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# Indeterminate States








Spaces 'betwixt and between'



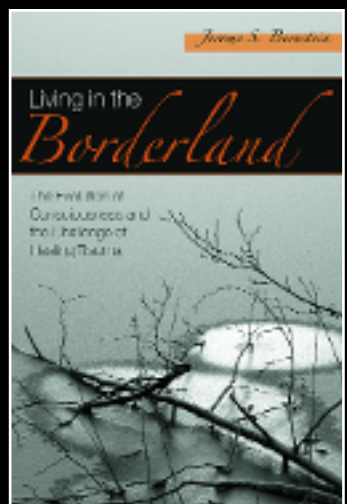
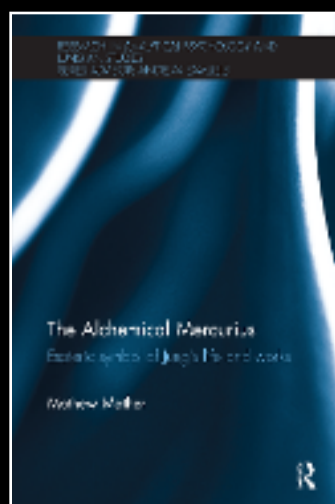
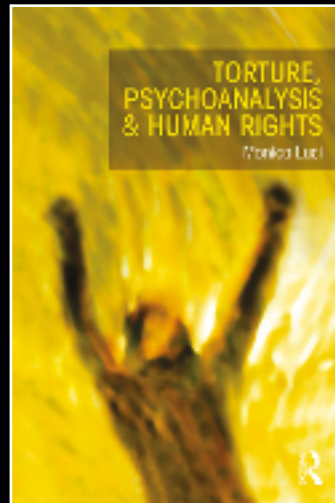


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# Introduction

The joint IAAP-IAJS conference held in Frankfurt August 2-5 2018 entitled ***Indeterminate States: trans-cultural, trans-racial; trans-gender*** asks whether these states mirror and reflect Jungian/post-Jungian ideas about cross border migration within personal and cultural complexes as facilitators for change. It reflects the increasing global migration and mixing between cultures, races and sexes which mirror the way we work with our own unconscious shadow complexes. Are we able to hold these indeterminate states as creative liminal manifestations pointing to new forms and allow sufficient cross border migration and fertilization as permissible? To illustrate and highlight the dynamics behind the theme of the Frankfurt conference we have chosen six authors and a chapter from each of their work, all published by Routledge:

- Jerome Bernstein: 'Borderland/Borderline' from *Living in the Borderland* (2015)
- Monica Luci: 'The Splintered Reflective Triangle in Bystanders, Perpetrators and Victims of Torture' from *Torture, Psychoanalysis and Human Rights* (2017)
- Mathew Mather: 'Mysterium Coniunctionis' from *Alchemical Mercurius* (2014)
- Jon Mills: 'The Essence of Evil' from (eds.) R.C. Naso and J. Mills *Humanizing Evil* (2016)
- Andrew Samuels: 'Beyond the Feminine Principle' from *The Plural Psyche* (1989)
- Silvia Tenenbaum: 'Borders of Belonging' from (ed.) O. Gozlan, *Current Critical Debates in the Field of Transsexual Studies* (2018)

## **Jerome Bernstein: *Borderland/Borderline***

Jerome Bernstein explores the margins of both the Borderline and *Borderland* personality structures. He admits that the distinction is not easily made, but argues for a deeper understanding of both terms by using a clinical example from one of his own patients. The term Borderland was first used clinically by C. Hughes in 1884 to describe people who were on the 'borderland of insanity'. It was continued to be used up until 1919 when the word Borderland was dropped from clinical literature. It was replaced by Borderline mainly through the work of Otto Kernberg. For many years, Bernstein has explored an alternative narrative to describe the structure of the western ego. Essentially, this post Genesis 20th century ego occurs because civilization has moved away from animism, group ritual and tribal culture. However, the cultural vestiges of a vital ancient ancestry still reside in the collective unconscious and influence the modern psyche in subtle and unseen ways. By comparison, Bernstein defines the new western ego as a highly rational, technology-oriented and non-magical. This is in stark contrast to what Searles describes as the 'nonhuman environment', which was the normal, prior state of consciousness. It is this contrast that Bernstein identifies and relates to as the differences and similarities between the Borderline and *Borderland*.

Bernstein suggests the type of ego structure that produces the Borderline personality is in fact 'insufficiently separated/split from its roots in nature.' Bernstein argues that Borderline personalities perceive a liminal, porous contact with nature as an antidote to the soulless technological world and that their perceptions are not distortions but in fact 'new psychic quanta entering into the cultural collective.' Using evidence from





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clinical encounters, Bernstein notices that an ever increasing number of people are having non-pathological *Borderland* experiences and that clinicians may be misdiagnosing Borderline personalities because of a built-in cultural and clinical bias against nonrational experience. Bernstein suggests practices to ameliorate misdiagnosis and for therapists, themselves, to be open to *Borderland* experiences as a natural, evolutionary occurrence. If this is not done, healing may be obstructed and even derailed. Bernstein notes that 'individuals who experience *Borderland* phenomena know something of the sacred that oftentimes we, as therapists, do not!'

## **Monica Luci: *The Splintered Reflective Triangle in Bystanders, Perpetrators and Victims of Torture***

Monica Luci proposes that reflective ability is the capacity to hold in the mind three poles: Me, You and Other which she refers to as the *Reflective Triangle*. Reflective ability keeps open in-between spaces among multiple positions and connected to abilities such as mutual recognition, appropriate mirroring and affective containment. She argues that the phenomenon of bystanders, perpetrators and victims of torture is the consequence of a massive use of *states of twoness* which results from the splintering of the *Reflective Triangle*. In a society shaped by the Panopticon pattern, individuals are subjected to a wide range of partitions and subjugated by a controlling central power: they can neither see each-other nor the controller but are seen by him. In a blind obedience to authority and being constantly observed in a blind state of twoness without access to a third position and no links of empathy and mutual recognition as an internal witness, the ability to create symbolic meaning is lost under such continuous repetitive trauma and intense stress. Luci describes the continuum between bystanders and perpetrators and the continuum between bystanders and victims, particularly in the characterising feature of *silence* as a social counterpart to a bonding with a *powerful other* whereby no psychic separation has occurred. Luci interprets bystander as term for absence as the missing witness of individual and social experience. Reality becomes manipulated at will through the massive use of denial and splitting whereby the psyche blocks off information that is literally unthinkable and unbearable. Luci suggests that the process of creating torturers relies heavily on the creation of and exploitation of dissociative responses.

Further aspects discussed in this informative and timely chapter are the formation of a *shattered shelf* through the experience of torture made concrete through a massive attack on borders, that is, the zones of interchange between the inside and outside of the body and how trauma is transmitted inter-generationally. Luci brilliantly describes the mechanics of how the bondage between torturer and victim is passed to their children who become entrapped in a projective identification and coerced to engage in a sustained *state of twoness*. The child sacrifices her/his own subjectivity to take on the horrific pain that the parent attempts to deny.



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## **Mathew Mather: *Mysterium Coniunctionis***

In this chapter, Mathew Mather gives us an in-depth and subtle overview of Jung's great opus, the *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. The alchemical marriage of the masculine spirit as Sol, the sun, and the feminine matter as Luna, the moon, produces a coniunctio, a synthesis of the psychic opposites. This grand alchemical allegory traces the myth of an aging and ailing King who must first be dissolved, mutilated or devoured before undergoing a rebirth or transformation. This is the essential and eternal drama of the opposites, and may also be understood allegorically as a fluid interweaving and recombining of 'masculine' and 'feminine' gender traits. The author follows this exploration with the idea of transforming the god-image and how the return of the feminine prefigures the return of heaven on earth.

The Christian worldview, according to Jung, has lost its interdependent relation to instinct in what has amounted to a dangerous split between the spirit and the chthonic. However, Jung perceives this optimistically and understands this 'separation of psychic opposites' to be an intrinsic evolutionary process that leads civilization towards reflection and a differentiation of consciousness. Jung believes that alchemists created and constructed alchemy as a mysterious process that contained a key that could unlock the process of uniting the opposites. Mather suggests that Jung, himself, continues this process and conceives *Mysterium Coniunctionis* as a medium to involve the reader experientially through the invocation of symbols into an alchemical transformation of consciousness. The chapter explores the role of Mercurius with an intention of remaining true to the original alchemical texts, mainly from Dorn. The chapter also reminds us of the chronology of the Second World War when Jung wrote this text. Mather elucidates how the principal deity, Mercurius, is initially interwoven in the very fabric of matter and materiality, as a *Deus Terrenus*. As a natural hermaphroditic deity, unconscious of itself and hidden to Christian and secular consciousness, the redemption of Mercurius requires torturous, painful, successive, alchemical transformations. Jung describes this process as a moral task and an 'archetypal drama' fraught with passion but producing the '*filius philosophum*' or the lapis, the child, as a creative *living* third, corresponding to the psychological idea of the Self, as the product of conscious and unconscious processes.

## **Jon Mills: *The Essence of Evil***

Jon Mills explores the nature of evil by posing relevant questions about its origin and essence. Does evil exist or it is a social invention? Although questions of its origin have been a human occupation since the beginning of civilization, there is no real consensus about what constitutes its essence. Mills suggests that there is a natural propensity to think in binaries with evil typically located on the negative pole of the dialectic, with god elevated as good and evil attributed to fallen man or the devil as pure negation or an innate badness that lacerates all semblance of social order. Evil is often defined as an act of transgressing but its absolute nature is conditioned and relativized within different cultural, social, linguistic expectations.



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In his examination on the nature of *radical evil*, Mills uses Kant's definition as the deliberate act of *choosing* evil in the light of a conscious awareness of moral law and moral duty. Mills points out that Kant is influenced by the prejudices of his day and upholds a Christian view of man's aberrant behaviour. After addressing other aspects of evil, for example, its *essence* and *normativity*, Mills turns to Hegel for a definition of evil as *appearance*. For Hegel, appearance means essence; evil is mediated by prior shapes that allow psychic reality to appear as physical reality. Hegel views the ontology of evil as not static but always transforming, leaving debris in its path. His view is that humankind is sinful by nature, transgressing on itself and within itself, simply as Mills explains, because humans *think*. Hegel suggests that evil is individual subjectivity, an inherent *pathos* waiting to be born and unveiled. Mills continues his fascinating exploration of evil by giving examples of its *institutionalisation* from colonial imperialism, totalitarian and fascist political structures as well as oppressive bureaucratic infrastructures. He concludes his chapter with thoughts about *the evil within* to stress why evil is structurally inherent as part of our unconscious ontology and humanness.

## **Andrew Samuels: *Beyond the Feminine Principle***

In this thought-provoking chapter, Andrew Samuels explores the developments in analytical psychology concerning gender identity set against the general question of sex-based psychology. The link between gender certainty and gender confusion is of central importance as well as the tracking of a pluralistic ethos in connection with gender characteristics and gender roles. Samuels questions Anthony's Steven's conclusion in his book 1982 *Archetype: A Natural History of the Self* that 'male dominance is a psychophysiological reality' by drawing on the work of Gerda Siann (1985) who shows that the secretion of male hormones is directly affected by environmental and social variables. Samuels differentiates between sex and gender and asks if there is such a thing as feminine psychology. He does not want to limit the discussion with a description of a woman's relationship to an *innate* femininity but to ask about her *relation to the phenomenon of difference* and what that difference is like. Samuels is not concerned about the *meaning* of women's lives but in their *personal experiences* as women. He is critical of the emphasis on 'the feminine principle' in recent Jungian literature as it assumes that there is something *eternal* about women and about femininity, particularly in the goddess image which provides a numinosity but also a form of authority and an oppressive ideation which has little to do with the lives of real women.

Samuels explores next the literal and metaphoric relationship between anatomy and psychology. The female body is supposed to contain a quite specific and innate female psychology, divorced from the male body and male psychology. Samuels differentiates this claim by using Lowndes' (1987) work on the comparative anatomy of male and female sex organs. She notes that the differences between female and male sex organs are *literally skin deep* as both possess similar anatomical characteristics. Samuels is concerned that sex-specific psychology leads to an overdependent theorising about the



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body's impact on psychology. If anatomy is destiny, then nothing can be done to change the position of women. Analytical psychologists who espouse the idea of innate female characteristics, even as contrasexual concepts of *anima* and *animus*, need to aware that their ideations appeal to traditional repositories of sensibilities and are directed away from political and social change.

***Silvia Tenenbaum: Borders of Belonging: challenges in access to anti-oppressive mental healthcare for indigenous Latino gender-fluid youth.***

Much has been written about decolonizing psychology as a profession and the necessity of incorporating a gender-fluid framework mindful of subjectivities in complex vectors of oppression, invisibility, and marginalisation. By using the term gender-fluid instead of transsexual or transgender, Silvia Tenenbaum importantly ascribes to a gender identity that changes through substantive transitions by incorporating psychic and social changes that occur when traversing physical borders. Tenenbaum's experience of working in Toronto, Canada with border-youths has taught her that gender fluidity must be approached intersectionally to understand how gender identities are shaped by migrant trajectories and how, in turn, one's border gender is framed in terms of migrant acculturation. Tenenbaum stresses that extending mental health services to border-gender youths requires an extended consciousness about societal embedded oppressive practices. For Tenenbaum, border signifies the ways in which structural forms of oppression and marginalisation make identities visible or invisible as well as contestations that emerge from the capacity to recuperate and translate one's own cultural knowledge in a diasporic context. How do border-youths' earlier experience of oppression before immigration become augmented by the institutional practices of invisibility practiced by mental health services in Toronto? Does the positioning of indigenous Latino border-gender youth vis-a-vis Canadian indigenous peoples, non-Latino gender-fluid youth and Hispanic Latino immigrants contribute to the lack of culturally relevant health care services?

Indigenous Latino gender-fluid youth form the fastest growing asylum seeker population in Canada. They often identify with their indigenous roots and the complex history of Latin American racial problems. Indigenous Latino gender-fluid youths feel a closer affinity with their Canadian indigenous counterparts than with other Latino immigrants. They struggle to find role models with the positive effect of gender-fluid youths organically taking over active leadership roles with the idea that leadership should come 'from the bottom up' as part of the community that expresses body image, gender representation, second-language acquisition and redefining one's identity in a new country. Gender-fluid immigrant youths face the challenge of crafting a diasporic voice that integrates their multiple knowledges, and geographical belonging through a reflective understanding of conflicting cultural codes. Research participants saw gender fluidity as an open-ended, active, self-affirming developmental agent. They had expected that migration to Canada would ease gender oppression rather than impose upon them new translational learning to navigate mainstream institutions. Tenenbaum advocates a social justice approach that offers alternatives to individualistic



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therapeutic practice and proposes a shift towards a community-based model by linking interpersonal processes within larger social systems that take into account the needs of the Latin American community in all its complexity, including the needs of gender-fluid youths who do not experience their gender fluidity as a disempowering pathology.

–Elizabeth Brodersen and Michael Glock, Editors

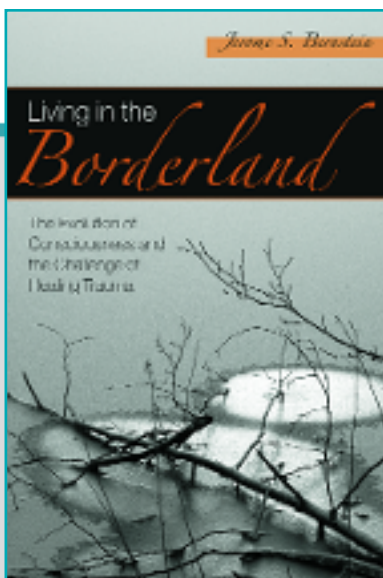
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CHAPTER

1

# BORDERLAND/BORDERLINE



This chapter is excerpted from

*Living in the Borderland*

by Jerome Bernstein

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# BORDERLAND/ BORDERLINE

Excerpted from *Living in the Borderland*

*The doctor especially should never lose sight of the fact that diseases are disturbed normal processes and not entia per se with a psychology exclusively their own.*

A colleague, in reading some of the material on the *Borderland* personality that I published prior to publication of this book, asked if, by using the term “*Borderland*” and its seeming allusion to “*Borderline*,” I intended to push the clinical limits of the *Borderline* personality syndrome. My answer was, “Yes.” However, the distinction between the two is not easily made.

The word “*Borderland*” came directly out of my work with Hannah. She introduced the word to me. She had just begun to read the book, *Borderlands: La Frontera*, by Gloria Anzaldúa. It traces the migrations of pre-Aztec Indians from what is now the US Southwest to central Mexico and then, centuries later, back again as mestizos, individuals with mixed Indian and Spanish Conquistador blood. Hannah had spent several years of her childhood living in South America. The title had caught her eye. As the dynamics described in Chapter 2 unfolded in our work together, I resonated to the word “*Borderland*” as one that best describes the phenomena that are the subject of this book.

In my review of the literature on the *Borderline* personality, I discovered that indeed the word *Borderland* was first used clinically by C. Hughes in 1884 to describe individuals who were on “the *Borderland* of insanity...who pass their whole life near that line, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other.” From then it was employed by a handful of others in various contexts, sometimes along with the word, *Borderline*. Eventually, the word *Borderline* personality disorder or *Borderline* personality organization stuck, largely through the work of Otto Kernberg, and the word *Borderland* dropped from use in the clinical literature after 1919.

I do not intend here to discuss the personality structure of the *Borderline* personality or treatment modalities per se. However, I do wish to introduce the idea that some of the dynamics that I have labeled *Borderland* are of transrational nature. They are sometimes mistaken for symptoms of underlying pathology and are used as a basis for diagnosing *Borderline* pathology – and worse.

Harold F. Searles, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, in a 1960 monograph entitled, *The Nonhuman in Normal Development and in Schizophrenia*, describes human maturation as “involving the individual’s struggling to achieve and maintain a sense of identity as being human and as being differentiated...from the nonhuman realm of his environment.” Certainly such differentiation on the part of the individual is fundamental and essential for healthy psychological development.

However, it is important to realize that this axiom applies to the post-Genesis ego construct – particularly what I have labeled here as the western ego construct. Prior to that time, it is likely that the ego was significantly enmeshed/identified/fused with the collective unconscious and with nature. Individuals functioned as much, if not more, in the context of a group self than in



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Excerpted from *Living in the Borderland*

an individual self. But for the most part, the compelling psychological dynamic was the group self, most particularly as expressed through ritual cycles of their tribal cultures. These tribal groups and the individuals within them were the guardians of nature's secrets and cycles, charged with the responsibility from their center of reality for assuring that the earth would rotate on its axis, that the sun would rise in the east and set in the west, for giving thanks for food obtained, and for the rain that fed the earth so that she in turn would be generous to the people and yield them food.

From the standpoint of the post-Genesis 20th-century ego (Figure 7.2, Part 5), it is easy to relegate all of this to "superstition" or "animism." And yet...and yet, when those of us who do attend the dances at the pueblos and at Hopi, or the healing ceremonies at Navajo, many of us can *feel* that something palpably different is taking place. We can *feel* spirit's presence. We *know* that these ancient "archaic" rites have potency even when we can't make rational sense of that *knowing*.

It is important to remember too that we, who constitute [western man and] western culture, descend from tribal cultures – the Hebrews, the Gauls, the Norse, the Celts, etc. The roots and arcane vestiges of the group self to which our ancient ancestors once paid homage through the enactment of the rituals and rites demanded by them still reside in the collective unconscious, which continues to impinge on our psyches throughout our lives, however subtle and unseen. Indeed, this concept is no different from the notion that the collective unconscious contains the cumulative learning of the cultures that are the psychic font from which we all draw our capacity to learn. Reading does not have to be re-invented anew as a technology with the coming into this world of each new individual. Neither does language, for that matter. The *technology* along with the cumulative learning of the culture resides in the collective unconscious available to all who draw on it.

So what does all of this have to do with the Borderline and *Borderland* personality? Prior to the Genesis call for the development of what ultimately was to become the western ego construct, the psyche – everyone's psyche – was partially identified with what Searles refers to as the "nonhuman environment." That was the normal state of psychic existence. As I have endeavored to demonstrate in Chapter 3, the evolution of what has become our highly rational, technology-oriented, non-magical, western ego construct, was dependent on what was ultimately to become an *absolute split* of the ego from its nonrational roots in the collective unconscious. Searles seems to be making this point clinically when he says:

I describe the major roots of the patient's transference-reactions as traceable to a stage in ego development prior to any clear differentiation between inner and outer world...Hence the therapist finds that these transference-reactions and attitudes of the adult borderline patient cast him, the therapist, in roles strangely different from those he commonly encounters in working with the



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Excerpted from *Living in the Borderland*

neurotic patient, whose transference casts him, say, as a domineering father or a sexually seductive, masochistic mother. Instead, the therapist finds the patient reacting to him in limitlessly extraordinary ways, most of which have a nonhuman, or less-than-fully-human, feel to them. The patient reacts unconsciously to him for example, as being nonexistent, or a corpse, or a pervasive and sinister supernatural force, or as God, or as being the patient's mind.

Another way of saying this is that the ego structure of the Borderline personality is insufficiently separated/split from its roots in nature, thus giving rise to a Borderline personality structure.

Searles asserts that this is clearly a determining, etiological factor in Borderline personality structure. In the next paragraph he attributes this lack of differentiation of the Borderline personality "from his nonhuman environment" to "parent-figures [who] were not predominantly whole, well-integrated individuals...but [who were] a collection of poorly integrated, and sometimes seemingly innumerable introjects, only precariously managed by the parent-figure's relatively weak own self." So, from Searles' point of view, this differentiation deficiency of the individual ego from its "nonhuman environment" largely, if not predominantly, derives from insufficient parental imagos of one sort or another.

I fully subscribe to what Searles says above about deficient early interpersonal dynamics as the etiology of the problem of the Borderline personality. This is indeed the case as far as it goes. However, I propose that in some, if not many, individuals diagnosed as having Borderline personality disorder, what appears to be a lack of differentiation of the individual "from his non-human environment" is in fact the presence of *Borderland* features, which in their essence are not pathological.

In another forward-looking (1972) paper entitled, "Unconscious Processes in Relation to the Environmental Crisis," Searles addresses another, *impersonal*, etiological source of Borderline personality structure:

[O]ver recent decades we have come from dwelling in an outer world in which the living works of nature either predominated or were near at hand, to dwelling in an environment dominated by a technology which is wondrously powerful and yet nonetheless dead, inanimate. I suggested that in the process we have come from being subjectively differentiated from, and in meaningful kinship with, the outer world, to finding this technology-dominated world so alien, so complex, so awesome and overwhelming that we have been able to cope with it *only by regressing*, in our unconscious experience of it, largely to a *degraded* state of nondifferentiation from it. I suggested...that this "outer" reality is psychologically as much a part of us as its poisonous waste products are part of our physical selves.

[Emphasis added.]



# BORDERLAND/ BORDERLINE

Excerpted from *Living in the Borderland*

He seems to be saying that environmental degradation and the encroachment of “dead” – I would say, soulless – technology can result in a regressed state similar to that of the child with poor parental imagoes, both giving rise to a Borderline personality structure. And certainly the combination of the two would argue for a high risk of Borderline personality structure. Both can produce the kinds of splitting, distortion, paranoia, and defense mechanisms in one’s personality structure that contribute to what is referred to as Borderline personality structure.

Searles talks implicitly about nature as if she were not only dominated by, but – psychologically at least for the individual – displaced by, technology. He suggests that these Borderline patients can have difficulty differentiating themselves from that overwhelmingly “wondrously powerful and yet nonetheless dead, inanimate” outer world of technology and its poisonous waste products. For Searles such a state is pathological in its essence. It is an infection of the outer world resulting in regression; it blocks differentiation of the ego-self from the nonhuman dimension. Nondifferentiation results in pathology.

However, might it be possible that some of the patients whom Searles diagnoses as Borderline could be having equal, if not more, difficulty differentiating their human self from *actual* experiences – *nonpathological* experiences – of nature? Might it be that the “problem” here is not a regression, but a lack of differentiation, or perhaps erroneous interpretation by both patient and therapist?

In other words, what if some of those individuals are perceiving what I have called objective nonpersonal, nonrational phenomena occurring in the natural universe that are barely liminal (i.e. phenomena that are at the threshold of conscious awareness)? Namely, what if they are perceiving *Borderland* phenomena? And what if at least some of these experiences are not distortions so much as they are new psychic quanta entering into the cultural collective? One *Borderland* woman reported: “My sensitivities to all things animate and inanimate were with me from my earliest memories. I would touch my bedroom door and it would ‘tell’ me about the forest it came from.” These were warm and positive feelings for her. She said that by age 4 or 5 she had learned never to speak of them although they were, and continue to be, central in her relationship to the outer world. And if, as I assert, there has been an unfolding evolutionary shift since the mid-20th century reconnecting the western ego with its split-off roots in nature, there has been and continues to be an ever-increasing number of people who have nonpathological *Borderland* experiences in a culture that is unaccepting and/or hostile to their experience. While Searles emphasizes the *outer* circumstance – poor parental imagos and an increasingly degraded technology-dominated environment – I am emphasizing *internal* dynamics, namely a growing number of individuals with heightened sensitivity to and apperception of nonrational reality. The latter is occurring due to an apparent evolutionary structural shift in the nature of the western ego. Jungian analyst David Sedgwick in his book, *Jung and Searles*, says:

Jung’s hypothesis of an impersonal “collective unconscious” lends itself to this distinction between the defensively avoided and the not yet understood. The



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Excerpted from *Living in the Borderland*

irrupting contents from the unconscious may be “archetypes,” whose strangeness, power and impersonality make them initially incomprehensible. These “internal selves” [Searles’ term] do not have a personal reference point or history against which the client might be defending. The heavy emotional overtone of this type of complex is not a function of defensive operations in Searles’ sense; it is inherent in the archetypal experience itself...If defenses do arise, according to Jung they will most likely be reactions to the “objective,” inner activity of the psyche.

I would add that defenses might arise due to the therapist treating an objective experience as if it needed to be defended against as regressive and unreal. This is my thesis and my emphasis here with regard to the *Borderland/ Borderline* realms: The clinical interpretations of what these individuals are experiencing may well be distorted because of a built-in cultural, and thus a clinical, bias against nonrational experience, i.e. “archetypal dynamics,” in Jung’s terms. Here is the nexus where *Borderland* phenomena can be unconsciously turned into pathology by the treating therapist.

In reviewing the literature on the Borderline personality I have been struck by the degree to which therapist-writers seem to have no questions regarding the actual threshold of conscious and unconscious contents as reported by the patient. What appears to be a distortion to the therapist is taken as such. (Interestingly, Searles in the above quote comes to the threshold of such a consideration of variable liminality in the normal spectrum, but doesn’t cross the line.) The literature is replete with statements about the patient’s “flawed sense of reality” and the patient’s “distortions.” It seems to me that a question that needs to be much in our minds here is: To what extent is there distortion on the part of the patient, and to what extent is the perception of distortion in fact a result of a perceptual limitation on the part of the therapist?

It is precisely here that Jung’s theories of the Self, the archetypes, the collective unconscious, and the psychoidal dimension make a profound difference. Without them, one is left at the object level with nowhere to go. To put it more accurately, one is stuck within the limits and grandiose inflations of the western ego. Without Jung’s theoretical constructs, psychological and emotional experience are considered either normal, namely rational, or they are abnormal, namely irrational. Psychologically speaking, no room is made for a link to a transpersonal realm outside of religion and personal *belief*. Thus the kinds of experiences reported by Hannah and others could only be seen as irrational and pathological in a non-Jungian context. And this was the problem for Hannah: She could not heal, could not get well, from the Borderline features that she did manifest and the deeper wound of having her *Borderland* experiences denied – until her experiences of reality were acknowledged as such and not pathologized.

In a March 1990 presentation by Charles McCormack, at the Washington School of Psychiatry, the Borderline personality was described as follows:





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Excerpted from *Living in the Borderland*

The core of the borderline difficulty is a fundamental incapacity to self-soothe. This results from a lack of assimilation in early childhood of a relationship capable of helping the child to manage its anxiety. This developmental shortfall results in the borderline adult remaining dependent on others to mitigate his experiences. In other words, he seeks out others to contain his anxiety.

For many individuals, of course, this analysis/diagnosis is accurate. Note, however, that this view is limited to an *object-centered* psychology which does not recognize the validity of nonhuman, archetypal, and spiritually based connections as a *primary* self-care system and a source of anxiety alleviation and self-ordering of the personality.

In numerous communications with individuals, some of whom have been diagnosed as having Borderline personality disorders, many have described to me the preciousness of their connection to these nonhuman dimensions, their reality, and their genuine healing power. Some have described these experiences as sacred. Others contend that there is no question that they could not function in the world without them. And virtually all have expressed their need to be secretive regarding this dimension of their life experience. Many have described the wounding experience of having these connections pathologized in therapy. Some individuals were driven out of therapy never to return.

Clinically, it is important to look at the data: Hannah remained chronically depressed and largely unrelated to the outer world, except to the world of nature. She had particular difficulty relating to people – and when she tried, it usually turned out disastrously for her. She was isolated in her connection to nature because she herself believed that her experiences were “crazy” (her word). *She* believed they were pathological. She did not *want* to give them up because they were and had been her primary source of anxiety alleviation and self-ordering. *As long as others did not know* that she lived in a parallel world alongside her relationships with others, and as long as she could keep secret her deep connection to nature and animals, she could function – even be happy at times. At the same time, she felt that her parallel life had to be kept from others lest they ridicule her and brand her as “crazy.” Western culture does not admit nonrational experience as legitimate, neither did the psychology she encountered through the various therapies in which she had engaged. Her experiences fed a chronically paranoid and schizoid pattern. Most therapists on initially encountering Hannah would likely have given her a diagnosis of “Borderline personality disorder.” But this diagnosis was not the whole story, or necessarily the primary diagnosis.

Critically in my work with Hannah, it was when I began to acknowledge that I thought what she was reporting was coming from a parallel reality and was not pathological, that the work began to change. The more I listened to, witnessed, and took seriously her transrational reality, the more her Borderline features seemed to melt away. I mean just that – they seemed to melt away. Whereas prior to our





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Excerpted from *Living in the Borderland*

encounter around her distress over the cows, focusing directly on her actual pathological content and behavior invariably would set off her angry defenses and splitting. By the same token, the more we focused on her *Borderland* reality – not only in the manifest content of the material that she brought, but also in her dreams and art – the more her Borderline features would seem to dissolve.

So, in answer to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, yes, I am trying to push the boundaries of what we consider to be reality in the context of the Borderline personality. It is my conviction that some patients are diagnosed as Borderline personalities in part, and sometimes substantially, because they have experiences of the *Borderland* realm that are pathologized by the therapist. And for even those individuals for whom a diagnosis of Borderline personality is appropriate, some have *Borderland* experiences similar to those I have been describing. It is important that their *Borderland* experiences not be pathologized – that they be differentiated from their pathological parts. To the extent this differentiation is not made, the picture is confounded and healing is obstructed. Indeed, it can and does make the individual more sick.

Specifically, the personalistic bias in object-relations ego-based therapies that insists that all (other than chemically induced) neurosis results from faulty object relations, itself is a source of the difficulty in the treatment of Borderline personality disorders. In some cases, such as Hannah's, this is not enough. Validation of the patient's experience of transrational reality is an essential part of the equation. The insistence that healing, "self-soothing," can be attained *only* through a healing relationship with another individual, *and that that relationship alone is sufficient for healing*, can derail and totally shut down the therapeutic process for the Borderline personality with *Borderland* features.

Individuals who experience *Borderland* phenomena know something of the sacred that oftentimes we, as therapists, do not. They can try to tell us. But what are we open to listening to and letting in? To the extent that we are closed, both therapist and patient may lose.

While acknowledging the central importance of the transpersonal dimension in human experience, Donald Kalsched warns us that: "In trauma...all investment of libido in 'this life' is resisted by the self-care system in order to avoid further devastation. Energies of the numinous world then become substitutes for the self-esteem that should come from embodied gratifications in the human world. *The transpersonal is placed in the service of defense.*" [Emphasis added.] Although his statement is undoubtedly true in many traumatized individuals, it is not necessarily true in the case of others. In Hannah's case, it was both true and not true.

Hannah would qualify clinically as a traumatized individual. She had been sexually molested at age 9, and had palpable somatic memories of being sexually molested at very early ages, perhaps by members of her own family. When we began our work together, my initial experience of her in the transference was similar to



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Searles' description when he speaks of the patient reacting unconsciously to the therapist as a "pervasive and sinister supernatural force," or as "nonexistent." This kind of transference was reflected also in her dreams. In this sense, Hannah's experience of the transpersonal dimension was "placed in the service of defense," as Kalsched suggests. But – and this is important – a major reason for this defensive stance was that no one, including her previous therapists and me, took as valid her experience of transrational reality. Ultimately, when I did, her capacity for "embodied gratification in the human world" broadened and deepened.

Did she feel the cows or not? Certainly my object relations stance early in the work was that she did not, that hers was an "as if" experience, not a "real one." It was her anger at me in the session described in Chapter 2 that moved me as her therapist from a defensive stance wherein I discounted her insistence that she had a genuine experience of the transrational. To let that notion in was too disquieting *for me*. Subsequently only when I did witness and acknowledge *her* reality, did the nature of the transference change and with it her relationship to me and others including her family, and to the transpersonal dimension.

