that so often arise in counseling. It is for this reason that therapists need to closely examine their own biases, prejudices, and conflicts regarding religious issues.

Another area that is often neglected by therapists is an exploration of the client’s cultural background and experiences. For example, it might have been helpful to Julia if she were to examine the differences between her parents’ Indian and Hispanic traditions, and to see how this may have affected her interactions with her friends and teachers who might have come from very different cultural backgrounds. Perhaps it would explain some of her communication and social problems in the home, at school, and in the counseling dyad as well.

It appears that Julia had little opportunity in her nuclear family to bond with either her mother or her father. Her statement that she had no friends was particularly poignant to me, for here was a woman who had never really connected with others. This, in part, could account for the counselor’s difficulty in building a genuine therapeutic connection with her, for her relationships seemed limited and her sense of self elusive. But she also seemed unable to connect with God, and her understanding of Catholicism placed her in a double bind: since she didn’t follow the rules, she couldn’t have her religion. Perhaps this is why she first became an atheist, and then later turned to meditation as a way of reconnecting herself to religion. But it also seemed to contribute to the collapse of her
defensive structure, which had heretofore served her well in the world. Her self core, in Kohut’s terms (1977), was very fragile, and I would not have encouraged her to resume meditating until she could reestablish her defenses. Some people simply do not have a strong enough grounding to enter those spiritual practices which specifically aim at dissolving various personality structures. Julia appeared to have a strong enough defensive structure to function well in the world, but not a strong enough self core to handle the personality breakdown which came about as a result of her meditation.

I saw her return to Christianity as a way for her to begin to reconstruct her past more effectively. It may have been a way of starting over, the “baby growing rapidly,” in Julia’s metaphorical terms. The fact that she chose a charismatic church also points to a healthier desire to be in a religious environment that is more loving and supportive than her experience with Catholicism. Such an environment might give Julia the emotional nurturing she needs and assist in reconstructing a positive identity by finding the loving “family” that was her birthright. But there is also the possibility that she will use the situation to protect herself by whitewashing the circumstances of her past experiences.

Julia seemed to suffer most from her inability to process and integrate a myriad of conflicts which centered around the issues of good and evil, sexuality, and religion. Often she waffled between totally embracing and totally rejecting religious ideologies. She could neither separate nor integrate these conflicting parts of her life, which was reflected in her struggle to define herself: “I need help. I feel like half of me is Christ, and half isn’t. It’s a battle with the devil.” It is for these reasons that I began to form a tentative DSM III-R diagnosis, suspecting schizoid traits, if not “schizoid personality disorder.” But there remained for me too many unanswered questions to make a firm determination.

Seymour Boorstein

I really admire the trend in psychotherapy, spearheaded by the humanistic psychology movement, which encourages us to see patients in larger terms than simple diagnostic labels. However, I do feel it is important—if we are to function successfully as therapists—to recognize that diagnostic labels are a shortcut way of understanding the specific level of psychosexual development from which a person’s current difficulties stem.

This, I feel, holds particular significance for transpersonal therapists. For example, some patients seek counseling because they have been frightened or overwhelmed by extraordinary experi-
ences they have encountered in their spiritual practice, as was the case with Julia. These experiences might include feelings of being dissociated from their body, alterations of visual or auditory perceptions, a sense of dissolution of ego boundaries, and so on. Since all of these phenomena may occur in meditation, we may mistakenly assume that they are part of a spiritual process and that the person experiencing these phenomena is basically psychologically intact.

Julia did not have a classic kundalini experience, although her intense energy rush, visions, mood swings, and emotional upheavals are not uncommon sequelae of intense meditation practice. It seems that these experiences arise most often from intense concentration practice rather than from mindfulness or insight meditation, which tends to maintain a more balanced composure in the mind. It is not unusual for people practicing intently to be suddenly flooded with previously repressed psychological material. In this regard it is similar to the floods of physical energy that characterize kundalini experience.

These experiences can also reflect primitive levels of psychological organization, and so it is very important for transpersonal therapists to take a careful psychodynamic history in order to make sure that they are looking at the most complete picture of the patient’s functioning. Even the transpersonal psychology schools tend to ignore or underemphasize the psychological dimensions in their work; they aren’t well grounded in the psychodynamics of why people don’t function well. And people who come from spiritual communities often want to “transpersonalize” their problems, refusing to see them as psychological. Ken Wilber (1980), in his paper “The Pre-Trans Fallacy,” cautions therapists about the need to discriminate between transpersonal phenomena that reflect an immature level of ego organization and these same phenomena which reflect a manifestation of mature psychospiritual development. It is particularly easy to make this mistake with someone like Julia, who seems to function fairly well.

Now, I do not see Julia as borderline or near psychotic, for I have known many well balanced people who have experienced similar reactions and difficulties. One of the hallmarks of the borderline condition is the inability to appropriately process aggressive impulses. Borderlines often have difficulty in handling their rage, and I do not see any signs of this with Julia. Borderlines also tend to see people as “all good” or “all bad” and often have obsessive or rigid belief systems which do not allow them to easily entertain other perspectives of reality. Julia, however, is capable of making such changes throughout her life: from Catholicism, to atheism, to Eastern meditation, and she later reevaluates her Catholic beliefs and turns to a more liberal Christian environment. Finally, border-
lines are often quite difficult to love or like, which does not seem to be an issue in this case.

In my own approach to transpersonal psychotherapy, I have found Kohut’s school of Self Psychology particularly useful, and I feel that many of the healing or therapeutic aspects of a spiritual or transpersonal approach can be best understood by looking at human development through this perspective. Self Psychologists postulate, with much supporting theoretical and clinical evidence, that in order for a person to become happy and psychologically healthy, he or she must have, starting very early in life, appropriately empathic, loving nurturers—usually the parents—with two principal functions. The first is that of looking at and mirroring back to the baby its sense of pride and expansiveness, which will later lead to a healthy sense of ambitiousness and assertiveness. The second function is to be available as an idealized figure who gives the child a sense of connection with greatness, strength and calm. Now the Self Psychologists feel that we continue to need these kinds of empathic resonances throughout life in order to maintain psychological health. This includes the availability of peer group empathy and identification. This “twinship” or “alter ego” relationship, as the Self Psychologists call it, gives the person a sense of connectedness with a kindred soul, which is where skills, talents and competency are developed.

Applying this to Julia, I would say that she came into counseling with a poor developmental sense of self, the result of a failure of empathy from her mother. This shows itself in terms of her poor self-esteem. The fact that she received some empathy from her sister may be what saved her from a more severe psychological collapse, and would explain why she was so important and influential.

What comes across within the therapeutic interaction is how much the counselor really likes her. Mark even admits to being aroused by her, and I think this is daring and courageous for him to say. Therapists don’t admit these things, even though it’s true. It happens all the time. Even in the analytic literature, no one ever says “I like the patient.” I think this case is important because it so clearly shows Mark’s liking, perhaps even to the point of being aroused. Intense caring, intense loving, even with an erotic tinge, is essential for treatment, and most therapists do not know that it is okay to feel these things.3

In this case, Mark’s caring really helped Julia to feel better about herself, even though it ultimately may have been too threatening for her. He told her that she could call him anytime; he validated her diary and her art. He was really interested in her, and this comes across in nonverbal ways as well, for example, in his desire to reach
out and touch her. These subtle nonverbal gestures—the body posture, the emotional tone, etc.—are quite important for they are all saying to the patient, “He likes me.”

In the Kohutian model, the mother mirrors to the child how wonderful and terrific he or she is, and the child feels inside, “I am wonderful; I want to be like you.” When that goes well, when the right empathic atmosphere is fostered, the child grows up with confidence and strong self-esteem. But in Julia’s case the mother is frightening, and I suspect depressed. The child hears this as “I’m making you unhappy; I’m no good,” and the child develops a sense of badness, which is damaging to her self-esteem. This is compounded by the seductiveness of Julia’s father, which puts her in a double-bind. Although she feels good about being loved, it is a betrayal of mother. I have often seen incest cases where the little girl’s problem was that her mother wouldn’t love her.

In therapy, it is the interaction between the two individuals that fosters the healing. But Julia seemed somewhat apprehensive about the counselor’s caring. Perhaps it simulated the erotic aspects of her family, or perhaps she picked up on his erotic feelings. Strong elements of sexuality were emerging in her dreams about the guru and her father, and perhaps the therapist, too. These feelings may have felt too overwhelming to her. When I know that a patient may have an erotic transference, I would say something to the patient to prepare him or her. For example, I might say: “During our work together, you may have certain reactions to me like you once had, say, towards your father, which may make you feel like backing away. You might have some worries or concerns if you feel me liking you, but between the two of us, we’ll work these things out.” Julia may have left counseling because this wasn’t addressed. Instead she turns to the Church and considers being a nun, where she can once more address her need for nurturing: “The Church/mother will like me; I will be loved; and I can give up sex, which gave me so much trouble from father.”

I think that it is important that we recognize that many aspects of the great spiritual traditions have the same psychological elements available that the Self Psychologists say are necessary for mental health to be present, and I suspect that Julia may have gotten some of this from the Church and her guru. For example, both Christianity and Buddhism will mirror to the individual a sense of love, empathy, acceptance, the person’s “wonderfulness,” etc. In addition, the guru, priest, rabbi, or other spiritual leader will likewise frequently mirror the same thing. The idealizing relationship would often occur with the actual originator of the tradition—Jesus, Buddha, etc.—and with the current representative of the tradition: the guru or priest or nun. Thus, someone like Julia could gain psychological strength by identifying with the presumed strengths,
virtues, and wisdoms of the original and current representatives of these spiritual and religious traditions. And by joining the church where her sister is active, Julia may be able to continue to receive the empathy and nurturing she needs to develop a stronger sense of self.

Bruce Scotton

I would like to give some attention to the issues of transference and countertransference—an area that has received little attention in the transpersonal literature—by addressing this case history from a Jungian transpersonal perspective. In the case of Julia, I think that from the beginning she transferred onto her counselor, Mark, her feelings about her father, for whom she feels great ambivalence. She expresses this in many ways: through her comments about her guru, her art teacher, in her dreams and visions, and in her reactions to Mark. But I think that he gets captured by her transference. For example, when she brings to session the picture with someone else’s drawing replacing her face, it may well be an expression of her father’s control over her; “father knows best (I’m worthless),” as she stated. She makes pleasing art of her attempt to replace her essence with someone else’s drawing, and then she gets Mark to like it, which further supports her devaluation of herself. I would rather say something like “I get it that you’re dissatisfied and trying to improve yourself by looking elsewhere for inspiration. You’ve made good art out of all that effort.”

Particularly because Julia is caught in such a painful period, and has been so badly hurt by her father, it’s important to balance the reductive analytic work with warm and caring support. For instance, I would reframe her word “breakdown,” pointing out that it is often necessary to break down old structures to allow new growth. Additionally, I would tell her that I did not think she had schizophrenia.

There is another form of intervention that communicates support and caring in two different ways. By carefully following the material presented and asking for details until the material is clarified, the therapist shows that he values the content that the client presents, and also shows that he trusts her to be strong enough to confront that content. For example, in the first session, it would seem important to ask about the content of her voices, nightmares, visions, and hallucinations; and in session #3, to ask which ear the mother addressed in the dream, and how Julia fell out of her father’s favor.

I want to add that I like how Mark balanced the reductive and prospective parts of the therapeutic work in sessions 3 and 4. But in
session 6, we begin to see evidence of the deepening transference and its effect upon him: as Julia’s guilt and anxiety surrounding issues of sexuality emerge, Mark’s memory becomes cloudy as he attempts to avoid the powerful field of the father transference. And although he is commendably honest with himself about his own countertransference, he is still too uncomfortable to confront her about her Freudian slip when she says “my father wasn’t supposed to sleep with me,” rather than with her sister [session 8]. Given that Mark is being pulled to recreate the lecherous father, I think it important that he not participate in any coverup. For example, by allowing her to leave session 12 early, Mark supports her fleeing in a major way by acting out with her the idea that the material is too much to handle. Blindness wins again, even though she had told him that blindness—the “blackness” of sleep—means death for her. However, a statement like “if we continue to work now we can begin to dissipate this blackness” would support her survival. Thus, when Julia decides to quit school and later to end therapy, she may, in fact, be fleeing the unaddressed transference issues of seduction and violence. In so doing, she saves the counselor but not herself. She is willing to surrender her own self awareness to help others. When a counselor is able to address these issues openly with the client, it helps to defuse the crazy-making potential of the conflict.

In my supervision with transpersonally-oriented therapists, I often suggest that they listen with an ear to the transference. For example, Julia’s story about her teacher’s lack of acceptance of her sandpainting—in essence a rejection of her Indian heritage and spirituality—may be a comment about Mark’s lack of acceptance of her Christianity. And her comment about Satan being in each of us may also apply to his seeming lack of willingness to deal with the father transference and his own seductive and violent sides. For example, in session 10, Julia succumbs to her need to please the counselor/father when she prematurely returns to meditation, thus turning away from the Christianity which Mark has trouble accepting. Meditation will likely both increase the flow of the kundalini and allow more unconscious contents to arise to consciousness. She’s not ready for either at this point. Although this stance may seem in contrast to what I said earlier about cover-ups, it really isn’t. The key here is trusting the unconscious to bring up material at the appropriate time and neither pushing it to move faster nor slowing it down. Right now she is barely containing her spontaneous unconscious productions. At a later, more stable time, she could tolerate the “pushing” provided by meditation. In contrast, Mark handles Julia’s painful experience very well in session 13. He has her lie on the couch, which can be seen as an intervention favoring descent into the maelstrom of experience like meditation. He is present with her, and available to help her moderate the experience. He also supports her own spiritual path in his encouragement of her sandpainting and art.
Throughout these sessions one can see the battle between the good and the bad, and Julia eventually decides to flee the therapy for the good of the church. Even at this juncture, pointing out the transference implications of her flight and admitting to the lack of success in treatment so far—“good” versus “bad” therapy—when coupled with the importance of persevering through difficulty, can sometimes save the therapy. It is always worth a try.

Julia reports six months later that she is doing well, but I see her as remaining caught in a split between good and bad: identifying with the good, repressing the bad, and failing to attain the wholeness she hinted at before. It seems like she has stifled the continuation of any kundalini experience, and thus her experience is not a true spiritual development which incorporates the experience through understanding and integration.

It is hard to say what would have happened had she seen a female therapist, for a whole new set of painful transferences, hinted at in the bath episode in Session #2, might have arisen. Her guru’s writing about the war between God and the devils brings us back to the major issue that arose for Julia with men, and for therapy to be successful with a man it would have had to deal with the reconciliation of good and bad in both Julia and the therapist.

I agree with Mark’s comment that a better outcome is predicted for people who have previously done psychodynamic work, but I would go even farther and say that what is most important in cases like this is that the client work to incorporate the profoundly unusual experience into his or her therapy. Such experiences affect the whole person and are viewed through the lens of that person’s history, and in my opinion, psychodynamic work remains the way to understand and optimally use that lens. But failure to understand and integrate the experience can result in the blockage of further spiritual work, as seems to be the case with Julia.

In conclusion, I would say that treating such a person in crisis is very difficult. It is possible that Julia was just not able to work through this material under the best of conditions. We as therapists and counselors can only do the best we can do, learn from our experiences, and continue with our work. I appreciate Mark Waldman’s courage and honesty in sharing this case publicly.

Lynne Saltzman

This is an important case for it exemplifies some of the specific clinical difficulties that emerge when a therapist is presented with a report of kundalini. First, there is the dilemma of the therapist, for if one has not personally experienced similar spiritual openings...
and manifestations, the therapist may have difficulty in being appropriately supportive, empathic, and non-judgmental, and thus might tend to interpret the experience only in terms of the client’s personal unconscious material. In such cases as Julia’s, it is easy to be skeptical, for these experiences often have a “twilight zone,” almost psychotic, flavor. In Julia’s case, although Mark maintained his skepticism, he was still able to establish an adequate empathic bond; however, his discomfort may have held him back from a deeper exploration of her experience.

Many therapists do not realize that kundalini has a life of its own, that once kundalini begins in someone’s life, it goes on forever. There may be times when it may be quiet or dormant, but it will eventually re-emerge. The expression “kundalini experience” is itself misleading. It is perhaps better to view it as part of a broader, and often, more subtle process; indeed, with some individuals it occurs as a gradual spiritual emergence rather than a spiritual emergency. Often these experiences are brought to the attention of the therapist only when they become dramatic and traumatic, as in the case of Julia.

There are people who are not aware that what they are experiencing is part of a symptom-complex, a clinical entity that is becoming more prevalent. Unfortunately, most physicians and psychotherapists are also unfamiliar with this process and may confuse it with psychotic and pre-personal states, anxiety, menopause, or even neurological disease.

On the other hand, there are those individuals who see kundalini openings in everything, and a more thorough exploration will often point to more traditional psychological issues or changes. I have had clients who knew too much about kundalini, and, not surprisingly, developed the very signs and symptoms that they had anticipated. I therefore do not lay out too much for clients who are beginning to open in these ways. If they become worried about their symptoms, however, and need a framework within which to understand what is happening to them, I explain the kundalini process more fully and recommend books such as Sannella’s (1987) The Kundalini Experience, which is a valuable resource for both clients and therapists. It describes the signs and symptoms of the kundalini process, and includes criteria for distinguishing between psychosis and spiritual emergence.

The manifestations of kundalini are sometimes confusing, frightening, and physically painful, and can lead to extreme crisis if informed, supportive guidance is not available. The client needs help in dealing with the physiological, psychological, and transpersonal experiences and shifts as well as the changes that occur in assumptive systems. Some of the symptoms that clients have de-
scribed to me include frequent headaches and grogginess, night sweats, tinglings and vibrations, and other bodily aches, pains, and spasms. Also reported are visions, internal lights and buzzings, and the unfolding of psychic, healing, and channeling abilities. There may be changes in menstrual cycles, blood sugar levels, eating and sleeping patterns, and sexual potency, all of which can be frightening if one does not have an overview. At various stages of the kundalini process, the client may develop anxiety, feelings of isolation, depression, fear of loss of control, even paranoia.

In my work as a therapist, I integrate gestalt therapy with perspectives drawn from object-relations theory and self psychology, from transpersonal psychology, and from neo-Reichian approaches to therapy. Although Fritz Perls drew from various spiritual and Buddhist sources when he founded gestalt therapy (Smith, 1976), he did not specifically address issues concerning spirituality.

