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HYPNOPOESIS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY:

Waiting and Watching at the Midspace
Between Image and Reality



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Hypnopoesis in Psychotherapy: Waiting and Watching at the Midspace Between Image and Reality

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Abstract: This paper presents a description and analysis of one instance of an unusual therapeutic phenomenon which I call "hypnopoesis." I define hypnopoesis as the spontaneous utterance, by a therapist during hypnotherapy, of poetic word images which seem thereafter to have worked to good effect on the client's behalf. In my own experience, it is characteristic of this phenomenon that I have no conscious sense of either creating a new poem or reciting an existing one. Nonetheless, the utterance contains internal rhymes, rhythmic transitions, evocative metaphors, and striking end rhymes at the conclusions of stanzas. Following an initial narrative of a case in point, I explore some ideas regarding both the nature and therapeutic role of hypnopoesis in terms of the ground between client and therapist—including what I take to be the spiritual source of this ground and the relation of the therapist to that source.

Mihi quaestio factus sum.

(St. Augustine)¹

The field of psychotherapy, like the battlefield of the Hindu epic, the *Bhagavad Gita*, provides a surround in which energies shift openly and decisively around issues of intent, sincerity, and truth. Such energies are always present but one of the limitations of human consciousness is that they must be adequately encompassed before becoming apparent. That requires a containment field, an arena as it were, in which they may be gathered. This field is the ground upon which therapist and client both act and are acted upon.² An unusual kind of event, in which I have felt acted upon for the benefit of the client, has occurred a few times during counseling sessions in my private practice. I have termed it "hypnopoesis" because it entails the spontaneous utterance of poetic word images by the therapist during hypnotherapy. In this report I offer both a brief narrative of my first experience with this phenomenon and an exploratory analysis of hypnopoesis itself.

Event Narrative

Let us begin with the narrative.³ The client had remained unspeaking in a deep state of hypnosis for 25 minutes.⁴ Feeling that I should not break the silence (uncertain in this case what it meant or what action it called for) I began a light, meditative self-hypnosis of my own. I sat quietly for a time, waiting for something to happen. Unexpectedly, I began to voice rhymed and cadenced poetic word images. I was conscious of internal rhymes, rhythmic transitions, evocative metaphors, and striking end rhymes at the conclusions of stanzas. I had never experienced this before. I had no sense of either creating a new poem or reciting an existing one. It was just there. I only voiced it. When it ended, my client's and my own hypnosis ended, as well. We both felt that something remarkable had occurred. Neither of us could recall more than a few words of the fairly long poem, yet that session became a turning point in his therapy. In subsequent meetings he began to recall and resolve previously blocked images and issues from early childhood.

Although the phenomenon has subsequently occurred on occasion with other clients, and with similar effects, I have never been able to deliberately induce it. In one instance my attempt to tape record the poem after it began simply terminated it. Always unexpected, it has seemed to require that I feel exceptional empathic concern toward a client and at an impasse as to what intervention to undertake next. In what follows, I present some ideas regarding both the nature and the role of hypnosis in terms of the ground between client and therapist—including what I take to be the spiritual source of this ground and the relation of the therapist to that source.

A Spiritual Premise

That this involves what are correctly called spiritual (but not necessarily religious) issues need be no bar. Many issues of concern to psychotherapists have long historical roots in traditions which were both philosophical and religious.⁵ Theorists and therapists who prefer either to bracket or to reject spirit have already made a *de facto* philosophical decision to accept material causality alone. Those whose philosophy affirms the reality of spirit see the material cause itself as an instance of spirit's self-disclosure. Both views are initial metaphysical posits and are,

therefore, inarguable. I thus make no attempt to persuade those whose premise does not permit my conceptions. I simply present hypnopoiesis in terms of the spiritual premise for the consideration of any who may find it meaningful.

As one who shares that premise, I must acknowledge from the outset that not all psychotherapy is undertaken as an invitation to spirit; nor is either such an invitation or the action of spirit itself in resolving psychological conflicts limited to psychotherapy. At the same time and in the same way that "poets are not the only poets,"⁶ we may all recognize that psychotherapists are not the only psychotherapists. Sometimes friends, teachers, even a stranger on the subway, can be wonderfully therapeutic. Moreover, not all professional psychotherapists are even good therapists.⁷ In fact, some have actually caused harm.⁸ If by *good* we mean *effective*, then we may hope that the great majority of professional psychotherapists are good—that is, competent to facilitate positive changes in the behaviors and attitudes of their clients. Nonetheless, they may have little interest or belief in therapeutic receptivity to spirit.

The absence of their belief does not diminish the validity of ours. Such receptivity is usually discussed in the context of religious philosophy or practice, not psychotherapy—yet some of our most renowned psychological theoreticians and practitioners have acknowledged that sometimes something "other," quite beyond ordinary reality, inexplicably presents itself in the meeting between client and therapist. When it does, it carries the quality of a meeting between the self and the numinous. That is to say it is an experience characterized by a profound sense of the mysterious suffused with the powerful imprint of a spiritual, even divine, presence. This meeting between the self and the numinous is an exceptional phenomenon. It frequently involves feelings of great joy. Yet it is also often a stormy experience, as well. That is as true for the greatest of psychologists and psychotherapists as it is for any of the rest of us. William James, for instance, was profoundly changed by his struggle to understand the numinous.⁹ Freud, threatened by its arational nature, utterly rejected the mystery of this "other" and tried to account for its intrusions into psychotherapy by subordinating them to highly rationalized psychoanalytic interpretations of the occult.¹⁰ Jung was intrigued by its expression in time as "synchronicity" and its embodiment in archetypes as "symbols of transformation."¹¹ Maslow recorded its joy in some of the "peak experiences" available to human beings as part of their

natural endowment.¹² Fromm noted that in some cases its effects upon the mind might not be easily distinguished from madness.¹³ Perhaps Karl Jaspers—both a fully qualified medical psychopathologist and an eminent professor of metaphysics—understood it best as the presencing of the Transcendent, which he also called the Encompassing.¹⁴

It is this "other" that we may call *spirit*, and we shall think of it here as the underlying principle of all that is, including both psychotherapy and hypnogenesis itself. We shall shortly turn our attention to an examination of the opening narrative in order to apprehend this principle in its action, if we can—bearing in mind that our aim is to understand what we may of hypnogenesis, and not to advocate any kind of "spiritual technique."