So for some individuals, as Kalsched suggests, the experience of trauma puts their relationship to the transpersonal (spirit) dimension in the service of defense, with serious personal and interpersonal consequences including the risk of somatic complications. For some, like Hannah, her trauma *may* have put her experience of the transpersonal in service of defense. But an equally, *if not more causal factor* in this regard was the absence of any available witness, particularly her therapists, to her genuine experience of transrational reality. And in some cases, it is the therapy itself that inadvertently serves to undermine the patient's experience of the transpersonal and spiritual dimension in the service of defense. Sedgwick says of Searles' attitude towards these transpersonal contents: "Searles' generally negative opinions about mysticism suggest that the theory of the collective unconscious might itself be an immature defense against painful 'Good Mother/Bad Mother' emotional experiences on the personal level." He goes on to say that Searles attributes "infantile omnipotence" to such transpersonal experiences.

Pathologizing *Borderland* dynamics can have the effect of "teaching" the individual with a Borderline personality disorder to behave in a more Borderline-like manner than would otherwise be the case. For example, when I suggested to Hannah, albeit quite subtly, that some of her experiences of and with animals were not real and had nothing to do with the animals themselves, i.e. that she was only projecting her own trauma and depressed feelings onto the animals, I was in effect encouraging her to deny and split off parts of her experience of reality while substituting mine. This produced rage (slamming the floor with her shoe) so typical of Borderline personalities.

We can see this dynamic as it is portrayed quite dramatically in Hans Christian Andersen's tale of "The Emperor's New Clothes," a fairytale one theme of which is the differentiation of what is "real" from what one perceives to be real or unreal –



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Excerpted from *Living in the Borderland*

and one's capacity to deal with it. At the end of the tale, after the little boy pointed out that the Emperor had no clothes, the Emperor and his court behaved as if he did, *even when they knew better*:

The Emperor took off all his clothes, and the impostors pretended to hand him one article of clothing after the other. They pretended to fasten something around his waist and to tie on something at his neck. This was the train, they said, and the Emperor turned round and round in front of the mirror. "How well His Majesty looks in the new clothes! How becoming they are!" cried all his followers. "What a design, and what colors! They are most gorgeous robes."

"The canopy which is to be carried over Your Majesty in the procession is waiting outside," said the master of the ceremonies.

"Well, I am quite ready," said the Emperor. "Don't the clothes fit well?" Then he turned around again in front of the mirror, so that he should appear to be examining his handsome new suit.

The chamberlains who were to carry the train stopped, felt about on the ground and pretended to lift it with both hands. They walked along behind with their hands in the air, for they dared not let it seem that they did not see anything...

"But he hasn't got anything on," said a little child.

"Oh, listen to the innocent," said his father. And what the child had said was whispered from one person to the other. "He has nothing on – a child says he has nothing on!"

"But he has nothing on!" cried all the people at last.

The Emperor writhed, *for he knew that it was true*. But he thought, "The procession must go on now." So he held himself stiffer than ever, and the chamberlains fussed and straightened the invisible train. And the procession goes on still!

[Emphasis added.]

In my work with Hannah, I was like the emperor, the imposition onto her of my object-relations training was like the "impostors" and the child was like the child in Hannah that kept protesting the false reality "we" kept presenting to her. Finally, unlike the emperor, I had to admit the previously disconcerting (to me) truth of her perceptions and desist from pressuring her to believe otherwise. On a more subtle level, this fairytale suggests how, as clinicians, even the best of us can be seduced by the patient's (unconscious) personality dynamics and our own countertransference reactions. Damage is done if the therapist (as does the emperor in the tale in the name of the "procession going on") presumes, *a priori* that his/her reality is more "real" than that of the patient, even in the face of feelings/thoughts/doubts/intimations on the part of the therapist that perhaps



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there could be some validity to the patient's representations. Even the best of us can, at the expense of our patients, succumb to a denial of our own countertransference anxiety or even our pathology.

The sometimes intractable and frustrating dynamics that those of us, as clinicians, have all encountered in our work with Borderline patients can harden not only our own defenses as therapists, but sometimes our minds and hearts as well. That is one reason why I was so moved and deeply touched by Searles' book, *My Work with Borderline Patients*. He has worked consistently for decades with some of the most difficult cases. Notwithstanding, it is my conviction that the Borderline personality is often unconsciously and palpably scapegoated.

There can be a lowered expectation of healing and greater countertransference resistance to some of the patient's subjective reality. We may not be inclined to "listen" to what our patients bring, let alone to what the patient considers sacred. And I do not mean that everything the patient considers sacred is free of pathological elements. I do mean that "listening" needs to include the possibility that the patient has a connection to a "reality" that goes beyond that of the therapist. The therapist needs, for the sake of the patient, to be open to the possibility that all that does not appear rational is not necessarily pathological – that the patient may have a relationship to the transpersonal, to the transrational, that is both sustaining *and healthy*. The *Psychiatric Dictionary* defines countertransference as:

The total reaction of the therapist, both the transference reaction and the realistic reaction, to all aspects of the patient's transference and general personality; the effect on the analyst's understanding or technique of the therapist's own unconscious needs and conflicts. Countertransference reactions, sometimes called analytic stumbling, are manifestations of the therapist's reluctance to know or learn something about himself. They may impair the analyst's interpretive capacity and his ability to deal with resistances *by distorting the therapist's perception of the patient's unconscious processes*.

[Emphasis added.]

It is my view that the point of breakdown between what is authentic from the patient's perspective and the therapist's *interpretation* of what is authentic comes when the therapist *leaves his or her feeling body and prematurely **thinks*** about what he/she is experiencing/perceiving from the patient. This is what happened initially in my work with Hannah. Psychoanalyst Nathan Schwartz-Salant, in his book on the Borderline personality says that "the process requires that the therapist allow himself or herself to be affected by the patient's material without having to resort to interpretation, which would at best prove to be a defensive maneuver." If the patient's authentic reality is different from any known reference point of the therapist, then the therapist lacks a frame for grasping what is being communicated consciously and unconsciously, and all the more so for transrational



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contents. On a subtle level, the therapist may be thrown back onto his/her fragmentation complex. At this point the therapist's own anxiety may create a need to pathologize the patient's authentic reality in an attempt to protect his sense of psychic and emotional cohesion.

I can't offer a simple formula for differentiating Borderline and *Borderland* dynamics in session. I can share some of my own experiences: With Borderline patients I often feel a pervasive anger present in the room. There is a hardness, an anger – sometimes rage – not too far below the surface if it is not overt, and a demandingness that is present to greater or lesser degree. And, of course, splitting is usually evident both in the manifest content offered by the patient and in the emotional content. In terms of the countertransference, I sometimes find myself wrestling with my own resentment of the Borderline patient, as well as a certain guarded feeling, particularly in my upper body. And I, too, feel split – sometimes disembodied and fragmented. For me, I experience my own splitting more on a body level than on a mind level.

With individuals whom I have come to refer to as *Borderland*, more than anything else I feel their sadness and a pervasive mournfulness, sometimes a Great Grief. So many appear to be in a state of chronic mourning – seemingly, at least initially, unconnected to anything. Oftentimes the patient seems to disappear in the session – without warning or any manifest reason. Ultimately what emerges is a secret life that is quite conscious to the patient and closely guarded. A mother wrote me that after reading an article of mine on the *Borderland* personality, she “came out” (her term) to her 20-year-old son about what he must have perceived as her weird behavior when he was young. She reported that her son seemed to understand both her process and her dilemma and had empathy for her struggles. For him, it was a kind of “Ah ha!” recognition regarding his childhood experiences with her. In terms of the countertransference, it is much as I described my reactions with Hannah – a feeling of something missing, something not happening in the sessions, some part of the patient missing. Sometimes it feels as if some part of *me* is missing in the room, a kind of two-dimensional experience of my feeling self. Sometimes I have the sense of being in the presence of the sacred, that the sacred has entered in, even when there is no such indication in the manifest dynamic of the session. And, notably, I don't feel many of the dynamics – particularly rage – I described above with regard to *Borderline* patients.

With regard to other characteristics common to the Borderline personality disorder such as a chronic feeling of emptiness, emotional volatility, poor impulse control (e.g. gambling, indiscriminate sex, binge eating), and self-destructive behaviors (e.g. self-mutilation, overdosing prescription medications and illegal drugs), some or all of these can be experienced in conjunction with *Borderland* dynamics. As pointed out previously, the interactions between these different types of dynamics (*Borderland* and Borderline) in the same individual often confuse the individual with regard to what is “abnormal” and what is “ordinary” transrational experience





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as reflected in their own patterns of behavior and personality structure. Because the individual does not know how to interpret his/her own behavior, these interacting patterns of behavior are often self-reinforcing. The result is often that *Borderland* dynamics inadvertently reinforce Borderline patterns of behavior and there is an overall exacerbation of symptoms and personality dynamics. (Early in our work this was the case with Hannah.) At the same time, it is my experience that *Borderland* personalities welcome a process of differentiation of their *Borderland* and Borderline parts. Nearly all are fully aware that they have pathological parts. Many would acknowledge having some Borderline features. The identification and authentication of *Borderland* dynamics can significantly improve difficult behavior patterns and the self-image of individuals diagnosed with Borderline personality disorder.

Well-trained therapists, particularly psychoanalysts, constantly use the countertransference in their work with Borderline (and other) patients. But the countertransference can be used either to heal or to hurt. And for the same reason, when the therapist cannot remain open to the possibility of a transrational reality outside of his/her own experience, the countertransference can be a powerful implement for wounding – the therapist as well as the patient.

In the last 50 years there has been a proliferation of new schools and theories in psychology and psychiatry. The object-relations school of psychology, particularly, has become prominent, if not dominant, in psychotherapeutic practice in the United States. It opened up and broadened the understanding of the underlying dynamics of psychopathology and put forth whole new approaches to treatment – particularly with regard to narcissistic disorders and the Borderline personality. I personally found this training indispensable and, when integrated with Jungian theory, it helped my own understanding of psychodynamics and my personal approach to treatment.

However, with the evolution of these new schools and theoretical orientations comes a heavy emphasis on etiology and psychopathology. The very term – “*object relations*” – depersonalizes the individual, and because it is so one-sidedly ego based, it leaves out the transpersonal dimension. For me, it blurs the boundaries between psyche and soul. The nature and language of the theory is a detraction in this regard, and there seems to be an inexorable drift toward looking at the individual pathologically to the exclusion of the soul. “Normality” too often has become merely the absence of pathology. Most important, the locus, the frame of reference, for addressing psychic contents seems to have become more and more centered in the theory and less centered in the frame of reference of the patient and the patient’s own experience of his/her inner processes and life connections.

Freudian and neo-Freudian schools of psychoanalysis contributed more than their share to what sometimes seems to me to be name calling. Stephen M. Johnson, Professor of Psychology at the University of Oregon observes:





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[T]he psychoanalytic and particularly characterological labels for characteristic adaptations are singularly negative and pathological; there is relatively little emphasis on where the absence of pathology will lead. There is little attention paid to what we really could be, and none to what this melodrama of life is all about. In traditional characterological terms, one has the choice of being one of the following or something equally horrible: Oral, schizoid, masochistic, psychopathic, narcissistic, rigid, hysterical, obsessive-compulsive, etc. While...we need to label psychopathology to communicate and think about it in a systematic way, these labels are, unfortunately, often powerful negative suggestions that convey judgmental attitudes and further separation between those whom one considers healthy and those whom one considers sick.

More recently, the “intersubjective” school of thought takes a significant step closer to what is needed to address this problem. The intersubjective perspective differs from other psychoanalytic theories in that it does not posit particular psychological contents (the Oedipus complex, the paranoid and depressive positions, separation-individuation conflicts, and so on) that are presumed to be universally salient in personality development and in pathogenesis. It holds that the child’s, and subsequently, the adult’s derivative experiences are the product(s) of mutual *interaction* between the individual and the primary care givers as well as other significant individuals in the person’s life. Robert D. Stolorow, faculty member of the Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis and clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine, asserts:

[A]ny pathological constellation can be understood only in terms of the unique intersubjective contexts in which it originated and is continuing to be maintained...

Psychoanalytic theories that postulate universal psychodynamic contents also tend to prescribe rigid rules of therapeutic technique or style that follow from the theoretical presuppositions...

The doctrine of intrapsychic determinism and corresponding focus on the isolated mind in psychoanalysis has historically been associated with an objectivist epistemology. Such a position envisions the mind in isolation, radically estranged from an external reality that it either accurately apprehends or distorts. Analysts embracing an objectivist epistemology *presume to have privileged access to the essence of the patient’s psychic reality* and to the objective truths that the patient’s psychic reality obscures...the intersubjective viewpoint...is best characterized as “perspectivalist.” Such a stance does not presume either that the analyst’s subjective reality is more true than the patient’s, or that the analyst can directly know the subjective reality of the patient.

[Emphasis added.]

Although this theoretical viewpoint significantly addresses the limitations of many other theoretical approaches, it is still limited to an object-relations context. It



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does not make adequate space for the role of nature even as a significant other, let alone as a “primary caregiver,” as is the case with some individuals.

Developmentally, for the insecurely attached individuals, trauma often provokes an attachment crisis – both interpersonally with others and between the individual and his/her own body experience. We have seen earlier how for *Borderlanders*, nature can become the positive, if not life-saving, “primary caregiver,” when the interpersonal dimension of treatment and healing have been spoiled. Here Mother Nature, herself, becomes the safe parent – *in lieu of an individual’s* (i.e. object attachment) – as the primary caregiver. I am proposing that when the interpersonal/intersubjective level of relating is so damaged and compromised as to be functionally unavailable to the individual as a primary part of the individual’s developmental attachment system, *the individual seeks out a “safe enough” impersonal primary caregiver and partner in the attachment drama.* Oftentimes this primary caregiver/attachment partner is nature. This instinctual gravitation toward nature as the *impersonal* safe enough primary caregiver is given further impetus by what I have described in earlier chapters as evolutionary process taking place vis-à-vis the western psyche. To insist, in the therapeutic context, that the individual repair what, from his/her soul’s standpoint, seems unrepairable (object constancy as their primary attachment), can lead to further stress, re-traumatization, and despair. Indeed, resistance by the therapist to the transrational dimension of the patient’s reality experience, may be a significant dynamic in reinforcing *Borderline* features in the therapeutic process itself.

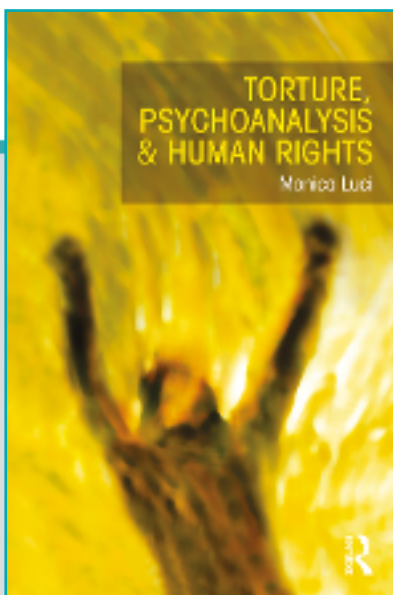
If we are open, we can find *Borderland* dynamics in virtually any diagnostic category. However, I wish to be clear that although I believe that the *Borderline* personality is particularly accessible to experiencing *Borderland* phenomena, not all people who experience *Borderland* phenomena are *Borderline* personalities. Indeed, as I have put forth in previous chapters, I believe that the experience of *Borderland* phenomena is not in itself a neurotic experience. Rather it is a natural evolutionary occurrence, and that the prevalence of such experiences has been rapidly developing in a substantial proportion of people in the United States. There are many individuals whose lives are quite functional and who do not seek psychological help – people whom I perceive as “*Borderland* personalities.” I have reserved the term “*Borderland* personality” to refer to individuals for whom this realm is consciously lived and is an enriching part of their reality. Many of them are quite aware that they fit the profile of *Borderland* personality. Since I have begun to publish material on the subject, scores of these individuals have identified themselves to me. All that I have heard from are immensely relieved to have words put to their experience – and, for many, to their secret. Without exception, they have expressed a longing for recognition and connection with others like themselves – a longing for community.



CHAPTER

2

# THE SPLINTERED REFLECTIVE TRIANGLE IN BYSTANDERS, PERPETRATORS AND VICTIMS OF TORTURE



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*Torture, Psychoanalysis and Human Rights*  
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# THE SPLINTERED REFLECTIVE TRIANGLE IN BYSTANDERS, PERPETRATORS AND VICTIMS OF TORTURE

Excerpted from *Torture, Psychoanalysis and Human Rights*

In this chapter, the phenomena related to bystanders, perpetrators and victims of torture, as described in Chapter 3, will be illustrated with the use of concepts elaborated in Chapters 4 and 5, particularly the idea of the *Splintered Reflective Triangle*.

Relying on psychoanalytic literature, I have proposed that reflective ability is the capacity to simultaneously hold in the mind three poles, Me, You and Other, which enables a paradoxical mental activity that at once processes difference and identity in relationships. This concept can also be expressed through the idea of keeping open *in-between spaces* among multiple positions in mind and society: potential spaces among multiple centers of experience that can be 'bridged' through symbolization, which is strictly connected to abilities like mutual recognition, appropriate mirroring and affective containment.

In this chapter, I am defending the hypothesis that the phenomena described in Chapter 3, those related to bystanders, perpetrators and victims of torture, can be understood as consequences of a massive use of *states of twoness*, which results from the splintering of the *Reflective Triangle*. Such a break is supposed to disconnect the three poles, but tends to leave the horizontal segment Me–You (or You–Me) and the vertical Me–Other (or Other–Me) and, You–Other (or Other–You) segments intact. The horizontal segment points to the dynamics of social construction of a collective identity through a massive use of the paranoid-schizoid modes of processing experience. This offers some explanation for the phenomena observed predominantly among bystanders and perpetrators. The second segments illustrate the establishment of a power gradient among members of society, most clearly between victims and perpetrators, but also between leaders and the general population of bystanders. This unconscious vertical alignment serves multiple purposes, such as re-enacting the violence endured on a weaker other to unburden unbearable emotions and find some relief, while having a feeling of control and a sensation of being protected.

## **Me–You and You–Me: bystanders and the phenomenon of the 'missing witness'**

We have seen that, in a society shaped according to the Panopticon pattern, individuals are subjected to a range of partitions and in a submissive relation with a controlling 'central' power. They can neither see each other nor the controller, but they are seen by him. In this state of being continuously seen, relationships are shaped in blinding states of twoness, binding those who perceive themselves as peers in horizontal 'psychotic' states of identity, and those in condition of inequality and/or hierarchical contexts in vertical 'perverse' phenomena of difference, such as blind obedience to authority.

Literature shows that the characterizing features of the bystander state are: 1) a relentless and continuous dissociation of the individual self sustained through an emotional climate of terror that prompts a peculiar status of knowledge called



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‘disavowal’, ‘denial’ or ‘knowing and not knowing’; and 2) compliance with a Monolithic Societal State, which offers some fake ‘protection’ from terror: this implies to be bound to the large group’s massive use of defence mechanisms, such as splitting and projective identification, that guarantees alignment with a terrific object.

The ‘bystander’ is a pivotal figure in torture, epitomizing a state of *absence* of an internal witness in society. Whereas a society is transformed into a mass of bystanders, what is lacking are borders, groupal skin (Anzieu, 1985, 1987), boundaries, community links, articulation in groups, spaces where experience can be shared and reflected upon, also thanks to the emotional ‘containment’ (Bion, 1967; Winnicott, 1965), which enables thinking. Being constantly observed, as the Panopticon suggests, means being under siege, compelled by an adhesive and controlling state of *twoness* with no access to a third position, and with no links of empathy and mutual recognition, only controlling hierarchical relations between superiors/subordinates. From the central tower, the power ‘impinges’ on individuals’ psyche through vision (Foucault, 1975): it is a society of control and security. The social environment of fear and control alters the self, making it dissociate and requiring it to work in paranoid-schizoid mode. This determines a condition in which the ‘internal witness’ is missing because the *in-between* spaces of self are contracted. The ‘internal witness’ is a third part which is present at and recognizes something happening. It is a function of the ego that, being ‘decentred’ and mobile within the self, allows multiplicity promoting links between different parts of self. It is not concerned with ‘control’ but with ‘listening’ partial truths and rights, ‘bridging’ multiple perspectives through symbolization (Bromberg, 1993, 1994, 1996; Jung, 1916, 1920, 1921, 1928, 1934, 1940; Mitchell, 1991). As seen in Chapter 5, this is linked to the ability of creating meaning out of experience, recognizing partial and even contradictory realities, something which seems lost under threat, with a loss of reflectivity.

## ***The continuum between bystanders and perpetrators***

We have seen that some bystanders are more similar to perpetrators than others for their active participation in social violence (Cohen, 2001; Hilberg, 1961, 1992; Laqueur, 1980; Staub, 1989 among others).

Straker (2000) shows that the immersion in contexts of exposure to continuous/repetitive traumas or intense stress, such as a climate of political repression and/or violence, makes individuals’ cognition change. He researched mental health professionals who were immersed in the context of continuing traumatic stress generated by South Africa’s political repression, civil conflict and the struggle for liberation during the 1980s. All the interviewees indicated that, during immersion in the continuous traumatic stress, they thought more about good and evil, life and death, meaning and meaninglessness, than they did previously. These preoccupations were often linked to the need to resolve pressing ethical dilemmas





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in the present, which required fairly immediate action. The professionals also reported differences in their manner of thinking: they spoke of how acts of violence committed by their allies became more acceptable and were justified by them in ways that were not conceivable before the civil conflict. Straker (2000) understands this in relation to Lifton's (1973) and Bar-On's proposition (1992) that, in contexts of continuing traumatic stress such as war, one develops a split morality: one pertaining to peace and one pertaining to war. Their epistemological position was, we might say, somewhere in the continuum between bystanders and perpetrators. Papadopoulos illustrates how unipolar archetypes work on individuals in pushing them towards action (1998: 464–5). He points out that violence can have an exhilarating, even 'liberating' effect on the individual, for at least four reasons: 1) the individual is relieved by the burden of thinking. This idea of thinking refers to the ability to create a space in which when one is not overwhelmed by pressing impulses (Bion, 1962b, 1967, 1970). Thus, not having such space provides a tragic kind of 'relief' from the pain caused by contradictions and conflicts. 2) Violence provides people a false sense of 'wholeness', since, in acting out, there is no division between thoughts, feelings and actions: all become one and action flows with exceptional consistency. 3) Destructiveness can have a certain kind of chilling purity, which is extremely seductive. 4) Individual identity is subsumed by a wider collective identity, which is polarized under the effect of unipolar archetypes.

I understand this to be an affirmation of a MSS where individuals are required by group pressure to function in states of twoness, while the intrapsychic fragmentation produced is compensated by a sense of unity derived from the merging within the group, which provides a satisfying and reassuring sense of identity and deservingness.

As seen in Chapter 3, institutions of doctors and psychologists are no exception to this dynamic and may act in collusion with monolithic states within their institutions (especially if the professional group has some material convenience for espousing the hegemonic ideology) (Allhoff, 2006; Altman, 2010; Bloche, 1987; Bloche and Marks, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Lifton, 1986, 2004; Miles, 2006, 2007; Patel, 2007; Physicians for Human Rights, 2007; Rasmussen *et al.*, 1988; Soldz, 2008; Summers, 2008; Vesti, 1990; Vesti and Lavik, 1991). Even in their case, morality may become one of a 'state of war' (Schwager, 2004). If the professional community does not offer any containment, any protected *in-between space* where reflectivity is viable, and sticks to a polarized wider societal discourse, professionals have only a binary choice: to adhere to the morality of war (to join) or disassociate (to leave) (for the active involvement of the American Psychological Association in the US 'war on terror', see: Altman, 2010; Patel, 2007; Soldz, 2008; Summers, 2008).





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## *The continuum between bystanders and victims*

If involvement and 'action' represent one aspect of the 'bystander' position, as seen in the previous paragraph, the other characterizing feature is 'silence' (see Chapter 3). The silence of those bystanders who do not accept the prevailing definitions of the situation, makes of them victims of power.

Nancy Caro Hollander (1992, 2006a, 2007, 2008, 2010) illustrates how, in the context of the authoritarian regimes of Latin American Countries during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, political and economic institutions impacted on people's unconscious and conscious mental functioning. She examines the powerful and dialectical interaction between the unconscious mind and hegemonic ideology, arguing that, in such a context, individuals internalize notions and values of mass culture, which become aspects of the unconscious world of inner representation and object relationships (Hollander, 2006a, 2007, 2008). She extends the concepts of denial and splitting to capture the defensive mechanisms employed by individuals who are forced to deal with a threatening political environment (2008). In Argentina, torture generated an emotional atmosphere of widespread fear, silence and inhibition, while self-censorship resulted in depoliticization and the destruction of a sense of community. She remembers that, in the attempt to deal with persecutory anxiety, people disavowed significant aspects of the self. The traumatogenic political environment drove citizens to disavow not only their identities, but often their capacities to believe and act on their perceptions of reality (Hollander, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008). Hollander makes the important observation that the symbols of state terror are 'subject-seeking' (Hollander and Gutwill, 2006), in the sense that they are designed to penetrate private life and phantasy. They are created to be in active pursuit of their subjects in order to ensure the dominance of the social interests they represent. This observation is crucial because, just as there can be no baby without a mother, according to Winnicott's thinking (1952: 99), there can be no individual who does not reside within the context of a community or culture. Embedded in the self is the knowledge that it is impossible to live outside the culture or community in which one is born. This makes both the baby and individual extremely vulnerable to the expectations and requirements of both the maternal and societal environment. Schwager (2004) points out that many theorists of early infancy (Beebe, 1985, 1988; Bick, 1986; Bion, 1959, 1962a; Mitrani, 1996; Ogden, 1989, 1994b; Winnicott, 1971) have shown that the early lack of a containing, holding and empathic environment results in an inability to separate from the maternal object. This results in a fused self/object sense of self and catastrophic anxieties, which can derail the evolution of the symbolic process.

I proposed the Panopticon as a social counterpart of this kind of bond to a powerful other. This social state, often called ideology, works in people's mind producing control through the simple device of being constantly visible (Foucault, 1975). Being constantly seen means being under the scrutiny of some superior and



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never being alone; Winnicott (1971) referred to the developmental relevance of the capability of being alone to explain the arising of a true self, which is only possible through experiences that promote also reflectivity. If a true self (or its correlate, the *Reflective Triangle*) is not in place, a false self (or a *Splintered Reflective Triangle*) cannot be anything but compliant to official truths. This happens because, at some level, consistency is needed. In this regard, Schwager (2004) remarks on the similarity between the use of terror by parents and leaders: both are coupled with ideology and utopian visions that justify and even encourage them to feel good about using violent means in order to bring about so called 'good results', 'virtuous ends' or a better or ideal society, generally diminishing an other. If the self cannot rely on the other's recognizing and mentalizing mirroring gaze (Benjamin, 1988, 1990, 1998; Bion, 1962a, 1962b; Fonagy, 2001; Winnicott, 1953, 1956, 1965) – and here I extend this function to communities within society - *Paradoxical Multiple Self States* leading to symbolization, responsibility, sense of self and other as whole subjects, are not viable. Instead, we find monolithic selves based on inflexible *states of twoness* that cement them with others selves in the same state. If the gaze is one-way, the Winnicottian false self 'adheres' to authority, and cannot separate from this kind of Other: the perception of oneself as an independent but relational agent fades away.

Once the self is deprived of its ability to find meanings, and must cohere with the meanings provided by the authority, reality may suffer that unwearyingly moment-to-moment flexibility in the treatment of facts by the powerful other described above (Chapters 3 and 5). Reality becomes something that can be manipulated at will through the massive use of denial and splitting (Hollander, 2008), which have a deep impact on the functioning of memory and the sense of time (Ogden, 1986). *Doublethinking*, as Orwell calls splitting and denial, means the ability to believe that black is white; better still, to know that black is white and to forget that one has ever believed the contrary (Orwell, 1949: 37). This demands a continuous alteration of the past which is based on fragmentation. History is continuously rewritten, through day-to-day falsification of the past, carried out by authority that makes mutability of the past a central tenet of changing society. Orwell seems to suggest the importance of a sense of threat to sustain the status of knowledge of bystanders: sustained terror is represented through the shocks produced by continuous explosions of bombs and the silent disappearance of people, deleted from the collective memory (1949). This is used to maintain consent on the legitimacy of the rule of Big Brother. The mental state of an endless war works to sustain this state of mind where you know and you do not know and, at the same time, you are ready to accept the 'official' definition of reality, as provided by leaders.

This defensive process to keep knowledge apart requires a continuous effort because, in order to keep something out of mind, the individual needs to constantly keep it in mind, so that it does not pass through the boundary or frame of the



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sequestered area. Thus, paradoxically, the individual is constantly mindful of that which is repressed.

In psychoanalysis, denial is understood as an individual unconscious defence mechanism for coping with guilt, anxiety and other disturbing emotions. The psyche blocks off information that is literally unthinkable or unbearable. Freud first referred to *Verleugnung* ('disavowal'), in the specific sense of 'a mode of defence which consists in the subject's refusing to recognize the reality of a traumatic perception' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1985: 118) – in his theory, the perception of the absence of the woman's penis (Freud, 1923: 143–4; 1925: 248–58). Freud distinguished between neurotic and psychotic denial of reality, but created some confusion by seeing them both as forms of repression. In neurosis, the ego, following a reality principle, suppresses a 'piece of the id', that is of instinctual life, for the sake of adaptation. In psychosis, the ego, being in the service of the id, withdraws from reality and recreates it anew. (Freud, 1924: 183–7): 'neurosis does not disavow the reality, it only ignores it; psychosis disavows it and tries to replace it' (Freud, 1924: 185). Some awkward facts of life are too threatening to confront, but impossible to ignore. The compromise solution is to deny and acknowledge them at the same time. Freud insisted that what is denied is the 'unwelcome idea' associated with the perceived reality, rather than the objective existence of the phenomenon itself (at least at the neurotic level). Unless there is a wholly psychotic interference, the subject is perfectly able to describe things accurately. Disavowal and denial, as originally described by Freud, do not imply an absence or distortion of an actual perception, but rather a failure to appreciate fully the significance or implications of what is perceived (Trunnel and Holt, 1974: 771). This is crucial, because it suggests that there is a failure in symbolization, the meaning is missed because of sustained mental discontinuities.

However, the original Freudian theory makes the assumption that there is a unified integrated self. By contrast, the late-modern and post-modern self has, in essence, no essence. To this fragmented, fluid and compartmentalized self, disavowal and denial, far from being aberrations, are only to be expected, and those contents of self that are not symbolized at an individual level may be processed in wider relational systems, at interpersonal, groupal and social levels.

According to the relational perspective, the primary psychic basis is interactive and, by nature, undifferentiated (Mitchell, 2000). Out of it, the individual gradually grows to become a distinct entity, while always keeping explicit or implicit contact with an other. From this perspective, there can be no subject without an other. Therefore, subjectivity and intersubjectivity go hand in hand (for example, Benjamin, 1988, 1990, 1998, 2002a, 2002b, 2004; Mitchell, 1988, 1993, 2000; Ogden, 1986, 1992a, 1992b, 1994a, 1994b; but also differently Aron, 1996, Atwood and Stolorow, 1984; Stolorow and Atwood, 1992; Stolorow *et al.*, 1994). Fonagy comments poetically: 'At the core of the mature child's self is the other at the moment of reflection' (2001: 173). But this other at the core of the self is not really



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other because, by definition, it is part of the self. And, since it is part of the self, one recognizes the other in the self and the self in the other.

In this perspective, the affect is not just an isolated intrapsychic event, but context dependent. It is a co-structuring, albeit unconscious, which is directed towards and with the other. In addition, we need the other not only to recognize but also to formulate and consolidate our experience. For this reason, a system of external and internalized relations supporting discontinuities installs an epistemological fracture in which people 'know and not know' because of the absence of a properly reflecting other (Cohen, 2001; Laub and Auerhan, 1993). Knowing depends on the ability to keep multiple perspectives in oneself, or to keep the *self multiple*. Actively supported discontinuities in the mind and society work against this ability to link the pieces of one's experience.

While society becomes more and more fragmented, reflective social contexts and relations vanish. This process increasingly 'sequesters' in-between social spaces. Since there is no such a thing as an isolated individual, the continuity with institutions (and groups) and survival within them demands compliance and acceptance of the reality they establish. As Schwager (2004) observes, at this stage, the development of one's creative, transcendent capacities (locating power and authority within oneself through the integration and transcendence of dualities and autonomous and creative thinking) is often neglected out of fear that this state of mind may challenge the existing power and the continuity of the group as it is presently organized. Thus, whole societies may slip into collective modes of denial and induce more and more individuals to comply with this state, without telling them what to think about or what not to think about. This happens in a silent and crawling way: it is sufficient for the monolithic power to just keep control of a piece of everybody (Todorov, 1991): a piecemeal involvement, often starting with the professional self and then encroaching on more and more space within personal self (as seen in Chapter 3). Then, ideology provides an appearance of unity and control that covers the emotional situation of fear, fragmentation and powerlessness. Recognizing its multiple and chameleon-like forms is not an easy task. However, the knowledge so produced lacks the complexity of multiple perspectives of experience and reality.

'Bystander' is a term for an absence. It is the 'missing witness' of individual and social experience. This absence, if sustained, is what allows other citizens to move just along the line of perpetrators and victims.

## **Other–Me and Me–Other: the objectification of perpetrators**

### ***Bureaucratic perpetrators***

In Chapter 3, we have seen that actual torturers and bureaucratic officials may be very ordinary people (Arendt, 1963; Browning, 1993; Christie, 1991; Conroy, 2000;



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Milgram, 1963, 1974; Todorov, 1991; Zimbardo, 1972, 1975, 2004; Zimbardo *et al.*, 1999, 2000). Their psychological and relational dynamics partially look like those of bystanders who are positioned somewhere in the continuum between bystanders and perpetrators. In the previous paragraph, I argued that, in a general sense, the emotional flooding from the social context creates the 'impingement' (Winnicott, 1958) that makes the individual mind ready for a reshaping of thought and the ideological interpretation of reality. This is actualized through an unconscious structuring of *Monolithic Self States* ready to link to others' *Monolithic Self States* within institutions and groups. Zimbardo (1972, 1975, 2004), Milgram (1963, 1974) and Conroy (2000), in their studies on obedience, show one important feature of these phenomena: the slippery slope of obedience towards authority can escalate to unthinkable violence when it is multiplied through groupal or institutional organization and may easily be perceived as morally acceptable. The monolithic functioning of institutions may reverberate among its members' selves.

