

JOURNEYING INTO THE SUBTLE-BODY  
- A VOYAGE -  
OF SUSPENDED DISBELIEF

by

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As I begin to ponder the complexity of clinical practice, images from the unconscious come and go with much rapidity. For me to attempt to coral and harness their energy is much like trying to gather a herd of wild gazelle. When first I lay eyes upon them, they are off in the shadows grazing. As I approach, they scatter, dashing first here and then there, eluding my grasp. I pursue, yet only to find that I am, at long last, standing alone in a timeless "in-between space", very close to where they were moments before, grazing peacefully. They have left behind only traces of their passing, their tracks. So now I wait, realizing that as I "stand here", still and quiet, they cautiously begin to return. Are they curious of this uninvited intruder?

coral

As I am being drawn from "my world" it seems as though they are inching closer. Are they approaching, leaving their dark places of hiding, to inform me? Are they coming to welcome me? Are these visitors from the unconscious realms, these feeling-images, coming to consciousness? Perhaps, it is I who am the visitor. Is it I, the ego, who is descending into these shadow-like places? Or is it possible that we are meeting somewhere "in-between"?

Like  
in-between  
image

My intention in this paper is to focus on this intrapsychic, "in-between" space and to relate it to the workings of the interpersonal space that exists between patient and therapist. I plan to work with Jung's understanding of the factors that influence this imaginal realm, and relate it to the Unus Mundus, a view of totality or wholeness whereby everything is connected. I would then like to discuss the concept of the subtle-body as expressed by Schwartz-Salant. It is my hope to weave an image of that which transpires, between client and therapist, in this realm where the

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shadow and the somatic unconscious intertwine. My main interest is to explore this "space", through which pours so many levels of being, as they emerge in consciousness. My approach will be to follow psyche and write with expectation of what is to be revealed.

As I write...I hesitate, for as I focus on my own "understanding" of this experience of consciousness, it seems to be a disassociation from that which is actually occurring. In addition, when I am reading someone else's theories or even when I am sitting with a client, I wonder if what they are describing to me, their experience, has anything to do with what is actually taking place. When they relate a dream, I know that they are attempting to share their memory of an experience of dreaming in the form of a language. Theoretically this is, in some way, connected to the images, sounds and sensations that are consciously available to them. Yet I ask myself, how much of what they are describing has anything to do with what actually occurred? In some mysterious way, our very language seems to distance us from our experience; leaving us with only a vague rendition of that which has actually transpired. When we leave the experience are we taking with us only a trace in memory? Our thoughts about our experience take form through a language from which we are developing a "knowledge" which we in turn attempt to communicate, through language. To what degree does language not only filter our experience but our thinking about that experience?

Now the deep structure of any given language embodies a particular, and peculiar, syntax of perception, and to the extent an individual learns the deep-structure of his native language, he simultaneously learns to construct, and thus perceive, a particular type of descriptive reality, embedded, as it were, in the language structure itself. He begins to live not so much in the world as in the world-as-described. For better or worse,

Just what  
they are  
doing with it  
now is  
occurring.

75

he sees not through his eyes, but through the eyes of his language, and from this momentous point on, as far as the evolutionary arc goes, the structure of his language is the structure of his self and the "limits of his world." (Wilber, 1978, p. 17)

However, without language how do we organize perceptions of the experience and how do we communicate or acknowledge that we share similar thoughts about our experience? As Whitehead explains

language is not the essence of thought...[yet without it]...the retention of thought, the easy recall of thought, the interweaving of thought into higher complexity, the communication of thought, are all gravely limited. (Whitehead, 1938, p. 35)

issue  
of  
with  
the language  
of  
psychology

Jung hints at the limitations of language when he tells us that "the psychological investigator is always finding himself obliged to make extensive use of an indirect method of description in order to present the reality he has observed" (Jung, 1971, p. 408). He goes on to say that "current psychological concepts are so imprecise and so ambiguous that mutual understanding is practically impossible" (p. 409).