Our approach will include appeals to the poetics of etymology and because there is always some resistance to this (particularly among nominalists) we do well to offer a case for it. We shall, in fact, allow two others to do this for us. Poetically, the physicist Roger Jones once remarked: "What precious insights are hidden in the folds of language."¹⁵ And philosopher Alan Watts spoke directly to the issues of etymology, philology, and semantics when he said: "It is always instructive to go back to the original meanings of words to discover not only what new senses they have gained, but also what old senses they have lost."¹⁶

A Spiritual View of Psychotherapy

We are now ready to consider a spiritual view of psychotherapy, the circumstance in which client and therapist have come together—the one seeking assistance in the resolution of important personal issues, the other holding out hope that such assistance is available and will be effective.

Sincerity

Their situation within that circumstance demands sincerity from both of them, yet the time when each can be sincerely himself in the presence of the other marks the fulfillment of therapy, not its beginning.¹⁷ We may say that client and therapist have *come together* in order to *become sincere* together. Partridge suggests that the

etymology of "sincere" reveals the image of an imperfect statue, the cracks of which have not been "waxed over" in order to conceal its true condition, an image similar to the concept of "unvarnished truth."¹⁸ Reaching beyond the Indo-European language group, we find that a similar understanding of "sincere" obtains in Chinese, as well, where perfect sincerity is represented by a sequence of the characters for "open," "heart," "see," and "sincerity," (*k'ai hsin chien ch'eng*; 開心見誠)¹⁹ and where the word for "concealment" (*i*, 夷) also means "injury."²⁰ In psychotherapy the one who hides himself from the other injures the relationship between them.²¹ The open-hearted-seeing sincerity which reveals the true person in full relatedness can be thought of in two ways. On the one hand, it can mean the sincerity of one who has opened his heart to another's view, despite his own imperfections. On the other, it can refer to the kind of vision available to one who sees with an open heart. When the two hands come together, we have one who is able to see and to be seen without any artifice, prejudice, or obstruction.

We must be careful not to identify this with the aperspectival return of mind to original awareness in spirit itself, where absolutely nothing stands between the seer and the seen—not even the activity of seeing—for they are one and the same. While, as we shall see later, the consciousness of hypnosis may be a spiritually altered state of consciousness, it is for that very reason not pure awareness—for consciousness and awareness are *not* one and the same, inasmuch as consciousness requires at least one object and awareness has none whatsoever.

Authenticity

In the professional literature, the sincerity sought after in psychotherapy is often called "authenticity." Authenticity, too, has a hidden dimension. If we turn briefly once again to the Chinese concept of sincerity, we find that the same character for "sincere" (*ch'eng*; 誠), is used in the phrase *ch'eng k'en ti* (誠懇的), to refer to "a *genuine* person"—comparable to the western concept of the authentic individual.

The Greek *authentikos* (αὐθεντικός) shares the same root as *author* and refers to "original" in the way that "author" refers to "originator." Thus we may argue that to be authentic in this sense is to return to the original spiritual root of one's nature and to live as a genuine person, one's true self.

Psychotherapy as a Sacred Service

Our discussion to this point may distress some therapists even as it encourages others, for it is not uncommon to regard psychotherapy as fundamentally a cognitive retraining of the personality. Even those who readily translate the Greek word for psyche (*psuche*, ψυχή) as "mind," and *therapeia* (θεραπεία) as the treatment and cure of persons must not press too far forward in overlaying ancient concepts with our modern images. Not everyone realizes for instance that quite early in its history *therapeia* also had clear reference to the care and repair of temples—or that *psuche* meant "soul" as easily as "mind."²² Contemporary reductions of mind to "biocomputer" and psychotherapy to "software reprogramming" rather than the care and cure of souls fall far short of the Greek vision, which connotes a spiritual context for *therapeia*. Authentic psychotherapy from this perspective is therefore quite intelligently imaginable as a sacred service in a secular setting.

This view neither creates nor requires any specifically religious structure, although it remains open to the presence and action of spirit in human affairs. Plato, although a philosopher and no priest, believed that his philosophy was what we today would call both spiritually and psychologically therapeutic.²³ The Corinthians built Antiphon (also a philosopher and not a priest) a house in which to practice his secular Art of Solace.²⁴ Even the Aztecs had secular therapists who seem to have practiced a spiritual psychotherapy quite apart from the religious structure of the time.²⁵ The spiritual overtones of psychotherapy have thus been with us all along. They are most easily heard by those with a "golden ear"—one not overwhelmed by the cultural beat of its own time and "empty enough of itself to hear clearly."²⁶

Another subtle constant also obtains in both ancient and modern psychotherapy. A duality is presumed, with the therapist on one side, the client on the other. Contemporary group, family, and conjoint therapies (as well as combinations of any or all of these) differ from the therapeutic dyad in this regard only in that they exhibit more complex forms of duality. The duality itself, however, presumes a limited unity: the ground on which the action of therapy unfolds—an arena or a theater in which images of self and other are both displayed and viewed. Therapist and client are thus understood to be related *to* one another in the social-psychological setting of

psychotherapy, and related *with* one another to the reality in which they exist. It is but another step to recognize that they are also related both to one another and to existence *in* spirit, which underlies all realities. This situation implies a multiple focus of mind. While one aspect is divided between the interpersonal domain and the wider existential surround, the other remains oriented (even if dormant) to the mind's underlying spiritual source. These may be thought of as a divided *consciousness* and a potential spiritual *awareness*, respectively.

