



## Panel: Problems of symbolization in children and adolescents

Brian Feldman (Moderator), *Palo Alto, CA*  
Gustav Bovensiepen, *Köln*  
Marica Rytovaara, *London*  
Linda Carter, *Providence, RI*

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

These three papers by Gustav Bovensiepen, Linda Carter and Marica Rytovaara give us a contemporary view, from the standpoint of analytical psychology, of the role of symbolization in Jungian analysis with children and adolescents. Jung's original speculations on the meaning of the symbol, symbolization and the transcendent function form the foundation of the papers upon which a scaffolding consisting of Fordham's post-Jungian developmental model, contemporary psychoanalytic theories, and contemporary infant research, is carefully and thoughtfully constructed. For Jung the symbol is a living thing pregnant with meanings. The capacity to utilize symbols for psychological growth, what would be termed symbolization processes, are the result of a symbolic attitude whereby the individual is able to engage in an active and reflective dialogue with images, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions which, given a secure analytic framework, promotes integration and individuation. The links between the conscious and the unconscious, between the rational and the irrational, the imaginary and the real are mediated through what Jung termed the transcendent function. The transcendent function is at the very core of analysis. It is its essence. In childhood and adolescence when symbolization processes mediated by the transcendent function are optimally operational individuation and integration processes are able to proceed, but when they are not able to function, the child or adolescent can become mired in developmental impasses often dominated by what Fordham calls defences of the self, and what Tustin terms autistic states of mind. These are mental states in which children and adolescents can become tormented by identity disorders, eating disorders, self-destructive behaviours, and other addictive and auto-sensuous rituals which impede the capacity to utilize symbols and create meanings. The concreteness of

---

<sup>1</sup> By Brian Feldman. The papers are in the chronological order in which they were presented.

their thinking and patterns of behaviour often indicates that a defence of the self is at work. Fordham has made a major contribution to analytical psychology by emphasizing that the self can become dominated by defensive patterns which curtail the possibility of developing symbolization capacities. These defences of the self often have their origins in infancy where bodily processes are unable to transform into a capacity for symbolization. Tustin as well as Bick have emphasized that the defences of the self are often experienced in a sensory and bodily way, and that a secondary skin function can develop which can be experienced as encapsulating, isolative, protective and self-soothing. Due to difficulties in developing secure attachment relationships, a primary skin function, where the child and adolescent can feel safely encased in their own skin, fails to develop. Data from infant observation, infant research and attachment theory all point to the fact that a secure attachment relationship between the baby and a stable present, mindful and sensitive attachment figure(s) (male and/or female; father and/or mother; or parents of either gender in a homosexual relationship) form the foundation of healthy symbolization processes upon which the scaffolding of all later psychological developments take place. Each of the papers emphasizes the importance of early attachment experiences for the development of either secure or insecure symbolization processes.

Each of the three analysts offers intriguing clinical material which points to the importance of a sensitive emergence in *prima materia* of the clinical material, the transference-countertransference relationship as the primary vehicle of understanding, empathy, and transformation. Gustav Bovensiepen reports on his analytic work with a 17 year old adolescent who presents with symptoms of bulimic eating and sexuality, and who was able to engage her analyst in a deep and often painfully penetrating way, as an attempt of repairing infantile and childhood trauma related to psychological neglect and abandonment. He skilfully provides a containing and reflective analytic space where the infantile/childhood traumas, expressed in part by the autistic fantasy of living in a 'disgusting soap bubble', were able to become integrated in a most remarkable way. Marica Rytovaara presents a most unusual case where a seriously self-destructive/suicidal adolescent developed a 'virtual' transference in which there was a good deal of transformation in the absence of an actual/real analytical relationship, but where the imaginary/virtual analytical relationship provided a structure for psychological growth and development. Linda Carter presents two intriguing cases of adult women stuck in their individuation processes which we can view as having relevance for child and adolescent analysis. I found the image from a dream of one of the analysands of a full body tattoo in the form of a dragon particularly interesting as it points to the construction of a psychic skin involving both imaginary and sensory processes. The beauty and numinosity of this skin image offers a profound glimpse into the mysteries of the reparative and transcendent functions of the psyche.

---

# Living in the soap bubble: the infertile couple and the standstill of the transcendent function in the treatment of an adolescent girl<sup>1</sup>

Gustav Bovensiepen, Cologne, Germany

**Abstract:** This paper considers disturbances of identity and developmental breakdown in the phase of 'emergent adulthood' with young adults together with a disturbance of the capacity of the Self for *coniunctio*. It is proposed that the capacity for effective intrapsychic linking as conceptualized in analytic psychology with the concepts of the *coniunctio* and the transcendent function, is disturbed because of an unconscious identification with an infertile 'couple'. This unconscious couple fantasy can lead to a standstill of the transcendent function and prevents the growth of meaning via the linking between parts of the psyche. This can lead to considerable clinical disturbances. A clinical vignette from the treatment of an adolescent girl should illustrate these hypotheses. The patient had developed a not good enough internal space and she suffered from fragmentation anxieties. She tried to control these anxieties by obsessive behaviour and by forms of adhesive identification. The standstill of the transcendent function was manifested when the patient developed a negative therapeutic reaction.

**Key words:** adhesive identification, *coniunctio*, identity crisis, nihilistic self, triangulation, the third

---

## Introduction

I see my contribution as embedded in a comprehensive theoretical network concept of the psyche that has kept me preoccupied for some time now (Bovensiepen 2004, 2009). In the 'weaving' of this network, psychic processes of splitting and linking and undoubtedly other mechanisms play an important role. While there is a wide range of psychoanalytic literature on psychic splitting processes and their impact, this does not apply in the same way to linking processes and their disorders. The transcendent function and the psyche's capacity for *coniunctio* are useful analytic psychology concepts for conceptualizing such psychological and mental linking processes.

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on case material which I have published in 2009 in 'Leben in der Seifenblase. Entwicklungszusammenbruch und Verteidigung des Selbst in der Post-Adoleszenz' (Developmental Breakdown and Defences of the Self in Post-Adolescence), *Analytische Psychologie*, 156, 134–51.

Several years ago (Bovensiepen 2002) I presented my view that, contrary to Jung, I do not consider the unfolding of the transcendent function as an archetypical or 'natural' process at all, a process that would just require a 'symbolic attitude' in the therapist in order to get started and induce transformative processes in the analysand's psyche. My thesis was that the unfolding of the transcendent function needed a relational matrix based on the child's earliest relational experience as an important model that is re-enacted then in terms of transference/countertransference within the treatment situation. I agree with Francesco Bisagni who emphasizes the relational importance of symbols and has already shown how the unfolding of the transcendent function can be explored in early infancy (Bisagni 1995). From recent longitudinal infant research we know that early development, interpersonally as well as intrapsychically, takes place as a triadic and triangulating structuring process (von Kitzing 2002). This means to me that the transcendent function is able to unfold only if a sufficiently triangulating state of mind is present. This corresponds to Jung's view that, in the conflict between ego and unconscious, the transcendent function and symbol formation are what he calls the 'establishing of a third' (Jung 1916/1958, para. 181). It also means that in these early triangulating processes a self is present which is capable of *coniunctio*. If not, it may lead to disorder or to a standstill of the transcendent function and a lack of symbol formation as well as the development of defences of the self, to use Fordham's term (1985).

My hypothesis in this paper is that at the core of the disturbed capacity of the Self's *coniunctio* there may be the unconscious fantasy of an *infertile parental couple*. Such an infertile internal couple cannot create a meaningful 'child', and the unfolding of the transcendent function is therefore inhibited. This may lead to a developmental breakdown in some adolescents or, in the course of an analysis, to a negative therapeutic reaction.

### The Self, the internal couple formation, and defences of the Self

In her paper 'The not-so-silent couple in the individual', Hester Solomon (2007) elaborates an aspect of the reintegration of deintegrates of the self that is essential for my considerations. She writes:

Deintegration is thought of as the spontaneous division of the Self into parts as it meets the environment. The subsequent reintegration will depend on two interacting elements, the quality of the capacity for internal *coniunctio* and the quality of the encounter, that is, the extent to which it is facilitating or good enough. If the deintegrative moves are not met, or not well enough met, disintegration may occur. The resulting negative affective experience can then lead to a defensive pathology of the Self, inhibiting further deintegration. It is easy to see how this negative feedback loop might lead to an increasingly impoverished inner world. Thus, there is a twofold, dynamic interaction, firstly between the parts of the Self as they meet aspects of the environment, and secondly between these deintegrates as they reintegrate back within the Self. (Solomon 2007)

In my reflections, I will concentrate on the aspect concerning the interplay or the *coniunctio*, the *mutual* connections of *parts of the Self* and in some respect neglect the aspect of encounter with the environment. Here I see the transcendent function as a linking function between the different deintegrates, structuring them as internal 'couples'. This is a process where Solomon believes 'that each part Self, either in projection or experienced internally, is represented in fantasy by a series of linked couples in which a 'Self' and an 'other' are related to each other, often according to the laws of the paranoid/schizoid position' (ibid., p. 12). This is part of a very complex process Jean Knox (2005) has described in simple but precise words: 'The transcendent function is precisely the means by which one part of the mind can find out what another part is experiencing' (p. 626).

According to Solomon (1997, p. 169f.) the regulatory activity of the Self therefore consists in integrating the *various* connecting, but often *opposite*, internal couples, a process that enables the Self through this experience of a combined and durable internal couple to become the source of psychological survival. Models of these connections that are internalized as *couples* are the different part object couples such as the breast/mouth. Affectively negative or deficient couple formations may be split off and not reintegrated, when for instance they are experienced as too frightening, thus preventing the development of mentalization. When the *couple* in the unconscious is dominated by such imaginary connections, the Self can use early defences like splitting and pathological forms of projective identification to get rid of these deintegrates. So we can assume that there are some 'couples' and 'copulations' that *cannot be integrated, but that still dominate the inner world* of the analysand. When I speak about 'couples' I do not necessarily have in mind a parental couple or a male/female couple although these couples are basic metaphors describing internal (between parts of the psyche) as well as external (intersubjective) linking processes.

In the last decade I meet more and more in my practice post-adolescents and young people in their twenties who suffer from severe identity crises up to developmental breakdown. 'Normally' in this age group, identity crises no longer play an important role in our clinical practice. However, those young people I have in mind often seem to be very mature, well adapted, intelligent, talented, successful students or even professionals. At first sight, they also seem to have a good capacity to manage relationships with others. But subsequently, it becomes apparent that they have great problems in developing intimate, emotionally meaningful and personal relationships with others. *Some of them seem unable to take any meaning (Sinn, Bedeutung) from a relationship at all.* Because they are either so fearful of intimate relationships or avoid them altogether, they often feel completely isolated, alone and are afraid of being annihilated; they fear falling into 'black holes' and suffer from chronic object hunger. Some of them internally retreat in the way John Steiner has described (1993).

Taking into account these adolescents or young adults with severe developmental breakdown, in my hypothesis I assume that the permanent or temporary fragility of these analysands' selves is related to their being dominated by an identification with an internal couple which is unable to create meaning. In the experience of the patient this 'couple' (as an internal structure) *pretends* to be a creative couple, but it appears to be a *substitute* of a creative couple, like most of the internal objects of these patients: they are substitutes and cannot satisfy the emotional neediness of the patients. It is therefore an infertile couple. This can have different clinical impacts, such as the sense that there is *nothing* a needy soul could obtain: so the internal child and the ego always go hungry, since there is no belief that anything can be created. This almost impossible to resolve situation may lead also to distinct negative therapeutic reactions during therapy as the case material will show.

The idea of the infertile internal couple as an image or unconscious phantasy of the deficient capacity for *coniunctio* of the self can be related to the concept of adhesive identification that Esther Bick (1968) and Donald Meltzer (1975) developed through working with autistic children. They describe children or adult patients who cling in a sticky way to the objects; the object relations are superficial and a good dependency to primary objects will be *substituted* by a pseudo-autonomy; some of the patients appear pseudo-mature. Bick relates this adhesive form of identification to the failure to internalize a sufficient containing function and a lack of internal *psychic space* and depth or tridimensionality. Adhesive identification then serves as a specific (defensive) form of relating to avoid the pain of early separation and to overcome the despairing feeling of dependency by a substitute 'good object', which will never be internalized sufficiently. These patients are permanently threatened by fragmentation anxieties because they have not developed a sense of internal cohesion. Bick assumes that the first sense of internal cohesion the very young baby can have is via the experience of the skin.

