

The Mechanics of the Transcendent Function

The centrality of the transcendent function in analytical psychology

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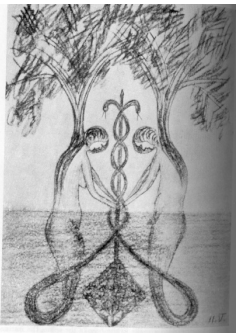


Plate 18. The Right Connective, a picture from the unconscious which attempts to symbolize the individual's relation to the outer world. It represents the state, creative union. The unconscious, animal sides of the man and woman have not grown separately together as in the case of blind intuition, but are joined by the 'snake of sublimation', which helps them to lift the precious stone, the symbol of the Self, without which true communion between them, represented as the tree of life with many branches, could never thrive.

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'And he said unto them,

"Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God:

but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables."

Mark 4:11

Jung published his paper on "The Transcendent Function", originally written in 1916, in the Collected Works soon after he had given the essay a major re-write in 1957. This paper will look at the "Transcendent Function" essay in light of the centrality of the transcendent function in analytical psychology as a tool for individuation.

Jung's theory of individuation postulates that a person is pulled forward in a purposive way by the psyche and, as such, was a central departure from the theories of Sigmund Freud, whose drive theory posited that a person's life was largely

determined by the push of early life events and traumas. Jung believed that psychological growth and individuation were only possible through an ongoing conversation between conscious and unconscious. He felt that the every idea, attitude, or image in consciousness was opposed or compensated for in the unconscious and that the two struggled with each other in a kind of polarised dance. If these opposites were held in swaying tension, he suggested, a new, third “thing,” numinous and symbolic in nature, would emerge that was not a mixture of the two but qualitatively different. This mechanism he called the transcendent function and it was not be confused with an individuals’ experience of transcendence. That is why Jung took such pains to define it as a psychological function and not as a metaphysical happening. He writes:

I have called this process in its totality the transcendent function, “function” here being understood not as a basic function but as a complex function made up of other functions, and “transcendent” not as denoting a metaphysical quality but merely the fact that this function facilitates a transition from one attitude to another. (Jung 1971, p480)

This was key to his thinking because only through a process of engaging in the transcendent function can a person foster the psychological growth that leads to individuation. Furthermore, it is through the transcendent function that unites the opposites that the experience of individuation takes on a transcendent character of a metaphysical nature.

Much of Jung's work stresses that through the transcendent function of the psyche, thesis and antithesis encounter one another on equal terms and achieve a symbolic synthesis that transcends them both. It is a psychological dynamic of great significance as it provides a valuable tool in overcoming sterility during conflicts and one-sided or narrow-minded points of reference. Furthermore the transcendent function becomes even more powerful if we attend to the symbols from the unconscious in an active way, and it becomes essential if we are to become committed to the goal of individuation and self-completion.

The actual contents of the transcendent function include many living, numinous symbols, some of a transcendent nature, which Jung identified in his work on the images of the coniunctio, most clearly demonstrated by his passion for the images of the alchemical process. One could argue that *mysterium coniunctionis* is a book dedicated to the contents of the transcendent function but, before looking at some of the contents of the transcendent function, I would like to look at the "Transcendent Function" essay and search out how Jung introduced the transcendent function, both as a process and a method, that the analyst could participate in. He set out a three stage procedure by which unconscious contents could be brought to consciousness, amplified and finally allowed to clash with the established conscious position. This clash of the opposites, not only between conscious and unconscious but also with those both in consciousness, could set the foundation for the symbol to appear.

The birth of the theory of the transcendent function in Jung's mind seems to have come about at a time in his life when he was in a deep personal crisis after his

departure and split with Freud that propelled Jung to “know thyself” as Goethe recommends. Jung went through several years of what he himself called a “period of uncertainty” (1989c, p179) saying that “it would be no exaggeration to call it a state of disorientation”. He recounts how he went through all the details of his life, with particular emphasis on his childhood memories, but to no avail. It was his last attempt at loyalty to the regressive theories of his mentor Freud, and only with his progress blocked did Jung surrender completely to the unconscious for guidance:

But this retrospection led to nothing but a fresh acknowledgement of my ignorance. Thereupon I said to myself, “I know nothing at all, I shall simply do whatever occurs to me.” Thus I consciously submitted myself to the impulses of the unconscious. (Jung 1989c, p177)

Jung emerged from his “creative illness” in 1916 and this became a pivotal year, not only because of the number of important essays he wrote at this time, but because his way of working with the unconscious had become teleological. The unconscious not only held the key to healing old wounds, but also to learning about one’s destiny, the telos of one’s life. From then onward the manner in which Jung approached a purposive unconscious became reflected not only in how he dealt with himself but also with his analysands’ psyches. In that year he wrote: “The Transcendent Function” (1960); “The Structure of the Unconscious” (1953) which became The Relation between the Ego and the Unconscious (1953) and the anonymously published “The seven Sermons of the Dead” (1967). A year later he wrote “The Psychology of the unconscious Process” which later he revised and

became “On the Psychology of the Unconscious” (1953). Many of Jung’s fundamental paradigm-shifting concepts were presented in this group of essays and are a direct result of his own conversations between himself and unconscious materials.

An incessant stream of fantasies had been released, and I did my best not to lose my head but to find some way of understanding these strange things. I stood helpless before an alien world; everything in it seemed difficult and incomprehensible. I was living in a constant state of tension; often I felt as if gigantic blocks of stone were tumbling down upon me. One thunderstorm followed another. (Jung 1989c, p177)

It is almost as if the paper “The Transcendent Function” is an example of the transcendent function at work in itself. What emerged at this time for Jung was the importance of the creative fantasy dynamic of the unconscious and its image and symbol producing capacity. This was a time when Jung was invaded by symbolic visions and he actively dialogued with fantasy figures like Philemon:

Philemon and other figures of my fantasies brought home to me the crucial insight that there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life. Philemon represents a force which was not myself...It was he who taught me psychic objectivity, the reality of the psyche. Through him the distinction was clarified between myself and the object of my thought. (Jung 1989c, p183)

Jung also produced many automatic drawings of circular shapes at this time but he had no idea of where this process was leading him or what its purpose was.

Gradually it dawned on him that the mandalas he was drawing represented the goal, the direction toward the centre of the psyche, toward the Self. The realisation that the path is initially linear but then becomes directed toward the centre affected all his work from that time onwards.

J Miller (2004) comments that some writers (Beebe, 1992; Hubback, 1996; Sandner, 1992) have argued that the foundations for Jung's writing of the "Transcendent Function" paper lay in the essay "The Seven sermons of the Dead" and its preoccupation with the theory of the opposites and their reconciliation. Solomon (1992) points out the strong similarity between the transcendent function and Hegel's dialectic vision. The emergence of a third from the dialogue between the conscious and unconscious bears a striking resemblance to the emergence of the synthesis from the interplay of thesis and antithesis. Nevertheless, however much the essay reflects the personal process of Jung and the evolution of his work with the unconscious at that time, the "Transcendent Function" paper stands firmly on its own two feet today as a description of a psychological dynamic that is central to the understanding of the modern psyche, the practice of analytical psychology, and also suggests how the analyst can tackle the tricky terrain that is the conflict of the opposites, not only in his analysands, but also in himself.

Method, Process or Function

Before turning to the paper itself, which focuses mainly on how the transcendent function operates, it is worth asking the question what is the transcendent function exactly? Is it the expression of the relationship between conscious and the unconscious? Is it the process that ensues out of such opposition? Is it the method one can use to conduct the process? Is it the final result, the third thing that emerges? Or is it some combination of all of these?