The Context of Hypnosis

This brings us to the role of hypnosis in our narrative, for late in the 19th Century James Braid became the first western medical researcher to suggest the notion of a divided consciousness in mental therapy as part of his work on the psychophysiology of "neurohypnotism."²⁷ Within a hundred years, Calvin Hall, Ernest Hilgard, and Martin Shor, among others, had conducted numerous experiments in hypnosis at Stanford, Harvard and elsewhere.

Hypnosis and Consciousness

In fact (in the West) hypnosis has been studied more thoroughly and for a longer time than any other altered state of consciousness. The first scholarly and practical publications on what we now call hypnosis appeared in the mid-19th Century. Today there are more than ten journals in the field, published in several languages, including Japanese. Although few researchers have formally extended their concerns to the ontology of consciousness, many studies support the phenomenological validity of divided consciousness.²⁸ Even where experimental methodologies are criticized, the thesis is often upheld by experience.²⁹ As a result many researchers and practitioners now accept Hilgard's theory of an inner observer or "witness self"³⁰ within each of us which is always aware of all of our experiences, emotions, and decisions—even those that remain unconscious to us in what Shor has called our "generalized reality-orientation."³¹

Many historical and contemporary reports of the hypnotic potentiation of both extended and mutual consciousness have also been documented.³² Almost twenty-five

percent of physicians and psychologists in one study reported that they had experienced some kind of extrasensory communication with clients during hypnosis.³³ Other research suggests that such phenomena are not elicited by either the client or the therapist, but are evoked by a condition of mutual understanding arising within the hypnotic relationship itself.³⁴ Both the extent and the effects of this condition are enhanced by intentional mutual hypnosis, in which therapist and client reciprocally induce and deepen hypnosis in one another.³⁵ Furthermore, it appears that an inadvertent and subtle simultaneous hypnosis may easily occur during hypnotherapy, with similar results. Let us think of this shared state as a common ground upon which therapist and client may converge: a true *meeting of minds*, as it were.

Hypnosis and the Spiritual

In addition to its significance in the psychology of consciousness, hypnosis has a spiritual history as well. In one form or another, and by many different names, techniques of hypnosis and self-hypnosis have existed in all ages and all civilizations. They are a part of our common human heritage. In ancient Greece and Egypt there were "temples of sleep" where religious and psychological healing methods were practiced. In surviving pictographs, healers are shown making various hand passes over their "patients," an old and still effective form of trance induction. Some Judaic scholars have found possible linguistic allusions to hypnosis in the Hebrew text of the Pentateuch and Talmud,³⁶ as well as clear connections between self-hypnosis and Jewish kabbalistic mysticism.³⁷ Other researchers have noted the presence of hypnosis and self-hypnosis in the religions of Japan,³⁸ Korea,³⁹ central Asia,⁴⁰ and the Indian subcontinent.⁴¹ Philip Kapleau provides a contemporary description of *bompu* Zen that seems identical with self-hypnosis⁴² and Alan Watts (closely acquainted with several oriental philosophical and religious traditions for many years) was struck by significant similarities between eastern meditation systems and western styles of self-hypnosis.⁴³ Historically then hypnosis has been an intersection of the contraries of East and West, consciousness and unconsciousness, "this world" and "other world" perspectives. We may therefore also think of the experience of therapeutic hypnosis as (potentially) a *centering* in which oppositions may be resolved.⁴⁴

In fact, in English the word "trance" was originally a metaphor for a specific kind of centeredness: that of "an intermediate way station on the mysterious transit from the earthly to the spiritual world."⁴⁵ Moreover, entry into hypnosis has been described as the opening of a "*trance vestibule*."⁴⁶ This is an especially apt metaphor for our present concern. A vestibule is an entrance hall between an outer door and the door to an inner chamber.⁴⁷ It is a place of wakeful waiting, for the call to enter the chamber could come at any time. In hypnosis one's consciousness has come in from its concern with the daily round. In the "trance vestibule" it awaits a summons. It is not, therefore, unreasonable for us to accept that the element of hypnosis in our narrative has spiritual as well as psychological significance. We can recognize that therapist and client share an altered state of consciousness, with a single primary interest: resolution of the client's personal issues. Let us also accept that, neither singly nor together, are they necessarily alone. *Something other* in which they are always already joined may choose to announce itself at any time—calling them to itself.

The Power of the Poetic

We may now examine the poetic element in our narrative. Poetry is one of the subtlest and yet most potent forms of communication. Aristophanes taught that words both excite the mind and elate the spirit. Both Aeschylus and Shakespeare understood the healing power of words and Emerson noted that poetry presents words with "enormous force."⁴⁸ Coleridge held that poetry has illuminated the pathway to altered states of consciousness since the time of Homer.⁴⁹ Horace thought of poets as prophetic seers and speakers of divine utterance.⁵⁰ William Wordsworth wrote of "the charm which, by the consent of all nations, is acknowledged to exist in metrical language."⁵¹ Perhaps this has to do with the fact that "psychic processes evince a striking tendency to become rhythmical."⁵² Alan Watts was aware of a distinctive "rhythmic, musical power at work" in some persons, absorbing the attention of others in such a way that even the survival of the "ordinary self" (which we may call self-image) "ceases to be the criterion of value."⁵³