If we assume that the archetypal wholeness ('Ganzheit') and a strong feeling of internal cohesion are the main qualities of the self we can discuss or put into question this assumption in the light of negative or traumatic early experiences, when processes like *coniunctio* or linking functions like the transcendent function obviously do not work 'naturally'.

### Case material: 'Living in a soap bubble'

The clinical vignette I am now going to report on is a phase in the second year of the intensive 6 year long therapy with Anna, who was 17 when I met her for the first time.

Anna exhibited her yearning for adhesive identification from the first session: I experienced her strikingly quickly very openly. She appeared to me as a verbally differentiated, highly intelligent and creative adolescent who seemed to be intellectually premature far beyond her years. At the same time, nevertheless,

I felt an almost pressing, very childish need in her look with which she did not let go of me, while she had to cry over and over again. In the course of the initial interview I saw a disorganized emotional helplessness in her, like a little girl who was well used to being alone and autonomous but had now completely lost her orientation. She expressed violent feelings of envy and rivalry towards her girlfriend and towards her mother: 'I have lost all security, am so furious with my mother, however, I cannot say this to her. My mother is so perfect, she always knows everything; I have the feeling she interferes with everything, although she doesn't really'. Anna reported to me that for some months she had to urinate compulsively; if she can't stand any situation with people, she must go on the toilet; also always before and after any new activities she undertook.

I had the impression that Anna was in a deep identity crisis which she had defended up to now by her intelligence and covered by a strong social engagement. When I announced the end of the hour in the initial session, she got up suddenly and expressed her outrage about the fact that I would have only 50-minutes time for her and left, banging the door to my consulting room, only to show up on time for the agreed second appointment—as I had expected. This mixture of pseudo-maturity and independence with, at the same time, an almost greedy-viscous and needy look with which she did not let me out of her sight, was a strong sign of her emotional need for me, particularly as it soon turned out at the beginning of the treatment that she also suffered from bulimic eating bouts without vomiting.

Anna was in school and when she came she was in a deep depressive mood after a failed love relationship. During the analysis she started her training at the university. After some resistance and turbulences in the form of sexual acting-out, the first year of treatment led to a noticeable stabilization. I understand this positive development as a 'good-Daddy-transference healing'. Anna became more autonomous and no longer needed to go to the disco every night to cruise for men. Parallel with the symptomatic amelioration, something occurred that could be called a negative therapeutic reaction (Horney 1936). She complained that she always felt bad, massively regressed in the sessions and uttered wishes of fusion. She had fantasies of living in the consulting room or creeping into the analyst and dwelling there. She responded to the ending of sessions with violent, almost panic-like fears of not being able to stay alone and falling into black holes. In each session when she lay on the couch she pulled the blanket up to her nose. Reproachfully she declared that she did not want to speak about any positive evolution in herself. She kept being a lamenting and whining baby to whom it would be no help to offer understanding and sympathy. At the same time she started to sexualize our relationship with almost pornographic fantasies. She also reported sexual dreams where she was together with both men and women; sometimes she carried along huge penises like clubs. Occasionally she looked for erotic experiences with girls.

I experienced Anna in her sticky-whiny and always reproachful attitude and in her sloppy clothes as very unpleasant and I had impulses to reject her. Together

with these countertransference feelings of rejection I could actually feel her despair. I was also able to reflect and tell her that she made me feel her suffering for never feeling accepted by her father, and for feeling deeply devaluated. My comments referred to her life history.

Anna was an illegitimate child whose father was living in another marriage with several other children. Her father never acknowledged her as his daughter. During her first years she grew up with a stepfather, a man her mother left after many years. Only at the age of 16 did she come to know who her biological father was. He met her occasionally and then secretly in a neutral place, because his family was not supposed to know about her existence. Her mother, a professionally extraordinarily successful and independent woman, never seemed to have questioned this behaviour on the part of the girl's father.

My comments on her pain for never being accepted by her father were answered with silence or with the grumbling rejection that my understanding would not help either. At this point it was not quite clear to me if she identified with the mother's devaluation of the father and this prevented her from appreciating me as a 'good father'.

I found myself in an almost confused state with Anna because I was unsure about the sort of parental transference that was present. This unfruitful situation in the analysis intensified as I experienced the analysand becoming more and more clinging and sucking me dry so that sometimes I could only stand it by detaching myself internally from her and thinking of something else. Then, of course, her tendency of clinging to me was reinforced. When I interpreted to her my feeling of being sucked dry as being linked to her fantasy of wanting all the good that she thinks her mother has (although I also thought that she wanted the father's unattainable penis) she burst out in loud weeping and complained that she would be all alone again after the session; it was useless to take something good from the sessions because she was going to lose it again immediately afterwards: she could not 'keep it inside her', as she put it. She could accept the interpretation, but could not bear the feelings it raised. She complained that I have *everything*, but above all that I am free to leave after the session and do whatever I want. She had nothing good for herself, nothing was left after the session. She said: 'I'm at your feet and let myself be dragged along'. My impression was that she wanted, by identifying with a very intrusive internal mother, to enrich herself in terms of a parasitic relationship, but could never get enough and had to remain hungry. In this situation I saw no symbolic or triangular space; she functioned on an entirely concretistic level.

This was reinforced by a compulsive behaviour she developed: five minutes after each session she would call me, to hear my voice; I would hear a desperate groaning and then the telephone would go dead. Later she told me that she felt strongly forced to do this, that she 'must' tell me her sexual and aggressive fantasies and at the same time she wanted to apologize, calm down her guilt feelings and on hearing my voice try to find out if I was angry or would kick



her out of therapy. This compulsive behaviour lasted many months and she behaved in the same way with her friends and with her mother.

From my perspective today (the therapy was terminated five years ago) I understand her behaviour not only as intrusive but also as adhesive; both forms of identification served as attempts to reach me, to get at least a feel of a sense of self-agency (cf. Knox 2009), especially in relation to the father-figure. But in the situation I felt more and more confused. One could say my transcendent function was suspended so to speak. Internal and external worlds got mixed up.

There were sessions in which we barely had any connections; she experienced me as far away. She complained that she could not take up my words and did not understand what I said. She had the feeling that she forgot everything immediately, during the session, as well as afterwards. Sometimes at this point I had the fantasy that I would have to take Anna very firmly in my arms, to *hold her together*, because I had the impression she would fall apart into fragments and nothing would be left of her. I tried to express this while speaking to her about her sense that she could only feel herself in a relationship if she felt very firmly held. Then the patient started to cry a lot, but mainly silently.

In the following, another element entered the sessions, that I understand as the destructive power of an *envious deintegrate*: Anna projected her own intrusive and possessive impulses into me and expressed her fear that I could *see everything inside her*, take it away from her and destroy it.

She said, *'I feel like you would take the good away if you see that I have it'*. She was aware that it was an envious figure within herself who had to destroy all the good and idealized elements. She said: *'It is also when I am alone and want to enjoy something that it turns around'*. This meant that envy turns the good within herself into something bad.

Envy dominated the sessions in the following months and she felt surrounded by objects she envied, mainly her boyfriend and her girlfriends. When she spoke about how she cannot stand to hear her flatmate laugh with her boyfriend in the other room and see her so happy even though she herself is together with her boyfriend, she seemed to express her envy at the parental couple of the primal scene. *'I am so overwhelmed by anger and envy, I am so alone then... I don't have anything at all... being alone I don't have anything anyway...'*

Regarding her relationship with her mother there was enough material to clarify the problem of envy; her mother was someone who, in her view, had attained almost everything: professionally she was extremely successful, and socially she was popular. Yet she had no man; in the analysand's imagination men were used by her mother just for sex or were tolerated as cuddly, but castrated, teddy bears. There was no space for a creative parental couple in Anna's fantasies. Her mother still had an outwardly very close and intrusive relationship with Anna at the time of the analysis.

At this time there was an aspect of the relationship with the mother that I could not properly understand: Anna repeatedly mentioned that she found it

unbearable and *disgusting* when her mother saw her naked or even wearing a nightshirt. I understood that as a defence against her homoerotic, *incestuous* fantasies about her mother. At times, I also took it as a sign of persecutory anxieties caused by the close relationship between the two of them – as if the mother could look into her to control her thoughts. However, I did not follow up these lines of thought with her.

As I became in some way better able to manage to think about my analysand and interpret her intrusive sucking-me-dry as a defence against her excessive fear of loss and her deep concern of losing me as an available father figure and I began to communicate my reflections to her in a more confronting way she accused me of '*violating her, rolling her flat, piercing her and putting her in the corner*'. This more *triangulating* way of dealing with her caused her desperate and lamenting condition to turn into an angry, almost sulky mood, and she began to say that she had to withdraw, that she just had no choice but to '*go on living in her disgusting soap bubble*'. This image moved me so strongly, much more than her outbreaks of desperation and yet I found it contradictory. For the first time she gave me an impression of the psychic space in which she internally lived. I had the impression of feeling her tremendous vulnerability in a better way now. On the one hand, it seemed to give her protection and shelter, perhaps even retreat into the intrauterine, into the amniotic sac. It seemed to be an image of her 'second skin' (Bick 1986), which was extremely vulnerable. On the other hand she said that she would never get out of the soap bubble, which meant she had to stay alone in this bubble with her poisoning, eroding envy and would thus poison herself. But the 'second skin' is one possibility of surviving psychically. The soap bubble was an impressive, emotionally strong image for Anna's internal world, but for her—I think—it had no true *symbolic* meaning: she *is* the soap bubble, she *feels* as if she lives concretely in the soap bubble but this image had a strong emotional and perhaps transforming effect *on me*. I experienced Anna's living in a soap bubble as a psychic condition at the edge of falling into the total void, into loneliness, into the nothingness of dissolution. We can understand the soap bubble as an image of a self unable to deintegrate, as if deintegration would lead to psychic death; and yet remaining in the soap bubble also leads to death. The child who will never leave the womb is sentenced to death and the parental couple remains infertile. This must lead to the question, what happens when deintegration of the self is experienced as a deadly risk.

On the other hand, Anna's image rendered my connection with her more meaningful; it was no longer only determined by the flooding affect of a crying, insatiable baby. So I started to think about how I could help her to get out of the soap bubble without damage.

All this did not really make things easy, as Anna now began to complain about feeling excluded from my thoughts when I kept silent, while she felt plagued by '*one hundred useless thoughts*', unable to think and only producing *nonsense* like when she masturbates. When I told her that all these useless thoughts

prevented her from feeling anything, perhaps like being in a soap bubble, she said: *'Yes, then I'm even more dead. I don't participate then. I think that you want me to feel something and not consider time. When you say nothing, the whirl of 50 other things gets through my head. I'm angry that you don't help me'*.

I said, *'It is so annoying for you when you think I have it all, I can think, feel, speak in your presence, but I don't let you participate in my thoughts'*. The analysand then said, *'You could let me, but don't want to. I feel so foolish that you have it all. I feel like I have nothing, just the strong stifling of the other one hundred things that emerge'*.

At this point, Anna became convinced that relationships are useless because it is always the other who has fun, and she left her boyfriend.

### Closing remarks

My analysand firstly tries to establish at any cost a very close, fusional, perhaps even intrauterine (uroboric) relationship; she wants to live *within* the analyst. Yet she does not experience this as a form of containment, or as a creative psychic space which enables development. Rather, it seems to be a condition designed to avoid painful separation anxieties and things that might happen to her and be felt as even worse. Living within the analyst gives her absolute shelter against the triangular situation. She needs to cover herself up, which *might* be understood as a defence against unconscious incestuous fantasies about the intrusive analyst-father. But it rather seems to be the analyst's observing eye that she fears just like she is scared of her mother's look. She needs to protect herself from this look through the enactment of a maternal wrap (the blanket) that offers no real, but just an outward containment. Perhaps the reason why she has to hide from her mother's look is that it makes her feel that what she has from her father—the big penis in the dream and the 'one hundred thoughts'—is worthless because she supposes all the good and desirable things to be possessed by her mother. Here envy starts gnawing at her. Anna makes it very clear that she cannot stand the parental primal scene (the girlfriend having fun with her boyfriend in the next room) and feels *totally left alone on her own*: *'I have nothing'*.