Looking at quotes in the Collected Works it seems that Jung used the term in varying ways:

The whole process is called the “transcendent function.” It is a process and a method at the same time. The production of unconscious compensations is a spontaneous process; the conscious realisation is a method. The function is called “transcendent” because it facilitates the transition between one psychic condition to another by means of mutual confrontation of the opposites. (Jung 1958, p489)

This passage highlights how Jung used the term differently to describe function, process and method. The dialogue between conscious and unconscious is a function because it reflects a relationship between them. In the opening paragraph of “The Transcendent Function,” for example, Jung focuses on the relational aspect

explaining that the transcendent function “means a psychological function” that “arises from the union of conscious and unconscious contents” (Jung 1960, p69). But what flows from the relationship is a process through which the polarities are discharged. In “On the Psychology of the Unconscious” (1953), Jung calls the transcendent function a “process of coming to terms with the unconscious” (p80). In another example, in *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (1963) he describes the transcendent function as the “continual process of getting to know the counter-position in the unconscious” (p200). Jung then also writes that the conscious practice of it can become a method:

But it can be used as a method too; that is, when the contrary will of the unconscious is sought for and recognised in dreams and other unconscious products. In this way the conscious personality is brought face to face with the counter position of the unconscious...Hence the transcendent function is only usable in part as a method, the other part always remains an involuntary experience. (Jung 1973a, p268)

Jung also calls the new thing that emerges, the third, the transcendent function in various places. An example of this is when, in describing a patient’s enormous shifts through joining the conscious and the unconscious, he concludes, “The result...is the transcendent function born of the union of the opposites” (Jung 1953, p223). Similarly, in working with a patient’s dream during a seminar, Jung refers to the animal in the dream as symbolising the reconciliation of the opposites: “From this reconciliation a new thing is always created, a new thing is realised. That is the transcendent function.” (Jung 1984, p648)

As the quote above demonstrates, the other question that comes to mind is whether the transcendent function is a natural process that occurs spontaneously in the psyche or a method that can be prompted or both. The ambiguity around the term the transcendent function, and whether it is a natural process or not, can be better understood in terms of individuation. On the one hand, individuation is an archetypal process pulling all people toward a purpose that can only be realised by the integration of the material in the unconscious. This archetypal vision would see the transcendent function as a natural and ongoing process on that road. Jung spoke of the natural occurrence of the transcendent function:

The transcendent function...is a natural process, a manifestation of energy that springs from the tension of the opposites...The natural process by which the opposites are united came to serve me as the model and basis for a method.

(Jung 1953, p80)

On the other hand, consciousness and the unconscious are separated by opposites the very nature of which are almost impossible to reconcile. Therefore the transcendent function is in no way assured to happen and needs artificial help. Having observed the organic workings of the psyche and how it deals with tension of the opposites Jung seems to have developed his method that became practically known as active imagination. At the end of the “Transcendent Function” essay he questions whether the process is purely natural by stating that if the psychological attitude is not correct then it is unlikely to happen at all:

Consciousness is continually widened through the confrontation with previously unconscious contents, or - to be more accurate - could be widened if it took the trouble to integrate them. That is naturally not always the case. Even if there is sufficient intelligence to understand the procedure, there may yet be lack of courage and self-confidence, or one is too lazy, mentally and morally, or too cowardly, to make the effort. (Jung 1960, p91)

So it would seem that the transcendent function is both natural (instinctive) and can be prompted or assisted (developed). The two aspects can occur together, sometimes independently, and sometimes in rhythm with each other.

The Transcendent Function essay

Prefatory note

The prefatory note to the “Transcendent Function” paper published in the Collected Works in 1960 is written by Jung himself. There also exists a James Hillman preface from A.R. Pope’s original translation that has never been published but was printed privately for students in 1957 at the Jung Institute in Zurich. I have attached it as Appendix A.

Hillman's short introduction to the "Transcendent Function" essay begins by emphasizing the historical importance of the paper in marking an irreversible change of direction for analytical psychology in relation to the Vienna school. He notes that the first ever mention of the transcendent function is in "Two Essays on Analytical Psychology," in the first of these essays, in its 1916 version (see: Collected Papers on Analytical Psychology, 2nd ed., 1917, Chap. 14) where it says that the transcendent function comes about as a result of "a new method of treating psychological materials such as dreams and phantasies."

Hillman goes on to explain the value of this new synthetic approach for the evolution of the Zurich school and also points out how in modern times the term the transcendent function has been replaced by the terms "the Self" and "the reconciling symbol." He writes:

Therefore, it had become necessary to evolve this new synthetic or constructive method to deal with these prospective aspects. As a detailed description of this new method of the Zurich School in its relation to the transcendent function, this paper fits in as an important complement to the work of that period. The term "transcendent function", used here for the "union of the conscious and unconscious", is not so much in use today, having been replaced in a wider sense by the self and in a narrower sense by the concept of the reconciling symbol, both of which are prefigured in this paper, thereby giving us further witness to the logical and empirical development of Dr. Jung's ideas. (Hillman's

unpublished prefatory note from A.R. Pope's original translation of the Transcendent Function 1916/1958)

Jung's prefatory note explains firstly how the "Transcendent Function" essay came to surface for publication 42 years after it was originally written and that as such it was still relevant and topical and therefore worth publishing:

"The essay may therefore stand, with all its imperfections, as a historical document. It may give the reader some idea of the efforts of understanding which were needed for the first attempts at a synthetic view of the psychic process in analytical treatment." (Jung 1960, p67)

J Miller (2004) suggests that the synthetic view here mentioned by Jung implicates that the relation to the unconscious contains meaning, purpose and a destiny. That could explain why in the prefatory note Jung capitalises the word "Unknown" and links it to the mystical quality of the unconscious and its parallel with the preoccupation of all religions and philosophies through time:

This problem is identical with the universal question: How does one come to terms in practice with the unconscious?...Indirectly, it is the fundamental question, in practice, of all religions and all philosophies. For the unconscious is not this thing or that; it is the Unknown as it immediately affects us. (Jung 1960, p68)

Finally the prefatory note prepares the reader for the description of the method of active imagination which Jung calls "the most important auxiliary for the production

of those contents of the unconscious which lie, as it were, immediately below the threshold of consciousness” (Jung 1960, p 68).

In his short prefatory note (Appendix A) Hillman stresses the importance of Jung’s exposition of the active imagination technique in this “Transcendent Function” essay because as “ Miss Barbara Hannah points out in her short summary of this hitherto unpublished manuscript (see: “Some Remarks on Active Imagination”, Spring 1953), we have here an early and very clear account of active imagination as available nowhere else in Dr. Jung’s writings.” (Hillman’s unpublished prefatory note from A.R. Pope’s original translation of the Transcendent Function 1916/1958)

Main Essay

The essay itself begins with Jung outlining the significant differences between his conception of the unconscious and its relationship to consciousness as compared to Freud's reductive view, something that in 1916 was still a relatively fresh departure of ideas. For Freud the unconscious was a repository for material that was too unpleasant, violent, or powerful to be held in consciousness. That is not to say that Jung dismissed the importance of the integration of the personal shadow in psychotherapy, but that as his experience and ideas matured, it became necessary to look at the journey of the ego beyond its reconciliation with things repressed to its natural journey of individuation into the collective unconscious (something that in this essay he calls "inherited behavior traces").

Jung then goes on to talk about the partition that exist between the ego and the unconscious and describes it like a membrane that, depending on its permeability, has different effects on consciousness. The modern Jungian viewpoint understands

this as the incest taboo and describes it as a barrier between the ego and the unconscious that amounts to a prohibition against fantasy and all that pertains to dealing with the unconscious. But the incest taboo and the whole idea of incest symbolism can be understood very differently in the two stage of life. In the first half of life, it is the task of the ego to be born out of the maternal unconscious and achieve an adapted relationship to the world of outer reality. The incest taboo serves the very important function of closing the maternal womb of the unconscious and preventing an evasion of the task of reality adaptation. That is what Lott's wife was warned against – looking back. You are not supposed to look back when you are in the process of being born into the real world. In that stage of development, the incest taboo for a man has the implication of belittling the feminine because the feminine is mother. The masculine ego needs to go through the phase of exaggerated emphasis on macho-masculinity and the depreciation of everything that pertains to the mother, because there is such a danger that it will not extricate itself from the unconscious. This process usually results in excessive differentiation of consciousness and a disconnectedness for the instinctual and the feminine.

The pattern is a little different for a woman. There the infantile tendency is more likely to operate through the father. The desire to be father's little girl and be taken care of is something that has to be overcome if a woman is to achieve full ego development.