There are many Eastern techniques for moving energy that can help alleviate the physical problems associated with kundalini; others were originated more recently by Western health practitioners and body workers of various disciplines. Clients can be taught some of the simpler approaches and can be referred to acupuncturists, chiropractors, deep tissue workers, massage technicians, yoga teachers, or holistic physicians when appropriate. But I would be very careful about introducing body-work therapy with someone like Julia who is struggling with self-boundary issues and issues of invasion, and who may possibly have been molested. One must approach her with gentleness and support, as when, in session #13, the counselor encouraged Julia’s trembling and shaking to continue as it naturally emerged.

Instead of interpreting, gestalt therapists use a phenomenological approach, which allows the experience to emerge and speak for itself. Let’s take, as an example, session #3, in which the counselor ponders and interprets Julia’s vision. A gestalt therapist would take a different approach and might have Julia role play and identify with the different elements of her vision. By doing so, she might better accept those disowned, projected aspects of herself. I might say to her, “Be the serpent”—which, by the way, is the symbol of kundalini—and have her describe herself as the serpent, and perhaps enact the dream fragment. I’d see what happens. I might then ask, “What are you saying in your father’s ear?” During this kind of creative dialogue Julia might have an “aha” experience, arriving at her own understanding of the meaning of her dream. It also helps the client to develop awareness and greater autonomy.

Let me give another example of how I would work with her imagery in session #3. When she suddenly feels as if a hand is around her, I would ask her to become the hand, and exaggerate the
movement. I would suggest a dialogue between the hand and Julia, using her metaphor to deepen her understanding, rather than trying to push past her resistance as the therapist did by not staying with the feelings and imagery that she brought up.

I suspect that as a child, Julia used to “split off” all the time. What I mean by this is that she seems to have a split focus—she’s both present and not present—and can easily go off into her head. This tendency can develop in young children whose parents are quite invasive. Somehow, the child must withdraw. It is a way of being there and not being there, going to a seemingly more comfortable place. In Julia’s case, I would help her to become aware of when and how she keeps her feelings down and how she prevents herself from being fully present. As she becomes aware of her process, change becomes possible.

What makes the kundalini experience so much more disturbing for Julia is that she has only a Catholic/Christian metaphor to compare it to. In session #11, for example, she superimposes her Christian framework onto the guru, and then turns the guru into the devil. More reinforcement of a different, non-evil model could have helped her to become aware of the similarities in all religious and spiritual paths and to see that she is not crazy or evil for straying from the church. I would have found ways for her to identify with her dream image—the multicolored being—whom she first sees as the devil and then as a normal human being. If she could identify with this glorious person, she might own her own glorious and human aspects.

Julia believes that her experience was evil. She does not know what it was or how to deal with the sensations and physical symptoms that arise, and so she returns to the church. It may only be a temporary respite, however, for my sense of kundalini is that it doesn’t go away, that it is a continuing process. Stifling or fighting it will probably create more physical problems. In addition, if other experiences occur—such as out-of-body or psychic experiences—Julia will likely become quite frightened, for she has not yet developed the awareness and self-support to cope with this powerful and disorienting process.

*Ronald Wong Jue*

To truly understand another human being, and to see the many layers that make up the fabric of one’s personality, we must draw from a number of different models and phenomenologies. This is the challenge that faces the transpersonal psychologist. In these commentaries we have seen how five different therapists have integrated a variety of traditional and non-traditional approaches,
ranging from ministerial counseling, to object relations and self psychology, and to Jungian and gestalt psychology. But transpersonal therapy cannot be adequately defined in terms of technique, but rather in terms of the context in which the therapist works with the client. In this sense, it is the therapist’s or counselor’s responsibility to develop an appropriate framework which will help the client discover that there is meaning in every portion of his or her life, and to realize that there is more to one’s self than meets the eye. On this we can begin to build a transpersonal perspective and methodology.

In many ways the gestalt approach described by Saltzman reflects this transpersonal dimension of integration which leads the client to wholeness and a new self sense. Every aspect of the client’s life—her dreams, her visions, her disowned feelings and fears—is seen, in part, as a projection of the self or pathology. Through identification and understanding a new self-definition emerges, and one begins to see that life itself provides the answer. This is why Scotton’s emphasis upon the transference and countertransference issues is so important, for it helps us understand how clients project their pathology or neurosis onto the therapist, distancing themselves from what they are feeling inside.

Within a transpersonal perspective, though, one can reach a point of surrender in which a deeper sense of self emerges, one that goes beyond the boundaries of ego and does not rest upon one’s self-identity or personality. At this point, one begins to realize that all of life is a spiritual process, a journey in which one’s whole life is seen in terms of a unitive experience. It is this unitive experience that brings transcendence. If we can direct the therapeutic interaction towards such a path, if we can include this in our definition of health, then it falls within the realm of transpersonal psychology.

But such was not the case with Julia, for she did not see these experiences in the context of a developmental or spiritual path. Instead, they remained foreign to her, outside of her sense of identity or self. Had she seen these events as an opportunity to reflect upon herself, had she reached a point where she could transcend her social and parental conditioning, then we would be addressing this case from a transpersonal perspective. But for Julia, no sense of resolution was reached. This is why I disagree with Lannert’s and Boorstein’s optimism concerning her return to a charismatic church, for I did not see that it would help her to resolve her difficulties with the past. Although Boorstein felt that she was capable of changing her perspectives of reality—citing as evidence her movement from Catholicism to atheism to Eastern meditation—in my view, she remained a Catholic. Her choices never allowed her to address her internal emotional conflicts, and she thus remained unable to differentiate between herself and her
projected disturbances. She could not even afford to get close to her therapist, retreating instead to the safety of the church. This is what I would call the use of religion in the service of pathology, and not a genuine step towards spiritual maturity. And it is why I consider Julia’s encounter a pseudo-kundalini experience, or what Wilber (1980) describes as “the pre-personal” dimension of consciousness.

But it is the subject of kundalini itself that makes this case particularly relevant, for it illustrates the need to differentiate between transpersonal content and transpersonal context. People tend to equate extraordinary experiences with spiritual development, which is often not the case. Simply because a case may involve religious and mythic imagery, or have references to spiritual issues, does not imply that these are transpersonal issues. Julia’s drama exemplifies how we cannot just use the trappings of transpersonal phenomenology as a way of designating a case as being transpersonal.

How do we begin to help a person like Julia, to help her build a foundation on which to stand? Perhaps the most important element that these five therapists have addressed is the need to probe deeply, with compassion and sensitivity, into the past and our experiences, trusting, as Scotton and Saltzman have emphasized, that the unconscious processes will unfold at the appropriate time. I really do believe that there is a wisdom to the unconscious, that one does not have to push the river. Julia was afraid of her unconscious, afraid of surrendering herself to her feelings, thoughts and visions. She did not grasp the paradoxical meaning that the journey into the underworld is the hero’s journey, a journey into the past, where we meet and slay our dragons, and return to life transformed.

There’s an old Zen saying that goes: “Before enlightenment, mountains were just mountains, but after enlightenment, mountains were once again mountains.” What then is enlightenment but a recon-textualization of our consciousness and an awakening that lets us see ourselves as we actually are, and to see life as it actually is. It is in this way that we can begin to see the emergence of a transpersonal perspective in therapy.

NOTES

1 I wish to thank Raymond Bakaitis, Ph.D., and Nanette de Fuentes, Ph.D. for their critical reviews of this paper, and Janet Orloff for her numerous suggestions and insights. —M.W.

2 Jue, however, disagreed with Boorstein: “The points that Boorstein specifically mentioned concerning the borderline personality—the inability to process aggressive impulses appropriately, seeing people as all good or all bad, having obsessive belief systems—I found in Julia. Perhaps I would feel different if I saw her in...
person, and this is something we must keep in mind when we study case histories secondhand, be it through a written presentation or within the supervisory context.” Bakaitis (see note #1) agreed with Jue: “I know others rejected this diagnosis, with good reason, but I too would have raised the possibility of a borderline diagnosis.” I, however, saw Julia’s symptoms as indicative of existential, neurotic (in terms of Hamilton’s [1988] object relations perspective), and spiritually-related disturbances (Lukoff, Turner, & Lu [1992]). —M.W.

3De Fuentes (see note #1), who is a clinical psychologist and an expert on incest survivors, felt strongly that Julia had been sexually molested. She comments that such a client will often provoke erotic feelings and thoughts in the therapist, particularly when there is a strong urge for the client to suppress those feelings and memories. —M.W.

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AVOIDING THE VOID:  
THE LACK OF SELF IN  
PSYCHOTHERAPY AND BUDDHISM

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The drugs that people take for non-medical reasons do more than numb pain or enhance pleasure or induce perceptual distortions. They are a weapon against the void. In his book on opium, Jean Cocteau wrote that every human activity “takes place in an express train hurtling towards death.” To take drugs, he proposed, is to get off that train. The potent illusion that drugs provide is called upon when the more commonplace illusions fail, and especially when life appears as nothing more than the conduit between birth and death (Luc Sante).

Sante’s point provides a welcome balance to all the moralizing in “the war on drugs.” It also suggests that if we seriously want to address the drug problem (preeminently alcohol, of course) we should consider not only how but why we run away from the void.

Cocteau sees our problem as death, an understanding consistent with much of the best recent work in psychotherapy. Existential psychologists such as Ernest Becker and Irvin Yalom believe that our primary repression is not sexual wishes, as Freud believed, but the awareness that we are going to die (Becker, 1973, 1975; Yalom, 1980). This paper, however, will offer an interpretation of Buddhism that makes a subtle yet significant distinction between fear of death and dread of the void: our worst problem is not death, a fear which still keeps the feared thing at a distance by projecting it into the future, but the more immediate and terrifying (because quite valid) suspicion each of us has that “I” am not real right now.

Sakyamuni Buddha did not use psychoanalytic terms, but in trying to understand the Buddhist claim about anatman, the denial of self, we can benefit from the concept of repression and the return of the repressed in symbolic form. If something (a mental wish, accord-
ing to Freud) makes me uncomfortable and I do not want to cope with it consciously, I can choose to ignore or “forget” it. This allows me to concentrate on something else, yet what has been repressed tends to return to consciousness anyway. What is not consciously admitted into awareness erupts in obsessive ways—symptoms—that affect consciousness with precisely those qualities it strives to exclude. What might this imply about anatman?

Buddhism analyzes the sense-of-self into sets of impersonal mental and physical phenomena, whose interaction creates the illusion of self-consciousness, i.e., that consciousness is the attribute of a self. The death-repression emphasized by existential psychology transforms the Oedipal complex into what Norman Brown (1961) calls an Oedipal project: the attempt to become father of oneself, i.e., one’s own origin. The child wants to conquer death by becoming the creator and sustainer of his/her own life. Buddhism agrees with this but shifts the emphasis: the Oedipal project is more the attempt of the developing sense-of-self to attain autonomy, like Descartes’ supposedly self-sufficient consciousness. It is the quest to deny one’s groundlessness by becoming one’s own ground: the ground (socially conditioned and maintained but nonetheless illusory) we know as being an independent person.

If so, the Oedipal project derives from our intuition that self-consciousness is not something “self-existing” (svabhava) but a mental construct. Consciousness is more like the surface of the sea, dependent on unknown depths that it cannot grasp because it is a manifestation of them. The problem arises when this conditioned consciousness wants to ground itself, i.e., to make itself real. If the sense-of-self is a construct, it can attempt to realize itself only by objectifying itself in some fashion in the world. The ego-self is this never-ending project to objectify oneself, something consciousness can no more do than a hand can grasp itself or an eye can see itself.

The consequence of this perpetual failure is that the sense-of-self has, as its inescapable shadow, a sense-of-lack, which it always tries to escape. In deconstructive terms, the ineluctable trace of nothingness in our being, of death in our life, is a feeling of lack. The return of the repressed in the distorted form of a symptom shows us how to link this basic yet hopeless project with the symbolic ways we try to make ourselves real in the world. We experience this deep sense of lack as the feeling that “there is something wrong with me,” but of course that feeling manifests, and we respond to it, in many different ways. In its “purer” forms lack appears as an ontological guilt or anxiety that becomes almost unbearable because it gnaws on one’s very core. For that reason ontological guilt wants to become guilt for something, because we then know how to atone for it; and anxiety is eager to objectify into
fear of something, because we have ways to defend ourselves against feared things.

The problem with objectifications is that no object can ever satisfy if it’s not really an object we want. When we do not understand what is actually motivating us—because what we think we want is only a symptom of something else (according to Buddhism, our desire to become real, which is essentially a spiritual yearning)—we end up compulsive. Then the neurotic’s anguish and despair are not the result of his symptoms but their source; those symptoms are necessary to shield him from the tragedies that the rest of us are better at repressing: death, meaninglessness, groundlessness. “The irony of man’s condition is that the deepest need is to be free of the anxiety of death and annihilation; but it is life itself which awakens it, and so we must shrink from being fully alive” (Becker, 1973, pp. 181-82).² From the Buddhist perspective, if the autonomy of self-consciousness is a delusion which can never quite shake off its shadow-feeling that “something is wrong with me,” it will need to rationalize that sense of inadequacy somehow.

Such a critique shifts our focus from the terror of future annihilation to the anguish of a groundlessness experienced now. On this account, even fear of death and desire for immortality symbolize something else; they become symptomatic of our vague intuition that the ego-self is not a hard-core of consciousness but a mental construction, the axis of a web spun to hide the void. Those whose constructions are badly damaged, the mad, are uncomfortable to be with in part because they remind us of that fact.

This paper will argue for the above position in two ways. First we shall look at what psychotherapy has discovered about guilt, anxiety and projection, to see if they may be understood as different symptoms manifesting the same problem: a repressed sense-of-lack that is intrinsic to the sense-of-self.

This will be followed by a Buddhist interpretation of lack, which agrees with much of the psychotherapeutic understanding of our situation but offers a way to resolve our unhappy state. Buddhism traces human suffering (duhkha) back to desire and ignorance, and relates all of them to our lack of self. The sense-of-self is deconstructed into interacting mental and physical processes, whose relativity leads to post-structuralist conclusions: the supposedly simple self is an economy of forces. The Buddhist solution to its lack is simple although not easy: if it is nothingness we dread, then we should become no-thing. The dichotomy between being and nonbeing can be conflated by yielding to the side we have been rejecting. In ceasing to deny my groundlessness I discover, paradoxically, that utter groundlessness (nonbeing) is equivalent to full groundedness (being). This reveals that from the very beginning

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there has never been any real lack, because there has never been any self-existing self apart from the world. The problem of desire is solved when the “bad infinity” of unsatisfiable lack transforms into a “good infinity” which needs nothing and therefore can freely become anything.

GUILT

Guilt has become an immense problem for modern man, and it seems to be getting worse. In Civilization and its Discontents (1930/1989, p. 97) Freud understands a heightening sense of guilt as the price we pay for advances in human culture, but the price is so high that guilt has now become “the most important problem in the development of civilization.” Norman O. Brown (1961) sees social organization as a structure of shared guilt: the burden is so heavy it must be shared in order to be expiated collectively. According to Otto Rank (1958, p. 194) contemporary man is neurotic because he suffers from a consciousness of sin just as much as premodern man did, but without believing in the religious conception of sin, which leaves us without a means of expiation. In the rituals of archaic man a sense of indebtedness was balanced by the belief that the debt could be repaid; today we are oppressed by the realization that the burden of guilt is unpayable. Even the possibility of expiation is denied us when we are not aware that what is bothering us is guilt. Hence unconscious guilt accumulates individually and collectively, with consequences that periodically become disastrous. Is this the price of progress, or do we have a bad conscience about what we are doing to each other—and to the earth? Or should the source of our guilt be distinguished from the reasons we invent to rationalize it?

Freud traced guilt back to the biologically-transmitted memory of a prehistoric primal deed, sons banding together to kill their autocratic father. With each generation this process is internalized anew in the Oedipal complex; the same instinctive wishes recur and cannot be concealed from the superego, producing guilt. The child has death-wishes toward parents yet is also dependent upon their love. Freud saw a parallel between the libidinal development of an individual and the socializing process of civilization: both require the internalization of a superego, leading to inevitable conflict with instinctual urges.

It is fascinating to observe the primal deed reenacted with Freud as psychoanalytic father and Jung, Adler, etc. as the rebellious sons. Just as striking is that Freud, the secularized Jew, locates the beginnings of our “original sin” in a moral infringement against the Father which occurred at the beginning of history and has been passed down biologically since then. As in the Old Testament, we
are not personally at fault for the initial violation, yet we inherit the consequences. Likewise, we cannot help it that in infancy we develop death wishes toward our parents, but, given that such death wishes arise toward the ones who nurture us, guilt is an understandable reaction. Both myths explain the origin of guilt-feelings by giving us moral reasons which parallel the way guilt is believed to operate in everyday life: when we do (or want to do) something wrong, we feel bad about it. The mechanism is presumed to be the same. Original sin may be proto-historical, biologically inherited, pre-conscious, yet it is only a repressed version of what happens whenever we infringe against the natural order. In terms of the distinction that the next paragraph will make between neurotic and ontological guilt, all guilt is neurotic for Genesis and Freud because we have all sinned.

If, however, the Oedipal project is the sense-of-self’s attempt to become self-grounding and to end its dependence on others by becoming autonomous (i.e., self-conscious), then the guilt that arises need not be traced back to ambivalent wishes, for it has a more primordial origin in the sense of lack inevitably deriving from the repressed intuition of self-consciousness that it does not self-exist. Such basic “guilt” is not neurotic but ontological. It is not a consequence of something I have done, but of the fact that I am—yet only “sort of.” Ontological guilt arises from the contradiction between this socially-conditioned sense that I am and the suspicion that I am not. Their clash is the sense-of-lack, which generates the / should be.... The tragedy is that I “awaken” into being only to be confronted by my lack of being. Schizophrenics may feel guilty just for existing because this contradiction is less repressed for them.

The prehistories of Genesis and Freud’s primal deed mythologize the fact that this mode of awareness is not some natural way of experiencing the world but historically conditioned. According to Erich Neumann (1973), the full emergence of the ego abolishes the original paradisal situation; this “is experienced as guilt, and moreover as original guilt, a fall.” The evolution of homo sapiens into self-consciousness alienated the human species from the rest of the world, which became objectified for us as we became subjects looking out at it. This original sin is passed down to every generation as the linguistically-conditioned and socially-maintained delusion that each of us is a consciousness existing separately from the world. Yet if this is a conditioning, it raises the possibility of a deconditioning, or a reconditioning.

