TRANSFORMATION SPACE:

Temporary schism in a structured world,
or permanent ground of existence ?

An analysis
from a socio-anthropological perspective

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T A B L E   O F   C O N T E N T S

INTRODUCTION

THE CENTRAL CONCERN

Transformation space is where the child is, the child throwing a tantrum, who is given the time and 'space' to organize him or her self without admonishment. Such permission to collect emotions, thoughts, and responses is fundamental to the healthy development of a child's sense of self.

Transformation space is that moment of insight, creation, or synthesis where knowledge, experience, sensation, and emotion meet. It is a mental state which allows the conscious and subconscious mind to communicate - where the content of dreams and intuitions is given meaning and respect, while dogmas and theories loosen their grip.

Transformation space is the psychiatrist's office, where individuals can construct new realities based on pieces of their past experience. It is a non-judgmental place to cleanse, to heal, to grow. It is where one can take the time to analyze one's way of communicating with others, and discover which interpretations of our interactions are astute insights, and which are delusions and projections carried forward into the present from other moments and places.

Transformation space is that moment of silence, or reflection, that can occur at a business meeting. It is when participants listen to their thoughts, consider what they will say next, reflect on their innermost motives and weight if these motives are constructive for the collective, or whether they are personal defense responses that may unnecessarily fragment the group and inhibit what it hopes to accomplish. Or, it is a cross-hierarchical meeting in any organization, where rank and experience are not used to segregate, and where social roles and status credentials take a back seat as participants learn to listen to one another as people, thus learning the essence of genuine communication.

Transformation space is that schism that opens in inhibitions when a crowd of cheering fans becomes a mob of vandals. The independent actions of each one, are mirrored in the actions of all, and who is leading loses significance. It is the joyful carnival where bodies melt into one large mass of energetic rhythmic expression.

Transformation space is where thorough, honest, and deep contemplation takes place. It is that moment of thought prior to action. It is that moment of being prior to thought. It is the ritual of silence and meditation which appears in many of the world's religions and mystic practices.

Transformation space is synonymous with the state called *Bardo* in Tibetan Buddhist mysticism. It is "a 'transition' or a gap between the completion of one situation and the onset of another. *Bar* means 'in between', and *do* means 'suspended' or 'thrown'."

(Rinpoche, 1992, p. 102) According to this ancient philosophy, the essence of living (and dying) is existence in a bardo state - where everything is in transition, suspension and ambiguity. It is a philosophy which suggests that the uncertainty of the bardo is the true reality, whereas the phenomena we experience through our intellect and senses is the illusion - the mirage. The goal according to this tradition is to recognize and accept this - to doubt that which we habitually trust, and trust that which we habitually doubt.

According to Rinpoche (1992), within Tibetan Buddhist thought, the bardo ...
> ... is a continuous unnerving oscillation between clarity and confusion, bewilderment and insight, certainty and uncertainty, sanity and insanity. In our minds, as we are now, wisdom and confusion arise simultaneously, or ... are 'co-emergent'. This means that we face a continuous state of choice between the two, and that everything depends on which we choose. ... [It is the uncertainty which should be embraced in that it offers] gaps, spaces in which profound chances and opportunities for transformation are continuously flowering - if, that is, they can be seen and seized. (p. 105)

Transformation space is a natural counterpart to the structured spaces provided by culture and society at large. It is that place in between positions, where change is the only constant - a place of power, of mystery, of healing, and of insight. However, it can also be seen as a place where fear, dysfunction, and chaos reside. It is madness, it is disease, it is the shadow, it is what is denied. Western society loathes and fears this space, but instinctively is drawn to it - in it's fascination with violence, when inhibitions are set free, in its favoring of security, youth, and pleasure, in an attempt to escape impermanence, decay and pain.

The question is - can there be growth without discomfort and uncertainty? Can evolution occur without some form of reorganization? Why is security and stability of such value, at the cost of uncertainty and growth? Biologist and environmentalist David Suzuki looks at this process of ongoing change within his own life:
> In retrospect, my life has been marked by a series of transformations. It's interesting to note that in the rest of the biological world, profound change in the lives of many organisms is a natural and necessary part of their development. Often these changes involve dramatic transitions in physical makeup, behavior and habitat. This process is called *metamorphosis*. (Suzuki, 1988, p. 6-7)

By drawing a parallel between stages in his own life, and stages in the life of insects, he points out that each stage which is part of this process of metamorphosis is impressively larger than the preceding one, but still incomplete. If life is indeed such an ongoing, endless process of change, where are those places where we are empowered, or allowed to change?

Rather than defining transformation processes as something dysfunctional - a temporary 'dis-ease' to be overcome as fast as possible enabling a return to the safety of social structures - this paper will explore where transformation is supported, socially sanctioned, and even facilitated. The possible beneficial outcomes of periods of transformation are many - new levels of self-understanding and growth can be reached, cooperative action and creativity can be unleashed, peace of mind can be achieved. However, would the easing of negative connotations which are often attached to

transformation, and the formal (perhaps ritualized) legitimation of these 'dis-comforting' rifts, cracks or schisms be of ultimate social benefit? Will support and acknowledgment of these periods of transformation - in other words, creating a legitimate permanent 'space' for them to occur - solidify and strengthen the process, or will it, by definition, destroy it? This is the question which this paper aims to address.

THE FRAMEWORK

In a previous paper[1], behavioral and perceptual mechanisms which inhibit egalitarian 'communicative action'[2] were explored. It was argued that the ability to suspend judgment and retain a flexible identity during social interaction is necessary in order to achieve genuine, sympathetic communication. However, several obstacles inhibit individuals from being able to maintain such an open, generous stance in relation to others - and even our own selves.

Our habitual patterns of cognitive functioning compel us to define and categorize what we come into contact with based on our past experience. Thus, we enter social interactions armed with preconceived notions, unwittingly biased from the onset. Attachment to binary polarities and hierarchical value systems for organizing experience also forces us to take a judgmental, discriminating stance. We aspire to define and delineate the boundaries of our own identity, both to respond to societal expectations, and to bask in the security which an integrated complete self can offer.

One could summarize by saying that human beings tend to have a limited 'tolerance for ambiguity'[3]. Rather than prolonging those moments of uncertainty when facing the unknown, we rush to 'make sense' of the complexity surrounding us by seeking refuge in what is definable, familiar, and conventional. This insecure outlook also leads to the adoption of various defense mechanisms which inhibit genuine, sympathetic communication with others, as well as our own development. Finally, egotistical tendencies limit the level of goodwill and generosity we are ready to afford others. The paper concluded by suggesting that we should invest equal effort in critical self-awareness as is spent on identifying institutionalized or structural obstacles to egalitarian communicative action. It is within our own selves that we need to find and eradicate the

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[1]Zielinska, I.E. (1993). Social Evolution Towards an Ideal Communication Community: Steps towards Social Integration and Self-Actualization for all? Unpublished paper, Department of Sociology, Concordia University. This paper was condensed and published under the title: *Overcoming Obstacles to Cross Cultural Communication: The Need for Critical Self Awareness*, Journal of Ethno-Development, 2 (2), 88-94.

[2]Habermas, J. (1987). The paradigm shift in Mead and Durkheim: From purposive action to communicative action. The Theory of Communicative Action - Volume 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason. (T. McCarthy, Trans.) (pp. 1.112). Boston: Beacon Press. (original work published 1981).

[3]Frenkel-Brunswick, E. (1949). Intolerance of ambiguity as an emotional and perceptual personality variable. Journal of Personality, 18,108-143.

seeds of bias and prejudice, as well as the unconscious defenses which inhibit our inner evolution. Essentially, this is a battle of 'inner disarmament'[4].

Having taken a position that places much of the responsibility for eliciting and sustaining egalitarian communicative action on human agency, the aim of this paper is to reconsider the problem but from the opposite point of view - by assigning responsibility to social structures. Those situations where institutions or rituals not only elicit such communication, but also support and maintain it, will be explored. For the purpose of this paper, the term 'communication' is meant to embrace not only exchange between self and other, but between various layers of the self as well.

In a way, enhanced communication sites are akin to schisms - rips in the fabric of an ordered, defined world, with fixed roles and rules. Although they invite freedom from convention, they owe their very existence to the structured field around them, finding definition due to the inherent opposition. Beyond enhanced 'humanistic' communication, other inherent qualities and possibilities offered by these sites will be considered. Some of the opportunities are of benefit primarily to the collective, as in offering a group the foundation for collaborative problem solving or the unleashing of joint creative insight. Others are of benefit primarily to the individual, as in offering the support for a deeper self understanding, for the practice of new patterns of behavior, or the re-establishment of the resilience of mental health.