Schwager (2004) accurately describes the state of mind we called *monolithic* with the following features:

1. it is dualistic,
2. it establishes a defensive, self-righteous, judgmental position,
3. it projects the shadow side on the other,
4. it lacks integration of self and is characterized by inner fragmentation,
5. the authority is located outside of self,
6. it operates in respect of the dominance of or the compliance with others, and makes others compliant with you, rather than operating from a creative, spontaneous core,
7. it has selective empathy: only for those who are like oneself; while empathy and love are conditional,
8. ideology is taken for reality, replacing reflective, ongoing doubt and openness,
9. love in part depends on coercion, thereby becoming a form of violence and manipulation,
10. it has symbiotic issues,
11. it is vulnerable to taking on ideas of and seeking approval from others in order to be part of a relationship or group,
12. it shows impairment in symbolic capacity and capacity for creativity, reflection and thinking.

### ***The training of torturers and reorganization of self***

There is considerable evidence in the literature that torturers, during their training, undergo a downright process of 'institutional colonization' of their self. In their case, the wider social process of identification with a rigid set of values is taken to extremes, through an institutionalized method consisting of isolating individuals, breaking their previous social bonds and sense of community, and replacing those





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relations with institutional ones. The personal transformation produced is extremely powerful and carried out by attacking the trainee's body and psyche. The treatment they undergo disorganizes their self, enabling them to reorganize it according to the institutional tasks of specialized monolithic institutions, usually deputed to the administration of violence (army, police, special operational forces, etc.). These institutions demand trainees to re-enact the violent treatment they underwent during their training with designated others (Conroy, 2000; Crelinsten, 2003; Crelinsten and Schmid, 1993; Haritos-Fatouros, 2003; Huggins, 2002; Huggins *et al.*, 2002). Joan C. Golston (1993) suggested that the process for the creation of torturers relies heavily on the creation and exploitation of dissociative responses. The process is promoted through: 1) an abusive introduction or initiation, 2) the ensnarement in the 'torturer's bind', 3) programming which ratifies their growing identification with their abuser.

As seen in *Chapter 3*, the training of torturers begins with physical and psychological abuse, even torture, and continues with rituals that mark the passage to a new identity, namely, that of a torturer. According to Golston (1993), from then on, the trainee is operating from a post-traumatic personality, which lays the foundation for their accommodation to abusive authority and their susceptibility towards further personality change. The trainee will struggle to manage recurrent intrusive imagery or physical sensations; they will go through both the voluntary and unconscious numbing of their normal responses; their attachment to themselves and others will be damaged, while they will experience emotional irritability and hyper-responsivity. The trainee's psychological needs and defences are likely to become more primitive and predisposed to action. If the abuse is repeated, their suffering denied and their chances for restoration of self blocked, then their initial dissociative responses may become lasting mechanisms, their memory may become selective, their susceptibility to trance will increase, their perceptions will be distorted and the meaning they attach to their life may dramatically alter. According to Golston, the trainee's trainers will exploit the features of this adjustment, so that, regardless of the trainee's psychological state as they enter training they will evolve from being an externally vigilant trauma victim, to simply accommodating to their abuser/trainer, with an increasing identification with their trainers' world view.

Stanley Rosenman (2003) calls this process 'assaultive projective identification and the plundering of the victim's identity'. The predator group establishes a bridge hold in the psyche of their members who are taken over by an 'alien' force. To badge the victim from within, the predators hold out many lures. These start with the cessation of initial violence, torture, menacing or imprisonment. In return for fidelity, the group can offer advancements in terms of career prospects, security, income, esteem, and companionship. Sacrificial services for an elite slaughterous organization will find ample reward and invitation to identify with the totalistic power that has guaranteed it will exist forever. This promise of an everlasting state is an important source of an anticipated extended period of symbolic existence for





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the raptor. The intimidating or even beloved abuser may forbid speaking of this exchange or persuade the victim that they were to blame. The victim's shame and dread add to the reluctance to talk about the violence. This ensures that the trauma endures, with the metamorphosed victim separated from their true affects, and destined to have a character stamped with sadomasochism and compelled to revisit the abuse.

Ruth Stein (2010) explores the processes at work in mind control methods, which rely on brain functioning, as well as on relational–transferential factors. Using Margaret Singer's words, she defines mind control as 'a behavioural change technology' which is 'applied to cause the learning and adoption of an ideology or set of behaviours' (Singer and Lalich, 2003, in Stein, 2010: 252). During military training, emotional overload, as well as physical techniques such as prolonged rhythmical pounding and drumming, music and dance, chanting and praying, fasting and sleeplessness, are vehicles for changing waves and brain functioning. Trance states can be evoked by rhythmic and acoustical activities, and by deregulating body functioning, such as sleep and food deprivation. Powerful emotions, too, can cause brain functioning that disconnects from reality and runs 'by itself'. The 'snapping' chaotic–change moment can be followed by a far-reaching transformation, amounting to a religious conversion or ideological 'illumination'. This process can be understood in physiological terms as a condition whereby the experience becomes more intense than the ability of the brain to encompass and contain it, followed by a feeling of being powerfully swept away, of losing control over actions and speech, combined with a sense of loss of self, and being pulled by some exterior power. Such moments can be short and abrupt, or they can be slow and drawn out. In the wake of such a rupture, the information-processing centers of the brain become disorganized and leave the mind open and receptive to new ideas, and even to a radical reorganization, similarly to what happens in religious enlightenment.

Stein (2010) suggests that the literature on varieties of mind control calls for distinguishing two main processes of coercive and indirect influence: 1) love is proffered, which later turns into abuse, coercion and humiliation; in this type of engineered abuse, the redemption seeker is lured by the grace, warmth and gentleness of their new acquaintances, with the coercive demands revealed only gradually; 2) the prisoner/indoctrinator relates to the prisoner with cruelty, after which they change their face to become kind, friendly and warm: what comes first is not love, but hate, the harsh practices of attack and imprisonment, and the mental or physical kidnapping, all of which impose discipline and utter obeisance. Following the 'softening' by these attacks, they are granted a reprieve and acceptance by the group to which they now feel a belonging once they begin to comply. Hence, they are rewarded in direct proportion to their self-denunciation and immersion in what is dictated to them. None of the coercive–persuasive environments and procedures is a pure type, but hate turning into 'loving kindness', seems to be more perverse and chilling. This is consistent with some different



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narratives that torturers have given about their introduction to torture, as reported in Chapter 3.

Jay Lifton's work on thought reform (1961) is a well-documented psychological study of the experience of individuals who underwent the thought reform programmes during China's Cultural Revolution in the 1950s and 1960s. These programmes exploited the effects of systematically administered guilt/anxiety/shame in the context of strong emotional arousal and inescapably enclosed settings (prisons for Westerners, 'revolutionary universities' for Chinese intellectuals) where people were both forcibly confined and exposed to massive social and psychological pressures. Thought reform programmes worked through the systematic instillation and amplification of the feeling of being evil. Initially, the individual would struggle with themselves and with others against the assault on their self-respect and sense of self. However, any attempt on their part to reassert their own identity was considered arrogant and dishonest, as well as a symptom of their error, which led to renewed pressures on them to capitulate. The external attacks, accompanied by sleep deprivation and harsh conditions, led many people to inner submission. They began to exist in a twilight state between no sleep and no wakefulness, in which they were increasingly susceptible to the influence from an ostensibly just and flawless outside, while being more vulnerable to destructive and self-destructive impulses from within themselves. The relief from this experience was offered by conversion into ideological fanaticism. Confession played a most crucial role in the indoctrination process, in particular, the confession of having committed terrible, albeit vague crimes. Confession was a means to call into existence a hateful, regretful self-condemnation. It was self-betrayal beyond the betrayal of friends and family that the prisoner was pressured to denounce. The more of one's self one was led to betray, the more deeply one became involved with one's captors. Dissociation was used to resolve the horrific contradiction between one's own history and beliefs, and the 'truths' the prisoner was coerced to believe in. When dissociation did not help, annihilation anxieties, suicidal thoughts and psychotic hallucinations emerged.

From Lifton's description, it is clear that the 'thought reform' techniques were torture, i.e. methods to destroy the prisoner's old internal objects, loyalties, and internalized relationships in order to rebuild them anew in relation to the attackers. Coercion and mind control are not just negative processes of oppression and domination, but positive ones of enhancing one's self-negating parts. In this way, the sense of inner evil can be transcended in the ecstatic experience of being purified and pronounced good. The message of the thought reform was that self-abhorrence could be corrected by applying oneself to the doctrine. Having achieved this, the prisoner now felt in harmony with surroundings that were not experienced as strange anymore. At this point, they experience many of their responses as personal discoveries. As O'Brien says in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: 'We are not content with negative obedience, nor even with the most abject submission.'



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When finally you surrender to us, it must be of your own free will' (Orwell, 1949: 267). What is described here is the process of the installation of an internal Panopticon, a restoration of self according to the lines of power and control of the new social and/or institutional bonding diagram.

Physical and psychological pain can have a primary role in this reorganization. When sufficient pain is inflicted on a person, the victim ends by feeling sympathy and affection toward the perpetrator (i.e., Stockholm syndrome). Certain aspects of childrearing are analogous to these processes. Ferenczi (1933), in his classic 'Confusion of tongues between adults and the child' describes how, when a child attains a certain level of anxiety, they become submissive to the will of the attacking adult, and will, from then on, try to guess each of the adult's desires and strive to gratify them. Ferenczi also points out the introjection of the feeling of guilt towards the aggressor: 'When recovering from the attack he feels enormously confused, in fact split – innocent and guilty at the same time – and his trust in his own perception is broken' (Ferenczi, 1933: 162).

Ferenczi sensed a principle that applies beyond the specific issue of sexual seduction. The 'confusion of tongues' is the conflict between the adult's construction of reality and that of the child, their different desires and needs. Ferenczi simply described one such typical reaction to trauma: children compliantly identify with the adult construction of reality, which results in a loss of trust in their own judgement of reality. In this situation, the child forgets himself/herself and identifies with the aggressor, while maintaining the fiction of being loved. Through this fiction they internalize their seducer's worldview. It is a huge transference fusion with the attacker's self.

Winnicott's theory of the transitional object (1971) describes the opposite process indicating how the constructions of reality of mother and child can interact with each other in a creative and healthy way. It is here that Winnicott positioned the formation of a third area of reality, which he called 'potential space'. This latter is an illusory world that belongs neither to the subject nor to the object; it is neither inner reality nor external fact. It represents the subject's creative transformation of the external world. This interplay of separateness and union with the other permits one to learn from others, while maintaining the autonomy of the self.

We have seen that Bion, Winnicott, Fonagy and Benjamin (among others) have differently elaborated on the idea that it is crucial that the parent connects with infant anxieties and 'digests' them by creating a mirroring analogue, albeit different from the infant's self state. This prevents the child (the self) having to adapt to the parent (the object), that is to an alienated presence in their own psyche, as if it were an integral part of themselves. On the contrary, if this paradoxical process is impeded, the infant is forced to internalize the other not as an internal object, but as a core part of the self.

Ronald Fairbairn (1952) believed that every internalization is a measure of



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coercion that occurs only when the object is tantalizing or withholding, not when it is good and gratifying. We paradoxically internalize bad objects, writes Fairbairn, because we cannot resign ourselves to their badness and accept it, thereby differentiating ourselves from them. Thus, we withdraw (sometimes schizoidically) from people in the external world, but we strive to overcome our helplessness in relation to them by struggling to become their masters, to possess them and to force them to change into good objects in our inner world.

We have seen that several psychoanalysts emphasized the importance of an interaction with another that enables the self to be differentiated but not isolated (Benjamin, 1988, 1990, 1998; Fonagy, 2001; Fonagy and Target, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998; Winnicott, 1953, 1958, 1960). For this to happen, one also needs to experience the other's hatred, but in a benign way. Winnicott finds that it is not aggressiveness as a primary instinctual element, but motility, i.e. the force of life, that gives the individual their sense of reality. The baby's 'ruthless love', a primitive, cruel and demanding love, which is aimed at the object available to them, certainly will arouse the mother's hatred – 'objective hatred', in Winnicott's terms. A growing child can only believe in being loved after reaching being hated. The mother's hate is inevitable, but she must carry it for her child, not deny it but also not act upon it. She must carry it for them so that they can meet it and, in due time, hate too, and thus create the world as a real world for themselves (Winnicott, 1947). This is Winnicott's account for the importance of becoming able to tolerate the flooding of positive and negative affects, and the discovery of the object-mother as someone with her own independent existence from one's own destructive feelings. These two developmental achievements favour the establishment of permeable boundaries between self and non-self, along with the ability to make contact with the other, and to process, at the same time, difference and identity in the *Reflective Triangle*.

At a low or moderate level of affectivity, the boundaries of self are always negotiated in the relationship between Me and Other. At a level of affectivity beyond one's tolerance, when environmental 'impingements' disturb the isolation of the core of personality (Winnicott, 1960b), the experience of self is always an experience of fusion with the other. In this fusion, a splitting occurs: a split object is no more an object, a split ego is no more an ego, but something whose bad and good aspects are arranged in a way that they are in control.

Rina Lazar (2003) makes sharp distinctions between hostility, rage, hatred and evil, which represent affective experiences on a continuum. Hostility is the most immediate response to exaggerated pain; it is an organismic ridding reaction *vis-à-vis* a noxious life-threatening element. Rage is a physiological-based affective reaction to high levels of excessive displeasure. Hatred is an affective experience of hostility, which has two additional components: 1) it is an enduring and stable or stabilizing affective experience, which persists as affect, once it is activated, and seems to be less dependent than hostility upon the continuation of



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the event that triggered it; and 2) it is more related to internalized representations of self-object experiential events than to current and concrete events. Lazar (2003) suggests that hatred is a sort of defence, a detaching, flattening and simplifying modality of relation, facing an uncontainable emotional complexity. This defence is not only intrapsychic, but exists between the subject and an other who is perceived as threatening due to its very existence, and, for this reason, it is objectified and reduced to a part object. Akhtar (1995) makes acute distinctions between rage and hatred, marking the latter as defensive. Rage is acute, whereas hatred is chronic. Rage releases the ego from the object because its aim is to remove a source of pain or irritation, whereas hatred binds the subject to a threatening idealized object. Rage is focused on the present, whereas hatred focuses on the past and on the future. Rage has an impeding effect on the intellect, whereas hatred may sharpen the individual's reasoning, although it may also narrow its focal range. Hatred provides a sense of continuity as the basis for a link and a core of identity. Hatred may protect against fear, guilt, dependent longing, repressed mourning, abandonment anxiety and the fear of psychotic disintegration, as well as from passivity, helplessness and the need to be loved.

In other words, differentiation between self and object is possible in low-level affect situations. Hence, it is clearer how the rage triggered by mistreatments during the training of torturers is put at the service of a fusion of self with its environment, the institution, with a consequent reshaping of self accordingly. The assaultive projective identification with its burden of physical pain, psychological suffering and induced rage compels the trainee to internalize the 'alien' persecutor or to become bound to them in a symbiotic bond. The ego becomes the territory of this alien presence, which identifies with good and aligns with vertical bonds to superiors and/or leaders, while projecting badness into the pretended inferior others. Torturers' learning sessions are not actual 'learning' sessions, but attacks on the self's boundaries to induce a mind-narrowing trance, often interspersed with demonstrations of the leader's knowing, healing and predictive powers (see Chapter 3). The enormous relief of having their uncertain, fragile, individual ego ideal taken over by the leader fuels a sense of renewal, happiness, even bliss, and rebirth fantasies within the trainee. Ties to family and former friends are generally cut, while autonomous thinking and planning for the future are relinquished. Human ties are sacrificed for the joy of refinding the powerful parent, who dispenses unconditional love and promises of salvation. The participants become increasingly bonded to such a figure, while working harder and harder not to disappoint them nor to be disillusioned themselves.

This relates to the installing of what Novick and Novick refer to as a 'closed system superego' within individuals. Novick and Novick (2003) postulate two systems of superego self-regulation. One system, the 'closed-system superego', avoids and denies reality, is unchanging, circular, and repetitive and is characterized by a static omnipotent sadomasochistic mode of functioning. The other system is the 'open-system superego'; this is attuned to inner and outer reality, constantly





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expands and changes, and is characterized by joy, competence and creativity in self-regulation, problem-solving and conflict resolution. The open-system superego contains a range of ego-ideals, values and standards, all of which are related to realistic aspirations and experiences, as well as to practical possibilities and consequences. Another difference touches on the style or quality of superego functioning. A closed-system superego is global and total, with black-and-white standards. Here belong issues of perfectionism, ideas of tyrannical, unending punishment, omnipotent beliefs and so forth. Differentiation, complexity, balance and an increasing capacity to encompass benefits and consequences are typical in the open-system superego.

The closed system super-ego and the confinement of self in a limited part of itself may be what links, in a vertical way, members of society in a close, intimate and adhesive power relationship between a superior and a subordinate, a shared pattern of mental functioning through which the power replicates itself.

Stein, in her analysis of religious fundamentalism (2002, 2003, 2006), observes that monotheism, sanctifying a single, integrative entity, may be the source of a violent, homoerotic, self-abnegating father-son relationship. Stein's picture of the 'vertical mystical homoeros' is significant for the understanding of *torturous societies* because of her inquiry into this vertical structure of desire, which transforms hate and self-hatred into idealized love. This kind of love (often expressed as 'love for Truth') is far from being simply a love of God; rather it has the character of reverence and fear, and a desire for a God who manifests Himself through absoluteness and unconditionality. Stein (2003) calls this 'regression to the Father'. When the Father, as legislator and protector, assumes the traits of a primitive, inexorable figure, He becomes the object of a certain kind of vertical desire, marked by a dissociated tone and a secret, alienated intimacy.

Thus, groups and societies may take a vertical shape in relation to a hyperidealized and split paternal object (Jones, 2006; Stein 2002, 2003, 2006; Colman, 2000). The nature of such relationships becomes based on the principle of authority, adhesive bonds, dissociation of action from decision, external control and blind obedience (the unifying vertical paternal principle symbolized by the tower of the Panopticon). So are the bonds tying torturers within a hierarchy: they provide not only protection, but also a special relationship with superiors. Verticalization of difference engenders vertical desire. Vertical desire is a mystical longing for the merger with an idealized fa(o)ther who requires one's inferior subjection (Billow, 1980; Stein, 2003).

## ***Understanding the future of a torturer***

At this point, the reason why former torturers experience themselves and their memories as ambivalently shifting among different 'truths' should be clearer. Lifton, informed by his twenty years of research on Nazi doctors and their



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Excerpted from *Torture, Psychoanalysis and Human Rights*

psychological adjustment to their life stories of cruelties perpetrated on Jews during the Third Reich (1986), puts forward the principle of *doubling* as a psychological mechanism for handling conflicts of identity. *Doubling* is the division of the self into two separate functioning wholes, so that each part of the self can act as an entire self. He believes this allowed the Germans to more easily tap into the underlying potential for evil. Doubling provided two separate selves for two separate tasks. Some authors, who interviewed former torturers, registered their strange inconsistent need to 'talk' (Lifton, 1986; Schwager, 2004; Verbitsky, 1996). This ambivalence may be considered as the trace of a struggle to liberate oneself from the internalized abuser and/or the shifting between the two selves and the consequent burden of guilt and helplessness. For example, in his interview with Horacio Verbitsky (1996), Scilingo, the former 'dirty warrior' mentioned in Chapter 3, reveals this dramatic internal struggle between a part of himself who wants to talk and one who does not want to. Finally, he makes the decision to talk and break the 'shell' of the torturer and executioner, feeling entitled to use the 'correct' words to say what he was demanded to do: 'kidnapping', 'torturing', 'murdering', in place of 'arresting', 'interrogating' and 'eliminating the enemy' (Verbitsky, 1996). However, during the interview, his internal struggle persisted, such that, in the end, he retracted his version of the facts for his own trial. Nonetheless, something in his behaviour, as narrated by Verbitsky, leaves the reader with the feeling that he wanted to be tried and condemned. Still, his main concern was not the crimes he committed but the fact of having been cheated by his military superiors and political leaders: the lost state of vertical fusion with the Father.

Schwager (2004) calls this 'speaking with double heart': a heart that has been terrified into 'loving and hating', that is loyal to a master it fears and that has learned to label this loyalty 'love'. Out of this loyalty, the torturer hates whom their master hates and has learned to call this 'justice', and so pretends to survive. This 'heart' is one in bondage, the heart of the symbiotic mentality that fears differentiating for fear of breaking up the symbiosis and losing its master.

## **Other–You and You–Other: de-subjectification of the victim**

### ***The horizontal segment of identity: a shattered self***

Torture distinctly appears as a *technology* of unmaking of the self. Physical and mental boundaries of individuals and groups are attacked, therefore, victims' identity and sense of belonging are destroyed. In the CIA's 1963 manual *KURBAK – Counterintelligence Interrogation*, we can find a clear formulation of torture as a destructive 'technology' to impair the affective abilities of the prisoner and, in this way, win their subjectivity.

Indeed, many after-effects of torture on victims can be described as bodily, intrapsychic and interpersonal states resulting from a 'shattered self' (Ulman and Brothers, 1993), a 'broken spirit' (Wilson and Droždek, 2004), a condition of 'world



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dissolution' (Scarry, 1985: 38–45) and lost 'trust in the world' (Améry, 1980). Scarry writes that 'Intense pain is world-destroying' (1985: 29) and refers both to the obliteration of contents of consciousness through the clearing action of pain ('seeing the stars') and to its ability to destroy language (1985: 4, 54). Améry (1980) masterly describes the way that the concreteness of physical pain and its intentionally malignant use in torture work on the mind to produce an explosion of mental contents: 'Whoever is overcome by pain through torture experiences his body as never before. In self-negation, his flesh becomes a total reality...Whoever was tortured, stays tortured. Torture is ineradicably burned into him' (Améry, 1980, in Schulz, 2007: 83).

In torture, the assaultive projective identification is made concrete through an invasive attack on borders, a violent intrusion into the body: the zones of interchange between the inside and the outside of the body are often attacked (through electric shocks, beatings, cigarette burns, injuries, etc.), substances that are normally outside the body are forced into or back into it (vomit, urine, faeces, such as in the various 'bathtub' variations), rape and every other kind of sexual assault, often committed with objects forcibly introduced inside through the anus, vagina, mouth, etc. Sironi and Branche (2002) maintain that making every boundary one that can be transgressed is part of the torturers' repertoire.

However, this attack on boundaries is also carried out by other more subtle psychological means: 1) the systematic destruction of the privacy and intimacy in the life of the prisoner; 2) techniques disrupting biological rhythms and the ability to discriminate perceptively or psychologically (such as sleep deprivation, sensory deprivation or overload, head-covering, the alternation between 'bad cop and good cop', etc.); 3) various techniques of material or psychological assault/annihilation; techniques aimed at increasing the sense of helplessness and isolation of the victim; techniques to break the cultural ties between the individual and their group (Sironi, 1999, 2001; Sironi and Branche, 2002).

The concept of trauma, widely used in medical and psychological literature, deals with the transgression of (bodily and psychic) boundaries of self. In medicine, the term 'trauma' was previously presumed to mean a blow to 'the tissues of the body' (Erichsen 1866) and its meaning was expanded to also signify, in a telling way, 'the tissue of the mind' (Breuer and Freud, 1895). Later, psychoanalysis referred the concept to the crucial function of associations and connections of feelings and ideas; the metaphor of 'the tissue of the mind' may be referred to the fabric of connections implied in the symbolic process (Bion, 1967, Jung, 1912, 1916, 1947). If the concept of trauma grasps a central feature of torture, i.e. the blow to the connections that keep together the bodily and psychic self, the psychiatric discourse about PTSD often risks contributing to the further 'objectification' of survivors of torture. Indeed, disconnecting the consequences of torture from personal meaning and social and political issues risks generating a detached language of symptoms and syndromes that produce 'dry narratives'. In other words,



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the discourse about trauma easily disconnects itself from its subjects, thus contributing to the process of de-subjectification of survivors initiated by torture.

Even though it is often the corporeality of the body that is most obviously attacked during torture, it is not the material body but the psychic body – the body in the mind that is the host to agency, the interpreter of volition, the container of affect that fragments when the psychic skin no longer offers protection against assaults from the world. Massive psychic trauma collapses the distinction between the external world and internal experience; as Tarantelli writes, ‘there is no longer an outside from which a perception came or an inside which can register it’ (2003: 919).

The ‘post-traumatic condition’ is a state lacking middle ground processing, where in-between spaces of self have come apart and are not available to meaning making activity.

Van der Kolk and Fislar (1995) argue that, while ordinary sensory input is immediately synthesized and translated into a personal story, traumatic experiences remain ‘imprinted’ as sensations or emotional states without narratives. The failure to symbolize traumatic experiences is at the core of PTSD and other common after-effects of torture, as described in the *Istanbul Protocol*. Neuropsychological studies reviewed by van der Kolk, McFarlane and Weisaeth (1996) and van der Kolk (2002) and other works (van der Kolk *et al.*, 2005) provide evidence of the brain’s failure to formulate thoughts efficiently under extreme stress: traumatic memories are quite literally short-circuited and stored as somatic sensations and visual images in the amygdala, as linguistic memory is frequently inactivated during trauma. After the traumatic event, these unprocessed somatic, visual and affective sensations may persecute the survivors, who may be unable to find the thoughts that might be attached to them, inducing more hyper-reactivity to stimuli and withdrawal. This somatic, perceptual and affective sensation may correspond to Bion’s (1959) ‘beta elements’, raw sense impressions that cannot be linked to one another, making them unavailable for reflection. Thinking requires that words be used symbolically, as signifiers, implying that there is a distance between the experience of the words and what they signify. Thinking and meaning are disrupted by the transgressive nature of trauma.

Varvin (2002, 2003) agrees on this point and delves deeper into this question. In post-traumatic state, there is a lack of integration between perceptions, feelings and thoughts in symbol formation. The perceptions may be judged according to symmetry, condensation and contiguity: any sign that bears some likeness to the characteristic of the earlier perceived danger is evaluated as a signal of danger (the characteristic hyper-reactivity to stimuli under post-traumatic conditions). Trauma turns the experience of time into a fragmented experience, totally disconnected from the framework of biographical time. Under these conditions, the perceptions and sensations of the body and environment are not even linked by means of imaginary modes of thinking. Instead, they may be said to be of an



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indexical nature, i.e. immediate, perceptual, non-symbolic intrusions on the mind.

Boulanger investigated into these states, seeing in the survivor's process of healing a crucial passage from the state of a 'voyeur' to the state of a 'witness' (2002a, 2002b, 2005, 2007, 2008). In the state of a 'voyeur', the traumatic experiences are 'wild', in the sense that the person has no capacity to process and organize them: they are traces from alienated worlds. The clinging of the traumatized mind to specific moments may undermine a correct sense of chronology in the subjectively felt flow of time. The distinctions between present, past and future become blurred and the existential experience of time is heavily conditioned by dream states and fantasies.

Boulanger (2002b, 2005, 2007) and Grand (2000), among others, have drawn parallels between the paranoid-schizoid position and the survivor's psychic state. When the psyche is in survival mode, the lens through which the world is perceived reverts to the concrete logic of the paranoid-schizoid position, where the self that acts as a mediator between words and what they stand for, between symbols and symbolized, between immediate and mediated experience, is no longer accessible. Perception and interpretation are one and the same, while thought cannot be relied up on to provide a different perspective. The distinction between signifier and signified has collapsed. The loss of the self as interpreter of experience also implies that the self as maker and conveyer of meaning has been lost.

Laub and Auerhahn refer to 'knowing and not knowing' (1993) when talking about the state of mind resulting from massive trauma. Their account is a very detailed description of different levels of this failure to connect perceptions, thoughts and memories with a sense of subjective narrative, rooted in time and space. According to them, we all hover at different distances between knowing and not knowing about trauma, caught between the compulsion to complete the process of knowing and the inability or fear of doing so. Trauma is *per se* something eluding our knowledge because of both defence and deficit. The knowledge of what is going on in trauma is fiercely defended against, involving an appraisal of events and our own injuries, failures, conflicts and losses, which affects us so violently that it exceeds the ego's capacity for regulation. Much of knowing is dependent on language. Victims often cannot find categories of thought or words for their experience. Knowing, in the sense of articulation, analysis, elaboration and reformulation, requires the preservation of a relatively detached sensibility, which is destroyed in situations of dread.

Not only trauma related events, but also experiences not related to the original traumatic experience, can be affected, creating a generalized instability in the network of mental representations. A continuous defect of symbolization may arise from the ability to deal with emotional experience. The plethora of symptoms, signs and personality features associated with post-traumatic conditions, as described in different diagnostic systems and phenomenological descriptions, may





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be an expression of attempts to rescue oneself from this mental confusion.

Even somatic symptoms, as Varvin (2003) suggests, can be a way to use the body as an arena for built-up tensions caused by non-metabolized affects. Acting may provide a means of dealing with aggression, either through acts of violence or self-harm behaviour or by mere hyperactivity. Re-experiencing may be seen partly as a deficit-avoiding strategy and partly as the ego's attempt to revert to the original helplessness by returning to 'the scene of the crime'.

### ***The vertical segment of difference: the traumatic bonding***

The psychological and physical suffering of torture survivors becomes the concrete mark of taking possession of the self by a tormentor. According to Miguel Benasayag (1981), who went through the experience of torture in Argentinian prisons, the torturer's aim is always to bring the prisoner to the point where the personality shatters, the point in which there is no other person, only a sort of fusion, when the victim is glued to the torturer. As in a nightmare, deprived of one's landmarks and previous identity, the body is broken at the torturer's mercy, with the victim likely seeing no exit other than submitting to the only other person available, namely, the torturer. The subject, endowed with self-awareness and autonomous will, is 'no longer there'.

Here, we can see at work the same relational dynamic of the traumatic bondage which the torturer underwent but with roles reversed. In an outstanding description of this nightmare from Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, O'Brien foretells Winston his capitulation under torture: 'You will be hollow. We shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves' (1949: 269).

After the attack, often the victim's body becomes the theatre where the malignant relationship with the torturers is perpetuated and made longlasting. The physiological changes occurring during the episodes of torture are registered at an implicit level in the body and in after effects they represent the abusive relationship between the victim and the torturers.

A survivor of torturous imprisonment vividly recounted to sister Dianna Ortiz:

'Once I was safe, I thought I was free of my torturers. I actually believed that I would never see them again, that I would never have to smell them or hear their voices. But what I soon realized was they were within me: they literally had made their home in my soul. So often I felt as if they were dancing within me, reminding me they were a part of my life.'

(Ortiz, 2001: 18–19)

From an object relations perspective (Rosenman, 2003), this condition corresponds to a failure of protection by the internal object with a decline in related feelings of basic trust and mastery. This may be experienced as a sense of betrayal or damage



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to internalized object relations, with a consequent difficulty in finding meaning in thoughts and actions (Bion, 1962a, 1962b; Fonagy, 1999, 2001; Fonagy and Target, 1996, 1997, 1998; Fonagy *et al.*, 1998, 2002; Winnicott, 1956, 1965, 1971). When this internal ability is damaged or destroyed, attachment to others may be perceived as dangerous, so that a withdrawal pattern will emerge. In brief, the attack of torture is an attack on that internal object, which once allowed self-differentiation and access to the process of symbolization through the modulation of affects and creation of meaning within a benign relationship of mutual recognition (Benjamin, 1988, 1990, 1998, 2004).

This interpretation of the meaning of the post-traumatic condition after torture is full of relational implications. Rosenman (2003) understands the post-traumatic suffering following torture as a consequence of the impact of torture on the victim's internalized relational world. According to him, the identity of the victim is impoverished through the cognitive dedifferentiation, the variety of dissociative experiences and the memory impairment that follow abuse. Good internal figures are crushed, with the void contrived to be filled by the evil-doer. The symptoms of PTSD reveal the decimated, newly possessed psyche of the victim, and their feeling of having been swooped down upon and appropriated by an alien, besmirching consciousness. Recurrent fantasies, flashbacks and nightmares suggest the tenacious grasp of the tormentor. Avoidant responses, such as emotional numbing, lack of responsiveness and amnesia, are also strained efforts to avoid thinking about the calamity and its perpetrators. In these ways, the victim divulges their preoccupation with the tormentor, signalling the hold by the latter on the victim's psyche. The trauma victim often suffers a 'derealization' that jumbles the aspects and markers of the surrounding world, so that it no longer looks familiar; while 'depersonalization' make them feel dead, not real, lost, utterly alone, debased, detached from the situation or taken over by an alien consciousness. By remaining ailing or dysfunctional, some injured parts of the body feel foreign. In the subject's unravelled state, they may view these parts as belonging to the enemy who has cleaved the body ego and now racks them from within (Goldfeld *et al.*, 1988; Scarry, 1985). Their suffering may turn against the organ that drew the abuse. It is as though the victim can no longer discern what they are supposed to guard or to protect, or what an appropriate defence looks like. The trauma may also result in states of intense absorption or trance, which in addition to an effort towards a defence, may end up as a takeover of consciousness by the assaulter.

For these reasons, meeting with others becomes potentially frightening to a survivor. Relationships may be felt as complicated, confusing or as an immersion in an internal power struggle. In meeting with other people, there may be more or less space for the interplay between the negative and the positive, a variable transitional space for the creation of symbols and protosymbols referring to opposing forces (Varvin, 2003). The relationships are exposed to the repetition of the logic of the 'traumatic bonding' (van der Kolk, 1989).