When the analyst manages to reflect more and in a sense behaves and feels more in a paternal triangulating way, Anna experiences him in the negative transference as 'rolling flat, piercing, violating' as she puts it. When she says that she has to retreat again into her 'disgusting soap bubble' I think she expresses the non-protectiveness of false containment that does not really contain or change in a creative way. At the same time, the image of the soap bubble as a space of retreat expresses the border zone of the total crash; it is just a thin skin that saves her from chaos. In so far as the soap bubble had a protective function for Anna, it was a *container-substitute* because it did not help her to create meaning. However the image of the soap bubble had

a strong impact on the *analyst's* mind and helped him to reflect about the patient in a different way. He could apply his transcendent function. But I doubt that the patient's transcendent function worked during this phase of treatment.

How could we describe the internal couple she is identified and lives with? At first it is clear that our 'couple relationship' with the initial eroticizing *father-transference-healing* still has the character of a honeymoon. It soon begins to change. Our analytic work stagnates. An aspect of an internal parental couple becomes constellated in the Self where excitement and sexualization dominate instead of the maternal reverie, and the paternal thinking is replaced by giant penises swung like clubs and by the compulsion of the 'one hundred thoughts', as the analysand puts it. This copulation of compulsive thinking ('father') and sexualization ('mother') has to stay infertile. I wonder if it is Anna's envy of her mother together with her father's rejection of her as a daughter that made her suffer so badly. Thus she actually could not appreciate either the *maternal* or the *paternal* in herself; an internal parental couple developed that did not function as a couple; it remained sterile, it could not create *the third* and did not tolerate any development of meaning within the analysis. Anna does not seem to feel like a *belonging* daughter who originated from a sexual and perhaps loving relationship between father and mother.

A couple that in unconscious fantasy remains infertile cannot nurture psychologically. It can pretend to be a couple, but it will remain empty. From that point of view it is desperate envy that makes the analysand so intrusive. Yet there is nothing to get, so greed and hunger for the object can never be satisfied and are endlessly reinforced, unless—in fantasy—she starts all over again, she retreats into her mother's womb hoping to meet *other* parents after her birth. From this point of view her refusal to acknowledge the triangular situation would make sense.

Technically, the situation in the treatment brings about phases of negative therapeutic reaction (cf. Freud 1918; Horney 1936) that is also caused by her envy for the analyst who can have his own thoughts and 'just leave and do his things' as Anna remarks resentfully. Yet the identification with the infertile couple, the regression and the *simultaneous* clinging to the uroboric-hermaphrodite state of mind (also an aspect of her living in the soap bubble) greatly prevents the unfolding of the transcendent function.

Up to this point we walk on relatively well known theoretical paths and we can accept the inhibition or the standstill of the transcendent function as a result of the patients' regressive state of mind. This is a situation which admits no third position and with it also facilitates no new connections or meaning; it is experienced by my patient as a life in the soap bubble. By means of adhesive identification (which appears clinically, among the rest, in the compulsive symptomatology) a 'normal' relationship is simulated which remains infertile, however, and which can manifest itself clinically as a negative therapeutic reaction.

However, I would like to suggest leaving the theoretical path of intersubjectivity and modern post-Kleinian object relations theory (e.g., Bion, Britton) to understand finally the 'life in the soap bubble' as an example of a not atypical post-modern existence (cf. the post-adolescent young people with massive developmental breakdowns whom I mentioned at the beginning of the paper) in the shadow of a nihilistic or destructive self. Peer Hultberg (1990/2009) has described the destructive aspect of the self which *prevents the regulation of internal psychic opposites*. Roman Lesmeister has dealt in a recently published, excellent study with this destructive aspect of the self which he calls the 'nihilistic self' (Lesmeister 2009, p. 59). The fight between sense and meaninglessness/nothingness is a subject in Jung's 'Answer to Job' (just as in Freud's dualistic drive theory). Now Lesmeister asks how the nihilistic self presents itself in a relation to other people/the other. He takes up the special form of the unrelatedness of many modern people which is not externally visible, by a striking psychopathology. This observation corresponds with my observation of many young people who suffer from severe identity disturbances, without this manifesting itself externally immediately. Many of these young people still live an existence in a bubble, cut-off from good enough relations to others.

To understand this psychodynamically, I would like to propose imagining the construction of the self by internalized couples. Then the self contains different 'pairs' or couples, some of which create meaning while others are infertile or create destruction. As in the case of my patient a prevailing infertile internal couple can lead to the experience of non-relation, emptiness and fragmentation anxieties. The patient tried to avoid this psychic pain by a sticky clinging to a *substitute of a good object*. Lesmeister has taken up my idea of this construction of the self in his work about the nihilistic self; he expresses it as follows:

In the enlarged consideration frame of the present study this would mean that a nihilistic self is a self which is inhabited predominantly by infertile or destructive couples, by couples where no sense and meaning can be created between them. (Lesmeister 2009, pp. 82/83; translation into English by G.B.).

In view of the capacity of the self for *coniunctio* and for the unfolding transcendent function, this could mean that the transcendent function demonstrates a psychic process of coupling. But it can remain open whether the result of this coupling process always has positive results, i.e. whether a 'child' originates who makes meaning or sense. Perhaps there are coupling processes which produce negative or destructive results like in phases of the work with my patient or with the patient about whom Warren Colman (2007) has reported in his very illuminating study about the idea of the third and the absence of meaning. With my patient as well as that of Colman the inability of the patients to endure the absence and separateness of a meaning-creating object played a central role. Colman's patient tried to defend against this intolerable experience of nothingness (I would say: he was caught in a nihilistic self) by a merciless

insistence on the 'mirror-image-sameness' of patient and therapist (p. 577) and non-meaning. Colman supposes that there was, in this case, no psychic coupling process and the transcendent function did not develop at all. This seems to have a certain resemblance to my patient who insisted over long periods on creeping into me, to live inside me and then got clinically into a negative therapeutic reaction. Britton (1997) has described clinically similar states from the point of view of the avoidance of the oedipal (triangular) situation by attempts to insist on a fusional relationship.

In the case of Colman's patient, one could assume that, indeed in the specific therapeutic situation, no internal coupling process was active which produced a symbolic meaning. However, on the interactive level, a dramatic connection between the patient and the therapist seemed to manifest, a connection from which I suppose took place at a level beyond the 'true symbolic' level on which a (new) third originates. I assume that in Colman's patient too psychic connections were produced which had, however, devastating results which could not be avoided by the therapeutic couple.

Finally, I would like to bring up for discussion with this example the suggestion that we should discuss clinically in detail how semiotic connections/couplings can take place mentally. Perhaps this is more familiar to child analysts, because they are occupied constantly with catching something in words or at least in pictures from what is expressed by the children on a much more 'primitive' representational level. Indeed, maybe it is our specific professional art that we as therapists with the help of our transcendent function, can make these connections/links between very different psychic and physical (semiotic) levels and then bring these connections into consciousness, perhaps still with words. Whether these connections do always make sense or have a negative or destructive effect is as yet undecided. In this sense I understand the transcendent function as a value-free (neither positive nor negative) central psychic function which is involved in weaving the psychic network but does not, *per se*, have only positive consequences.

---

#### TRANSLATIONS OF ABSTRACT

Cet article traite des perturbations de l'identité et de l'interruption du processus de développement au moment de l'«émergence de l'âge adulte», chez de jeunes adultes présentant également une perturbation de l'aptitude du Soi à la *coniunctio*. L'auteur avance l'idée que l'aptitude à établir des liens intrapsychiques tel qu'il est conceptualisé dans la psychologie analytique au moyen des concepts de *coniunctio* et de fonction transcendante, est perturbée du fait d'une identification inconsciente à un «couple» stérile. Ce fantasme de couple inconscient peut entraîner un arrêt de la fonction transcendante et empêcher la formation de sens issue du tissage de liens entre les différentes parties du psychisme. Ceci peut entraîner des perturbations cliniques considérables. Une vignette clinique tirée de la cure d'une jeune adolescente illustre ces hypothèses. La patiente n'avait pas développé un espace interne suffisamment bon

et elle souffrait d'angoisses de fragmentation. Elle essayait de contrôler ces angoisses par un comportement obsessionnel et par des modes d'identification adhésive. L'arrêt de la fonction transcendante se manifesta lorsque la patiente développa une réaction thérapeutique négative.

---

Es wird versucht, Störungen der Identität und des Entwicklungszusammenbruches in der Phase der 'emergent adulthood', bei Jugendlichen und jungen Erwachsenen im Zusammen zu sehen mit einer Störung der Fähigkeit des Selbst zur Coniunctio. Es wird angenommen, dass die intrapsychisch wirksame Verknüpfungsfähigkeit, wie sie mit der Coniunctio und der transzendenten Funktion in der analytischen Psychologie konzeptualisiert wird, aufgrund einer unbewussten Identifikation mit einem unfruchtbaren elterlichen Paar gestört ist. Diese unbewusste Paarphantasie kann zu einem Stillstand der Transzendenten Funktion führen, sodass verhindert wird, dass durch die Verknüpfung von verschiedenen Teilen der Psyche seelische Bedeutung wachsen kann. Dadurch kann es zu erheblichen klinischen Störungen kommen. Ein Fallbeispiel aus der Behandlung einer Jugendlichen mit einem narzisstischen Abwehrsystem soll diese Annahmen illustrieren. Diese Patientin hatte einen unzureichenden inneren Raum entwickelt und litt unter starken Fragmentierungsängsten, die sie durch zwanghaftes Verhalten und durch Formen der adhäsiven Identifizierung zu kontrollieren versuchte.

---

In questo scritto vengono presi in considerazione i disturbi dell'identità e il blocco evolutivo nella fase della 'adulthood emergente' in giovani adulti, insieme a un disturbo della capacità del Sé per la coniunctio. Si suppone che la capacità di un efficace legame intrapsichico, come concettualizzato in psicologia analitica con i concetti della coniunctio e della funzione transcendente, venga disturbata a causa di una inconscia identificazione con un 'coppia infertile'. Questa inconscia fantasia di coppia può portare a un blocco della funzione transcendente e impedire la crescita di significato che si ha connettendo le varie parti della psiche. Ciò può portare a considerevoli disturbi psichici. Queste ipotesi vengono illustrate attraverso una vignette clinica presa dalla terapia con una adolescente. La paziente aveva sviluppato uno spazio interno non sufficientemente buono e soffriva di ansia di frammentazione. Cercava di controllare tali ansie con un comportamento ossessivo e con forme di identificazione adesive. Il blocco della funzione transcendente si manifestò quando la paziente sviluppò una reazione terapeutica negativa.

---

Эта статья рассматривает нарушения идентичности и срывы в развитии на фазе «зарождающейся юности», когда у молодых людей отмечается нарушение способности Самости к coniunctio. Делается предположение, что способность к эффективной интрапсихической связке, нашедшая выражение в аналитической психологии в концепциях coniunctio и трансцендентной функции, нарушается вследствие бессознательной идентификации с бесплодной «парой». Подобная бессознательная фантазия может привести к простою трансцендентной функции и не дать обрести смысл посредством связи между частями психики. А это может привести к клиническим нарушениям. Гипотезы иллюстрируются клинической виньеткой о терапии девушки-подростка. Пациентка развила недостаточно хорошее внутреннее пространство и страдала

от фрагментационной тревоги. Она пыталась контролировать эту тревогу обсессивным поведением и формированием склеивающей идентификации. Простой трансцендентной функции проявился, когда у пациентки развилась негативная терапевтическая реакция.

Este trabajo considera las perturbaciones de la identidad y el fracaso en el de desarrollo en la fase de la emergencia de la edad adulta, en jóvenes adultos con una perturbación de la capacidad del Self para la coniunctio. Se propone que la efectiva capacidad intrapsíquica para relacionar, tal como es conceptualizada en la psicología analítica con los conceptos de la coniunctio y de la función trascendente, se ha perturbado a causa de una identificación inconsciente con una “pareja” infértil. Esta fantasía inconsciente de la pareja puede llevar a una detención de la función trascendente y dificulta el crecimiento del significado al no establecer conexiones entre partes de la psique. Esto puede llevar a alteraciones clínicas considerables. Una viñeta clínica sobre tratamiento de una chica adolescente ilustra esta hipótesis. El paciente había desarrollado un espacio interior no suficientemente-bueno y sufrió de ansiedades de fragmentación. Ella trató de controlar estas ansiedades por medio de conductas obsesivas y formas de identificación adhesiva. La detención de la función trascendente se manifestó.

