SPACE, TIME, AND SPIRIT: THE ANALOGICAL IMAGINATION AND THE EVOLUTION OF TRANSPERSONAL THEORY
PART ONE: CONTEXTS—THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL

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ABSTRACT: The author calls for a more mindful engagement with the analogical imagination, the creative promptings of which have guided the evolution of transpersonal theory from its inception to the present. Beginning with some reflections on the metaphorical or analogical ground of all theories, the author goes on to trace the role of spatial and temporal image schemata in the formulation of models of the psyche and its relation to Spirit or the transpersonal. The body of the paper considers the significance of these schemata in the models of such transpersonal precursors as G.T. Fechner—one of the founders of scientific psychology; Frederick Myers—the great pioneer of psychical research; William James—the founder of American psychology and one of the initiators of the psychology of religion; and C.G. Jung—whose concepts of the Self and of the collective or “transpersonal” unconscious continue to inform much of the transpersonal movement to this day. The further evolution of transpersonal theory into the paradigmatic models of Wilber and Grof is treated in Part Two, along with some implications of the trajectory as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

In the following pages, I wish to explore the fundamental metaphors or analogies of transpersonal theory, from its neglected origins in Fechner, James, and Myers, to the more systematic or paradigmatic contributions of Jung, Grof, and Wilber. The discussion is distributed into two parts (and accordingly two articles in this volume). Along with some preliminary considerations, Part 1 addresses the historical, and Part 2 the more contemporary contributions.

Attempting more deeply to understand the meaning of a theoretical position from the perspective of its underlying but often implicit analogies can help to illuminate the theory, as well as to articulate both differences and similarities in alternate positions and points of view. Raising to the level of awareness and discussion the central role of such analogies in the evolution of transpersonal theory is, I believe, vital to the long-term health of the field. Accordingly, I would like to encourage a more mindful engagement with what I am calling the analogical imagination, which has fueled not only transpersonal theory per se, but many of the great breakthrough scientific discoveries. Although generally preceded by a rigorous disciplining of the abstractive intellect—what cognitive psychologists refer to as formal operational thinking—such discoveries have emerged, in fact, as imaginative leaps, as insight-bearing metaphors or analogies: One thinks of Newton’s equating of the orbiting
moon with a falling apple (universal gravitation), of Einstein’s imagining being in a windowless room being towed by an accelerating rocket (general relativity), or of Kekule’s dream of the ouroboric serpent (the benzene ring). While such breakthroughs are, by definition, exceptional, all theories are organized around, and to a certain extent generated by, favored metaphors or analogies which, when formalized, function as models (see Barbour, 1974).

Genetic theory, for instance, presupposes the analogy between the organization of a certain class of organic molecules, on the one hand, and that of language, on the other. This basic analogy allows for the application of such linguistic concepts as “code” and “transcription” to a domain which, strictly speaking, has nothing to do with speaking or writing. The same, of course, is true of the concept of the genetic “program” imported from the domain of computer technology. Nevertheless, the structural or organizational analogy between both domains has proven fruitful to such an extent that those who engage in the informal discourse in which genetic theory is embedded tend to literalize the analogy—which is to say that they are generally unconscious of the analogical basis of the theory’s conceptual formulations.

It is by “seeing” both the identity and the difference involved in any postulated analogical equivalence (which includes all explanatory concepts) that the process of understanding can avoid the rigidity and closed-mindedness of literalistic thinking. In so doing, thinking becomes more fluid (without being imprecise) and open to novel possibilities regarding the meaning of whatever is being considered. Hegel calls this kind of thinking “Reason” (Vernunft, which he contrasts with Verstand or Understanding). Edgar Morin speaks of an “open rationality,” David Bohm of “intuitive reason” or “creative intelligence,” and Ken Wilber of “mandalic reason” and “vision-logic” (see Hegel, 1998; Morin, 1998; Bohm & Peat, 1987; Bohm & Kelly, 1990; Wilber, 2000, Volume Six). While I agree with Wilber’s characterization of vision-logic as the kind of cognition which allows for the grasping of “networks of relations,” I would emphasize that, when most developed, vision-logic involves a dialogical encounter between the analogical (“vision”) and conceptual (“logic”) modalities of articulating meaning. Since theorizing already tends to subordinate the analogical to the conceptual, the exercise of vision-logic in the context of theoretical discourse demands that the theoretician render his or her central concepts transparent to the metaphors or analogies upon which, in fact, they are dependent. This kind of transparency is one of the principal traits of a more mindful engagement of the analogical imagination.