Poetry as Therapeutic

The remarkable impact of poetic utterance on states of consciousness has also been demonstrated in clinical research. Snyder and Shor, for instance, have shown that trance inductive poetry can actuate a "sublime ecstasy" in experimental subjects.⁵⁴ Furthermore, a considerable literature on the uses of poetry in psychotherapy is now available,⁵⁵ from which we learn that the client's writing of poetry can be used diagnostically,⁵⁶ and is sometimes therapeutic in itself.⁵⁷ In addition, the direct clinical presentation of selected poetry has had positive effects for some clients.⁵⁸

Speaking Forth

Our case, however, has a distinctive dynamic to which we must attend. Although at least one account of a client's spontaneous poetic utterance during trance states has been published,⁵⁹ apparently no case in which a therapist spoke in such a manner has been recorded. Historically, utterance of this kind has been known as "speaking forth," in the Greek sense of *propheteio* (προφητεύω)—having to do with the oral declaration of a revelation or disclosure, often in poetic form, from a spiritual source beyond the person of the speaker. Western culture is already familiar with accounts of the Delphic Oracle and the Hebrew prophets, and this oral phenomenon is equally well known and highly regarded in other cultures, as well. Moreover, Raimon Panikkar notes that the wisdom literatures of all cultures, although refined through writing over time, begin with speech and therefore in its beginnings even "wisdom lies in the spoken rather than in the written word."⁶⁰

We find another point of resonance in Pindar, great poet of classical Greece, who recognized the effects of song and word on the minds of men and for whom the aims of poetry were therefore essentially ethical. In epic Greek poetry words which truly communicate are called "winged"⁶¹ and Pindar himself described poetic words as "winged arrows."⁶² In that apt image we can easily envision the spontaneous expressions of hypnopoiesis flying from one person to another, going directly to the point—the heart of the matter. Pindar also understood that "Words live longer than deeds."⁶³ This, too, seems to be true of hypnopoiesis—for, although the utterances

which occur in hypnosis are not consciously remembered, their effects long outlast the acts of speech which send them on their way.

Julian Jaynes has advanced the intriguing hypothesis that vocal presentations of this kind are rooted in the dual structure of the human brain and represent an atavistic state in which the mind reverts to a more pronounced bilateral asymmetry than is ordinarily the case in modern man.⁶⁴ "Speaking forth," he suggests may originate in some primal activity of the right brain without the left brain's knowledge. This would account for the therapist's surprise at the event and his perceived dissociation from it, as related in our narrative. It also corresponds well with atavistic theories of hypnosis, which propose that the hypnotic state arises in part as an archaic response to critical situational stimuli.

Paul Watzlawick has thought along lines similar to Jaynes' with specific reference to psychotherapy. He theorizes that the left and right cerebral hemispheres actually function in two separate linguistic codes: *digital* and *analogical*. The digital is the language of reason; its expressions are logical, analytic, objective, and definitive. It is the language of scientific explanation and interpretive exposition. Analogical language, in contrast, speaks in metaphor, image, symbol, and synthesis. It is the language of dreams, fantasy, and poetry. Watzlawick notes that the analogical "right hemisphere is often referred to in the literature as the 'silent one,'" and he regards it as the seat of the client's *world image*, the emendation of which is the true task of therapy.⁶⁵

Although Jaynes and others may posit possible mechanisms for "speaking forth," they do not address the absolute origin of the phenomenon. Nor can they. To do so lies beyond the purview of either psychology or physiology. Questions of absolute origin are reserved to metaphysics—where there are no absolute answers, only intuitions. For our part, we shall affirm with Henri Bergson that "intuition bears toward spirit."⁶⁶

Spirit and Poetic Disclosure

Inasmuch as spirit both inheres in and yet transcends all that is, its disclosure must come as much from within as without. Yet, we would claim far too much (as well

as too little!) were we to say that it comes from the right brain—the nature of which would seem to contravene the possibility, for it would imply that the 'silent one' speaks on its own.⁶⁷ In fact, no possible material cause for "speaking forth" can actually explain it away—unless it can first explain the mystery of being, which none can. Perhaps a poet like Mary Richards makes a better guide—one who understands from experience what it is like to "get tuned in on hidden matters," to "begin to hear things,"⁶⁸ and to find ourselves "speaking lines we cannot memorize for we know them for the first time consciously only when we utter them."⁶⁹ For Richards, to attempt to capture such speaking by intellectual analysis is to abandon it in the desire for power over it.

Any attempt to place it under our own measure is futile. In Sanskrit the term for "illusion" is *maya* (मया), the root of which is *ma*, the word for "measure." We must be careful with respect to what we subject to our own measure, or we too easily subject ourselves to increasingly vain illusion. We are better off to regard hypnosis as Yasuda does haiku: "What the image says is expressed only through the presentation of the image."⁷⁰ Not to miss its disclosure requires what one therapist has called: "an *intensely yielded and dedicated listening* such that a person achieves rapport with the word from within the core of her existence."⁷¹ Disclosure is not something which either the therapist or the client does or contrives, but rather something which happens at a time when it is not interfered with. It does not occur when one is present in such a way as to prevent it—yet, although it may be refused, it cannot be compelled.

Waiting

Disclosure is best invited by an attitude of *waiting* which has the quality of a decisive surrender of initiative. Imagine for a moment a baseball player at bat. He does not make the first move. Instead, he waits for the ball to come to presence at the point where his swing must begin if the bat is to meet the ball. Note that the batter awaits neither the pitcher, nor the pitch, but the ball—the right ball, in the right place, at the right time. Of course, he must be talented, well practiced, and timely in order to engage the ball well. The baseball emerges into his response zone at such

speed that he must begin to meet it before it arrives—but not before it *begins* to arrive. Now, of course, we know that all analogies break down on close analysis and we realize that baseball and psychotherapy are not the same. There is, nonetheless, one essential point in which the analogy between the batter and the therapist holds up quite well. The power of first beginnings does not belong to the batter. His power lies in waiting and responding. So, too, with the therapist.