When you go to the second half of life, the situation reverses. If there is going to be full individuation, the second half of life requires that psychological incest take

place. There is a need for the ego to return to its source in the unconscious in order to be reborn as is typified symbolically by many myths, fairytales and dreams.

So for Jung the unconscious was an independent psychic system in dynamic relationship to consciousness. Consciousness contains directed, adaptive, and personal material, whereas the unconscious holds the less directed, personal material from the past, fantasy material and the archetypes (something that Jung was yet to publish in 1916).

The early part of the “Transcendent Function” essay marks out the evolution of consciousness as related to the unconscious and presents a case, for the first time in depth psychology (1916), for the two to be seen as co-equals in the psyche. Consciousness allows us to function in our daily lives whereas the unconscious compensates by providing symbol, fantasy, intuition and collective images. Jung writes:

This lack of parallelism is not just accidental or purposeless, but is due to the fact that the unconscious behaves in a compensatory or complementary manner towards consciousness... The reasons for this relationship are:

(1) Consciousness possesses a threshold intensity which its contents must have attained, so that all elements that are too weak remain in the unconscious

(2) Consciousness, because of its directed functions, exercises an inhibition on all incompatible material, with the result that it sinks into the unconscious.

(3) Consciousness constitutes the momentary process of adaptation, whereas the unconscious contains not only all the forgotten material of the individual's

own past, but all the inherited behavior traces constituting the structure of the mind.

(4) The unconscious contains all the fantasy combinations which have not yet attained the threshold intensity, but which in the course of time and under suitable conditions will enter the light of consciousness. (Jung 1960, p69)

Jung goes on to identify the modern day problem that this differentiated consciousness, necessary for adaptation to the modern world, results in a constant tension with the unconscious. He also identifies another crucial disadvantage that differentiated consciousness brings by it constantly making judgements which, by its nature, excludes all that is not known, the unconscious, and results in consciousness becoming too one sided. This rejection of what is new and unknown by consciousness closes us off from the root of our being and furthermore, Jung argues, the more the unconscious counter-position is pushed down, the greater its strength and the chance it will erupt into consciousness with unpleasant results:

The counter-position of the unconscious is not dangerous so long as it does not possess any high energy-value. But if the tension increases as a result of too great one-sidedness, the counter-tendency breaks through into consciousness... The further we are able to remove ourselves from the unconscious with directed functioning, the more readily a powerful counter-position can build up in the unconscious, and when this breaks out it may have disagreeable consequences. (Jung 1960, p71)

Jung goes on to talk about how the unconscious is an inexhaustible and omnipresent part of psychic life that cannot be emptied any more than consciousness can. Furthermore, this became an important psychic truth because the unconscious is ever present, not only influencing conscious life but fundamentally necessary for the ego's growth and renewal. Even when something from the unconscious is made conscious, there emerges still another counter-position to what just became conscious, so for Jung analysis becomes an approach that helps the individual to deal with the ubiquitous effects of the unconscious on a continuous basis.

Jung then arrives at the central question of the essay and paves the way for the exposition of the transcendent function, that in itself symbolises the task of finding a way to bring consciousness into contact with the unconscious:

The basic question for the therapist is not how to get rid of the momentary difficulty, but how future difficulties may be successfully countered. The question is: what kind of mental and moral attitude is it necessary to have towards the disturbing influences of the unconscious, and how can it be conveyed to the patient? The answer obviously consists in getting rid of the separation between conscious and unconscious. This cannot be done by condemning the contents of the unconscious in a one-sided way, but rather by recognising their significance in compensating the one-sidedness of consciousness and by taking this significance into account. (Jung 1960, p73)

Here begins the main thrust of the essay in outlining the importance of the role of the unconscious in compensating for the one-sidedness of consciousness and the

part the analyst plays in assisting the patient to discover that. This argument is carefully interwoven with an emphasis on how this relationship is constructive/synthetic, as opposed to reductive, and that essentially this is what is at the centre of every individual's search for purpose and meaning. Here Jung not only does away with his last links to Freud's absolute reductive attitude towards the unconscious but he also re-examines the dynamics of the transference, in light of the transcendent function, and puts the infantile Eros model underpinning Freud's transference theory to rest.

Jung sees the transference from the patient to the analyst as "a metaphorical expression of the not consciously realised need for help in a crisis" (Jung 1960, p74). Whatever the crisis is, it requires a change of attitude in the personality that Jung called "transcendent" because it makes the transition from one attitude to another organically possible, without loss to the unconscious' (Jung 1960, p73). The analyst helps this along by taking on the projection of the transcendent function for the patient:

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 this function of the analyst lies one of the many important meanings of the transference. (Jung 1960, p74)

J Miller (2004) asks what Jung meant by "mediates the transcendent function" exactly. Is the analyst mediating the actual contents of the patient's transcendent function, in the sense of somehow carrying the contents until the patient is able to

absorb the new attitude? Or is the analyst mediating the idea of a new attitude or situation and in that sense holding some kind of potential space for the patient? Or, is the analyst mediating the transcendent function by modelling it for the patient, showing the patient that it is normal and positive to allow that kind of transition? Jung does not answer these questions directly but the answer is probably a combination of all these ways of mediation as required at different moments in time. S.M. Joseph (1997) interprets it as “the analyst carries unrealised potentials for psychological transformations” by “being open to carry whatever aspects of initiatory change the patient needs to encounter at any given moment” (p153). S. Powell (1985) believes that “the symbolic attitude is mediated through the analyst until the patient is able to allow unconscious contents of the psyche to enter consciousness freely” (p51).

Jung says that “the patient clings by means of the transference to the person who seems to promise him a renewal of attitude; through it he seeks his change, which is vital to him, even though he may not be conscious of doing so. For the patient, therefore, the analyst has the character of an indispensable figure absolutely necessary for life... If we interpret this in terms of infantile Eros” then “in that way the meaning and purpose of the transference are not understood (Jung 1960, p74). Jung in this section of the essay adds his finishing arguments for his case that the transcendent function is the way for the patient to obtain insight into questions of meaning and purpose and that this occurs with a constructive treatment of the unconscious. This is also why fantasy (imagination) and symbol are so critical to the Jungian formulation because it is only through them that the psyche can break free of

the limits and bondage of the opposites and experience a quantum leap to something new.

Unconscious material

In order to develop the transcendent function the most important requirement is the production of data from the unconscious: “First and foremost, we need the unconscious material”(Jung 1960, p77). Though in later years Jung places more emphasis on the use of dreams, here he regards dreams as somewhat unsatisfactory towards developing the transcendent function because they are difficult to understand and make too many demands on the dreamer. He states that although “ the most readily accessible expression of the unconscious processes is undoubtedly dreams” (p77) and that the “dream is, so to speak, a pure product of the unconscious” (p77), he also points out that “since the energy tension in sleep is usually very low, dreams...are inferior expressions of unconscious contents” (p77) and are “unsuitable or difficult to make use of in developing the transcendent function” (p77).

Jung then considers the possibilities for gathering unconscious content. These are: (1) Emergence of unconscious complexes into the waking state, e.g., slips of the tongue and lapses of memory. (2) Spontaneous fantasies. This is achieved by eliminating all critical attention and creating a vacuum in consciousness and entering a state of mind meditators often experience. Then those fantasies which have a high-energy charge are most likely to emerge and fill this empty space. (3) Active imagination or the free play of fantasy. In order to do this the individual has to become conscious of the emotional mood and note down all the fantasies and

associations that come to mind. (4) Drawing the mood by means of a picture. (5) Expressing the mood through sculpture or painting. (6) Expressing the mood through bodily movement. (7) Word association test. This helps to get at the hidden complexes lying beneath the threshold of consciousness and it can be very helpful when all else fails.

All of these methods bring unconscious material to the surface of consciousness. Jung then presents two answers to the important question of what to do with this material. The first option leads to creativity and the whole area of aesthetic motifs but Jung says he is much more interested in the second option of the understanding and meaning that these contents carry for the individual person and stresses that both approaches need to be kept in mind as they complement each other: *The ideal case would be if these two aspects could exist side by side or rhythmically succeed each other; that is, if there were an alteration of creation and understanding*" (Jung 1960, p86).