As for the word “transpersonal,” the prefix “trans” literally means “across” (as in “transatlantic”) or “beyond” (as in “transcendence”), but also more generally “change” (as in “transfigure” or “transmute”). As a distinct discipline, transpersonal theory seeks to articulate the meaning of “transcendental” data, to use Wilber’s terminology—data originally “seen” through the “eye of spirit” (see Wilber, 2000, Volume Seven). This “eye” is open in a wide range of contexts, especially meditative or contemplative practices, but more generally whenever it is a question of experiences of transcendence of the boundaries or limits which normally define the person as a separate self. From a psychological point of view, since the “I” or ego is considered the locus of the separate-self sense, transpersonal experiences are
therefore most often described as experiences “beyond ego” (see Walsh & Vaughan, 1980, 1993).

Whether or not it is grounded in a specific scientific discipline (usually psychology), transpersonal theory typically draws from across the disciplinary spectrum—from physics to metaphysics and theology—in its attempt to articulate the meaning of spiritual data. It is therefore thoroughly transdisciplinary, not only in the sense of crossing disciplinary boundaries, but also in the sense of the prefix meta—the Greek equivalent of trans—which means that it constitutes a second-order reflection on the disciplines from which it draws. It is this meta-disciplinary character of transpersonal theory which demands the full cultivation of vision-logic. As I have already suggested, the latter involves a particular sensitivity to the analogies or metaphors upon which, as a rule, theoretical constructs are based.

**Spatial and Temporal Schemata**

Kant was the first convincingly to argue that all knowledge is structured or organized by means of certain a priori, or pre-given, categories (most notably, perhaps, that of causality). Such categories are “transcendental,” in the sense that they describe the “conditions for the possibility” of knowledge. Even prior to the categories, however, are the two fundamental forms of “intuition”—space and time. The categories and forms—and, correlativelly, concepts and sense data—are mediated by the so-called “schemata” of the imagination. Drawing on Kant (though he introduces his own significant modifications), Mark Johnson proposes the notion of “embodied” or “image schemata.” An image schema is “a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience” (Johnson, 1987, p. xiv). “Our schemata for spatial and temporal orientation,” he continues,

are so pervasive and so constitutive of our ordinary experience that they are taken for granted (and thus overlooked) in standard accounts of meaning and understanding. We thereby miss a large part of the means by which anything can be meaningful for us (whether it is an object, event, word, sentence, or narrative). We need to look more closely, therefore, at the way such schemata operate in our understanding. (p. 31)

In the following sections I will consider the manner in which transpersonal theorists make use of what Johnson calls metaphorical or analogical extensions of spatial and temporal image schemata in their models of the psyche, in general, and in their articulations of the nature of transpersonal experiences, in particular. Before I do so, however, we would do well to establish the deep structure of these schemata and the concrete manner in which they are embodied.

The word which perhaps best expresses the essence of spatial schemata is positioning. Spatial positioning can take place upon two planes, the horizontal and the vertical. The structure of the horizontal plane is defined by the root notions of right/left and front/back, the vertical by the notions of up/down (or high/low). The physical basis of orientation on the horizontal plane has to do with the body’s bilateral symmetry (right/left) and concentration of sensory apparatus on the front of
the head. Orientation on the vertical plane is related to our upright posture and its relation to the gravitational pull of the Earth. The center, or point of intersection, of both planes defines the perspective or vantage point of the positioning. It defines the singular “here” relative to the many “there’s.”

As embodied beings we experience this center not as a dimensionless point, but as our most intimate locus or “place” which can feel relatively full or empty, and this both pleasantly or unpleasantly (pleasantly full after a good meal, for instance, and unpleasantly when we overeat). In this case the more general notion of positioning gives way to the specific notion of containment (see Johnson, pp. 21–23, 34–35, and 39–40) with its correlative distinction of in/out. We experience ourselves, moreover, not only as containers but also as contained (again, pleasantly—as when we are lovingly held or safe at home; or unpleasantly—as when we feel “surrounded” or “boxed in”). Both positioning and containment, however, can be represented by the figure of a circle or sphere, with the more general notion of positioning being described by the relation of center to periphery, and the notion of containment by the in/out positioning relative to the periphery.