An attempt will be made to present a variety of examples where such freedom, support and group effort may be invaluable for the achievement of certain objectives. However, the choice and scope of examples will not be rigidly systematic, or exhaustive. Since the paper is exploratory, the goal is not to construct a theoretical position, but to sketch the possible parameters of what such a position could entail.

In conclusion, the potential for 'inner transformation' which is present during moments of escape from the status quo will be analyzed. An often dormant process of self-actualization[5] may be initiated. However, although it will be argued that legitimate 'transformation space' can surely be of benefit both to the individual and to the collective,

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[4]The Dalai Lama (1994). <u>A Flash of Lightening in the Dark of Night: A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life</u>. Boston: Shambala Publications.

[5]I would rather leave this term vague at present since any attempts at definition I might make at this stage would be premature. Gradually, I am realizing that **self-actualization** is the core topic of what will be my thesis. Enhanced communication is seen as being a symptom of this process. In essence, I hope to explore in depth, from various perspectives, what is meant by the following passage written by Dogen, one of the founders of Japanese Zen Buddhism:

<div align="center">

To study the Way is to study the self.
To study the self is to forget the self.
To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things.
To be enlightened by all things,
is to remove the barriers between one's self and others.

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Source: Yokoi, Y. (1976). <u>Zen Master Dogen: An Introduction with Selected Writings</u>. New York: Weatherhill (p. 5).

fundamentally, its limits still reside in individual agency and motivation, and not the quality of the supporting space.

DELINEATING TRANSFORMATION SPACE

If we view society as a series of positions, then we can assume that as we travel the journey of our life, we enter and leave various states and stages in which we claim membership, and as part of which we play socially defined roles. These positions are sometimes fleeting, like emotional states, or temporary, as perhaps periods of illness tend to be, or those stages related to degree of maturation, or age. And there are those positions that are permanent, such as gender or race. The choice of professional niche might also lean towards permanence. However, with more and more people experiencing several career changes during a lifetime, professional positions are becoming more temporary.

As we proceed, we sometimes pause, or step outside the frames defined by our collection of social roles. During such moments of suspension, we may reflect on the past, contemplate and brace ourselves for what we anticipate awaits, experience relief from our day-to-day pressures and circumstances, or, conversely, assume the pressure of being marginal - suddenly not part of those groups to which we previously claimed membership. These pauses can come of one's own initiative, as in going on holiday for instance, they can be imposed by the culture of which we are a part, in the form of rituals, or they may occur spontaneously due to unforeseen events or circumstances, as in the nervous breakdowns or types of collective panic or collaboration which can emerge at times of crisis. Furthermore, they can be experienced individually, and they can be shared. In trying to define the conceptual parameters of 'transformation space', before looking at examples of when it shared, it might be useful to begin with the individual experience.

PRIVATE ENTRIES

HUMOR AND CREATIVITY AS THE DOOR

In his book The Act of Creation (1964), Arthur Koestler analyses the psychological process involved in the experience of humor and creativity. Underlying his analysis, are several concepts which can be used in constructing a conceptual framework for private entries into transformation space. Koestler posits that fundamental to the experience of humor, is 'bisociation' - which he describes as the ability to perceive "a situation or idea ... in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference" (1964, p. 35). It is only from the vantage point provided by such a space between frameworks that the joke can be seen. It is also in this space that creativity thrives and conceptual breakthroughs are possible. Thus, while a sociologist might refer to the possible frameworks which can 'contain' human beings as social roles, and an anthropologist might describe them as customs, Koestler refers to them as 'matrices', or codes and sets of rules which control one's behavior, as well as delineate the scope of thought and understanding.

Using creativity and humor as the point of departure, Koestler's theoretical thought concerns itself with learning and mental evolution. The mental frameworks, or ...

silent codes can be regarded as condensations of learning into habits. Habits are the indispensable core of stability and ordered behavior; they also have a tendency to become mechanized and reduce man to the status of a conditioned automaton. The creative act, by connecting previously unrelated dimensions of experience, enable him to attain a higher level of mental evolution. It is an act of liberation - the defeat of habit by originality. (1964, p. 96)

Thus, what Koestler refers to as 'the creative act', might also be seen as an entry into and temporary sojourn within 'transformation space', where by being outside the delineated limits of various 'frames of 'reference', 'associative contexts', universes of discourse', mental 'sets' or 'schemata', a new level of understanding may be achieved.

LIBERATION FROM HABIT

In this position 'beyond and apart', various mental acts described by Koestler can occur - namely, 'interpolation' (filling in missing gaps), 'extrapolation' (extending the series), and **transformation** (re-interpretation into analogous terms). He refers to this state of mind as a 'period of incubation', where the conscious mind meets the subconscious - the contents of the shadow are brought to light and explored. He likens the state to one of temporary withdrawal, prior to renewed effort - a '*reculer pour mieux sauter'*.

Just as in the dream the codes of logical reasoning are suspended, so 'thinking aside' is a temporary liberation from the tyranny of over-precise verbal concepts, of the axioms and prejudices ingrained in the very texture of specialized ways of thought. It allows the mind to discard the straight jacket of habit, to shrug off apparent contradictions, to un-learn and forget - and to acquire, in exchange, a greater fluidity, versatility, and gullibility. (Koestler, 1964, p. 210)

RISKS OF ASPIRING TO FREEDOM

However, the transformation process is by no means easy to initiate or maintain. Without even looking for external social or cultural constraints which may inhibit such a 'letting go', Koestler conceptualizes of an inner resistance, an 'anti-body' reaction. This powerful defense mechanism attempts to restore habits and protect against the intrusion of novelty, or change. Furthermore, the results of transformation can be deemed either positive and beneficial, or negative and destructive.

This rebellion against the constraints of conventional thought, but an impediment to the creative leap, is symptomatic both of the genius and the crank; what distinguishes them is the intuitive guidance which only the former enjoys (Koestler, 1964, p. 210).

In a sense when positive, the transformation leads to an opening up, a higher form of integration, one which is often accompanied by the ability and desire to expand the sphere of human communication - to borrow from social theorist George Herbert Mead, the ability of the individual to identify with others is enhanced[6].

However, transformation may also give rise to a process of alienation, where the circle of communication narrows. This is the case of the schizophrenic, whose inner world becomes more and more individual and incomprehensible to others, or the cultist

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[6]refer to footnote 1.

whole level of identification with the 'chosen' may be strengthened by the exclusion of those who do not share the chosen ideology. Orrin Klapp (1969) presents a thorough investigation of cultic movements in which he posits that they offer the individual an 'identity-redefining experience which can be shared collectively'. His analysis focuses on the 'collective search for identity'. However, in the context of this paper, finding such a shared identity would signify the end of one's sojourn in transformation space. Within the framework of this discussion, transformation is seen as an ongoing process of opening which does not have a final or ultimate shape towards which the metamorphosis is reaching. It is only this type of process that can guarantee the 'ideal' universalistic communication which Mead spoke of, one which includes all, and therefore perhaps can never attain a defined fixed form.

ACCESSING THE SUBCONSCIOUS

Koestler refers to the process of transformation as a 'night journey'. Borrowing from mythological archetypes, he considers the process from the point of view of a hero/heroine's Odyssey.

> Under the effect of some overwhelming experience, the hero is made to realize the shallowness of his life, the futility and frivolity of the daily pursuits of man in the trivial routines of existence. This realization may come to him as a sudden shock caused by some catastrophic event, or as the cumulative effects of a slow inner development, or through the trigger action of some apparently banal experience which assumes an unexpected significance. The hero then suffers a crisis which involves the very foundations of his being: he embarks on the Night Journey, is suddenly transferred to the Tragic Plane - from which he emerges purified, enriched by new insight, regenerated on a higher level of integration. (p. 358).

This 'night journey' can proceed on a grand scale, as in the unexpected nervous breakdown, or it can emerge within a single night's sleep, where the subconscious offers new patterns of possible integration through dreams. It can also be provided as part of a mystical or spiritual practice.

THE SPIRITUAL CONTEXT

Within a mystical, or spiritual context the scope of transformation can operate on a much larger scale, one not limited to human integration within society, but aspiring to integration with a consciousness which is often described as infinite, universal, divine, or immortal. The means of transformation usually transcends attempts to expand, explore and control solely intellectual responses and concepts.