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## ***Transgenerational transmission of trauma***

The working-through of this kind of trauma tends to occur spontaneously through the repetition of the same relational pattern that produced the original traumatic bonding, involving people in asymmetric relationships. In this way, trauma is easily transmitted up through the generations from parents to children (Daud *et al.*, 2005). Schwager (2004) observes that the parent-survivor typically creates a sense of emotional inaccessibility because of their own neediness, requiring the child to parent them through symbiotic attachment, especially when the parent tends to maintain defences against trauma. This makes the child's sacrifice of their own subjectivity necessary, with consequent loss of their self. What often happens is that the child takes on the horrific pain that the parent attempts to deny. Accepting the parent's projective assault may be the only way that the child feels they have meaning in relation to their parent, the only way not to be abandoned. Auerhahn and Prelinger (1983) find that survivors' children, with their empathic capacity and relative distance from the actual experience of torture, may serve as an easier medium for knowledge to evolve and memories to emerge, with association and imagery. Unfortunately, theirs is a displaced knowledge, an event that defies representation and, instead, is experienced as an absence. An ironic outcome emphasized by Rosenman (2003) is that the abusive situation creates a child who is forced to play parental host to the internal representation of the predator. Cajoled into being a repository for their parents' terrible experience, the child's pervasive assignments can fill them to bursting: in this situation there is no room for the child to discover and find themselves. Guilt, shame and abashment may become salient features of the next generation's character, which is designated to be a mute container of the parents' imperative needs (Bar-On, 1989; Bergman and Jucovy, 1982; Brown, 2007; Heck, 1988; Heimannsberg and Schmidt, 1993). However, victims, when chronically abused, often seek out increased contact with their attackers and with others in an attempt to placate and prevent further assaults (Ainsworth and Eichberg, 1991; Main and Hesse, 1990). Abused children cling to the abusing parent often in direct proportion to the perversity and extremity of the abuse. This creates a form of perverse or 'negative intimacy', not unlike a lovesick relationship (Twemlow, 1995), narrowing the visual world on the attacker. At the same time, most other thoughts are absent from the conscious mind, except for intrusive thoughts about the attacker. These states seem to install the paranoid-schizoid position as a permanent feature (Bion, 1970; Ogden, 1986) with its correlates of diminished self-awareness, self-as-object and a world experienced as containing only omnipotent, powerful, persecuting bad objects, which are capable of annihilating the victim.

As Alice Miller writes,

The child's dependence on his or her parent's love also makes it impossible in later years to recognize these traumatizations, which often remain hidden behind the early idealization of the parents for the rest of the child's life.

(Miller, 1983: 4)



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The concrete projective assault of torture, which actualizes the traumatic bondage between the torturer and the victim, is often passed to children who become entrapped in a massive projective identification with the parent, in which they are unconsciously coerced to engage in a sustained *state of twoness* in relation to the survivor-parent in the attempt to de-freeze the parent's monolithic self. The vertical segment of difference (Other–Me) actualized in torture victims' children, once again becomes a concrete subjection of a weaker other to a process of 'othering', which risks transforming the other's self into a rigid monolithic system, as both a repetition of and an attempt to work through the experience of torture through generations.

## ***Positive responses to torture***

In Chapter 3, we have seen that positive responses to torture are possible and, conceptualized as resilience, post-traumatic growth, and Adversity Activated Development. Most studies on this topic focused on internal and external factors contributing to positive responses.

A long-standing result is that internal factors of resilience include strong individual religious or political beliefs. For example, Basog˘lu *et al.* (2001) contend that the inmates of a prison in Turkey, who were jailed for political reasons and, therefore, politically committed, prepared for and expecting torture, did better than a control group with no record of political activity. Holtz (1998) similarly found that a group of tortured Tibetan nuns were found to be almost as non-pathological as their sister nuns who were not tortured.

Among external factors, Rosenman (2003) reports that it is commonly believed by clinicians that, when impunity is given to the torturer, resilience for the victim is more difficult to attain. It would seem that impunity makes the abuser more present, less under the survivor's control, not subject to justice. This is confirmed by other studies (Amnesty International, 2001; Herman, 2003).

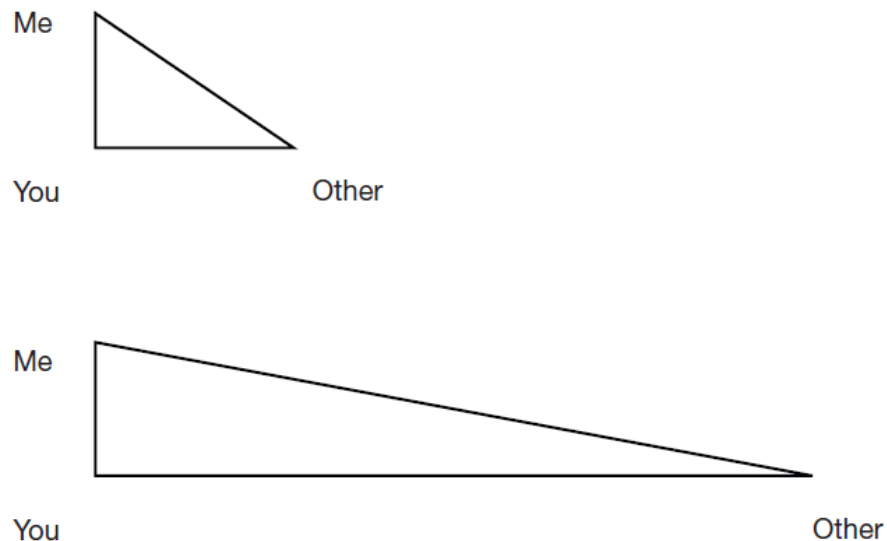
Combining these data with the idea of the *Reflective Triangle* at both individual and social levels, we can make the inference that the possibility of maintaining trust in the world and a framework of meanings to understand (adverse) life events is a crucial key point for positive responses to torture. The most striking example is probably that of Nelson Mandela, who found in his political commitment the meaning to withstand his experience of torture and 27 years of prison, with a final extraordinary accomplishment of his political ideas, i.e. the end of Apartheid in South Africa, when he became the President (Mandela, 1994).

In terms of resilience, we may speculate that a strong belief system is helpful because it provides individuals with emotional containment, *vis-à-vis* the dramatic experience of torture, through the intelligibility of events in one's (political, religious, etc.) framework of beliefs, and the sense of an emotional connection to an ideal (political or religious) community.



# THE SPLINTERED REFLECTIVE TRIANGLE IN BYSTANDERS, PERPETRATORS AND VICTIMS OF TORTURE

Excerpted from *Torture, Psychoanalysis and Human Rights*



**Figure 6.1** The expansion of the Reflective Triangle in Adversity Activated Development

On the other hand, if a society can restate a principle of justice by trying persecutors, we can similarly expect that the victims' recovery process will be faster and more likely to succeed, because the social processing of torture will help a parallel individual working-through, making sense of the traumatic experience.

However, the concept of AAD (Papadopoulos, 2004, 2007) is much more challenging than that of resilience, because it establishes a causal connection between adversities, in this case torture, and development. I speculate that this kind of development might be connected to the process of exploration and pursuit of meaning of the terrible experience, which powerfully entered into the survivor's life. One way out from the enormous suffering produced by torture, is the possibility for the self to widen the range of its possible meanings, including the experience of torture itself. Instead of expelling it from the consciousness and alienating it as 'other', the containment and integration of this extreme experience in the self, may be tremendously developmental for the self. In the *Reflective Triangle*, if the pole of the Other is very far from Me and You, i.e. the experience is truly 'alien', in order to connect Me, You and Other, the area of the *Reflective Triangle* will necessarily be expanded, indicating an enlargement of the reflective capacity. Images can help to grasp this phenomenon (see Figure 6.1).

Nevertheless, the factors that influence this dynamic process, and contribute to such a paradoxical and significant result, still need to be satisfactorily explored and clarified.

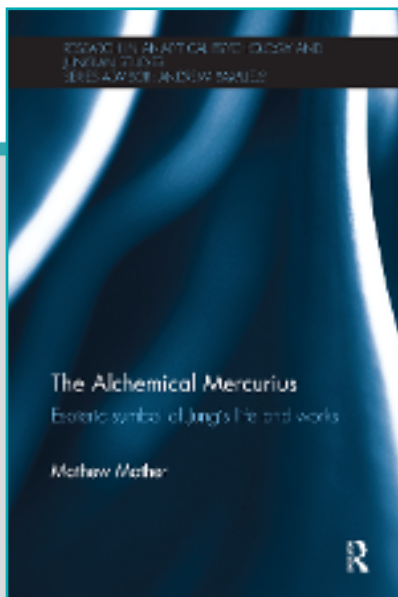




CHAPTER

3

# MYSTERIUM CONIUNCTIONIS



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*Alchemical Mercurius*  
by Mathew Mather

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# MYSTERIUM CONIUNCTIONIS

Excerpted from *Alchemical Mercurius*

*Mysterium Coniunctionis*, which took Jung roughly twelve years to write, is generally considered to be the most significant part of his magnum opus – his ‘last great work’ (Jung 1955/1956: v). The theme was initially inspired by Kerenyi’s essay on the Aegean Festival scene from Goethe’s *Faust* and by such works as Rosencreutz’s *Chymical Wedding* (ibid.: xvi). According to von Franz, the first draft of this work was completed in 1944. She adds that when she saw Jung after his illness, he said: ‘What I wrote in the *Mysterium* is true, I don’t need to alter the text. But I only know now how real these things are’ (von Franz 1966/2000: xiii).

The initial draft of this work was apparently a rather slim volume consisting of ‘a nucleus of basic concepts tied together logically, in the form of a hypothetical construct’ (Heisig 1979: 108). According to James Heisig, Jung’s copious alchemical insertions bloated this original theme beyond recognition: ‘the original cluster of ideas had all but perished under the weight of its embellishments’ (ibid.: 108). Heisig further writes that ‘strands of guesses, facts, suspicions, and hypotheses are all woven together in a torrent of seemingly endless allusions, which only the most encyclopaedic of minds could ever hope to sort out’ (ibid.). Indeed, he notes that no significant development on the psychology of religion (beyond what can be found in *Aion* and *Answer to Job*) can be found here (ibid.: 89). Consequently, his treatment of *Mysterium Coniunctionis* is practically non-existent.

In contrast, Edward Edinger’s hagiographic opinion is that this work is likely to be ‘a major object of study for centuries’ (Edinger 1995: 17). According to him, Jung is here functioning as a mediator of contents from the collective unconscious: ‘he is transmitting them through what I can only call a magisterial consciousness’ (ibid.: 18). He considers this work as being of quintessential significance: ‘...if you take it as a whole, the net result is an exceedingly rich picture of the anatomy of individuation, with all its interconnecting images dissected out for us’ (ibid.: 20).

In his *Mysterium Lectures*, Edinger considers ‘The Spirit Mercurius’ to be an appendage to *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (Edinger 1995: 32). Toward the end of his commentary he states: ‘The symbolism of the spirit Mercurius is so important to all our accounts with the autonomous psyche, both in ourselves and in our patients, that it should be uppermost in our consciousness’ (ibid.: 296). However, despite such importance, he does not deal exclusively with this figure (to any great length) at any point in his commentary. His work is also strongly biased toward clinical rather than cultural concerns.

Overall, I am of the opinion that Heisig exemplifies a general post-Jungian tendency to mostly detour around this work. Indeed, the relative scarcity of scholarship on *Mysterium Coniunctionis* can be flagged as a curious omission. In addition, it is of interest to point out that Mercurius features as *the* most prominent character in this work, as borne out by a perusal of its index:

Christ: 1/2 page

Anthropos: 1/2 page



# MYSTERIUM CONIUNCTIONIS

Excerpted from *Alchemical Mercurius*

Self: 1/2 page

Mercurius: 2 pages

As a development on *Aion* which explicitly deals with the Age of Pisces, it is tempting to surmise that this climactic work coincided (in Jung's mind) with the approach of the Aquarian Age. To corroborate this idea I point out that in 1929 (and again in 1932), he 'prophesied' the dawning of the New Age in the decade of the 1940s – the decade in which he worked on *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. During this decade, with the precession of the equinoxes touching 'the first star of Aquarius', he was embroiled in the 'uniting of opposites' that were supposedly sundered in the Age of Pisces. For Jung, quoting Taoist philosophy, heaven and earth had been sundered for 'unfathomable reasons' and could 'come together again only if the wise man re-establishes Tao in himself by ritual meditation' (1955/1956: 419). He equates such a Taoistic 'marriage of heaven and earth' to the alchemical *mysterium coniunctionis* (ibid.: 463–4).

\* \* \*

My method here is to develop a fair amount of exposition focussed on identifying the role of Mercurius as featuring in *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. A rationale, once again, is to ensure a fidelity to 'original texts' in light of scarcity of scholarship in this particular area.

My chosen themes allow for a degree of narrative coherence coalesced around the theme of Mercurius. I begin by establishing a broad mythic framework, after which the major components of the coniunctio as Sol and Luna are identified. This is followed by their marriage and the subsequent birth of the *filius philosophorum*. The idea of Sol (transformation of the god-image) and Luna (return of the feminine) are then expanded upon and the idea of the coniunctio is extended to include Dorn's three coniunctios. I then finish with a brief look at von Franz's *Aurora Consurgens* and a final discussion.

Throughout, one should bear in mind the historical circumstances of this decade, as well as Jung's personal situation. Most notably, World War II erupted in 1939 and continued up to 1945. Furthermore, on a personal level, Jung was intensely engaged intellectually with such notables as Pauli (physics) and Victor White (Catholicism). This was also a decade during which his health suffered, not only during his 1944 near-death experiences but also through recurrent bouts of ill health and depressive malaise, as evident in the various letters during this period.

## An alchemical myth

In chapter 10 I focused predominantly on the figure of Mercurius in relation to Christ. In *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, however, Jung substantially broadens the range of meanings of Mercurius in relation to Christianity.



# MYSTERIUM CONIUNCTIONIS

Excerpted from *Alchemical Mercurius*

In this work, we come across two quaternio representations; one alchemical and the other Christian. Concerning the Christian quaternio, the vertical axis is composed of *Pater Auctor* (top) and *Spiritus Sanctus* (bottom) and the horizontal axis has *Filius Salvator* (left), *Diabolus Antichristus* (right). Concerning the Alchemical quaternio, the vertical axis is composed of *Principium Mercurius* (top) and *Filius Mercurius* (bottom) and the horizontal axis has *Filius, Frater, Pater, Sol* (left), *Filia, Soror, Mater, Luna* (right) (1955/1956: 101–2).

These are further developed by identifying a *three-part process* in the form of an origin, a drama and then resolution in what would appear, superficially, to be two mutually exclusive ‘myths’. For the alchemical myth, the beginning is an origin as *Mercurius*. In the development we get *Sol* and *Luna*, which then leads to the final goal as the *Filius Mercurius*. For the Christian myth, the beginning is the *Auctor Pater*. This develops into a conflict of *Salvator* and *Diabolus* and the final goal of *Paraclete* or *Holy Ghost* associated with the Church or Kingdom of God (ibid.: 103).

In the Christian model, the *Auctor Pater* is an all-knowing deity, as God, who creates the world and universe according to a preconceived design. Once created, he (mostly) disappears from the world, but then reappears in the form of a God-man as Jesus Christ: son of God, son of Man. In this schema Christ’s adversary, the devil, tempts humanity into a sinful life which is instinctually fulfilling but leads to damnation in the hereafter. Individual humans find themselves in a conflict between Christ and the Devil. Redemption is possible through the *imitatio Christi*, leading to everlasting life in a transcendent Kingdom of Heaven after death. Although humanity is essentially alienated from deity, there are times when direct experience and guidance from God can occur, under extraordinary circumstances such as through God’s presence as the Holy Ghost.

In the alchemical model, the principal deity is one of immanence that exists in the very fabric of matter and materiality, as a *Deus Terrenus* dispersed (ubiquitous) throughout nature. In its natural form this hermaphroditic slumbering deity is largely unconscious of itself and is also hidden to secular consciousness. It is, like the Christian God, a hidden deity or *deus absconditus*. However, unlike the Christian deity, it requires redemption through the labours of the alchemist. By means of the opus the alchemist effectively engages with this being and struggles to redeem it through a torturous ordeal of transformations and successive alchemical operations. Paradoxically, this being also guides the process. All being well, the alchemist is also transformed and redeemed, though this is apparently only a secondary concern (1955/1956: 349).

Within the opus, the original hermaphroditic matter as the *Principium Mercurius* gets differentiated out into gendered opposites, as *Sol* and *Luna* (Rex and Regina, etc.), as the active and passive aspects of *Mercurius duplex* respectively (ibid.: 101). Through an alchemical mystery wedding, as the *coniunctio*, *Sol* and *Luna* then unite and give birth to the *Filius Mercurius* as lapis, which combines *Sol* and *Luna* into an enigmatic unity. This many-named lapis – as *filius macrocosmi*, *filius regius*, *filius*



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*Mercurius*, etc. – is considered the saviour of the natural world who thereby completes the work of the Christian redeemer, who was the saviour of humanity only (ibid.: 34, 216).

These descriptions, admittedly simplistic, afford insight into how the Christian and alchemical conceptions are both similar and different. Of note is the extent to which the figure of *Mercurius* features in the alchemical myth. Indeed, Jung emphasises that ‘The opus is a...transformation whose subject and object is the elusive *Mercurius*’ (ibid.: 218).

A further important difference in the alchemical and Christian ‘myths’ concerns the idea of the opus as a passion. Thus, according to Jung, the transformations and operations on the various substances in the retort signified for the alchemist not only a transformation of the deity slumbering in matter, but also corresponded to a profound psychological and spiritual transformation of the adept, which he likened to a passion. However, this passion is described as different to the ‘imitation of Christ’. Rather, it is described as ‘the exact opposite’, as a ‘spontaneous’ and ‘involuntary experience of the sacred [alchemical] legend’ whereby the ‘true man’ as a Christ image is assimilated to his self. He emphasises that such a torturous passion ‘happens not to the alchemist himself but to the “true man,” who [he] feels is near him and in him and at the same time in the retort’ (1955/1956: 349).

Such ideas, to an extent, correlate to the Christian mystics’ personal experience of divinity through the grace of the ‘blessed greenness’ of the ‘spermatic and procreative’ Holy Ghost (ibid.: 113, 375). However, for the alchemist, such grace had a subtle difference, as it was thought of as emanating from nature through *Mercurius* in his form as a *spiritus vegetativus* or as the *lumen naturae* – a figure with origins from an immanent alchemical deity as opposed to a transcendent Christian deity (ibid.: 127). Another crucial difference is the deeply feminine connotations of alchemy. The royal art is thus described as ‘queen of the alchemist’s heart, she is at once his mother, his daughter, and his beloved, and in his art and its allegories the drama of his own soul, his individuation process, is played out’ (ibid.: 381).

\* \* \*

I now expand on the alchemical quaternio and three-stage process by looking at the main protagonists of this drama as *Sol*, *Luna* and *Mercurius*, and their ‘magical correspondences’.

## **Sol, Luna and magical correspondences**

In medieval alchemy, ‘magical correspondences’ refer to the idea of sympathies between levels of the natural and supernatural world. Most notably these are the inorganic, the human, the heavenly and the divine (1955/1956: 184). In such a worldview the element gold, for example, corresponds to the sun, to the king, to





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Excerpted from *Alchemical Mercurius*

aspects of the human psyche and to God. In *Mysterium Coniunctionis* two sets of magical correspondences that feature prominently include:

Sulphur – Sol – King (masculine) Sal – Luna – Queen (feminine)

In each case an alchemical substance (Sulphur, Sal) corresponds to a celestial body (Sun, Moon) and to a royal figurehead (King, Queen). These are also represented as opposites, with the inclusion of Mercurius, in the following way:

Sulphur – Mercurius – Salt Sol – Mercurius – Luna King – Mercurius – Queen

In these schemas the figure of Mercurius plays a central and mediating role. As already discussed, this figure appears as the original alchemical ‘substance’, as a mysterious hermaphroditic *Principium Mercurius* who then differentiates out into an active part as red–sulphur–Sol–King and a passive part as white–Sal–Luna–Queen. Jung amplifies each of these with a plethora of alchemical material. He reveals that each substance, though exhibiting unique properties, also shares many characteristics. The tendency to consider sulphur and salt as mutually exclusive opposites, for example, is shown as deficient. Each displays a subtle complexity and has intrinsic similarities to its so-called opposite, reminiscent of the Chinese yin–yang symbol. For Jung, this is of vital significance in that alchemy is an unconscious compensation of an overly rationalistic worldview: ‘the eternal images are far from consistent in meaning’ (1955/1956: 333).

Despite the rich ambiguity of such conceptions as Sal, Mercurius and Sulphur, there is nevertheless a clear bias toward relatively specific meanings.

## The marriage of Sol and Luna

Sol and Luna, as the active and passive aspects of Mercurius, differentiate out of an original ‘hermaphroditic matter’– the *Principium Mercurius*. The marriage of masculine–spirit as Sol and feminine–matter as Luna, as the coniunctio, was considered by Jung to be the ‘central idea’ of alchemy (1955/1956: 89, 457). This marriage is also said to take place in a ‘third thing’ which has commonality with both luminaries: ‘*Mercurius masculinus* and *Mercurius foemineus* are united in and through *Mercurialis menstrualis*, which is the “aqua”’ (ibid.: 462).

Jung expresses the same idea in the alchemical myth, wherein the original one world (*unus mundus*) gets divided into two as heaven (spirit) and earth (instinct) – such a division apparently being necessary to bring the potential *unus mundus* into reality as the ‘ten thousand things’ of the empirical world (ibid.). Within this spirit–instinct binary lies a ubiquitous and hidden ‘third thing’ that partakes of both natures, and which is capable of reuniting the split by means of a ‘holy matrimony’. Alchemically, this ‘third thing’ as Mercurius is the mysterious and paradoxical ‘fluid’ that catalyses a love relationship as the ‘sweet smell of the Holy Ghost’, a spiritual



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water, *aqua permanens*, *aqua aeris* (aerial water), etc. As the medium in which the coniunctio of Sol and Luna takes place, it is the marvellous sea that 'mitigates and unites the opposites' (1955/1956: 461–2).

By magical correspondences, the coniunctio combines on different orders of existence. These include: substances in the retort; Sol and Luna; heaven and earth; king and queen; the psyches of the alchemist and his *soror mystica*. The coniunctio itself also requires a range of imagery to capture its multifarious facets as a process in which 'extreme opposites unite' (ibid.: 166). The 'spagyric marriage' is thus portrayed as not only erotic but also a tension of oppositions. For example, in one version we read of the woman being pursued by a 'grey haired, winged, ithyphallic old man. He is named...Flowing Light... and she is Dark Water' (ibid.: 149). In another, we hear of it as a struggling of the winged and wingless birds or dragons (ibid.: 117, 151). Elsewhere it is the mating or fighting of 'dog and bitch' or 'cock and hen' (ibid.: 29, 147). More profoundly, it is also the 'marriage of heaven and earth' (ibid.: 419). Less mysteriously, Jung describes it as an 'archetypal drama' wherein 'immemorial human emotions clash together' and as 'the moral task...to bring the feminine, maternal background of the masculine psyche, seething with passions, into harmony with the principle of the spirit – truly a labour of Hercules!' (ibid.: 41). In effect, he notes that the alchemists drew upon a wide range of variants on the *heiros gamos* theme in their attempts to 'express the all but incomprehensible nature of the mystery' (ibid.: 470). Despite these multifarious coniunctio motifs, the one Jung most often cites is Sol and Luna, inclusive of their magical correspondences, uniting within a dissolving bath, in a condition not unlike a chemical 'dynamic equilibrium' (ibid.: 24).

This motif is amplified with the mythic image of Gabricus dissolved into atoms in the embrace of his sister–wife Beya. Jung further describes such a death experience in terms of a 'histolysis in the chrysalis state', thereby identifying the coniunctio with the quintessential image of a transformation mystery as caterpillar–chrysalis–butterfly (1955/1956: 272, 283). Elsewhere he amplifies using Christian iconography, whereby Luna (as Virgin and/or the Church as Mother-beloved) carries the disintegrated King Sol (as Christian dominant) in her body, where they together form a 'single homogenous solution' (ibid.: 315).

Jung continues by noting that in the histolysis state, the '*scintillulae* are put together to form the gold' or 'the fishes eyes are tiny soul-sparks from which the shining figure of the filius is put together' (1955/1956: 53). In effect, a 'transconscious process' as the union of consciousness and the unconscious produces an embryo as homunculus or lapis (ibid.: 272, 381). He adds that such a phenomenon cannot be grasped rationally as, by definition, 'the unconscious is unconscious and therefore can neither be grasped nor conceived' (ibid.: 381). Consequently, he is of the opinion that such things must remain the 'mystery of the queen' or 'the secret of the art' (ibid.: 381).

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Excerpted from *Alchemical Mercurius*

We should remember that the coniunctio of Sol and Luna includes all the magical correspondences identified in the previous topic. For Jung this union certainly has an intrapsychic factor, though he also entertains the possibility of it having an external reality (1955/1956: 300). If we include the idea of synchronicity as a coincidence of psyche with the world or of ego with the unconscious, then the idea of the coniunctio and birth of the lapis as a 'being' created through a wearisome opus takes us into some interesting speculative territory!

## Birth of the 'filius philosophorum'

Jung writes that 'usually' the lapis is the child from the coniunctio of Sol and Luna and therefore 'the lapis exactly corresponds to the psychological idea of the self, the product of conscious and unconscious' (1955/1956: 371). Alchemically, the duplicity of Mercurius (ego-consciousness as Sol and unconscious as Luna) is thus cancelled out in the unity of the stone (ibid.: 79). The lapis could be said to have integrated its Sol and Luna parents into its own being, and thus to have given birth to its own parents as regenerated unity.

The birth of the lapis, synchronous with such natural events as an earthquake or an eclipse, also vivifies the idea of it as a *filius macrocosmi* (son of the world). As a *mysterium coniunctionis* this entity combines not only the inorganic (stone) but also a human-like form as youth or hermaphrodite (1955/1956: 227–8). Its magical properties include incorruptibility, food of immortality (*cibus immortalis*), ability to multiply itself indefinitely, and so on (ibid.: 372–3). Indeed, it is also described as 'an Anthroparion, a kind of goblin, a familiar who stands by the adept in his work and helps the physician to heal. This being ascends and descends and unites Below with Above, gaining a new power which carries its effect over into everyday life' (ibid.: 227–8). In effect, this was the alchemist's birth of the whole man: 'this "Man," being indescribable, is an intuitive or 'mystical' experience' (ibid.: 171). The numinosity of such experiences, according to Jung, also compelled the alchemists to describe the lapis in superlative terms – most notably by establishing a lapis–Christ parallel and, more specifically, by identifying it with the Messiah as second coming (ibid.: footnote 158, 318). More mysteriously, he describes the lapis as 'a fabulous entity of cosmic dimensions which surpasses human understanding' (ibid.: 63).

Importantly, the lapis here does not replace the Christ image, but rather completes and renews it (1955/1956: 361). Put slightly differently: 'the symbol of the stone, despite the analogy with Christ, contains an element that cannot be reconciled with the purely spiritual assumptions of Christianity' (ibid.: 450).

The lapis is thus aligned to his conception of the self as realised through the individuation process and as the unification of consciousness with the unconscious through the transcendent function. In effect, 'it is a half physical, half metaphysical product, a psychological symbol expressing something created by man and yet supra-ordinate to him' (ibid.: 454).



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Excerpted from *Alchemical Mercurius*

\* \* \*

The above descriptions are a development on Jung's 'alchemical myth'. An original 'hermaphroditic substance' differentiates out into Sol and Luna (with their magical correspondences) and reunites in the coniunctio to give birth to the *filius philosophorum*.

I now expand on such themes by identifying cultural problematics appearing in *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. These include transformation of the western god-image, the missing feminine and the idea of Dorn's three coniunctios. After this I consider, briefly, *Aurora Consurgens*.

## Transformation of the god-image

The idea of an ageing and ailing deity in need of transformation and renewal is a prominent theme in *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. For Jung, this is a perennial phenomenon in human culture since prehistory, in that 'Man's ideas and definitions of God have followed one another kaleidoscopically in the course of the millennia' (1955/1956: 367).

Here, the terms 'God' and 'king' get contaminated in meaning. King refers more to an earthly incarnation of 'God' as the mythic God-man. More precisely, for Jung, the image of the king is 'the carrier of a myth...the statements of the collective unconscious' (ibid.: 258) with the power, characteristic of a symbol, to vitalise the psyche by means of a life giving 'pneuma' (ibid.: 264). Such an archetypal image, for him, is not static but rather 'signifies a dynamic process whereby the human carrier of the mystery is included in the mysterious drama of God's incarnation' (ibid.: 265). Such a 'dynamic process' would typically include renewal of the ailing king by means of an alchemical transformation mystery (inclusive of features such as a death, a *heiros gamos* and rebirth) into a reborn form of incorruptibility and wholeness (ibid.: 266).

Alchemically, in relation to Christianity, this corresponds to the idea of the 'corrupt arcane substance', the drowning king and the redeemer son as *filius* who represents his renewal. In the grail legends, it is the motif of the ailing king and his redeemer as Parsifal (ibid.: 280–1). For Jung it is also a motif implicit in Christianity itself – in the form of the 'figurative language of the Church', whereby the Christian deity as 'bearded old man' was worshipped in Christ as rejuvenated Son (ibid.: 281). He also adds that the idea of Yahweh as wrathful *senex* being transformed into a God of Love as *puer* in the New Testament was not only championed by the alchemists, but was also believed in ecclesiastical circles (ibid.: 361).

In Jung's view deity personified as king represented, in alchemy and the grail legend, a symbol of the religious collective dominant – Christianity (in the Middle Ages and onwards) – as ailing, in crisis and in need of transformation and renewal (ibid.: 280–2, 360). For him the medieval man, 'not remotely conscious of this



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problem', struggled to resolve it through unconscious projections such as in alchemy (ibid.: 360). In this view, the alchemist's 'king' was therefore God himself, who had grown old and was being renewed as their sacred and enigmatic *filius philosophorum* through the art (ibid.: 367). Indeed the magnitude of the problem for Jung, some centuries later, was such that it 'can hardly be grasped even today – which is why the psychological interpretation of the One, the *filius regius*, meets with the greatest difficulties' (ibid.: 360).

Furthermore, for him, the urge for renewal of an ageing god is all the stronger and more traumatic the more it is consciously denied, as is the case with a Christianity that stubbornly adheres to a dogma (ibid.: 282, 325). For others, disillusioned with Christian dominants, such renewal is welcomed as liberating and revitalising (ibid.: 325). Alchemically both positions are represented in such imagery as the drowning, dismembered or devoured king and, positively, as an ecstasy in consummation of the chymical wedding. Thus the melting of metals, or dissolution of metals through acids, and a recasting into a new amalgam provides a metaphor for the relativisation and renewal of such dominants (ibid.: 325, 347). Renewal of the king by means of 'a bath into which all the planets pour their "influences"...expresses the idea that the dominant, grown feeble with age, needs the support and influence of those subsidiary lights to fortify and renew it' (ibid.: 358–9). Thus the king is reborn and experiences an apotheosis described variously as 'wonder of the world', and further as 'the most elect, subtle, pure, noblest', and so on (ibid.: 328). Psychologically, Jung interprets this as the production of a new dominant of consciousness (ibid.: 355). In such imagery we get the idea of the Christian 'king' being melted and dissolved, and also renewed by means of a 'regression' into a pagan-like polytheism.

Thus for Jung, although such stirrings of renewal may find creative expression in visionary individuals sensitive to archetypal dynamisms, such as the medieval alchemist, their transformative impact on society can only take effect 'when the time is fulfilled' (ibid.: 308).

Applied to analytical psychology and the microcosm of the psyche, the 'ailing king' would typically represent a mid-life crisis whereby the dominants of consciousness were beginning to falter, early hints of which may be mirrored and anticipated in dreams (ibid.: 358, 359, 368). Renewal of the king thus corresponds to a descent of ego-consciousness into the unconscious. In particular, Jung stresses the 'archetype of the nuptial union' as the means by which the unconscious resolves its contradictoriness (ibid.: 81). Thus the ailing king, after an ordeal, eventually achieves rebirth as a new totality that joins consciousness and the unconscious, symbolised by the son as *filius* (ibid.: 369).

In such a portrayal of the renewed dominant there is a paradoxical unity of opposites that includes king and queen in an amalgam of light with dark, the muddy with the clear, and so on, in a life-affirming wholeness wherein 'wisdom herself [can]...celebrate her carnival' (ibid.: 334).





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Excerpted from *Alchemical Mercurius*

## Return of the feminine

In chapter 9 I mentioned how Jung completed the Christian Trinitarian formulation by including a fourth as Mercurius, in the form of 'Mary or the Devil'. Here, I highlighted his idea of a transforming god-image whereby the Christian worldview is portrayed as being under tectonic stresses – a situation supposedly prefigured by the alchemical 'king in crisis'. In this context the Catholic Assumption of Mary in 1950 was, for him, a momentous event that finally institutionalised an archetypal truth; that is, the god-image as a quaternity that finally included the 'numen of feminine deity' (1955/1956: 186, 469). For him this event also signalled a sacred or archetypal marriage as a *heiros gamos* of the masculine spirit with feminine matter (ibid.: 244). Within the bigger picture of his thinking, this was an important movement toward renewal of the Christian God image synchronistic with the beginning of a new Platonic Aeon. He also located the assumption of Mary within an earlier alchemical frame of ideas as found, for example, in such images as Reusner's Pandora (Figure 11.1). Mary's coronation is paralleled here by the releasing of a 'monster' from matter, described also as the *anima mundi* and the *filius macrocosmi* (ibid.: 188). He also refers to this being in Reusner's Pandora as 'the re-arisen Primordial Man, who is the cosmos' (ibid.: 317).