Asher (1988) tells us that "contact with the unconscious is mediated. It is through the images of dreams, poetry and art, for example, that this mediation or ritualization takes place". In a sense there are gatekeepers which allow in only that which can be used, protecting and maintaining the ego's ability to tolerate what arises from the unknown. It may also follow, that these gatekeepers are in the form of language, filtering that which moves from the known to the unknown. Is language then an ordered and agreed upon process by which we attempt to remain separate from the unconscious, thereby reinforcing and maintaining the veil which separates the known from the unknown as well as the knower from the known? Through its capacity to protect are we not also limited?

yes



MISSING  
PAGE #4

invisible to ordinary perception (it can) be seen imaginally" (Swartz-Salant, 1986, p. 20). In addition, he tells us that Jung referred to the subtle body as "that part of the unconscious that becomes more and more identical with the functioning of the body, growing darker and darker and ending in the utter darkness of matter...(and is consequently)...exceedingly incomprehensible" (p. 31). This begins to sound like the shadow, yet Jung distinguishes the psychological shadow from the somatic subtle-body in that the shadow "forms part of the psychological or psychic unconscious, while the subtle-body represents the somatic unconscious, the unconscious as it is experienced as we descend into the body" (p. 31).

Salant tells us that when client and therapist are aware of the interaction of their subtle bodies they

often [feel]...a change in the quality of space between them; it is experienced as energized and more material in nature. They are then at the threshold of an awareness of archetypal processes, a *mundus imaginalis*. (Swartz-Salant, 1986 p.21-22)

This  
seems  
true  
to me.

Jung was careful to distinguish the archetype from the archetypal image. He tells us that the archetype is "never...conscious and [it] never will be...It was, and still is, only interpreted" (Samuels, 1985, p. 25).

Now let me weave in the role of *coniunctio*. Salant goes on to describe this as the "central structure of the background realm that can be encountered by two people through subtle-body experience...an archetypal form of union" (Schwartz-Salant, 1986 p.22). He later describes it as a "central, ordering structure" of the *Unus Mundus* (p. 32). He tells us that this space is partially created by these subtle bodies and that there is a rhythmic quality characteristic of an archetypal process



when the *coniunctio* is an active, imaginal experience, both people will feel a sense of alternately being pulled together towards fusion, and then pulled apart towards separation, while in the realm between them there is a continual sense of unity. (Swartz-Salant, 1986, p.22)

This rhythmic quality then could be seen as an interplay occurring out of a tension of opposites, which in turn establishes a middle ground on which the opposites can unite. Jung refers to this constellation as a "new content" which occurs due to "thesis and antithesis in equal measure and standing in compensatory relation to both" (Jung, 1971, p.479).

So perhaps this unity, which is reached through a "free and sheltered" space (Kalff, 1980, p. 32), becomes the arena through which the whole universe as such can filter through the therapeutic relationship. Perhaps this is where true birth of the psyche takes place. I am reminded of the concept, as discussed by Holger Kalweit, of The World Tree. It can be imagined as

good thought

the axis mundi connecting heaven, earth, and the underworld—is seen as an opening or channel to other realms of being. Along it, gods and beings of the Beyond descend to earth and the souls of mortals rise to heaven. This cosmic axle holds the universe in balance and at the same time is its center. (Kalweit, 1984, p. 209)

In a sense then, the therapeutic relationship could be imagined as the axis mundi; a center through which that from above and that from below intersect with this worldly plane of existence. This is also illustrated in a discussion by Samuels (1985, p. 27) of archetypes, where he refers to them as "psychosomatic entities, occupying a midway position between instinct and image". He goes on to say

How about motion of liminality  
i.e. Victor Turner

There is therefore an interdependence and neither instinct nor image has separate or primary existence in relation to the other. With regard to image the archetype is 'upward-looking',

connected to ideas, creative inspiration and spirit. With regard to instinct the archetype is 'downward-looking' to incorporation in biology and the drives. (Samuals, 1985, p. 28)

Yet, it seems, that certain conditions must be met in order to make this "ground" sacred, so that this may occur. The concept of *temenos* comes to mind. In the ancient temples of Asclepius "healing practices and rituals took place within a closed setting, the *temenos* or temple precinct...and fostered sleep in the hope of the 'patient' having healing dreams" (Samuals, 1985, p. 187).