Why do we need to feel guilty, and accept suffering, sickness and death as a suitable punishment? What role does that guilt play in determining the meaning of our lives? The best answer may come not from Freud but from an existentialist: “Original sin: a new

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sense has been invented for pain” (Nietzsche, 1956). Even the feeling of wrongdoing gives us some sense of control over our own destinies, because an explanation has been provided for our sense of lack. “The ultimate problem is not guilt but the incapacity to live. The illusion of guilt is necessary for an animal that cannot enjoy life, in order to organize a life of nonenjoyment” (Brown, 1961, p. 270). In The Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche observes that man will suffer readily if he is given a reason for his suffering. Since nothing is more painful to endure than pure lack, we need to project it onto something, because only thus can we get a handle on it. If that object is found outside, we react with anger; if directed inside, it becomes guilt (introjected anger, according to psychoanalysis). In “Some Character Types Met with in Psycho-analytic Work,” Freud (1916) describes “criminals from a sense of guilt” whose guilt feelings are so powerful that committing a misdeed actually brings relief—which makes sense, if what they crave is something specific to be able to atone for. “Guilt implies responsibility; and however painful guilt is, it may be preferable to helplessness” (Schmideberg, 1956, p. 476). We are all too familiar with collective examples of the other blaming system: racism, anti-Semitism, nationalism, etc. If social organization is a structure of shared guilt, what better solution to one’s communal sense of lack than to project it onto a communal scapegoat? This is the resentment that Nietzsche (1968a; 1968b) detected in the soul of modern man:

The spirit of revenge: my friends, that, up to now, has been mankind’s chief concern; and where there was suffering, there was always supposed to be punishment. As far as man has thought, he has introduced the bacillus of revenge in things. He has even made God ill with it, he has deprived existence in general of its innocence.

This reveals the problem of postulating an original sin as the ultimate cause of our suffering: instead of helping us end our sense-of-lack, it reifies our lack by providing it with a pedigree. It also maintains the institutions, religious and otherwise, that claim to have control over its absolution.

In contrast, Buddhism does not reify the sense of lack into an original sin, even though our problems with attachment and ignorance are historically conditioned. This is an important way nondualism, such as Buddhism, differs from theism. If you believe in an all-loving, all-powerful God, our suffering can be justified psychologically only by postulating a primal act of disobedience against Him. Sakyamuni Buddha declared that he was not interested in the metaphysical issue of origins, and emphasized that he had one thing only to teach: dukkha and the end of dukkha, our suffering now and the path to end that suffering. This means the
Buddhist path is nothing other than a way to resolve our sense of lack. Since there was no primeval offense and no expulsion from a paradise, our situation turns out to be paradoxical: the actual problem is our deeply-repressed fear that our groundlessness/nothing-ness is a problem. When I stop trying to fill up that hole at my core by vindicating or realizing myself in some symbolic way, something happens to it—and me.

This is easy to misunderstand, for the letting-go that is necessary is not directly accessible to consciousness. The ego cannot absolve its own lack because the ego is the other side of that lack. When ontological guilt is experienced more “purely”—as the unobjectified feeling that “something is wrong with me”—there seems to be no way to cope with it, so normally we become conscious of it as the neurotic guilt of “not being good enough” in this or that particular way. For Buddhism, the guilt expended in these situations should be converted back into ontological guilt, and that guilt must be endured without evasion; the method for doing this is simply nondual awareness, which meditation cultivates. The result is that one becomes profoundly guilty and feels completely worthless, not because of anything one has done but simply because one is. Letting-go of the mental devices that sustain my self-esteem, I stand alone and vulnerable. Such guilt, experienced in or rather as the core of one's being, cannot be resolved by the ego-self; there is nothing one can do with it except be conscious of it and bear it and let it burn itself out, like a fire that exhausts its fuel, which in this case is the sense-of-self. If we cultivate the ability to dwell as it, then ontological guilt, finding nothing else to be guilty for, consumes the sense-of-self and thereby itself too.

Anxiety

It can be no coincidence that everything just said about guilt must now be restated in terms of anxiety. The first seems to be a more limited case of the second. Even ontological guilt has an object: one’s own sense of self, for it is the self that the self feels bad about. In anxiety, however, lack attains its originary form, which is formless. Cultivating such objectless anxiety is the most direct route to realizing our own formlessness.

Freud gradually realized that anxiety is at the heart of the humanization process. He first understood anxiety as a by-product of repression but soon reversed himself. “It was not the repression that created the anxiety; the anxiety was there earlier and created the repression.” This makes ego rather than libido the locus of anxiety. Although Freud emphasized that his concept of the unconscious was derived from the theory of repression, he never suc-
anxiety as “cosmic”

ceeded in answering to his own satisfaction why there is repression in the first place. In neurotic phobias the symptom has been constructed in order to avoid an outbreak of anxiety, which traces neurosis and repression back to anxiety. But that just pushes the problem back a step:

We have once more come unawares upon the riddle which has so often confronted us: whence does neurosis come—what is its ultimate, its own peculiar raison d’etre? After tens of years of psycho-analytic labors, we are as much in the dark about this problem as we were at the start (Freud, 1923/1989).

In the next generation Harry Stack Sullivan had the most to say about anxiety, and he perceived an essential connection between it and the formation of the self. Anxiety originally arises out of the infant’s apprehension of the disapproval of significant persons in his world. Like Freud, Sullivan viewed anxiety as “cosmic,” something that invades us totally, and the self is formed out of the infant’s necessity to deal with such anxiety-creating experiences, to defend against that anxiety. The self “comes into being as a dynamism to preserve the feeling of security.” This pertains not only to behavior but to awareness itself:

The self comes to control awareness, to restrict one’s consciousness of what is going on in one’s situation very largely by the instrumentality of anxiety, with, as a result, a dissociation from personal awareness of those tendencies of the personality which are not included or incorporated in the approved structure of the self (Sullivan, in May, 1977, pp. 145-46).

We could not ask for a clearer formulation: it is not merely that something is denied, for that denial is what constitutes the self. So much for the nobility of Cartesian ego-consciousness: the sense-of-self is reduced from the locus of rationality to a pattern of evasions. No wonder it feels so uncomfortable, for coping with discomfort is its role; and no wonder it is so difficult to realize who or what we are, for such a consciousness has no being, only a function. This makes the sense-of-self into a double lack: an ungrounded awareness whose task is to repress anxiety.

Just as ontological guilt “wants” to become a more specific fault, so that I can deal with what is wrong with me, anxiety wants to become fear. Freud distinguished between anxiety (in which there is no object threat) and fear (in which there is), but psychoanalysts since him have found that distinction difficult to maintain in practice. According to Rollo May, “anxiety is the basic underlying reaction ... and fear is the expression of the same capacity in its specific, objectivated form.” Anxiety “is objectless because it strikes at that basis of the psychological structure on which the
perception of one’s self as distinct from the world of objects occurs” (1977, pp. 198,182). According to my Buddhist interpretation, such pure anxiety accompanies the ego-self's intuition of its own unreality; how reassuring, then, to project this outside as the threat posed by an external object. If the self is constituted by the denial of anxiety, as Sullivan seems to say, to objectify anxiety into fear will also subjectify the sense-of-self as that which copes with the fear—and as that which needs to be protected from the threat.

If so, then ending anxiety (if that is possible) also implies ending the sense-of-self as something autonomous and self-grounding. Freud said that what the ego fears in anxiety “is in the nature of an overthrow or extinction.” Rollo May adds that in anxiety “the security base of the individual is threatened, and since it is in terms of this security base that the individual has been able to experience himself as a self in relation to objects, the distinction between subject and object also breaks down” (May, 1977, p. 183). No Buddhist could express it better. For psychoanalysis, such breakdown is a definition of psychosis. For Buddhism, it may describe enlightenment:

Where there is an object there is a subject, but not where there is no object. The absence of an object results in the absence also of a subject, and not merely in that of grasping. It is thus that there arises the cognition which is homogeneous, without object, indiscriminate and supermundane. The tendencies to treat object and subject as distinct and real entities are forsaken, and thought is established in just the true nature of one’s thought (Vasubandhu, 1964).

The issue becomes whether the subject-object distinction can break down in different ways: why the mystic can swim in the same sea that drowns the psychotic.

In sum, the Buddhist critique of ego-self implies that anxiety is essential to the ego because it is the ego’s response to its own groundlessness, something more immediately threatening than fear of death sometime in the future. This theme is familiar in existential philosophy as well but it is uncommon in psychoanalysis. In Existential Psychotherapy, Irvin Yalom discusses what he calls the “ur-anxiety” of groundlessness yet concludes that, unlike death anxiety (to which he devotes almost half his book), anxiety about groundlessness is not evident in our daily experience (Yalom, 1980, pp. 221-22). Is such anxiety hard to recognize because it is so rare—confined, perhaps, to abstract philosophers—or because it is so well repressed?

In an influential essay “Life Fear and Death Fear,” Otto Rank divided anxiety into two opposed but complementary fears. Life fear is anxiety in the face of standing out from nature and becoming
an individual, thereby losing connection with a greater whole. Death fear is anxiety in the face of extinction, of losing individuality and dissolving back into the whole. “Between these two fear possibilities, the individual is thrown back and forth all his life” (Rank, in Yalom, 1980. pp. 141-42). In Existential Psychotherapy, Yalom develops this into his own dual paradigm of death-denial through individuation or fusion. The psychological defense of specialness is trying to become different and better than everyone else, thus deserving of a better fate. The defense of fusion is hiding in the group, which includes expecting to be taken care of by others. Yalom employs these defenses against death to explain the behavior of many of his clients, despite the fact that many of them display little if any obvious death anxiety.

My point is that Yalom’s paradigm need not be limited to the use Yalom finds for it, for specialness and fusion can work even better as defenses against a sense of ontological lack. If I am driven by an unacknowledged intuition of my groundlessness, I can try to compensate for that by becoming someone special who stands out from the crowd and thereby hope to become real by being acknowledged by the crowd. Conversely, I may try to resolve my sense of lack by fusing with others, in order to be no different from them: “there’s nothing wrong with me; I’m just like everyone else.” In the first case I compensate by striving to become more real than others; in the second I reassure myself by becoming no less real than others seem to be.

Until recently the emphasis has been on a more communal version of the latter. Society may well be a structure of shared guilt, as Brown says, but it is more obviously a structure of shared anxiety. Today our problem with anxiety is greater for at least two reasons: a more individualistic society produces people with a stronger sense-of-self, therefore with stronger anxiety, and it provides fewer effective ways to cope with that anxiety. Religion is the traditional consolation because it reassures me that my anxiety will be put to rest, my lack filled in, my groundlessness grounded in God or nirvana. If this is our deepest need, the death of God will only result in the search for an equivalent. The more individuated can try to deify their own egos, but it is difficult to become one’s own sun. Most people require a more collective, more objectified deity. Herein lies much of the appeal of nationalism, and socialism’s claim to embody “the will of the people.” “If modernization can be described as a spreading condition of homelessness, then socialism can be understood as the promise of a new home” (Berger, Berger & Kellner, 1973).

Herein, too, is a key to understanding many of the horrors of the twentieth century.
Totalitarianism is a cultural neurotic symptom of the need for community—a symptom in the respect that it is grasped as a means of allaying anxiety resulting from the feelings of powerlessness and helplessness of the isolated, alienated individuals produced in a society in which complete individualism has been the dominant goal. Totalitarianism is the substitution of collectivism for community, as Tillich has pointed out (May, 1977, p. 212).

In the passage from which this quotation is taken, May looks no further than the need for community; he does not consider what that need might express. This is no minor issue if our rapidly-evolving “global village” means there is no return to the small towns that sustained almost all of us until a few generations ago. Nostalgia may mythologize those communities, but they provided the security of a common worldview and the hope of redemption in one symbolic form or another. Without that possibility, the question becomes whether there is another alternative to mass collectivism, a different type of community, in which individuals are able to take more personal responsibility for coping with increased anxiety and resolving their own ontological lack.

That brings us back to the possibility of ending anxiety. Again, most of what was said earlier about ending guilt also applies here, transposed from a minor to a major key. But what is more noticeable in terms of anxiety is the almost unanimous agreement among existentialists and psychoanalysts that anxiety cannot be eliminated, only reduced and kept in its proper place. Many psychologists doubt that anxiety should be eliminated, viewing it as a spur to, or a necessary by-product of, heightened awareness. Liddell notes that “anxiety accompanies intellectual activity as its shadow” (quoted in May, 1977, p. 46).

For a different view we must turn again to religion, which confronts us with the task of demythologizing transformation from consolation, of distinguishing possibility from wishful thinking. For the role of anxiety in the religious life, I can find no better account than the short chapter which concludes Kierkegaard’s The Concept of Anxiety. In a few unforgettable pages Kierkegaard delineates the paradox that, if there is to be an end to anxiety, it can be found only through anxiety. Understood and experienced in the right way (one who misunderstands this anxiety is lost, he says), anxiety is a school which roots out everything finite and petty in us, and only then takes us wherever we want to go. As with guilt, the path of integration is an awareness that does not flee anxiety but endures it, in order to recuperate those parts of the psyche which split off and returned to haunt us in projected, symbolic form. If the way to integrate guilt is to be profoundly guilty, the way to integrate anxiety is to become completely anxious: to let formless, unprojected anxiety gnaw on all those “finite ends” I have at-
tempted to secure myself with; so that, by devouring these attachments, anxiety devours me too and, like the parasite that kills its host, consumes itself (see Kierkegaard, 1957, pp. 155-62).

To learn how to be anxious is to learn the ultimate, says Kierkegaard. The school of anxiety is the path to true freedom, which is what remains after we have been purged of all the comforting hiding places we automatically flee to whenever we feel insecure. Only such anxiety is “absolutely educative, because it consumes all finite ends and discovers all their deceptiveness.” The curriculum of this school is possibility, “the weightiest of all categories.” No matter what tragedies actually befall us, they are always far lighter than what could happen. When a person “graduates from the school of possibility,... he knows better than a child knows his ABCs that he can demand absolutely nothing of life and that the terrible, perdition, and annihilation live next door to every man.” It is an exercise in awareness: dredging up all the psychic securities we have hedged around us and then “forgotten,” until we found ourselves in a safe but constricted little world. Consciousness of what could happen at any moment deconstructs this comfortable cocoon by reminding us, at every moment, of our mortality; in psychotherapeutic terms, this demolishes one’s unconscious power linkages or supports. “He who sank in possibility ... sank absolutely, but then in turn he emerged from the depth of the abyss lighter than all the troublesome and terrible things in life.” Such a person no longer fears fate, “because the anxiety within him has already fashioned fate and has taken away from him absolutely all that any fate could take away.” This spiritual discipline stands in striking contrast to the sense of divine protection that is usually taken to be a secular benefit of religious faith. Kierkegaard is no less interested in faith, yet for him it does not come so cheaply. Authentic faith is not a refuge from anxiety but its fruit.

If the ego-self is a mental construction whose function is to preserve a feeling of security (as Sullivan puts it), then such an exercise in deconstructing security should eliminate that sense-of-self. Usually much of our mental activity is structured by the need to have reassuring hide-outs, where we can flee when our self-esteem is threatened. A trivial example: when I lose a chess game to an opponent with a much lower rating, I automatically compensate: official ratings show that I am really the better player. Fixed by repetition, the web of such automatizations constitutes my character and therefore my unfreedom: all the ways I habitually run away from open encounter with the world. For Buddhism as well as Kierkegaard, I must let go of these thought-props, which is to suffer. Without these defenses to self-esteem, I die a thousand little ego-deaths—or walk on the edge of a thousand swords, to use the Zen metaphor. In Kierkegaard’s terms, such thought-props are the
finitudes which must be rooted out to reveal the infinitude that is our true ground.

Projection

Our discussions of guilt and anxiety need to be supplemented by some reference to their objectifications: projection and transference. The apparently-objective world is unconsciously structured by the ways we seek to secure ourselves within it. We meet again the unfortunate paradox that precisely this attempt to ground myself in the world is what separates me from it.

In The Ego and the Id, Freud observes that the dynamically unconscious repressed is not capable of becoming conscious in the ordinary way, and suggests that “anything arising from within that seeks to become conscious must try to transform itself into external perceptions” (Freud, 1923/1989, pp. 12-13). That insight is now taken for granted, yet the way Freud expresses it also takes for granted our commonsense bifurcation between subject and object even as the phenomena he refers to—projection and transference—challenge it. Such formulations assume that the locus of the unconscious is some place within me and that the objective world is what it appears to be, something external to me. Like most of us all the time and perhaps all of us most of the time, Freud takes for granted the objectivity of the world—yet this is a dangerous assumption, given Kant’s Copernican Revolution and the more recent discoveries of quantum physics and cognitive psychology. It is also a difficult assumption to become aware of, if we constitute the world in a manner which conceals the fact that we have constituted it:

Perhaps the most potent defense of all [against death-anxiety] is simply reality as it is experienced—that is, the appearance of things.... appearances enter the service of denial: we constitute the world in such a way that it appears independent of our constitution. To constitute the world as an empirical world means to constitute it as something independent of ourselves (Yalom, 1980, p. 222).*

Why is this such a potent defense against anxiety? Why do we forget that we (for it is a social construction: we learn to perceive the world the way others do) have constituted the world? Yalom relates this to a repressed fear of groundlessness, which makes us try to secure ourselves by stabilizing the world we are in. We need a world of dependable, self-existing things, fixable in objective time and space and interacting in ways we can learn to manipulate. Once a predictable world has been automatized, we can concentrate on achieving our ends within that world. However, there is another reason for “forgetting” if the sense-of-self which is in that world is itself constituted at the same time: in that case these acts of

*Avoiding the Void: The Lack of Self in Psychotherapy and Buddhism
constitution cannot be accessible to self-consciousness because
they are also the foundations of self-consciousness. Then to repress
the fact that my objective world is constituted is also to repress the
fact that I am constituted.

The implication of this for projection and transference is that
unconscious phenomena need not be sought in some undetermined
mental place within me but are to be found embodied in my world.
Then, if I want to find my unconscious, I should look at the
structures of my world, and if we want to locate our collective
unconscious we must look to the shared structures of our social
world.

What really happens [in transference] is not that the neurotic patient
“transfers” feelings he had toward mother or father to wife or therapist.
Rather, the neurotic is one who in certain areas never developed
beyond the limited and restricted forms of experience characteristic of
the infant. Hence in later years he perceives wife or therapist through
the same restricted, distorted “spectacles” as he perceived father or
mother. The problem is to be understood in terms of perception and
relatedness to the world (May, 1983, p. 154).

However, this does not mean that developing into the less restricted
forms of experience characteristic of most adults is a satisfactory
solution. The “pathology of normalcy” (Fromm) or the “psychopa-
thology of the average” (Maslow) are no answer insofar as the
child is father to the man and we remain children “blown up by
age.” The difference is that the infant’s world is determined by his
parents’, but as we grow up our need for security becomes invested
in wider social structures, which emphasize competing for so-
cially-agreed security and status symbols: wealth, prizes, power
and so forth.