> The aim of certain mystic practices - such as Hatha Yoga - is to permeate the self with awareness of itself by gaining voluntary control over visceral processes and isolated muscles. It would seem that this focusing of consciousness on the self, the inward core of the contracting spiral, is the direct opposite of the self-transcending aspirations of other schools of mysticism - the expansion of consciousness in an unfolding spiral, and its final dissolution in the 'oceanic feeling'. In fact, however, the Yogi's effort to gain conscious mastery of the body is considered as merely a detour towards attaining 'pure consciousness' - that is, 'consciousness without object or content other than consciousness itself'. Thus turned upon itself, pure consciousness is supposed to penetrate the Real Self - which, unlike the transient self, is part and parcel of Atman, the universal spirit. (Koestler, 1964, p.634-635)

In a spiritual context, the process of transformation may benefit from the assistance of a teacher or guru who is empowered to provide the container within which to re-organize the self (Greenwell, 1990). However, as previously discussed, there is always the danger that rather than liberating the self from past limitations, a spiritual process of transformation may invite a surrendering of the personal self to a fixed ideology. The limits of how beneficial this is in the long run are worth considering, especially in light of the history of cults and the possible antisocial delusions some propagate.

AS PART OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

Transformation can also be undertaken willfully, as part of psychotherapy. The temporary and systematic disintegration offered by this process can open the way for a reintegration of the personality in a new synthesis. Faulty integrations caused by past traumas can be corrected, and habitual patterns of interpretation can be loosened. The advantage here is that the process of transformation is not totally solitary, but benefits from the guidance and protection offered by the therapist. Within the non-judgmental container provided by the therapist, the individual can gradually, with some control, gain a new lease on life.

It is important to point out that healing, or attempting to correct damage done in the past, may only be one aspect of the type of transformation which a therapeutic context offers. Another equally important aspect of psychotherapy involves the opportunity to complete the self-development process which may have been thwarted during crucial childhood stages. Usually, the damage is done inadvertently since parents or caretakers are, by and large, perpetuating an unconscious pattern of interaction from generation to generation. If they thwart the development of their children, it is because they themselves were victims of the same type of developmental stifling.

Solomon (1989) asserts that individuals who are not given the space to 'organize their own self' but instead are treated like an extension of their caregiver's self - one meant to provide gratification - will not reach a mature level of narcissistic functioning. Instead, they will carry this incompleteness into the next generation, demanding the same of their own children or of other significant 'objects' they enter into relationships with. Thus, a complete sense of self needs to be established before an individual is able to release others from their gratifying function. And, that sense of self needs the freedom and space within which to develop. If not offered during childhood, therapy may be the only alternative.

Another case where childhood does not offer the space required for the transformations which are a natural part of the development process, is brought to light by Bateson (1972) and elaborated by Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967). Taking a communications perspective, they examine how a 'untenable communication context' can propel an individual into an escalating alienation where they are unable to communicate with 'normal' people. Bateson (1972, p. 178) states that there are several levels to everyday human communication - the *denotative* level, at which something is simply pointed out (i.e. "That dog is black"), the *metalinguistic* level, where the subject is the use of language itself (i.e. "The word 'dog' cannot bark"), and finally the *metacommunicative* level, where the subject of discourse is the relationship between the speakers (i.e. "Since

we both know the dog is white, I am teasing you by saying it is black", in other words, "This is play"). As part of our development, we learn to interpret the various 'mood-signals' of others, and to recognize the fact that we ourselves as well as others emit signals that "can be trusted, distrusted, falsified, denied, amplified, corrected, and so forth" (Bateson, 1972, p. 169). The danger occurs when a child's perceptions and interpretations of the signals of others are not confirmed by those around them; instead, they are denied, or even punished.

Miller (1990a; 1990b) likens the experience of having perceptions affirmed to one of having a witness. Without such affirmation of one's point of view, an individual can grow to doubt their own perceptions, or even believe that it is dangerous to have perceptions which are counter to those of the surrounding 'communication system' (i.e. the network of people among which the child grows up). Miller uses the children's fairy tale "The Emperor's New Clothes" as an analogy for this situation. The obvious - that the king is naked - is seen by the child, but denied by the whole populace. To survive within that system, the child will have to learn to sacrifice their own views.

Bateson theorizes that in a family system where all collaborate to support a false truth, one person may become the 'identified' one - the one who sees that which is denied, notices the contradictions, but faced with a strong, often dangerous, and unified opposition front, instead of finding justice, they are often silenced by being labeled as 'sick'. A schizophrenic may emerge within such a system. They become the dysfunctional object and thus ensure the survival of the dysfunctional system. Thus,

> at the clinical end of the behavioral spectrum, 'crazy' communication (behavior) is not necessarily the manifestation of a sick mind, but may be the only possible reaction to an absurd or untenable communication context. (Watzlawick et al, 1967, p. 78)[7]

In this case, treatment is usually initiated by the 'patient's' family, rather than by the patient him or her self. Perhaps it is safe to assume that the outcome of a process of transformation which is self-initiated, and one which is enforced, might be entirely different, and not necessary beneficial in both cases.

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[7]There continues to be debate as to whether schizophrenia and other mental disorders (including pathological aggression and depression) are the result of 'nature' or 'nurture'. For instance, as discussed in a series of articles on The Biology of Violence (which appeared in the Montreal Gazette, Dec. 24-28, 1993), recent research indicates that a stressful environment during childhood may permanently affect brain chemistry, and predispose individuals to either aggression or to depression (which can be likened to anger turned in against the self). Thus, in the case of individuals whose childhoods were affected by violence, there may be more involved than simply social learning of violent behavior patterns; the brain's entire response mechanism to a perceived threat in the environment may have been altered (the fight or flight instinct is somewhat skewed, either too impulsive, or too passive). Medication which adjusts the levels of certain brain chemicals may hold the key to changing behavior patterns. Perhaps the middle way is the best approach to take with regards to this argument. It may mean finding the right balance between chemical therapy and psychotherapy assuming that both nature and nurture contribute to the problem.

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In general, it is unfortunate that the transformation context offered as part of psychotherapy must attach the stigma of 'mental illness' to the individual seeking re-definition. The individual becomes a patient, and must accept a definition of self as somehow not well adjusted, faulty, or ill. The stress which this may give rise to may be partially alleviated by keeping the fact of one's participation in therapy private. It is interesting to note, however, that a new trend is emerging in psychotherapy, namely, 'narrative therapy'.[8] Educational Psychologist Jerome Bruner (1990) traces the roots of this 'self-narrative' approach to the late 1970's, thus rather than being a new phenomena, perhaps it is more a question of it becoming increasingly emphasized at present. Instead of looking for flaws in the psyche, narrative therapy aims to foster forgotten strengths. Thus, the dysfunctional label itself is called into question as the individual in therapy is empowered to present another version of him or herself.

> At the heart of the new approach is the post modernist idea that we don't so much perceive the world as interpret it... So we collapse our experience into narrative structures, or stories, to make it intelligible. As we forge identities, we inevitably give some patterns of experience more weight than others, and cultural pressures help determine which patterns define us. If our 'dominant stories' happen to center on problems, they can become spiritual prisons. ... A 'problem saturated' dominant story tends to 'filter problem-free experiences from a person's memories and perceptions' so that 'threads of hope, resourcefulness and capacity are excluded from a person's description of self.[9]

SUMMARY

Perhaps one should view the process of aspiring to higher and broader levels of consciousness as a universal cornerstone of life and evolution, rather than a temporary period of self-healing or corrective endeavor undertaken only by some. In keeping with Suzuki's analogy of ongoing metamorphosis, Koestler posits that

> ... organic life, in all its manifestations, from morphogenisis to symbolic thought, is governed by 'rules of the game' which lend it coherence, order, and unity-in-variety; and that these rules (or functions in the mathematical sense), whether innate or acquired, are represented in coded form on various levels, from the chromosomes to the structures in the nervous system responsible for symbolic thought. ... The rules are fixed, but there are endless variations to each game, their variability increasing in ascending order... . There is also an overall-rule ... which says that no rule is absolutely final; that under certain circumstances they may be altered and combined into a more sophisticated game, which provides a higher form of unity and yet increased variety ... (p. 631).

Unfortunately, aside from within mystical movements which have presented themselves across the ages and offered guidelines and techniques for self-transcending aspirants, by and large, periods of transformation are neither encouraged, facilitated or cherished. If anything, in contemporary western society, they are feared, avoided, and loathed; often arising as a result of some trauma, crisis, dysfunction, or neurotic 'identity-seeking'.

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[8]Cowley, G., & Springen, K. (1995, April 17). Rewriting Life Stories. Newsweek, p. 70-74.