## References

- Bick, E. (1986). Further considerations on the function of the skin in early object relations. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 2, 292–99.
- Bisagni, F. (1995). Liebe Hass und Wissen. Anmerkungen über Säuglingszustände und die transzendente Funktion. *Analytische Psychologie*, 26, 3, 181–93.
- Bovensiepen, G. (1995). Suicide and attacks on the body as a containing object. In *Incest Fantasies and Self-Destructive Acts. Jungian and Post-Jungian Psychotherapy in Adolescence*, eds. M. Sidoli & G. Bovensiepen. New York & London: Transaction, Rutgers State University.
- (2002). Symbolic attitude and reverie: problems of symbolizations in children and adolescents. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 47, 241–57.
- (2004). Bindung –Dissoziation– Netzwerk Überlegungen zur Komplextheorie vor dem Hintergrund der Säuglingsforschung und der Neurowissenschaften. *Analytische Psychologie*, 135, 31–54.
- (2009). Depressive Komplexorganisation bei narzisstischen Störungen. *Analytische Psychologie*, 155, 1, 26–56.
- Britton, R.S. (1997). Weitere Überlegungen zur dritten Position. In: Britton, R.S., Feldman M., Steiner, J., *Groll und Rache in der ödipalen Situation*. Beiträge der Westlodge-Konferenz., edition diskord, Tübingen.
- Colman, W. (2007). ‘Symbolic conceptions: the idea of the third’. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 52, 5, 565–83.
- Fordham, M. (1985). ‘Defences of the Self’. In: *Explorations Into The Self*. London: Academic Press (152–60).
- Freud, S. (1918). Aus der Geschichte einer infantilen Neurose (der ‘Wolfsmann’), *SE* 12.
- Horney, K. (1936). ‘The problem of the negative therapeutic reaction’. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 5, 29–44.
- Hultberg, P. (1990). Zentrum und Umkreis. Die Rolle von Jungs Selbstbegriff in der Gegenwart. Reprint *Analytische Psychologie*, 2009, 156, 204–26.
- Jung, C.G. (1916/1958). ‘The transcendent function’. *CW* 8.



- 
- v. Kitzing, K. (2002). Frühe Entwicklung im Längsschnitt: von der Beziehungswelt der Eltern zur Vorstellungswelt des Kindes. *Psyche – Z Psychoanal*, 56, 863–87.
- Knox, J. (2005). ‘Sex, shame and the transcendent function: the function of fantasy in self development’. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 50, 5, 617–40.
- (2009). ‘When words do not mean what they say. Self-agency and the coercive use of language’. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 54, 25–41.
- Lesmeister, R. (2009). Selbst und Individuation. Facetten von Subjektivität und Intersubjektivität in der Psychoanalyse. Brandes & Apsel, Frankfurt a.M.
- Meltzer, D. (1975). ‘Adhesive identification’. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 11, 289–310.
- Solomon, H. (1997). Das gar nicht so schweigsame Paar im Individuum. *Analytische Psychologie*, 28, 149–71.
- (2007). ‘The not so silent couple’. In *The Self in Transformation*. London: Karnac Books.
-

# The transcendent function in adolescence: miracle cures and bogeymen

Marica Rytovaara, *London*

**Abstract:** This paper proposes that Damasio's mental images, Stern's moments of meeting and Tronick's dyadically expanded consciousness refer to different aspects of the same psychological process as Jung describes in the transcendent function. This proposition is illustrated with two case vignettes of adolescents who functioned on a pre-symbolic level, but who through a transformative experience were catapulted into new developmental trajectories and the beginning of symbol formation.

**Key words:** adolescence, attachment theory, core consciousness, 'moments of meeting', transcendent function

## Introduction

The transcendent function, according to classical Jungian theory, mediates between opposites and expresses itself through the symbol. This became for Jung the most significant part of the therapeutic process, because the symbol is the means by which unconscious complexes are transformed and brought into conscious awareness. The transcendent function forms a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious and facilitates the process of individuation. Jung describes it as 'a natural process, a manifestation of the energy that springs from the tension of opposites and it consists of a series of fantasy occurrences which appear spontaneously in dreams and visions' (Jung 1953, para. 121). The transcendent function is a comfortingly familiar concept, but when it suddenly explodes into the consulting room, it brings in its trail the fleeting ambiguity of the Cheshire cat. My two case vignettes illustrate the powerful, almost visceral, paradigm shift of 'now you see it, now you don't and nothing will ever be the same'. Within Jungian doctrine, the transcendent function is a given since Jung does not describe its origins, nor how it comes into being from a developmental perspective. This is where I suggest that we have to look wider afield to the developmental psychology of the Boston school and to the neuroscience of Damasio.

Jung thought that all search for meaning had to be grounded in the body, although he was not in a position to develop this idea. 'Natural science combines two worlds, the physical and the psychic. Psychology does this only in so far as it is psychophysiology' (1954, para. 103).

Damasio (2000) developed his theory of consciousness from his research into the neurophysiology of emotions. He postulates that at a much more basic level than the transcendent function, a pre-conscious primal somato-sensory

protoself gives rise to an emergent second order core consciousness, which contains an inner sense of self based on mental imagery. Language is part of an extended consciousness which is a later elaboration of feeling toned non-verbal mental images; so we symbolize in words and sentences what we already know in a non-verbal form. Damasio sees core consciousness as a kind of wordless storytelling, which makes up a fleeting core self constantly recreated and also transient and separate from the autobiographical self. Damasio describes this, quoting T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, as 'you are the music while the music lasts' (2000, p. 172). This is akin to Heraklitos' famous dictum: 'One cannot step in the same river twice'. Jung's transcendent function is likewise a fleeting symbolic process. Jung talks about the true symbol which is an intuitive idea that cannot be formulated in any other or better way (1966, para. 105). Jung's 'visions' can be seen as related to Damasio's mental images as both are natural processes, which arise spontaneously and are anchored in our neurobiological make up. The transcendent function illuminates individuation as it is formed, in process.

Both Jung and Damasio manage to avoid the isomorphic fallacy where the meaning is seen as located in and thus universally decipherable from 'the mental image' or 'the vision' and instead see the meaning as arising from the symbolic process and its connectivity. There is therefore no easy blueprint for the symbol and it can only fleetingly be grasped.

Both Jung and Damasio describe internal psychic processes, though both of course presuppose a social context or a nurturing environment. The Boston Group (the Boston Change Process Study Group) represented by Daniel Stern and Ed Tronick developed their theories from mother/infant research, but extended them to the relationship between psychotherapist and patient and the nature of therapeutic change. They describe dyadic interactional processes. Tronick (2007) postulates that what he calls 'implicit relational knowledge' is a form of attunement between mother and infant or patient and therapist. In his model of the therapeutic process, two self organizing systems (i.e., the patient and the therapist) expand and create a third domain, which he calls 'a dyadically expanded state of consciousness'.

Stern (1998, 2004) describes from a similar perspective the process of mutual affect regulation between mother and child or therapist and patient as 'moving along' episodes, which creates pockets of attunement, 'now moments' that might culminate in rare and emotionally heightened 'moments of meeting'.

I suggest that though Jung, Damasio, Stern and Tronick come from very different theoretical backgrounds, they nevertheless all describe aspects of the same psychic phenomenon either as an internal or a dyadic process.

This search for a deep non-verbal connection with another mind, a re-awakening of earlier attachments and an intense longing for long lost moments of attunement, has a particular significance for adolescents. Adolescence is a period characterized by an extensive search for meaning, significance and identity or as an adolescent expressed it, 'I want to be understood without having to ask and without somebody messing with my mind'.

I intend to present two clinical vignettes in which I suggest that the two adolescents I describe each experienced a transformative moment, 'a moment of meeting', which catapulted them into new developmental trajectories and the beginning of symbol formation and that this process could be seen as a manifestation of the transcendent function. One of these, a case of a young man in 'virtual therapy' illustrates the transcendent function as an internal psychic process whilst the other, a girl entwined with a poltergeist, illustrates the transcendent function as a dyadic process. I will, however, first bring up some of the general themes of adolescence to provide a containing frame.

### **The nature of adolescence**

Adolescence is generally defined as the transition between childhood and adulthood marked by the onset of puberty and sexual maturation. The traditional psychoanalytic model views the adolescent through the prism of childhood: Freud (1905) saw adolescence as primarily being a recapitulation of infantile sexuality. Anna Freud (1958) held a more pessimistic view and saw adolescence as a defensive period when a weak immature ego battles against the id and the regressive pull of the past. Blos (1962, 1967), on the other hand, was more optimistic and saw adolescence as offering a second chance and an opportunity to achieve new resolutions before the personality finally became fixed in adulthood.

Adolescence has from an adult perspective for a long time been seen as nothing but a dormant transition which for an impatient adolescent must feel like a draughty waiting room until real life begins. The waiting room is not only a void, but also filled with unprocessed raw emotions, blood and gore as adolescents have little executive function and are filled with a sense of impotence, lack of agency and the means of shaping their own destiny. Adults often mock the adolescent's vulnerable dependency and fail to see the naked terror and fear of abandonment which lies behind the mask of defiance. The adolescent is only too aware of the imminent withdrawal of the threadbare parental safety net and the realization that taking the wrong step can end in being lost forever.

Adults tend to suffer from collective amnesia about their adolescence and resort to either dissociations or confabulated heroic narratives to avoid reconnecting with the turmoil and the narcissistic wounds of unrequited love, rejections and betrayals. The adolescents on the other hand descend into loneliness, the beginning of separation and individuation and the realization that parents can no longer protect them from the harsh entry into social hierarchies. They have to acquiesce to the sharper teeth of their superior peers and roll over and accept their place in the adolescent wolf pack.

Steven Duck's friendship studies from the seventies found that there is a general tendency to overestimate the similarities between loved objects and oneself. This is particularly pertinent for adolescents as the influence of the peer group becomes the central lodestar. Adolescents develop intense attachments to

blood brothers, buddies and spiritual sisters. These attachments usually have a limited life and end in disillusionment when the idealized object is exposed as being deeply flawed and fallible. If the young person has experienced secure early attachments, these losses are recoverable and morph into a more differentiated theory of mind. With less resilient traumatized adolescents, these rejections have an altogether different impact. A teenage girl with PTSD who experienced being jilted wrote 'so fucked up is me, taking overdoses, witnessing things I can't see'.

Adolescence is also the time when young people are the receptacles of the adults' projections and envy of the adolescent's budding potential and the adults' own regrets for the road not taken. Golden youths only appear luminous in the eyes of the beholder and many golden girls and boys never make it and fall apart under the strain. Shakespeare seems to offer a comfort for senex pathology and a reminder of the transience of youthful bloom and passion.

*Fear no more the heat o' th' sun...  
Golden lads and golden girls all must  
As chimney sweepers come to dust.*  
(*Cymbeline*, Act 4, Scene 2)

Developmental neuroscientific research is beginning to gather a substantial body of knowledge of the adolescent brain and its major maturational changes. This is a particularly unsettled and vulnerable time for young people as most adult psychiatric disorders have their roots in the developing adolescent brain and adolescence also represents the peak onset of mood disorders (Pine et al 1998).

Many adolescents engage in mild flirtations with a personified death, as they grow in awareness of their liminal state and of the enormity of standing on the threshold of a metamorphosis. They long to escape from inner turmoil, crushing expectations and peer group pressure into the welcoming arms of the 'twin brothers', Morpheus and Thanatos. Death is seen as the poet Philip Larkin describes it in the poem 'Aubade' as, 'the anaesthetic from which none comes round' (1988, p. 208) or in the words of an adolescent patient 'Silent night, broken night, nothing's changed, nothing's right, sleep in heavenly peace'. In a minority of more fragile adolescents this longing becomes a morbid preoccupation with eternal sleep, expressed through repeated suicide attempts, accident proneness or extreme risk taking as a form of a fatalistic dicing with death.