Jung described projection as leading to a dream-like experience of
the world:

The effect of projection is to isolate the subject from his environment,
since instead of a real relation to it there is now only an illusory one.
Projections change the world into the replica of one’s unknown face. In
the last analysis, therefore, they lead to an auto-erotic or autistic
condition in which one dreams a world whose reality remains forever
unattainable (Jung, 1958, p. 8).

Jung also noted that people in the process of individuation take
their projections back into themselves. To understand better the
principles involved in such de-projection, we can benefit from the
fifth part of Spinoza’s Ethics (1677/1982), “Of the Power of the
Intellect, or of Human Freedom,” which discusses how human
freedom may be realized. Proposition three is: “An emotion which
is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and
distinct idea of it.” Do we passively suffer from the way our minds work or are we “self-determined” because we understand how they function? Proposition two makes it more evident that, in psychotherapeutic terms, this is the difference between an unconscious transference/projection and the awareness of what we are doing to ourselves: “If we remove a disturbance of the mind or an emotion away from the thought of an external cause, and join it to other thoughts, then love or hatred towards the external cause, as well as waverings of the mind which originate from these emotions, are destroyed.”

Earlier in the Ethics Spinoza defines love and hatred as pleasure and pain, respectively, accompanied by the idea of an external cause. In a similar fashion, fear might be defined as “anxiety accompanied by the idea of an external cause” and guilt as “anxiety accompanied by the idea of an internal cause (i.e., oneself).” The solutions are similar in each case: to break the association between the emotion and its supposedly external (or introjected, in the case of guilt) cause, which is what my argument has been recommending in order to experience pure ontological guilt and anxiety, unrelieved by any projection or introjection.

If something about a person particularly bothers me, the psychotherapeutic approach is to use that as an opportunity to learn something about myself, by inquiring into why that affects me. Spinoza is also pointing out that if I suffer psychologically, it is because my own ways of thinking, alienated and projected, have put me in a bind. Efforts to real-ize myself symbolically mean I give power over myself to those persons and situations which can grant or refuse the symbolic reality that I hope will fill up my lack.

Spinoza, like Buddhism, believes that genuine freedom can be actualized by becoming aware of the repressed mental events we have projected. If, for example, I want to be respected by certain philosophers, whom I look upon as eminent (usually because others look upon them as eminent), this will naturally affect the nature of my world and the way I feel compelled to act within it. Spinoza shows me how to realize that the opinions of these philosophers do not have power over my state of mind, but that I give these people power over me by my ways of thinking about their states of mind. In gaining a “clear and distinct idea” of my desire for their approbation—by becoming aware of it rather than just being motivated by it—I can distinguish my desire from my idea of those people (“the thought of an external cause”) and notice instead the connections between that desire and other ideas of mine, such as my desire to become a famous thinker (“join it to other thoughts”). In this way I can free myself from the “waverings of the mind” arising from fear of their evaluation and need to be esteemed (“loved”) by them. This does not mean I should become indifferent.
to the opinions of others, but it allows me to respond in a more self-
determined way, informed rather than affected by their views.

BUDDHIST DUHKHA

A monk whose mind is thus released cannot be followed and tracked out even by the gods ... Even in this actual life, monks, I say that a released person is not to be thoroughly known. Though I thus say and thus preach, some ascetics and Brahmins accuse me wrongly and baselessly, saying that “the ascetic Gotama is a nihilist and preaches the annihilation, destruction and non-existence of an existent being.” That is what I am not and do not affirm. Both previously and now I preach duhkha and the cessation of duhkha (Sakyamuni Buddha, Majjhima Nikaya 1.135).

I am not aware of any precise Buddhist equivalent for the psycho­analytic concepts of repression and the return of the repressed as a symptom. Yet we have already noticed that Buddhism does have a term which corresponds to the sense-of-lack as I have been using it, and by no coincidence it is probably the most important concept of all: duhkha. The Buddha repeatedly summarized his teachings into four truths: duhkha, the cause of duhkha, the end of duhkha, and how to end duhkha. What makes this an equivalent for lack is that Buddhism sees an integral relationship between our duhkha and our delusive sense-of-self. In order to end duhkha, the sense-of-self must be deconstructed.

Dukhha is a Sanskrit term meaning suffering, pain, discomfort, frustration, etc. The first truth defines homo sapiens as the dissatisfied animal. Without confronting the ultimate source of our duhkha, any amelioration in one aspect of life will only shift the emphasis to another: from physical pain to psychological stress, for example. That is because, like psychoanalytic anxiety, duhkha is not something we have but something we are.

The early commentarial tradition distinguishes three kinds of duhkha. What we usually think of as suffering and discomfort is all included in the first, which incorporates the trauma of birth, illness, worry, decrepitude, death-fear; to be bound to what one dislikes; to be separated from what one loves, etc. When momentarily free of such suffering we are able to contemplate the second type of duhkha, that caused by anitya, impermanence. “Such is the state of life, that none are happy but by the anticipation of change: the change is nothing; when we have made it, the next wish is to change again” (Dr. Johnson). As long as there is lack, real life is always elsewhere. Modernity has aggravated this problem:

On the one hand, modern identity is open-ended, transitory, liable to ongoing change. On the other hand, a subjective realm of identity is the
individual’s main foothold in reality. Something that is constantly changing is supposed to be the ens realissimum. Consequently it should not be a surprise that modern man is afflicted with a permanent identity crisis, a condition conducive to considerable nervousness.

... The final consequence of all this can be put very simply (though the simplicity is deceptive): modern man has suffered from a deepening condition of ‘homelessness.’ The correlate of the migratory character of his experience of society and of self has been what might be called a metaphysical loss of ‘home.’ It goes without saying that this condition is psychologically hard to bear (Berger, Berger & Kellner, 1973, pp. 74, 77).

The special contribution of Buddhism is how it relates these first two types of duhkha—dis-ease and impermanence—to the structure of the sense-of-self: the third kind of duhkha is that due to the “conditioned states,” the physical and mental factors whose interaction constitutes the ego-self. Samadhi, meditative absorption, enables us to end our sense-of-lack by cultivating the ability to forget oneself, whereby the sense-of-self lets go of itself. The rest of this paper discusses this Buddhist deconstruction. The following section presents the ontological and epistemological deconstruction of the self according to Buddhist doctrine. The final section looks at that deconstruction more phenomenologically, according to Buddhist praxis, in order to understand how it solves the problem of our lack.

**Buddhist Deconstruction of the Self**

Buddhism deconstructs the sense of self in two ways: synchronically into the five skandhas, literally “heaps,” and diachronically into pratitya-samutpada “dependent origination.” These doctrines explain how the illusion of self is constituted and how it functions. They also imply how it may be ended.

The five skandhas are the physical and mental factors that compose the psychophysical personality. They are usually translated as: form, which includes the material body with its sense-organs; feelings and sensations; perceptions; mental formations (or volitional tendencies) including habits and dispositions; and consciousness, understood here as the six sense-consciousnesses (including mental consciousness of mental events). These are also called “the five groups of grasping.” All experiences associated with the sense of self can be analyzed into these five “heaps,” with no remainder outside them. There is no persisting self or transcendent soul to be found over and above their functioning. The Buddha emphasized that these five do not constitute the self; their interaction creates the illusion of self. The recommended attitude is to regard each skandha “with proper wisdom, according to reality,
thus: ‘These are not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’” As a
result, the “well-instructed noble disciple, understanding this, wea­
ries of them, becomes passion-free, and is thereby emancipated”
Nikaya XXII, 54).

Yet the skandha deconstruction of self has been overshadowed by
and even subsumed into pratitya-samutpada (dependent-origina­
tion), by far the most important doctrine in Buddhism. The Buddha
emphasized that someone who understands pratitya-samutpada
understands his teaching, and vice-versa. Dependent-origination
explains our experience by locating all phenomena within a set of
twelve factors, each conditioned by and conditioning all the others.
The twelve links of this chain (a later doctrinal construct which
integrates shorter chains that the Buddha elaborated on different
occasions) are traditionally understood as follows.

The presupposition of the whole process is (1) ignorance or ignore­
ance, because something about experience is overlooked in our
usual eagerness to gratify desires. Due to this ignorance, the other
factors function, including (2) volitional tendencies (the fourth of
the skandhas) from a person’s previous lifetime which survive
physical death and tend to cause a new birth. The original Sanskrit
term samskarah refers to the influence that previous mental activi­
ties have on our conative acts. The persistence of these volitional
tendencies explains how rebirth occurs without a permanent self:
the samskarah survive physical death to affect the new (3) con­
sciousness that arises when a fertilized egg is conceived. Concep­
tion causes (4) mind-body, the fetus, to grow, which develops (5)
the sense-organs, which allow (6) contact between each organ and
its respective sense-object, giving rise to (7) sensation that leads to
(8) craving for that sensation. Craving causes (9) grasping or
attachment to life in general. Such clinging is traditionally classi­
ified into four types: clinging to pleasure, to views, to morality or
external observances, and to belief in a soul or self. This classifica­
tion is striking because it ignores any difference in kind between
physical sense grasping and mental attachment; evidently the same
problematic tendency manifests in all four. Grasping leads to (10)
becoming, the tendency after physical death to be reborn, causing
(11) another birth and therefore (12) “decay and death, sorrow,
lamentation, pain, grief and despair.” And so the cycle continues.

The first factor mentioned, ignorance, is not understood as a “first
cause” that initiated the whole process in some distant past. Bach of
the twelve factors conditions all the others, and there is no refer­
ence in Buddhism to some pristine time before this cycle began
operating. Even (8) craving, which the second Noble Truth gives as
the cause of duhkha, is here explained as conditioned by (7)
sensation, which in turn is conditioned by (6) contact, and so forth.
In response to the problem of how rebirth can occur without a permanent soul or self that is reborn, rebirth is explained as a series of impersonal processes which occur without any self that is doing or experiencing them. In one Pali sutra, a monk asks the Buddha to whom belong, and for whom occur, the phenomena described in pratitya-samutpada. The Buddha rejects that question as misguided; from each factor as its preconditions arises another factor; that is all. The karmic results of action are experienced without there being anyone who created the karma or anyone who receives its fruit, although there is a causal connection between the action and its result.

A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, which points to the Buddhist solution to this cycle of suffering. “Through the entire fading away and extinction of this ignorance [the first factor], however, the samskarah [second factor] become extinguished,” an extinction which in turn affects the third factor, and so forth until all twelve factors have been extinguished. “Thus takes place the extinction of this whole mass of suffering.” This formulation has encouraged many Buddhist as well as most Western commentators to understand Buddhism as nihilistic, yet Sakyamuni Buddha himself denied this, for it misunderstands the significance of the fact that there has never been any self to be annihilated.

This exposition of basic doctrines may seem a digression from our earlier discussions of lack and the return of the repressed. It is necessary to keep in mind, therefore, the connection between such theoretical constructs and the praxis they underpin. All Buddhist doctrines may be viewed as heuristic, because they all refer back to the essential matter of resolving our duhkha. We need to understand how the chain that leads to duhkha functions in order to learn how to end it. We must realize how certain, largely automatized and unconscious, ways of understanding ourselves in the world perpetuate both our sense-of-self and the objectified world we find ourselves in; and that what has thereby been constructed may also be deconstructed.

From this point of view, the important issue is not whether the five skandhas are the only synchronous way to analyze the sense-of-self, nor whether the Buddhist doctrines of karma and rebirth are valid, but the integral connection between duhkha and the sense-of-self. Our discussion of that relationship is not yet complete, because the Buddhist understanding of pratitya-samutpada changed radically with the development of Mahayana. Nagarjuna’s interpretation of pratitya-samutpada constituted a “Copernican revolution” within Buddhism, and the locus classicus of this revolution is in his Mulamadhyamikakarikas (hereafter “MMK,” Candrakirti, 1979). Let us see what the MMK says about sunyata and nirvana.
The first verse of the MMK proclaims its thoroughgoing critique of being: “No things whatsoever exist, at any time or place, having risen by themselves, from another, from both or without cause.”9 Paralleling the poststructuralist radicalization of structuralist claims about language, Nagaijuna’s argument merely brings out more fully the implications of pratitya-samutpada. Dependent origination is not a doctrine about causal relations between entities, because the mutual interdependence of these twelve factors means they are not really entities. None of the twelve phenomena—which are understood to encompass everything—is self-existent because each is infected with the traces of all the others. That none self-exists is the meaning of sunya and its substantive sunyata, terms notoriously difficult to translate but usually rendered as “empty” and “emptiness.” Nagarjuna was careful to warn that sunyata is a heuristic concept: “Sunyata is a guiding, not a cognitive, notion, presupposing the everyday” (MMK XXIV: 18). It presupposes the everyday because it is parasitic on the notion of things, which it refutes, thereby refuting itself at the same time. Nagarjuna warned that sunyata was a snake which, if grasped at the wrong end, could be fatal: “The spiritual conquerors have proclaimed sunyata to be the exhaustion of all theories and views; those for whom sunyata is itself a theory, they declared to be incurable” (MMK XXIV: 11).

The point of sunyata is to deconstruct the self-existence of things. Nagarjuna addresses the main philosophical theories of his day, yet his real target is that unconscious, automatized metaphysics disguised as the world we live in. If philosophy were merely a preoccupation of academics one could ignore it, but we have no choice in the matter because we are all philosophers. The fundamental categories of everydayness for us are self-existing/self-present things which originate, change, and eventually cease to be; in order to explain the relations among these things, the categories of space, time and causality must also be employed. The most important and problematical of these supposedly self-existing things is, of course, the self: the Buddhist notion of interdependent factors is thus diametrically opposed to the Cartesian notion of an autonomous, self-grounded consciousness. And the vehicle of this commonsense metaphysics, creating and sustaining it, is language, which presents us with a set of nouns (self-existing things) that have temporal and causal predicates (arise, change, and cease).

Can our duhkha be explained in terms of sunyata and pratitya-samutpada? The ego-self is delusive because, like everything else, it is a temporary manifestation arising out of the interconditionality of the twelve factors, yet it feels separate from that chain and from the rest of the world. The basic difficulty is that insofar as I feel separate (i.e., an autonomous, self-existing consciousness) I also feel uncomfortable, because an illusory sense of separateness is inevitably insecure. It is the ineluctable trace of nothingness in my
empty" (because not really self-existing) sense-of-self that is experienced as a sense-of-lack; in reaction, the sense-of-self becomes preoccupied with trying to make itself self-existing, in one or another symbolic fashion. The tragic irony is that the ways we attempt to do this cannot succeed, for a sense-of-self can never expel the trace of lack that constitutes it insofar as it is illusory; while in the most important sense we are already self-existing, because the infinite set of differential traces that constitutes each of us is the whole universe. “The self-existence of a Buddha is the self-existence of this very cosmos. The Buddha is without a self-existent nature; the cosmos too is without a self-existent nature” (MMK XXII: 16). What Nagarjuna says here about the Buddha is equally true for each of us and, indeed, everything; the only difference is that a Buddha knows it.

Yet insofar as we strive to become a Buddha, we misunderstand the Buddha’s teaching. Instead, the serenity we seek is “the coming-to-rest of all ways of taking things, the repose of named things” (sarvopalambhopasamaprapancopasamah) (MMK XXV: 24). Nagarjuna’s most important commentator, Candrakirti, glosses this verse: “the very coming to rest, the non-functioning, of perceptions as signs of all named things, is itself nirvana.... When verbal assertions cease, named things are in repose; and the ceasing to function of discursive thought is ultimate serenity” (Candrakirti, 1979, p. 262). The problem is not merely that language acts as a filter, obscuring the nature of things. Rather, names are used to objectify appearances into the self-existing things we perceive as books, tables, trees, you and me. In other words, the objective world of material things, which interact causally in space and time, is metaphysical through-and-through. It is this metaphysics, disguised as commonsense reality, which makes me suffer, especially insofar as I understand myself to be one such self-existing being in time that will nonetheless die.

It is possible to end our duhkha because the coming-to-rest of using names to take perceptions as self-existing objects can deconstruct the automatized inside-outside dualism between our sense-of-self and the “objective” everyday world. Since that world is as differential, as full of traces, as the textual discourse Derrida analyzes, the Buddhist approach is to use those differences/deferrals to deconstruct that objectified world—including ourselves, since we subjects are the first to be ob-jectified. If there are only traces of traces, what happens if we stop trying to arrest those elusive traces into self-present things? “When there is clinging perception (upadane), the perceiver generates being. When there is no clinging perception, he will be freed and there will be no being” (MMK XXVI: 7).

This explains how Buddhist doctrine deconstructs the self-existence of things, but this is not sufficient for understanding how that
deconstructs our sense-of-lack. The last section will address that deconstruction by considering how the most fundamental dualism of all—that between my ungrounded sense of being and the nonbeing or no-thing-ness that threatens it—may be conflated.

Letting the Mind Come Forth

By now it has become clear that, from the Buddhist perspective, our most problematic duality is not life against death but self versus nonself, or our being versus nonbeing. In psychological terms, our primal repression is not fear of death—which still holds the feared thing at arm’s length by projecting it into the future—but the sense-of-self repressing its suspected nothingness right now, which, I have argued, we become aware of as a sense-of-lack that shadows our sense-of-self. This particular bipolarity infects much of our thinking. A good example is Paul Tillich’s *The Courage to Be* (1952). According to Tillich, ontological anxiety is anxiety about one’s ultimate non-being, about not being able to preserve one’s own being. Since he believes this anxiety cannot be eliminated, his theological solution is for us to be accepted by the Power of Being, which gives us the courage to affirm being despite the threat of nonbeing. God is “the self-affirmation of Being itself which prevails against nonbeing.”

Perhaps it is reassuring to learn that God is not on the side of nonbeing—which is presumably why nonbeing does not rate a capital letter—but the Buddhist approach is different: as the seventh century Ch’an master Hsuan Chueh of Yung Chia put it, “Being is not being. Non-being is not non-being. Miss this rule by a hair and you are off by a thousand miles” (Aitken, unpublished). Such conceptual paradoxes may not seem very relevant to our lives, yet the speculations of theologians and metaphysicians are only the most abstract version of a game which touches our core, if the basic issue turns out to be the groundedness or groundlessness of that core. Like the matter and anti-matter of quantum physics, nonbeing (experienced as lack) turns out to be the shadow of being (self). They arise together, in relation to each other, and therefore they should be able to disappear together by collapsing back into each other—which cannot leave the nothingness we dread (for that is one of the two poles), but... what?