The nature of temporal schemata is more complex. While the experience of time necessarily involves the root notions of motion or change, most Indo-European languages, as Thorleif Boman has pointed out (Boman, 1970), tend to express temporal relations in spatial terms. One speaks of “points” in time, of time “span” and time “segments.” On the analogy of movement across a plane, time is characterized as a line (whether or not this line be conceived discretely with a definite beginning and end, or as curving back on itself to form a cycle), where the past is visualized as what lies “behind,” and the future as what lies “ahead” or “in front,” of a moving point which constitutes the present. In this case the phenomenon of spatial juxtaposition is used to represent the temporal fact of succession, just as the spatial sense of “here” stands for (and fixes, or makes “static”) the temporal experience of the “now.”

Whereas the dominant mode of schematizing time seems to have arisen in conjunction with the observation and “mapping” of the heavens—most notably with the marking of the summer and winter solstices (where the sun is seen to “stand” still for a time in its rising and setting positions)—our experience as beings in time, when not spatialized on the analogy of juxtaposition, is perhaps best expressed by the notion of rhythm. Even animals, writes Boman,

who may not be capable of observing sun and moon have a keen sensation of time which is connected with bodily rhythms. As subjective time-determinants for man we may cite sleep and wakefulness, work and rest, meal-times; we also have shorter rhythms, such as heart-beat, pulse-beat, and respiration. It is common to all of these that they can determine a point in time or an interval of time without using any sort of spatial movement. The same can be said of the heavenly luminaries as time-determinants; the difference between light and darkness, their regular alternation, the phases of the moon, the weaker and stronger heat of the sun in the course of the day are time-rhythms and not [spatialized] time-movements. (Boman, p. 134)
Although psychological models have no direct relation to our physical nature as spatial and temporal beings (as do anatomical or embryological models, for instance), they nevertheless draw upon the same forms of intuition, and make use of the same spatial and temporal schemata which serve to organize all knowledge, regardless of discipline or domain.

**Transpersonal Precursors: Fechner, Myers, James, and Jung**

While Gustav Theodore Fechner (1801–1887) is often, and rightly so, lauded as the founder of modern experimental psychology, it is not generally recognized (and has even been kept as a kind of secret, if not held as a scandal) that his extensive “scientific” output was paralleled by an equally imposing body of work concerned with the immortal human soul, the soul of the world, and the nature of God as the soul of the cosmos. The secret, one might say, is that modern psychology was, in its inception, thoroughly transpersonal in character. Fechner was also, moreover, a master of analogical thinking and vision-logic. The analogy for which Fechner is most famous is that of the threshold of consciousness. “Imagine,” he writes, the whole psycho-physical activity of man to be a wave, and the degree of this activity to be symbolized by the height of the wave above a horizontal basal line or surface, to which every psycho-physically active point contributes an ordinate. . . . The whole form and evolution of the consciousness will then depend upon the rising and falling of this wave; the intensity of the consciousness at any time on the wave’s height at that time; and the height must always somewhere exceed a certain limit, which we will call a threshold, if waking consciousness is to exist at all. (Fechner, 1860, in James, 1992, pp. 1115–6)

Fechner then proposes a diagram in which a line, describing several continuous waves, is bisected by a straight line so that the crests all appear above, and the valleys below, the bisecting line which constitutes the threshold. “If,” he continues, in the diagram, we should raise the entire line of waves so that not only the crests but the valleys appeared above the threshold, then these latter would appear only as depressions in one great continuous wave above the threshold, and the discontinuity of the consciousness [whether within a single organism—where each wave stands for a discrete state of consciousness—or between organisms—where each wave stands for the totality of states constituting an individual organism] would be converted into continuity. We of course cannot bring this about. We might also squeeze the waves together so that the valleys should be pressed up, and the crests above the threshold flow into a line; then the discretely-feeling organisms would have become a singly-feeling organism. (p. 1117)

Though the diagram in question consists of lines on a two-dimensional plane, the threshold analogy, coupled with the analogy of the wave, allows for an extension or projection of the vertical dimension of the spatial schema to create an impression of the inner “space” of the psyche. Fechner associates that which lies “above” the threshold with the conscious and the discrete, and what lies below with the unconscious and the continuous. The threshold analogy will be taken up by Freud and, implicitly at least, by all subsequent theoreticians in the “depth” psychological tradition.
What is also worthy of note, however, are the transpersonal implications of the analogy. As James (1992, p. 1117) remarks: “One sees easily how on Fechner’s wave-scheme, a world-soul may be expressed. All psycho-physical activity being continuous ‘below the threshold,’ the consciousness might also become continuous if the threshold sank low enough to uncover all the waves.” In this case an increase in depth is coextensive with an increase in breadth. The lower the position on the vertical axis, the wider the span in all directions on the horizontal plane. The deeper I am able to plunge, the more of me is revealed, until finally the distinction between “in” and “out,” you and me, disappears altogether.