In a way the biological dice is already cast for adolescents when it comes to risk taking. The developing field of neuroscience though still in its infancy has found that the adolescent brain undergoes fundamental changes which increase risk taking and emotional vulnerability. Steinberg (2008), a neuropsychologist, discusses changes during puberty in the brain's socio-emotional system. These lead to increased reward seeking especially in the presence of peers. Changes in the brain's cognitive control system, on the other hand, happen gradually, leading slowly to an improvement in the young adult's capacity for self

regulation. The salient factor is the different maturational timetables for both these systems, as the increase in reward seeking occurs early and abruptly, whilst the increase in self regulatory competence occurs gradually and is not complete until the mid-20s. Steinberg concludes that this makes mid-adolescence a particularly vulnerable and risky time. I would, however, wish to inject a word of caution, because though we know that different brain systems are implicated in different kinds of behaviour (for example, an increase in limbic and dopamine activity in adolescence correlates with heightened emotionality, novelty seeking and risk taking), the actual extrapolation from functional neuro-imaging techniques to behaviour and even more problematically to mindfulness and the creating of meaning, is still only hypothetical. Many brain imaging experiments use simple tasks to assess cognitive function and these may or may not be meaningful for the subjects and correlations might turn out to be merely confounding variables.

Steinberg concludes that heightened risk taking during adolescence is likely to be normative and biologically driven and goes on to speculate that this might be evolutionarily advantageous, because increased risk taking might give a survival and reproductive advantage. Girls supposedly prefer bad boys. However, in the case of my first vignette, Leo's extreme risk taking with his blood brother and their wild swings between inertia and manic activity were no doubt fuelled by underlying severe depressions.

Winnicott's famous dictum that there is no cure for adolescence, except time and maturity, sets the baseline for therapeutic interventions as damage limitation and keeping the adolescent alive until intemperate youth recedes, anything additional being fortuitous.

## Case vignettes

### 1. *The miracle cure and virtual psychotherapy*

My first case describes a marginalized, socially isolated young man who lost his buddy and was racked by intense survivor guilt and a strong compulsion to be reunited with his dead 'twin'. He had not been previously known to mental health services and would certainly not have been referred for psychotherapy.

*Leo was a gangly, dishevelled 17 year old boy, who was in the care of the Welfare Services. He had a lengthy forensic history of stealing cars with his best friend and they both smoked dope. Leo and his buddy would oscillate between the excitement of driving recklessly at night through the speed track of deserted streets and the hibernation of days spent in drug induced stupor. Leo had some contact with his mother whom he idealized, but who had no parental influence over him. One night his mate wanted to go out and hotwire a car, but Leo felt tired and stayed in. That night, Leo's mate was pursued by the police, smashed into a wall and was instantly killed. Leo was racked by intense survivor guilt and attempted to hang himself. He had to be cut down.*

When he came to see me, he had just been discharged from a secure ward and still bore visible rope burns on his neck. Nothing very significant took place in our first meeting as far as I was concerned; we merely agreed on a time and I said that he needed to come and talk about his longing to join his dead friend. Leo never kept an appointment. He would appear in the waiting room in a drugged state, always on the wrong day or the wrong time and I would go and briefly talk to him. I did not feel any connection with him. When I went to his first review I was therefore surprised to hear that his mother had reported enormous progress through his therapy and had said that Leo would come home and tell her how much saner his therapy made him. She felt that the therapy was the only thing that kept Leo alive and she was desperate for it to continue. The professional network strongly supported her and would not listen to my protestations that there was no therapy. They ignored me and seemed if anything to see my protestations as a rather perverse expression of self modesty.

This state of affairs continued for a full year; I never saw Leo for a proper session, though he continued to make progress and tell his mother about my interpretations and how important his therapy was. I was rather uneasy, because as I did not know what was happening, I had no way of judging whether he was contemplating another lethal suicide attempt. The whole professional network seemed to be gripped by the same delusional transference and I felt that I was the only sane voice crying in the wilderness. I was also peeved that I had no control over the interpretations that my virtual self seemed so effortlessly to sprout forth. My final dilemma came when it was time to end the psychotherapy. My professional colleagues were adamant that any reality testing was totally contraindicated and that I had to slowly release him from his dependency on me, virtual or not as the case might be. I therefore wrote a letter to Leo saying I felt privileged to have been part of his improvement and to see him embrace life again, but that the time had come for him to get on with his life without me though I would remember him. His last session would be in four weeks time. Leo did of course not come, but the feed back through his mother was that he was keeping the letter with him as a talisman.

After I had recovered from my irritation with my colleagues who seemed caught in the delusions of a miracle cure whilst trapping me in their *folie en masse*, I was left with the uncomfortable feeling of having been a somnambulist on a tightrope, who at any time might have woken up and lost her footing.

I can only speculate about what took place in Leo's mind. When I first met Leo, he was in a deeply traumatized, regressed and dissociative state. I think that a very early form of attachment, similar to imprinting, was constellated and that I became fused with an idealized early mother before his expulsion from paradise.

My own countertransference appeared as an image of containment, of containers within containers. The theme 'Anna-herself-Third' was widespread in medieval iconography, particularly in Scandinavia where the cult of Mary as the protective mother was very strong. The image I held in my mind was of

Anna, the mother of Mary, holding the grown up Mary holding the divine child. I felt that I was containing both the internal and external mother-child couple until Leo became able to reconnect with a good internal nurturing mother. The healing process that took place for Leo is an illustration of the plasticity of the human mind and the power of what Jung calls the self regulating psyche. Perhaps merely reconnecting with my gaze in the waiting room reactivated the initial 'moment of meeting' and this bare minimum was sufficient to keep the internal healing process going.

The internalized therapist thus became the live counterpoint to the seductive pull of the dead buddy and through these opposites Leo was able through his own transcendent function to create a third creative synthesis of proto-individuation.

## 2. *The poltergeist and the bogeyman*

The second case is that of a young girl who became trapped between the poltergeist and the bogeyman and who made me share her internal state through a process of dyadically extended consciousness.

*Chika was a painfully thin 12 year old African girl with huge blank eyes. She came with her stepmother, who was worried about Chika's withdrawn silences and self starvation. Chika's mother had recently died and her father had immediately remarried a young woman sent from the mission back home. She came to look after Chika and her younger sister and the couple quickly had a new baby. Chika's stepmother asked to see me on her own and told me that the other big problem was that their home had been invaded by an evil spirit, a poltergeist, who visited at night and shred her new curtains to ribbons, emptied the food cupboard and smashed her wedding crockery. She thought somebody from back home was envious and had sent the spirit to destroy her new happiness and good fortune so she kept the damage secret from her husband and the children. She was ashamed and at a loss about what to do and felt helpless without any spiritual mediators in an alien culture.*

*Chika was mute and listless when I tried to talk to her. Gradually she told me that her father said that she was the living double of her mother and she added that her mother came to visit her every night. I was wondering whether her dead mother came to comfort her, but Chika stared blankly and said that her younger sister had been the golden girl, her mother's favourite and her mother just came to her every night. That was all. I tried to talk about the dead mother, her sudden illness, the extended family Chika belonged to... anything I could think of whilst tiptoeing around themes like a cat around hot porridge—all to no avail. Chika continued to come and see me and repeated that her mother just came and then Chika would fall into a heavy dreamless sleep. She said her mind was empty; she had no thoughts or memories.*

*One day Chika suddenly told me that she had had a terrifying dream of a jackal's grinning face with bared fangs so close she could feel the animal's hot*



*breath on her face and in the dream the jackal suddenly turned into a bogeyman and then morphed into her father.*

*I experienced a sudden countertransferential vision of perceiving the world through Chika's mind as if we were symbiotically connected. I said that Chika felt invaded by her mother's ghost who came without her permission and took over Chika's body, a form of possession, not to comfort Chika but to sleep with her husband, and that it was all too confusing and too much for a little girl to understand. She was not to blame, she just longed to be a little girl again and to get her real mummy back, not the cold ghost mummy. Chika crumbled and began screaming and rolling around on the floor. When she gradually calmed down, she said that the ghost had left her and that she could not return home, because now she knew what had happened. Unfortunately she was already pregnant with her father's child. The father insisted that he had seen his dead wife's face superimposed on Chika, but the court took a rather different view and he was duly sentenced.*

*It was easy to understand that the poltergeist was Chika in a dissociated state acting out her dead mother's revenge against the impostor and Chika's own rage against her mother's death and abandonment of her. It was only when the image of the predatory jackal/bogeyman appeared that I became aware of the sexual transgression by the father. Chika had to keep the poltergeist and the bogeyman apart in her mind and remain in a dissociated lifeless state. This became increasingly untenable and she was slowly starving to death. Perhaps she was also longing to join her dead mother as an act of atonement or to return to the imagined bliss of being the first born before her sister, the golden girl was born. The poltergeist and the bogeyman were like dual characters from a comic strip and by balancing each other in magical power they kept her mind intact and perversely integrated. The connection to me, the outsider and interloper created a third in this hermetically sealed system and blew it wide open.*

This is an account of a traumatic transgression. In a culture which partly believes that the ancestors still walk amongst people to protect them or to demand revenge for the wrongs they have suffered, the possessed is absolved from blame through an appropriate ritual, in some respects similar to the eliciting of family myths in systemic therapy. Chika, as a motherless child in exile, could not restore cultural meaning or find a cultural solution for what had befallen her.

Chika was full of rage towards her dead mother, who had first abandoned her daughter and then metamorphosed into an evil ghost-mother, fusing with the father into an abusive parental couple. Chika's aborted mourning as the stepmother moved in, the rivalry with the stepmother who immediately produced a baby—all these left Chika in an unbearable conflict, which could only be managed through dissociation and splitting.

The transcendent function also manifested itself through the divided maternal image; on one hand the idealized mother from early childhood activated by the therapy and on the other, the nocturnal ghost mother who possessed Chika in

an oedipal scene to create other hated siblings in her womb. The third position emerged when Chika lost the poltergeist's magical cloak and experienced herself as the lost little child she really was. Chika had used what Michael Fordham termed 'defences of the self' to protect herself from the overwhelming affects that threatened the survival of her real self.

## Discussion

The transcendent function seems to arise from the human mind's striving to find meaning and purpose for its existence through the interweaving of the search for similarity and difference.

The anthropologist Michael Taussig explores the tension between mimesis, the idea of imitation and sameness and alterity, the idea of difference between the self and the Other. When the psyche is threatened by annihilation and overwhelming affects, transcending into a state of bodily possession through the imitation of the sameness of an ambiguous other becomes an escape providing a temporary temenos. Taussig interestingly develops this theme further and links this imitation of sameness which he calls the yielding component with Freud's death instinct. He describes on one hand the child's relation to the body of the mother, which remains as a regressive fusionary longing for 'the pulsational landscape of the mother' (1993, p. 37) because it formed the mimetic basis of signification. He describes how mimesis also has a healing power and how, based on Hegel's epistemology, it leads to finding self identity through becoming another, finding oneself within the Other. The powerful compulsion humans harbour to become someone else thus forms part of the road to self discovery and individuation. Freud (1905) introduced the concept of 'ideational mimetics' in his seminal paper on jokes and referred to bodily copying, embodiment and ideational imitation of the Other. Mimesis thus becomes a process of internalizing parts of the other and through this gaining self knowledge. Taussig describes this as the self being inscribed in the Other. He explores the search for identity through many convoluted loops of alternating mimesis and alterity and concludes that there is no such thing as a fixed identity, 'just chimeras of possible longing' (1993, p. 254). This seems to provide another facet to the fleeting temporal nature of Damasio's core consciousness and Jung's transcendent function.

Anthropological discourse has a long tradition, dating back to the turn of the last century and Frazer's *Golden Bough*, of exploring sympathetic magic or in modern terminology, mimesis where the representation assumes the power of the original. The function of magical thinking can be seen to control and restructure inner chaos and thus obliterate transgressions. When Chika became her mother, she discovered the searing truth behind mimesis, which was an amplification of the unbearable loss of her mother. She became trapped in her longing to join her dead mother and was no longer able to take in anything, whether in the form of symbolic or concrete nourishment or nurture. The therapeutic encounter could be viewed as having provided enough alterity

through cultural dissonance to break this fatal fusion with the mother and separate Chika from what Taussig calls a mimetic culture where spirits copy physical reality as Chika-the-poltergeist had become mother's avenging spirit.