In the Samyutta Nikaya Sakyamuni declares that “the world is nothing in itself and for itself,... therefore it is said the world is nothing.” What is this nothing? He says that it is the six organs of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, their six sense-objects, and the six corresponding types of sense-consciousness. Yet the Buddha also describes these same eighteen indriyas as the all: “Whoever, O monks, should say: ‘Reject this all, I will proclaim...
another all”—it would be mere talk on his part.... Why so? Because it is beyond his scope to do so.” The Buddha then provides “a teaching for the abandonment of the all”: “The eye must be abandoned, visual-objects must be abandoned, eye-consciousness must be abandoned, eye-contact must be abandoned. That enjoyment or suffering or neutral state experienced which arises according to eye contact—that also must be abandoned.” And so forth for all the other senses (Samyutta Nikaya XXXV, 23-26). Since the Buddha has just said that these eighteen indriyas encompass everything, such a teaching seems odd: there is nothing else to become, nowhere else to turn. The solution is so obvious that we are liable to overlook it: it is simply to realize something about the sunya “empty” nature of these phenomena, an approach that Mahayana developed.

As in psychotherapy, the Buddhist response to bipolar dualisms involves recognizing the side that has been denied. If death is what the sense-of-self fears, the solution is for the sense-of-self to die. If it is no-thing-ness (i.e., the repressed intuition that, rather than being autonomous and self-existent, the “I” is a construct) I am afraid of, the best way to resolve that fear is to become nothing. The twelfth-century Japanese Zen master, Dogen, sums up this process:

To study the buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly (Dogen, in Tanahashi, 1985, p. 70).

“Forgetting” ourselves is how we lose our sense of separation and realize that we are not other than the world. Meditation is learning how to become nothing by learning to forget the sense-of-self, which happens when I become absorbed into my meditation-exercise. If the sense-of-self is a result of consciousness attempting to reflect back upon itself in order to grasp itself, such meditation practice makes sense as an exercise in de-reflection. Consciousness unlearns trying to grasp itself, real-ize itself, objectify itself. Enlightenment occurs in Buddhism when the usually-automatized reflexivity of consciousness ceases, which is experienced as a letting-go and falling into the void and being wiped out of existence. “Men are afraid to forget their minds, fearing to fall through the Void with nothing to stay their fall. They do not know that the Void is not really void, but the realm of the real Dharma” (Huang-po, in Blofeld, 1958, p. 41). Then, when I no longer strive to make myself real through things, I find myself “actualized” by them, says Dogen. This process implies that what we fear as nothingness is not really nothingness, for that is the perspective of a sense-of-self anxious about losing its grip on itself. According to Buddhism,
hanging over a precipice letting-go of myself and merging with that no-thing-ness leads to something else: when consciousness stops trying to catch its own tail, I become no-thing, and discover that I am everything—or, more precisely, that I can be anything.

An example of Zen meditation may be helpful here. In the Zen lineage that I am familiar with, a first koan such as Joshu’s Mu is treated more or less like a mantram. Putting all one’s mental energy into “muuu . .(repeated mentally during breath exhalations) undermines the sense-of-self by letting-go of the mental processes which sustain it. At the beginning of such practice, one attempts to concentrate on “muuu . .but is distracted by other thoughts, feelings, memories, desires, etc., that arise. A later, more focussed stage is when one can concentrate on “muuu . .without losing it: “muuu . .effectively keeps other thoughts, etc., away. The stage when “both inside and outside naturally fuse” occurs when there is no longer the sense of an “I” that is repeating an objective sound; there is only “muuu . .This stage is sometimes described by saying that now “muuu . .is doing “muuu . .it is “muuu . .that sits, walks, eats, and so forth.

Sometimes this practice leads to a condition that has been described as hanging over a precipice. “Except for occasional feelings of uneasiness and despair, it is like death itself’ (Hakuin, in Suzuki, 1956, p. 148). The solution is to throw oneself completely into “muuu . .

Bravely let go on the edge of the cliff.
Throw yourself into the abyss with decision and courage.
You only revive after death! (Po-shan, in Chang, 1959).

At this point the teacher may help by cutting the last thread: an unexpected action, such as a blow or shout or even a few quiet words, may startle the student into letting-go. “All of a sudden he finds his mind and body wiped out of existence, together with the koan. This is what is known as ‘letting go your hold’ ”(Hakuin, in Suzuki, 1956, p. 148).“ One classical Zen story tells how a student was enlightened by the sound of a pebble striking bamboo. When the practice is ripe, the shock of an unexpected sensation can help it to penetrate to the very core of one’s illusory sense of being—that is, it is experienced nondually.

Is this being or nothingness? groundlessness or groundedness? If each link of pratitya-samutpada is conditioned by all the others, then to become completely groundless is also to become completely grounded, not in some particular, but in the whole network of interdependent relations that constitutes the world. The supreme irony of my struggle to ground myself is that it cannot succeed because I am already grounded in the totality. Buddhism implies
that I am groundless and ungroundable insofar as delusively feeling myself to be separate from the world; I have always been fully grounded insofar as the world is me and I am the world. With that conflation, the no-thing at my core is transformed from sense-of-lack into a serenity that is imperturbable because nothing is there to be perturbed. “When neither existence nor non-existence again is presented to the mind, then, through the lack of any other possibility, that which is without support becomes tranquil” (Santideva).  

How does this solve the problem of desire, our alternation between frustration and boredom? A consciousness that seeks to ground itself by fixating on something dooms itself to perpetual dissatisfaction, for the impermanence of all things means no such perch can be found. But since it is our lack that compels us to seek such a perch, the end of lack allows a change of perspective. The solution is a different way of experiencing the problem: in Hegelian terms, this is the “free-ranging variable” which always has some finite determination but is not bound to any particular one. The bad infinite of lack transforms into the good infinite of a variable that needs nothing. In Buddhist terms, this transforms the alienation of a reflexive sense-of-self always trying to fixate itself into the freedom of an “empty” mind that can become anything because it does not need to become something.

The Astasahasanka Prajnaparamita Sutra begins by describing this “good infinity”:

No wisdom can we get hold of, no highest perfection.
No Bodhisattva, no thought of enlightenment either.
When told of this, if not bewildered and in no way anxious,
A Bodhisattva courses in the Tathagata’s wisdom.
In form, in feeling, will, perception and awareness [the five skandhas]
Nowhere in them they find a place to rest on.
Without a home they wander, dharmas never hold them,
Nor do they grasp at them (Conze, 1973, 1: 5-7, p. 9)

For Buddhism the problem of desire is solved when, without the craving-for-being that compels me to take hold of something and try to settle down in it, I am free to become it. The Buddhist solution to the problem of life is thus very simple: the “bong!” of a temple bell, the “tock!” of pebble against bamboo, the flowers on a tree in springtime, to cite some Zen examples. Of course, becoming an object is precisely what we have been trying to do all along, yet in a self-defeating way, compulsively seizing on our own objectifications in order to stabilize ourselves. But I cannot become something by grasping at it. That merely reinforces the delusive sense of separation between that-which-is-grasped and that-which-grasps-at-it. The only way I can become a phenomenon is to realize I have always been it, according to Buddhism. When nothing is needed
from the object to fill up my lack, it can be just what it is—the reverberating temple bell, etc., now no longer frustrating because there is no longer anything lacking in me that I need to experience as something lacking in my world.

If I am the object, however, it no longer makes sense to understand it as an object. When there is no sense-of-self that is inside, there can be no outside. In the “Sokushinzebutsu” fascicle of the Shobogenzo, Dogen quotes the Chinese Ch’an master Yang-shan: mind is “mountains, rivers, earth, the sun, the moon and the stars.” This mind is not some transcendental Absolute. It is nothing other than your mind and my mind, when it is realized to be a free-ranging variable not bound to any particular determination. Such a mind is absolute in the original sense of the term, unconditioned. Meditative techniques decondition the mind from its tendency to secure itself by circling in familiar ruts, thus enabling its freedom to become anything. The most-quoted line from the best-known of all Mahayana sutras, the Diamond Sutra, encapsulates all this in one phrase: “Let your mind come forth without fixing it anywhere.”

Conclusion

We have seen how Buddhism anticipated the reluctant conclusions of modern psychology: guilt and anxiety are not adventitious but intrinsic to the ego. According to my interpretation of Buddhism, our dissatisfaction with life derives from a repression even more immediate than death-terror: the suspicion that “I” am not real. The sense-of-self is not self-existing but a mental construction which experiences its own groundlessness as a lack. This sense-of-lack is consistent with what psychotherapy has discovered about ontological guilt and basic anxiety. We usually cope with this lack by objectifying it in various ways and try to resolve it through projects which cannot succeed because they do not address the fundamental issue.

So our most problematic dualism is not life fearing death but a fragile sense-of-self dreading its own groundlessness. By accepting and yielding to that groundlessness, I can discover that I have always been grounded, not as a self-contained being but as one manifestation of a web of relationships which encompasses everything. This solves the problem of desire by transforming it. As long as we are driven by lack, every desire becomes a sticky attachment that tries to fill up a bottomless pit. Without lack, the serenity of our no-thing-ness, i.e., the absence of any fixed nature, grants the freedom to become anything.
NOTES


2For Becker, facing the truth of the human condition without psychological defenses leads to mental paralysis, partial (neurosis) or severe (psychosis); yet to hide from this fact is to find security in a world of projections and transferences (Becker, 1973, chs. 2-4 and passim).

3“Sin . . . constituted the greatest event in the entire history of the sick soul, the most dangerous sleight-of-hand of the religious interpretation” (Nietzsche, 1956, p. 277).

4Existential Psychotherapy 221-2. Yet Yalom cites some evidence for it. For example, Adah Maurer and Max Stem have separately conducted research into the night terrors of very young children. Stern concluded that the child is terrified of nothingness; according to Maurer, the infant’s first task is to differentiate between self (being) and environment (nonbeing), and during a night terror the infant may be experiencing “awareness of nonbeing” (p. 89).

5Without such a psychoanalytic understanding, sociological explanations like Hannah Arendt’s “the banality of evil” are incomplete. (See her *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* [New York: Viking, 1964], p. 276 and passim.)

6A similar realization—that the ego not only represses, but represses the fact that it represses—was a turning point in Freud’s career, redirecting his investigations from the nature of the repressed to the nature of repressing.

7For an example of how our socially-agreed and apparently-objective temporal schema can be deconstructed back into an eternal now, see Loy, D., “What’s Wrong with *Being and Time*: A Buddhist Critique of Heidegger,” *Time and Society* (1992), vol. 1 no. 2.

8For a scholarly examination of *pratitya-samutpada* in early Buddhist literature, see Govind Chandra Pande, *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 2nd ed., 1983), 407-42. “Apart from the central idea... the formula has grown through accretions, fusions, and analyses. In its full grown form, consequently, it has about it an aura of vagueness, and in the details, even of inconsistency” (441).

The translation used in this paper is Mervyn Sprung’s in his edition of *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way* (Boulder, CO: Prajna Press, 1979), Candrakirti’s classic commentary on the MMK. Mervyn Sprung translates *sunyata* as “the absence of being in things.”

9For Derrida’s textual deconstruction, see, e.g., *Positions* (1981) and *Margins of Philosophy* (1982), both published by University of Chicago Press.

10For more on this process, see Yasutani-Roshi’s “Commentary on the Koan Mu” in P. Kaplcau, ed., *The Three Pillars of Zen* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1966), 71-82.

11*Bodhicaryavatara* 9: 35. Cf. MMK V11.16: “Anything which exists by virtue of dependent origination is quiescence in itself.”

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DIFFERENCES BETWEEN
TRANCE CHANNELING AND
MULTIPLE PERSONALITY DISORDER
ON STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

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Trance channeling and multiple personality disorder both seem to be predicated on the basic mental process of dissociation. Dissociation has been defined, very simply, as the opposite of association. Elements of the psyche may be in a dynamic relationship with each other, in which case thoughts, feelings, experiences, etc. are integrated into consciousness and memory (association). Or these same elements of the psyche may be relatively isolated and separate, in which case they are dissociated (Ross, 1989, p. 87). This concept can be traced to Janet (1977). While dissociation in and of itself is a “normal human ability” (Richards, 1990), it is generally accepted that there is a continuum of dissociative phenomena (Bernstein & Putnam, 1986). Bernstein and Putnam have characterized this continuum as ranging “from the minor dissociations of everyday life to major forms of psychopathology such as multiple personality disorder” (1986, p. 728), while Richards (1990) has characterized it as ranging from automatizations of routine behaviors at one end to “co-consciousness” at the other. While Prince defined “co-consciousness” as simply the simultaneous but separate presence of two streams of consciousness (1978), Richards utilizes Beahrs’ definition, i.e. “the existence within a single human organism of more than one consciously experiencing psychological entity, each with some sense of its own identity or selfhood, relatively separate and discrete from other similar entities” (1982, p. 182). Phenomena at the far end of the dissociative continuum are the focus of this paper.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 89th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, New Orleans, December 1990.

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Dissociation in the form of, or accompanied by, co-consciousness is currently found in at least two forms in our own culture: trance channeling and multiple personality disorder. Trance channeling has been defined by Klimo (1987, p. 2) as “the communication of information to or through a physically embodied human being from a source that is said to exist on some other level or dimension of reality than the physical as we know it, and that is not from the normal mind (or self) of the channel.” While this activity could be categorized as a type of “possession” following Winkelman’s definition, i.e. “a trance state interpreted by the culture as a condition during which the practitioner’s own personality is temporarily displaced by the personality of another entity” (1986, p. 194), it should be noted that the trance channels who participated in this research prefer the term “blending” to describe their trance state. The term “blending” connotes harmony and mutual cooperation between the channel and the entity rather than domination of the channel by the entity (Hughes, 1991). Finally, some authors have chosen to include classic “mediumship” within the scope of trance channeling (Hastings, 1991; Klimo, 1987). D. Scott Rogo has stated that “mediumship is the art of bringing through spirits of the dead specifically to communicate with their relatives. Channeling I define as bringing through some sort of intelligence, the nature undefined, whose purpose is to promote spiritual teachings and philosophical discussions” (quoted in Klimo, 1987, pp. 5-6). It is this last definition that most closely describes the activities of the subjects who participated in this research.

MPD and trance channeling may appear very similar to a casual observer in that there are at least two distinct personalities sequentially inhabiting or controlling the same body in each case. Further, it would seem that trance channels fit the DSM-III-R criteria for MPD, i.e.: “the existence within the person of two or more distinct personalities or personality states (each with its own relatively enduring pattern of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and self)” and “at least two of these personalities or personality states recurrently take full control of the person’s behavior” (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1987, p. 272). Earlier ethnographic and EEG research with trance channels (Hughes, 1991; Hughes & Melville, 1990) raised questions as to whether or not the phenomena of “channeling” could indeed be understood in terms of multiple personality disorder.

Accordingly structured interviews were conducted with ten trance channels using the Dissociative Disorders Interview Schedule (DDIS), developed by Ross and Heber (Ross, 1989, pp. 314-30) to determine the degree of overlap between the complex of symptoms that characterizes MPD, and the phenomenological experience of the trance channels. These results were compared with the DDIS scores of twenty MPD subjects as set forth by Ross, Heber, Norton
and Anderson in their 1989 article comparing patients diagnosed with MPD, schizophrenia, panic disorder, and eating disorder. In his 1989 book on MPD, Ross has further stated that these results (pp. 330-34 in that publication) are typical of MPD as it presents throughout North America.

All subjects also completed the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES), developed by Bernstein and Putnam (1986), in order to measure the frequency and the number of different types of dissociative experiences among trance channels. Median DES scores and median numbers of items endorsed were compared for the group of trance channels and two groups of subjects whose scores were reported by Bernstein and Putnam (1986). These latter two groups consisted of twenty MPD subjects, and thirty-four normal adults.

METHOD

The Dissociative Disorders Interview Schedule

The DDIS is a 131-item structured interview which differentiates MPD from several other psychiatric disorders, as well as from normals, using DSM-III diagnostic criteria (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1980). It has an overall interrater reliability of 0.76, a sensitivity of 90%, and a specificity of 100% for the diagnosis of MPD (Ross, et al., 1989). Rather than giving a total overall score, it provides a profile of scores in a number of areas which can then be compared with a typical profile for an MPD patient (Ross, 1989).

The Dissociative Experiences Scale

The DES is a 28-item self-report instrument with a reliability of .84. While the DES is a screening, rather than a diagnostic instrument, it does generally distinguish between subjects who have a dissociative disorder and those who do not (Bernstein & Putnam, 1986; Ross, 1989).

Subjects

The ten trance channels who participated in this study are the same subjects who participated in a study measuring brainwave activity of trance channels while both in and out of trance (Hughes & Melville, 1990). All had been channeling for longer than one year, two had been channeling as long as seven years, and the modal experience was 2½ to 3 years.
None of the subjects had any psychiatric diagnoses currently active. Two subjects had previous diagnoses of anxiety disorder, one subject had a previous diagnosis of depression, and one subject had previous diagnoses of both depression and obsessive compulsive disorder. Seven of the ten had no physical diagnoses currently active. Of the remainder, one 74-year-old subject had cardiac dysrhythmia, one 64-year-old subject had high cholesterol and a bladder problem, and one 35-year-old subject had rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, autoimmune disease and migraine headaches.

Ethical approval (in the form of a Statement of Exemption) for interviewing the subjects had been obtained from Human Subject Protection Committee at the University of California, Los Angeles.

**Interview Administration**

Nine of the subjects were interviewed by the author. Each interview (DDIS and DES) lasted approximately forty-five minutes. One subject had moved out of the area and so was mailed a modified DDIS, i.e. all major subject headings and “notes” to the interviewer that may have biased the subject against positive responses (due to implications of psychopathology) were removed. Actual interview questions remained unchanged. The unmodified DES was also completed by the subject through the mails.

Data were analyzed using t-tests for continuous data, Fisher’s exact test for dichotomous data and comparison of DES medians.

**RESULTS**

**Demographic Characteristics of Subjects**

The ten subjects were evenly divided as to sex. They ranged in age from 31 to 74, with a mean age of 47.6 (S.D. = 13.17). Four were married, and as a group they had a mean of 0.6 children (S.D. = 1.07). All but one of the subjects had some post-secondary education; four had attained Bachelor’s degrees, two had Master’s degrees, and two had Ph.Ds. Occupations varied widely, but all were employed and all could be classified as middle- to upper-middle class. Eight had never been jailed; the other two had each spent a few hours in jail for minor infractions.