The underlying principle in all these types of exploration is how the individual is affected by the contents emerging from the unconscious and this in itself gives voice to a fundamental tenet of Jung's psychology: within the symptom lies the patient's ability to respond. *In the intensity of the emotional disturbance itself lies the value, the energy which he should have at his disposal in order to remedy the state of reduced adaptation.* (Jung 1960, p82)

The goal for Jung then is not to eliminate the symptom but rather to dive into the energy locked inside of it. Of all the methods listed above for gathering unconscious

content he found the essence of active imagination allowed the best way into the symptom or emotional state behind the image. (That is why he called active imagination “the beginning of the transcendent function” and forms stage one of a three stage process.) In this way Jung sees the emotional state as a constructive symptom and can be seen as pulling one in a purposeful way, something the patient must learn to contact and record:

He must make himself as conscious of the mood he is in, sinking himself in it without reserve and noting down on paper all the fantasies and other associations that come up. Fantasy must be allowed the freest possible play, yet not in such a manner that it leaves the object of its orbit, namely the affect, by setting of a kind of “chain-reaction” association process... Out of this preoccupation with the object there comes a more or less complete expression of the mood... Either concretely or symbolically. (Jung 1960, p82)

Active imagination was frequently used by Jung to coax material from the unconscious toward the threshold of consciousness and as the fantasy making capacity of the psyche increased in relevance so did the importance of imaginal psychology as a whole. This essay, originally written in 1916, reflected Jung’s thinking that through imagery we can retrieve information from the unconscious and, that by giving the images psychic energy, the images would be vivified and emerge into consciousness where they would begin to prompt a shift in consciousness:

The whole procedure is a kind of enrichment and clarification of the affect, whereby the affect and its contents are brought nearer to consciousness,

becoming at the same time more impressive and more understandable. This work by itself can have a favorable and vitalizing influence. At all events, it creates a new situation, since the previously unrelated affect has become a more or less clear and articulate idea, thanks to the assistance and co-operation of the conscious mind. This is the beginning of the transcendent function, i.e., of the collaboration of conscious and unconscious data. (Jung 1960, p82)

Once the imagery, symbolism and affect of the unconscious material have been manifested, the conscious mind must interact with them and in so doing develop the second stage of the transcendent function. So far in the paper, the compensatory and imagistic nature of the unconscious has been developed by Jung, as has its opposite, the analytical, directed and overdeveloped nature of consciousness. Jung now suggests bringing them together using the metaphor of a coming to terms of two antithetical positions out of which emerges a third:

Once the unconscious content has been given form and the meaning of the formulation understood, the question arises as to how the ego and the unconscious are to come to terms. This is the second and most important stage of the procedure, the bringing together of the opposites for the production of a third: the transcendent function. (Jung 1960, p87)

Jung follows the formulation of the transcendent function's second phase by returning to emphasize the important role the ego takes from this point forth. A strong ego is needed for the continuation of the process as it safeguards against inundation by the unconscious. So Jung stresses that, just as it is important for the unconscious

not be subverted by the directedness of consciousness, it is equally important that the ego not be overcome by the unconscious:

The position of the ego must be maintained as being of equal value to the counter-position of the unconscious, and vice versa. This amounts to a very necessary warning: for just as the conscious mind of civilized man has a restrictive effect on the unconscious, so the rediscovered unconscious often has a really dangerous effect on the ego. In the same way that the ego suppressed the unconscious before, a liberated unconscious can thrust the ego aside and overwhelm it. (Jung 1960, p88)

This quote is very important in that it leaves no doubt that there must be an equal partnership between the unconscious and consciousness as a foundation for the “third” symbol, that which transforms consciousness, to appear. With both the unconscious material having been acquired and the conscious ego fully engaged, the transcendent function now culminates in a dialogue between the two. This is a conversation where there is an exchange of information. Jung goes on:

Thus, in coming to terms with the unconscious, not only is the standpoint of the ego justified, but the unconscious is granted the same authority. The ego takes the lead, but the unconscious must be allowed to have its say too...It is exactly as if the dialogue were taking place between two human beings with equal rights, each of whom gives the other credit for a valid argument and considers it worth while to modify the conflicting standpoints by means of thorough

comparison and discussion or else to distinguish them clearly from one another.

(Jung 1960, p88)

Coming now to the end of the “Transcendent function” essay Jung closes with some final thoughts, the first of which is a further comparison between the ability to dialogue with the “other” intrapsychically via the transcendent function and the ability to dialogue with another human being with whom one is in relationship. Jung claims that the inability to listen to others will inhibit the ability to listen to the intrapsychic other, and the inability to dialogue with the unconscious will impede human relationships:

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. (Jung 1960, p89)

Jung’s final comments on the transcendent function in this essay stresses the importance of maintaining the tension of the opposites and that this is really the only way a new level of being can be achieved and that in this way individuation takes place. He writes:

The shuttling to and fro of arguments and affects represents the transcendent function of opposites. The confrontation of the two positions generates a tension charged with energy and creates a living, third thing – not a logical stillbirth in accordance with the principle tertium non datur but a movement out of a suspension between, a living birth that leads to a new level of being, a new

situation. The transcendent function manifests itself as a quality of conjoined opposites. So long as they are kept apart – naturally for the purpose of avoiding conflict – they do not function and remain inert. (Jung 1960, p90)

Jung 's last comment is that he would like to include the contents of the transcendent function, of which there are many, in the essay but that more time (1916 then) was needed before this could be done. Thankfully, Jung did publish extensively before his death on myths, dreams, symbols, archetypes, alchemy, individuation and therefore it is possible to look at some of the contents of the transcendent function.

Symbols of individuation: contents of the transcendent function

The ultimate content of the transcendent function on an archetypal level is the symbol of individuation or wholeness but before looking at symbols like the mandala or the hermaphrodite it is interesting to look at what Jung meant by individuation and how this related to the transcendent function. Individuation is the term used by Jung to designate

the process of personality development which leads to the fullest possible actualisation of the Self. The Self is understood to mean the central nucleus of the personality that contains all the archetypal potential with which an individual is innately endowed and, through the dialogue of the opposites and the ensuing birth of the “third”, this potential becomes more conscious. This dialogue of the opposites and the production of the reconciling symbol often follows archetypal patterns and Jung identified them in many symbols reflecting the different stages of the coniunctio process.

Symbols relating to the notion of individuation and wholeness are often experienced by the ego as transcendent and numinous and an experience of the holy. The transcendent refers to ideas, images and symbols which lie beyond ordinary mundane experience and are therefore numinous by nature. Life is full of conflicting or opposing tendencies and the psyche is equipped with a ‘transcendent imperative’ that enables it to deal with the resulting tension successfully, and historically this imperative has been projected outward to the collective.

In this way, for people who lived in times past, care of the psyche (soul) was natural and instinctual. It was carried out through ritual, ceremony, mystery centres, oral traditions of story, myth and art. But, while natural, it was not necessarily conscious in an individual way; it was most often a participation in an instinctual group or tribal consciousness and as such the transcendent function did its work unnoticed. As consciousness has evolved in the direction of individuality, forms of care of the soul have needed to become more conscious and more individual, as in Jung’s example that we can use the transcendent function to actualise Self-realisation.

The path to individuation is symbolically represented by the journey of the Alchemist and the Philosopher's Stone or the hero and the treasure hard to attain, both of which symbolise the ego's task throughout the passage of life to actualise the full potential of the Self. All the way along this journey there will be encounters with situations that require a confrontation of the opposites and require the transcendent function in order to proceed beyond the stalemate. This is the transcendent function being used as a tool for transformations that result in a shift in attitude. On a deeper level the transcendent function is the outcome of a shift in the ego-Self axis that translates into the ego relating to something more powerful than itself and finding meaning and purpose. At birth the Self is all, the ego existing only in potentia, a seed waiting to germinate within the matrix of the Self. An archetypal image of the Self at this pre-ego stage is the uroboros and the most impressive expression of its opposite is the individuated and consciously realised Self as seen in the universal symbol of the mandala, one of the more powerful contents of the transcendent function.