Chika emerged from her trance and though her whole world had crashed around her, she became alive in her suffering and real to herself. She retrieved a connection to an internalized nurturing mother instead of the dead ghost mother who had possessed her.

Leo internalized an unknown aspect of the therapist and underwent an internal process which reconnected with some fragments of an early good attachment with his mother. He grasped the hems of two different maternal images and was able to let go of the bond to the dead twin and begin the process of individuation and separation.

Both cases go back a long time, but have remained active in my mind, because of their tantalizingly mocking quality, particularly as I never gained access to the mutative interpretations my virtual self produced, though on closer scrutiny they would no doubt have turned out to be cryptograms.

## Conclusion

When I began my training, the transcendent function appeared quaintly old-fashioned linked as it was with mystery, irrationality and numinosity. It seemed to appear at whim out of a sleight of hand as a Jungian card trick. The transcendent function seemed to rely solely on blind belief as it defied explanations and its structure was deceptively simple, similar to a metaconceptual ladder (apples – pears become fruit). It also was something that separated the Jungians from the wider psychoanalytic community. It is therefore interesting that the transcendent function has risen to the forefront of current Jungian thinking and has become part of the zeitgeist movement towards unification and the search for meaning and mutative change behind verbal interpretations.

Donald Meltzer, writing within the post-Kleinian tradition about the psychoanalytical process based on mutative verbal interpretations, seems nevertheless to make a fleeting connection with the transcendent function and the analytic triangulated third. Meltzer writes: 'The analyst at work must be 'lost' in the analytical process as the musician at his instrument, relying on the virtuosity of his mind in the depths' (1967, p. xi) and later refers to virtuosity as 'the mysterious function of creativity' which can only emerge from the unconscious in union with the organ of consciousness (*ibid.*, p. 94). He appears to say that it is not the right interpretation or the depth of interpretation that brings internal change, but the psychoanalytic stance or the quality of virtuosity. I understand this as a reference to 'the analytic third' or by analogy Jung's creative synthesis as it emerges through the transcendent function

Warren Colman, in a recent paper 'Symbolic conceptions: the idea of the third', sees Jung's creative synthesis as the emergence of a meaning function and

a nascent symbolic representation or what he calls 'imaginal capacity'. Colman states that 'It refers to something more than the capacity to symbolize since it also involves the capacity to relate to symbols as significantly meaningful, having multiple referents that remain distinct from the form in which they are represented' (2007, p. 566).

Jung did not have access to the findings from neuroscience and developmental psychology that we have today and it is therefore easier to make tentative links with major explorations in other fields with the accompanying dangers of misinterpretations and simplifications. Some of the similarities might prove to be illusory and others will hopefully lead to new discoveries in times of increased integration across different domains.

Adolescence is a period of great fluidity and plasticity, opening up endless possibilities. Adolescents possess a developmental rocket that launches them onto their developmental trajectories if prevented from exploding in the stratosphere. Both the adolescent patients I have described moved into domains of nascent symbolic representations which enabled them to make meaning out of experiences that had been previously devoid of meaning. They managed to emerge from fusional states into the beginning of individuation and reflective functioning. Both cases can be seen as part of a palimpsest with the transcendent function emerging as an internal psychic process on one side and as a dyadic process on the other.

It is exciting to experience the convergence between different theoretical orientations emerging from different cultural and temporal contexts and, though these might turn out to be overestimations of similarity, this phenomenon will nevertheless create new meaning and increase the likelihood of meaningful 'moments of meeting' in the consulting room. I have suggested that there are similarities between Jung's transcendent function, Damasio's mental images and core consciousness, Stern's moments of meeting and Tronick's dyadically expanded consciousness and that these might merit further exploration and development in clinical practice.

I want to conclude by making a plea for psychotherapists and psychoanalysts to extend the frontiers of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis and undertake work at the margins to reach out to impossible patients—Peter Pan's lost boys and girls who play deadly games at the edge of a void. They frequently resist any form of therapy, but even if they take flight or bite the hand that feeds them, they might nevertheless retain an implicit imprint of a fleeting moment of a deep connection and return to the feeding bowl in their own good time.

---

#### TRANSLATIONS OF ABSTRACT

L'auteur de cet article soutient que les images mentales de Damasio, les moments de rencontre de Stern et l'expansion dyadique de la conscience de Tronick se réfèrent à différents aspects du processus psychologique de la fonction transcendante tel qu'il est

décrit par Jung. Ceci est illustré par deux vignettes cliniques d'adolescents fonctionnant à un niveau présymbolique. A travers une expérience de transformation, ces adolescents furent projetés dans de nouvelles trajectoires de développement et purent accéder à la formation de symboles.

Dieser Text entwirft die These, daß sich Damasio mentale Bilder, Sterns Momente der Begegnung und Tronicks dyadisch ausgebautes Bewußtsein auf verschiedene Aspekte desselben psychischen Prozesses beziehen, den Jung als Transzendente Funktion beschrieben hat. Dies wird illustriert durch zwei klinische Vignetten von Adoleszenten, die zunächst auf einer präsymbolischen Ebene verhaftet waren, dann durch eine wandlungsbedingende Erfahrung auf eine neue Entwicklungsbahn und an den Beginn von Symbolbildung katapultiert wurden.

In questo lavoro vengono proposte le immagini mentali di Damasio, i momenti di incontro di Stern, la coscienza ampliata diadicamente come riferimento ai differenti aspetti dello stesso processo simbolico che Jung descrive come funzione trascendente. Ciò viene illustrato attraverso due vignette cliniche di adolescenti che funzionavano a un livello pre-simbolico, ma che attraverso un'esperienza trasformativa vennero catapultati in nuove traiettorie evolutive, all'inizio della formazione del simbolo.

В этой статье делается предположение, что ментальные образы Дамасио, моменты встречи Стерна и диадически расширенное сознание Троника – все это относится к разным аспектам одного и того же психологического процесса, описываемого Юнгом как трансцендентная функция. Это иллюстрировано двумя клиническими виньетками о подростках, которые функционировали на до-символическом уровне, однако посредством трансформирующего переживания оказались катапультированными на новые траектории развития, к началу формирования символов.

Este trabajo propone que las imágenes mentales de Damasio, los momentos de encuentro de Stern y la expansión de la conciencia diádica de Tronick, se refieren a aspectos diferentes del mismo proceso psicológico como Jung describe en la función trascendente. Esto es ilustrado por dos viñetas clínicas de adolescentes que funcionaron en un nivel pre-simbólico pero, que por una experiencia de transformativa fueron catapultados a nuevas trayectorias de desarrollo y al inicio de formación de símbolos.

## References

- Blos, P. (1962). *On Adolescence: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe.
- (1967). 'The second individuation process of adolescence'. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*. New York: International Universities Press, 1967, 22 162–86.
- Casey, B.J., Jones, Rebecca M. & Hare, Todd A. (2008). *The Adolescent Brain*. *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, 1124, 111–26.

- Colman, W. (2007). 'Symbolic conceptions: the idea of the third'. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 52, 3, 565–83.
- Damasio, A. (2000). *The Feeling of What Happens—Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness*. London: Random House/Vintage.
- Duck, S.W. (1973). *Personal Relationships and Personal Constructs*. London: John Wiley.
- Freud, A. (1958). 'Adolescence'. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 13, 255–78.
- Freud, S. (1905). 'The transformations of puberty'. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. SE VII.
- (1905). *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. SE VIII.
- Jung, C.G. (1953). *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. CW 7.
- (1966). 'The spirit in man, art and literature'. CW 15.
- (1954). 'The development of personality'. CW 17.
- Larkin, P. (1988). *Collected Poems*. London, Boston: The Marvell Press & Faber and Faber.
- Meltzer, D. (1967). *The Psychoanalytic Process*. London: Heinemann Medical Books.
- Pine, D.S., Cohen, P., Gurley, D., Brook, J., Ma, Y. (1998). 'The risk for early adulthood anxiety and depressive disorders in adolescents with anxiety and depressive disorders'. *Arch General Psychiatry*, 55, 56–64.
- Stern, D. (2004). *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life*. London & New York: W.W. Norton.
- Stern, D.N., Sander, L.W., Nahum, J.P., Harrison, A.M., Lyons-Ruth, K., Morgan, A.C., Bruschweilerster, N., Tronick, E.Z. (1998). 'Non-interpretive mechanisms in psychoanalytic therapy: the "something more" than interpretation'. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 79, 903–21.
- Steinberg, L. (2008). 'A social neuroscience perspective on adolescent risk-taking'. *Developmental Review*, 28, 78–106.
- Taussig, M. (1993). *Mimesis and Alterity—A Particular History of the Senses*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Tronick, E. (2007). *The Neurobehavioral and Social-Emotional Development of Infants and Children*. New York & London: W.W. Norton.

# The transcendent function, moments of meeting and dyadic consciousness: constructive and destructive co-creation in the analytic dyad

Linda Carter, *Providence, RI, USA*

*Abstract:* In reading the work of Beebe (2002), Sander (Amadei & Bianchi 2008), Tronick (2007) and Stern and the Boston Change Process Study Group (1998), resonances to the transcendent function can be registered but these researchers seem to be more focused on the interpersonal domain. In particular Tronick's concept of 'dyadic expansion of consciousness' and 'moments of meeting' from the Boston Change Process Study Group describe external dyadic interactions *between* mothers and babies and therapists and patients while, in contrast, Jung's early focus was on the intrapsychic process of internal interaction between conscious and unconscious *within* an individual. From an overall perspective, the *interpersonal* process of change described by infant researchers, when held in conjunction with Jung's *internal* process of change, together form a transcendent whole that could also be called a complex adaptive system. Such new theoretical perspectives from other fields confirm and elaborate long held Jungian notions such as the transcendent function which is, in many ways, harmonious with a systems perspective. Throughout this paper, clinical vignettes of interactive moments along with sand play and dreams will be used to illustrate theoretical points regarding the healthy process of the transcendent function along with descriptions of failures of such conjunctive experiences.

*Key words:* analytic dyad, constructive and destructive co-creation, containment, dyadic consciousness, emergence, transcendent function

---

*To and Fro, To and Fro*

*Should I Come...*

*Or Should I Go...*

The patient, whom I will call Alan, silently struggled with himself in the waiting room caught by his longing to run toward me and his countervailing need to run away. His stony visage did not betray the hidden conflict bubbling beneath the surface. He entered his hours with a secret script for our interactions that if not lived out would result in rageful attacks on the analysis.

Another patient, Marianna, hummed while she waited and consistently greeted me with a warm smile and what seemed to be eager anticipation of spending time together. An artist, she was comfortable with the unknown and had a powerful intuitive feel for unconscious process. There was an easy flow

to the hours along with a sense of collaborative effort on work with the creative imagery of her dreams.

Both analysands are highly intelligent and accomplished and both come from households of early relational trauma and severe psychopathology in immediate family members. I will use my work with them to illustrate theoretical points regarding the healthy process of the transcendent function along with descriptions of failures of such conjunctive experiences. Further, I will consider the transcendent function as a central therapeutic process which has the potential to effect change in analysis.

This central concept was first described in 1916 by Jung as an intrapsychic phenomenon although one can feel its presence in what many would see as the intersubjective matrix of 'The psychology of the transference'. In reading the work of Beebe (2002), Sander (Amadei & Bianchi 2008), Tronick (2007) and Stern and the Boston Change Process Study Group (1998), resonances to the transcendent function can be registered but these researchers seem to be more focused on the interpersonal domain. In particular Tronick's concept of 'dyadic expansion of consciousness' and 'moments of meeting' from the Boston Change Process Study Group describe external dyadic interactions *between* mothers and babies and therapists and patients. In contrast, Jung's early focus was on the intrapsychic process of internal interaction between the conscious and the unconscious *within* an individual. From an overall perspective, the *interpersonal* process of change described by infant researchers, when held in conjunction with Jung's *internal* process of change, together form an overarching whole in which the dyad may be viewed as part of a complex adaptive system whose emergent properties include a transformation of individual consciousness via dyadic interactions.