**Clinical Characteristics of Subjects**

As shown in Table 1, the trance channels differed from the MPD subjects on all of the DSM-III diagnoses made by the DDIS. While
the differences between the trance channels and the MPD subjects were not significant at the .05 level with regard to DSM-III diagnoses of psychogenic fugue and somatization disorder, it should be noted that this is due to the (relatively) small percentage of MPD subjects positive for these diagnoses, as none of the trance channels were positive for these diagnoses. The average number of somatic symptoms (used in diagnosing somatization disorder) for the MPD subjects in 13.5 (Ross, 1989, p. 331), which compares with an average number of somatic symptoms for the trance channels of 1.8 (p < .0001). The average number of borderline criteria positive for the MPD subjects is 5.3 (Ross, 1989, p. 332) which compares with an average number of borderline criteria positive for the trance channels of 0.3 (p < .0001).

**TABLE 1**

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRANCE CHANNELS AND MPD ON DSM-III DIAGNOSES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
<th>Trance Channels N = 10</th>
<th>MPD N = 20</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychogenic Amnesia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychogenic Fugue</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depersonalization Disorder</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Personality Disorder</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somatization Disorder</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Depressive Episode</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borderline Personality Disorder</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not statistically significant at the .05 level

**TABLE 2**

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRANCE CHANNELS AND MPD ON HISTORICAL ITEMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Trance Channels N = 10</th>
<th>MPD N = 20</th>
<th>(p-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substance abuse</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleepwalking</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trance states</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>NS*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginary playmates</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>NS*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>.0004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not statistically significant
As shown in Table 2, the trance channels differed from the MPD subjects on four of the six historical items known to be associated with MPD.

As shown in Table 3, the trance channels differed from the MPD subjects on sixteen secondary features of MPD. These include objects missing or present where the person lives, handwriting changes, strangers knowing the person, doing or saying things one cannot remember, periods of missing time, “coming to” in an unfamiliar place, amnesia for large parts of childhood after age five, flashbacks, depersonalization, auditory hallucinations, speaking of oneself in the plural tense, and feeling that there is another person inside of one who has a name and takes control of one’s body. The trance channels also differed from the MPD subjects with regard to sixteen types of supernatural experiences which included such things as mental telepathy, clairvoyance, telekinesis, clairvoyant dreams, deja vu, feeling possessed, having contact with ghosts, poltergeists, or spirits, knowing something of past lives, and being involved in cult activities. Finally, the two groups differed with regard to eleven Schneiderian first rank symptoms of schizophrenia.

### TABLE 3
**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRANCE CHANNELS AND MPD ON ASSOCIATED FEATURES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>TRANCE CHANNELS</th>
<th>MPD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N= 10 AVERAGE</td>
<td>N = 20 AVERAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary features of MPD</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supernatural experiences</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schneiderian symptoms</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 4
**COMPARISON OF MPD, TRANCE CHANNELS AND NORMALS ON DES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>TRANCE CHANNELS</th>
<th>MPD</th>
<th>NORMALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N= 10</td>
<td>N = 20 (P-VALUE)*</td>
<td>N = 34 (P-VALUE)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median DES score</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>57.06 (01)</td>
<td>4.38 (NS*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median number of DES items endorsed</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>28 (01)</td>
<td>11 (NS*)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p values denote difference between that group and trance channels.
• Not statistically significant
While Ross, et al. do not provide data with regard to the average number of previous psychiatric diagnoses for the twenty MPD subjects, two large series of MPD patients have yielded averages of 3.6 and 2.74 (Putnam, et al., 1986; Ross, Norton, & Wozney, 1989). The average for the trance channels was 0.5, and when compared to 2.74 (the Ross, et al. large series average), is significant at the .0001 level.

**DES Scores of Subjects**

As shown in Table 4, the trance channels differed from the MPD subjects with regard to both frequency of dissociative experiences (median DES score), and number of different types of dissociative experiences (median number of DES items endorsed). There were no differences between the trance channels and normal subjects with regard to these items.

While Bernstein and Putnam (1986) do not provide data with regard to the average DES score of the twenty MPD subjects, a separate study comparing MPD and complex partial seizures (Ross, Heber, Anderson, et al., 1989) does provide such data for a separate group of twenty MPD subjects. The average DES score for those MPD subjects is 38.3 (S.D. = 20.9) which compares to an average DES score for the trance channels of 6.28 (S.D. = 4.78). This is significant at the .0001 level (t = -21.18). When the average DES score of the trance channels is compared to the average DES score of twenty-eight neurologic controls (5.2) (S.D. = 6.6) as reported in the complex partial seizures study (Ross, Heber, Anderson, et al., 1989) there is no significant difference (t = .71).

**DISCUSSION**

The results presented above indicate that trance channels cannot be characterized as suffering from psychogenic amnesia, psychogenic fugue, depersonalization disorder, somatization disorder, depression, borderline personality disorder, or schizophrenia (Tables 1 and 3). They seldom have histories of substance abuse, physical abuse or sexual abuse (Table 2). Despite the fact that three of the ten channels would have met the strict DSM-III criteria for MPD (Table 1), I believe that none of them can be validly diagnosed as multiples based on lack of secondary features of MPD (Table 3) as well as overall profile. MPD has been characterized as “the great imitator in psychiatry” (Ross, 1989, p. 94) because patients are polysymptomatic and often have numerous previous diagnoses as well as long mental health care histories. The subjects of this study did not fit this overall profile, either individually or collectively.
It might be noted that three of the ten subjects responded negatively to the “trance states” question (Table 2), despite the fact all were self-identified as “trance channels.” Question #69 asks: “Have you ever had a trance-like episode where you stare off into space, lose awareness of what is going on around you and lose track of time?” (Ross, 1989, p. 322). The three channels who responded negatively to this question objected to various aspects of the wording of the question, as it did not accurately describe their experience.

It is also interesting to note that the trance channels averaged nearly twice the number of supernatural experiences as did the MPD subjects (Table 3) in light of the fact that the presence of these experiences differentiates MPD from other diagnostic groups (Ross, 1989, pp. 108, 332). When the data were examined more closely, it was found that responses to this section of the DDIS were clustered as follows. All of the subjects had experienced mental telepathy, deja vu, contact with spirits, knowing something of past lives, and additional supernatural experiences not specified on the DDIS. Eight of the ten had experienced clairvoyance, and six had experienced clairvoyant dreams. On the other hand, none had experienced telekinesis or been involved in cult activities. Half had experienced contact with ghosts, with three of these having experienced contact with poltergeists. Finally, with regard to the question on possession, one had felt possessed by a demon, one had felt possessed by a dead person, two had felt possessed by some other power or force, and none had felt possessed by a living person. Ross has suggested that ESP experiences are a form of nonclinical dissociation which may occur in otherwise healthy, high-functioning individuals (1989, p. 184). This suggestion is based on the results of an unpublished study in which eleven nontraditional therapists and seventeen psychiatry residents were interviewed with the DDIS and the DES. According to Ross (1989, p. 184) “Neither group exhibited a notable degree of psychopathology. ... The item that most clearly differentiated the nontraditional healers from the psychiatry residents was ESP experiences, which were very common in the community-based group. The two groups both had low rates of childhood abuse.” It would seem that while supernatural/ESP experiences may indeed differentiate MPD from other diagnostic groups, they are found in a variety of other (non-pathological) contexts, and should not, therefore, be considered inherently symptomatic of mental pathology.

With regard to the DES scores (Table 4), it would seem that while these subjects clearly engage in dissociative behavior at the far end of the dissociative continuum (i.e. “co-consciousness”), as a group they do not experience the types of dissociative phenomena queried about on the DES more often than normals. This suggests that rather dramatic forms of dissociation (co-consciousness) can exist.
independently of not only other types of dissociative experiences, but also a high degree of overall dissociation. This may call into question the concept of a single, naturally occurring dissociative continuum, without negating the fact that people who have experienced severe trauma (such as those with MPD) do tend toward a large number of different types of dissociative experiences, and have these experiences with some frequency.

**Etiology**

It has been widely recognized that MPD is a psychobiological response to overwhelming trauma during early childhood. The form this trauma takes is severe and repeated physical and sexual abuse. A 1986 National Institutes of Mental Health survey found that 97% of all MPD patients reported experiencing significant trauma in childhood (Putnam, et al., 1986). Dissociation seems to be an adaptive strategy utilized by these very small children in order to survive (Ludwig 1983, p. 95). Ross has stated that, very simply, “MPD is a little girl imagining that the abuse is happening to someone else” (1989, p. 72). Thus, per Putnam, “repeated childhood trauma enhances normative dissociative capacities, which in turn provide the basis for the creation and elaboration of alter personality states over time” (1989, p. 45).

Trance channeling, on the other hand, is an activity which its participants believe promotes personal growth and development through the experience of altered states of consciousness. It is very often learned behavior—a skill that is routinely taught to adults with no history of physical or sexual abuse. The form that this training takes is meditative in nature, utilizing visualization techniques, and is often done within the context of trance channeling classes (Hughes, 1991).

**Function**

MPD also differs from trance channeling with regard to the function of dissociation. For multiples, dissociation is a defense mechanism, a way of blocking out of conscious awareness horrific emotional and physical pain. It is also their primary coping mechanism—when things go wrong, they compulsively dissociate (Putnam, 1989, p. 141).

For trance channels dissociation is a method of achieving altered states of consciousness in a quest to attain a sense of spiritual connectedness to something larger than oneself. Further, there are a number of trance activities or exercises that the entities (disem-
bodied personalities) “do” with their channels while they are in trance. These activities add to a sense of not only having a spiritual life, but also expanding or improving it (Hughes, 1991).

Control

There are also differences with regard to control over the “switching process.” Multiples compulsively dissociate, with switching between alter personalities being triggered by any number of environmental and internal stimuli (Putnam, 1989, p. 117; Ross, 1989, p. 103). In contrast, trance channels exercise complete control over the “switching process.” They consciously decide when, where, and if they will go into trance. There are specific, somewhat stylized, culturally appropriate contexts for the activity, and the “entities” do not come through unless and until they are invited (Hughes, 1991).

Pathology

Finally there is the matter of pathology. MPD is, above all, a dissociative disorder. Ross has compared MPD patients with circumpolar shamans and has found that whereas “the shamans were healthy and used their dissociation in a culturally integrated way, the MPD patient tends to be dysfunctional and socially isolated” (1989, p. 13). Peters and Price-Williams have suggested that the cultural embedding of an altered state of consciousness may be an important means of discriminating pathological states from shamanism (1980, p. 406). Bourguignon has pointed out that “the great difference between MPD patients and the characteristic Haitian cult initiate (or for that matter, a possession trancer in any of our 251 sample societies and many others as well) is that these (the multiple personality) dissociations are purely idiosyncratic; the behavior is not learned by following a cultural model” (1976, p. 38). Trance channeling is a form of dissociation that is not idiosyncratic but is instead highly culturally contextualized through trance channeling classes, specific meditative techniques, etc. Trance channels also use dissociation in a culturally integrative way, in that they are utilizing their psychobiological capacity for dissociation for the purpose of actualizing, at a personal level, culturally relevant themes such as personal growth, increased responsibility for their own lives, self-trust, and empowerment of the individual (Hughes, 1991). While the absence or presence of cultural contextualization may be an indicator of sorts as to whether or not a specific type of co-consciousness can be categorized as “pathological,” I believe it would be specious to suggest that it is cultural contextualization that accounts for the lack of psychopathology evidenced among the trance channels who participated in this...
study. Rather, I would suggest that it is the experience of trauma, to which dissociation is a reaction, which leads to the psychopathological aspects of MPD, rather than the process of dissociation per se. Further, I would suggest that it is the lack of repetitive trauma-induced dissociation in early childhood which accounts for the lack of psychopathology evidenced among the trance channels who participated in this study despite the fact that they clearly evidence co-consciousness. In sum, extreme dissociative phenomena, i.e. co-consciousness, cannot be assumed to be inherently pathological or automatically accompanied by psychopathology, nor can one form (e.g. trance channeling) be equated with another (e.g. MPD) even when they are found within the same society.

CONCLUSIONS

These DDIS and DES data indicate that trance channels differ in highly significant ways from subjects with multiple personality disorder. Trance channels cannot be presumed to be multiples despite the fact that both groups exhibit co-consciousness (extreme dissociative behavior). Trance channels do not exhibit a high degree of psychopathology (DDIS results), nor do they experience a high frequency or large number of different types of dissociative experiences (DES results), but they do experience trance states and extrasensory and supernatural experiences. While both trance channeling and MPD are predicated on dissociation at the level of mental process, they differ with regard to etiology, function, control and pathology. For multiples dissociation with co-consciousness is idiosyncratic and compulsive, while for trance channels the dissociative experience with accompanying co-consciousness is culturally contextualized and under the conscious control of the practitioner. It is suggested that the independent variable with regard to psychopathological aspects of dissociation is whether or not the dissociative activity is trauma-induced, rather than where the activity might lie on a dissociative continuum.

REFERENCES


LUCID DREAMING: 
SOME TRANSPERSONAL IMPLICATIONS

Roger N. Walsh  
Irvine, California

Frances Vaughan  
Mill Valley, California

Waking is long and a dream short; 
other than this there is no difference.  
Ramana Maharshi (1988, p. 10)

Lucid dreaming and transpersonal studies are two vigorous and important fields with overlapping interests and much to contribute to one another. Unfortunately, they have remained largely isolated and ignorant of each other, in spite of the fact that lucid dreaming research has significant transpersonal implications. Researchers are now investigating advanced forms of lucidity, finding technological means to enhance it, observing physiological correlates, using lucid dreaming as a spiritual practice, and building conceptual bridges to ancient techniques such as Tibetan dream yoga. In this paper we will briefly summarize some of the transpersonal implications of lucidity research and show some links between the two fields.

DREAMS

From ancient times, dreams have been regarded as a source of inspiration, mystery and messages. For shamans, dreams served notice of their sacred vocation (Walsh, 1990), while for the prophets of Israel dreams were messages from God (Sanford, 1968).

“Hear my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream” (Bible, Numbers 12:6). In ancient Mediterranean cultures, dreams were regarded as a source of healing, and people came to the
temple of the god Asklepios to incubate healing dreams (Kilborne, 1987). Recently, dreams have been regarded psychologically as “the royal road to the unconscious” (Freud), and as messages of healing and intuitive wisdom from the unconscious (Jung).

However interpreted, dreams are a nightly “miracle” in which a whole universe arises populated with people, places and creatures that seem solid, independent and “real.” Moreover, in our dreams we appear to possess an equally solid, “real” body that seems to be the source and support of our lives, our pleasures and our pains, whose eyes and ears provide sensory input, and whose death means our death. In short, the dream world and body seem to create and control us. Yet this seemingly objective universe is a creation of our own minds, a subjective, illusory, transient, production that we create and control.

When we awaken, we say “It was only a dream” implying that it was “unreal.” In the technical terms of Indian Vedantic philosophy we “subrate” it (Deutsch, 1969). That is, we accord it less validity or ontological status in light of our waking consciousness. Yet in spite of each awakening, night after night, time after time, we take our dreams to be “real” and therefore flee and fight, laugh and cry, curse and rejoice within the dream.

However, most of us have had at least one experience, while in the midst of some apparently dramatic adventure or terrifying threat, of suddenly realizing that “It’s only a dream.” At that moment we become “lucid;” we are dreaming yet we know that we are dreaming. That moment can result in a sense of relief, delight, wonder and freedom. Then we are free to confront our monsters, fulfill our desires, or seek our highest goals, knowing that we are creators, not victims, of our experience. As the philosopher Nietzsche observed, “perhaps many a one will, like myself, recollect having sometimes called out cheeringly and not without success amid the dangers and terrors of dreamlife: ‘it is a dream! I will dream on!’” (LaBerge, 1985).

THE HISTORY OF LUCID DREAMING

For most of us such lucid dreams are rare and beyond our ability to induce. Is there any way of cultivating our ability to awaken in our dreams at will? A variety of contemplative traditions and dream explorers say yes. In the fourth century, the classical yoga sutras of Patanjali recommended “witnessing the process of dreaming or dreamless sleep” (Shearer, 1989). Four centuries later Tibetan Buddhists devised a sophisticated dream yoga. In the 12th century the Sufi mystic Ibn El-Arabi, a religious and philosophical genius known to the Arab world as “the greatest master,” claimed that “a
person must control his thoughts in a dream. The training of this alertness ... will produce great benefits for the individual. Everyone should apply himself to the attainment of this ability of such great value” (Shah, 1971). More recently a number of explorers and spiritual masters such as Sri Aurobindo (1970) and Rudolf Steiner (1947) also reported success with lucid dreaming.

For decades Western researchers dismissed such reports as impossible. However, in the 1970s, in a breakthrough in the history of dream research, two investigators provided experimental proof of lucid dreaming. Working independently and quite unknown to each other, Alan Worsley in Britain and Stephen LaBerge in California both learned to dream lucidly (LaBerge, 1985). Then, while being monitored electrophysiologically in a sleep laboratory, they signaled by means of eye movements that they were dreaming, and knew it. Their electroencephalograms showed the characteristic patterns of REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, during which dreaming typically occurs, validating their reports. For the first time in history someone had brought back a message from the world of dreams while still dreaming. Dream research has never been the same since. Interestingly, for some time LaBerge was unable to get his reports published because reviewers simply refused to believe that lucid dreaming was possible.

Since then, with the aid of eye movement signaling and electrophysiological measures, much progress has been made, such as in studies of the frequency and duration of lucid dreams, their physiological effects on brain and body, the psychological characteristics of those who have them, the means for inducing them more reliably, and their potential for healing and transpersonal exploration.

IMPLICATIONS OF LUCIDITY

Lucid dreaming also has stimulated thinking about the philosophical, practical, and transpersonal implications of both dreams and lucidity. One striking philosophical implication concerns the nature of our waking world. If, night after night, we mistake our dreamworld and bodies for objective, “real” things that exist quite independently of our minds and that seem to control us, perhaps we do the same with our waking world and bodies. How do we know that the waking state is not also a dream? Was Shakespeare right when he wrote in The Tempest?:

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on;
and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.
Tibetan Buddhists point out that “there is no characteristic of waking experience that clearly distinguishes it from dreaming” (Gyamtso, 1986).

Various philosophers and mystical traditions agree. The great Tao­ist philosopher Chuang-Tzu (1991, p. 22) pointed out that for the dreamer “While he is dreaming he does not know it is a dream, and in his dream he may even try to interpret a dream. Only after he awakes does he know it was a dream. And someday there will be a great awakening when we know that this is all a great dream.” The philosopher Schopenhauer suggested that the universe is “a vast dream, dreamed by a single being, in such a way that all the dream characters dream too” (Schopenhauer, n.d.). The Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki (1930) argued that “As long as we are in the dream we do not realize that we are all dreaming.” The Indian spiritual genius Ramakrishna (1992) claimed that “The secret of the jnani’s (sage’s) dispassionate mood, his freedom from all contexts, is the direct knowledge that dreaming experience and waking experience are essentially similar.” Likewise, A Course in Miracles, a contemporary Christian teaching, points out that:

Dreams show you that you have the power to make a world as you would have it be, and that because you want it you see it. And while you see it you do not doubt that it is real. Yet here is a world, clearly within your mind, that seems to be outside. ... You seem to waken, and the dream is gone. Yet what you fail to recognize is that what caused the dream has not gone with it. Your wish to make another world that is not real remains with you. And what you seem to waken to is but another form of this same world you see in dreams. All your time is spent in dreaming. Your sleeping and your waking dreams have different forms, and that is all (Anonymous, 1975).