The mandala is a symbol of transcendence par excellence; it represents the achievement of the goal: the opposites are reconciled in a state of dynamic balance. In Buddhism mandalas are used in meditation to assist the spirit as it moves along its evolutionary course from a lower realm of the corporeal and the mundane to the higher realm of the spiritual and the sacred. The mandala is a symbol which combines both the journey and the destination and as such holds the paradox of the differentiation and oneness of all things, the unus mundus. Jung writes on this:

The transcendent function does not proceed without aim and purpose, but leads to the revelation of the essential man. It is in the first place a purely natural process, which may in some cases pursue its course without the knowledge of the individual, and can sometimes forcibly accomplish itself in the face of opposition. The meaning and purpose of the process is the realisation, in all its aspects, of the personality originally hidden away.... the production and unfolding of the original, potential wholeness. The symbols used by the unconscious to this end are the same as those which mankind has always used to express wholeness, completeness and perfection: symbols, as a rule, of the quaternity and the circle. For this reasons I have termed this the individuation process. (Jung 1953, p110)

Organized religion says that a divine world order is the creation of the god(s) and the task of the human being is to submit to this order. Depth psychology takes a similar view but places it in the realm of the psyche, saying that the inner life is also governed by the gods and the task of human beings is to submit/divest to the gods within (the ego submits to the archetypes and then gradually this gives way to the Self.) The difference between a religion of an outer order and the religious nature of the soul work of individuation is that the former establishes outer laws and practices to be followed uniformly by those who take up that religion, while the latter establishes what pleases or displeases the gods on a more individual basis. It is often said that in the first instance we have a group religion while in the second we have an individual religion. Furthermore, the outer religious institution or individual, as in a priest, takes on the projection of the

transcendent function and one of many examples of it in action is the ceremony of the mass.

The inner religious dimension plays a central role in Jungian psychology because the main purpose of the individuation process is to achieve as conscious a harmony as possible with those forces in the unconscious that are seeking a centring of the whole personality. These centring forces are structured by the Self and hence are often represented by symbols of transcendence conveying a numinous element and more often than not are seen by the Self as a god-image, the ultimate content of the transcendent function.

These symbols appear at different stages of the journey and incorporate the idea of rotation about a centre. The Buddhist wheel of transformation, the spiral representing the creative power of the universe emanating from the navel and the zodiac (Greek words *zoe* (life) and *diakos* (wheel), all speak of the never-ending cycle of involution and evolution around a primal point. The omphalos also represents the central origin from where all things originate and are nourished. There is a sense in which every sacred or consecrated place is an omphalos. Delphi is a good example of the symbol of the Great Mother representing the Earth and the birth of all things. Thus the goal of existence as a centre is seen in the symbols of the labyrinth, the pilgrimage to the holy land, the quest for the Holy Grail, the alchemical opus for the lapis philosophorum and a New Jerusalem. Probably the oldest symbols of reconciling antagonisms and of transcending them are the cross and the tree and therefore these would qualify as some of the oldest symbols of the transcendent function. Jung describes in *Symbols of Transformation* (1956) how the crucifixion of Christ

is a symbol that brings together masculine consciousness and feminine unconscious, it “signifies the conjunction of the conscious and unconscious, the transcendent function characteristic of the individuation process” (p433). Similarly, Jung tackled the problem of evil by saying that the only hope of understanding the eternal rift between good and evil is through the individual finding a collaboration between conscious and unconscious.

The critical link drawn by Jung between the transcendent function and the individuation process is that a person cannot grow toward wholeness without reconciling the polarities of consciousness and the unconscious. The transcendent function also describes the capacity of the psyche to change and grow toward individuation whereby, when consciousness and the unconscious join, the essential person is revealed. It is as if we join with whatever is missing from ourselves in order to enhance the wholeness and cohesiveness of the personality. So the transcendent function expresses the telos or goal of the personality. Jung wrote about the relationship of the transcendent function and individuation in Archetypes of the Collected Unconscious and even though the quote is long it sums it up very well:

The psyche consists of two incongruous halves which together should form a whole. Conscious and unconscious do not make a whole when one of them is suppressed or injured by the other. Both are aspects of life. Consciousness should defend its reason and protect itself, and the chaotic life of the unconscious should be given its chance of having its way too. This means open conflict and open collaboration at once. That, evidently, is the way life should be.

It is the old game of hammer and anvil; between them the patient iron is forged into an indestructible whole, an "individual."

This, roughly, is what I mean by the individuation process. As the name shows, it is a process or course of development arising out of the conflict between two fundamental psychic facts. How the harmonising of consciousness and unconscious data is to be undertaken cannot be indicated in the form of a recipe. It is an irrational life-process... Out of this union emerge new situations and new conscious attitudes. I have therefore called the union of the opposites the "transcendent function." This rounding of the personality into a whole may well be the goal of any psychotherapy that claims to be more than a mere cure of symptoms. (Jung 1959, p287-289)

Alchemy

For Jung the group of symbols that most reflected his insights into analysis, the transcendent function and the individuation process was the stages of the alchemical opus. The movement toward the Opus is seen as a cycle of steps between different stages and the coniunctio, the uniting of the opposites, is always followed by the nigredo, the state of disorganisation and putrefaction that breaks and transforms things. He wrote

The secret of alchemy was in fact the transcendent function, the transformation of personality through the blending and fusion of the noble with the base components, of the differentiated with the inferior functions, of the conscious with the unconscious.

(Jung 1953, p220)

On the surface, Alchemy is the ancient art of transmuting base metals into valuable ones like gold and silver. Its importance for Jung was in the conviction that “outer” changes in the substances correspond with the “inner” changes of the alchemist’s psyche and as the alchemist’s endeavour proceeds, transformation occurs in both the alchemist and the substance. The alchemical metaphor is that of personality transformation and its genius lay in the assumption that change was part of an interaction between subject and object in which both were transformed.

Each stage of the Alchemist’s transformation was distinguished by a characteristic colour: nigredo (blackening), albedo (whitening), and rubedo (reddening). The nigredo (the first stage) is associated with the separation of the elements in the prima materia which

are then grouped into male and female opposites. The black aspect symbolises depression, the melancholia which commonly begins the process of self-examination and brings people into analysis. The encounter with negative aspects of the Self (the shadow personality) is experienced as a mortificatio since the humiliating parts of oneself have to be confronted and integrated, and associated feelings of guilt and worthlessness have to be suffered, taken on, and worked through. It is dying to the old neurotic way of life and to the emotional dependencies of childhood.

The albedo (white) as the second stage of the opus comes about as a result of the washing of the products of the nigredo. The soul (anima) which died in the nigredo is released, refined, and then reunited with the revitalised materia to produce the glorious stage of many colours, the peacock's tail which then transforms into white. In this stage the white becomes united with the red through raising the heat of the fire, the white being associated with the queen and the red with the king. They arise to perform their coniunctio oppositorum, the union of all opposites as symbolised by the conjunction of the archetypal masculine and feminine in the chymical marriage, the hieros gamos. This results in the grand climax of the achievement of the goal, the lapis philosophorum, the hermaphrodite embodying the united king and queen.

The king and the queen perform their coniunctio and melt into a single being with two heads but their son, the filius philosophorum, in the words of Jung (1954) "...is not born of the queen, but king and queen are themselves transformed into the new birth."

Alchemy holds that subject and object, indeed all opposites, are joined in an unseen way by a universal process or substance, called the lapis, which imbues all creation, even

the human mind and the human body. Alchemy also posited that “outer” and “inner” are merged in a space called the subtle body that mediates between spirit and matter and alludes to the liminal space of transition that is the transcendent function. Instead of separating them, alchemy sees spirit/matter, inner/outer, and subject/object as related in some profound way. This non-dualistic way of perceiving reality has come to be known as alchemical thinking.