In speaking directly to the question of the relation of the individual soul to the realm of spirit or the transpersonal, Fechner appeals most often to the schema of containment. To begin with, the soul principle itself is understood as the “within” of things. Given the apparently universal fact of psycho-physical parallelism, as our bodies are contained within—or exist as members of—the body of the Earth that sustains and surrounds us, so our souls are contained within the soul of the Earth (which in turn is contained within the ascending series of souls whose bodies are the stars and galaxies, all the way to the cosmos as a whole as the body of God). To account for the preservation or survival of the individual soul following the dissolution of the body, Fechner extends the analogy with reference to the experience of the transition from sensation or perception to memory. “As our earthly life here below,” he writes,

has a wider and higher life around it and above it, so will it have after and beyond it, inasmuch as this life in its continuation, instead of being blended and absorbed in a wider and higher life, enters into it as a new factor in its development and gains an independent part in it. What occurs to our sense-perception when it is extinguished, namely, that it is reborn as memory in a higher region of our spirit, will, only in a broadened and exalted degree, occur to our spirit as a whole in the highest Spirit in which already we are contained. (Fechner, 1946, p. 275)

Notice that, along with the many spatial terms used (“wider,” “higher,” “broadened,” “contained”), Fechner invokes the (non-spatialized) temporal dimension as well. He invites us to witness the mysterious moment of transition from perception to memory, a moment which he then likens to the process of (re)birth. The coupling of the notions of soul as the “within” and of spiritual transcendence as containment with the analogy of birth is developed in greater detail in his early work (1836/1906), *On Life After Death*. “Man lives on earth not once,” so Fechner begins this lovely pearl of a book, “but three times:”

the first stage of his life is continual sleep; the second, sleeping and waking by turns; the third, waking for ever . . . The act of leaving the first stage for the second we call Birth; that of leaving the second for the third, Death. Our way from the second to the third is not darker than our way from the first to the second: one way leads forth to see the world outwardly; the other, to see it inwardly . . . death is merely a second birth into a happier life, when the spirit, breaking though its narrow hull, leaves it to decay and vanish, like the infant’s hull in its first birth. And then all those things which we, with our present senses, can only know from the outside . . . will be penetrated into, and thoroughly known, by us. (p. 32)
Regrettably even more neglected than Fechner is the work of Frederick Myers (1843–1901), one of the founders of the Society for Psychical Research. In the opinion of Theodore Flournoy (1854–1920), a correspondent of James and greatly esteemed by Jung as one of his mentors, “If future discoveries confirm his [Myers] thesis of the intervention of the disincarnate in the web and woof of our physical and mental world, then his name will be inscribed in the golden book of the initiated, and, joined to those of Copernicus and Darwin, he will complete the triad of geniuses who have the most profoundly revolutionized scientific thought, in the order, Cosmological, Biological, and Psychological” (in Shepard, 1980, p. 629). It was Freud, of course, who openly aspired to—and to a large degree succeeded in—having his name placed alongside those of Copernicus and Darwin. Whether Freud or Myers is more worthy of the honor, I have no doubt that a more earnest reading of Myers’ work would well repay the historian of transpersonal psychology and the transpersonal theorist. 2

Pursuing Fechner’s analogy of the threshold, Myers popularized the English word subliminal (literally, below the threshold), extending the sense of the term to cover not only “those sensations which are too feeble to be individually recognized,” but also as including

all that takes place beneath the ordinary threshold, or say, if preferred, outside the ordinary margin of consciousness;—not only those faint stimulations whose very faintness keeps them submerged, but much else which psychology as yet scarcely recognizes; sensations, thoughts, emotions, which may be strong, definite, and independent, but which, by the original constitution of our being, seldom emerge into that supraliminal current of consciousness which we habitually identify with ourselves. (Myers, 1903/1975, I, p. 14)