We call this attitude of waiting "decisive" because upon every instant, *while* he waits, the batter must uphold the decision to keep waiting until it is time to stop waiting. We have said that he awaits the ball, but in a deeper sense he awaits the moment of its timely presencing within the limited actuality of his response zone.

This awaiting is therefore more than a waiting *for something*—it is a waiting *until* the *moment* has arrived. How is that moment known? No one can say. It is a knowing which no one can teach. The knowing of the moment is its own mystery. We do know that an attentive watchfulness is imperative.

Spiritually Receptive Psychotherapy

This is true in spiritually receptive psychotherapy as well, and indeed the underlying action of any such psychotherapy is *watching*. The therapist keeps watch.

Watching

The surface operation of a therapist's methodology may conform to almost any clinical model and still be spiritually receptive so long as her watching invites watchfulness itself to watch with her. It is together with watchfulness that she vigils. The therapist remains as alert as she can in every moment because she understands that disclosure may come at any time. Watchfulness is not like a stick with which she touches something; nor yet a net in which she captures it. It is a power in itself, a companion with which she watches. Whenever the power of watchfulness—in the sense of keeping watch—is absent, her own watching degenerates into mere looking. The difference is that looking requires an object: one is said to be looking at or for something.

Therefore, to say that someone is *looking at* the midspace between image and reality is not the same as saying that he is *watching* there. Keeping watch is altogether self-sufficient. It requires no object (no "other half") to be complete. Yet, although the watcher watches no object (no thing), that does not mean that nothing is seen. It means, in fact, that nothing is overlooked—for in *looking at* one thing we are sure to miss seeing others. The midspace between image and reality includes an invisible line at which images first begin to appear to human consciousness. Waiting and watching there, open to the possibility of disclosure, one may come to apprehend them in their beginnings. As a result, one is on time and in place to meet and release these images correctly, without losing oneself in them.

Image and Reality

Briefly imagine the batter's swing zone again. It is an arena into which the baseball emerges. Imagination is the arena into which images emerge. As the swing zone lies within other arenas (infield, ball park, horizon), so too imagination is an arena within human consciousness. It is encompassed by the greater surround of consciousness itself, which is underlain by spirit. As human beings, all we can see are images of reality offered us by spirit and mediated by our consciousness. The batter meets the ball because his image of the ball's emergence in time and space coincides with its actual presence. When it does not, he misses.

The presencing of spirit. If we are not to miss the presencing of spirit in the particular time, space, and context of psychotherapy then our image of spirit must be equally appropriate. But what appropriate image can we have of spirit? Itself the source of all forms, spirit has no limited form of its own to which it is restricted. Always already inherent in all forms, it reveals itself to us only in its effects. Even its action is invisible. For example, in the midst of a storm one might point out the window toward a field in which grasses and trees are bent backward and say, "Look at the wind!" Still, it is neither the wind nor its action, but only its effect, that is seen. Truly we cannot even imagine wind itself. Wind as wind per se does not submit itself to our process.

Imaging spirit. How then do we arrive at an appropriate image of spirit? We proceed in the same way only more so. It is the *same way* in this way: we do not let

our inability to envision spirit deter us from responding to spirit. It is *more so* in that we carefully and thoughtfully refrain from forgetting that no adequate image of spirit is possible. While it may be a convenience to forget this about wind (our ordinary conversations about the weather may go more smoothly without the burden of philosophical precision) it is disastrous to forget it with regard to spirit.

It is a misfortune of our time that this spiritual disaster is so prevalent everywhere as to go almost unnoticed anywhere. Images of spirit are appropriate only when we recognize that they are temporary appropriations which are appropriated *to* us for a time. Then we must let go of them. We must not attempt to appropriate them *for* ourselves. They are going to go anyway. It is their nature to do so. Those who remain attached to images—whether of psychotherapy, wind, spirit, or anything else—risk being carried off with them when the time comes for them to leave. One who has gone too "far out" with an idea is said to have gotten "carried away" with it. It is no small thing to be thus carried away, for it is not always in our power to carry ourselves back.

As for our understanding of spirit, we must admit that we have none. We are not permitted to understand spirit itself, since it is impossible for the finite to comprehend the infinite. The critical issue is that we not *misunderstand* spirit to begin with. Whatever grasp we may have of spirit comes not out of cognitive analysis, but from our willingly taking a *stand under* its influence. Thus our receptivity to spirit is far more crucial than any image of it which we may receive. Without such receptivity it is impossible for us to have any inkling of spirit at all. In fact because it is an intuitive inkling and not an empirical knowing, watchful, receptive waiting offers us our only chance at not reifying (and thereby misunderstanding) spirit. The disclosure of spirit is its own mystery, of which nothing specific to itself can be known. Spirit as spirit *per se* does not submit itself to our process. Yet, as Jung realized, "Bidden or unbidden, God is present."⁷²

We have seen that for our part a patient receptivity to that presence is imperative. To remain patiently receptive to spirit is to accept the task of continuing to be faithfully available both when nothing is offered and when something is. Each time an intimation of spirit is offered to us, however, it is the misfortunate tendency of our human nature to formalize it (to give it a form)—that is, to "imagify" it in our

own terms. Paradoxically, this same misfortune is also our greatest opportunity: the opportunity to relinquish the image and receive a formless intimation. Not seizing upon the image of the moment, we may be enabled instead to grasp a timeless (i.e., atemporal) intuition of reality. The catch is that this remains possible only so long as ours is an open grasp which does not grab. To clutch at spirit's disclosure is to have it immediately withdrawn. Perhaps this is why the hypnopoetic utterance described in our narrative seems beyond recall and why it vanishes as soon as one attempts to bind it to time with tape recorders or notebooks. It makes its impression, delivers its message, fulfills its effect, and then departs before it can be interfered with by "imagification."