Archetypally, Mercurius is the messenger between the realms and is a figure crucial to both hermetics and the transcendent function because he transmutes what is beyond human understanding into something that can be grasped. Mercurius holds the archetypal energy that is the messenger between two worlds, bringing them together, crossing boundaries that seemed uncrossable and, in descending to the underworld and back again, has the ability to hold multiple levels of consciousness, something central to the transcendent function (the capacity to move back and forth between layers of meaning). Furthermore, Mercurius symbolises the capacity to make transitions and transformations and therefore is an archetypal manifestation of the transcendent function that results in the birth of the new “third thing”.

Schwartz-Salant (1998) sees this “third thing” as a “metaphorical third” that in alchemy is a way of perceiving reality not in the Cartesian model that separates everything into opposites, two’s (i.e., observing subject and observed object) but with alchemical thinking that emphasizes the “threeness” of every situation; between observer and the object is the relationship between the two. The metaphorical third is more a process than a thing, the process of being aware that every subject-object experience creates a

neither/nor, metaphorical space where a relationship may be found between the two. This way of seeing the Eros between opposites was what so fascinated Jung in his search for transitional mechanisms to form connective tissue between disparate psychic states. The transcendent function is the embodiment and product of alchemical thinking's "metaphorical third," a process or space in which opposites are held, where the choice between either one or the other is suspended so that the relationship between them becomes the focus.

The Axiom of Maria that states that, "out of the One comes the Two, out of the Two comes the Three, and from the Three comes the Four as the One," is a good archetypal way of understanding the growth of consciousness and what part the transcendent function plays in the process. The Axiom of Maria evokes imagery of movement from a primitive unity (the One), to the separation of opposites (the Two), into a vessel or field in which the opposites reside in tension (the Three), and to a place of transcendence or Oneness (the Four as the One).

The original One represents a state prior to order that is chaotic and confusing, before the opposites have separated. The Two is the beginning of making sense of phenomena and the emergence of pairs of opposites. The Three is the creation of the third thing, the field, and of the "metaphorical third". Here, the opposites are held so that they create a kind of vessel that is separate from but at the same time contains them. Jung described the "Three" flowing from the opposites:

This vacillating between the opposites and being tossed back and forth means being contained in the opposites. They become a vessel in which what was previously now

one thing and now another floats vibrating, so that the painful suspension between opposites gradually changes into the bilateral activity of the point in the centre. (Jung 1963, p223)

Jung looked deeply at the symbolism of the trinity and was keenly aware of its historical, religious, and philosophical importance in terms of resolving the eternal conflict of mankind between the “One” and the “Other”:

The “One”...seeks to hold to its one-and-alone existence, while the “Other” ever strives to be another opposed to the One... Thus, there arises the tension of the opposites between the One and the Other. But every tension of the opposites culminates in a release out of which comes the “Third.” In the third, the tension is resolved and the lost unity is restored. (Jung 1958, p119)

That having been said, Jung departed from accepting the third as the goal, in terms of achieving unity and perfection, and instead looked for the transformation of the three that leads to the wholeness of the four. The Four is the experience of the Third as it now links to a state of Oneness of existence. Through the experience of the Three (the vessel) something new emerges: the Four as One, a sense of Oneness.

JMiller (2004) writes that the axiom of Maria allows us to see that in the workings of the transcendent function there are actually four elements: the two opposites, the transcendent function process, and the transformed, new attitude, which has been called so far the third. The two opposites are mediated by the process or container of the transcendent function and this mirrors the Axiom of Maria whereby the transcendent function is the movement of the Two to the Three. This is the metaphorical third, the field

or the relationship between the two opposites. It is the metaphoric, neither/nor space where the opposites sit in tension, vacillate, oscillate and allow a shift in consciousness. But, the new third “thing” that emerges from the operation of the third is actually a fourth, the alchemical fourth. When it emerges it is a totally new consciousness, not an amalgam of the disparate elements but some part of the Oneness that connects them.

Case studies

We cannot rid ourselves of the doubt that perhaps this whole separation of mind and body may finally prove to be a device of reason for the purpose of conscious discrimination – an intellectually necessary separation of one and the same fact into two aspects, to which we then legitimately attribute an independent existence. (Jung 1960, p326)

How does all this apply to the neurosis we encounter in our consulting rooms and, furthermore, how can the transcendent function be used to heal the body? Neurotic forms of organisation usually manifest themselves as two types of symptom. The neurotic structure creates a protective structure, namely the neurotic symptom, to deal with conflict or emotional pain, whereas in psychosomatisation there would be a regression to a more primitive form of relationship between body and mind. In other words, a symptom that may be corporal (“organic illness”) or psychic (“mental illness”) can be the symbolic representation of a disconnection or disturbance in the ego/Self axis. Jung states that the result of the alchemical endeavour, i.e., in this case the cure, should be sought neither in the body nor in the psyche but rather: “....*in an intermediate realm between mind and matter, i.e., a psychic realm of subtle bodies whose characteristic is to manifest themselves in a mental as well as a material form.*” (Jung 1968, p276)

Jung here is turning to the “subtle body” as a solution to the problem. In his work, the terms “subtle body”, “pneumatic body”, “breath-body” (Jung 1970, p332; 1960, p194),

“internal body” and corpus glorificatus are used as virtually synonymous. Corpus subtile or “diamond body” is a transfigured and resurrected body i.e. a body that is at the same time spirit (Jung 1968, p427-428). Corpus glorificatus or glorificationis is the body of the resurrection, the subtle body, in the state of incorruptibility (Jung 1975, p114), “a state achieved by the hero as a reward for his victory” (Jung 1970, p332). It is a pure and eternal substance capable and worthy of being united with the unio mentalis” (Jung 1974, p774). The subtle body is also mixed up with the somatic unconscious. In his seminars on Nietzsche, Jung states that the unconscious can only be experienced in the body and that the body is exclusively the external manifestation of the Self (Jung 1988).

Subtle body, pneumatic body, somatic unconscious, dream body, subjective body, and symbolic body are all concepts which refer to a third factor that transcends the psyche-body dichotomy: the symbol. The symbol expresses the perception of the psyche-body phenomenon by perceiving, synchronistically, physiological changes and corresponding images. A complex always has a corporeal symbolic expression through which we may grasp the key to comprehending the illness. In the case of a complex, the symbol points toward a dysfunction, a detour that needs correction because the relation of ego to Self has changed.

In Groddeck, regarded by many as the father of psychosomatic medicine, we find the same idea. To him, disease does not exist as an entity, but only as an expression of the totality of man, as an expression of “this” (id). To cure would be to “correctly interpret that which this totality is trying to express through symptoms and to teach it a less painful mode of expression” (Groddeck 1992, p173).

Moving toward a vision of how the transcendent function can be used in curing physical disease using active imagination, Jung speaks of the image that informs us of organic events:

Mind and body are presumably a pair of opposites and, as such, the expression of a single entity whose essential nature is not knowable either from its outward, material manifestation or from inner, direct perception... This living being appears outwardly as the material body, but inwardly as a series of images of the vital activities waiting within it. (Jung 1972, p619)

Denise Gimenez Ramos (2004) works with many patients, not only using dreams, but active imagination to approach a variety of physical diseases.

The repressed person: when the skin erupts (acne rosacea)

Daniel, a 36 years old public relations man, had been afflicted with allergic symptoms and other dermatological problems ever since he was child. At age 22 he received the diagnosis of acne rosacea, a chronic skin disorder that affected most of his face.

His job was adversely affected, as it depended very much on physical appearance to please his clients. Daniel was aware that the symptoms worsened after family fights. As an introvert he did not react to brotherly provocation and tried to keep their fights under control. He was considered the family mediator. According to Daniel his marriage was fine: his wife was very demanding but he knew how to avoid fights. Denise Ramos treated this case in only a few sessions using the sandplay technique and reports two scenes that reflect the transcendent function at work.

In the first scene Daniel put his hands in the sand and left deep imprints. He had the sensation of a deep uterus and felt sheltered. The handprints depicted a recognition of his own self and the taking possession of a territory. Being a middle son in a family of various siblings he had never had his own space and had always given his place over to his more aggressive brothers. Daniel was moved by the image of his hands and realised how little he used his hands to express his emotions.