I am reminded of my work with a client who repeatedly attempts to express images, hinting at such an experience. Her words seem to echo the above discussion. Mary, who is sixty-seven, came to me for treatment several months ago. She had just been diagnosed as having terminal cancer and was given "weeks to set her affairs in order". She presented a tired and withered body. Recovering from alcohol and drug addiction, and in the process of grieving the death of her father and only daughter (both have died during the course of our work together), she never-the-less "mushes on" with the spirit of a World War I trouper, willing to die in the trenches. Mary is clearly in the afternoon of her life and dusk is quickly approaching. By necessity, brought on by her illness, her aim is to release her search for meaning outside of herself (i.e. How did it happen that she has ended up in the trenches?) and is refocusing her aim within herself. She realizes that only by turning inward may she hope to find the guidance and strength to face the coming night, her death. She recently began to describe an experience which she says usually occurs during our therapy hour and as of late happens at "odd moments throughout the day". These are some of the ways she describes it



I feel like I am flying. It's like breath or that space that exists just after the inhalation and just before the exhalation. But it is not just a feeling...its like an offering of sorts. As something is about to go out then something comes in.. and as something comes in...I experience something going out. Then for a moment there is nothing, yet it is as though this nothing contains everything.

*good image*

In a later session she continues

It is like diving off of a diving board. As I spring and leap into the air I spread my arms and move up and out of reach of gravity, just for a moment. It is like that place just at the top of the dive when I've moved beyond gravity's grasp ...just for a moment... and just before gravity reaches up to snatch me back to earth. I truly fly and my body sings with emergence.

*These are moments that seem suspended*

She relates this experience as a timeless moment and tells that it usually occurs in relationship to a thought she is having or when she is listening to another person. She describes a quality of mind which she terms "care-ful". " It usually occurs when I feel very safe. I am sitting and paying close attention and really care about what it is that I am experiencing. My body feels so alive at these times".

As this is occurring during a session, I confirm a very similar experience in my own body. Having a sense of vague imagery, I am aware of a type of "feeling-image". There is awareness in which I "feel" that I am "looking into" a timeless-space. Moment to moment I return from this experience carrying with me a feeling which I attempt to report or describe in imagery. I may verbalize this to the client or simply hold the image in consciousness. Each return journey from this "in-between" space seems to carry with it another piece of a slowly unfolding three dimensional puzzle.

Mary's experience constellates in what I would describe as an interactive field or dialectic. She tells me that she is "care-ful" in relationship to another person or an object of intense concentration. She

feels that, in some way, it would be possible for her to experience herself interacting with the object or to actually become the object interacting with herself; and that out of this manifests a third dimension. My experience is that words and thoughts recede into a backdrop and a process which involves unacknowledged mutual awareness comes to the fore. We have an unspoken agreement to suspend disbelief and we seem to move timelessly through psyche. When this occurs, the boundary between what I imagine to be my psyche and her's becomes blurred. Perhaps I could say that there are now three realms; two made up of the internal structure of our psyches which in turn, three-dimensionally, overlap to manifest a third. It then seems possible that our individual awareness, our knowing consciousness, can move freely throughout. However, due to the nature of our relationship, client and therapist, I for the most part shield my psyche and we move imaginally within her field and the interactive field that we generate. Her psyche becomes the predominate region of our exploration.

Good description  
it seems accurate given my experience.

While this occurs, I maintain a constant vigil for signs that the imaginal experience is registering in the body. Flushed skin surface, change of posture, swelling of lips, dialation of the pupils, modified breathing pattern, all seem to indicate that what is occurring imaginally has made a body connection. I continue to scan my own body for it most often is mirroring that which the client is experiencing. This becomes a cross-check system whereby I am able to confirm visual data with an in-the-body experience. In addition, this acts to maintain and sustain this shared field.

Why is this now?