[9]Cowley, G., & Springen, K. (1995, April 17). Rewriting Life Stories. Newsweek, p. 70.

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COLLECTIVE ENTRIES

<u>DEFINING 'COLLECTIVE'</u>

Aside from processes of transformation undertaken on an individual scale, one can find cases of shared journeys - 'collective entries' into transformation space. Before proceeding further, the scope of what is meant by the term 'collective' must be considered. If we take the perspective that the key issue is the sharing of the same core experience or 'content' by many, regardless of if the event is simultaneous, then even a private entry into the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1969) would fit within the framework; an individual who dreams of universal archetypes on their 'night journey' (to use Koestler's term), although witnessing the symbols alone, might be seen as having a collective experience since it is available to all. Orrin Klapp (1991) presents another variation on such private sharing of common content in his analysis of contagious communication and how fads grow. Although the decision to partake in the fad is more or less an individual choice, once made, the outcome is shared; thus, while the entry and participation may be a private event, outwardly, it will appear as a symptom of joining in a larger public event. Within the context of this paper, both these examples will be considered beyond the chosen framework - although the content is shared, the lack of convergence in terms of the time and place leave the event largely private.

Another example of a collective experience which is shared on some but not all levels is that where several individuals are presented with the same content, at the same time, but not necessarily in the same place. From this perspective, the television viewing experience might apply. For instance, when millions tuned in and witnessed American super hero O.J. Simpson making his 'live', public escape before being arrested for the double murder of his ex-wife and her friend, the shock and disbelief of seeing a hero cast in the role of murder suspect was probably shared by most viewers, and certainly could have being transforming in that a substantial chunk of America's innocence was forever lost. Basically, mass viewing of any broadcast live-event which is of interest to millions might fit into this category (i.e. the Academy Awards, or the Super Bowl for instance, when rumor has it that the New York City sewer system overflows during commercial breaks!). Again, in the context of this paper, the collective nature of this type of experience is not seen as being tangible enough either.

Partaking in the frenzy of crowd behavior in its various forms from riots, mobs, to religious revivals, might represent a step closer to the collective convergence we are looking for. Although there are several theories as to what the mechanisms of crowd behavior are (McClelland, 1989), once the interactive gathering has taken place, total strangers can be 'swept away' and unite in a mass release from the conventions of everyday protocol.

> A crowd moves people not by numbers but its unanimity and types of interactions that prevail. According to sociologist Herbert Blumer, crowd contagion develops from circular interaction (often called milling), in which interactions by speech, applause, yelling, shoving, escalates movement into joint action or expressive behavior. A key point is that circular interaction is by automatic responses which are quick and similar, rather than by 'interpretative' responses that are deliberate, take more time, and make people different. The crowd attains unanimity, not the diversity of public opinion. In an excited crowd, people reinforce each other by

feedback, causing emotions to escalate. Anonymity also helps release behavior from normal restraint. (Klapp, 1991, p. 63)

Crowd behavior, since it is transitory and disinhibiting can be said to be transformative in some respects. Furthermore, since there is a convergence as to the time and place of its occurrence, and its participants are privy to the same content, one could certainly define it as a tangible collective experience. However, the one distinguishing factor between the transformation space offered by the crowd and the type of collective experience this paper aims to focus on, is the fact that the crowd does not invite deliberate, conscious, and 'interpretative' participation. Perhaps this may be different in the case of certain catastrophes, where participants have been known to share strategic, collaborative action, still, since participation is random and accidental, it would not fit within the chosen criteria.

<small>RITUALIZED EVENTS</small>

Thus, the type of collective entry into transformation space that will be analyzed is one where participation is deliberate, the occurrence is simultaneous, the stage is shared, and neither anonymity or unanimity is compulsory. In a sense, it is part of a ritual. By virtue of being a ritual, the event is planned, culturally acknowledged, and esteemed.

> Rituals reveal values at their deepest level. ... [People] express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed. (Wilson in Turner, 1969, p. 6)

The focus of analysis then, is a collective event which has the respect of the community, celebrates its principal values, and which invites and allows participants to experience states (emotional, mental, possibly physical) which are not common to everyday life. "In most tribal societies the plunge is symbolically enacted in the initiation-rites which precede the turning points in the life of the individual, such as puberty or marriage" (Koestler, 1964, p. 359). Rituals which mark passage tend to predominate.

Van Gennep (1960) was the first to give serious consideration to the form of cultural 'rites of passage, which he saw as having a universal structure, encompassing three distinct phases: separation, margin and aggregation.

> The first phase ... comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'), or from both. During the intervening ... period, the characteristics of the ritual subject ('the passenger') are ambiguous; he [or she] passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase ..., the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of a clearly defined and 'structural' type; he [or she] is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards biding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions. (Turner, 1969, p. 94-95; based on Van Gennep)

It is the marginal mid-stage which represents the period of transformation; it is where participants are removed both from the source, and from the destination. Victor Turner (1969) referred to this stage as the liminal period (from 'limen', meaning 'threshold' in Latin).

> The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. (Turner, 1969, p. 95)

An analysis of numerous rites of passage reveals that during the liminal stage, participants are believed to return to their original state and are said to be shown that "in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society" (Turner, 1969, p. 103). Somé, in his description of his initiation as part of the Dagara tribe from Burkina Faso in West Africa, confirms this return to a primordial self.

Turner (1969) lists numerous binary oppositions which can be used to delineate the difference between liminality, and culturally defined states, or what he refers to as the status system. They are listed as follows (p. 106):

LIMINALITY	STATUS SYSTEM
transition	state
totality	partiality
homogeneity	heterogeneity
communitas	structure
equality	inequality
anonymity	systems of nomenclature
absence of property	property
absence of status	status
nakedness or uniform clothing	distinctions of clothing
sexual continence	sexuality
minimal sex distinctions	maximal sex distinctions
absence of rank	distinctions of rank
humility	just pride of position
disregard for personal appearance	care for appearance
no distinctions of wealth	distinctions of wealth
unselfishness	selfishness
total obedience*	obedience only to superior rank*
sacredness	secularity
sacred instruction	technical knowledge
silence	speech
no kinship rights & obligations	kinship r & o
much reference to mystical powers	little reference
foolishness	sagacity
simplicity	complexity
pain and suffering	avoidance of pain and suffering
heteronomy	degrees of autonomy

* for the purpose of this discussion, since relationships to authority figures are not of primary importance, it might be preferable to view 'total obedience' in terms of 'universal respect', and 'obedience only to superior rank', as 'unilateral or strategic respect'.

Of particular importance in the above list of binary oppositions, is the one between 'communitas' and 'structure'. According to Turner, the liminal period, by definition, does not occupy a position in cultural space - it is a stage which takes place between structures.

He uses the term 'communitas' to describe this marginal attitude, state of mind, or 'time-out'.

Instead of defining liminality as a position, Turner puts the emphasis on the nearly 'spiritual' relationship which can develop between participants, which he calls 'communitas'. He points out that 'threshold' people share intense comradeship and egalitarianism - there is a basic humanistic quality present, one which blurs secular distinctions of rank and status. Turner argues that

> from the perspectival viewpoint of those concerned with the maintenance of 'structure', all sustained manifestations of communitas must appear as dangerous and anarchical, and have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions. (Turner 1969, p. 109)

Since communitas can be said to represent the primordial evolutionary life-force, it can certainly be seen as threatening to the social order. It is where participants are 'stripped' of all distinctions of status and rank, and thereby 'leveled' and brought down to the lowest common denominator (Goffman, 1961).[10] As social and cultural divisions are removed, participants can re-discover their core humanity which is equally shared by all.

Turner argues that communitas - or the 'emptiness at the center - would not exist without a structured periphery. Structure and communitas are positioned as immortal antagonists, dependent on the maintenance of the dialectic between them. Furthermore, communitas can never be a permanent state, but must by definition be a temporary release from structure in order to return revitalized. If it exists too long, communitas falls 'declines and falls' into structure and law. Instead of taking a purely theoretical approach to the question of if ritually guarded and stimulated liminality must indeed remain a temporary and 'position-free' space, let's consider the problem from a somewhat experiential perspective, based on several concrete examples.

VISITS TO TRANSFORMATION SPACE

THE CONTEXT

Within the culturally heterogenous context of western urban society, it is difficult to find formal rituals which celebrate, mark, and support transformation - especially on a mass scale where the entire community takes part. This is not a society which allows the collective to lower its defenses in unison, or to take a 'time-out' from its own rules and conventions. The culture does not allow its members to openly express what lurks in the shadows[11], as in the case of the northern Ashanti of Ghana. There, the opportunity for all

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[10]Goffman's analysis centered on patients in asylums and inmates in penal institutions, but aside from the negative connotations, the process and result is similar in that participants are rendered equal – equally marginal, and in a sense, equally inferior, or at the ground level.