In the second scene Daniel draws a volcano spouting powerfully with cars driving around it that pay no attention to the danger. He cries a lot after finishing. The symbol of the volcano became central in the amplification process and was the central metaphor for his acne. Through it he was able to perceive how much he was repressing his emotions by always being submissive. Raised as a fervent Roman Catholic he thought he should always imitate Christ by “turning the other cheek” and had great difficulty expressing his feelings and repressed anger. The cars run close to immanent danger, representing his idealised persona, which, indifferent to danger, sought always to appear calm and in control of the situation.

The “third” in the symbol of the volcano that was produced by Daniel engaging his unconscious led, through association and amplification, to his realisation that the acne rosacea was the exploding volcano and the pus that ran down his face a lava of emotions he had repressed for so many years. This allowed the new attitude, as a liberating force, to set in and Daniel began to voice his anger, no longer serving as a mediator of family conflicts. Furthermore, his opinions destabilised the family relations that counted on his apparent good sense. As he began letting go of his aggression his skin improved

dramatically and he was able to make conscious the unconscious feelings and emotions, via sand and then verbally, that were affecting the relationship of ego to Self.

The freezing hands and Reynaud's syndrome

Fiona is 32 years old and complains of cold hands and feet even during summer. She cannot stand the cold, remembers “always wearing sweaters” and also complains of terrible back pain. She cannot sleep because the bed is cold. Fiona is also depressed and has not been able to succeed professionally. She was diagnosed with Raynaud's syndrome and had undergone various treatments with temporary results.

Fiona is very unhappy in her marriage but remains married for fear of being alone. Her husband is an alcoholic and has mistresses, but she feels weak and unable to make decisions to change her life. Her appearance however is strong, muscular and highly masculine. She cannot ever recall wearing a skirt or dress in her life. She had little contact with her mother who abandoned the family when the patient was 7 years old.

Using active imagination the patient worked on the two presenting symbols: constant pain in the back and Reynaud's syndrome.

Back pain

With her eyes closed Fiona reported the following image:

I am riding a very tall horse. I don't want to get on the horse but my father is making me do so. I am very afraid. The horse bolts and I hold onto his neck. I feel very frightened.

The patient had completely forgotten this situation. Remembering it, she became very angry with her father and at the same time she felt acute pain in her back and neck. This allowed her to see the clear manifestation of the complex both as an image and a physical pain.

The father always demanded that she be a hero. As the eldest of three children she always had to be the first in all activities. She was a model student and sports player and she worked hard at being first at everything. The father complex was not only locked in the repressed memory and its accompanying emotion but also in the contracted muscle in her back that protected her from a “deadly fall.”

Reynaud's syndrome

Image:

I am swimming in a frozen lake under the ice. I try to come up but I can't find a way out. I feel more and more frozen.

During the active imagination the patient became increasingly pale. Her fingers turned light blue. As much as the analyst tried to break the ice nothing seemed to help. In her imagination the patient was suffering and she felt that she could die and saw no way out of this dangerous situation. The analyst began to feel deep cold too and in being on top of the ice felt no way to reach the patient. The analyst decided to move closer to the patient's hand (without touching) to try and warm her. It turned out to be this heat (love)

that would break the ice, the transmitting of warmth, instead of interpretations (more masculine and logical) that only reaffirmed her sense of abandonment and strengthened her positive father complex (positive in the sense that she was extremely linked to her father, trying to imitate him in all possible ways). The feminine, maternal side had been repressed together with ambiguous negative feelings regarding the abandoning mother.

The two organic symptoms are clearly linked with the father and mother complexes. In the shadow, compensating for the efficient, professional, and winning sporty woman, remained the girl almost frozen from lack of affection and warmth. While the back pain expressed the authoritarian, demanding father complex, Reynaud's syndrome mirrored the coldness of her affective relations, of which the patient was not conscious. In allowing the transcendent function to provide an image of the ice symbol, the patient was able access and express the grief that she had denied herself after her mother's abandonment. Exercises following this image, where the patient saw herself giving love and warmth to the child of her imagination (shadow), slowly alleviated her symptoms until they were gone.

The untouchable princess: when sexual instinct threatens (pelvic inflammatory disease)

Georgia, 42 years old, suffered from recurrent gynaecological infections for many years without her doctors being able to discover their cause. Georgia seemed a princess to the analyst on meeting, her looks young but expressionless. Her beautiful hands looked as if they had never been used and true to form Georgia was born to a wealthy family and

had never done any domestic activities. She spent her days reading novels and dreaming that one day a strong man will come and rescue her from her dull life.

Georgia had a terrible fear of dogs and avoided walking in the street in order to avoid them and apart from that she said her life was totally “normal.” She was very religious and went to church every day. Her marriage was “fine” and she only had sexual relations with her husband in order to please him, feeling no pleasure in the activity for herself.

Two sets of images came up from the unconscious during active imagination.

Image 1

A dog is talking to a girl and a strong fat Buddha. The dog asks the Buddha to get out of the doorway of the house so that the girl can come and play with him in the forest. The Buddha says that the girl cannot come out; she has to stay outside praying and meditating.

Image 2

A prostitute, a woman in red, is upset because the priest will not let her enter the church. There is an abandoned baby under a fruit tree. The baby is crying from hunger, but can't eat the fruit. There are some big insects behind the rock that might attack the baby.

The image sequences show the patient's father complex (represented by the priest and the Buddha) prevents her from leaving, from going to the forest to play. Here the dog represents her instinctive and sexual life that threatens her, and the girl is her shadow

imprisoned by religious authority. Her shadow also appears as a prostitute and abandoned baby.

In working on the dog symbolism her fantasy was that it would jump panting on her breast, without biting her. With active imagination and amplification the image caused her sexual excitement and left her feeling disorientated. Then she remembered a small dog in her childhood that used to masturbate itself on the furniture and once ejaculated on her leg. Slowly, to her surprise, the patient was able to perceive the sensuality of her own body and many sensations of which she had never been aware.

Many conflicts accompanied the repressed emotions that the transcendent function was allowing her to access, least of all facing the belief systems that came from a highly traditional, strict family and a convenience marriage devoid of love or passion. Her extreme religiosity, she came to understand, was a defence mechanism against her sensuality and eroticism. She took up gardening and got great pleasure from messing with the earth. Two years after the end of her therapy her unexplained gynaecological infections ceased altogether.

The guilty person: when the head is tortured (migraine)

Helen, a 49 year old woman, was a well known professor, who had suffered from migraine headaches for about ten years, treated with various procedures giving only temporary relief. Although she was taking the most modern drugs for this illness, at least three times a month she was unable to work or even open her eyes.

During an acute migraine incident Helen was asked to close her eyes and increase the pain in her head. She grew redder and redder and the veins on her forehead became

very prominent. Suddenly she opened her eyes saying: “....*I was in a village, being judged in a public square. Someone squeezed my head with a tourniquet to make me confess my guilt.*”

Returning to active imagination Helen returns to the torture scene and screams to all that she is not guilty. But she rids herself of the tourniquet only when she denounces the truly guilty party: her mother. As she does so her analyst, is surprised to see the colour of Helen's skin return to normal and the immediate relief from her migraine.

The patient had a deep maternal wound because at 14 she had discovered that she was the daughter of her mother's lover. She recollected that even as a small child she had noticed her mother's affairs. She was always terrified that her “lawful” father would discover them and murder her mother, because he had a violent personality. Her mother had forced her to be her silent accomplice, a fact that was hard for her to reveal even in analysis. She refused to get married but had many affairs, always breaking up the relationship upon falling in love with another man.

During analysis she was able to work through her hatred of men and her mother. She had a strong seductive defence mechanism but at the same time unconsciously identified with her mother. The therapy lasted three difficult years with much psychological instability. The terrible repressed suffering and terrible fear of what discovery of the betrayal might entail. Helen remembered that on coming home at night she was so afraid that her father might discover the truth that she would hide in the bed with terrible headaches. She hated men and blamed them for the anguish in her life but at the same

time used her seductive powers (gained from her mother) to get money and destroy her companions.