Although the word subliminal evokes the sense of inner depths, Myers differentiates between “low,” “middle,” and “high” centers (p. 72)—in ways suggestive of the notion of the chakras—within the more general and inclusive concept of the subliminal self. He recognizes, to use more current terms, the distinction between the preegoic and the transegoic, as well as the distinction between the pathological and the more authentic, or integrally, spiritual. 3 In this connection, he is the first as well to propose the analogy of the spectrum of consciousness to describe the full range of subliminal activity. Though more suggestive than the bare evocation of relative positioning along a vertical axis, Myers admits—reflecting the degree to which his theorizing is a genuine expression of vision-logic—that “Our simile, indeed . . . is a most imperfect one.”

the range of human faculty cannot be truly expressed in any linear form. Even a three-dimensional scheme,—a radiation of faculties from a centre of life,—would ill render its complexity. Yet something of clearness will be gained by even this rudimentary picture,—representing conscious human faculty as a linear spectrum whose red rays begin where voluntary muscular control and organic sensation begin, and whose violet rays fade away at the point at which man’s highest strain of thought or imagination merges into reverie or ecstasy. (p. 18)

Myers was writing just before the birth of the new physics when scientists still postulated the existence of the ether as the medium for the propagation of the subtler forms of energy (namely, heat, electricity, magnetism, and light). Because many of
the phenomena which he attributed to the subliminal self—the phenomenon of telepathy in particular—seemed to defy the constraints of both Newtonian physics and the nature of the ether, Myers suggested that: “Within, beyond, the world of the ether,—as a still profounder, still more generalized aspect of the Cosmos,—must lie . . . the world of spiritual life” (p. 215). This deepest “within” he called the metetherial realm, by which he meant to imply “that from our human point of view it lies after or beyond the ether, as metaphysics lies after or beyond physics” (p. 216). Clearly, despite the inevitable recourse to the extension of spatial qualifiers (“profounder,” “beyond”), what Myers calls the metetherial—the closest parallel today is perhaps Bohm’s theory of the implicate order—is essentially non-local in character and must, therefore, ultimately contravene the very nature of all such qualifiers.

William James (1842–1910) was Myers’s good friend and heartily acknowledged the latter’s preeminence in the new field of psychology, in general, and more particularly in the sub-field of psychical research (in many ways the direct forerunner of transpersonal psychology). James was also an enthusiastic admirer of Fechner and, artist that he was, an equal master of metaphor, analogy, and the well-turned phrase. James’s model(s) of the psyche draws freely from Myers; but while he occasionally uses the terms subliminal and subconscious, James seems to orient himself more habitually on the horizontal, rather than the vertical, plane, and so prefers to speak of the transmarginal (literally “across the edge or boundary”). This orientation makes it easier to incorporate the field analogy (which in turn flows easily into Fechner’s original wave analogy). “As our mental fields succeed one another,” writes James,

> each has its centre of interest, around which the objects of which we are less and less attentively conscious fade to a margin so faint that its limits are unassignable. Some fields are narrow fields and some are wide fields. (James, 1902/1985, p. 231)

James stresses the “indetermination of the margin.” Though mostly invisible under normal circumstances, transmarginal contents lie “around us like a ‘magnetic field,’ inside of which our center of energy turns like a compass-needle [note the evocation of cardinality, which is a root expression of orientation on the horizontal plane], as the present phase of consciousness alters into its successor” (p. 232). In more explicitly transpersonal terms, James writes:

> Every bit of us at every moment is part and parcel of a wider self, it quivers along various radii like the wind-rose on a compass, and the actual in it is continuously one with possibles not yet in our present sight. And just as we are co-conscious with our own momentary margin, may we not ourselves form the margin of some more really central self in things which is co-conscious with the whole of us? May not you and I be confluent in a higher consciousness, and confluentlly active there, tho we know it not? (James, 1909/1984, p. 365)

James’s use of the word “confluent” (literally, “flowing with”) leads naturally to the metaphor for which he is most famous—the stream of consciousness. Though easily harmonized with the images of waves and fields, the image of a flowing stream appeals more directly to the temporal than to the spatial intuition, and more
particularly to the non-spatialized intuition of time as *duration* with its characteristic rhythmic quality. “When we take a general view of the wonderful stream of consciousness,” writes James,

what strikes us first is the different pace of its parts. Like a bird’s life, it seems to be an alternation of flights and perchings. The rhythm of language expresses this, where every thought is expressed in a sentence, and every sentence is closed by a period. The resting places are usually occupied by sensorial imaginations of some sort, whose peculiarity is that they can be held before the mind for an indefinite time, and contemplated without changing; the places of flight are filled with thoughts of relations, static or dynamic, that for the most part obtain between the matters contemplated in periods of comparative rest. (James, 1892/1992, pp. 159—160)