Ecstatic Observation

Nonetheless, as the narrative indicates, the event does not go unnoticed. The therapist is conscious of the utterance, of its features, and of its independence from him; and yet is at the same time not conscious of its meaning or its source. He is both speaker and bystander in the presence of an ongoing mystery. This is characteristic of ecstatic experience. In our time "ecstasy" has acquired overtones of a dreamy, visionary state of unreality, but of itself the Greek *ekstasis* (ἔκστασις) means to be an "outside" observer of one's own experience. This concept is comparable to Hilgard's "hidden observer," except that one is conscious of both the flow of events and the witnessing of them at the same time. In our case, the therapist has become so acutely conscious of hypnopoesis as it occurs in the present that he does not recall it once it is past. Although ecstasy is often associated with specifically religious practices, there need be nothing in the practice of psychotherapy which would inhibit it. Furthermore, hypnosis, as we have noted, has been associated (in many places, times, and ways) with receptivity to spirit. It is not difficult, therefore, to regard hypnopoesis as an instance of prophetic ecstasy in a limited sense of "detached speaking forth."⁷³

The Virtue of Hypnopoesis

This brings us to a very important consideration: of what virtue is hypnopoesis in the practice of psychotherapy? That is to ask what power or strength it offers, for

true speaking forth (as *propheteio*) has always been understood as being directed by spirit toward some appropriate end. We may answer with a reexamination of our narrative with respect to the therapist's way of being present with the client. He is, in a sense, both present and absent. Following the client, he has withdrawn into the trance vestibule where he withholds himself from untimely willful intrusion into the client's inner reality but has not lost his attention to the client's situation. He abides meditatively, waiting and trusting for "something to happen." In a sense he seemingly approaches (but makes no claim to fulfill) the role of the sage, for in Lao-tzü's words:

Putting himself in the background,
He is kept to the fore;
Remaining outside,
He is included within.⁷⁴

In the case of our therapist, this is a reflexive withdrawal followed by a passive presence: he *puts himself* in the background, but *is brought* to the fore. The state of being to the fore is not a matter of his own action, only the act of withdrawal is—and even then only as spirit permits. The act is transitive. It has an object, the background in which he puts himself. Being in the state on the other hand is, of course, intransitive. Having no object, it is sufficient unto itself. To borrow from Lao-tzü once again, we may say that as long the therapist "does not strive for any personal end,"⁷⁵ not even the rewards to self-image of doing good work, he remains available *to be moved* into the forefront of the client's inner reality—the healing of which is the purpose of their being together in the first place. This surrender of egoic intentionality in the interest of spirit's own purpose is critical—for inasmuch as he does not move himself, we may rightly understand that he is moved by spirit acting for its own ends. If at some point hypnogenesis occurs then it is spirit's doing, not the therapist's.

This clearly is of very great benefit to the client. Whatever is said or done will be wholly and precisely what is called for. Although effective therapists know that words are tools with which to shape acts, there is more to it than that. Elie Wiesel recognized that "Words can sometimes, in moments of grace, attain the quality of

deeds."⁷⁶ They can bear (and bare) whatever incomprehensible truth is required to set us free for a sincere effort at authenticity. In hypnopoesis it seems that words are spoken which actually do something like that within the client. Because they are poetic (analogical rather than digital in Watzlawick's terms) they are not limited by the cognitive constructs of either client or therapist, and therefore encounter no resistance. That the words are not thereafter available to consciousness only underscores their primal power.

The Midspace

In hypnopoesis words arise from and return to the midspace between image and reality, between consciousness of existential experience and awareness in essential reality. As T. S. Eliot wrote in *The Hollow Men*, "between the idea/and the reality ... falls the shadow/*For Thine is the Kingdom.*"⁷⁷ In hypnopoesis that ground "between" includes the midspace in which hidden words of poetic force perform unseen deeds of healing grace at the behest of spirit acting for its own ends. It is of the utmost significance that this grace is given not only *in* the midspace between image and reality, but also *at* the midspace between client and therapist. That is to say, it exists (in the Greek sense of *stands forth*) and presents itself in an openness between two persons.

We do well, therefore, to reflect for a moment on the nature and meaning of this *space between* and the circumstance of psychotherapy which surrounds it. To begin with, psychotherapy is an inherently social engagement. It may be undertaken hierarchically, on the lines of orthodox Freudian psychoanalysis, in the rather self-conscious egalitarianism of Carl Rogers' nondirective approach, the often rough-and-tumble confrontation of gestalt therapy, or along the Socratic path of mutual discovery favored by dialogical therapists—but it can nevertheless transpire only as a person-to-person engagement. At its best that engagement is marked by a deep, compassionate concern of one person for another. A particularly fine image for this is found in the etymology of *jen* (仁), the Chinese character for human-heartedness, the fundamental principle of Confucianism. 仁 consists of a variation of *ren* (人), the graph for an upright human being, paired with *er* (二), the number two. *Jen* thus

represents the very foundation of human society: two persons relation to one another.

Just as contact without engagement remains no more than encounter, therapy without engagement is only conversation. At its core such engagement involves trust—and while it may be somewhat fragile at first on both sides, it is the growth of this mutual and basically social trust that makes the work of psychotherapy possible. The client trusts that he will be helped, or at the very least that he will not be harmed as he tries to find his way through his problems. The therapist trusts that the client will make a sincere effort at the process, and at the very least that he will not endlessly indulge himself in his problems or obdurately refuse to change. Considering that psychotherapy frequently focuses on serious issues of personal pain and emotional dysfunction, even these minimal levels of trust are therapeutically and socially significant. Vitaly important also in the instance related here is the therapist's trust that spirit is not absent from the midspace, that disclosure is possible at any time. It is in the small clearing where therapeutic and spiritual trust come together that something more may grow—and it is there that hypnogenesis may sometimes occur.