[11]Perhaps the popularity of television talk shows, where individuals publicly disclose and in a way purge themselves of various unsavory or unconventional secrets, attests to the valid need for such departures from the conventions of society.

to simultaneously 'cleanse' themselves of accumulated ill will, anger, or other otherwise unacceptable emotions and attitudes is ritually provided on a yearly basis. Turner (1969, pps. 178-181) describes the *Apo Ceremony* which marks the new year and during which members of the entire community are allowed to speak their mind plainly and indiscriminately, thereby purging themselves of whatever ill feelings towards others may have accumulated in structural relationships during the previous year. Once these secret resentments are revealed, the community, cleansed, returns to the conventions of everyday life. Within western culture, all such content is permanently suppressed, and unfortunately, in the case of some individuals, it finally erupts in violence and acts of terrorism.

Even natural periods of transition receive little social support or ritual marking. Although one can find isolated examples - as in the initiation rituals of college fraternities, or the Barmitzvahs of Jewish boys - it is not a phenomena which is common to all across the board. As a case in point, the universally experienced developmental period know as 'adolescence', with its accompanying rebelliousness, is seen as a disease, one which is expected to somehow pass on its own, without the benefit of social guidance, support, or even official acknowledgment. In a sense, western society at large offers no common container for the emotional and identity crises which mark the process of moving from youth to adulthood. Teenagers must not only negotiate the passage themselves, but must also emerge into adulthood on their own, without experiencing the comfort and support which a ritualized arrival would confer.

Based on his analysis of indigenous culture, Somé (1994) suggests that if adolescence is indeed a disease, then initiation is the only cure. As part of his experience within tribal African society, he underwent such an initiation. Essentially, this six-week journey combined the hardships of survival, with a descent into the magical underworld, a "place where one encounters one's own identity prior to being born into a community of humans" (p. 68). Somé contends that when an official initiation process is restored as part of western culture, one which "helps young people ritualistically focus and transcend their wild energy, demonstrate their worth, and be accepted into a community" (p. 68), the problems of crime, abuse, suicide, and depression will be greatly alleviated. Overly optimistic as this may seem, it is worth analyzing the benefits and outcomes of socially sanctioned initiation rites and transformation processes. Such transition periods have been viewed as having almost mystical power by some anthropologists. And, if we look, we can indeed find examples of isolated pockets of collective release in the form of self-help groups, organizational rituals, and other group activities.

THE SELF-HELP MOVEMENT

Starting in the sphere of self-help initiatives, one example of a popular, transformative, collective experience which comes to mind is that of the various 12-step method groups which assemble to support their members as they battle to overcome certain addictions. In such a facilitating environment, where perhaps due to the fact that all participants are similarly afflicted, judgment is suspended, and individuals can be uplifted and get a new lease on life.

Another example of people who are 'identified' along some personality dimension joining in ritual transformation, is the emergence of community psychiatric centers which

are organized and run by current or former psychiatric patients, to the total exclusion of medical professionals[12]. By the fact that all are 'leveled' and share the affliction, the stigma is lessened, and patients have been seen to experience escalated recovery. Such initiatives are said to help reduce not only the length of treatment, but also the number of patients who end up back in hospitals. From this perspective, perhaps certain psychiatric patients are simply people who are seeking a non-judgmental place where they can integrate life experiences which they are having problems dealing with. Often, the act of defining persons as 'patients' who are mentally ill, and having them submit to the supervision and control of 'healthy' professionals, simply adds to the stress and pressure which is already overwhelming them. Instead, if offered the 'transformation space', or the 'container' they need, they can retain control of their own process and heal more effectively.

Finally, a visit to any bookstore will show that having an 'identified' problem, dysfunction, or disability is not a prerequisite to seek transformative experiences. Judging by the thousands of self-help books flooding the market, even 'regular', 'everyday' people seek personal growth. It is common for the 'gurus' who produce these printed or taped guidelines, many of whom acquire a massive following, to organize group events where participants can transform collectively. Perhaps Werner Erhard[13] and his *est* movement (described as an intensive, two-weekend seminar of transformation which became extremely popular during the 1970's) was among the first to disseminate this approach. Currently, a milder offshoot of the *est* movement is alive and well and going under the name *The Forum*[14]. Thousands swear by the effectiveness of such training seminars which help individuals expose, identify, become conscious of, and thereby gain control over the various patterns of communication and perception which govern their lives. The Forum, by initiating what it calls 'the work of transformation', aims to

> open a profound and continuing inquiry into the questions of what it is to be alive, to be 'human'. This inquiry produces deep, lasting and empowering results, both in people's individual lives and in their ability to contribute within the everyday world.[15]

However, by defining transformation as 'work', and designing a set method for this work, the process can become one of indoctrination into and adoption of a jargon and philosophy, rather than an invitation to invoke genuine communitas.

DIALOGUE WITHIN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES

Transformation space can also exist within and be of benefit to organizations. Since, as previously stated, western urban society is increasing multicultural and heterogeneous

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[12]Several local initiatives are described in a report printed in the March 29, 1993 issue of the Montreal Gazette (pp. A1, A5)

[13]Wakefield, D. (1994, March/April). Erhard in Exile. In <u>Common Boundary Between Spirituality and Psychotherapy</u>, pp. 22-31.

[14]The Forum workshops and seminars are run by an organization called Landmark Education International Inc., with offices worldwide.

[15]Taken from the letter of introduction which comes with the registration package for seminars offered in Montreal.

along a variety of dimensions, perhaps examples of 'cultures' which are more or less homogenous can now be found not in some remote jungle away from modern influences, but right in the middle of the urban jungle, within multi-national corporations. Taking the existence of 'organizational culture' (Schein, 1985) as a given, it is easy to see how management might consider ways of manipulating the resident culture, or at least identifying it in order to better understand how to interact with it, and what its own managerial 'leadership' role should be within it.

Beginning in the late 1940's, group methods started being employed by organizations as a means both of personal and organizational change. Selected members of a particular organizational culture would undergo group training, which would be conducted in a 'laboratory' type setting. Generally, this means that participants selected from the organization would be taken to a 'cultural island' - or what Schein and Bennis (1965) describe as "somewhere away from the pressures of day-to-day urban living, generally in an isolated comfortable hotel or conference center." (p. 12). Although the laboratory training session would be informal, delegates were expected to live-in, and keep their contacts with the outside world, family, and even their job environment to a minimum. Delegates were then exposed to a novel combination of education and therapy, where they had the opportunity to share time with each other, to explore the communication process itself, and to analyze their personal habitual roles and reactions within that process.

As pointed out by Schein and Bennis (1967) ...
[T]he removal of structure, agenda, and ground rules facilitates a *maximum exposure* of the reactions of the group members to the group situation. There is no place to hide, no agenda or set rules behind which to obscure feelings. ...[However], merely creating a situation in which members expose some of their typical reactions does not, by itself, lead to learning. In addition, there must develop a *frank sharing of reactions and feelings* and a *climate of support and encouragement* which facilitates further exposure; there must develop a *willingness to engage in genuine exploration* of group phenomena and a group atmosphere in which *experimentation* and *exploration* are viewed as positive sources of learning; there must develop a set a ground rules and a climate which permits *behavior to be viewed objectively* as data for analysis, rather than something to be evaluated, rewarded, or punished. Finally, for the learning to be fully useful to the person, there must develop some degree of *intellectual understanding* of what is happening at the emotional level.(pp. 19-20)

What was called laboratory training in the 1960's, has evolved and is referred to as *Dialogue* (Schein, 1993b) in the 1990's. Although the chosen setting for dialogue sessions can still be away from the organization, it has become more of a routine, permanent and accepted part of how the organization is managed, rather than an isolated, rare event. It is easy to draw a parallel between participating in such a dialogue session and what Turner refers to as being in a liminal stage. However, instead of merely experiencing communitas as a consequence of the liminal event, the goal becomes to consciously generate, understand, and manipulate it, and take maximal advantage of it in order for both the individual and the host organization to benefit.