While this passage suggests that the “flights” and “perchings”—or what he refers to more technically as the “transitive” and “substantive” elements—are equal “parts” of the stream of consciousness, it would perhaps be more consistent to conceive of the substantive elements as subsets of the transitive. A flowing stream, after all, does not rest, though there are eddies and standing waves which give the appearance of doing so. This is not to deny the relative reality of the latter, nor is it to denigrate the tendency—inevitable if not always necessary—to represent time on the analogy of space. It is simply to honor, in the spirit of James’s radical empiricism, the felt quality of immediate experience. More precisely, it is to honor what to James is the numinously charged, transpersonally diaphanous quality of consciousness as such, a quality which defies the self-enclosed, hypostasizing character of mere intellect. “Only concepts are self-identical,” James declares,

only “reason” deals with closed equations; nature is but a name for excess; every point in her opens out and runs into the more; and the only question, to any point we may be considering, is how far into the rest of nature we may have to go in order to get entirely beyond its overflow. In the pulse of inner life immediately present now in each of us is a little past, a little future, a little awareness of our own body, of each other’s persons, of these sublimities we are trying to talk about, of the earth’s geography and the direction of history, of truth and error, of good and bad, and who knows how much more? (James, 1909/1984, p. 364)

Although the metaphor of the stream of consciousness is rich in transpersonal implications, James does not draw upon it in his discussions of the varieties of religious, or transpersonal, experience. We have seen how the field and wave metaphors, which harmonize naturally with that of the stream, facilitate an understanding of the topographical, or spatially intuited, continuity between such distinct, and often dissociated, terms as ego and other, profane and sacred, or finite and infinite. From the point of view of temporality or process, however, James is especially interested in those kinds of transpersonal experiences which mark a discrete or discontinuous transition from one way of life to another, in experiences of global or enduring transformation rather than those that are more fleeting or transient (though he values these as well). While his recognition of the subliminal or transmarginal self allows him to see or postulate a greater degree of continuity of experience, in even the most radical and sudden of transformations or “conversions,” than would otherwise be apparent—here he uses the metaphors of “ripening,”

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“incubation,” and “hatching” (see James, 1902/1985, p. 230)—James nevertheless follows Fechner in choosing birth as the most appropriate metaphor for the transformations in question (see James, 1902/1985). I will have more to say about birth in connection with Grof’s theory of the perinatal process (Part 2 of this series). Here I would simply point to the manner in which describing spiritual transformation as a “second birth” implies the emergence of genuine novelty (the metaphors of ripening, incubation, and even hatching, by contrast, imply the emergence of something formerly hidden but still really present) and an experience of temporal (if not necessarily ontological) discontinuity between the old and the new self.

Although I include C. G. Jung (1875–1961) among the precursors, the case can certainly be made for including him among the full-fledged transpersonal psychologists. Not only did he use the word “transpersonal” as an alternative qualifier of the more characteristically designated “collective” unconscious (Jung, 1917/1926/1943), but more importantly he founded a living tradition which continues to inform much of the transpersonal movement to this day (this is especially true, of course, of all depth-oriented transpersonal approaches). Though obviously indebted to Freud, Jung’s version of depth psychology has perhaps an even greater affinity with Fechner’s panpsychism, Myers’s openness to psychic phenomena, and James’s positive estimation of the religious life.

An important source of Jung’s personal alignment with the depth orientation is revealed in the chapter of his autobiography called “Confrontation with the Unconscious.” Jung relates how, following his break with Freud, he experienced a period of intense “disorientation” (Jung, 1963/1977, p. 194), vivid dreams that seemed pregnant with meaning, and an “incessant stream of fantasies” (p. 200) which he did his best to try to shape into workable material. At a certain point—during Advent of the year 1913, on December 12th, to be exact—Jung took what he considered the decisive step. “I was sitting at my desk once more,” he relates, “thinking over my fears.”