Jung continues by stating that this image also contains in it 'the great secret', in that the assumption, by including matter, brings with it the 'prince of this world' as the devil. The assumption of Mary thus includes, according to him, a sophisticated nuance as a drama of redemption wherein the Christ–Devil split seeks resolution. The devil here is represented as the darker side of Mercurius duplex (1955/1956: 188).

Furthermore, Mary's association with the Church and its congregation (on earth) means that the Assumption, viewed as a sacred marriage, unites the congregation with Christian heavenly deity and therefore represents, for Jung, the return of the kingdom of heaven on earth (ibid.: 317). If we extend the meanings of Mary here to include the main alchemical associations as *Luna – Sophia – Sapientia Dei – anima mundi*, effectively the feminine half of Mercurius (ibid.: 322), then we get a better idea of what he was trying to convey. The Assumption as a divine *heiros gamos* thus unites king Sol with queen Luna – the 'unlocking of paradise' or the 'advent of God's Kingdom on earth' (ibid.: 317). This brings with it the plethora of meanings he associates with these images: psyche and matter, transcendent and immanent, heaven and earth, masculine and feminine, Christian and pagan, consciousness and the unconscious, etc. This is a marriage that is followed by the birth of the *spiritus mercurialis* as sun–moon child, homunculus, etc.

In the same place Jung further writes that 'in a psychological sense Mercurius represents the unconscious, for this is to all appearances that "spirit" which comes closest to organic matter and has all the paradoxical qualities attributed to Mercurius' (1955/1956: 491). Psychologically the 'extraction of Mercurius' as redemption of the feminine numen (as Mary and her alchemical connotations) is



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therefore interpreted as being achieved ‘through the pains of the opus’ (ibid.: 322). His equivalent for the opus, of course, would be the concept of individuation with emphasis on the role of the anima, at least in this context. The assumption of Mary as coronation, apotheosis and marriage is thus interpreted psychologically by him as a *coincidentia oppositorum* whereby the conscious and unconscious unite in a mystical marriage (ibid.: 380).

Jung saw in this the possibility of a *renovatio* as a dogmatic Christianity having integrated its mystical other. In this context he writes that ‘the regenerated dominant also brings the corpus *mysticum* of mankind (Ecclesia as Luna) into glorious reality’ (1955/1956: 372). Following the alchemical drama, the *heiros gamos* of Christian dogma as Sol and its corpus mysticum as Luna gives birth to a ‘third thing’ as sun and moon child in the form of the *filius philosophorum* or *Mercurius-lapis*. For the alchemists, in Jung’s view, this also entailed either the knowledge of ‘God in nature’ being integrated into the Church as a rebirth of dogma or, more heretically, as the investment of nature with ‘a mystic significance, whose mysterious light outshone the splendid incomprehensibilities of Church ceremonial’ (ibid.: 326).

## Dorn’s three coniunctios

The coniunctio, represented previously as a marriage of Sol and Luna or King and Queen, finds further elucidation in the final part of *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. Here we read of *three* coniunctios as various stages of a mystical journey. In this form Mercurius, by means of a celestial journey and return to earth, is said to unite the powers of Above and Below, and thereby effects a mystical marriage of Heaven and Earth (1955/1956: 16). In this action deity, previously split into opposites, is restored to its original unity (ibid.: 23). Mercurius, in particular, features centrally in this ‘mystical journey’.

### *The first coniunctio*

Prior to the first coniunctio is an original half-animal condition of unconsciousness as ‘an inextricable interweaving of the soul with the body’ in a *unio naturalis* (1955/1956: 488–9). Separation of this ‘enchained soul’ from the body concerns the first coniunctio.

In this coniunctio, the *unio mentalis*, the soul leaves the body to unite with the spirit. Effectively, the departed soul leaves the body behind as a dead corpse to unite with the spirit, where it experiences a ‘divine influx’ (ibid.: 473). Here, quoting Dorn and Leibniz respectively, the spirit is described as ‘a “spiracle [spiraculum] of eternal life,” a sort of “window into eternity”’ (ibid.: 470–1). This is the goal of spiritual discipline as mind overcoming one’s instinctual animal nature, with the further purpose of visualising the self ‘as a “window” into eternity’ (ibid.: 535, 542).



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Excerpted from *Alchemical Mercurius*

According to Jung, the *unio mentalis* corresponds to the goal of Christianity in its seeking after a spiritual position and a conquering of bodily desire. The centuries-old Christian aspiration is thus, for him, a 'separation of psychic opposites' as spirit and instinct in the *unio mentalis* (ibid.: 475, 524–5).

## ***The second coniunctio***

The second coniunctio entails the return of the soul-spirit to re-animate the 'dead body', and thus the incarnation of pristine consciousness achieved from the first coniunctio back into the phenomenal world – a process represented as a 'chymical marriage'. Such an experience requires a re-engagement with the instinctual nature and with the passions as the soul returning to its 'natural inclinations', but now with spiritual control derived from consciousness attained in the *unio mentalis* (1955/1956: 475).

More subtly, the second coniunctio for Dorn is the spirit-soul uniting with a cosmic *imago Dei* as a 'secret truth' hidden in the materiality or physiology of the body. By means of various sensual magical procedures that invoke the spirit-soul of the *unio mentalis* into this bodily *imago Dei*, a manifestation of the soul-spirit becomes incarnated as a subtle, celestial, 'sky-coloured' fluid, the *caelum*. Such a magical procedure, for the adept, would appear to be the manifestation of the 'potential world' as 'nothing less than the kingdom of heaven on earth' (ibid.: 487, 478–9, 531–2, 542–3). The *caelum* is thus also described as 'the very essence of the body, an incorruptible and therefore pure and eternal substance, a *corpus glorificatum*, capable and worthy of being united with the *unio mentalis*' (ibid.: 542–3).

In terms of analytical psychology, all of this entails the difficult task of actually applying insights and numinous experience of the self as paradoxical wholeness, derived from the first coniunctio through analysis (inclusive of mandala work), into the context of lived experience (1955/1956: 476, 528, 531–2). Indeed, the 'elusive Mercurius' here would appear to have become truly transformed, such that 'the centre experienced proves to be a *spiritus rector* of daily life' (ibid.: 544).

The second coniunctio as re-animation of the body, according to him, also echoes a larger cultural movement reminiscent of the medieval correspondentia. The meaning of body here extends beyond the human form (and the retort), to include the natural world. Transcendent deity returns to animate a dead (disenchanted) natural world which finds expression in the alchemical fascination with the *numinosum* of matter. In this schema, Christ (representative of the *unio mentalis*) is 'wedded' to the *Imago Dei* in matter which produces the *lapis*, in the second coniunctio. Here, it is important to remember the alchemist's lapis idea incorporated the Christ image.

Effectively, spirit and matter are re-united as a 'synthesis of psychic opposites' in a *chymical wedding* (to use a specific symbolic image). Put differently: the immanent spirit of matter (Below) sublimates into an ascent to wed the descending and



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Excerpted from *Alchemical Mercurius*



Figure 11.1 'The extraction of Mercurius'; Reusner's *Pandora*, 1582; p. 253.





# MYSTERIUM CONIUNCTIONIS

Excerpted from *Alchemical Mercurius*

concretising transcendent spirit of heaven (Above) in a process of mutual transformation (1955/1956: 451, 536). From this synthesis comes resolution in a 'third thing', such as in the image of the liquid *caelum* or stony *lapis* as a 'transcendental entity that could be described only in paradoxes' (ibid.: 536). An analogy is the *filius philosophorum* as that reborn and transformed Mercurius – that 'paradox par excellence' (ibid.: 43–4). For the alchemists, it represented the goal, as successful production of the lapis (ibid.: 533). For Jung, the second coniunctio was thus the goal of medieval alchemy, perceived as a developmental progression and as a healing of an ailing Christianity.

## ***The third coniunctio***

Jung, following the alchemist Dorn, also speculated on a third and final coniunctio: conjunction with the *unus mundus*. In this conjunction the combined spirit–soul–body now merges with the universal ground of being.

He invokes a range of descriptions in an attempt to articulate the concept of the *unus mundus*. As 'one world' it is described variously as the potential world of the first day of creation; eternal Ground of all empirical being; the suprapersonal atman; matter as intrinsically deified; a transcendental psychophysical background; an underlying unity of the empirical world; and the underlying unitary nature of body and psyche (1955/1956: 534, 535, 537, 538).

In these descriptions we get a bridging of what we generally think of as the opposites of psyche and matter. The emphasis though is not on the empirical world of multiplicity or the ego world of perceptions, but rather on an underlying (hidden) unitary psychophysical background. Jung uses Plato's cave parable to amplify: the shadows we see on the cave wall are likened to our empirical reality (ibid.: 538). In this sense the *unus mundus* is viewed as 'hidden' or as the unconscious but, in another sense, as a modality we could describe as 'more real than real', or perhaps as the mystic's spiritual reality. Union with the *unus mundus* in the third coniunctio is therefore described by Jung as the *mysterium coniunctionis* and as a new synthesis characterised by 'many far-reaching changes of consciousness' (ibid.: 539).

## ***Aurora Consurgens***

Both Jung and von Franz cautiously championed the view that the original *Aurora Consurgens* was the transcription of the visionary experiences of Thomas of Aquinas during a near-death experience, and possibly on his deathbed (von Franz 1966/2000: 428–30). Von Franz, in reflecting on Jung's 1944 near-death visions, further comments: 'Might it not be that St. Thomas Aquinas too, only experienced on his deathbed, when the Song of Songs flooded back into his memory, how real Wisdom and a union with her can be?' (ibid.: xiii).





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For Jung, the original text of *Aurora Consurgens* represented an example of how the medieval Christian worldview came to terms with alchemy in the thirteenth century (1955/1956: xvi). In this context von Franz notes that Aquinas, after a lifetime of immersion in the Christian worldview, experienced a flood of compensatory symbolic material from the unconscious (von Franz 1966/2000: 322). For her this eruption can be understood, using the key of alchemical symbolism, as a 'treasure of the doctrine' which is 'concealed in the darkness of matter' and which appears as a 'gift of the Holy Ghost', in which the wisdom of Sophia (as anima) functions as a psychopomp to God (ibid.: 186–7, 194). Importantly, von Franz notes that the author, entering the post-mortal land, beholds in the Holy of Holies 'not the Godhead, but the mysterium coniunctionis of sun and moon' (ibid.: 320). Von Franz further remarks that Aquinas apparently died having contemplated God in an ecstatic vision, whilst dawn was breaking (von Franz 1966/2000: 428–9). Indeed, *Aurora Consurgens* means 'rising dawn'. She associates this phrase with 'the moment of mystical union with God' (ibid.: 205) and, psychologically, as 'the luminosity of the unconscious' (ibid.: 204). This theme, resurrected as part of *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, thus also carries with it nuances of the birth of a new Platonic month. A particularly prominent figure in the visions is the Shulamite as the dark, feminine side of God. Von Franz links this figure to Wisdom, as the *anima mundi* immanent in matter who enters the author's consciousness as anima to consummate a coniunctio, resulting in the birth of a Sun–Moon child in the future as the *lapis philosophorum* (ibid.: 212). This feminine deity is thus described as being 'friendly to man', with the intention that the 'ordinary man' be the place chosen for God's birth, in which both his dark and light sides find expression (ibid.: 233–4). Thus the author is exalted, for a time, into Wisdom's male partner as the 'King of Glory' in the *mysterium coniunctionis* (ibid.: 359). Similarly, the author is also described as having experienced inflationary identifications with the child of this union as the *filius philosophorum* (ibid.: 356). Later, however, his role shifts more humbly to that of a mere 'guest at the banquet' (ibid.: 359).

Von Franz notes the calming effect of such visions in their capacity to convey a feeling of immortality (ibid.: 338). She further compares these experiences to Dorn's third coniunctio: 'after the self has been experienced as a divine centre within the psyche, this experience expands into a feeling of oneness with the whole cosmos' (ibid.: 340). We further get the idea of an apotheosis into a 'God-man' in the idea of the lapis as a divine–human figure (ibid.: 354).

In summary: the author's visions are viewed by von Franz as a condensed opus in which the hidden, material, feminine aspect of God 'imprisoned in matter' is redeemed and wedded to the manifest, masculine deity by means of the alchemical labour (ibid.: 242). From this union the enigmatic *lapis philosophorum* as a transformed Mercurius is born. In essence, she considers the author (versed in alchemical lore) to have undergone a completed individuation process by means of these climactic visions (ibid.: 403–4). Accordingly, for von Franz, the visions are of relevance not only for their age, but prospectively as the resolution of a problematic Christianity.



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## Commentary

In summarising Jung's position, we could say he believed the Christian worldview had lost its interdependent relation to instinct in what amounted to a dangerous split between spirit and the chthonic. Spirit had concretised into a belief system overburdened with dogmatism and at odds with instinct. Optimistically, however, he considered this 'separation of psychic opposites' as intrinsic to the evolutionary process itself – whereby the separation creates an energetic tension that facilitates a differentiation of consciousness. However, he sees a problem when such a separation results in an extreme and dangerous polarisation, inaugurating an enantiodromian correction toward an opposite movement as a 'synthesis of psychic opposites'. For him such a movement was already anticipated in the medieval alchemical worldview as a preoccupation centred on a union of opposites, as embodied in their coniunctio symbolism. He was of the opinion that Christianity had to more openly integrate such a worldview in order to renew and heal itself. In effect it had to reunite spirit and instinct in a relatively harmonious and interdependent regulatory system, in a new ritual that also reconnected one, through an anamnesis, to an original wholeness of a cosmic and divine identity – the *anthropos* as archetype of man (1955/1956: 418–20). In this sense, we could say that he believed alchemy contained a key that could unlock a renewal and rebirth of the Christian worldview. In this view the religious dominant of the western nations, in the form of the patriarchal Christian deity, was in need of renewal. In alchemistic allegory, the ailing king was to be 'dissolved', 'mutilated', 'devoured', etc. before undergoing a trans-formation and rebirth as the *filius philosophorum* (son of the philosophers); effectively an image that incorporates a 'mysterious conjunction of opposites'. The neglected feminine, chthonic aspects of deity, and a holistic worldview that included the natural world, would find redemption in this new amalgam of greater wholeness. Importantly, it would also involve a reintegration of all that was dangerously repressed in the Christian Aeon of Fishes, such as the pagan-oriented worldview.

In this context Dorn's first coniunctio could be viewed as a recapitulation of the 'split opposites' (psyche–instinct) in the first fish of the Age of Pisces. His second coniunctio would then be the union of the second (matter) fish with the first (spiritual fish) begun mid-Aeon and to be fulfilled in the grail-like vessel of the coming Age of Aquarius – a theme corroborated by precession through the astrological Pegasus, as a further symbol of the *coniunctio* of instinct and spirit. The third coniunctio might then be considered a visionary experience, as 'holistic grail' of an even more complete spirit–matter unity, intimated by the symbols of the Aquarian Age.

The theme of a 'synthesis of psychic opposites' also translates into a cultural zeitgeist of peacemaking. Here I recall that Mercury causes the two entwined 'fierce' serpents of the caduceus to agree (ibid.: 229). Thus, in identifying the one 'golden serpent' with the Christian spirit, the other 'silver serpent' would represent



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the pagan spirit and mystical feminine. In this schema, renewal of Christianity is envisioned as an engagement with its Other, inclusive of the pagan 'adversary'.

By means of an alchemical mystical marriage these spirits combine and give birth to a renewed form as one with a 'united double nature'. Similarly, the caduceus could also be cast as an image that unites a Sun religion (Christian worldview) with a Moon religion (Muslim worldview) – see the Dream Analysis Seminars (Jung 1984: 321–435).

In this view, a new cultural dominant was thus beginning to emerge from the collective unconscious: a dominant that found early articulation in certain visionary individuals of medieval alchemy and that was now hatching, through mediums such as Jung's magnum opus, into the cultural landscape of a new Platonic Aeon. In this context I aver that one of Jung's intentions with *Mysterium Coniunctionis* was to effect in the reader, through an invocation of symbols, an alchemical-like process of transformation – as an 'immersion in the mercury' as the 'highest mystery of the Whole work' (Figulus, cited in Giegerich 1999: 137) – in which the figure of Mercurius functions as an agency that stitches together a plethora of oppositions and confounds one's rationalism, thereby opening one toward a revelatory gnosis.

Overall, it would appear that in *Mysterium Coniunctionis* Jung was seeking to articulate a *renovatio* of the Christian god-image not only as a fringe psychological theory (embedded in his analytical psychology) but, more ambitiously, within the very fabric of the mainstream Christian 'myth'. For him, the separation of psychic opposites in the Aeon of Pisces as a dualistic sign (two fishes) would now experience a healing in a synthesis of opposites in the unitary and grail-like image of the Aquarian water-bearer.

Within this operatic drama, the figure of the alchemical Mercurius takes centre stage variously as *metaphor of transformation*, as *image of wholeness* and as new cultural dominant as the *filius philosophorum*, emerging from the chaos of cultural rupture and renewal – effectively as a quintessential *transcendent function* capable of healing and renewing an ailing Christianity.



CHAPTER

4

# THE ESSENCE OF EVIL

Chapter by Jon Mills



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*Humanizing Evil*

Edited by Ronald C. Naso and Jon Mills

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# THE ESSENCE OF EVIL

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Does evil exist, or is it a social invention? Is evil an action, a disposition, a property, a consequence, and/or a characteristic that necessarily makes it what it is, essentially? Does it hinge on creating pain for others—from relatively benign modes of discomfort to harm and gratuitous suffering? Does malicious intent have to be involved or simply just intent, even if not malicious? Surely, pain can result without intent, so what is the relationship between harm and human motivation? What if an event that brings about harm and suffering was not due to a direct action but rather a failure to act, such as in a weakness of will, the bystander effect or a miscarriage of moral courage? Here we may describe evil as the abnegation of responsibility, the failure to choose, the denial of freedom. But what happens if these failures are unconsciously informed, even chosen, the product of an unconscious will toward evil? Or are these queries contingent upon value judgments we ascribe to events and their causal attributions?

The question and nature of evil have been a human preoccupation since the rise of civilization, yet we can find no consensus on what constitutes its essence. The instantiation of evil unequivocally contributes to the necessary social manufacturing of law and order, religion, morality, justice and systemic mechanisms of restraint, as well as punishment, that govern individual and collective relations within all societies. Psychoanalysis generally has tended to focus upon the pathological dynamics that motivate evil actions, from primary, malignant, and traumatic narcissism to primitive defensive enactments, superego lacunae, failure in internalization and empathy, sociopathy, self-object deficits, developmental trauma and attachment pathology, rather than on the question of evil itself. For example, is evil a human phenomenon, or does it have a metaphysical structure? What makes evil (by necessity) what it is? Is it merely a relative enterprise fashioned by our subjectivities? Any determination of evil stands in relation to the meaning of value and the value of meaning, for what differentiates a natural act (such as animals killing prey, extreme weather phenomenon resulting in environmental disasters with loss of life, and so forth) from a human act is the construction of meaning and value inquiry within ethical agency. Furthermore, are actions in themselves sufficient to determine the essence of evil, or does psychological intent become a necessary ingredient? What if such intent was unconsciously harbored yet unacknowledged by the conscious subject, let alone enacted, the evil within? And what about the consequences of both action and intention as a touchstone by which to adjudicate evil? These questions tend to situate the problematic of evil within a moral realm. But what if the question and nature of evil have nothing to do with morality whatsoever?

In this chapter, I wish to explore the essence and ethics of evil. What I will conclude is both controversial and counterintuitive. But, before we get there, I will need to prepare our discussion. After laying out various philosophical problematics, our analysis will center around the domain and structure of violence as: (a) natural phenomena, (b) subjective interiority, (c) objective instantiation, (d) systemic perpetuation, and (e) ontic universality. The degree to which our natural





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constitution derived from evolutionary pressures predisposes the human animal toward evil will be contrasted with developmental currents that are cultivated as a result of social interaction and the interiority of suffering. What marks the qualification of evil is the degree of ethical agency within an individual and society determined by the objective attainment of self-consciousness and voluntary choice. The evil that inhabits man in thought, intention, and deed is beyond psychological dynamics, I suggest, for violence is a metaphysical principle that saturates the natural world as a *mysterium tremendum*, at once a frightening necessity governing life yet one that signals the nonviolent domain of ideality we attribute to moral idealism, paradoxically, itself a violent imposition as ethical demand.

## What is Evil?

Let us first begin with basics. In classical Greek, κακός historically signifies that which is intrinsically “bad,” whereby the term “evil” is a transliteration. Etymologically the origin of the word is unknown, but many philologists believe it is derived from the proto-Indo-European root *kakka*, taken from κακκάω—to defecate. In other words, evil is shitty. The term is taken up in numerous contexts in classical antiquity and has generally informed our modern conception of all valuative discourses today. κακός refers to: (a) persons and their character: *bad, lowly, wretched* (see Herodas, 1922, 3.42); (b) of appearance: *ugly*; (c) of birth: *ill-born, mean*; (d) of courage: *craven, cowardly*; (e) of kind: *worthless, sorry, unskilled*; (f) of things: *pernicious* (see Homer, *Odyssey*, 10.64); (g) of omens: *unlucky*; (h) of words: *abusive, foul*; (i) of actions: *to do harm or ill to another (Illiad, 2.195)*; and (j) in the moral sense: *base, evil*. Interestingly, κακός is a cognate of καλός, its opposite, namely, the good, the beautiful. Here we may see how good and evil are dialectically related and mutually implicative. In other words, we cannot have any discussion of either concept without invoking the other. This makes evil, by definition, contingent on a notion of good, which is itself equally presupposed, debatable and problematic.

There is a natural simplicity to splitting based upon a perfunctory economy. This is an elementary aspect to mental functioning and observed endlessly as a normative process, whether in society or in the clinic. This natural (hence normal, inborn, instinctual or organic) tendency to think in terms of binaries—same/different, good/bad—is a rudimentary mechanism of thinking that is superimposed on all experience. It is only with cognitive development and the acquisition of self-consciousness or a reflective function (often referred to as mentalization) that the binary proclivity is breached through attempts at entertaining complexity, holism, integration of opposite perspectives, and synthetic attempts at unification or reconciliation of opposition and difference. But this synthetic function, I argue, is a developmental or ideological ideal that is never fully achieved as a hierarchical reality when it comes to certain matters, especially those involving the human emotions, including the notions of right and wrong. In fact, an ideology of right can



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intensify this bifurcation and fortify a rigid antithesis that blinds us to the opposing perspective, which further introduces a danger of imposing an absolutism on phenomena, phenomena that by definition are open, transient, fluid and pluralistic, thus radically resisting unification. Here there is no transvaluation of values, no *Aufhebung*, no discernible space beyond good and evil; rather we have an impasse, a gap, lacunae, or parallax where there is no synthesis between the two polarities. We cannot make each opposition—the fork between good and evil—a unified position based on fanciful logic alone. It defies all social realities. It betrays what we know about the human psyche as an unconsciously desirous and conflicted animal. There will always be a firm obstacle, limit or check between these opposing forces in the mind. Yet it all depends upon what perspective you take.

Evil is typically construed on the negative pole of the dialectic, a construct defined in relation to absolute difference. Evil as contrast to its opposite highlights its one-sided polarity, one based on pure negation, yet this duality forms an ontological unit. Since antiquity, evil has been signified by its privative function and formally instantiated as innate badness, viz., that which deracinates and generates social disharmony by lacerating all semblances of moral order. It is none other than the introduction of radical negativity, to the degree that existential preoccupations with its recalcitrant presence has generated the psychological need for elaborate systems of theodicy to explain its occurrence. Here reconciling the appearance of evil with the good and with the question and meaning of God has elevated the notion of evil to a metaphysical factor. Historically, God has been extricated from evil, and it is attributed instead to fallen angels or man, yet this fantasy is hardly intellectually worthy of support. In today's secular world, the reification of evil to a supernatural hypostatization (i.e., the Devil) is an untenable explanation for the atrocities committed by human beings. In the absence of divine presence or intervention, evil is exclusively a human phenomenon.

What would a secular theory of evil look like? First we must explore whether we can pinpoint its essence, namely, that which necessarily circumscribes and defines what it is, without which it would not and could not exist. Here I am chasing after the question of universality: Can evil be shown to have an essence, and if so, does it apply universally across modes of human phenomena that are adjudicated to be or deemed as evil? This would imply, all things being equal, that any universal attribution of evil would carry epistemological and hermeneutic agreement to warrant such generalizations, even if only confined to theory. But is this possible? This would mean, hypothetically, that no one instance or particularity would elude the label of evil if it was deemed a universal attribution. This surely would challenge the notion of context, contingency, accident and chance. Perhaps we should not assume that universality and context are mutually exclusive, especially when they ontically inform each other. Perhaps evil may be viewed as a certain positionality as fixation on one side of its dialectical polarity, what may also be said of the good, whereby both positions form a tension arc between their



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oppositions. Here we may posit that both good and evil involve a radical splitting of the other, one that is obstreperous to mediation or synthesis.

Because evil is historically by definition the absence or privation of good, opposition is required for it to have structure and meaning. Here evil is value laden, hence it stands in relation to the question and nature of morality. This presupposes that evil cannot be amoral as it signifies a judgment about value and agency. But what if evil is in itself a relative construct and there are no absolutes? What if it has no value? This would imply that there is neither good nor evil, for valuation itself is either held in abeyance, neutralized, suspended, non-existent or devolves into a meaningless construct. But how can a material act or embodied event lack valuation, how can it escape human judgment? Perhaps we may conclude there are no absolutes due to the relativity of conferring value judgments while still observing appearances of evil that are universal. Conversely, can the notion of pure negativity carry with it a metaphysical value even if it lies outside of human valuation? In other words, can evil exist without agency? These are difficult questions to sustain.

Evil is often defined as an act of transgressing, which in many cultures corresponds to something that is wrong, yet we immediately encounter the thorny issues of determining what constitutes wrongness, the non-good, and what it means to transgress, as these determinations stand in relation to a contextual and collective attribution of meaning as valuation. Here evil is not merely an intellectual concept or the religionization of human desire and action, for it stands in relation to an absolute value that has been contravened, devalued or occluded. Because value judgments are determinative and transpire within a given material culture and linguistic social structure replete with local customs and prejudices of meaning, the question of absolute value may succumb to relativity. Regardless of the questionable antipodes and extremity of either absolutism or relativism, the essence of evil is found in its contextual valuation whether absolute, universal or relative in its instantiation and scope. This necessarily places valuation at the heart of any determination of evil, and since valuation stands in juxtaposition to greater collective-meaning structures within any given society, evil becomes a social artifact.

The term “evil” is burdened by its history. In the Judeo-Christian tradition that has dominated Western thought, evil is considered to be that which violates God’s will. We may already see an ideology at play by presupposing a Supreme Being to begin with, one that dominates world discourse and preys on the fears, emotional vulnerability, ignorance and religious prejudices of contemporary cultures. Promulgating such a way of thinking further reinforces the unconscious social fantasy that such a reified Ideal exists by which all humans will be compared to and judged by divine authority. In ancient times, the God posit served many pragmatic and psychological purposes, but it hardly serves as a touchstone let alone justification for an operational definition of evil. I see no valid rational



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argument for perpetuating this psychomythology that evil is deviation from God's way, when God is merely a social construction born of a fantasy principle and instituted as a cultural symbolic (Freud, 1927; Mills, 2016).

But we must take seriously the notion that evil is the privation or absence of good. This was set out by Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* (see Part I: Treatise on The Distinction of Good And Evil [Q 48–49]), which was earlier echoed by Augustine (*Confessions*, Bk 3, vii [12]), what Plotinus believed was a psychic or subjective event, hence belonging to the soul (*Enneads*, I, 2.1–3; 8.8), not a godhead, yet at the same time an ontological condition based upon the fact that we are embodied. But the privation (*steresis*) theory of evil (*kakon*), although debatable, may be said to have its genesis in Aristotle who discussed the notion of lack, such as when something is deprived of an attribute belonging to its nature, for “a thing comes to be from [it's] privation” (see *Physics*, bk 1: 191b15). With stipulations, this may be (loosely) interpreted to mean that which is evil comes into being from what it is lacking. Perhaps this is merely an inverse tautology: evil is the lack of goodness. Of course this sentiment is inherited from Plato: evil is the destroyer and corrupter of all things (*Republic*, 10.608e), which can never be done away with (*Theaetetus*, 176a). That which is deemed objectively beneficial is good, and that which is deemed evil is not. As for the nature of evil, it is derived from the natural “desire of food of drink of sex,” but not for the momentary pleasure it produces, but rather from its “consequences” (*Protagoras*, 353c-e). Here we may see a kernel of Neo-Platonism influencing the Christian perversion of pathologizing human nature as sinful. Despite the fact that discourse on the nature of evil was inspired by the pre-Socratics and can be historically found in virtually all records of early civilization, good and evil have become the positive and negative exemplifications of moral absolutes.

## Radical Evil

Kant's treatise on evil does not attribute evil to original sin or to a turning away from God, nor does it conform to the Augustinian denial of evil since it is nothing but the privation of good (*privatio boni*). It does not even conform to human want or desire, but rather is due to free choice (*Willkür*). Evil is the product of our determinate powers of choice because, for Kant, we are radically free to determine the grounds for the sake of which to behave. This places the onus of responsibility squarely on the existential agent making such choices and not on natural inclination, impulse or desire, for as Kant (1793) tells us, “the source of evil...can lie only in a rule made by the will for the use of its freedom, that is, in a maxim” (p. 17). So even though we are born with innate needs, desires, leanings, dispositions, and impulses, man is the author of his nature due to acts of freewill as choice that either conform to or neglect the moral realm. This so-called freedom of the moral will that generates maxims upon which all human beings supposedly construct for themselves, is a purely determining, autonomous spontaneity of choice and is





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therefore influenced by many “incentives.” And for Kant, “the moral law, in the judgment of reason, is on itself an incentive, and whoever makes it his maxim is *morally* good” (pp. 19–20), whereas deviation from the moral injunction makes one an “evil man.”

Kant believes that such a disposition toward choosing good or evil is a matter of free choice, and as such, natural a priori predeterminations are contradictory to the principles of choice as one cannot freely choose what is given or thrown. But are dispositions always freely chosen? Are not urges, impulses, inclinations and wants also mediated by forces outside of one’s immediate agentic will, awareness and intent? Propensities, he argues, are acquired, and therefore not necessarily innate, although they are naturally predisposed by virtue of the fact that we crave and have penchants and susceptibilities; but how can he justify the claim that we are predisposed to be inclined to freely choose any course of action unless we are subjected to particularized experiences? Moreover, if we are predisposed to be free agents, are we not necessarily conditioned on naturalized tendencies? Our corporeality is a necessary condition for actualizing free choice, although it is far from a sufficient one.

If we are naturally predisposed to freely choose, then are we not naturally predisposed to choose evil, necessarily so? Left to our own natural devices, would we not likely choose what feels good in the moment regardless of any moral maxims, much like a child in the candy store? Moral laws are not naturally given, for they are acquired: Morality is the education and imposition of culture.

We can no more presuppose the moral law as a transcendental good than we can as evil, for every human activity is based in naturalized psychology. Kant behaves as though the so-called moral imperative is a metaphysical given in the universe much like the physical laws governing our world and the cosmos, when it may be forcefully argued that morality is a human phenomenon. When Kant repeats his ethical mantra that “there is no propensity to moral evil, for such a propensity must spring from freedom...in the moral capacity of the will” (p. 26), he is presupposing a moral capacity adapted as a rational decision to live one’s life according to moral maxims. On the one hand Kant wants to champion a radical freedom by virtue of our capacity to choose evil, while on the other denying an *inherent necessity* to such a choice that is by nature a “natural predisposition” (p. 27). In the end, for Kant, all choices derive from maxims of the will.

What is “radical” for Kant is the deliberate act of choosing evil in light of our conscious awareness of the moral law, which is tantamount to the free choice of violating our moral duty, hence a corruption of the will in selecting evil maxims; although we are naturally inclined to do so, we are nonetheless responsible and accountable for it, which is brought on by ourselves (p. 28). Evil is radical in the sense that it “corrupts the ground of all maxims” (p. 32), which is subjectively chosen through perversity of the heart, human frailty, impurity and vulnerability to wickedness and vice (see p. 24), for it ultimately “puts out of tune the moral





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capacity to judge” (p. 34). Yet, for Kant, the moral law is transcendently given, hence presupposed, as is the notion that human beings freely choose their actions through rational means. Here Kant’s theory of radical evil suffers from a theoretical prejudice to begin with, namely, the belief in sober rationalism, as though people conduct their lives in deliberate fashions that embrace ethical principles and rules of behavior conforming to logical axioms in choice and action. This could not be farther from the truth of our primordial natures, for moral deliberation is a developmental triumph of the will mediated by many psychological dynamics that ultimately inform any rational comprehension of choice.

Kant ultimately makes evil a rational enterprise of choosing to follow a maxim in discord with duty and allegiance to the moral law, or what duty demands, as if morality is a purely rational decision. Furthermore, ethical attunement is either aligned or misaligned with some realm of moral metaphysical realism, once again freely chosen or ignored, rather than attributed to a moral idealism invented by humanity. Kant fails to reconcile the tension arc between the faculty of desire and free will and begs the question of ethical duty by presupposing a transcendental moral law, as though it is preordained; not to mention that we choose maxims to follow in rational ways rather than as emotionally expedient, mediated events under the press of a whole host of extraneous factors and cultural environs. For example, when he says that “the predisposition to *personality* is the capacity for respect for the moral law as *in itself a sufficient incentive of the will*” (pp. 22–23), he fails to understand human nature as driven by other competing dynamic processes and conflicts that condition this will, especially those imposed by unconscious currents and environmental determinants. Here evil impositions can come from a multitude of directions having very little to do with free will. Evil begets evil whether chosen or not.