*Emergence* is a current concept that we can read backward into Jung's work on the transcendent function. It could be said that it is through the dynamic interaction of lower level elements in a scale free network<sup>2</sup> that a supraordinate self emerges and transcends its antecedents. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, as is the case with the mind emerging from the body, brain and environment. This notion has highly significant implications for analysis, science and theology, among many other fields. From Beebe's point of view, emergence is the engine of change that results from the integration of the mutual co-ordination of parts within an interactive, co-created system (personal communication, May 2009).

Jung's notions of the transcendent function are in many ways harmonious with a systems perspective. First, there is a conjunction of opposites. Then the complementary/compensatory nature of the unconscious in relation to one-sided consciousness leads to emergence of the symbol. And finally, a new and

---

<sup>2</sup> Scale free networks have to do with scale invariance of phenomena as originally described by the Mandelbrot Set. By Mandelbrot Set, we mean that 'regardless of the scale at which one examined a phenomenon the same basic structure would be revealed' (Hogenson 2007, p. 3020).



complex entity, a synthesis not a fusion of antecedents, is presented. The result is a transformed attitude and the birth of a sense of wholeness.

According to Jung (1916/1960, para. 146), 'the suitably trained analyst mediates the transcendent function for the patient, i.e., helps him bring conscious and unconscious together and so arrive at a new attitude'. In addition, Jung's oft quoted lines analogizing the analyst/patient relationship with chemical interaction and mutual transformation resonates with contemporary views of both self and mutual regulation within an interactive field. As I see it, the emergence of the transcendent function is highly dependent on the reflective function of the individuals and the dyad within a co-constructed field. Indeed, the analyst's successful history of experiences with the transcendent function, grounded in healthy interactive relationships, provides a holding environment for the emergence of evermore complex systems intrapsychically and with outer others. One could say that this view offers an understanding of the mechanics of containment which differs from Bion's notion of projective identification. There is a move here toward mutual influence which fits well with Jung's diagram of conscious/unconscious connections between the king and queen in 'The psychology of the transference'. It should be noted, however, that analytic bidirectional influence is asymmetric and that if reflective function in the patient is limited, then the analyst carries symbolic understanding for the dyad while the patient's abilities in this area are in the process of emerging. The symbolic attitude and reverie of the analyst provides a nutritive environment for the development of the patient's ability to think and imagine about himself and interactions with others (see Bovensiepen 2002, p. 253).

An example of the emergence of bidirectional influence within a complex system can be found in my work with Alan. His wish for closeness and anxiety regarding separation manifested in an insistence that we literally marry. Discussions of this issue resulted in rageful attacks on the analysis and anger at me for withholding what he felt he needed. The attacks both provided emotional intensity and, simultaneously, an avoidance of actual possibilities in the analytic relationship. This came at a time when Alan was moving ahead professionally and he needed to reduce hours in order to meet a work commitment. The healthy developmental pull to expand his outer world had to do with an emergent separation/individuation process between us. These changes seemed to trigger a regression and a move toward fusion evident in the marriage proposal. It was only when I realized the similarity of my current feelings of frustration to those I experienced with a traumatic separation in my own history that I felt freed up to reflect on this current situation. Through empathy for my younger self, my attitude toward the current clinical crisis shifted and I re-engaged with the patient more openly and was able to hold the tension created by his symbolic 'leaving home'. There was a longing to be together and a developmental need to separate—for both of us. This situation could not be reduced to a uni-directional projective identification where he was 'putting into' me his disavowed affect. We had, in fact, mutually co-constructed

the current dilemma and were aided by the joining function of Eros 'to transcend the negative shadow and keep the creative process alive' (Powell 1985, p. 43).

This kind of co-constructed relationship between therapist/patient and mother/infant has been carefully studied by Louis Sander, a pioneer in the field of infant research whose work has influenced Beebe, Tronick and Stern, to name a few. Looking at the polarities and paradoxes of interaction, he notes three principles generally characteristic of complex systems:

- a) polarities exist in dynamic opposition,
- b) paradoxically opposite processes proceed along together, and
- c) integrative mechanisms harmonize these polarities and paradoxical tendencies.

(Sander 1982, p. 317)

Further, Sander notes that 'the organism gains coherence as ever new coordinations between organism and environment are created in new combinations of action and function that serve to bridge the disparities generated within and between systems' (*ibid.*). This constructive, integrative view is quite in harmony, I think, with Jungian notions of prospective function in the individuation process.

Sander, Stern and Tronick are all members of the Boston Change Process Study Group who seem to use interchangeably the terms 'moments of meeting' and 'dyadic expansion of consciousness'. I will define them and ask that the reader 'listen' for similarities to the transcendent function. This group values interpretation and working with the transference but they are more focused on:

the real relationship as the intersubjective field constituted by the intersection of the patient's and the therapist's implicit relational knowing [of each other]. This field extends beyond the transference-countertransference domain to include authentic personal engagement and reasonably accurate sensings of each person's current 'ways of being with'.

(Tronick 2007, p. 314)

Further, they state:

In traditional theory, interpretation is viewed as the semantic event that rearranges the patient's understanding. We propose that a moment of meeting is the transactional event that rearranges the patient's implicit relational knowing by rearranging the intersubjective field between patient and therapist, what Tronick refers to as dyadic expansion of consciousness.

(*ibid.*)

As I understand it, 'Moments of meeting are jointly constructed, and they require the provision of something unique from each partner. Sander (1995) has pointed out the essential characteristic that there is specific recognition of the other's subjective reality' (*ibid.*). The result is a mutual ratification of what is happening now between the two (*ibid.*). Further, these moments do not occur

with conscious intentionality but emerge from the implicit, procedural domain which has been dyadically co-created.

From Tronick's view,

At the moment the dyadic system is created, both partners experience an expansion of their own state of consciousness. The boundary surrounding their own system expands to incorporate elements of consciousness of the other in a new and more coherent form [from an alchemical view, dissolve and coagulate [see Edinger 1985]]. In this moment of dyadic formation, and for the duration of its existence, there must be something akin to a powerful experience of fulfillment as one paradoxically becomes larger than oneself.

(*ibid.*, pp. 291–92)

This, to me, comes extraordinarily close to what Jungians would call a transcendent experience of the self constellated within and between two people as the third in the field. It is an experience of the self as both centre and circumference that changes, dramatically, one's world view. The infant researchers seem to 'get' the power of such a transcendent moment but lack the beauty and mystical feeling that Jung so beautifully articulates through amplification in his writing.

A numinous moment of dyadic expansion and sense of being surrounded by the self occurred recently with my second patient Marianna, noted above. After a year of analysis, she was experiencing a surge in productive creative writing, thus allowing for a renewed sense of herself as artist. At this point, she had the following dream:

I dreamed I was getting a tattoo. It was a dragon. It covered my entire body with the vibrant colors of its scales and was luminescent. It was like a cloth wrapped around my entire body. I couldn't see its head or tail and I had the revelation that I would never be able to see all of it at the same time. I thought I was getting a small dragon tattoo on my upper arm. The scale was amazing. Not what I had expected. It was a surprise.

The dream was told with awe and delight. I, too, was struck by the powerful presence surrounding us. On completion of the dream, with enthusiasm, I said, 'Amazing!'. We laughed and shared a moment of mutual appreciation of this fantastic image. No interpretation or amplification was offered. Using a phenomenological approach, we elaborated on description of the image and her affective experience of it. It was a magical moment. We both were wrapped in the dragon. Reminiscent of Sander, paradoxes and polarities had been held in our interaction over many months of being together and the dragon represented something larger that held us both. We were in awe of the imaginal other co-created between us and emerging within her psychic conjunction of conscious and unconscious. We both were moved by an expansion within and between.

During a week's interval of sessions, Marianna had had a persistent sense of 'Ah Ha!'. Something had changed. Here is a selection of her comments:

The dragon is a gift. A privilege. The blinders have been taken off in some ways. Tells me things are possible. This is not intellectual knowledge. There is no action, no narrative. It is a moment of perception. Multiple things emanate from this dream. Things to look at for all of my life. I will never see it all at once. The question is: how do I move through life in imaginative ways?

A creative formulation has been achieved here in the aesthetic domain while full understanding of meaning has yet to unfold. Jung notes that ‘aesthetic formulation needs understanding of the meaning, and meaning needs aesthetic formulation. The two supplement each other to form the transcendent function’ (Jung 1916/1960, para. 177). It should be noted, here, that the work with Marianna has really just begun and the shadow aspects of the dragon have not yet been affectively experienced in the analysis. Understanding the meaning of the dragon symbol has yet to be fully explored although the aesthetic experience has been profoundly felt within and between us.

In this case, a moment of meeting intrapsychically led to a moment of meeting in the analysis, deeply changing the psychological atmosphere not with action or interpretation but through intense engagement with each other and with the image. The dragon represents a symbol of conjunctive processes in an emergent system moving toward greater cohesion and continuity. Given that the dream occurred within the patient, we could borrow on infant research terms and say that she had an intrapsychic moment of meeting held in a dyadic context. There is a fluidity, a flow here of interpersonal/intrapsychic mutual influence. Perhaps, it could be said that a moment of meeting is a significant element in an emergent transcendent process; that is, the transcendent function is *both* intrapsychic *and* interpersonal.

In contrast, some trauma survivors have great difficulty in working with imaginative play and dream material due to a powerful inclination toward dissociation and fragmentation. Dissociation has become ‘hard wired’ as a means of protecting against disruptive memories and affects that threaten to overwhelm the personality. Unconscious material tends to be defended against thus constricting capacity for relating to one’s inner world or to outer others. Jung notes that

Everyone who proposes to come to terms with himself must reckon with this basic problem. For, to the degree that he does not admit the validity of the other person, he denies the ‘other’ within himself the right to exist—and vice versa. The capacity for inner dialogue is a touchstone for outer objectivity.

(1916/1960, para. 187)

The trauma survivor’s mental state is, at times, an exaggeration of the human inclination to split and project leaving the internal world and interpersonal interactions caught in polarities and depleted without the creative mediation that comes with the facility for holding.

Alan had great difficulty in negotiating closeness and distance or separateness and oneness, skills dependent on early good enough accessible attachment

experiences. He wanted to be close but only if he could control our interactions (in order to protect himself). Terrified of being engulfed by a psychotic mother, he pushed away even though intimacy was what was longed for. Alan and I struggled between his hope for interpersonal love in the real relationship and transference hate and the fear of psychotic fusion which kept us apart at the other extreme.

Clinicians have long been inclined toward our own kind of splitting where we can fall into blame of our difficult patients for their projective identification whereby they 'put into us' their disavowed affects. Such patients challenge the constructive, synthetic model with their inclination toward fragmentation and destruction. Both longing for and terrified by closeness, we see Alan's to and fro behaviour in the waiting room. Although moments of meeting did occur and outer life relationships significantly improved, there was tension around the ongoing wish that I read his mind. This, of course, was often quite disappointing for him (and for me). He worked hard (without words) to get me to play certain prescribed roles. I was to be the rescuing mother, idealized in his imagination or the torturing, abusive witch of his childhood experiences. My empathic presence was in fact quite provocative in that it stimulated longing leading to hatred for what could not be fully realized in the present relationship. Further, it brought forward envy for what he perceived as my ability to contain both poles (love and hate). Through negative affective states, intense engagement could be achieved which provided both closeness and simultaneously distance. This kind of intense situation related to negative parental interactions in both of our histories. Finding words to speak of the anger and aggression co-created between us was an essential element of the treatment. Discussing such heavily laden emotional content was not easy for either of us and the potential for destructive enactment loomed in the space between us. Through negative affect, there was a pull to lock into a fused state of boundariless confusion like the hermaphrodite (Jung's image borrowed from alchemy to illustrate the initial state of fusion at the outset of the individuation process). This prevented movement toward a more differentiated and conscious state of wholeness as the *coniunctio* symbolized by the androgyne (the differentiated conjoined state that concludes the alchemical opus).