Within dialogue, communitas becomes a method in and of itself - a method which boosts genuine communications and facilitates the development of collaborative thought and coordinated action. Isaacs (1993) sees dialogue as "a sustained collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions, and certainties that compose everyday experience" (p. 25). He continues to state that:

> The central purpose is simply to establish a field of genuine meeting and inquiry (which we call a container) - a setting in which people can allow a free flow of meaning and vigorous exploration of the collective background of their thought, their personal predispositions, the nature of their shared attention, and the rigid features of their individual and collective assumptions. (Isaacs, 1993, p. 25)

Isaacs's definition brings us back to the concept of transformation space (which is liminal and can give rise to communitas) as being a container within which an individual can aspire to a new level of self-organization, or a group can participate in the creation of shared meaning. It also brings us back to Bateson (1972) and his notion of multi-level communication. In a sense, dialogue generates what Bateson called 'learning III' - which is learning about the context of learning. By the fact that dialogue demands an acute awareness of the communication and/or learning process, it requires participants to find the common ground level of shared meaning. Is this not an example of communitas, but communitas which moves beyond being merely a shared state or process, but becomes the object of discourse itself? If we interject Kurt Lewin's seminal concept of 'fields' (1951), dialogue becomes an attempt by a group to create a shared field of meaning. The assumption being that conflicting fields within the same social space will create disharmony, misunderstanding, and will inhibit collective creativity. The use of the spatial term 'field' leads us closer to conceptualizing communitas as more than a process, or stage, but as an actual positioned space where individual transformation or unified, collective experience can take place.

It is one thing to organize such a dialogue between members of one level within an organization. However, when a cross-hierarchical dialogue is created - status and rank are stripped and leveled to borrow from Goffman - the effects on the organization can be profound. Schein (1989) suggests that hierarchy and authority in organizations needs to be re conceptualized in the 21st century. Although managers tend to remain adamant about retaining a role intrinsically depend on the hierarchical system, signs of change are emerging. Predictions about the future include assertions that:

> organizations will be more information based, flatter, more task oriented, driven more by professional specialists, and more dependent upon clearly focused missions. Some scholars have gone beyond our present concepts and talk of 'heterarchies' or 'multigons'. They point towards models of organization that are more like holograms, in which each part of the organization contains enough information to recreate the whole. Common cultural assumptions in an organization could be thought of as equivalent to genetic codes that permit reconstruction of the whole from any one part. Other metaphors for the evolving workplace include 'harmonies of dissimilar elements' or 'controlled diversity'. (Schein, 1989, p. 12)

The concept of a 'learning organization' is another popular model of what organizations which embrace dialogue are purported to being (Schein, 1993a; Kofman & Senge, 1993). Essentially, they are "organizations capable of thriving in a world of

interdependence and change" (p. 5). Since contemporary existence is seen as fluid and complex (perhaps it was always so, but today, since the complexity is on a global scale, this has become overwhelming) the creation, maintenance and support of rigid social roles and spaces is becoming viewed as counterproductive. Social structure must become more flexible in order for the whole system to adapt to change and the complexity of demands being made on it. In a sense, social structures can be viewed as institutionalized patterns of thought, and since these need to be increasingly dynamic, they are becoming cumbersome and unwieldy.

To complete this discussion about dialogue as an example of transformation space, it is fitting to introduce an interesting analogy about the dialogue process which was drawn by David Bohm (1994). Based on his work in quantum physics, he draws a parallel between the process of dialogue and that of superconductivity. Isaacs presents Bohm's analogy as follows:

> In superconductivity, electrons cooled to very low temperatures act more like a coherent whole than as separate parts. They flow around obstacles without colliding with one another, creating no resistance and very high energy. At higher temperatures, however, they began to act like separate parts, scattering into a random movement and losing momentum. ... When confronting tough issues, people act more like separate, high-temperature electrons. Their associations are unstable and incoherent in the sense that they collide with one another at times. Dialogue seeks to alter this by producing a 'cooler' shared environment, by refocusing the group's shared attention. When this takes place, people can spend time in high-energy interactions with reduced friction, without ruling out differences between them. Negotiation tactics, in contrast, often try to cool down interactions among people, but do so by bypassing the most difficult issues and narrowing the field of exchange to something manageable. They produce somewhat cooler interactions, but lose energy and intelligence in the process. In dialogue, the aim is to produce a special 'super cooled' environment in which a different kind of relationship among the parts comes into play. (Isaacs, 1993, p. 31-32)

Now let's look at another example of a collective entry into transformation space - one that is perhaps even 'cooler' than that generated in dialogue. By contrast, it is highly ritualized, it unfolds in total silence, the context is extremely formal, and individuality is suppressed. However, strangely enough, the communitas which is generated is largely the same.

THE ZEN *SESSHIN* (RETREAT)

The core of Zen Buddhism is the practice of *Zazen*. Essentially, it is a means of controlling one's posture and breathing to such an extent that it unleashes the power to control the activity of the mind itself - the process of thought. The aim of Zazen is to achieve what is known as *samadhi*, a state during which the activity of consciousness ceases, and awareness of time, space, and causation fall away. In a sense, this is a return to seeing the world in its pure state, without the distortions which come with the apparatus of perception (the body with its senses), and which result from the conditioning which that body and consciousness have been subject to.

> On coming out of samadhi it can happen that one becomes fully aware of one's being in its pure form; that is, one experiences pure existence. This experience of the pure existence of one's being, associated with the recovery of pure consciousness in samadhi, leads us to the recognition of pure existence in the external world too. ... To look at oneself and the objects of the external world in the context of pure existence is *kensho*, or realization. (Sekida, 1989, p. 30)

Zazen aims to reach beyond awareness of habitual patterns which affect how we perceive and interact; for instance, one's cultural assumptions, personal defensive filters and biases, emotional response biases, judgments, conditioned responses and impulses, all of which Schein (1987) suggests are core bases of misperception. The goal of zazen is, assuming there is no end to the amount of noise which affects our perception, to stop the mind game at its root. Since the various threads of consciousness emerge and find expression in a temporal realm, they are bound to be deluded by the fact that they cannot keep pace with the infinite changing variables which contribute to their making. Thus, rather than following and cataloguing these elusive, partial, and inevitably incomplete concepts as they unfold, one attempts to bring the entire activity to a complete standstill.

It is common for Zen practitioners to go on group retreats, called *sesshins*, during which they sit in Zazen for several days at a time. In unison, the group enters transformation space, and although in complete silence, they achieve a level of shared insight, communication, or communitas, which is hard to match by any other means. In a sense, the field of shared meaning is not created, it is simply acknowledged. The common ground which emerges in this case is the time and space which is being shared equally and simultaneously. Perhaps it is best to describe it from an experiential point of view.

THREE DAY SESSHIN, MONTREAL ZEN CENTER, 1994

Arrival:

> Five in the afternoon. One by one we arrive - twenty five of us. Most people seem to know each other. This is my first Sesshin - I am clearly the newcomer. We check a bulletin board - headquarters! - for the number of the room we have been assigned to sleep in, the location of the meditation mat facing the wall in the *zendo* (meditation hall) we have been given, the time of our daily allotted fifteen minutes in the bathroom for washing, and our job during the daily work period. There is tension in the air - even among the regulars - or is it anticipation?

> Apart from the above, there are other rules to abide by. You have to stay till the end of the sesshin - if three days is the official length of the retreat, three days you must stay, period!. You cannot speak from the moment the sesshin officially starts, till the official end - except during *dokusan* which is when you briefly meet your teacher for guidance, support, testing, sharing, confiding, or complaining, as the case may be. You can have no eye contact with anyone, or communicate in any manner whatsoever. You must do everything as efficiently and quietly as possible. You must clean you own plates and utensils after meals. You must never be late for formal zazen periods, and you must attend all of them. You must wear a brown robe like everyone else. You are not to look in the mirror (all the mirrors in the house have been turned towards the wall), wash your hair (this is no time for vanity), or wear

perfume (which will distract the others and call attention to you). Apart from that, you must take care of your personal hygiene in order that your personal odors do not disturb your neighbors. You must get up at 4 am. You must not read or write anything. You must practice 'mindfulness' continually, no matter where you are or what you are doing. And finally, most lethal of all (imagine the pain after sitting immobile a few hours!), you must not move at all during zazen in the zendo. As you can see, the rules are remembered at random - just the way they were in my mind, without any hierarchical arrangement in terms of importance. As we prepare for the first evening of zazen, two thoughts are abuzz in my mind in face of all this: 1. Clearly, this will be no picnic!, and; 2. Am I really, underline really ready for this?

We all lay down our sleeping bags, arrange our stuff in such a way as to know where everything is quickly, efficiently, quietly, and in the dark! Did I mention we will live in the dark, with only one little night light plugged directly into the wall socket - one solitary 'lamp' per room, you know, to illuminate the place? That shouldn't be a problem, right?