Because it is often the case that her body experience is outside of her conscious awareness, I may then guide her awareness to the sensation in her body so as to link-up or overlap the two, mind and body. When this body-mind connection is made it is as though a flood gate is opened and, as is



often the case, there is an out pouring of here-to-fore unconscious material. Images and emotions coalesce in the form of memories or fresh material which I often refer to as "active dreaming". We then "ride out" this experience until the "active dreaming" begins to dissipate and an aftermath experience arises. This is often described as a soft drained feeling with an accompanying realization that "a sort of" birth of the psyche has just taken place.

Again I ask myself, what is going on in our relationship that fosters such a mediation between the conscious and the unconscious realities? What is it that takes place in this therapeutic space that allows for such a deep connection? Here Jung's concept of the "transcendent function" begins to give us an image of a process which acts to bridge this gap between the conscious and the unconscious. He describes it as "a natural process, a manifestation of the energy that springs from the tension of opposites, and it consists of fantasy-occurrences which appear spontaneously in dreams and visions" (Jung, 1953, p.80). It seems then that what I refer to as "active dreaming" could be viewed as our entering into the transcendent function.

It is my experience that the content of the words spoken during a session have little relevance as we continue to deepen our shared journey. Speech becomes the way through which we maintain our connection and our openness to the subtle body experience. Language then becomes an intricate system of seeking and probing and works to evoke what is fertile and ready for birth while helping to maintain our connection in this interactional field. In this context, language is no longer a filter through which we attempt to communicate or to describe our individual experience. Rather, it is a tool which acts to facilitate our common experience. New insight,

Language is "tool" — NOT quite full right  
to me

Good connection

aka  
that



images and feelings are evoked and birthed out of this shared field. Language functions as a midwife who introduces and protects this new, unfolding synthesis. The subtle-body then serves as a delivery room receiving that which emerges from the shadow of the unknown, embraced by the parenting dialectic.

Like mid-wife image  
Soul

See p. 47.  
Lambert,  
\* Analysis,  
Regional  
Individualism  
vol. 5  
Academic  
Press.

Yet again I ask, what allows us to sit in this "free and sheltered space" remaining open to the next emergence in this mind-body birthing process? Perhaps it is just that, the space is protected and allows this freedom. Yet how is this protection maintained? In all journeys, when the unexpected is encountered and the unimagined becomes real, there would occur naturally a defensive function which maintains a sense of balance. In other words, this "new" material, which is allowed into consciousness, could be viewed as psyche's attempt to remain open and to protect and maintain its homeostasis. This has been referred to by Jung as the self-regulating psyche

Soul

Perfect psychic balance or harmony...[may not be] attainable or even desirable, but ...whatever happens (for example, dreams or symptoms) can be seen as an *attempt* by the whole organism to achieve homeostasis...we do need moments of a sense of integration even if this is unattainable as a whole. (Samuals, 1985, p. 28)

In order to delve more deeply into this discussion I would like to imagine why I think this type of body-mind connection and birthing process, resulting from the subtle body experience, doesn't happen more often. Why doesn't it just naturally occur when two beings come together? To discuss this I would like to mention a few changes that have occurred in society and culture. Simply put, I think we have lost our ground; a sense of a base from which we operate, perceive ourselves as being in relation to, and to which we return to as holding environment. We have lost contact with time and



place...with Home. We have forgotten our way back to to temenos. Michael Ventura speaks of this in terms of the fragmentation of time and space, the loss of boundaries that we experience in modern times

The boundaries between intimate time and business time; between home and work; between night and day; between individual and corporate; between private space and public space; between environment and psyche...(have become).. fuzzed boundaries. Areas once distinct that now bleed into each other. Dislocated time. Timeless space. (Venture, 1988, p. 2)