Then I let myself drop. Suddenly it was as though the ground literally gave way beneath my feet, and I plunged down into dark depths. I could not fend off a feeling of panic. But then, abruptly, at not too great a depth, I landed on my feet in a soft, sticky mass. I felt great relief, although I was apparently in complete darkness. (p. 203)

After this initial, spontaneous descent, Jung repeated the experiment in a more directed manner. “In order to seize hold of the fantasies,” he writes, “I frequently imagined a steep descent.”

I even made several attempts to get to the very bottom. The first time I reached, as it were, a depth of about a thousand feet; the next time I found myself at the edge of a cosmic abyss. It was like a voyage to the moon, or a descent into empty space. (p. 205)

With these subsequent descents, Jung came into contact with the figures of Elijah/Philemon and Salome, the experiential prototypes for what he would later call the archetypes of the wise old man and the anima, respectively. These experiences show clearly, to begin with, how going “down” is equivalent to going “in.” At the same
time, however, we see how a certain threshold must be crossed, a requisite depth
achieved, before the vertical plunge begins to reveal something (or someone) that
transcends the personal boundaries of the “skin-encapsulated ego.” Though more
mythopoeically expressed, Jung’s experience confirms the import of Fechner’s
analogy in which the discrete waves of consciousness are seen to share a common,
continuous medium below the threshold of ordinary awareness. The repeated
descents, whether spontaneously arising or intentionally induced, are experienced as
the transpersonally inflected moments of an alternating, two-beat, rhythm of
withdrawal and return or descent and reascent (Jung also referred to this double
movement as the “regression” and “progression” of libido [see Jung, 1928]).

Jung sustained his confrontation with the unconscious until the end of the First
World War. His emergence from this critical period was accompanied by a growing
insight into the nature of mandala symbolism. As commandant of prisoners of war at
the Chateau d’Oex, Jung sketched a small circular image every morning which, he
realized, “seemed to correspond to my inner situation at the time” (p. 220). Gradually,
he came to see these images as symbols of what he would later call the
Self, the central archetype of the collective, or transpersonal, unconscious. Through
the mandala symbols, Jung “saw that everything, all the paths I [had] been
following, all the steps I had taken, were leading back to a single point—namely, to
the mid-point.”

It became increasingly plain to me that the mandala is the centre. It is the
exponent of all paths. It is the path to the centre, to individuation. . . .

I began to understand that the goal of psychic development is the self. There is no
linear evolution; there is only a circumambulation of the self. Uniform
development exists, at most, only at the beginning; later, everything points
towards the centre. This insight gave me stability, and gradually my inner peace
returned. I knew that in finding the mandala as an expression of the self I had
attained what was for me the ultimate. (p. 222)

The turbulence of Jung’s repeated descents have given way to a new “stability” and
“inner peace.” Correlatively, his experience is now characterized by a shift from the
vertical to the horizontal plane (circumambulation). More generally, despite the
references to development and evolution, the spatial dimension as a whole—with its
exemplary image of the circle and the relation of center to circumference—is
privileged as the best medium for expressing the experience of wholeness and the
concept of the Self to which this experience corresponds.

This privileging of the spatial dimension over the temporal is evident in Jung’s
overall evaluation of the images of the quaternity and the trinity as symbols of the
Self. The quaternity, writes Jung, “forms the logical basis for any whole judgment.”

If one wishes to pass such a judgment, it must have this fourfold aspect. For
instance, if you want to describe the horizon as a whole, you name the four
quarters of heaven. . . . There are always four elements, four prime qualities, four
colours, four castes, four ways of spiritual development etc. So, too, there areour aspects of psychological orientation [Jung’s four functions: sensation,
thinking, feeling, and intuition]. . . . The ideal completeness is the circle or
sphere, but its natural minimal division is a quaternity. (Jung, 1942/48, par. 246)
Given this ideal, the image of the trinity tends to be relegated by Jung to the status of a truncated quaternity. In my treatment of the relation of Jung to Hegel (Kelly, 1993), however, I have argued that the image of the trinity—and this is particularly true of its Christian theological expression—ought to stand on a par with the quaternity as symbol of the Self. In his essay on the dogma of the Trinity, Jung claims that the “conflict posited by duality resolves itself in a fourth principle, which restores the unity of the first in its full development. The rhythm is built up in three steps, but the resultant symbol is a quaternity” (Jung, 1942/48, par. 258). The rhythm in question refers to the ongoing dialectical or dialogical movement between the unconscious and the ego which, when grasped as totality or complex whole, points to a third “moment” as the synthetic, though still dynamic, embrace of the first two. Jung himself recognizes that, in developmental terms, the third moment, corresponding to the Spirit as the third person of the Trinity, involves “articulating one’s ego-consciousness with a supraordinate totality” (par. 276). In general, however, Jung either ignores or downplays this more esoteric reading of the Trinity symbol, perhaps because of the way it had been co-opted by the dominant, exoteric, theological tradition (where the Trinity is associated with the male deity and is portrayed as standing above, and to a certain extent as split off from, the realm of matter). What I am suggesting here is that, were Jung as sensitive to the temporal dimension of the analogical imagination as he is to the spatial, he would have recognized the legitimacy of both Trinity and quaternity as symbols of the Self.