Effects of Hypnogenesis on the Therapist

We shall now complete our endeavor with a brief excursus regarding the therapist of our narrative. With respect to hypnogenesis he is best regarded as one in whom "speaking forth" has presented itself a few times in the context of his work and for the sake of his clients. Yet he too may benefit from hypnogenesis. If in the aftermath of even a single occurrence of it, he is led to be better able to wait and watch at the midspace, then that in itself is a good thing. If in that way he takes his stand upon the field of action—and is enabled to remain spiritually receptive amid swirling issues of intent, sincerity, and truth—then his intuition may become more lucid, his empathy more profound, and his ordinary work more effective. Even his normal therapeutic interventions may arise more and more at the promptings of spirit. Surely these are also good things. Nonetheless, although he has awakened in consciousness to the experience itself and to the experience of experiencing it, he is

not yet awake beyond both in spiritual awareness. He has thus arrived again only at a beginning point—a point at which he has become conscious of being, in Augustine's words, a question to himself.

NOTES

¹ Augustine of Hippo, "I have become a question to myself," *Confessions*, bk. XII, para. x. See also Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, One Volume Edition (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978) bk. II, p. 85. In H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, One Volume Edition (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978) bk. II, p. 85.

² One indication of the relation between the image of "field" and the concept of "action" is found in Latin, where "act," "agent," and "field" share the same root: *agra*.

³ This is a brief description of an event which occurred in my counseling office in San Diego, California in March, 1983.

⁴ The client was a married 43-year-old white male university professor referred for resolution of self-concept issues. He has given permission for this account to be published.

⁵ B. Shertzer and S. Stone, *Fundamentals of Counseling* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), 215; paraphrased.

⁶ M. Richards, *Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person* (Middleton, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 59.

⁷ B. Zilbergeld, *The Shrinking of America: Myths of Psychological Change* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1983).

⁸ T. Spitzer, *Psychobattery: A Chronicle of Therapeutic Abuse* (Clifton, NJ: Humana Press, 1980).

⁹ B. Brennan, *William James* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968); R. Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1935).

¹⁰ See Freud's papers in G. Devereux, ed., *Psychoanalysis and the Occult* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1953).

¹¹ C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

¹² A. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976).

¹³ E. Fromm, et al, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960).

¹⁴ Jaspers' clinical understanding of the relation of self to reality is presented in his text *General Psychopathology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). A more metaphysical presentation is available in his book on philosophical thinking, *Philosophy is for Everyman [Kleine Schule des Philosophischen Denkens]*, trans. R.F.C. Hull and Grete Wells (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1967).

¹⁵ R. Jones, *Physics as Metaphor* (New York: American Library, Inc., 1982), 150.

¹⁶ A. Watts, *Nature, Man, and Woman* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 160.

¹⁷ A. Margulies, *The Empathic Imagination* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1989).

¹⁸ E. Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958).

¹⁹ R. Matthews. *Mathews' Chinese-English Dictionary*. Rev. American ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1943), 481. [See under "K'AI" (開), word no. 3204/74.]

²⁰ T. Cleary, *The Taoist I-Ching* (Boston Shambala, 1986), 144. R. Ritsema and S., *I Ching: The Classic Chinese Oracle of Change—The First Complete Translation with Concordance* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1994), 406. I am most grateful to Julie Su, Head of Serials Department and East Asian Studies Librarian, San Diego State University Library, for her scholarly assistance in researching and substantiating this archaic dual meaning for 一i.

²¹ This is not to suggest that the therapist is unrestrained in self-disclosure but rather that he or she engages in the therapeutic relationship without the insincerity of hidden motives—and is thus authentic in interaction.

- ²² H. Liddell, et al, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940).
- ²³ R. Cushman, *Therapeia: Plato's Conception of Philosophy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958).
- ²⁴ P. Lain-Entralgo, *The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity*, ed. and trans. L. Rather and J. Sharp (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).
- ²⁵ M. Wasserman, "Aztec Psychotherapy: A Study of Help-Giving in Ancient Mexico" *International Journal of Psychiatry* 1972, 28, 54-59.
- ²⁶ Richards, op. cit, 58.
- ²⁷ N. Kravis, "Braid's Psychophysiology: A Turning Point in the History of Dynamic Psychiatry," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 1988, 154:10, 1191-1206.
- ²⁸ The basic concept is well presented in E. Hilgard, *The Experience of Hypnosis* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1968).
- ²⁹ A. Weitzenhoffer, "Hypnotism and Altered States of Consciousness," in A. Sugarman and R. Tarter, eds., *Expanding Dimensions of Consciousness* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1978), 183-225.
- ³⁰ Hilgard, op. cit. For a sound clinical approach based on Hilgard's theory see A. Deikman, *The Observing Self: Mysticism and Psychotherapy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982).
- ³¹ R. Shor, "Hypnosis and the Concept of the Generalized Reality-Oriented," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 1959, 13, 582-602.
- ³² C. Tart, "Psychedelic Experiences Associated with a Novel Hypnotic Procedure, Mutual Hypnosis," *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* 1967, Oct., 65-78.
- ³³ L. Channon, "Extrasensory Communication in Hypnosis: Some Uncomfortable Speculations," *Australian Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* 1984, 12:1, 23-29.
- ³⁴ D. Fourie, "Hypnosis and PSI: Taking stock," *Parapsychological Journal of South Africa* 1982, 3:1, 17-27.

³⁵ D. Mirza, "Electrophysiological Correlates of Rapport in Hypnosis," *PSI Research* 1984, 3:4, 99-102.

³⁶ S. Glasner, "A Note on Allusions to Hypnosis in the Bible and Talmud," *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 1955, 3, 34-39.