It is within the subtle body experience that a manageable process arises through which we can then embrace and explore the mysteries of life. However, it is due to the fragmented and diminished boundaries of our conjoint external reality that, that which was once capable of being "known", has now become the domain of ~~and~~ the unknown. The external world which was once explained and contained by our beliefs and mythology generated through a perspective of linear time, has now eroded and we are left with a mystery. Ventura sights the invention of the electric lightbulb as "the technological beginning of the end of linear time" (Ventura, 1988, p. 3). He tells us how, prior to the electric lightbulb "darkness constricted human space...night shrank the entire landscape into the space within arm's reach" (p. 3). It used to be that we were prisoners of time and space. When night fell, time closed in and space shrank as our visual access to our environment diminished. In a sense, we became confined and hence protected from the expansiveness of the day. Relying less on sight we would become more dependent on our other senses of hearing, smell and touch. Our experience then would be in direct relationship to the body...we would experience ourselves as contained and even limited to who we were in that moment. And the mystery was explained through the stories that were to emerge from those dark places.

This is a  
really good  
point - time -  
feel you're  
on to an  
important  
insight

her therapy, she again opens to energies which will intern activate the unconscious. As this material floods into consciousness, it is experienced in the body which then becomes an expression of the transcendent function allowing for a resettlement between conscious and unconscious. Her way becomes a ceremonial process whereby she enters into a sacred space, opens psyche to unconscious material, integrates this material in a structure of body, weaving back into body the stream of imagery that ensues, until she has in some way moved through this experience and is open to the next. Right now she is alive and full of care for so many moments of her day. However, given the severity of her disease, she cannot be too far from the veil, yet it is evident that she has never been more full of life. Due to the therapeutic container maintained for her, she becomes transient in psyche. Yet it seems to be reinforced by the strong distinction between her "care-ful" attention to moments of life and her felt sense of the darkness of death. Her moments of life take on a luminosity formed against a backdrop of the darkening skies of her approaching death. Could this also be the experience of the subtle-body, a timeless moment which arises as we approach that veil which keeps this world, as we know it, apart from what lies beyond? Is it possible that it is due to the acknowledgement of death and the boundary that exists between death and what we refer to as life that some field opens to what lies beyond that which we are presently conscious? Could it also be a moment when that which separates us from one another becomes apparent as we, just for a moment, experience our oneness? And taken outside of time, couldn't we say that this is the realization of our oneness? For we can only move so close before dissolving that barrier which separates us, in which case there would be not a separate entity left behind to describe the experience?



Death, as it draws closer, provides Mary with a demarcation, a boundary, which allows or forces her to hold a center. The threat of the impending nothingness provides a sharp contrast to her, in the moment, somethingness. Perhaps it is through this ground that above and below can flow. Without this awareness of boundary of Self do we float endlessly in an inflated realm of ego, imagining that we are in transition, yet going nowhere and never really facing death, the prime experience which forces us to claim Self? We are also cut off from our dreaming, and the images and instincts from above and below which wait to guide us through this veil of ignorance.

"Free and sheltered" space then takes on a new meaning. The boundaries are maintained so that the separation between light and dark, life and death are symbolically established. As one opens within this *temenos*, one opens to the dream. ...So, as I greet these visitors from the unconscious realms, have they come to inform me of that from which they came and to which we must all someday return? Does the dream hint at something we so easily avoid; that death sits outside of every moment and waits...casting a shadow to remind us, in a vague sort of way, of its' presence?

Tim,

This is a very good paper. I like the subject very much because I feel this is so neglected in most of our thought in clinical practice & the notions of, for example, withdrawing projections seem stilted. To me "subtle" shows that. Love

you do good work in bringing some  
focused attention to that "in between  
space."

I appreciate very much your introspective  
creativity. you are consulting your own experience,  
personally I in your work. you care to be accurate,  
and I sense you doing that in your paper.

I could see you exploring more the issue of  
language in the process. What kind of language interfaces?  
What facilitates? In your thought language seems  
brought in from the outside a bit.

The shadow side of your creative introspection is  
the need to take your subjectivity I for the  
persona Ph.D. - certainly the decentering - put this in  
more objective form. It's hard to do I not violate  
your spirit. I'd work more on that.

The idea of our lost boundaries, marking transients  
of us all I of how that relates to therapy is a  
"holding place" - where boundaries are I hence allow  
psyche to emerge is very insightful.

I like the way you risk study for yourself.

Keep it up, down, around, in between ....

A-