I will go on, in Part Two, to consider the further evolution of transpersonal theory into the paradigmatic models of Wilber (from Wilber I to IV) and Grof, paying particular attention to the tendency to spatialize, and therefore obscure, the more complex aspects of psyche and its relation to Spirit or the transpersonal. This tendency, when not rendered conscious, can lead to a kind of hardening of the categories and to a clash of tacit metaphysical assumptions and character dispositions hidden behind the variously defended “positions.”

NOTES

1 A tendency to literalize the analogy is inherent to the process of understanding. To understand something, to “see” that it is so, is to postulate an identity between the two (or more) terms involved—one affirms that A (the term whose meaning is in question) is equal to B (the term which serves as definition). In this sense, therefore, all understanding is fundamentally analogical. It takes an additional reflective effort to “see” to what extent, despite the apparent identity, the two terms are also different or non-equivalent (A is not equal to B, the so-called negative analogy).

2 Justly acclaimed by Gardner Murphy as “the great central classic of psychical research,” Myers’s monumental Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death was published posthumously (!) just three years after Freud’s Interpretation of Dreams (1900). While the latter went on to revolutionize psychology, Myers’s work fell into greater and greater obscurity, to the point where only a handful of specialists now recognize both author and title (fewer have actually read its more than 1300 pages).

3 “Hidden in the deep of our being,” warns Myers, “is a rubbish-heap as well as a treasure-house—degenerations and insanities as well as beginnings of higher development; and any prospectus which insists on the amount of gold to be had for the washing should describe also the mass of detritus in which the bright grains lie concealed.” (Myers, I, p. 72).

4 A term that he invented, incidentally.

5 Myers at one point uses a metaphor that closely resembles Bohm’s analogy of the dissolution and reconstitution of ink droplets in a rotating cylinder filled with glycerin (see Bohm, 1982). “Our world of matter,” writes Myers, “is but a flocculence held in critical suspension, which a touch may dissolve or a touch precipitate” (Myers, II, p. 542).

6 It is true that to our normal, modern, and “perspectival” (see Gebser, 1953/1985) consciousness, the element of
uninterrupted flow, to which corresponds the notion of the “indetermination of the margin” of waves and fields, tends to be occluded by the tendency of the mind to seize upon the substantive elements.

In *Aion* (Jung, 1951, pars. 396–397), Jung suggests that the quaternity can symbolize the unity of space and time, with time as the fourth dimension (his diagram lists depth, height, and width as the three spatial dimensions, but should have breadth instead of either height or depth), or alternatively with space as the fourth added to past, present, and future as the three temporal dimensions. “The space-time quaternio,” he writes, is the archetypal *sine qua non* for any apprehension of the physical world—indeed, the very possibility of apprehending it. It is the organizing schema par excellence among the psychic quaternities” (par. 398). Again, however, Jung does not see that, properly conceived, the complex relation between space and time can equally be symbolized by a trinity, where the third element or moment is constituted by the ongoing dialogic between the first two (i.e., space and time), much as the Tao is related to yin and yang. It is in this sense, I believe, that Edward Edinger claims that the quaternity involves an “emphasis on static support and containment,” whereas the trinity “emphasizes movement, activity, initiative” and he suggests that, given the complex character of the Self to which both symbols point, “the thesis three and the antithesis four must be resolved in a new synthesis” (Edinger, 1974, pp. 188 and 189). As I see it, such a synthesis would involve the full mobilization of vision-logic where neither the spatial nor the temporal dimensions of imagination or intellect are given absolute priority.

**References**


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