Is not the moral law an achievement of culture, at once an invention and imposition of civilization? Kant’s view of good and evil as rational choice succumbs to the prejudices of his day concerned with upholding a Christian explanation of man’s aberrant behavior while salvaging a theodicy that insulates God from allowing evil. In the end, it is hardly a satisfactory account of the irrational, emotional, libidinal and aggressive predilections that fester within our human natures clamoring for release in various forms, under various guises and valences, and in various circumstances that stimulate their appearance. Contra Kant, moral law is not the provenance of “*divine command*” (p. 37), but rather a human calling.

## The Relativity of Evil

I have a country home on a modest fishing lake surrounded by many acres of forest and bush in the lush Canadian wilderness. My closest friend was visiting from the States when my wife, while taking a walk with our daughter on the property, called me on her cell phone alerting me to her discovery. There were several large fish



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pooling together in a shallow area of the lake near a water drain that connects to a stream. She had no clue what kind of fish they were, but she found the discovery of concern. I immediately feared they were Asian carp attempting to migrate upstream to spawn in the spring. Asian carp are an invasive species that kills practically everything in its ecosystem and have received much attention from anglers and ecologists in Ontario, hence stimulating governmental campaigns designed to combat their contamination of indigenous waters. The invasion of Asian carp has been so damaging in the United States that it is estimated that approximately 90 percent of the ecosystem in the Mississippi River has been decimated. I am a catch-n-release bass fisherman, forester and conservationist, and the last thing I want is my precious fishing paradise destroyed by unwelcome intruders. Upon this news, I immediately grabbed a large fishing net and walked briskly with my friend to the scene of the crime.

As I feared, these were not largemouth bass but one-to-two-foot carp waiting for the right moment to swim upstream. I instinctively started to scoop them out one by one with my net in a frenzied manner and threw them onto the shore to die. Only a few escaped back into the lake. When the deed was done, I looked at my friend's face and could immediately see his visible discomfort with my murderous act. Was this evil? From my perspective, I was protecting my lake. From his, this was morally reprehensible. Here, witnessing the killing of living creatures was disturbing, and I must admit I did not enjoy it one bit, but I felt compelled to safeguard my habitat. One could even say this basic instinct, as biologists will tell you, is evolutionarily programmed despite the elevation or sublimation of self-consciousness we typically confer onto reason and moral conscience. But herein lies a clash of values that provoke basic ethical questions. Despite the fact that we are hardwired toward predation, adaptation and survival, should human consciousness be obliged to rise above its naturalized tendencies? Should one kill another living thing? Is it evil to set a mousetrap or swat a fly? Moreover, is it innately base? Necessarily so? Or do we value some entities more than others to justify our acts of killing? World societies face these dilemmas every day. In other words, is killing intrinsically evil?

Of course we may differentiate the act of killing from murder, as the world masses must eat and have no malicious intent when harvesting grain, plants and vegetables, or slaughtering animals to put food on the table in order to be healthy and thrive. The cold brute fact of nature is that we must necessarily kill in order to live. Despite the well-intentioned, ethically conscientious objector who demands that we as humanity transcend our primitive natures as desirous, self-enhancing agents, most of the world pays very little attention to this moral question when a hungry stomach cries out to be fed. Here we value our own sustenance over an axiological category or lower form of life that we determine is secondary to human need. But here I had no intention of eating these fish. They were an atrocious enemy that needed to be eradicated in order to preserve what I have and value. This basic splitting in my consciousness at the time may be compared to a simple



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economy that justifies hurting others, including murder and warfare, based on the notion of relativized experiential value.

## On Universality

On January 10, 2015, Nigeria's militant Jihadist group Boko Haram (which literally means "Western education is forbidden"), after going on a mass killing spree in Baga on Lake Chad, strapped explosives to a 10-year-old little girl and sent her off into a market in Maiduguri as a human detonator (Nadeau, 2015). This atrocity comes after the April 14th, 2014, kidnapping of nearly 300 schoolgirls from the Chibok Government Secondary School by the terrorist group; the girl is believed to be one of the abductees. Although reported accounts vary, as many as 276 are still missing, all of which are believed to be used as sex objects and domestic servants.

On December 16, 2014, seven members of a Pakistani Taliban extremist group entered the back door of an army public school in the dustbowl border city of Peshawar and indiscriminately opened fire with machine guns and explosives strapped to their vests, killing 132 schoolchildren. The Taliban proclaimed the attack was a vendetta for an army offensive in North Waziristan in June that beset militant insurgents. Pakistan's Taliban spokesman Mohammed Umar Khorasanin plainly stated their motive: "We targeted the school because the army targets our families...We want them to feel our pain" (Inayat, Qazi & Bacon, 2014). Among the copious voices of world outcry, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said in a news conference:

I think it's hard for any of us as rational and compassionate people to understand terrorism, to understand why people would want, in the name of some political cause, to simply terrorize, hurt, kill innocent people, whole sections of society, but I think it is just beyond, it is beyond our comprehension why somebody would target children.

(Canadian Press, 2014)

These words read alone do not convey the felt emotionality of his speech. This psychological perplexity of disbelief nicely encapsulates the unfathomability of bearing witness to a universal horror. What is beyond comprehension is that innocent helpless children would be brutally murdered by deliberate, malicious and calculated actions of men. It is as if the response of the collective psyche were to say: "How could human beings do this? Only animals prey, for they are instinctual evolutionary organisms that have no self-reflective function or moral conscience by natural design. Humans are supposed to be different." But whether we accept the inherent animality to humanity or not, the line has been crossed.

It is only on the condition that slaughtering innocent children in cold blood would be permissible in any possible world that one would even question its moral significance. In other words, it would never occur to most civilized people to ask



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whether it is moral or immoral to kill innocent children who have done nothing to others, for the Kantian categorical imperative already speaks a universal language of prohibition. In such instances, where the masses identify with the purity and holiness of childhood, whether as a cultural symbolic or through the direct empathic identification with their own families and personal lives—namely, their own relatives and the child within, the immediate dissociation of understanding any rational means behind such atrocities is emotionally unfathomable for the simple fact that it disrupts our psychic need for a moral order in the universe. Such an imposed confrontation with universal horror forces us to question the presupposed universality of a moral universe to begin with, for it eclipses all value as we know it. Here our rational “unfathomability” that is “beyond comprehension” is none other than our own emotive dissociation to the realization (that must be disavowed) of the *dissociation of ethics*—hence the renunciation of “right”—perpetrated by the Other. In other words, we would have to suspend or abandon a universal concept of what is right and wrong, not to mention entertain a mentalized stance that others would not share our own sense of values. Here lies the pathological breach, an incipient a priori knowledge, that human nature is at base a primitive, feral process that fractures all illusory notions of a civilized, just, and loving world, for it only takes one act of barbarism to remind us that evil is no illusion.

## On the Question of Essence

Let us begin to try to sketch out a more refined definition of evil. First of all, as stated earlier, I categorically reject the notion of the personification of evil as a supernatural force or being derived from theosophic perspectives, theodicy or ontotheology. Having said this, there are certain metaphysical principles that are operative in any account of evil, such as the institution and/or experience of pure or radical negativity, disorder, disharmony or disintegration as a structural process endemic to the instantiation of destruction and decay, but these factors may also be viewed as a necessary complementarity to life, for without such events, there can be no change or growth, only stasis. I cannot conceive of the universe without process; therefore without privation, variation, difference, conflict and negation, there would be no motion, evolution or creativity; hence negativity in itself cannot be condemned as evil and in fact may be deemed a metaphysical good because it leads to variation, heterogeneity and plurality. But this discourse on metaphysical evil hardly satisfies our quest for an answer to essence.

Natural disasters and tragedies happen every moment, from the Lisbon earthquake that sparked the theodicy movement to overcome the aporia of how such systemic destruction could even be allowed by a benevolent godhead, especially now when the problem of evil and gratuitous suffering remains the most severe challenge to justified theology (Frances, 2013), to the banality of death, from the butcher's block to political warfare and military science; but we do not impart a malevolent intent





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to the impersonal hands of cosmic forces. They merely happen through the blind random mutation of organic nature, as well as influenced or expedited by human intervention, as we may readily observe as global populations slowly destroy our planet through climate change, global warming, pollution, exploitation of natural resources, desertification and the despoliation of our ecosystems. But when people burn coal to warm their homes or cook food, there is no malignant intent to cause harm, only to survive. Despite the fact that these continued practices, if allowed to go unrestrained or unchecked, may bring about the demise of our planet, to call them intrinsically evil would mean that we must abort our natural inclinations toward self-sustenance dependent upon a social infrastructure that promulgates and provides the necessities of life. This is not to say that societies should not improve upon such cultural institutions through collective education and social consciousness, but to call them inherently evil, I suggest, is misguided. After all, most people value their own immediate concrete lives over an abstract principle or a fish in the sea, even if such suspension of reason or ethical myopia leads to slow global suicide.

We must first attempt to isolate a key ingredient before formulating an answer to the question of the essence of evil. In paraphrasing Aristotle, for something to be, it must necessarily contain certain essential qualities, elements or forms that make it what it is, without which, it could not be or exist. In other words, if something does not possess certain features, it would not be fundamental to its nature, hence it would not be a vital aspect to its ontological structure. The essence of anything must be indispensable, critical, requisite or basic, hence the lifeblood of its being. Does evil have an essential form? Does it have essential properties? And what would they be?

If evil necessarily encompasses pure negativity, and negativity is an indispensable property to its constitution and appearance, then its instantiation must issue forth or bring about a modicum of violence. Violence may have many appearances, from the pulsating threat of passion or power to the intensity of fear, intimidation, felt aggression, overt hostility, brute force, abuse, ferocity, fury, viciousness, cruelty, savagery, death, and so on. Violence may also be lulled, implicit or expectant, an immanent looming presence that suffuses our world, even if conspicuously absent, an invisibility that is felt. In this regard, violence is hidden but is always there. We may say this is metaphysical violence, as origin, as *arkhē*, the violence of Being. Mind is an original form of violence, a violent coming into being, an awakening as internal rupture, as upheaval, as the self-violent manifestation of interruption.

Slavoj Žižek (2008) identifies *subjective* violence as the phenomenon of subjective experience, which is the most salient among the masses perpetrated by an identifiable agent or entity. By contrast, *objective* violence is both symbolic, that which is constituted through language and semiotic orders of understanding, and the myriad forms it may sociologically take. In fact, language itself is violent: It places a proverbial demand on the other whether solicited or not through





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aggressive encroachments and superimposed universals of meaning; while *systemic* violence is instantiated through our economic and political institutions that are operating as concretely inscribed mechanisms within our cultural infrastructures and social ideologies. Here we must differentiate the ontological structural elements of evil from their subjective phenomenological-hermeneutical counterparts.

A defining characteristic that differentiates subjective from objective evil is that subjective experience or its qualitative, hermeneutic equivalent may elude a universal appraisal of its definition. This may be due to a lack of shared personal experience or history, linguistic meaning, social convention, consensus, or objective standards of measurement and their interpretation that separates the individual from the collective. We have already encountered this with the problem of relativity. Here empathy may play a key ingredient in sympathizing with how another may interpret a particular personal experience as evil or not, but the form of the experience and its adjudication is nevertheless a solipsistic enterprise. The question becomes whether or not it is universalizable. Here a potential objective dimension materializes, namely, does it resonate with other subjects and their subjectivities that can form some basis of consensus that is adopted as social convention? Whether this makes something objective is still another matter, for one can envision a community of others that hold onto propositional attitudes, false beliefs, emotional prejudices, distortions of truth and reality and socialized delusions based on intersubjective fantasies peculiar to a group, mass or culture. The God posit is a good example.

Let us propose a distinction between: (a) an evil *act* and (b) an evil *intention*. An act always leads to some form of a consequence, while an intention may be passive, active, conscious, unconscious and either linked to a motive or action, suspended, disavowed, or even held in check, hence non-enacted. For example, an act that brings about death may be accidental, such as a motor vehicle accident, but there was no intent to kill. The same applies to forces of nature, such as a tornado or tsunami: Weather has no personal intention to destroy; it is merely a series of random or teleonomic physical events. In these cases death and destruction result from acts without intent; despite being tragic, dreadful and disastrous, I would not classify these as examples of evil. Hence for something to be evil, it requires *agency*. This implies that a certain modicum of intentionality is at play in operationalizing evil. Here an intention always possesses an *aim*. And when it comes to the human psyche, this would necessarily require consciousness (even if consciousness lies on a continuum) that aims at a particular act as an intentional meant object. This means that an act that brings about a certain negative consequence we deem evil must stem from an intentional stance, hence it is deliberate although not necessarily deliberated, as acts may be spontaneously enacted and not particularly well thought-out; albeit it would have to stem from an intention all the same, for no action is devoid of a motive or purpose driving an act, even if it is unconscious.



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This brings us to speculate that a certain state of mind must be operative in acts of evil, whether this be: (a) *dispositional* or (b) *intentional*, as well as bearing a particular (c) *qualia* or (d) *psychic form* (e.g., emotion) attached to the intentional act. Here is where we may consider a state of mind that is ontically or dispositionally aggressive, which is the manifestation of the purely negative split of the dialectic. Here violence becomes an ontological feature structurally infused in the very essence of evil. This commits us to accepting a universalizing principle to evil, for every form of evil must participate in a rudimentary violence. We may further say that in its pure (abstract) form, dispositional violence is the inscription of radical negativity, while evil is the manifestation (hence the appearance or enactment) of dispositional violence. Not only is this subjectively constituted in each person (*viz.*, dispositional evil), it materializes in empirical reality when externalized in society. In other words, it takes on objective properties and consequences, is institutionally organized, signified and represented in the concrete universals that comprise our social, economic and political suprastructures and as Žižek points out is systemically politicized through reinforced ideologies operative within hegemonic, socio-symbolic and cultural unconscious processes. Not only is there a phenomenal appearance to evil, it is ontologically encrypted in the very fabric of worldhood itself.

From the side of phenomenology, the qualitative appearance of intentionality manifests as a certain mode of dispositional violence that takes on a malevolent form: namely, there is a certain malignancy, spitefulness and maliciousness directed toward an object of aggression. Therefore, there must be a certain desire to hurt or cause pain to another person or thing, even if this is a pre-reflective act. Here the *agent*, the *intent* and the *act* must display its dispositional violence, while the consequence may or may not bring about an evil outcome based upon the success or failure of the intentional act to achieve its goal. For example, the intent to inflict pain, suffering or death on another may be thwarted, but the intentional act itself is nevertheless evil. Here we may say it is predisposed. The corollary is that dispositional violence ontically informs intentionality and action, including the act of thinking itself. This means that people are evil and not merely their behavior. Here we may conclude that the disposition toward evil is structurally constituted, because human nature is predisposed toward violence in thought and deed. This means that the customary, hackneyed definition of evil as deliberate malicious intent falls short because it fails to account for its innate, deep structural psychic precursors. Evil exists without malicious intent; it merely becomes a question of disclosedness or concealment. Hence the ontology of evil may or may not be enacted based on impulse and restraint, therefore relegating the domain of evil to a bifurcation of desire, emotionality and thought on the one hand, and the behavioral instantiation of intentional action on the other. In other words, we are inherently evil (as that which is onto-structurally innate), but not all people engage in evil endeavors. Here a principle of restraint supersedes our base primitive constitutions, if not for the beacon of reason attuned to the reality principle, due to



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identification and empathy for others, the development of conscience, and the pursuit of the good or virtue as an ethical comportment. But this involves a process of socialization and domestication based on self-renunciation and a taming of the inner shrew, as Freud (1930) famously points out, the sublimation and foil to our primitive propensities.

Thus far we have deconstructed evil as having an ontological (hence a necessary and universal) edifice based upon our primordial psychic constitution that interpellates the individual and society by natural proclivity and desire, as well as through the objective institutionalization of social, semiotic and symbolic practices that condition our being in the world. Therefore, the psychic dimension of evil is *structural* as both: (a) innate disposition due to our organic embodiment fueled by drive and desire and (b) socially superimposed by concrete (hence environmental) materiality via our thrownness into culture. Here structuralization accounts for the universality of our corporeal and cultural embodiment as an objective fact suffused with metaphysical violence. But the *phenomenal* dimension of evil is concerned with lived subjectivity or *psychic qualia*. This may be radically relative or germane to personal experience under hermeneutic variants even if shared by a collective ethos.

We have already determined that a degree of intentionality must be operative (even if pre-reflexive) in conditioning the phenomenology of evil, but the qualitative forms of such appearances must emerge from dispositional violence that ingress in the intentional act. The subjective state of mind is pertinent, as there is an affective qualitative manifestation of maleficence that is mobilized in evil intentionality through a negative emotional intensity of the will. However, we cannot restrict our definition to conscious intentionality or recapitulate the narrow, pedestrian view that evil is born from malicious intent, or in the words of Heidegger (1978) that “the essence of evil is in the malice of fury, not in the mere baseness of human action” (p. 355). Evil is not merely about intention and action or destruction of the moral law or institution of the signifier, but rather is unconsciously structuralized as primordial, ontological violence in the very masonry of the human psyche itself, hence the humanization of evil; yet one we can’t help but moralize.

## The Normativity of Evil

If evil is structurally constituted in all human beings, then evil is normative. It exists in all cultures, conditions our social relations with others, and is carried out in a variety of ways by people just like you and me. No one is immune from its signature or affliction. This is part and parcel of our fermenting *pathos* (πάθος). It is the new psychopathology of everyday life. Psychoanalysis has cogently shown, like the Zimbardo and Milgram experiments, that human nature is oriented toward hurting others, including ourselves. All human beings have sadistic wishes and



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impulses and aggressive tendencies—from jealousy, envy, rivalry, hate, the diabolic, death wishes, punishment fantasies and the need to humiliate and destroy—this is part of our unconscious animal nature morphed by experiencing the world; while personal and social defenses keep us from consciously embracing our unconscious destructive principles vying for pleasure, greediness, decadence, excess and egoistic hedonism. These empirical facts speak toward our unconscious motivations that condition our waking conscious choices. Of course there are different instantiations of evil as qualitative classifications of the wrong offering gradations in concrete appearance, but my point is that evil is ontologically prepared as a primordial violence permeating Being itself. Asteroids collide, cosmic dust flickers and every astronomical event is a physical-energetic negotiation: there is no ontic difference in this basic proposition governing the universe *or* human relations, for each is merely a modification of the metaphysics of experience.

In most discourse on evil, no one talks about unconscious intentionality, the evil within. And it is only by accident, on the occasion and condition of a non-conscious choice through the proverbial slip or faulty achievement (*Fehlleistung*), that evil is allowed expression. The fact that we are dominated by reflective choice via the puissance of consciousness does not eradicate the force and reverberation of unconscious teleology. In psychoanalysis, which has discovered the fact that universally, we not only have the *capacity* to kill, we all have the *wish* to commit murder. In those who have developed sufficient superego defenses of conscience and moral values, this wish is bulwarked against a strong desire for denial, repression, renunciation and undoing—even reaction formation, such as those going into helping professions to reverse or annul this unconscious artifact by making reparation for our lingering guilt. The violentization of human proclivity is historically proven and biologically conditioned, the backbone of civilization, one that is far more civil today than in its *arkhē*. But the way we come to apprehend our “nature” is humanized, as mentioned earlier, by our freedom to choose certain paths of thought and action, even under the strain of a lack of mentalization or affect regulation that colors our penumbra of ethical choices.

In what Adam Morton (2004) refers to as the “barrier theory of evil,” he emphasizes that “the essence of evil motivation is the failure to block actions that ought not even to have been considered” (pp. 55–56). Here, he insists, most people filter out harmful actions to others when considering the right course of action; however, this does not displace motivation itself. Furthermore, it does not consider the fact that many actions are motivated and executed by unconscious telic forces that scarcely recognize the foreseeable results or outcomes they may have on others, especially when such pre-reflective enactments are carried out unconsciously. This framework with which to adjudicate evil also presumes a Kantian bias that moral motivation and behavior are rationally contemplated with self-conscious foresight to consider the penalties of our actions. The notion of instituting barriers and refraining from the wrongful breach of barriers once put into place are important





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factors in understanding patterns of motivation, yet motivation and action are not always amenable to following a learned strategy or habitual procedure as rational deliberation of choice; rather people simply act and deal with the consequences later. Here we may observe that consciousness is often foreshadowed by overdetermined, psychodynamic events that affect the conscious motivation and action of the agent, even if under disinhibition or self-deceptive currents. This may explain, in part, why the great majority of evil acts are committed by normal or average people rather than criminals and violent sociopaths. The failure to construct barriers affecting our conscious choice of actions is only one such component of evil, regardless of whether it is unconsciously conceived or organized. Therefore, the barrier theory of evil conforms to a deeper structuralization process we may refer to as the “defense theory of evil,” which is subject to the free reigns of imagination mediated by unconscious fantasy and compromise formation.

As a semiotic, the word “evil” has become too readily equated with moral outrage, which always stands in relation to a value judgment. And since value judgment is a human phenomenon, the criteria of determining a proper interpretation of a *concept* of evil remains our task. We have already determined that evil may be ensconced in the realm of thought and not merely action and that violence is interred in thought. Thoughts can do violence to those who think and harbor them, who suffer, let’s say due to unremitting hate, and they manifest in the most normative of situations, such as through symptoms, somatization, affect dysregulation, sleep dysfunction, memory disturbance, and so forth. Here thought may be a form of self-evil, even if it is self-instituting and involuntary, hence the product of one’s own self-victimization, even if such original victimization was due to the encroachment and internalization of the Other.

## Evil as Appearance

Rather than focus on the myriad forms of evil that appear throughout humanity, and they are innumerable, let us address evil as appearance as such. It was Hegel (1830) who famously argued that “essence must *appear*” (§ 131), for appearance is the requisite for anything to be made actual. This simple yet sophisticated observation is logically prepared: the coming into being of any phenomenon is ontologically conditioned on its essential a priori fulcrum. Here we may summon the principle of sufficient reason: every mental event must stand in relation to its original form from which it is derived. In other words, there must be an original ground for every mental event that stands in relation to every mental object. For Hegel (1807), “appearance is essence” (§ 147), for nothing can exist unless it is real, hence has being or presence. Here evil appears as essence revealed through its marbled modes of manifestation.

Hegel’s doctrine of essence is conditioned on the notion that whatever comes into being is always mediated by its previous appearances. Evil is mediated by prior





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shapes, the conduit that allows psychic reality to appear as concrete reality. This includes human history, as well as any contextualization of our thrownness, what I have referred to as “archaic primacy” (Mills, 2010). This further means that evil has a prehistory and a metaphysical structure: appearance emerges from a primordial ontic ground. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel (1807) tells us:

The inner world, or supersensible beyond, has, however, *come into being*: it *comes from* the world of appearance which has mediated it; in other words, appearance is its essence and, in fact, its filling. The supersensible is the sensuous and the perceived posited as it is *in truth*; but the *truth* of the sensuous and the perceived is to be *appearance*. The supersensible is therefore *appearance qua appearance*. (§ 147)

This “inner world” is none other than a psychic one, an unconscious presencing that has been made objectively real—the instantiation of the evil within. Essence appears and appearance fills *its* essence; more specifically, appearance fills *with* essence. The “truth” is “posited” in itself as a supersensible beyond, but it may never be beyond appearance, for truth is equated with appearance as such. In Hegel’s (1830) words, “Essence therefore is not *behind* or *beyond* appearance, but since the essence is what exists, existence is appearance” (§ 131). In other words, by extrapolation, evil is “really actual,” or it would not appear. This makes evil an ontological presence within humanity. But the ontology of evil is not a static or hypostasized thing; rather it is a process of emergence that is always transforming, leaving debris in its path. In fact, Hegel warns us that evil is not fixed or simply contained in an absolute unity with the good, but rather it “*wants* to be on its own account” as “semblance of inward negativity” (§ 35, *Zusatz*), one that is exteriorized. The negativity within must manifest; it must materialize in order for evil to be actual. Its reality is to be found in its appearances, but it lies deeply hidden within its interior, an interior that conditions all appearance, evil or otherwise.

Hegel (1830) argues that evil is to be equated with “cognition” itself due to a “schism,” split or “universal separation” from the “immediate knowledge” or unity with the good, a cleavage introduced through the act of thinking and self-reflection, a turning away from the simple unity of “innocence in the moral sphere” (§ 24, *Zusatz* 3). Here he evokes the Mosaic myth of the Fall. Man is sinful by nature, and here we need no sophisticated theory to argue that humankind transgresses on itself and within itself, that it surpasses limit and restraint, and by definition, this is the same function ascribed to thinking itself. Thinking violates innocence; it breaches simplicity and breaks up unities through instituting negation, difference and self-reflection as internal relation. As Hegel puts it, “It is thinking that both inflicts the wound and heals it again” (§ 24, *Zusatz* 3). In the Garden lies the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, the cognition of good and evil; and herein stands our “entry into the antithesis,” the forbidden, the realm of the *not*. Cognition wants to surpass itself, to explore new territory, to enact its desire, the desire to know, and to transgress its curtailment of knowledge. This is



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the saga of the human spirit (*Geist*) as mind discontent with its immediacy, the fate of desire enslaved as self-relation wanting to satiate the lack.

What Hegel concludes is nothing other than profound: mankind by nature is evil, not because we are born of original sin, but because we think. It is only on the condition that we are autonomous subjects that make us evil, for this is the price of freedom, one that “wills in his particularity without reference to the universal,” that is, without considering others. This is why Hegel concludes that “evil” is individual “subjectivity.” In other words, our subjective experiences and actions are the locus of ignobility, which stand in opposition to an objective corollary holding itself up to be a universal ideal, namely, humanity’s symbolic godhead.

The Greeks defined truth through a privative expression—ἀ-λήθεια, through the *via negativa*, a negation or reversal of the closed, the unseen. Evil is disclosed through its openings, or more precisely, through its openness into the light of being. Evil as appearance is everywhere, even if hidden, concealed or non-manifest, dwelling below in the cellar of non-appearance, waiting to be born, unveiled, released. Evil’s disclosedness or unconcealment reveals a particular truth about the inherent nature of our *pathos*, one that feels compelled to no longer remain hidden. This holding fuels a festering that cannot be contained, as it is destined to make itself known, to show itself, to shine. The shining of evil is the face of man, the image of a fallen ideal, the petty iteration of subjectivity, the human mirror of self-negativity.

## The Ethics of Evil

We live in a sick society, one chosen yet unconsciously determined. Here evil is the natural consequence of the cost of freedom. We kill people for this cost, for the privilege, politics and principle of freedom, itself a lamentable and ethically dubious dilemma. Military intelligence has studied and strategized about the best way to kill people, to deracinate, to dismember their spirits, to rob them of soul, to crush entire peoples of their dignity to the degree that warfare and state murder have become both a technological and mechanized industry. A weapon is an instrument designed to kill—from the steel and bronze age to a drone. The atomic bomb was invented for one thing: human extermination.

The technology of evil is witnessed everyday on our television sets, from Wall Street to mass scale corporate corruption, to Internet fraud and cyber bullying, all abetted by advances in computer science. The use of global information exchange, digital communication, social media, robotics, nanotechnology and the engineering of terror has become its own science. From WikiLeaks and Edward Snowden to the Arab Spring and *Charlie Hebdo*, no nation is immune from its own homegrown transgressions. Sometimes the craft or art of *techne* enlists a certain psychological intelligence condoned through state torture, such as inducing learned helplessness through waterboarding and “rectal rehydration” at Guantanamo or rape warfare used in the ethnic cleansing campaigns perpetrated in Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo and Rwanda.



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The ethics of evil is the distortion of an inverse relation, namely, the justification of self-righteousness while perpetrating evil under the guise of moral superiority. When ethical arguments are employed to justify evil acts, we reason in a hegemonic circle of self-interest that betrays a philosophy of right, even if such actions are deemed necessary in order to combat an identifiable threat. Ethical rationale can be exercised by any individual, group or nation state to legitimate its activities and foreign policies affecting other lives regardless of the legitimacy of one's belief system, veracity of events or the flimsiness of moral reasoning employed. Under the rubric of national security and the crusade against terror, people simply "disappeared" into CIA custody, were detained against their wills without criminal charges laid, and systemically subjected to the use of "enhanced interrogation techniques," a euphemism for torture, in the hopes that reliable intelligence could be procured despite the legal and ethical prohibitions against torture instituted since the Geneva Conventions' forbiddance of it even during times of war. Not only is this a good example of moral hypocrisy under the justification of state ethics, as are drone attacks, military commissions and mass electronic surveillance by a superpower that bases its global political platform on democracy, freedom and human rights, it furthermore underscores the universality of national self-interest at the expense of democracy itself.

When nation is against nation, narcissistic national identity forms a firm antithesis against the other that becomes legalized within state foreign policy or totalitarian rule, even if duped or deluded. Under the Bush Administration following 9/11, the United States manufactured a war on terror because it needed to have enemies to pillory as revenge for its castrated ego. Here the Other becomes alien, a xenophobic object prone to hurt us. And after they found Saddam Hussein tucked away down a spider hole, there were no weapons of mass destruction to be found. But he served a utilitarian public purpose: he was the symbolic Bad Man who was put to death under state execution, itself a practice deemed evil despite enjoying a cathartic welcome by the West.

We may readily observe the paranoid position at work on a global scale: otherness is the enemy. This primal fear is even further spread within our own nations and communities, where private lives are under state surveillance, neighbors spy upon neighbors, race riots are on the rise, and home invasions are the norm. Under Big Brother, anyone could disappear. And with global economic unrest due to the fuel crisis, Russia's infringement on the Ukraine to seemingly attempt to recover its lost Soviet Union has generated a new paranoia where citizens can't speak freely due to fear of police arrest or public assassination. Paradoxically, after the country had lost almost half of its value and people couldn't afford a mortgage payment, the nation's approval ratings for Vladimir Putin skyrocketed. Whereas in the United States, the disgruntled public craves a swing of the pendulum toward any politician selling hope for a recovering economy, Russia can't get enough of its leader while blaming the greedy West for its own financial malaise.



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When the class genocide in Rwanda occurred, initiated by rival ethnic tensions between the Hutus and Tutsis, where mass mayhem organized by Hutu paramilitary personnel and locals having much to gain from the systematic extermination of the Tutsis, the world remained curiously passive and silent. Even after reports of entire villages and individual family members killing their own kind with machetes and the crudest of utensils were known to be factual, the West looked on as a detached spectator unwilling to do anything until it was too late. Lethargic in its enthusiasm to intervene, after nearly a million dead, world superpowers finally felt motivated to lift a finger to stop the genocide at the U.N.'s beckoning. The Dark Continent, I suggest, held little value to democratic and developed countries who had little to gain and many economic costs to bear for intervening in a country that is (symbolically) associated with poverty, famine, AIDS, overpopulation and disease, hence the alien Other. But when SARS, Swine-Flu (H1N1) and Ebola can conjure up the paranoid position and threaten a global epidemic, the world has become more gracious and attuned to social realities that affect us all. The cold hard facts are that some peoples and countries are valued over others based upon their discernible worth, others on their discernible threat. Even humanitarian aid is never devoid of political self-interest, especially if it means thwarting global anxiety.

Is it evil not to think of other peoples, cultures and continents, to not consider their needs and social challenges? This would not only imply an admonition as failure to acquire self-consciousness and empathic attunement for the other, but incite an intransigent condemnation for not caring to do so in the first place. Yet Levinasian ethics barely occur to the masses engrossed in their everyday lives, let alone being handed down a moral sentence for not thinking about the plight of the disenfranchised abstract sufferer residing somewhere in an arbitrary land. It is too much for the individual psyche to bear; that's why it is turned over to the collective social psyche to contemplate and do something about. Even in the most well-intentioned and conscientious soul who envisions a better humanity and wishes to serve altruistic causes, in the end we do what we can, because that's all we can do. Is it evil that we don't do more, that we cease to try because we value our own needs over others? Or do we merely accept our humanism that we cannot live up to the demands of our own ideals we place on ourselves? Here I am reminded of Hegel's beautiful soul: when we become aware of our imperfections we bear an unhappy consciousness. Here the self is divided: we can posit the Ideal but simply can't actualize it. Here moral lassitude becomes another banality.

## Institutionalization

When we think about the institutionalization of evil in recent times, from colonial imperialism, totalitarianism and fascism, we often think of large scale suprastructures that superimpose an oppressive bureaucratic machinery on its citizenry, but we may observe how these unconscious cultural fantasies operate as





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entrenched ideologies unquestioned by the masses. The caste system in India may be said to foster a form of institutional racism where social class is determined by blood, history, custom and skin color. The upper class or Brahmins hold wealth, power, status and education, while the Untouchables are held in contempt and allocated the most unpleasant and revolting of all vocations in the most horrid conditions of sanitation, domestic servitude and back-breaking manual labor. Aryan descendants with lighter-skinned pigments are more aesthetically valued while the darker-skinned Indians are viewed as ugly, an attitudinal phenomenon we may also witness in Africa. There is an air of superiority by birth and provenance and an aura of disdain, condemnation and vilification of the underclass, even though the advantaged groups rely on the sweat and subservience of the underclass for their privileged lifestyles. Huge discrepancies between rich and poor determine the social infrastructure, where the elite govern the masses, political and social institutions are rife with corruption and abuse of power, and the citizenry have no tangible access to housing, education or work. The subcontinent is suffocating in pollution, and every major city is a conglomeration of slums. Poverty, death, disease, crime, infestation, filth, lack of sewage, vagrants, panhandlers, homelessness, frantic desperation and abject hopelessness abound; the majority of its billion people are illiterate, disenfranchised and penniless. In fact, India has the highest illiteracy rate in the world (United Nations, 2014), followed by China and Sub-Saharan Africa. Abandoned children, the deformed and handicapped and destitute mothers with emaciated babies in their arms roam the streets begging for food. An endless swarm of hovering hands pounce on tourists and locals alike hoping to get a rupee or American dollar for free.