It begins:

Once unpacked, we head to the zendo to prepare our meditation mat. We select additional pillows from storage, then fluff and arrange them on our designated mat - convinced, or faithful rather, that comfort is attainable.

Zero hour draws near, and the excitement is palatable. The mood is one of preparation to embark on an arduous journey which we are not sure we will survive.

The first night, after a brief ceremony, we sit for about three hours. This is about as long as I'm used to so it isn't a problem. We sit in rounds of thirty-five minutes, followed by five minutes of what is called *kinhin*, which is where we walk around the zendo in a neat circle, one following the other. The point is to continue the practice of zazen, but to allow the body to stretch. By the end of the three hours, as always, I've slowed down considerably. My breathing is even and deep - sometimes it is so slow I feel I'm not breathing at all. A silent unity among the group is established. It's as if our individuals bodies have attuned themselves to a common frequency - one shared by the whole group. The experienced practitioners become the vessel, and the more inexperienced lean on their stillness and one-pointed concentration for support in times of need. However, that first evening, I can hold my own.

Back in the rooms, in darkness, without a word, we get ready for bed. We are four to six per room, and although we don't talk or look at one another or communicate in any shape or fashion, our common breath unites us - comforting, soothing, extremely social. We are close - intimately close. We quickly sink into sleep - pitch black - primordial sleep. This is a deeper sleep than I can ever recall - safe in retreat, the worries of our everyday lives slip out of touch. We are free to rest, to sink into the depths of our being. I disappear into the comforting embrace of emptiness.

Zazen, zazen, and zazen:

A solitary bell - one of those hand held things. It moves through space, spiraling down from above, closer, closer, then retreating into distant silence. The sound so familiar, immortal somehow, rediscovered like water quenching a prolonged thirst. Where am I? What am I doing? What century is this? Who am I? ... Then a sudden panic, and the realization that no matter what happens, I must not be late. Where does this knowledge come from? It's as if I've done this thousands of times before. Alone - everyone is already gone - I dance through the motions of morning, wrap my robe around me with surprising mastery, and glide outside, barefoot in the snow, to the zendo. Who is doing all this with such swift precision, certainty and grace?

The first morning, while it is still dark, it is hard to differentiate zazen from sleep. I actually think I am sleeping, sitting up. Only the jerks which signal my body's falling over awaken me. Slowly, with the sound of the birds, I too wake up.

By mid-day, I silently rename my meditation mat 'the rack'. One more second and I swear (forgive me!), a rocket will erupt at the base of my spine and send me up to the ceiling. One little move. Who will notice? One teeny, tiny little adjustment of weigh, uncrushing of bones, miniature spinal stretch to the left. Suddenly, "NO MOVING" erupts like thunder, and my body freezes in surprised shock. It's the monitor no doubt. Thanks! I think I can sit still now - for a while anyway.

Perhaps it is only when one considers giving up, when the battle is from moment to moment - the 'hand to hand combat' our teacher describes - that the sesshin truly begins. The moments become eternal. Each breath provides an opportunity to travel the universe of one's imagination - one latches onto anything, just to escape the eternal stillness of the moment. But, like a kind teacher, something redirects my awareness back to the moment, always returning, returning to now, returning to pain. I try to imagine that I'm upside down and gravity is not pressing me into the ground, hurting and paralyzing my limbs, but is keeping me attached to the ceiling - keeping me from falling down. I'm cheating, I know, but the momentary relief is bliss. Already, I'm sweating, and we've just started this round!

The pain ... it grows deeper and deeper till something clicks inside me. I sink into it, without trying to escape. I merge with it, accept it, love it, and then - miraculously - it redefines itself! What was agony now becomes simply heat, or some other sensation - neither good, nor bad, just there - an energy. That awakening to energy stops everything. Suddenly, I'm falling through the moment into another place - the air sparkles, my ears roar, and time stops ... then perception fades and nothing appears. For one moment, I am in eternity, but then, in total panic, each cell of the body reacts - seizes up, desperately fighting for its existence - terrified of the annihilation which looms before it.

The body's fear brings me back, back to the zendo, back to the pain, back to me. I can't make it. I'll scream. I'm sweating harder now. I'm going to leave - who needs this? I'm not a masochist. That's it, I'm getting out of here! But then, as if by miracle, the exquisite vibration of the bell signals the end of that round of sitting. Now we can walk for five minutes, actually walk, using our feet - it's bliss. Seated again, my

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confidence is restored (for three minutes, anyway, until the pain returns with a loud 'howdy!).

Strange, but only in this state of sheer agony, does the pure moment of existence unfold - each so unique, so detailed, so perfect, so eternal, yet undergoing an infinity of changes. Suddenly, a bird, a plane overhead, a dog barking - these are infinitely interesting, profound, satisfying. And then one feels it ... the others ... all listening, all witnessing the exact same present as you. The content is identical since judgments and reactions are suspended. We are one. We listen. We inhale. We exhale. Someone coughs. It is me or you? It is both and neither. It is a cough, coughing. As we rise for the next round of *kinhin* (the walking), the flutter of our robes is a symphony of exquisite beauty - are we swans, rising towards the sky, our wings playing the air beneath them to create music?

Hungry and thirsty ghosts:

Meal time: A time to ease restrictions perhaps, to relax? Far from it. You kneel on the floor, your back still straight as an arrow, you look down, you don't talk, and you continue to partake in formal rituals and observe strict rules of protocol. And yet, what a delight for the senses - it's like a carnival compared to the austere blank wall back at the zendo! You can get lost in your rice bowl - merge your consciousness with a sesame seed, worship the yogurt sauce as if it were the elixir of life itself.

Everyone seems to reach for and desire everything edible available on the table. Why? I don't know. Because it's there? It's something to do? It will miraculously extend the length of the meal? The silence only accentuates the greed fueling those hands reaching for things here and there. Then, as the ceremonial offering bowl for hungry and thirsty ghosts passes, one recognizes the hungry and thirsty ghosts within - those same energies running wild and free inside each of us without distinction.

Where is uniqueness? Each person is that self important 'I' - the hero while the rest are extras. How ridiculously deluded we all are! The sea of brown robes, rather than drowning out individually, only accentuates the myriad of universal energies which possess us all at various moments, and which masquerade as individuality when animated by the self-worshipping ego. In light of this, we are free to share in each other's strengths and weaknesses without attachment or aversion - merely witnessing them as clouds passing in an infinite sky. Each distracted action or attitude in others is easily forgiven - they are part of the possibilities which animate us all.

Work:

How infinite a job is the cleaning of a bathroom - or five bathrooms rather! So many rags and mops and cleansers and buckets and all to be carried up three floors - in silence - then efficiently applied while some, those who have jobs at other times during the day, are actually resting a few feet away! Do I feel like Cinderella? No. I feel like a dancing bear with bells on my feet, or a one-women musical band with noise makers attacked to every moving part of my body! A world opens within each minute action. To think, this is what we do at every waking moment of our lives, these thousands of motions and sounds, all linked, purposeful, all sending out ripples

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of effects across space. And to realize how little of it all we notice! We sleep-walk through existence! We miss countless opportunities to learn about, to awaken to, to recognize pure existence. The pure existence which is the ground of our collective experience.[16]

It ends, or does it?

After three days of sustained practice (this is not a long period, considering that sesshins can run for a week or ten days as well), it is over. We celebrate with a dinner at which we can talk! Funny, we were all more coordinated when silent. Now, we bump into one another, and make wuite a racket. It's the contrast, I suppose.

It is only upon returning to one's everyday life - out of liminality - that the full effect of the sesshin becomes noticeable. One is more awake to the present in all its detail. One listens and sees more and prolongs the witnessing rather than reacting indiscriminately. In a way, there is a spill over effect, where the boundary between the retreat and the return is blurred. Are they really separate? This is the question which leads one to an even deeper mindfulness as one witnesses the succession of changing moments which are life.

Finally, let's look at another example of a collective entry into transformation space, within yet another setting, and for an entirely different purpose. Here, instead of discovering the common ground of time and space in communion, one discovers the common themes of our universal human formative experience - that of the family. Considering the fact that not all persons grow up within a biological family, one can still assert that this is a universal structure in that we all spend at least part of our childhood in some human system with its particular distribution of power, responsibility, and affection. For the purpose of discussion, this too is family.