³⁷ M. Bowers, and S. Glasner, "Autohypnotic Aspects of the Jewish Cabalistic Concept of Kavanah," *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 1958, 6, 50.

³⁸ F. Marcuse, *Hypnosis Throughout the World* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1964).

³⁹ W. Kim, "Korean Shamanism and Hypnosis," *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* 1967, 3, 193-197.

⁴⁰ J. Hallaji, "Hypnotherapeutic Techniques in a Central Asian Community," *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 1962, 10, 271-274.

⁴¹ J. Das, "Yoga and Hypnosis," *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 1963, 11, 31-38.

⁴² P. Kapleau, ed., *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, foreword by Huston Smith (New York, Harper & Row, 1965).

⁴³ A. Watts, *Psychotherapy East and West* (1961; reprint New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

⁴⁴ My use of the passive voice here ("may be resolved") is meant to emphasize that hypnosis could not be, in itself, the agent of resolution. That, should it occur, would be the work of spirit.

⁴⁵ T. Sarbin and R. Coe, *Hypnosis: A Social Psychological Analysis of Influence Communication* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1972), 107.

⁴⁶ H. Rugg, *Imagination* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 135.

⁴⁷ Partridge, op. cit.

⁴⁸ Aeschylus: "Words are the physicians of a diseased mind," *Prometheus Bound*, 1.378; Shakespeare: "Calm ache with air and agony with words," *Much Ado*

About Nothing, act 5, sc. 1, ln. 26; Emerson: "Poetry teaches the enormous force of words," preface to *Parnassus*.

⁴⁹ P. McKellar, "Coleridge, the Imagined Albatross, and Others," *Journal of Mental Imagery* 1987, 11:2, 113-124.

⁵⁰ E. Ehrlich, *Amo, Amas, Amat and More* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 138. Ehrlich observes that in his *Epistles* Horace used the phrase *genus irritabile vatum* (irritable race of poets), in which *vatum* carries this connotation. Ehrlich has also noted a somewhat *sinister* aspect to the word. This is intriguing given the reference "sinister" has to the left side (left-handed, nonlinear) and the role of the right cortical hemisphere in the poetic process.

⁵¹ W. Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800).

⁵² M.-L. Von Franz, *Number and Time*. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 49.

⁵³ Watts, op. cit., 186.

⁵⁴ R. Shor, "Trance Inductive Poetry: A Brief Communication," *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, 1963 1, 1-7.

⁵⁵ For an excellent overview see H. Polio, et al, *Psychology and the Poetics of Growth: Figurative Language in Psychology, Psychotherapy, and Education* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1977). See also J. Leedy, ed., *Poetry Therapy: The Use of Poetry in the Treatment of Emotional Disorders* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Company, 1969).

⁵⁶ M. Harrower, "Poems Emerging from the Therapeutic Experience," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 1969, 149: 213-233.

⁵⁷ M. Harrower, *The Therapy of Poetry* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1972).

⁵⁸ Of particular interest: S. Fling, "The Use of Psalms in Psychotherapy," in M. Morrison, ed., *Poetry as Therapy* (New York: Human Sciences Press, Inc., 1987), 100-111.

⁵⁹ F. Geer, "Another Royal Road," in Morrison, op. cit., 132-140.

⁶⁰ R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, trans. Annemarie S. Kidder (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 3.

⁶¹ M. Lejkowit, *Journal of Sport History* 11, 2 (Summer 1984): 19.

⁶² M. Simpson, "The Chariot and the Bow as Metaphors for Poetry in Pindar's Odes," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 100 (1969) 455n.35. There is a difference of perspective to be noted here. As Lejkowit (n. 60 above) notes, Pindar describes himself as an archer who consciously takes aim at his target and releases his arrow on his own initiative. That is not the case in hypnopoiesis.

⁶³ Pindar, *Nemian* 4.6.

⁶⁴ J. Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976).

⁶⁵ P. Watzlawick, *The Language of Change: Elements of Therapeutic Communication* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978), 128.

⁶⁶ H. Bergson, Excerpt from a personal letter to Jacques Chevalier, quoted in S. Radakrishnan, *The Brahma Sutra: The Philosophy of Life* (1960; reprint London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1971), 106 ; italics deleted.

⁶⁷ As it is within the power of spirit to raise things above their own level, perhaps hypnopoiesis is the speaking of the "silent one," but if so then only at the behest of spirit itself.

⁶⁸ Richards, op. cit., 58.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 143.

⁷⁰ Yasuda, K., *The Japanese Haiku: Its Essential Nature, History, and Possibilities in English, with Selected Examples* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1973), 179.

⁷¹ J. Firet, *Dynamics in Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Company, 1987), 37; my italics.

⁷² “*Vocatus atque non vocatus, Deus aderit.*” Jung had these words of Erasmus’ inscribed above the doorway to his home. They also appear prominently on his tomb in Zurich.

⁷³ It may also have been prophetic in another sense, because it seems to have heralded a new turn in the client's progress. We must be clear, however, that no claim to what is commonly called "prophecy" can on such account be made.

⁷⁴ A. Waley, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and its Place in Chinese Thought* (1934; reprint London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1949), 150. Translations of these lines from Lao-tzü vary considerably. Mine relies on but differs significantly from Waley's. There being no formal passive voice per se in Chinese grammar, the mode of action is contextually implied and open to interpretation. I have brought the passive voice forward here (as in line 2, "He is kept to the fore," rather than Waley's "He is always to the fore") because it reinforces the perspective that spirit always retains the initiative in such things. This reading is valid in itself. With respect to line 2 it has the additional merit here of eliminating any suggestion that I might see myself as being "always to the fore" like the sage, in whom being both there and in the background at one and the same time is never not the case.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ *Reader's Digest*, Quotable Quotes, August 1988, 101.

⁷⁷ T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men," in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), 81-82.