This perspective, a form of philosophical idealism, is the metaphysical view that what we take to be external reality is a creation of mind. Though not popular in these materialistic times, this position has been advocated by various philosophers, East and West. Hegel, for example, claimed that “Spirit is alone Reality. It is the inner being of the world” (Hegel, 1949). The fact that no philosopher has ever been able to demonstrate the existence of an outside world (Jones, 1975) is no surprise to idealists.

Lucid dreamers can have a powerful realization of how convincingly objective and material a dream world can seem, and how dramatic a personal awareness of this fact can be. The lucid dreamer can experience with startling clarity that what seemed an unquestionably external, objective, material, and independent world is in fact an internal, subjective, immaterial and dependent creation of mind. Some begin to question their previous world views, to wonder whether the waking world could also be a dream,
and to agree with Nietzsche that “We invent the largest part of the thing experienced. We are much greater artists than we know” (Nietzsche, 1955).

This suggests important philosophical and practical implications for our usual waking state. While dreaming, we usually assume that our state of consciousness is clear and accurate and that we are seeing things “as they really are.” Only when we awaken or become lucid do we subrate our previous dream consciousness and recognize its distortions. This leads to two questions: Could our usual waking state of consciousness be similarly distorted? If this is so, is there a way to “wake up” and become lucid in daily life?

The mystical cores of many religious traditions answer yes to both questions. They claim that our usual state is distorted and that we live in what has been called in some Asian systems maya, delusion and illusion; and more recently in the West, a mutual hypnosis, collective psychosis (Walsh & Shapiro, 1983) or consensus trance (Tart, 1983). These traditions also claim that we can become lucid in daily life and they offer contemplative disciplines to help us awaken to the clear state known as enlightenment, liberation, salvation, wu or moksha (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993).

The existence of lucidity raises two additional questions. First, is it possible to further refine lucidity so as to extend it into dreamless sleep? Second, is it possible to cultivate higher states of consciousness within dreams, and thereby develop what Charles Tart calls “high dreams?”

Sages such as Aurobindo, Ramakrishna, and Steiner, as well as Western meditation students in retreat, have described being able to maintain continuous lucidity throughout much of the night in both dreams and dreamless sleep. Advanced transcendental meditation (TM) practitioners report this experience also and some even describe being able to “witness” their dreams (Gackenbach & Bosveld, 1989). By this they mean that in dreams, or even in dreamless sleep, they remain identified with pure consciousness and therefore simply observe the figures and dramas in their dreams without being perturbed by them. Moreover, this equanimous witnessing can extend to daytime waking life. According to the TM Vedic tradition, the first state of enlightenment is reached when witnessing become imperturbable and unbroken (Alexander & Langer, 1989).

Evidently yoga and meditation can induce lucid dreaming, and lucid dreaming can itself be used as a meditation. Indeed, lucidity seems to spontaneously motivate dreamers to do just that. Experienced practitioners report that even the thrill of repetitive

Lucid Dreaming: Some Transpersonal Implications 197
wish fulfillment eventually fades, a condition variously known as
divine apathiea (the Desert Fathers), nilibida (Buddhism), or “the
equality of things” (Taoism). This leaves dreamers longing for
something more meaningful and profound than playing out another
sensual fantasy. These people rediscover the ancient idea that
sensory pleasures alone can never be enduringly satisfying.

At such a point dreamers may begin to seek transpersonal experi­
ences and to use lucid dreaming as a transpersonal technique. To do
this they may employ three strategies. First, they actively seek
within the dream for a spiritual experience, be it a symbol, a teacher
or a deity. Second, they may adopt a more passive approach,
turning control of the dream over to a “higher power,” whether that
power is conceived to be an inner guide, Self, or God (Walsh &
Vaughan, 1993).

In the third strategy they begin a meditative-yogic practice while
still in the dream. By far the most sophisticated such practice is the
1200 year old Tibetan Buddhist “dream yoga.” According to the
Dalai Lama (1983), Tibetan yogis are taught to develop lucidity,
first in their dreams, and then in their nondream sleep, seeking to
remain continuously aware twenty-four hours a day. Meanwhile,
during daylight hours they cultivate the awareness that their wak­
ing experience is also a dream. The ideal result is unbroken aware­
ness, the sense that all experience is a dream, and ultimately “the
Great Realization.”

The final step leads to the Great Realization, that nothing within the
Sangsara (realms of existence) is or can be other than unreal like
dreams. The Universal Creation, with its many mansions of existence
from the lowest to the highest Buddha paradise, and every phenomenal
thing therein, organic and inorganic, matter or form, in its innumerable
physical aspects, as gases, solids, heat, cold, radiations, colours, ener­
gies, electronic elements, are but the content of the Supreme Dream.
With the dawning of this Divine Wisdom, the microcosmic aspect of
the Macrocosm becomes fully awakened; the dew-drop slips back into
the Shining Sea, in Nirvanic Blissfulness and At-one-ment, possessed
of All Possessions, Knower of the All-Knowledge, Creator of All
Creations—the One Mind, Reality Itself (Evans-Wentz, 1958).

NOTE

The authors would like to acknowledge the helpful suggestions of Jayne Gacken­
bach, John Levy and Gordon Globus, and the secretarial assistance of Bonnie
L’Allier.

Introductions to the theory and practice of lucidity arc available in LaBerge (1985)
and Gackenbach and Bosveld (1989). Research findings are reviewed in Gacken­
bach and LaBerge (1988) while the journal Lucidity publishes recent research. The
philosophical implications of dreaming are discussed by Globus (1987) and their
religious significance by Kilbome (1987). A (somewhat obtuse) account of Tibetan
dream yoga can be found in Evans-Wentz (1958), and transpersonally oriented papers on lucidity are collected in Walsh and Vaughan (1993).

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Requests for reprints to: Roger Walsh, Psychiatry Department, University of California Medical School, Irvine, CA 92717.
WARWICK FOX’S “TRANSPERSONAL ECOLOGY”: A CRITIQUE AND ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

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Patrick McNamara
Keene, New Hampshire

Warwick Fox has done a service to both eco-philosophy and transpersonal psychology in his attempt to “psychologize” eco-philosophy (Fox, 1990a). Although the two disciplines share common concerns and theoretical interests (e.g. interconnectedness, mind and earth, consciousness, etc.) they had not, until Fox’s article, “talked to each other.” Fox has opened a dialogue between the two which promises to enrich each.

What are these concerns and theoretical interests which transpersonal psychology and eco-philosophy share? Fox’s answer is “the idea of the this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible.” The expansion of self is accomplished, according to Fox, via a process of identification (or recognition of one’s commonality) with all that is. Fox’s expectation is that once such an expansive sense of self is achieved one will “naturally be inclined to care for the unfolding of the world in all its aspects” (Fox, 1990a, p. 93). In this paper we summarize Fox’s proposal for development of a transpersonal ecology, point out what we feel are its limitations, and then we outline an alternative approach for a transpersonal ecology. Throughout we attempt to spell out the implications of the rapprochement of ecology and transpersonal psychology for both disciplines.

The authors would like to thank Steve Chase and Mary Mayshark-Stavely for their helpful discussions of these ideas.

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The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 1992, Vol. 24, No. 2
In 1990 Fox published, in this Journal, “Towards a transpersonal ecology: Psychologizing ecology.” The paper was a milestone in the growth of transpersonal psychology because it demonstrated the relevance of transpersonal psychological concepts to major issues in eco-philosophy. Conversely, the paper also showed how eco-philosophical work could enrich theory in transpersonal psychology. The central idea in Fox's attempt to psychologize eco-philosophy is his equation of transpersonal ecology with a “this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible” (Fox, 1990a, p. 59). Fox showed that a transpersonal sense of self was compatible with an ecological perspective of Self as an organism embedded in a network of ramifying relationships which in turn define an ecosystem.

In referring to a self of the widest extent, Fox is applying the concept of “Self-Realization!” offered by the founder of “deep ecology,” Arne Naess (Naess, 1989). Both the capital “S” and the exclamation point are significant in the presentation of this term. Little “s” self is the item of everyday discourse contained in (or constituting) the individual’s physical body and contrasted in experience with other persons and things. On the other hand, big “S” Self is the outcome of an identification process in which the individual grows to experience the whole world—plants, animals, climate, terrain, watersheds, and all—as interwoven with or componential of herself or himself. The exclamation point functions after the fashion of the factorial marker in mathematical notation: full realization (growth, development) of the self requires recursively reaching for greater richness and inclusiveness in one’s self-definition. “Identification” in this formulation is similar to the developmental psychology meaning of the term (Kagan, 1971). One comes progressively to perceive a commonality with, relatedness to, and involvement with the rest of creation. A Self-Realized! individual would not experience confusion over what is his or her own body or person and what is a sparrow, tree, brook, or stone.

What is being emphasized is the tremendously common experience that through the process of identification my sense of self (my experiential self) can expand to include the tree even though I and the tree remain physically separate” (Fox, 1990a, p. 81).

Identification is not identity in Fox’s philosophy. Rather, a Self-realized person would experience discomfort or loss when some part of the ecological environment is damaged or destroyed contra-ecologically, presumably in recognition of the commonality between the person and the environment.
Fox presents Self-Realization! as the basic transpersonal concept of deep ecology to contrast with the standard personal division of the (little “s”) self into desiring-impulsive, rationalizing-deciding, and normative-judgmental aspects, corresponding closely with the Freudian id, ego, and superego. An individual without access to the transpersonal self experiences inner tension due to the disparate leanings of these aspects with respect to inner impulses and elements of the surrounding world. She or he performs behavior deriving from a process of inner negotiation, debate, deception, and power manipulation. Right action, whether refraining from overeating, giving aid to a needy person, or caring for the ecosystem, is performed because the normative-judgmental aspect commands enough influence to dominate. One does one’s duty.

On the other hand, a person who does have access to the transpersonal self, who is Self-Realized! and well-identified with the nonhuman world, will behave in harmony with the human and nonhuman worlds, acting from inclination rather than duty.

Because right action derives naturally and without effort from the marriage of selfhood to the lively and mutually inter-connected world beyond the self, Fox explains that traditional philosophical concerns with instrumental and intrinsic value theory are irrelevant as they bear upon ecological concerns. Eco-philosophy need not build an elaborate logical scaffolding to justify ecologically favorable human behavior. Such conduct grows organically out of one’s enlightened awareness of one’s active role in the living dance of matter and energy when one attains Self-Realization!

Fox then suggests that transpersonal ecology amounts to a maximally expansive sense of self that includes the ecological web of the nonhuman world integrated with one’s own being. Possessors of this sort of Self will as a matter of course make choices and take actions that are ecologically positive. Philosophically, this position constitutes a reorientation of value theory from instrumental and intrinsic value explanations to ecological values as axiomatic.

THE TRANSPERSONAL SELF AND THE PROCESS OF IDENTIFICATION

The reorientation of value theory away from instrumental assumptions and towards ecological values requires, according to Fox, the development of an expansive sense of self. He distinguishes the expansive self from a non-transpersonal tripartite conception of self. As summarized above the tripartite self consists of a desiring-impulsive self, a rationalizing-deciding self and a normative-
judgmental self. Fox’s description of the expansive self, on the other hand, crucially includes more than just that self which is the center of volitional activity:

[O]ur sense of self can be far more expansive than that of being a center of volitional activity. For example, I can experience my volitional self as part of a larger sense of self that includes aspects of my own mind and body over which I do not experience myself as having particularly much control.... In turn, I can experience this larger, but still entirely personal, sense of self as part of a still more expansive, transpersonal sense of self that includes my family, friends, other animals, physical objects, the region in which I live, and so on (Fox, 1990a, p. 69).

Although Fox touches here on what we feel to be central to a transpersonal vision of psychology—namely those aspects of the self outside of volitional control—Fox does not pursue the matter. He chooses instead to focus on what he calls the process of identification. We will argue below that Fox’s reliance on processes of identification as forms of, or roads to, transpersonal experience, as opposed to emphasis on non-volitional aspects of “self” prevents him from developing a truly transpersonal eco-philosophy. We need to first examine Fox’s analysis of identification in order to see clearly its limitations for a transpersonal approach to ecology.

The defining characteristic (for Fox) of the transpersonal expansive self is the ability to make wider and deeper identifications—“How does one realize, in a this-worldly sense, as expansive a sense of self as possible? The transpersonal ecology answer is: through the process of identification” (Fox, 1990b, p. 249). By identification Fox means the experience of commonality between my self and the world. An ecologically sound life would be one that “sustains the widest and deepest possible identification” (Fox, 1990b, p. 249).

Fox delineates three types of identification: personal, ontological and cosmological. “Personally based identification refers to experiences of commonality with other entities that are brought about through personal involvement with these entities ..(Fox, 1990b, p. 249). Personally based identification is the most common form of identification. Transpersonal ecology, however, is more concerned with the other two forms (the transpersonal forms) of identification. Fox implies that unless personal identification is placed in the context of the transpersonal forms of identification, then it is likely to be destructive:

... although the positive aspects of personally based identification are praiseworthy and fundamental to human development, the negative aspects that go with exclusive or primary reliance upon this form of
identification (my self first, my family and friends next, and so on) are costing us the earth (Fox, 1990b, p. 267).

Transpersonally based identification prevents or at least puts a check on the destructive tendencies of narrow egoistic forms of identification:

When personally based identification is set within the context of ontologically and cosmologically based forms of identification (i.e. within the context of forms of identification that tend to promote impartial identification with all entities), then it is expressed in terms of a person being, as Naess says, more reluctant to interfere with the unfolding of A than B in those situations where a choice is unavoidable if the person is to satisfy nontrivial needs of their own. However, considered in the absence of the overarching context provided by ontologically and cosmologically based identification, personally based identification is expressed in terms of a person having no desire to harm A in any way (say, their child) but having few or no qualms about interfering with—or standing by while others interfere with—the unfolding of B (where B is an entity of any kind—plant, animal, river, forest—with which the person has no particular personal involvement) (Fox, 1990b, p. 267).

Transpersonal ecology therefore attempts to promote the proper integration of the three basic forms of identification. From a theoretical point of view the objects of inquiry are ontologically based identification and cosmologically based identification.

In contrast to personally based identification, ontologically and cosmologically based identification are transpersonal in that they are not primarily a function of the personal contacts or relationships of this or that particular person (Fox, 1990b, p. 250).

Transpersonal forms of identification are impartial insofar as the object is to identify impartially with all that is, to experience all that is as “unity in process.”

Ontologically based identification refers to experiences of commonality with all that is that are brought about through deep-seated realization of the fact that things are... it [ontological identification] properly belongs to the realm of the training of consciousness (or perception) that is associated, for example, with Zen Buddhism...” (Fox, 1990b, p. 250).

If we interpret Fox rightly, ontological identification apparently allows one to experience the “suchness” of phenomena, to let them stand forth without attempting to change or manipulate them in any way.

The basic idea that I am trying to communicate by referring to ontologically based identification is that the fact—the utterly astonish-
ing fact—that things are impresses itself upon some people in such a profound way that all that exists seems to stand out as foreground from a background of nonexistence, voidness, or emptiness—a background from which this foreground arises moment by moment (Fox, 1990b, pp. 250-51).

The other type of transpersonal identification extends the awe and astonishment one feels toward existence as such to the realization or insight that all is one.

... cosmologically based identification refers to experiences of commonality with all that are brought about through the deep-seated realization of the fact that we and all other entities are aspects of a single unfolding reality... this realization can be brought about through the empathic incorporation of mythological, religious, speculative philosophical, or scientific cosmologies (Fox, 1990b, p. 252).

Although cosmological identification seems to depend on some kind of cognitive event (realization, insight) as opposed to the experiential content of ontological identification, Fox makes it clear that cosmological identification is more than just a cognitive accomplishment:

... cosmologically based identification means having a lived sense of an overall scheme of things such that one comes to feel a sense of commonality with all other entities (whether one happens to encounter them personally or not) ... (Fox, 1990b, p. 257).

Since transpersonal forms of identification involve a sustained growth and deepening of these self-same identification processes, i.e., in the gradual development of a lived sense of the unity of all that is, we may be justified in conceiving of the process of the integration of personally based forms of identification with the transpersonal forms of identification as nothing less than a spiritual transformation of the individual. Fox, in fact, asserts that cosmologically based identification issues in

... an orientation of steadfast (as opposed to fairweather) friendliness. Steadfast friendliness manifests itself in terms of a clear and steady expression of positive interest, liking, warmth, goodwill, and trust; a steady predisposition to help and support; and, in the context of these attributes, a willingness to be firm and to criticize constructively where appropriate (1990b, p. 256).

Nevertheless “steadfast friendliness” does not necessarily imply nonviolence:

... if a particular entity or life form imposes itself unduly upon other entities or life forms, an impartially based [read “cosmological”] sense of identification may lead one to feel that one has no real choice but to
oppose—in extreme cases, terminate the existence of—the destructive or oppressive entity or life form (1990b, p. 256).

In summary, Fox offers us a relatively coherent framework for development of a transpersonal ecology. The central idea revolves around Self-Realization! and the process of the growth of identification. Personally based forms of identification need to be integrated with transpersonal forms of identification, namely ontological and cosmological identification, if we are to prevent destruction of ourselves and the earth. Ontological identification centers around the experience of existence as such, while cosmological identification constitutes the lived sense of a meaningful unity of all that is. Transpersonal forms of identification promote a stance of steadfast friendliness towards the entities with which we identify while not precluding violent opposition in extreme situations.

LIMITATIONS OF FOX'S APPROACH

Our major objections to Fox’s ideas center around two issues: 1) the emphasis placed on the process of identification as the basis for a transpersonal ecology, and 2) the idea that transpersonal forms of identification promote “steadfast friendliness” towards the earth. We begin with the first issue concerning Fox’s emphasis on processes of identification.