Fairy tale romances are nonexistent, for marriages are arranged by patriarchy based on caste, birth and class as a union of families, not love, where relationships are determined, not freely chosen, lest one betrays the family, established social order and the entrenched cultural tradition that sustains this institutional practice. It is no wonder that Buddhism branched off from Hinduism and Islam was successful in converting much of the underclass, each under the teachings that all men are equal regardless of race, caste or custom.

In other developing countries, such as in the Middle East, where despots, dictators and autocrats rule their totalitarian regimes, women and children are systematically oppressed, often under the edicts of Islam. Here we may observe a widespread institutional practice in most Arab countries that grant men both legislative and property rights over their wives and children, where strict observance of Muslim law is harshly imposed, including denying women access and rights to education, individual autonomy and independent finances in order to keep them enslaved, including controlling their dress, physical mobility and behavioral practices, and granting them virtually no criminal protection or civil liberty rights under the law. Women and children may be beaten or raped by men with practical immunity from prosecution, and transgressions by females may be punishable by death. Public stoning, immolations and honor killings (from Pakistan





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to Canada), where women turn on other accused women, including mothers and family members who are willing participants, are salient phenomena fueled by culturally engrained misogyny.

In vast parts of China and India, female (sex-selected) infanticide is ubiquitous due to the cultural devaluation of women. Concentrated in northeast Africa, Yemen, Iraqi Kurdistan, the Middle East and portions of Asia, female genital mutilation (circumcision) is legally imposed against their will (usually in childhood), often under horrendous unsanitary conditions that permanently disfigure and endanger the survival of its victims, and condoned under the dominion of male patriarchy. These primitive practices are designed to fortify a man's power and authority by turning women into functional objects of domestication, obedience and sexualization where only a man has the right to pleasure. Furthermore, in many of these countries, as throughout South and East Asia, children are sold into slavery by parents to pay for family debt or for profit, as are human organs offered on the black market to help pay for passage to another land. Human trafficking and the child sex trade industry have become an international pandemic, often abetted by institutional corruption and systemic pathology thriving on high profit margins with no signs of a conscience.

Israeli legislative policy is designed to promote and privilege an exclusive Jewish state. Israel actively recruits immigration from European Jewry, hence lending asylum and giving economic and material benefits (including housing, transportation and tax-shelters) to Jews over non-Jewish Israelis, imposes higher costs of living and excise taxes on domestic Palestinians and other Israeli Arabs who refuse to live and work in the West Bank, although entire generations had previously owned property and run family businesses throughout the country before the declaration of Israel. A democratic state that maintains class privilege and financially rewards one ethnic group over others who live and work in the same country, own property, and are equally part of the same society would be an unfathomable occurrence in North America.

Israel is concerned with occupying rather than compromising over disputed land, and retaliates with military bombardments that deliberately target civilian neighborhoods where innocent lives are lost. And with Palestinian resistance compelled to fight and galvanize subversive insurgencies and initiate clandestine missile fire, keeping hate and resentment alive, Israeli citizens break out the lawn chairs, crack a beer, and watch the military pick off houses in Gaza. Here each side points the finger while calling the other "terrorist." This is a good example of the paranoid-schizoid position at play where radical splitting and projective identification leads to reiterations of violence as proportional exchange, like a ping-pong ball traversing each side of the net until one opponent slams a victory. But this is followed by endless rounds of repetition in fixed perpetuation of retaliatory aggression to the point that systemic acrimony toward the Other justifies state institutional racism and military barrages. It is understandable that



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Israel suffers from dread due to centuries of European and Russian anti-Semitism while living in the shadow of the Holocaust, but with the messianic clash of religions and fundamentalist supporters of Islamic State (e.g., ISIS/ISIL) recently killing Jews in Paris and Copenhagen, the tinderbox could explode without warning, especially if Iran continues with its nuclear development program, a spark that could ignite a Third World War.

## The Evil Within

When my daughter was not quite four years old, my wife gave birth to our second child. Upon bringing our daughter to see her mother and newborn baby sister for the first time in the hospital with roses in hand, we visited them both at bedside, our new baby swathed in a blanket. After receiving a flower to give to her mother, our older daughter took the stem and started poking her baby sister in the belly as if the rose were a knife. To my daughter, this wasn't her baby sister, but rather a *thing*, an intruding object that commanded special attention and displaced her importance in a fraction of a second. There was nothing playful about her action: she wanted to hurt or kill it, for she wanted it to die, or simply vanish. It came to steal away her mother. It had taken her place. We may joke about Oedpalization, sibling rivalry over parents' affections or the feelings of abandonment and hatred for the replacement object, but there was an air of innocence to this event, an evil normalcy, so to speak, conveyed in this automatic behavior.

Everyone is intrinsically evil: it is a structural invariant of the human psyche as normativity. Why is this so? Because everyone is predisposed to aggressivity and violence, to mistreating others, to intentionally inflicting verbal, emotional, relational and/or physical pain, even abuse of various forms and vicious maliciousness no matter how unsavory the thought, or how one vociferously objects to or disavows such characteristics, or how saintly a person may appear. Show me one person who has committed no evil! Who has not demonstrated some form of violence? In Derrida's (1978) words, "A Being without violence would be a Being which would occur outside of the existent: nothing; non-history; non-occurrence; non-phenomenality" (p. 147). To uphold the proposition that there are humans without evil would be a ludicrous denial of our humanity.

Psychoanalysis has illuminated this psychological fact to the point that it bears no further justification or empirical demonstration, for all one has to do is observe a child in daycare or turn on the evening news. Our world is a festering cesspool of pathology, but we cannot say the same about the good. Goodness or virtue is not structurally intrinsic like evil; rather it is a developmental achievement acquired through socialization and education, unless one prefers to define goodness as a purely biological-ethological category belonging to our animal bodies, such as nurturing and protecting one's young. But this also requires aggression to meet its aim. Animals kill in order to eat, nurture, protect and defend. Just as this innate



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inclination belongs to our natural constitutions, so does our dispositional urge toward violence. It is as natural as breathing to have aggressive fantasies and to kill—for food, self-preservation, out of fear, protection of others and so forth, hence falling under the rubric of natural law theory. The naïve notion that we are born good and become bad is as infantile as the most guileless fantasy that we have fallen from God's grace into sin by natural desire, corruption and choice. Not only is this illogical, for it would mean denying our embodied facticity, it also negates all empirical facts that we are libidinal and aggressive creatures by virtue of our evolutionary phylogenetic pressures. Many psychoanalysts today do not take seriously the notion of drive theory or phylogeny, when it is a biological fact that human psychology is conditioned on and derived from our naturalized material embodiment. It is beyond dispute. We are capable of anything, from killing to loving, to giving into instinct and impulse, to ethical sociality, to self-sacrifice for an ideal, to transcending our basic animality for the greater Other.

It seems superfluous to even have to argue for the obvious, but I shall briefly recapitulate why evil is structurally inherent as part of our unconscious ontology. Roughly, the argument goes, because we (the human race) are biologically conditioned toward aggression through dispositional violence, it is a natural predisposition that can be both activated and inhibited. Potentiality (< Lat. *potentia*) is enough to warrant the ontological label of dispositional evil, for if there were neither a potential for evil, its inhibition or its actualization, then we would not be human. The potentiality is inherent within everyone, and a variety of circumstances can kindle or defuse its possible occurrence. These sociological factors do not concern us here, but suffice it to say that drives are stimulated by external factors.

The inner a priori ontological preconditions toward evil, however, do not mean that all human beings will enact their evil tendencies. This is subject to many factors including inhibition, defense, compromise and transformation, as well as their failures, which always stand in relation to social systems, institutionalization and intersubjective relations. The point here is to emphasize that to be human is to always stand in relation to the evil within. In fact, our humanization requires us to confront our evilization. We would not be human without such a confrontation, for this demands that we examine our interior and social environs and analyze what is preferably good from what is characteristically bad. Although this conundrum is a contentious enterprise that is inscrutable and open to many estimations, it is also a social requirement that influences the parameters of institutional law and order. Without such dialogue, we would merely be slaves to self-interest and biological instinct at our own peril.

It is rather elementary to remind the reader of the primacy of the drives (*Triebe*); I do not find it necessary to regurgitate a dissertation of their defense (cf. Mills, 2010). The basis of Freudian theory from its inception allowed for the polymorphous perversity of the drives if not for the simple fact that desire has no



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bounds. Desire is free-floating and can attach to any object. While desire is unbounded in itself, only a drive can appear bound, whereby its aim is to achieve satisfaction. Although drives may be temporarily sated by infusing or incorporating an object in reality or fantasy (which is completely variable and arbitrary), desire is always an incessant craving that is never satiated. Because the fantasized object of a wish is always transient and never permanent, unconscious fantasy and its potential foci are fodder for the imagination ripe for the enactment of evil. This means that our libidinal investments will always entail aggressive complementarities in the strife and gratification of any wish fraught with controversy, competition, compromise formation, and defensive countermeasures that define psychic process. This structural tension produces antithetical dialectical relations that influence the internality and manifestation of our *pathos*.

Whether derived from instinct or simple learning theory, the pleasure-pain principle that is operative in all psychological motivation driving human action is an ontological given. The human organism is hardwired or preprogrammed to process mental events in concord with basic biological parameters that inform our disposition to think and act. But these parameters are nevertheless subject to modification, realignment, and redistribution of psychic energies that give shape and content to their contextual expressions. Our ontological thrownness presupposes the logic of the interior based on a simple economy of splitting objects of experience into counterparts, each with a positive and negative vector. This dialectical division must be instituted in thought, as Kant, Fichte and Hegel demonstrate at the most fundamental level, and hence a determination of difference through negation is unconsciously interjected into every mental act while mediating any experiential object. What follows is that early fantasy life is dominated by evil impulses, sadistic urges, primitive affects and paranoid anxieties we project onto objects and re-introject or re-gather back into our internal constitutions. Here we may say that inborn aggression as instinct is a *primary evil*, for it is structurally constituted in nature as dispositional violence and not merely chosen. What is chosen is how it shall be autonomously processed by mind. That which is not equiprimordially given a priori is retroactively mediated by consciousness. Since the disposition-toward-violence is ontologically given phylogenetically, it is no surprise that we see it everywhere.

The human psyche has a peculiar tendency to use and abuse objects of functional immediacy, namely, for disposable means of gratification. This is often hidden and unacknowledged because it takes place behind the back of consciousness. The phylogenetic or tribal evolutionary origin of aggression as dispositional emotional violence is part of our thrownness into the human race. The theoretic speculation of an inherent death drive (*Todestrieb*), although controversial, does not preclude the reality of dispositional violence oriented toward human aggression, but rather accounts for it as a destructive ontological principle channeling negation and conflict within a psychobiological framework. The human psyche is born/e of negativity and radical splitting, which initiates a procreative or generative process





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that is simultaneously life enhancing yet paradoxically self-destructive. The logic of the interior that suffuses unconscious organization fuels this antithetical impulse as a will toward life and death, hence creating antinomies and impasses in their ability to meet resolve or find a synthetic node of unification. But as Freud (1920) reminds us, before the will toward murder as an externalized aggressive fantasy belying our true primitive natures, there is also a primal impulse of suicidal self-negation that may be equally enacted through volitional eruptions in psychic space. The analyzed mind cannot deny these human predilections, because they materialize every day in the clinic and the social world, which tells us something irrefutably profound about human nature. The human animal fights the evil within on a daily basis as an inherent self-renunciation we are obliged to accept on the one hand, and as the refusal to take ownership of our desire on the other, that which is part of our clashing dialectical symmetries, hence the formal dynamics underlying the structural tensions bolstering our unconscious *pathos*. Here self-repudiation is only possible on the condition that we secure a psychic space for the fulfillment of our pathologies, where we may unconsciously enjoy our evil fantasies mired in the kingdom of *jouissance*, that realm of excess so satisfying yet so repugnant that it *cuts*.

The dispositional wickedness of urge, affect, fantasy, behavioral impulse and thought is scarcely capable of being eradicated, only mitigated. What ultimately matters is control over its enactment. This is the functional introduction of an ethical social introject as a prohibitive law or ideal that facilitates human sublimation over brute instinct often initiated by empathic identification with others based in human attachment. But the fantasy life of world masses carries on in a sordid underworld where satisfaction is achieved through the contemplation of the nefarious as a fantasized internal drama that brings about both horror and relief, but only on the condition that it is consigned to fantasy with our self-reflective awareness of such. Those who are not able to maintain an internal reflective ego or mentalized stance of self-consciousness may beckon the dark call of the shadow, the demonic, or whatever term we may wish to employ to signify the destructive forces of evil. Thinking evil thoughts and wishing evil deeds or events is not the same as doing them. This defensive containment of self-restraint makes all the difference between a civilized human being and a criminal. And this frames our problematic: it is in the locus of decision, of concreteness, where we find evil. Despite the fact that we are all dispositionally evil, it may never come to light.

So here we have a crucial difference in the value parameters we assign to our definition of evil. Although we may be constitutionally predisposed toward evil, it does not always appear. That is, evil dispositions and intentions may be relegated to thought rather than actions, hence inhibited and transformed. What this means is that evil remains hidden in some while disclosed, unconcealed or enacted by others. This makes the qualia and empirical quantification of evil contingent upon evil's modes of manifestation, or how it appears. But our pithy unsavory conclusion is anything but trite: everyone by nature is evil; it's just a matter of degree.





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CHAPTER

5

# BEYOND THE FEMININE PRINCIPLE



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*The Plural Psyche*  
by Andrew Samuels

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# BEYOND THE FEMININE PRINCIPLE

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In this chapter, I look at developments in analytical psychology concerning gender identity, gender characteristics, and gender role. This is set against the background of a general debate about psychology of sex and gender and the question of sex-based psychology. As in the previous chapters, the linkage between gender certainty and gender confusion is a central concern, as is the tracking of fluidity, flexibility, and a pluralistic ethos in connection with gender.

## The gender debate

Some questions: are men innately more aggressive than women? Does that explain their social and political dominance? Is there such a thing as innately 'masculine' or innately 'feminine' psychology?

In his book *Archetype: a Natural History of the Self*, Anthony Stevens drew on the work of the sociobiologists Wilson and Goldberg to reach the conclusion that 'male dominance is a manifestation of the "psychophysiological reality" of our species. In addition [there is] genetic and neurophysiological evidence relating to the biology of sexual differentiation...Patriarchy, it seems is the natural condition of mankind' (Stevens 1982: 188–92).

In *Jung and the Post-Jungians*, I drew on the work of Janet Sayers to critique Stevens's position (Samuels 1985a: 220–2). Sayers felt that those opposed to changes in women's role had appropriated biology to their cause and she demolished the sociobiological case in a witty and learned way. For instance, Wilson quoted studies that showed that boys were consistently more able than girls at mathematics but that girls have a higher degree of verbal ability. And boys are, in Wilson's view, more aggressive in social play. From these bases, Wilson concluded that 'even with identical education and equal access to all professions men are likely to continue to play a disproportionate role in political life, business and science' (quoted in Sayers 1982: 77). She wryly remarks that it is hard to see how males' lesser verbal ability leads to their being better fitted for political life. Surely, if biology really does determine social role, it should be the other way round?

Recently I came across the work of another academic psychologist, Gerda Siann (1985). She comprehensively surveyed the various research findings that purport to link aggression to the male hormones. She concluded that 'no specific areas in the brain or nervous system have been pinpointed as controlling aggression' and that an overview of the repeated studies shows that androgenized girls do not seem more aggressive than their peers, siblings, or mothers. Overandrogenized males do not display noteworthy dominance, assertion, or aggression in spite of the fact that their greater size would guarantee victory (they seem to be rather gentle people). What is more, Siann's careful reading of the research findings shows that castration has no effect on the overall aggressive behaviour of sex offenders, save in relation to actual sexual behaviour. Finally, plasma testosterone levels do not seem to



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relate directly to aggressive behaviour. Siann's overall conclusion was:

the evidence does not show any clear and unambiguous relationship between male hormones and the propensity to display violent behaviour or feel aggressive emotion. Indeed the likelihood of such a simple unidirectional relationship has been thrown into doubt by two additional lines of investigation. The first shows that the secretion of male hormones is itself directly affected by environmental and social variables, and the second is concerned with the speculation that female hormones may also be implicated in violent behaviour and aggressive emotion.

(Siann 1985: 37)

Siann also investigated the published research linking genetic inheritance and aggression. Her findings, which make interesting reading when read in conjunction with the discussion in the next chapter on the hereditary factor in borderline disorder, was that there is no evidence for the genetic transmission of aggression or violence (Siann 1985: 39). *In sum, there is no corporeal innate factor in aggression.* The possibility remains that there is a non-corporeal innate factor – that aggression is linked to sex by invisible, psychological factors. We shall consider that possibility in a moment.

To sustain Stevens's sociobiological viewpoint, female aggression has to be overlooked or minimized. What is more, there is a confusion between 'aggression' and 'dominance'. Not all human dominance depends on aggression. We have to explain phenomena such as altruistic or self-sacrificing behaviour, conscience, the checks placed on the power of a leader, human capacity for collective decision-making, and so forth.

What follows is a discussion of the third question with which we started this section: are there such things as innate 'masculine' and, more pertinently perhaps, innate 'feminine' psychologies? If there are, then there could be a non-corporeal innate factor in aggression.

## **Beyond the feminine principle**

It is hard to write flexibly and fluidly about what is flexible and fluid. The danger when trying to reflect on our current preoccupation with gender is that we might become too clear and too organized – a reaction formation to the inevitable anxiety (and guilt) we experience at finding that what we thought was solid and fixed is perforated and shifting. Humanity is not just divided into women and men but also into those who are certain about gender and those who are confused about gender. As we have seen, getting the balance between gender certainty and gender confusion is a hard task. Clinically, we see the negative effects of an excess of either position and working with individual patients in the area of gender identity is a kind of research work before moving on to the collective stage and a wider scale.



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For gender confusions have as important a role to play as gender certainties. They contribute something imaginative to social and political reform and change. I refer to 'confusion' and not to something that sounds more laudable like 'flexibility' because, experientially, that is precisely what it is, no bones about it. Not for the first time in psychology, we can fashion the strengths out of an apparent weakness. To do this, I have found that I have had to learn from women about what they have been through.

Does use of the word confusion not imply the possibility of definition and clarity concerning gender? The way I use the word 'certainty' in relation to gender is intended to suggest that, while clear definition is theoretically possible, it is, for the most part, illusory and/or problematic.

In order to discuss the subject at all, the distinction between sex and gender should be noted, allowing for some overlap as well. *Sex* (male and female) refers to anatomy and the biological substrate to behaviour, to the extent that there is one. *Gender* (masculine and feminine) is a cultural or psychological term, arising in part from observations and identifications within the family, hence relative and flexible, and capable of sustaining change. Now, in some approaches, particularly in analytical psychology, what can happen is that a form of determinism creeps in and the invariant nature of gender is assumed, just as if gender characteristics and qualities were as fixed as sexual ones. The history of women shows that change is possible just because the social meaning of womanhood is malleable. But when this is ignored, as by Stevens, the possibilities of change, other than as part of ordinary maturation and individuation, are lost.

Is there such a thing as a 'feminine psychology'? I'll begin with a general discussion, then consider whether there is a feminine psychology that applies to women. In a moment, I'll look at the 'feminine' in relation to men, and, after that, at femininity and masculinity as metaphors.

Males and females do have experiences that vary markedly. But it is a huge step from that to a claim that they actually *function* sufficiently discrepantly psychologically for us to speak of two distinct psychologies. The evidence concerning this is muddled and hard to assess. For instance, the discovery that boys build towers and girls build enclosures when they are given bricks can be taken to show a *similarity* of functioning rather than difference (which is what is usually claimed). Both sexes are interested in their bodies and, possibly, in the differences between male and female bodies. Both sexes express that interest in the same way – *symbolically*, in play with bricks. Or, put in another form, *both sexes approach the difference between the sexes in the same way*. The differences that we see in gender role and gender identity can then be looked at as having arisen in the same manner. The psychological *processes* by which a male becomes an aggressive businessman and a female a nurturing and submissive housewife are the *same* and one should not be deceived by the dissimilarity in the end product.





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What I have been describing is not a woman's relation to an *innate* femininity or to an *innate* masculinity. Rather I am talking of her *relation to the phenomenon of difference*. Then we can consider the social or cultural structures erected on the basis of that difference. Each woman lives her life in interplay with such difference. This leads at once to questions of gender role (for example, how a woman can best express her aggression in our culture) but these questions need not be couched in terms of innate femininity or innate masculinity, nor in terms of a feminine–masculine spectrum. Rather, they might be expressed in terms of *difference*. In the example, the difference between aggression and submission needs to be seen as different from the difference between men and women! Or, put another way, whatever differences there might be between women and men are not illuminated or signified by the difference between submission and aggression. In the previous two chapters, we have been exploring how gender difference is formed in relations between parents and children and by cultural and social organization.

I am aware that *men* are said to have access to the 'feminine', or to the 'feminine principle' and I used to think that such an unremittingly interior view was the jewel in the Jungian crown. Now I am not so sure. If we're attempting to describe psychological performance, we have to be sure *why* terms with gendered associations and appellations are being used at all. Otherwise we end up with statements such as that 'masculine' aggression is available to women via their relation to the animus, or 'feminine' reflection in the man via his anima. But aggression is part of woman and reflection is part of man. What is more, there are so many kinds of aggression open to women that even current attempts to speak of a woman's aggression as 'feminine' rather than 'masculine' still bind her as tightly as ever. Let us begin to speak merely of aggression. Gender engenders confusion – and this is made worse when gender terms are used exclusively in an inner way. When we speak of 'inner' femininity in a man, we bring in all the unnecessary problems of reification and substantive abstraction that I have been describing. We still cannot assume that psychological *functioning* is different in men and women, *though we know that the creatures 'man' and 'woman' are different*.

The question of 'difference' brings us to a point where we can play back these ideas into analytical psychology. From Jung's overall theory of opposites, which hamstring us by its insistence on contrasexuality ('masculine' assertion via the animus, etc.), we can extract the theme of *difference*. The notion of difference, I suggest, can help us in the discussion about gender. Not innate 'opposites', which lead us to create an unjustified psychological division expressed in lists of antithetical qualities, each list yearning for the other list so as to become 'whole'. A marriage made on paper. No, I am referring to the fact, image, and social reality of difference *itself*. Not what differences between women and men there are, or have always been; if we pursue that, we end up captured by our captivation and obsession with myth and with the eternal, part of the legacy from Jung. I am interested in *what difference is like*, what the experience of difference is like (and



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how that experience is distorted in the borderline disorders). Not what a woman *is*, but what being a woman is *like*. Not the archetypal structuring of woman's world but woman's personal experience in today's world. Not the *meaning* of a woman's life but her *experience* of her life. Each person remains a 'man' or a 'woman', but what that means to each becomes immediate and relative, and hence capable of generational expansion and cultural challenge. My suggestion has been that *paternal deficits constrict the expansion and truncate the challenge*.

In both the collective, external debate about gender characteristics and the personal, internal debate about gender identity, the question of 'masculine' and 'feminine' is best left in suspension – even, and the word is used advisedly, in some confusion. *'Gender confusion' is a necessary antidote to gender certainty* and has its own creative contribution to make. This is particularly true in the treatment of borderline disorders, as we shall see in the next chapter. For, when we consider gender and the borderline we will see how gender confusion and gender certainty can operate in isolation from each other. *Inadvertently, those who propound a 'feminine principle' play into and replicate the dynamics of unconscious gender certainty, denying gender confusion*.

It is probably fair to say that post-Jungian analytical psychology has become preoccupied with gender certainty and gender confusion in its concern with the 'feminine principle'. Here, I am not referring to the writings on women and 'feminine psychology' by Jung and his early circle of followers. The problems with that body of work are well known and often repeated. But in the 1970s and 1980s, mainly in the United States, women writers in analytical psychology have set out to revise, or revolutionize, the early work. Such writers are struggling to be 'post-Jungian' in their attempt to critique those of Jung's ideas that seem unsatisfactory or just plain wrong without dismissing Jung altogether.

The reason why there has been a concentration on the 'feminine principle' in recent Jungian writing is that it has provided a means to celebrate the specificity of women's identity, life, and experience. In addition, having the notion of a 'feminine principle' in mind helps to make a critique of culture out of personal confrontations with it. The basic desire of feminists who are involved in Jungian psychology has been to refuse and refute the denigration of women that is perceived in analytical psychology, to bring the feminine gender in from the condescending margins, and to promote an alternative philosophy of life to that expressed in the power institutions of a male-dominated society.

Taken as a whole, and I realize I am generalizing, feminism which draws on Jung's ideas stands out from other varieties, with which I feel more in sympathy, in two main ways. Both of these stem from Jung's approach, resist eradication, and cause great difficulties. It is assumed that there is something eternal about *femininity* and, hence, about *women*; that women therefore display certain essential transcultural and ahistorical characteristics; and that these can be described in psychological terms. What is omitted is the ongoing role of the prevailing culture



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in the construction of the 'feminine' and a confusion develops between what is claimed to be eternal and what is currently observed to be the case. It is here that the deadweight of the heritage of archetypal theory is felt, but as the mirror image of Jung's problem. He assumed that there is something eternal about *women* and, hence, about *femininity*. As Young-Eisendrath (1987: 47) writes, 'certain beliefs about difference – for example, about gender and racial differences – have influenced our thinking about the meaning of symbolic representations, behaviours, style, and manner of people who are alien to the roots of our psychology in Switzerland'. She goes on to say that we need 'something more than maps and charts of our own design'.

I would like to say what I find problematic in the many attempts to locate eternal models or maps for the psychological activity of women in mythology and goddess imagery. When such imagery is used as a kind of role model or resource for a woman in her here-and-now pain and struggle, that is one thing. But when it is claimed that such endeavour is a reclamation of qualities and characteristics that once prevailed in human society only to be smashed by the patriarchy, then that is altogether more suspect. For it is a highly disputed point, to put it mildly, that such an era ever existed. Could this be a case of taking myth too literally? And isn't there a hidden danger here? For if men were to claim that they are in the direct line of psychic inheritance of the characteristics and qualities of gods and heroes, then we'd end up with the status quo, with things just as they are, for they couldn't be any other way. As far as role-modelling and resource provision goes, surely any woman, even or especially an analyst, can perform this task for another woman.

It could be argued that referring to a goddess as a role model or resource is to miss the point about what is special in a divine figure – the numinosity that attaches to such a figure and hence provides a special form of authority. I am not convinced by this argument, for any figure can constellate the kind of venerated transference that is exemplified in the mortal-divine relation. This is something well known to any and every analyst who has experienced an idealizing transference. If the numinosity is not what is specific to the goddess, then, as I suggested, it is her atemporality, that which is claimed as eternal and absolute in her.

The search for hidden sources of authority is a project constellated by what is seen as a flawed cultural tradition. But there may also be a 'flaw' in the project itself, for such a search demonstrates the very sense of weakness and lack of authority which it seeks to overcome. Engaging in a rivalrous search for female archetypes could lead to a new set of restrictions on female experience, as several writers have observed (Lauter and Rupprecht 1985: 9 discuss this point in detail).

Could we try to play the feminine principle in a pragmatic and not an eternal or absolute key? If so, then its truth would be measured, in William James's words, 'by the extent to which it brings us into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience' (1911: 157). We would have to start assembling material on the



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experience of difference as well as on the experience of womanhood and manhood. Sociologists and academic psychologists may have done this but depth psychologists have not – or not yet. Then, in Shorter's words, we would become less concerned with the 'image' of woman and more with 'likeness' to that image. She says: 'Likeness is consciousness of image and its embodiment. . . It is not a question of imitation; each person becomes in part and to the measure that he (sic) is able "like to" the image' (Shorter 1987: 40). Or in Caroline Stevens's words: 'as a woman, anything I do is feminine' (personal communication, 1987).

The second point of disagreement between feminism in analytical psychology and feminism generally has to do with the impression that much Jungian discourse on the 'feminine' seems directed away from political and social action. Dwelling upon interiority and feeling becomes an end in itself. So, just as middle-class Victorian women were believed to be the repository of sensibility and confined to hearth and home, in the Jungian manner of it, women in the nuclear age are meant to be mainly private creatures.

My concern is that much thinking and writing around the 'feminine principle' has opened a secret door into analytical psychology for the return of what is, paradoxically and ironically, an overstructured approach to psyche, heavily dependent upon abstraction and decidedly moralistic. What I'm suggesting is that much contemporary Jungian work on feminine psychology may be seen as far more of an 'imitation of Jung' than was consciously intended. The intention of rectifying Jung's mistakes and prejudices has been perverted.

Trawling the recent literature, I have been struck by the massiveness of the feminine problematic, signified in numerous phrases such as: feminine elements of being, feminine modality of being, femininity of self, feminine ways of knowing, feminine authority, feminine assertion, feminine reflection, feminine dimensions of the soul, primal feminine energy pattern, feminine power, feminine response, feminine creativity, feminine mysteries, feminine body, feminine subjectivity, feminine transformation. I could have quadrupled the list; for ease of reference, I have subsumed all these terms under the general heading of the 'feminine principle'.

Something oppressive has come into being – not, repeat not, because what is claimed as the *content* of the 'feminine principle' is oppressive but because celebrating the feminine has raised it to the status of an ego-ideal, leading to a simple and pointless reversal of power positions. Further, perhaps it is the shadow of feminism generally to make women feel inadequate when they don't come up to its mark – or cannot emulate notable feminist figures.

## Gender, metaphor, and the body

I would like to say a few words now about the literal and metaphoric relationships between anatomy and psychology to draw together the psychological and



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scientific aspects of the gender debate, and because I will be talking again about this towards the end of the chapter. A literal determinism has seduced those who seek to make a simple equation between body and psyche. We do not really know what the relationship between them is but it is probably *indirect*. The fact that a penis penetrates and a womb contains tells us absolutely nothing about the psychological qualities of those who actually possess such organs. One does not have to be a clinician to recognize penetrative women and receptive men – nor to conclude that psychology has projected its fantasies onto the body.

A claim is often made that a female's body contains in it certain qualities and characteristics that lead to there being a quite specific and innate female psychology, based on the female body and quite divorced from male psychology, based on the male body. Now, as I just mentioned, there seems to be no problem with the idea that males and females have experiences of their bodies as different from the other sex's body. But the argument that innate psychological differences between the sexes are based on the body has serious and insidious difficulties in it. It *sounds* so grounded, so reasonable, so commonsensical, so different from social or ideological styles of exploring gender issues. However, if psychological activity is body-based then, as body is more or less a constant over the entire history of humanity, body-based psychological theory can only *support* the horrendous gender situation with which we are faced just now. For, if it is body-based, how can it be altered? It must be an inevitability and we would have to agree with Stevens when he argues that 'patriarchy is the natural condition of mankind' (Stevens 1982: 188).

Of course, psychology cannot be split off from the body. But the link is on a deeper level even than that of anatomical or endocrinological distinctiveness. The link between psyche and body surely refers to the body *as a whole* – its moods and movements, its pride and shame, its rigour and its messiness. On this level, the body in question is already a psychological body, a psychesoma, an imaginal body even – providing a whole range of experiences. Sometimes, this imaginal body provides crossover experiences, 'masculine' for women and 'feminine' for men. When the link between psyche and body is envisioned in terms of the body as a whole, then whether that body is anatomically male or anatomically female is less significant. But I am not attempting to deny anyone's experience of their body, nor to dispute the value of paying attention to the body. Indeed, the descriptions in this book of the father's relations with his children are markedly oriented towards physical experience and activity.

Even on a literal, bodily level, recent advances in anatomical research show that things are not what they seem to be. This renders attempts to link bodily and psychological characteristics, even of a subtle and metaphorical kind, highly relative, mutable, and conditioned by the state of knowledge and belief at any one time. In her book *Eve's Secrets* (1987), Lowndes engages in a comparative study of women's and men's sex organs. It turns out that the results of such studies depend





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completely upon what is compared. For instance, we usually compare penis and vagina, or penis and clitoris. But what if we compare the penis to the sum of clitoris, urethra, and vagina (the so-called CUV)? Then, according to Lowndes, the fact that the clitoris does have a much longer and deeper structure under the skin that merely culminates in the visible crown means that the female possesses an organ equal in size to the penis and composed of the same erectile material. What is more, a woman has a glans – this is not to be found on her clitoris but close by the opening of her urethra, a raised area as yet possessing no consensual medical name. Looking at the man, Lowndes points out how little is known about the inside of the penis and suggests that in the *corpora cavernosa* there is an area, or spot, that is as sensitive as the clitoris and performs the same functions: a male clitoris.

Lowndes has also found that men and women both have erections, though the charging with blood is visible more markedly in the male. She has also established, by means of careful test measurement, that there is a female ejaculation, composed of fluid that is neither urine nor vaginal secretion.

Anatomical differences between sex organs of men and women are, on the basis of Lowndes's work, quite literally skin-deep. *However, the point is not whether she is right or wrong about it but rather to underline the problems with regarding the body as a fixed element in a body-psyche linkage.* Again, this is not to deny such a link, merely to point out the impossibility of dismissing fantasy and/or changing knowledge from our eventual conclusions.

A further instance of the psychological significance of such work is that it is not at all new. In 400 BC Hippocrates said that men and women both ejaculate. In AD 150 Galen said that the vagina and ovaries are penis and testicles 'inside out'. In 1561 Fallopio discovered, as well as his tubes, that the clitoris has deep structures. In 1672 Regnier de Graaf looked for and found evidence of female ejaculation. It seems that what we say is the case about the body is already psychological (e.g. Freud or, indeed, Kinsey).