The migraine remained the best symbol that expressed her complexes that revealed her constant telling of lies. The lying behaviour was a defence mechanism which protected the patient from a potential death situation. For, within her perception, due to her complicity she would be killed along with her mother. While involuntary, this complicity, even though it protected her mother, generated an unconscious of guilt that tortured the patient. Her organic symptom could only be relieved when she denounced the original conflict using active imagination repeatedly. Permanent relief took a long time because the defence mechanism surrounding the symptom protected the patient from deeper pain: that of being herself betrayed by her mother, who used and abused her love and loyalty.

The dirty uterus: when incest is remembered (miscarriage)

Isabel was 28 years old and had successive miscarriages, suffering four spontaneous abortions in the past six years. Clinical exams had been unable to detect any organic problems.

While working with the imagination with her eyes closed, Isabel, in touch with her body, “saw” a smelly, dirty uterus. During active imagination she visualised that she pulled a rope from within her uterus. Slowly coming out with the rope were pieces of a noxious and putrid fetus. At the same moment Isabel started to remember that when she was a child her mother put her to sleep after lunch in the same room with her grandfather. She recalled that her grandfather fondled her and obliged her to fondle him.

As the grandfather became more abusive Isabel did not want to lie down with him any more but her mother made her obey and go to “sleep.” Isabel remembered subsequently that when she was not able to sleep her maid used to masturbate her to calm her down (at about six or seven years of age).

These situations are remembered with repugnance and revulsion during the analysis and later were amplified when she remembered that at the age of 12 she saw her father kissing the maid. The father denied the fact and the mother accused her of trying to destroy the marriage. Nevertheless, the father later left the house to marry the then pregnant maid.

The therapy consisted of “cleaning the uterus” through imagination techniques and reliving the repressed unconscious emotions associated with the images that started to pour out. Memories of incest and lies, which hid illicit sexual relations, were the filth that contaminated her uterus.

After eight months of therapy Isabel got pregnant and had a normal pregnancy. She refused rest and to take hormones and saw her uterus as a clean a beautiful nest where a baby could grow and live. Today she has three healthy children.

This last case shows the power of the symbolic body in the form of the pregnant and contaminated body. This image impregnated in the patient’s organism informed her that there was no place for pregnancy, for her uterus was already filled by a decomposing uterus. No matter how much she wished for a child, the memory registered in her body’s cells defensively avoided a new traumatic situation. You could even say that the abortions

were a defence protecting Isabel from an “incestuous pregnancy,” in that her being was highly contaminated by incestuous abusive relations.

Case Summary

In all these cases, once an emotion was evoked or expressed, a physiological change also took place. The work through active imagination and sandplay allowed for consciousness of the emerging images that referred directly to each patient's organic symptoms. By comprehending these images it was possible to perceive the nature of the dysfunction in the ego/Self axis. The transcendent function was used in these cases presented by Denise Gimenez Ramos (2004) in a way that gives a great illustration of how the symbol/symptom is mirrored in the psychic structure and/or vice versa. It is possible that for these patients the primary parental figure that is critical in modulating the infant's psychological and physiological arousal, by not mediating between psyche and body, made the symbolic, transcendent function stay stuck fast in the body, rather than transforming itself into fantasies and images that could be assimilated by the ego.

Concluding remarks

The transcendent function still remains essentially a mysterious process that Jung outlined as an integral part of his psychology in 1916, immediately after his own unsettling confrontation with the unconscious, and was seen by Jung as uniting the opposites, transforming the psyche, and central to the individuation process. It essentially facilitates the extraction of the symbol to consciousness and thereby is central to Jung's vision of healing. It also reflects the fruits of his own confrontation with the unconscious. Jung portrayed the transcendent function as operating through symbol and fantasy and mediating between the opposites of consciousness and the unconscious to prompt the emergence of a new, third posture that transcends the two. The transcendent function itself can be seen as a method, a process, an outcome or a mixture of all three. It can also be seen as a function that unites the opposites for a new attitude to emerge or it can be seen more archetypally as our relationship or interaction with the unknown or other.

The symbolic contents of the transcendent function can be seen in the many symbols that Jung studied relating to individuation, especially in the images of alchemy. The alchemical fourth can also be seen as a way of perceiving reality and has come to be known as alchemical thinking, a way of not only seeing the opposites in tension but simultaneously the invisible connection that binds them. A paradoxical vision of reality that previously was the domain of the mystic or poet.

Furthermore, we have looked at some cases where the work of some Jungians, using the transcendent function and active imagination, is having an impact in fields like medicine. It goes to show that the symbolic approach to healing organic illness is not only effective but very much the medicine of the future.

We are not machines or gears.
The cause of our illness
Does not reside in the malfunctioning of our mechanisms
But in the wounds of our souls.
In the depth of our emotional self.
And it takes a long, very long time, to heal these wounds
Only patience and time can help us,
And a laborious repentance,
The long and difficult confirmation
That our vision of life is mistaken,
An error that humanity seems intent on repeating.
D.H. Lawrence
"Healing"

Appendix A

Editors Preface to The Transcendent Function

Written by James Hillman

This is James Hillman's preface from A.R. Pope's original translation. Printed privately for students in 1957 at the Jung Institute in Zurich.

This essay, which has not before appeared in print either in English or German, was written in 1916. Because it has not been revised by Dr. Jung, but stands in its original form, this note may serve to place the essay within its historical context.

In 1916, Dr. Jung was working out those two fundamental formulation of analytical psychology which, after many revisals, are now known in English as "Two Essays on Analytical Psychology." The first of these essays, in its 1916 version (see: *Collected Papers on Analytical Psychology*, 2nd ed., 1917, Chap. 14), mentions the transcendent function, which comes about as a result of "a new method of treating psychological materials such as dreams and phantasies." Since he had discovered that dreams and fantasies had a prospective aspect which could not be reduced to past events, the reductive methods of the Vienna School became only partial methods. Therefore, it had become necessary to evolve this new synthetic or constructive method to deal with these prospective aspects. As a detailed description of this new method of the Zurich School in its relation to the transcendent function, this paper fits in as an important complement to the work of that period. The term "transcendent function", used here for the "union of the conscious and unconscious", is not so much in use today, having been replaced in a wider sense by the self and in a narrower sense by the concept of the reconciling symbol, both of which are prefigured in this paper, thereby giving us further witness to the logical and empirical development of Dr. Jung's ideas. Also, as Miss Barbara Hannah points out in her

short summary of this hitherto unpublished manuscript (see: “Some Remarks on Active Imagination”, Spring 1953), we have here an early and very clear account of active imagination as available nowhere else in Dr. Jung’s writings.

In addition to its historical value, the essay is also highly up-to-date. Active imagination is here discussed in terms of the compensatory relationship of the conscious and unconscious, that is the transcendent function is presented in terms of the psyche as a self-regulating system. This view is analogous to later ideas of self-regulation which are now much in vogue in contemporary psychology: the concept of homeostasis in physiology (Cannon, 1932) and the concept of the feed-back circuit in cybernetics (Wiener, 1948). Those views, however, the self-regulation is a biological or mechanical process. As such, the coming into balance (homeostasis) of self-steering (cybernetics) can not only be experienced, but also influenced by consciousness. Furthermore, as this paper shows, this influence of consciousness is necessary, because in civilized man self-regulation cannot be taken for granted as an automatic process. Without the participation of consciousness, there occurs an accelerated one-sidedness comparable to the physiologist’s description of run-away, positive feedback, i.e. “a machine, whose speed regulation is so insensitive that it can continue to function to a point of self-injury” to use the remarkably contemporary words of Dr. Jung (p. 14 below). Seen in the light of these current ideas, active imagination, as an instance of the transcendent function of self-regulation, becomes a way of directly influencing psychological balance, and so it can have far-reaching significance, particularly for the field of psycho-somatics.

Because of the importance of this essay, the students are very proud and grateful that Dr. Jung gave us the honor of bringing it to print. We thank Dr. Jung most cordially for entrusting it to us. We also want to thank Miss Barbara Hannah most warmly for her generous help in going through the translation, and Mrs. Aniela Jaffe for her kind cooperation in many ways.

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