While it is clear that ontological and cosmological identification (as Fox presents them) can be experienced as transpersonal processes, many if not most transpersonal events involve a process opposite to that of identification. Otto (1968), for example, described deep religious and mystical experience as essentially experience of the “wholly other” (ganz andere)—something fundamentally and totally different from self. Eliade asserted that “the first possible definition of the sacred is that it is the opposite of the profane” (Eliade, 1961, p. 10), the profane being our everyday worlds. C. G. Jung thought of the transpersonal realm as the experience of all those psychic contents outside of the volitional control of the subject. “The most amazing fact about the unconscious is that it is unconscious!” (Jung, 1959). Jung thought of the experience of the objective psyche as the experience of something totally foreign, uncanny, numinous and strange (Jung, 1959). For Jung transpersonal events came to us unbidden, involuntarily and as gifts. Dreams, for example, should be conceived as “visitations” or “possessions” rather than as products of the dreamer. Dreams happen to us. We cannot voluntarily stop dreaming. Even the contents of our dreams come to us involuntarily. Transpersonal events, then, seem at a minimum to be non-volitional states. Yet
Fox’s transpersonal forms of identification depend on the efforts of the human subject to “identify.”

Besides the emphasis of transpersonal states as creatures of human agency rather than as non-volitional states, there is another and related problem with Fox’s philosophy of identification. Ironically, in Fox’s philosophy of identification there seems to be a strain of anthropomorphism since the crucial event(s) in his philosophy take place within the human individual (e.g., realization of oneness, awe and wonder for existence itself and so on). This anthropocentric strain in Fox’s philosophy is ironic because of the strenuous efforts of the deep ecology philosophers to avoid anthropocentric biases.

The human self, in Fox’s philosophy, acts on “natural” objects (trees, animals) until the human experiences a commonality between him/her and them. Identification, in short, is a human accomplishment. Indeed Fox points out that transpersonal forms of identification are achieved through discipline such as the “consciousness disciplines.” Integration of personal and transpersonal forms of identification implies work to accomplish the integration. In this philosophy, human agency is required for the all important work of integration. Integration, in turn, is required to prevent further destruction of the earth.

Now, clearly, it makes sense to focus on human agency if one is interested in preventing ecological disaster. But from a purely theoretical point of view it may not be wise to center a transpersonal psychology solely on human agency or events occurring within the individual.

We wish to urge an alternative conception of a transpersonal self as that self that is shaped by the wild world, by the Earth, by wilderness, nature, etc., as opposed to that self shaped by human effort. The transpersonal self is not a creature of human agency. It is trans-human. In our perspective wilderness and the wild, non-humanized world is the active agency. Nature is no longer the passive set of objects awaiting the human imprint. Rather, the crucial set of events in development of a transpersonal self depends on natural forces outside of volitional control of the subject.

If the transpersonal self is not a creature of the volitions of the subject, then identification (which is an achievement of the individual) cannot be central to transpersonal experience. If we are right, the task is not so much to integrate personal and impartial forms of identification as to submit to the experience of those transpersonal energies we come equipped with at birth, to undergo a transformation which is out of our control.
The conceptions of a transpersonal self as shaped by the earth independent of personal agency carries with it, we believe, some startling implications for both transpersonal psychology and eco-philosophy: There can be no transpersonal self (and therefore no transpersonal psychology) without wilderness, since the transpersonal self is precisely that self which has its origins in interactions with the wild world. Also, there can be no theoretically coherent eco-philosophy without a transpersonal psychology, since the most important product of the ecosystem (from the point of view of an environmental ethic) is the transpersonal self.

FOX’S PSYCHOLOGIZATION OF ECOLOGY: THE MISSING PSYCHOLOGY

We turn now to a discussion of what we believe is the second major shortcoming of Fox’s philosophy, namely Fox’s assertion that transpersonal forms of identification promote a “steadfast friendliness” towards the earth and its creatures.

As previously discussed, Fox’s proposals concerning the integration of personal, ontological and cosmological forms of identification imply a fundamental spiritual transformation of the individual who accomplishes the integration. Fox argues that the spiritual transformation, in turn, will promote a change in the transformed individual’s values such that the individual will exhibit a form of steadfast friendliness towards the earth. We believe that the idea that a stance of steadfast friendliness towards the earth will prevent or even slow the destruction of the earth is, unfortunately, mistaken.

If we translate Fox’s term of “steadfast friendliness” or spiritual transformation into the more common term “enlightenment,” it becomes clear that, as with the case of enlightenment, steadfast friendliness is no guarantee of social change. Enlightenment is the uncertain fruit of persistent and dedicated hard work. Zen masters state that kensho (enlightenment) may come at any moment on one who practices zazen (sitting meditation) diligently and that “any moment” may be no moment (Kapleau, 1980). Once again we see that enlightenment is not a function of human agency despite the paradoxical necessity of human effort. Accounts of other paths to enlightenment suggest similar effort and uncertainty (Tart, 1975). Not all members of a Buddhist or yogic culture undertake the quest and not all who set out on the path continue for the duration. Furthermore, having enlightenment as a central cultural value does not guarantee that the culture as a whole will abide by the precepts of the discipline, nor that the population at large will succeed in behaving well. Warfare and social injustice are to be found in
Buddhist South- and East-Asia as well as in the West where self-aggrandizement is a central cultural value. One can predict with confidence that relatively few of the world’s people will spontaneously choose to pursue Self-Realization! and that, of those, few will attain it.

To anticipate spontaneous pursuit of this goal is a bit unfair, however. Paul Shepard (1973) proposes that the great majority of civilized humanity (those who live in agricultural and industrialized cultures) are incompletely developed psychologically. People whose ancestors gave up hunting, gathering, and/or village-scale gardening also gave up the experiences and practices that connected them with the world of animals and plants. With that abandonment of the wild world went the wisdom to care for others, one’s community, and one’s nourishing environment while at the same time taking from the ecosystem only what is needed and leaving no mess behind. The archetypal equipment is available in each person’s neuro-endocrine systems to attain full (trans)personhood, but she or he will live out life bereft of this wisdom unless her or his culture provides the requisite initiation challenges and celebrations.

Mentioning the communal rites required to release the archetypes of Self-Realization! opens the way to another problem with Fox’s account of transpersonal ecology, that is, his continuing focus on the individual to the exclusion of the group. In fact, humans are creatures of culture, and are not fully human without enculturation. Participation in family, clan, community, work team, lodge, or coffee klatch constitutes the warp and thread of life’s tapestry. Individual personality is a social object as much as it is a congenital and a self-created one. The attainment of personal wholeness in cultures that support it is a social activity. Youths may go on vision quests alone, but their community sends them off and welcomes them warmly when they return. The quest would not exist without the community (and the archetypes) offering up the form and substance of practice. Shepard’s (1973) concern is that contemporary society develop beliefs and practices sufficient to literally bring out the (untapped) spiritual wealth in us. Only by moving from the individual level to the group can the transpersonal possibilities for ecological survival be realized.

REFERENCES


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Michael Murphy has given us a book which may forever change our view of our own bodies.

Although he would be the last to mention it, Michael Murphy is perhaps the most important person in the human potential firmament, having turned a family property into the Esalen Institute, the birthplace of what became a national and now is a world movement. His Soviet-American exchange was one of the pivots in the eventual transformation of the U.S.S.R. Knowing all this plus having enjoyed his three novels and having experienced his inexhaustible enthusiasm and erudition, I wanted to know what Murphy has been researching for the past seven years so intensely, and on and off for another ten years before that.

What he presents, in a convincing exposition, is that the body is the vehicle and instrument of evolution and that our spiritual nature is not divisible from our natural body. The body does not impede spiritual progress, instead, our development as individuals and as a species is manifest in the body itself.

Murphy does not pontificate or quote his “secret teacher’s secret doctrines” as can be found in endless high vapor content spiritual books and teachings. Instead he presents substantial evidence of every facet of his central thesis. What emerges is a radical clarion call for us to return to a proper valuation of the human body.

It might seem unnecessary to laud the value of the body to a culture obsessed with sex, food, and sports, but he is writing to those of us who also have accumulated a pervasive mythology that exalts transcending the body, letting go of the material world and urges denial, repression, asceticism, and self-mortification as ways to bootstrap ourselves into being better, clearer, more evolved beings.

The book is a textbook on the scope and capacities of the body. It is a reference book as well, replete with footnotes, appendices and hundreds of references to replicated research protocols from refereed journals. These are supplemented by solidly substantiated earlier accounts, recorded before modern science began to formulate its own rules of evidence. The result is a masterful synthesis of a dozen disciplines each enriching and clarifying one another’s partial revelations and discoveries.
The book is divided into three parts. The first part, “Possibilities for Extraordinary Life” examines a score of potential or residual unusual human capabilities and the likelihood of their reality. In part two, “Evidence of Human Transformative Capacity,” Murphy shifts his emphasis from the possible to the proven. Included in chapters grouped by scientific area are sections on natural healing capacities (as verified in placebo research), psychological, physical, and paranormal changes that occur within psychotherapy, and some of the transcendent physical feats from the annals of professional sports, the martial arts, and body therapies. He includes data and extensive reports on “extraordinary capacities of religious adapts” as well as a special section on phenomenon documented within the Catholic Church—research often undertaken to disprove the “miracles” under examination.

The final section, “Transformative Practices,” is perhaps the most important. In it Murphy makes it clear that the multiple human capacities described throughout the rest of the book are not freaks of nature, genetic abnormalities, or human oddities. He lays out how different capacities can be enhanced; what disciplines, what practices, and what orientations could be useful in moving people forward in the areas they choose. Murphy lays out a comprehensive but not exhaustive panorama of the human form, its mental, physical, and spiritual unity. This section also stands as a map of self-improvement toward individual evolution.

This book is as radical a reformulation of contemporary thinking in its way as Darwin’s and Freud’s were in theirs. Murphy’s is closer to Darwin’s in that it takes on entrenched theological and scientific commitments about the nature of mind, the function of body and the place of spirit. Also like Darwin, instead of a strident polemic, he asks us to look over the data, review his conclusions and come to our own. By the end of this book, after absorbing the cumulative impact of the observations, it is hard not to agree with Murphy. Painful as it always is, I had to let go of a set of personal dogmas. The alternative was to hunker down in my old ideological foxhole and let the evidence fly by. But if I do this, I would be like those lungfish who stayed underwater refusing to believe those who tasted air and returned to tell their tales.

Many years ago a teacher said to me, “You incarnated into a material body to learn how to use it, not to learn how to leave it.” I didn’t know what he meant. Now, with Murphy’s guidance, I begin to understand. Long after we have come to terms with the basic tenets presented here, this book will be a necessary reference volume for all of us for years to come.
How different folk across the world classify the world about them and their selves has been the focus of attention in anthropology for a long time. As might be expected, often the principle of classification is quite different from the way to which we are accustomed, and we further find that there is a considerable deviance from the so-called scientific models that have been part of our world-view for a long time. Thus there has emerged in anthropology different models of plant classification or ways of dividing the earth or the heavens, which have been dubbed ethno-botany, ethno-geography and ethno-astronomy respectively. Eventually, different types of classification of psychology have been found, hence “ethno-psychology.” This latter discipline has been reinforced by studies of different ideas regarding the self and emotions. Similarly, the study of “ethno-medicine” has emerged, looking at the different ways of regarding illness and its treatment. Therefore, a study of ethno-psychiatry was to be expected and was introduced by George Devereux in the early sixties with observation of how Mohave Indians in the U.S. classified mental disorders. At the same time, while there has been considerable focus on folk systems of one kind or another, there has also been attention, by social psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists, to the cultural underpinnings of our own scientific world-view. The present book under review takes one step further than the traditional division of “folk” and “professional” psychiatry, by regarding both equally as examples of ethnopsychiatrics: “professional” ethnopsychiatrics, whether they are found in the United States, France, Germany, the United Kingdom or Japan, are views which are different in degree from folk medicine or psychiatry, by being more formalized but not in kind. What folk and professional medicine and psychiatry share in common is that both are, at root, cultural constructions.

The various chapters in this book are presented with this perspective. Some chapters are devoted to folk ideas regarding the types and causation of mental disorder; other chapters trace the cultural roots and emphases of professional psychiatry in different countries. Thus there are chapters on folk psychiatry in southeast India, the North American Indians, and in ethnic populations in the United States. There are other chapters on professional psychiatric systems comparing, for example, France and the United States, South Africa and Japan. In covering this material it can be seen that there is more of a blending between folk ideas of mental disorder and the scientific viewpoint, rather than a sharp contrast, and that cultural perspectives tend to influence even what we regard as the most outright scientific mode of thought.
What is there in this book for the transpersonal scholar? One of the important cultural factors is religion. We can see the influence of religion on the idea of mental disorder more obviously in folk psychiatries. The role of “the goddess” among the Jalari people in southeast India (Chapter 3) is interpreted in what one would call a social homeostatic way. A person gets ill. Immediately a shaman is called in so as to identify the attacking goddess who is what the author calls the efficient cause to the sickness. But there is a precipitant cause, which is a social dispute in which the sick person is involved. A social balance is disturbed; the goddess reacts by inflicting illness; the goddess is appeased by having the dispute settled, and the patient is cured. Whether one considers the goddess to be a transpersonal force or not, the point is that interpersonal and “other-than-personal” energies are linked. Somewhat the same kind of point can be found in the analysis of a charismatic healing group in the U.S. (Chapter 5). The interpretive role of the healer is well brought out in this chapter. What is striking is that, given certain cultural and religious assumptions, it is difficult to draw a line between a clinical diagnosis and what we would call “superstitious.” For example, as the author of this chapter explains on p. 144, Catholic pentacostalists tend to label demons either as sins (e.g. lust and gluttony) or as negative behaviors (e.g. self-destruction and rebellion) or as just negative emotions (e.g. anger and fear). As the author says: “This leads to a systematic ambiguity in distinguishing where human emotion and behavior leave off and the influence of evil spirits begin.” A professional clinical psychologist undoubtedly would eschew the role of demons and sins, but would be content with the labels of negative behaviors and negative emotions. Here again, the connection of interpersonal and transpersonal is close. So-called professional psychiatry may feel itself to be emancipated from such medieval ideas, but Chapter 6 comparing psychiatric knowledge in the United States and France shows how the antecedents of our modern medical nomenclature has its historical roots in religious notions. The author shows how ideas regarding depression, for example, as it is understood in modern-day France, can be traced to the practice of contemplation in the early Christian Church.

A further thought for the transpersonal scholar is one that is not really addressed explicitly by this book, and that is the relative nature of transpersonal psychology. If we can have an ethno-psychology and an ethno-psychiatry, why cannot we have an ethno-transpersonal psychology? We already know that what constitutes transpersonal psychology in Europe is different from that in the United States. What this book suggests is that a transpersonal psychology cannot be abstracted from our own understanding of psychology; it has to be considered within the framework of our own history and culture, which may be quite distinct from other cultures.
BOOKS OUR EDITORS ARE READING


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... James Fadiman


... Stanislav Grof


... Michael S. Hutton


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... John Levy


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... Charles T. Tart


... Frances Vaughan


... Thomas N. Weide


... John Welwood

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Hughes, Dureen J. Differences between trance channeling and multiple personality disorder on structured interview.—Trance channeling is often equated with multiple personality disorder in Western psychological thought. The Dissociative Disorders Interview Schedule (a structured interview) was administered to ten trance channels and the results were compared with those of twenty MPD patients which have been shown to be typical of MPD across North America. Subjects also completed the Dissociative Experiences Scale. Results show that none of the trance channels could be diagnosed as multiples based on lack of secondary features of MPD as well as overall profile. While dissociative processes underlying both MPD and trance channeling may be similar, differences seem to exist with regard to etiology, function, control and pathology.

Loy, David. Avoiding the void: The lack of self in psychotherapy and Buddhism.—Buddhism anticipates the reluctant conclusions of modern psychology: guilt and anxiety are not adventitious but intrinsic to the ego. For Buddhism, our dissatisfaction with life derives from a repression even more immediate than death-terror (which still keeps the feared thing at a distance by projecting it into the future): the suspicion that “I am not real.” The sense-of-self is not self-existing but a mental construction which experiences its own groundlessness as a lack. This sense-of-lack is consistent with what psychotherapy has discovered about ontological guilt and basic anxiety. We usually cope with the lack by objectifying it in various ways and try to resolve it through projects which cannot succeed because they do not address the fundamental issue. By accepting and yielding to one’s groundlessness, one can discover that one has always been grounded, not as a self-contained being but as one manifestation of a web of relationships which encompasses everything.

Stavely, Homer & McNamara, Patrick. Warwick Fox’s “transpersonal ecology”: A critique and alternative approach.—“Transpersonal ecology” is the term coined by Warwick Fox to refer to a wedding of ideas from transpersonal psychology and ecological philosophy. The central idea in Fox’s synthesis is an emphasis on an “as expansive sense of self as possible” via a process of an ever-widening set of identifications between self and environment. Fox asserts that the forms of identification will promote a stance of “steadfast friendliness” towards the earth. The authors find Fox’s idea of a transpersonal self based on identification as problematic, and his assumption of steadfast friendliness and individual agency as limited and incomplete. Their alternative is to recognize the transpersonal self as shaped by the wild world, outside the realm of volition, and not a creature of achievement.

Waldman, Mark; Boorstein, Seymour; Jue, Ronald Wong; Lannert, Jonna; Saltzman, Lynne; Scotton, Bruce. The therapeutic alliance, kundalini, and spiritual/religious issues in counseling: The case of Julia.—A ministerial counselor describes a session-by-session case of a woman who seeks help to understand an extraordinary and frightening experience that was associated with her meditation practice. The counselor-client interactions explore her family background and religious beliefs, history of abuse, and the disturbing experience that brought forth a variety of hallucinations, visions, and dreams. A brief case analysis is presented by the counselor. Five clinicians then analyze the case as
presented, from a variety of approaches, describing how they might have worked with the client. Lamncrt examines the issues of religion and spirituality often avoided or left unaddressed in therapy, and discusses the client’s eventual return to a charismatic church. Boorstein examines the case from a psychoanalytic self-psychology perspective and its application to transpersonal psychotherapy; Scotton addresses the transference and counter-transference issues from a Jungian/transpersonal perspective. Saltzman describes how she would work with Julia using gestalt therapy with object relations theory and neo-Reichian techniques, paying particular attention to the specific issues concerning kundalini processes. Jue addresses the importance of developing a transpersonal context within the therapist’s perspective and how it may be applied to the therapeutic alliance.

WALSH, ROGER N. & VAUGHAN, FRANCES. Lucid dreaming: Some transpersonal implications.—The authors summarize features of lucid dreaming and transpersonal studies, showing links between the two fields. Emphasizing history, cultural dynamics, empirical research, the theory of lucid dreaming, and the transpersonal implications, the discussion is extended from REM dream states to conscious “dream” states, “consensus trance,” and the strategies for becoming lucid in daily life.
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