Why is this issue of the body as a possible base for sex-specific psychology so critical? I can give two suggestions about this. First, the whole cultural versus innate gender debate is, or has become numinous. If I have taken one side rather than advancing a multifactorial theory, this is partly because it is what I think, partly because that's my personal style, and partly because a clash of doctrines is where the life in psychology is to be found. Again, though I think I'm right, it does not matter so much whether I am right or wrong, but whether what I am talking about can be recognized.

The second reason why the gender debate stirs us has to do with our ambivalence about our constitution, the psychological make-up that we bring into the world. On the one hand, how secure and fulfilling to know that one is quite definitely a man or a woman! I certainly feel a need for certainty and at no time do I suggest that there are no such entities as men or women. On the other hand, I am sure that



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anatomy is not destiny and am trying to work my resentment at the idea that it might be into a critique of those who tell me it is. There are no *direct* messages from the body.

Which leads back to the great problem with an overdependence in theory-making on the body's impact on psychology. If anatomy is destiny, then nothing can be done to change the position of women. So women who base their quest for a new and positive meaning for femininity on the body inadvertently undermine their own cause. On the contrary, we know how definitions of women and men change over time. Up until the end of the eighteenth century, for instance, representations of men in literature and drama quite often had them as crying – so different from this century, in which big boys don't cry. The body is not an icon in a vacuum.

It follows that animus and anima images are not of men and women because animus and anima qualities are 'masculine' and 'feminine'. No – here, for the individual woman or man, anatomy is a metaphor for the richness and potential of the 'other'. A man will imagine what is 'other' to him in the symbolic form of a woman – a being with another anatomy. A woman will symbolize what is foreign to her in terms of the kind of body she does not herself have. The so-called contrasexuality is more something 'contrapsychological'; anatomy is a metaphor for that. But anatomy is absolutely *not* a metaphor for any particular emotional characteristic or set of characteristics. That depends on the individual and on whatever is presently outside her or his conscious grasp and hence in need of being represented by a personification of the opposite sex. *The difference between you and your animus or anima is very different from the difference between you and a man or woman.* (I do realize that I am discussing animus and anima in their personified forms but I am bringing them in as illustrative of the indirect nature of the relation between body and psyche.)

What I am saying is that '*metaphor*' can be as seductively misleading and one-sided as '*literalism*'. Sometimes, it is claimed that 'masculine' and 'feminine' are metaphors (you know, 'just' metaphors) for two distinct *Weltanschauungen* or the typical styles of operating of the two cerebral hemispheres. Why can't we just talk of *Weltanschauungen* or just of hemispheres? When we bring in either masculinity and femininity or maleness and femaleness we are projecting a dichotomy that certainly exists in human ideation and functioning onto convenient receptors for the projections. Then the argument that masculinity and femininity should be understood nonliterally, as really having nothing to do with bodily men and bodily women in a social context, may be taken as a recognition that a projection has been made, but falling far short of a successful recollection of it, certainly as far as our culture is concerned. All the other divisions that we know about – rational/irrational, Apollonian/Dionysian, classical/romantic, digital/analogic, and so forth – all these exist in every human being. They cannot conveniently be assigned by gender (or sex), save by the kind of bifurcated projection I have depicted. Why do we make such a projection? Surely it is more than a question of



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language? It could be because we find difficulty in living with both sides of our murky human natures. In our borderline way, we import a degree of certainty and clarity, and hence reduce anxiety, by making the projection. Summarizing my view: it is in this projection that we find the origins of dualist ambitions to construct distinct psychologies for the two sexes and of the attempt to use 'masculinity' and 'femininity' solely as metaphors.

The whole gender debate suggests that, as with the father's relations to his children, we need to question whether heterosexuality itself should be taken as innate and therefore as something fundamental and beyond discussion, or whether it, too, has a nonbiological dimension. Freud's perception was of an innate *bisexuality* followed later by heterosexuality. Jung's view was that man and woman are each incomplete without the other: heterosexuality is therefore a given. In this sense he differs from Freud's emphasis on bisexuality as the natural state of mankind. In Freud's approach, sexual identity arises from the enforced twin demands of reproduction and society. What I have been arguing shifts the concept of bisexuality from something undifferentiated (polymorphous or polyvalent) into a vision of *there being available to all a variety of positions in relation to gender role – without recourse to the illusion of androgyny*.

Feminist art critics have faced up to many of these problems concerning the body. In a critique of the relation between the biologic and the cultural, Parker and Pollock state that 'acknowledging the importance of events of the body...is not reducible to biological essentialism, a facet of patriarchal ideology which supposes a primordial difference between the sexes determined by anatomical and specifically genital structures. How the body is lived and experienced is implicated at all levels in social or societally determined psychic processes' (Parker and Pollock 1987: 29). Parker and Pollock go on to describe an art work entitled 'Menstruation II' by Cate Elwes. During her period, dressed in white and seated in a white, glass-fronted box, she could be watched bleeding. Questions and her answers could be written on the walls of the box. Elwes wrote, 'The work reconstitutes menstruation as a metaphorical framework in which it becomes the medium for the expression of ideas and experience by giving it the authority of cultural form and placing it within an art context' (quoted in Parker and Pollock 1987: 30).

If discriminations like these are not made, then those analytical psychologists who espouse the idea of innate, body-based, sex-specific psychologies, find themselves lined up with those groupings often referred to as the 'New Right'. New Right assumptions about sex-specific psychology tend to be based on appeals to tradition and often have a romantic appeal but, as Statham has argued in her paper 'Women, the new right and social work' (1987), those working therapeutically need to be aware of the way in which the assumptions can be used to promote the notion of 'order' and of how women's activities, in particular, are decisively limited. The same point is made, with a good deal of passion, by Anne McManus in the



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August 1987 issue of the British feminist journal *Spare Rib*. She wrote:

Feminism is flowing with the rightward tide, its critical radical spirit diluted beyond recognition...A decisive shift came in the transformation of women's *liberation* from oppression, to today's *confirmation* of that oppression in a type of popular feminism which unashamedly embraces anything female. Never mind that this implies a conservative re-embracing of traditional women's roles that the original movement was all about denouncing. Now any old gullible gush practised by women is feminist, especially if it's emotive, and authentic (what isn't authentic anyway at this level?), and anti-male rationality. A false dichotomy between thinking men and feeling women evacuates reason to men while women's fates are sealed, trapped again in eternal emotionality which leaves male power safely intact. Thus women are immobilised and trivialised by their very softness and tenderness, voluntarily abdicating the dirty power struggle, and *thereby* the power, to those who have it.



CHAPTER

6

# BORDERS OF BELONGING

## CHALLENGES IN ACCESS TO ANTI-OPPRESSIVE MENTAL HEALTH CARE FOR INDIGENOUS LATINO GENDER-FLUID YOUTH

Chapter by Silvia Tenenbaum



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Much has been written about decolonizing psychology as a profession, and even more about the necessity of incorporating a gender-fluid framework mindful of the intersectional positionality that implicates subjectivities in complex vectors of oppression, invisibility, and marginalization. Feminist and multicultural models have guided therapists in adapting therapeutic practices to reflect social justice perspectives, thereby improving their ability to offer psychotherapeutic treatment that is not compromised by sexist, racist, heterosexist, or classist bias (Smith, Chambers, & Bratini, 2009). Authors employing these models have invited socially aware therapists to analyze the pathogenic influence of structural oppression on the emotional wellbeing of individuals and communities, in order to increase the development of socially mindful interventions (Smith et al., 2009). Moreover, further consideration of the dynamics of oppression invites practitioners to transform their interventions to achieve an emancipatory psychology geared at “breaking the chains of personal oppression as much as the chains of social oppression” (Smith et al., 2009. p. 159), which include the patriarchal underpinnings of the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM V) (Smith et al., 2013). In the absence of conceptual tools to understand the pathogenic nature of structural oppression, mainstream psychology exhibits a tendency to cast oppression’s damage as an individual disorder and thereby risks perpetuating an unequal status quo (Smith et al., 2009).

Critical psychology, on the other hand, offers an overarching framework of values, assumptions, and practices seeking to reduce or eliminate oppression in society (Hernandez, 2008). Social justice, feminist, and other critical analyses of mental health theory and practice have illuminated the sociopolitical origins of these epistemologies, as well as the embedded risk found in conventional psychotherapeutic interventions of maintaining and even reproducing the belief systems and power relations from which they emerged (Smith et al., 2009). “Therapists who wish to break from this position of complacency and allow their relatively privileged social positions to become the platform by which silenced members of society can begin to be heard...becom[e] part of the solution” (Smith et al., 2009. p. 167). The research conducted since 2010 by Dr. Suzanne Stewart and her team at OISE leans on the paradigm of decolonizing psychology in order to problematize the epistemological foundations of mainstream clinical psychology, grounded in unexamined patriarchal values, Eurocentric approaches, and systemic oppressive practices. The consideration of mainstream psychology as another oppressive tactic is one of the premises of the decolonizing approach this essay follows. Such consideration would “open the Pandora’s box of gender, race, privilege, and privileged roles in supervision” (Smith et al., 2009. p. 84) which are deeply embedded in educational programs and practices geared at incoming clinicians and psychology students at large. Dr. Stewart’s pivotal work at the University of Victoria and the University of Toronto, and my own at OISE from 2009 to 2014, form the epistemological bases of a critical view of “traditional”



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psychology that historically has not taken into consideration geographic dislocation in border identities. The status quo of graduate psychological training still assumes a Eurocentric, heteronormative, and cisgendered viewpoint or, at most, a viewpoint that incorporates sexual difference as an “addendum” rather than as a core value that should inform a rigorous critique of the very ideologies that determine which sexual identities are hegemonic and which marginal. Likewise, this hegemonic model of psychological training has yet to incorporate a postcolonial and diasporic perspective to questions of geographical displacement and acculturation. As my decade-long clinical experience working with border-youth has taught me, gender-fluidity in Indigenous Latino populations must be approached intersectionally in order to understand how gender identities are shaped by migrant trajectories, and in turn, how one’s border-gender comes to bear on the processes of migrancy and acculturation. To the extent that these questions and issues continue to be marginal to the main concerns of mainstream psychology as a discipline, border-youth will continue to face access barriers to culturally aware healthcare services. For instance, when gender-fluidity is framed solely in terms of granting or denying access to hormonal treatment or sex-reassignment surgery, there is no space to explore the process and meanings of gender-becoming amidst complex processes of cultural adaptation that engage the DNA of one’s transgenerational history. Up-to-date training models for mental healthcare providers must address issues of center and periphery in clinical psychology by incorporating a critical analysis of the ways in which patriarchal and heteronormative values shape understandings of mental health and recovery, as well as the imbrication between individual suffering and systemic oppression. In addition, a decolonizing approach to mental healthcare must implement a contextualized approach that considers the intersectional nature of oppression and privilege that differentially positions individuals and groups in terms of their social equity needs and claims. Accordingly, the central claim of this essay is that extending mental health services to border-gender youth requires an extended consciousness about societal-embedded oppressive practices. This is of particular relevance in addressing the power differential between ‘clients’ and ‘service providers’ when defining mental health and illness, formulating a diagnosis, and planning intervention strategies to alleviate suffering.

It is within this theoretical and clinical orientation that I have approached the issue of access to mental healthcare services for Indigenous Latino gender-fluid youth, understood as a transitional and multiple subject position which I term “border-youth.” Border-youth refers to an intersectional, in-process, and context-dependent subject position articulated through the negotiation of socially imposed categorizations around race, ethnicity, gender, migration status, linguistic identity, sexual orientation, and so on. Here, “border” signifies both the ways in which structural forms of oppression and marginalization strategically make identities visible or invisible, as well as the contestations that emerge from the capacity to recuperate, translate, and make one’s cultural knowledge relevant in a



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diasporic context. In critically examining the counseling experiences of border-youth through the participants' own narratives regarding mental healthcare access, I follow the cultural context model to address the following questions: How do border-youth's experiences of oppression undergone before immigration become augmented by cultural and institutional practices of invisibility actualized by mental healthcare services in Toronto? And how does the specific positionality of indigenous Latino border-gender youth vis-à-vis Canadian indigenous peoples, non-Latino gender-fluid youth, and Hispanic Latino immigrants further contribute to their invisibilization and lack of access to culturally relevant mental healthcare services?

Some key barriers to access identified in this study are:

1. There is an under use of mental healthcare services by immigrant Latino gender-fluid youth because they need to consult and/or receive culturally competent counseling services, which are not presently provided in Spanish (Ivette Jaque, personal communication, August 13, 2010; Jose [Pepe] Mellado [counselor, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples], personal communication, November 15, 2010).
2. Precarious legal status creates complexity for this already vulnerable population. There is a lack of empirical data in counseling psychology related to immigrant border-youth in general and, in particular, to those who are Spanish-speaking (Marlinda Freire, personal communication, August 2, 2013).
3. There is a lack of understanding of specific cultural patterns of gender development for border-youth because clinical intervention has been predominantly implemented through a family approach, even though they might not share the same language and cultural practices with the rest of their family of origin, other counselors, and/or other members of the community using the services.

Indigenous Latino gender-fluid youth formed the fastest growing asylum seeker population in Canada before December, 2015, when 31,000 Syrian refugees began arriving (Statistics Canada, July 2016). Immigrant Indigenous Latino gender-fluid residents in Canada between the ages of 16 and 29 have a higher prevalence of mental health problems than their non-Indigenous gender-fluid youth counterparts, as reflected in depression and suicide rates, and education dropout statistics (Statistics Canada, 2009). Many Indigenous Latino youths' parents arrived in Canada as asylum seekers after being tortured, arrested, and forcefully displaced in their countries of origin, experiences that generate and continue the cycle of intergenerational trauma (Dr. Freire, personal communication, September 20, 2012). There is, however, a documented gap in culturally specific mental healthcare services for this population who typically does not have access to or remains in mainstream counseling services. Very little is currently known about their experiences of access to mental healthcare services, and even less is known about how their hybrid identities shape these experiences.



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Indigenous Latino gender-fluid youth are multifaceted and multilayered groups of individuals and are distinct from traditionally understood mestizo, Latin American, or Spanish-speaking LGBTQ youth. Despite sharing similar challenges with other Latino immigrants—such as precarious legal status, job insecurity, racialization, and language barriers—they often identify with their Indigenous roots, an identification that carries a complex history of Latin American racial relations.

Latin American Indigenous communities have faced a long history of discrimination and violence in their countries of origin. Immigrant seekers of Indigenous origin typically do not disclose their ancestry because it proliferates their sources of oppression. For instance, a massive Guatemalan exile occurred as a result of the Guatemalan genocide, but the crux of the reported reasons was political rather than ethnic (Marlinda Freire, personal communication, May 12, 2013). Indigenous families decided to keep their ancestry hidden as a strategy to secure refugee status, resulting in authorities undercounting and underserving these acutely oppressed minorities. Because these new immigrants do not disclose their Aboriginal status upon entering Canada, authorities assume that their first language is Spanish, their religion is Catholicism, and so forth. Two sets of problems arise: first, a lack of proper disclosure and further invisibility of their specific social equity needs and challenges once they have landed in Canada; and second, immigrant organizations cannot apply for funding from institutions that will not acknowledge the existence of such an isolated community within the larger Latino community. This has perpetuated historical cycles of oppression, which only now are beginning to be recognized and addressed by the more politically aware members of the psychology community; however, an understanding of intergenerational trauma has yet to enter mainstream psychological training programs at the graduate level.

In discussing nonconforming gender identities among Indigenous Latino youth, I have chosen the term “gender-fluid” over transsexual or transgender, in order to better articulate these youth’s lived experience of gender and sexuality. I ascribe to Prosser’s understanding of gender-fluidity, as referring to a gender identity that changes over time through “a substantive transition: a correlated set of corporeal, psychic, and social changes” (Shelley pp. 4, 22). Gender-fluid has a psychological beginning and end, in terms of insight, awareness, accommodation, and acknowledgment of a paradoxical ongoing processing. Gender-fluid is a productive term as it allows us to pay attention to the flow of becoming, in all its intricacies, from a respectful stance that honors its timing. As a clinical social psychologist, my approach is framed mainly by therapeutic concerns, and therefore, I concur with Prosser that fluidity as a concept changes over time: both internal and historical time, although its manifestations vary. Gender-fluidity is the parameter that encompasses changes. This understanding of gender-fluidity assumes that gender shifts and transitions are always intersubjective. Therefore, they involve gender-fluid children, their non-traditional parents, their teachers, as well as activists and counselors – among other allies – who intervene in school programs





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and other institutional settings to problematize and challenge ideologies and practices that exert gender-based oppression by upholding hegemonic understandings of gender as dichotomous, self-evident, stable, and continuous with birth-assigned sex.

Identities in formation are transient by nature and need to be understood not as an incomplete process but as a process per se, that is, as defined by the praxis and movement of becoming. The term gender-fluid responds to this aim and suggests that identities in formation don't need to go anywhere, but rather just be, where Prosser's "substantive transition" navigates one's own intersubjective tempo. The concept of gender-fluidity also surpasses the gender binary paradigm which sustains patriarchal and heteronormative ideological frameworks and institutions. From a psychological perspective, the term gender-fluid connotes greater degrees of freedom in navigating one's gender experiences, identifications, and presentation, including the choice to remain illegible according to traditional gender markers.

Indigenous Latino gender-fluid youth often feel a closer affinity with their Canadian Indigenous counterparts than with other Latino immigrants, given important similarities in their collective histories of oppression. Despite these cultural similarities, Canadian First Nations and other marginalized groups from postcolonial nations also differ fundamentally in their share of wealth, education, resources, and access to public health services (Sherbourne Health Centre, 2009). Indigenous Latino youth, for instance, cannot make use of Indigenous supports because they do not yet have the language skills necessary to access English-language services directed specifically at Indigenous peoples, nor can they access resources allocated to Canadian First Nations in Indigenous native languages. Spanish-language supports exist in the city of Toronto. However, these services do not differentiate among the specific needs of various Latin Americans populations and, as a consequence, specific Latino Indigenous needs remain invisible.

## Psychology research with border-youth

Gender research in the Latin American population residing in Toronto was initiated in 2012 (Ivette Jaque [counselor, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples], personal communication, March 20, 2012), but the specific variable of gender-fluidity has not yet been addressed even in sexual minority research, partly because the ever-changing aspect of gender-fluidity cannot be easily grasped in quantitative epidemiological research.

In the present research, Indigenous Latino gender-fluid youth were invited to examine their experiences with mental healthcare access in Toronto. An important aspect in researching border-youths' access to mental healthcare services from a social justice perspective is the need to understand the barriers to access as





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political in nature; that is, as systematic exclusions of experiences and social locations that do not fit hegemonic representations of Latino, mestizo, heterosexual, able-bodied immigrants who speak the Spanish language. When it comes to the immigrant population, for instance, access to mental healthcare services is framed as facilitating the process of incorporation understood as a linear and assimilationist process of securing legal status, finding employment, learning English, and so on. To the extent that Indigenous, Latino, border-fluid youth fail to conform to heteronormative, neoliberal, and assimilationist ideals of cultural adaptation, their mental healthcare needs remain invisible to mainstream services.

When participants were prompted to expand on their own understanding of the barriers, they provided ample examples: “Access is not about putting your name down for a wait list. Access is about getting an actually useful, pertinent group that is going to make me feel better, not worse” (Mona, p. 20). From a similar context, Pat stated:

I don’t need to have access to a token after a slice of pepperoni pizza and a talk about sexual health, as if my gender orientation puts me at risk, risk of what! I am gender-fluid or gender-independent, not a freak of nature! When I tried to speak to a counselor about spirituality, she sent me to a Catholic church! The doctor who made the referral thought that because we are both from Chile, we share a similar cultural background. What a farce! (Pat, p. 18)

Access may be compromised when issues of confidentiality and information sharing are not clear. As one participant stated: “Sometimes, I’m not sure about what can happen if I fill out an “intake” form. Who has access to this information? Where is it going?”

Another participant expressed her discomfort about being asked to participate in an exclusive gender-fluid group as it created a ghetto-like mentality. Indeed, this participant has accurately identified the problematic underlying assumption that border-youth struggle more with their gender-fluidity than with negotiating their difference in mainstream settings.

The implied uniformity assumed of all peoples based on place of origin—in this case, Latino—carries with it other generalizations about these individuals’ class, sexual orientation, immigration trajectory, and status. This becomes problematic as it often takes precedence over an acknowledgment of the lack of resources, which the participant might have felt as more honest and real: “I know that there is no place for people like me, but I would have preferred to deal with the truth rather than a polite lie” (Pat, pp. 18–19). In general, participants’ comments about barriers to access considered how immigration intersects with their social location; for example, not having services in languages other than Spanish (for Indigenous newcomers’ youth), having predominantly white, upper-class, long-term residents in ethnic-based community centers (so participants could not easily relate to their



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societal standards and privileges), and a lack of training in gender-fluidity by frontline workers. Indeed, one should wonder why ethno-specific community centers do not reach out, hire, and assign professionals with lived experience in gender navigation or diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Psychological research has consistently shown that a combination of clinical expertise and lived experience creates rapport, which is the basis of good outcome in the therapeutic alliance. Not surprisingly, peer-support groups coupled with self-and other-selected leaders from their own communities were a recognized need by all participants, across countries and situations. The present clinical support is insufficient, fragmentary, and not up-to-date in terms of gender.

## **Therapeutic guidelines: models of identification and grassroots mental healthcare initiatives**

Generally speaking, the gender-fluid community struggles with finding role models. For such a small community as the gender-fluid Latino youth living in Toronto, the chances of encountering an all-encompassing leader are even more rare. However, communities tend to have natural leaders who, if given training and opportunity, may produce significant social change, strengthen social networks, and channel community resources to better serve underprivileged individuals and groups. As the participants in this study disclosed, many youth mentors have assumed leadership roles in important social initiatives; for instance, there is a group in formation applying for a small grant to participate in a trans march as a unique and distinct minority within youth groups.

The idea of leaders as being both innate and formed is one that resonates with Latin American political struggles all over the continent. Many youth can relate to this from their ancestral fights for land and social freedom through family stories, community circles, and from Indigenous notions of leadership which are grounded on principles of solidarity and collaboration. For this youth, taking the torch is, so to speak, part of a cultural desideratum, especially when forming certain aspects of the self such as body image, gender presentation, and representation, second language acquisition, and re-defining a way of being in a new land. The words of Tabare form an apt summary to this aspect: “Leaders should come bottom up, and as part of our community movements” (Pat, p. 11). The identification, selection, and acceptance of grassroots leaders is a difficult process, particularly for recently formed diasporas, as is the case for the Latin American community in Toronto which began to form in the 1960s. Moreover, the incorporation of an LGBTQ agenda within Latin American and Latino activist movements is even more recent (since 1980), and gender-fluid identities have only become visible in the past decade at the most. Furthermore, partly because of the process of acculturation, some community leaders would incite gender-fluid youth to assimilate in order to access mainstream society and its perceived privileges. On the other hand, mental healthcare practitioners’ perception of this population as homogeneous and stable



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– e.g. traditional heteronormative – limits their capacity to see gender-fluidity and to approach it in non-essentialist terms.

The idea that desired models of identification should emerge organically from within their own communities is coherent with the participants' own understanding of what a culturally sensitive mental healthcare model would look like: a long-term supported grassroots process, where initiatives are driven by the identified needs of the population and not by insurance company guidelines or budget restrictions. They would be interested in receiving support, including clinical direction, in configuring autonomous grassroots self-help groups that could facilitate mental healthcare services, such as securing safe and affordable housing for people struggling with mental illness, support in the process of requesting sex-reassignment surgery – with cultural interpreters if requested – and therapeutic support for transitioning individuals. Art-therapy based group and community counseling groups were also suggested, as a means to securing a healthy attachment to their newly formed communities of care. Needless to say, none of these services are currently available as they would require a paradigm shift in mainstream mental healthcare services. As Tabare articulates:

For me, seeing any link between me as a person, my mental health needs, and community connections through any existing leader in the [. . .] community center is as foreign as going to a Dyke March. Trans Pride is the best community connection I have felt in years, but there is nothing yet for Indigenous Latino youth (that meant, in psychological terms, and in Spanish language as a clinical intervention), not a support or self-help group. The existing gay Latino group [. . .] is all about drugs, cross-dressing for fun, and excess not to feel their pain while keeping them marginalized from other opportunities. I don't want to be part of that. I have other dreams to dream.

*Tabare, pp. 7–8*

Understanding themselves as diasporic selves—that is, as individuals made foreign through geographic, cultural, and linguistic displacement—Indigenous Latino gender-fluid youth do not see themselves fully reflected in a Queer community such as Toronto's, which still struggles to diversify and decolonize their political movement. While acknowledging the choice they themselves—or their parents or other family members—have made to migrate, they still harbor mixed emotions and ambiguity towards having roots in a foreign land as their diasporic condition imposes the challenge of having to negotiate between different and often contradictory value systems and worldviews.

## **An intersectional approach to gender-fluidity**

Understanding gender-fluidity within an immigration process is no doubt challenging but absolutely necessary if we are to reduce barriers to mental healthcare access.



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Border identities are, by definition, produced in sites of “occult instability” (Fanon, 1952), that require complex, contextually situated, and contingent negotiations of sociocultural meanings and identity/legibility markers. We live in a world where identity and critical subjectivity depend upon the process of translating a profusion of intersecting cultural meanings, and gender-fluid immigrant youth face the challenge of crafting a diasporic voice that integrates their multiple knowledges, temporalities, and geographical belongings through a reflexive and relational understanding of numerous, and often conflicting, cultural codes. The results of this study provided the researcher with a vivid reminder that we live in an oppressive regime in which identities are “teleologically” inscribed toward a standard end: the employable citizen (McLaren, 1995, p. 65). Most gender-fluid youth and many of their allies do not want to inscribe in this type of socially insular and politically marginal existence, as all the participants in this study expressed difficulty in conforming to what is expected of them in the deregulated, precarious, and labor-flexible economy. Border-youth have the possibility of living multidimensional lives through actively contesting oppression and marginalization through their ability to recuperate, translate, and make one’s cultural knowledge relevant in a diasporic context. As participants explained, living a multidimensional life often means choosing to obscure or underplay certain aspects of their life; for instance, their preferred gender presentation in the workplace, or gender aspects or Indigenous background in processing refugee claims or in dealing with immigration authorities. These strategic negotiations constitute a form of translative knowledge through which border-youth navigate, resist, and actively transform their living conditions and integrate themselves into the larger community. Untrained clinical staff might pathologize these strategic identity negotiations when they, in fact, constitute productive and resourceful coping mechanisms that help these individuals navigate mainstream institutions.

One unexpected finding from this research was the fact that gender presentation resolution took precedence over immigrant trajectory and foreign origin, as all participants named the gender-fluidity aspect as more crucial than the geographical one. To clarify: while participants expressed that their gender-fluidity is not in itself a problem to resolve or a pathology to cure and displayed unusual insight for their chronological age regarding their gender choices, they were puzzled about the mental healthcare system’s approach to their gender non-conformance and felt uncertain about its implications for accessing services. This added a new layer of complexity to experiences of discrimination and oppression previously undergone in their countries of origin. They expected that migration to Canada would ease gender oppression rather than impose on them the need for new translative learning in navigating mainstream institutions and settings. Most of the original literature on counseling the “different one” (Sue & Sue, 2008) presents a romanticized version of cultural adaptation that assumes that most people settle and assimilate into the receiving culture after a decade. Later research has shown (Tenenbaum, 2014) that this is clearly not the case since





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settlement is rarely a linear and unidirectional process and the migration itself poses adds challenges, drawbacks, and loss of status—social, cultural, and economic. Despite the fact that participants felt that Toronto has provided them with more opportunities for self-expression than their countries of origin, their institutional experiences did not mirror such openness or tolerance, which resulted in the participants' choice to discontinue their use of counseling resources.

Participants who are ambiguous in their gender presentation feel that they cannot access mental health programs. Pat, for instance, stated that “counsellors feel uncomfortable with me, always calling me by the wrong pronoun” (Pat, p. 2). The issue of how to call a border-gender youth is an important aspect of access and equity; it is important to ask rather than trying to guess. “I understand people might be confused by my appearance, and I don't mind to state my choice of pronoun, but most people are afraid to even approach me” (Rodrigo, p. 5). This could indicate the need to have a simple and honest communication with a teenager whose gender presentation is unconventional. Overall, a significant shift in perspective in what concerns therapeutic means and ends, the role of the clinician, and the purpose of mental healthcare services is paramount to the ability of counselors to be able to function in the real Toronto of today.

The results of the present study suggest that border-youth may engage in strategies of racial or gender passing as a protective mechanism when navigating the intersectional sources of oppression they face. For instance, they may conceal their indigenous identifications or gender-fluidity when needing to pass as Latino immigrants in accessing current programs. A culturally sensitive researcher thus needs to consider how the domains of sexuality, gender, cultural/linguistic, and political identity coexist in complex and often conflictual ways. Present frustrations with program guidelines and counselors/facilitators appear to arise from discrepancies among these domains and their rigid categorizations that usually focus on gender-fluidity as the most problematic aspect of border-youth identity.

These individuals are insightful pioneers, the makers of a newly emerging subcommunity that is part of a larger sexually diverse community. They are also aware of the fact that they share common needs with other first-generation immigrants: securing permanent residence status, acquiring an acceptable level of proficiency in the English language, and obtaining safe housing (getting out of the shelter system and no longer being under-housed or at risk of homelessness, as declared by Rodrigo). These are their priorities, not their gender expression. As these participants expressed, they are new to the city and its institutional systems, not to their bodies:

I know that I am living at the margins of society, but at least I am not at the margins of my most authentic identity: a gender-fluid teen that feels closer to Indian roots than to the white middle class, whether Canadian or Latino, and I get support and strength from the two people I know similar to me in my circumstances. Lonely? No, I rather have a community of three, than an





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alienation of millions out there. It would be nice if I can get counselling too, like anybody else, I have emotional needs to resolve.

*Tabare, p. 16*

In these participants' experience, gender is an agentic project, an aspect of a self-affirming developmental process, and what they require from counselors and other mental healthcare providers is respect for their choices—including the right to determine and prioritize what is experienced as problematic in their lives—and genuine openness for exploration that is not driven by implicit agendas that pathologize or fail to recognize the social origins of individual suffering. “I have bigger fish to fry” was Rodrigo's response when asked whether he experienced his gender-fluidity as problematic. His comment resonates with most participants' experience that gender is not a problem to solve and that other needs, material and symbolic, take precedence as they struggle to make themselves at home in their new country while trying to heal the sedimented wounds of history and generating a connection to nature, spirit, and self.

In summary, solidarity—understood as the provision of care and safety for one another—and the possibility to freely and safely express their gender non-conformance were identified as key aspects of experiencing gender-fluidity as less problematic than their intersectional social location as racialized Indigenous Latino immigrant youth. One implication of these findings is the need to critically address the ways in which community counseling and clinical practices may be embedded in, complicit with, and at risk of replicating colonially oppressive practices that further marginalize, make invisible, and oppress these communities. Both Mona and Rodrigo expressed concerns over the generalized denial of the existence of Indigenous populations—both Canadian and South American—and over gender-oppressive practices that are common among mainstream clinicians, even guidance counselors in schools. For instance, Mona explained that “they [school guidance counselors] are always asking me the reason I want to dress like this and stated that I have a choice to dress differently to reduce the bullying I am regularly subjected to in high school” (Mona, p. 3). Mona further stated that we live in a “rape culture, as everybody knows” (Mona, p. 5) and she did not feel that the school counselors were willing to acknowledge or address systemic gender barriers, thus making gender harassment ‘her’ problem and failing to provide a safe space.

Lack of trust appears to be at the crux of the inability of existing programs to provide culturally-sensitive services. Trust was a concept defined by these participants as the fit between the client's expectations of therapeutic work and the counselor's ability to prioritize the client's needs and frame of reference. For instance, when assessing and treating culturally diverse clients, it is recommended that counselors ask clients for their expectations of therapy (Paniagua, 2005) instead of imposing their own perceptions and goals on them (Tenenbaum, 2008). Furthermore, Paniagua (2005) has recommended that “mental health professionals



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should be familiar with the meaning attached to the term ‘therapist’ across different cultural groups. American Indians often see therapists as medicine men or medicine woman and many Hispanics view therapists as ‘folk healers’” (p. 22). This is consistent with the views expressed by these participants as they search for credibility less in the counselor’s credentials than in their shared agreement around the therapeutic process and its aims, rapport-ability, and from appraisals of the therapist’s healing power from other respected members of the community.

This essay has addressed key access-barriers to mental health services encountered throughout a decade of clinical work with border-youth at various university, hospital, and community settings in Toronto. My work’s goal has been to support each and every participant in the process of becoming an integrated being, and from a psychological and culturally-sensitive compass, to accompany their flourishing and their search for harmony, self-fulfillment, and creative self-expression. My research findings advocate for a social justice approach that offers an alternative to individualistic therapeutic practice and proposes a shift towards a community-based model by linking interpersonal processes and larger social systems (Hernandez, 2008). Such an approach implies a contextual understanding of the other within the self, a basic tenet of the newcomer who brings their ancestors’ history on their shoulders, a transgenerational inheritance that adds complexity and texture to the ‘adaptation’ process. Providing access to meaningful, culturally-aware, and socially just mental health programs and services requires making institutionally visible the needs of the Latin-American community in all their multiplicity, including the situated needs of a gender-fluid youth who do not accept working within the hegemonic parameters of the medical approach, border-youth individuals who do not live their gender-fluidity as disempowering pathology, and Spanish-speaking newcomers who are proud to claim their Indigenous ancestry.