Differentiation, a healthy mediating ego and imaginative capacity are ingredients for the emergence of the symbol as something new and creative. This patient often used sand play as a means to communicate his abuse experiences and affective states that were beyond his capacity for verbal expression. After a time, he tended to use the figures fetishistically thus disallowing the emergence of true imagination. In other words, this kind of sand play was repetitious and fraught with a magical wish that something in the unspoken domain would bring into being longed for experiences with the analyst. Although I believe that this in some ways can happen, the patient, at times, used the sand play as a means of avoiding the hard work of reflecting on experience and finding words to discuss his internal affective states. Further, the sand play frequently

seemed to be consciously constructed rather than used as an expression of unconscious contents. Alan's struggle with holding ambivalence constricted his capacity for play with the objects and with the analyst. His fear of making a mistake limited access to deeper levels of creative process; this fear was rooted in anxieties related to fragmentation and loss of self. Movement and flexibility, both psychologically and physically, were constrained leading to loneliness and isolation. On one occasion, Alan dreamed of a hard-won honour at work achieved through persistence and diligence while his co-workers were having fun at a baseball game. He longed to participate and belong but that kind of involvement was difficult for him given childhood interactive experiences. Moments of transcendence certainly emerged throughout the course of our work but such conjunction was limited due to the dissociation and fragmentation rooted in early relational trauma.

Tronick notes that with pathology in a child's early dyadic history there can be 'a debilitating attachment to negative relational experiences' (Tronick 2007, p. 409). The infant is wired to seek complexity and coherence and a way for the infant to achieve this with a depressed or psychotic mother is

to take on elements of the mother's states of consciousness...by taking them on the infant and the mother may form a dyadic state of consciousness, but one that is negative at its core...Critically, when the infant of the depressed [or psychotic] mother comes to other relationships, the only way he or she is available for expanding the complexity and coherence of her states is by establishing dyadic states of consciousness around the depressive [or psychotic] features that were first established with the mother.

(ibid.)

In Jungian parlance, the hermaphrodite is born of this kind of union. There is not a new entity born but rather unhealthy fusion in the form of monstrous interactions that endlessly replay like mythological figures caught in Hades. Without reflective function, there is a failure of the transcendent function which rather results in stagnation and destruction. We see the persistence of early childhood interactions with his mother in Alan's fetishistic attachment to the known world of monsters that he is profoundly attached to while Marianna, despite early trauma, has established ego integrity and is capable of facing the unknown with hope and anticipation. (Again, shadow aspects of the dragon have yet to be explored.) There seems to be a crucial difference in their capacity to form and use symbols and this is perhaps as much a cause as a result of being able to face the unknown with hope. Problems of symbolization emerge from interactive processes in early dyadic interactions. Through these persistent disrupted relational processes, unhealthy structures form leading to repetition of destructive patterns. Concepts such as the transcendent function, moments of meeting and dyadic expansion of consciousness help us to grasp an understanding of intrapsychic and interpersonal processes as aspects of a complex system. Further, any well integrated system is highly dependent on healthy ego development and reflective function. Without reflective function,

the ability for imaginative play within oneself and with others is severely limited so that symbolic appreciation and an aesthetic sense fail to emerge.

With this brief paper, I have argued for the clinical and theoretical importance of Jung's work on the transcendent function as it elaborates a profound intrapsychic process. (I specifically use the word *process* here as I prefer to think of the transcendent function as a process rather than a structure.) I see it as resonant with infant research notions such as moments of meeting and the dyadic expansion of consciousness which are more focused on interpersonal interaction. These concepts, when taken together, create the transcendent whole of a self organizing system. New theoretical perspectives from other fields confirm and elaborate long held Jungian notions such as the transcendent function. We are indebted to Jung's prescient perceptions that have been carried further by infant researchers whose careful work helps to deepen our own clinical and theoretical understandings.

---

#### TRANSLATIONS OF ABSTRACT

La lecture des travaux de Beebe (2002), Sander (Amadei & Bianchi 2008), Tronick et Stern (2007) et du «Boston Process of Change Group» (1998), n'est pas sans résonances avec la question de la fonction transcendante. Cependant, ces chercheurs semblent plus axés sur la dimension interpersonnelle. En particulier, la conception de Tronick de l'«expansion dyadique de la conscience» et celle des «moments de rencontre» du *Boston Process of Change Group*, décrivent des interactions dyadiques externes *entre* mères et nourrissons tandis que Jung, lui, a très tôt mis l'accent sur le processus intrapsychique d'interaction *interne* entre le conscient et l'inconscient d'un individu. D'un point de vue global, le processus de changement interpersonnel décrit par la recherche sur les tout-petits (*infant research*), couplé avec le processus de changement *interne*, étudié par Jung, forment un tout transcendant que l'on pourrait également nommer système adaptatif complexe. Ces nouvelles perspectives théoriques issues d'autres champs confirment et élaborent des notions jungiennes telles que la fonction transcendante qui, à de nombreux égards, est en harmonie avec une perspective des systèmes. Des vignettes cliniques de moments interactifs dans le cadre de jeux de sable illustrent des aspects théoriques du processus de guérison à l'œuvre dans la fonction transcendante, ainsi que des moments où de telles expériences de conjonction échouent.

---

Bei der Lektüre der Arbeit von Beebe (2002), Sander (Amadei & Bianchi 2008), Tronick (2007) und Stern sowie der Boston Change Process Study Group (1998) lassen sich Beziehungen zur Transzendenten Funktion wahrnehmen, doch scheinen diese Forscher mehr auf den interpersonellen Bereich fokussiert zu sein. Insbesondere Tronicks Konzept der 'dyadischen Entwicklung des Bewußtseins' und das der 'Momente der Begegnung' der Boston Change Process Study Group beschreiben externe dyadische Interaktionen *zwischen* Müttern und Babies und Therapeuten und Patienten, wohingegen, im Gegensatz dazu, Jungs frühes Augenmerk auf die intrapsychischen Prozesse der internalen Interaktionen zwischen Bewußtsein und Unbewußtem *innerhalb* eines Individuums gerichtet war. Von einer höheren Warte aus betrachtet bilden

der *interpersonelle* Prozeß der Wandlung, wie er von Erforschern des Kindesalters beschrieben wird, und Jungs *internaler* Prozeß der Wandlung gemeinsam ein transzendentes Ganzes, das auch als komplexes adaptives System bezeichnet werden kann. Solche neuen theoretischen Perspektiven aus anderen Gebieten bestätigen und vertiefen lange bestehende jungianische Ideen wie die der Transzendenten Funktion welche, in mancherlei Hinsicht, mit einer systemischen Perspektive harmoniert. Durch den Text hindurch ziehen sich klinische Vignetten interaktiver Momente im Zusammenhang mit Sandspiel und Träumen zur Illustration von theoretischen Positionen, die die Heilwirkung der Transzendenten Funktion beleuchten, ergänzt durch die Beschreibung von Fehlschlägen solcher verbindender Experimente.

---

Leggendo i lavori di Beebe (2002), di Sanders (Amadei & Bianchi 2008), Tronick (2007), Stern e il Boston Change Process Study Group (1998), si possono trovare accenni alla funzione trascendente, ma queste ricerche sembrano essere focalizzate maggiormente sul dominio interpersonale. In particolare nel concetto di Tronick di "espansione diadica della coscienza" e nei "momenti di incontro" del Boston Change Process Study Group vengono descritte interazioni diadiche esterne fra madre e bambini e fra terapeuti e paziente mentre, al contrario, in Jung l'attenzione principale era sul processo intrapsichico di interazione interna tra conscio e inconscio all'interno di un individuo. Da un punto di vista complessivo, il processo interpersonale di cambiamento descritto dai ricercatori infantili, connesso al processo di cambiamento interno junghiano formano un tutto trascendente che si potrebbe chiamare un sistema adattivo complesso. Tali nuove prospettive teoriche di altri campi sono una conferma e una elaborazione di nozioni junghiane a lungo sostenute quali la funzione trascendente che è, da molti punti di vista, in armonia con una prospettiva sistemica. In questo scritto verranno utilizzate vignette cliniche di momenti interattivi insieme alla sandplay e a sogni per illustrare i punti teorici che riguardano il processo di guarigione della funzione trascendente insieme alla descrizione dei fallimenti di tali esperienze di congiunzione.

---

Читая работы Биби (2002), Сандера (Амадей и Бьянки 2008), Троника (2007), Стерна и Бостонской группы перемены процесса (1998), можно отметить сходство с трансцендентной функцией, однако эти исследования, похоже, больше сосредоточены на межличностной сфере. Это касается в особенности концепции Троника о «диадической экспансии сознания» и «моментов встречи» Бостонской группы, которые описывают внешние диадические взаимодействия *между* матерями и младенцами, терапевтами и пациентами, тогда как Юнг, напротив, сначала фокусировался на интрапсихическом процессе внутреннего взаимодействия между сознанием и бессознательным *внутри* индивидуума. Если взглянуть на все в целом, то *межличностный* процесс изменений, описываемый исследователями младенчества, совмещенный с Юнговским *внутренним* процессом изменений, совместно формируют трансцендентное целое, которое можно назвать сложной адаптивной системой. Подобные новые теоретические перспективы из других областей подтверждают и еще дальше разрабатывают такие давнишние Юнгианские концепции, как трансцендентная функция, которая во многом созвучна системному взгляду. Статья иллюстрирована клиническими виньетками интерактивных моментов,



материалами из работы в песочнице и снами в поддержку теоретических выкладок о здоровом прохождении процесса, связанного с трансцендентной функцией; есть и примеры неудач такого рода опытов соединения.

En la lectura del trabajo de Beebe (2002), Sander (Amadei y Bianchi 2008), Tronick (2007) y Stern, Boston Change Process Study Group (1998), se pueden registrar las resonancias de la función trascendente, sin embargo estos investigadores parecen estar más centrados en el ámbito de lo interpersonal. Particularmente el concepto de Tronick ‘de expansión diádica de la consciencia’ y el de ‘los momentos de encuentro’ del Boston Change Process Study Group describen interacciones diádicas externas *entre* madres y bebés, y terapeutas y pacientes, mientras que, en contraste, el foco original de Jung estaba en el proceso intrapsíquico de la interacción interna entre consciente e inconsciente *dentro* de un individuo. De una perspectiva general, el proceso interpersonal de cambio descrito por los investigadores infantiles, cuando está sostenido conjuntamente con el proceso interno de Jung, forman una totalidad trascendente que podría llamarse un Sistema Adaptativo Complejo. Las perspectivas teóricas novedosas de otros campos confirman y elaboran las nociones Jungianas sostenidas desde hace mucho tiempo tales como la función trascendente ella es, en gran medida, coherente con la perspectiva sistémica. En este trabajo se utilizarán ilustraciones clínicas de momentos interactivos, conjuntamente a la caja de arena y a sueños, para ilustrar los puntos teóricos con respecto al proceso sano de la función trascendente unida a descripciones de falta de tales experiencias conjugantes.

## References

- Amadei, G. & Bianchi, I. (2008). *Living Systems, Evolving Consciousness, and the Emerging Person*. New York: The Analytic Press.
- Beebe, B. & Lachmann, F. (2002). *Infant Research and Adult Treatment*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press.
- Bovensiepen, G. (2002). ‘Symbolic attitude and reverie: problems of symbolization in children and adolescents’. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 47, 2, 243–57.
- Edinger, E. F. (1985). *Anatomy of the Psyche*. La Salle, IL: Open Court.
- Hogenson, G. (2007). ‘From moments of meeting to archetypal consciousness’. In *Who Owns Jung?*, ed. Ann Casement. London: Karnac Books.
- Jung, C. G. (1916/1960). ‘The transcendent function’. CW 8.
- Powell, S. (1985). ‘A bridge to understanding: The transcendent function in the analyst’. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 30, 1, 29–45.
- Sander, L. (1983). ‘Polarity, paradox, and the organizing process in development’. In *Frontiers of Infant Psychiatry*, eds. J. D. Call, E. Galenson & R. Tyson. New York: Basic Books, 315–27.
- (1995). *Thinking about Developmental Process: Wholeness, Specificity, and the Organization of Conscious Experiencing*. New York: American Psychological Association.
- Stern, D. N., et al. (1998). ‘Non-interpretive mechanisms in psychoanalytic therapy: “the something more” than interpretation’. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 79, 903–21.
- Tronick, E. (2007). *The Neurobehavioral and Social-Emotional Development of Infants and Children*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Copyright of Journal of Analytical Psychology is the property of Wiley-Blackwell and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.