CREATING AND EXPERIENCING A FICTIONAL FAMILY

Actor training, apart from allowing individuals to explore their resources - voice, body, senses, imagination, intellect - also presents a rich opportunity for personal growth. Undertaking such training as part of a group workshop, can further amplify the benefits of the process; individuals gain from each other's learning and growth, and quickly forge a solid bond based on hours of intense, shared experience, which provides a powerful support structure. Gold (1991) has developed an innovative method of actor training - the *Fiction Family* structure - which can take such a workshop to yet another dimension in terms of the personal transformation it can afford its participants.

Gold (1991) describes the technique as follows:
> [T]he class is subdivided into groups of four to six students. Each group invents a fictional family. The members of this group give their family a name, historical background, geographical location, and identify the various family members' ages and positions within the family. Each ... [member of the family further develops

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[16]I have described the more generic practices which occur during a sesshin. There are other ceremonies and rituals which also take place. However, since they are specifically related to aspects of Buddhist philosophy, they do not relate to the context of this discussion.

their] own character by defining the character's birthplace, personal history, profession, income, religion, likes and dislikes, personal relationships to, and attitudes toward, the other family members. (p. 1)

Once envisioned, the family is launched through improvisation. The evolution of the family is dependent on the joint creativity and imagination of the group. It is common to see a clash of objectives, since each family member tends to think of themselves as the 'star', while the others are the 'extras'. The group invents and re-enacts pivotal scenes from the past, present, and projected future.

The technique allows actors to re-create the structure and dynamics of their real family, or to try a different position or status on for size. In this way, protected by the safety net of a fictional reality, they can evolve their personality beyond the constraints imposed by their own lived conditioning. New behavior patterns can be explored, and their effects on others studied. Such use of theater can be a powerful therapeutic tool for individual transformation[17]. The shy person can become assertive; the brute, gentle; the coward, brave; the fearless, vulnerable.

Taking into account Bateson's (1973) view that family systems can be highly interdependent, and not necessarily of equal benefit to all its members, one can see another advantage of the fiction family technique. In certain families, one individual can take on a role, which although self-destructive, is in some way useful to the overall functioning of the family system. Perhaps it is only within such an artificial family structure that such an individual would be allowed to explore a different role, and experiment with previously inhibited or punished modes of interaction.

Participants within this type of interactive dramatic training program can also come to understand how they contribute to the creation of their own reality by the choices they make. If one's social interactions grow uncomfortably familiar within the fiction setting, similar to the very patterns one may be trying to alter or avoid in real life, by comparing the two situations and looking for parallels, one can discern the elements of one's interpretations and projections which perhaps play a part in creating the unwanted outcome. As awareness of such patterns emerges, the opportunity to alter them becomes available. If we take Goffman's view that life is indeed enacted on a stage, a stage upon which we strategically present ourselves (1959), such a workshop empowers individuals to alter or master their performance to better meet their objectives, or to eliminate the pain or discomfort which may habitually have become a part of it.

Perhaps the best way to describe the type of transformation space which emerges as part of the fictional family actor training structure, is to share the author's personal experience as part of such a workshop.

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[17]There was an article in the Montreal Gazette (May, 1995) about Stephen Snow, a theater professor at Concordia who uses developmental drama with special populations to help individuals build confidence and self esteem. I intend to pursue this line of research further at some point.

Twenty some strangers gather in an empty space in the Arts Building of McGill University, to begin an eight week workshop. Three hours a day, four or five times a week - and that's just the official hours allotted. We all know this will be intense, and although we are too many, since everyone exhudes a tenacious commitment, Dr. Gold has a hard time reducing the size of the class.

Seated in a large circle, from the first moment, there is little opportunity to hide or remain in the background as everyone is expected to present themselves. However, since we are soon asked to warm-up and find ourselves actively shaking the kinks out of tense limbs, and releasing relaxed sighs deep from our diaphragms, we become involved with more than our minds and are at ease much sooner than expected.

After several sessions where we perform a variety of rehearsed and improvised pieces, we have gotten to know each other rather well, and can all refer to a common pool of shared experience in interacting with one another. The accumulated time we have already spent together becomes a rich backdrop which supports us as we move into new unexplored territory, and which we can draw from as we communicate with and entertain one another. Already, a bundle of ideas, jokes, and shared events travels with us, continually evolving as time goes by.

Finally, we officially begin to work with the fiction family structure. Although it is common to have groups come together by choice, in this case, groups are created based on their schedules of availability for additional informal group work. Our group has five members - three female, two male. We start by sharing our real family experience with the group. Strange - it seems that three members in our group have backgrounds which were challenging, to say the least. Essentially, several topical social issues are not strangers to these individuals. We have divorce, conjugal violence, homosexuality, drug addiction, alcoholism, terminal illness, single parenthood, inter-racial marriage and children, learning disabilities, and post divorce and re-marriage family structures which are a complicated and changing network of blood, emotional, or logistical ties. Aside from that, we are all Scorpio's or Taurus's, and the majority believe in that sort of thing. Furthermore, it seems the birthdates of group members are days apart, and also happen to be identical or similar to those of their past or current real family members. Will projections be a problem? Two of our group members are also the oldest in the class, and of the group, only one of our members still lives with his parents. We are an intense group - to say the least.

Each of the total of four groups which emerge in the class is unique. The major difference between ours and the other three is the abundance of social issues which have been reportedly experienced. One of the other three groups, in particular, stands out in immediate contrast to ours. All of its members come from happy, stable homes and have no problems to report! Our group wonders ... can this be possible? How dull, or is it that they are hiding something; we are suspicious, as 'life-experienced' persons tend to be. Already, as each group presents a summary of its collective life experience to the class, the bonding process has begun, and instead of groups, it feels as if we have tiny clans, or gangs within the room.

As we set out to create our characters, it appears that several members are adamant about having the freedom to be irresponsible within this family (to counterbalance real family dynamics, no doubt). As our characters take shape, it seems that three of us are assuming roles in contrast to our lived experience, while two take roles which appear familiar to what has been and/or continues to be lived experience. We emerge as a family consisting of a father (Julian - 45), his second wife (Natasha - 25) who actually joined the family ten years ago in the capacity of governess and maid, a set of twenty-year old twins (Dylan and Brenda), and an illegitimate daughter (Vava - 27) of the father's from the distant past, before his first marriage, who has just arrived and upset the family power structure.

As we move through the assigned improvisations which initially require conflicts and clashing objectives, we see that our family has no problem with generating these. Since three members have taken on an irresponsible, selfish attitude, there is virtually no harmony. Since my character is that of Natasha, I will continue primarily from her perspective - biased in her favor, no doubt, and influenced by my own personal assumptions and projections.

Natasha came into the family in a subordinate position, and then found a central role as wife and mother. Due to her own childhood experience as an illegitimate child (whose father remained officially married to someone else, but maintained an ongoing, secret relationship with Natasha's mother), she has a deep need for holding on to this central, respected position within the family. However, without Julian's support and acknowledgment of her status, it is difficult for her to retain the respect of the others. The twins, who were initially close to her (when she was not 'mother'), now tend to mock and resent her. And, Vava's arrival which disturbs the set family dynamics, is a definite threat to Natasha. Not only does she realize that blood ties are stronger than those by marriage, but Vava's mother apparently continues to share a deep friendship with Julian. Since Natasha won Julian with understanding and friendship, only another, older friendship, would threaten her security with regard to the relationship with her husband. The twins - self centered as they are - are upset by the arrival as well. Julian, who wants to hold on to everything and everyone, expects the family to pull together. However, he does not extend much understanding, warmth, or sympathy for their respective fears.

Vava's arrival drives Natasha into an insecure frenzy, but instead of trying to solve the situation by taking responsibility for it, she becomes increasingly hostile and emotionally withdrawn. Here we find the first opportunity for transformative learning through the role of Natasha. Having always taken a mediator role in my own family, where my own happiness was secondary to that of the others (particularly my mother), taking no responsibility is a roller-coaster ride! First of all, I expect someone to pull me back into the family (to play the role I would normally play), and no one does! The situation goes from bad to worse, and Natasha (and I!) feel cast aside, unloved, used, disrespected - not a good feeling. And, I am expected to fix this, even though it would be totally out of character to do so for Natasha, but perfectly in character for me, the actress. What a bind! But a realization emerges: What was assumed previously to be a role of 'victim' (that of family therapist and mediator), is now perceived in a different light. Instead of withdrawing from the field at the risk of no one coming after me to pull me back, by sacrificing my own needs for those of the

others, I gained a certain amount of control over the outcome of interactions! If you make yourself needed, that is a form of security, or power. Being Natasha, and not being able to resort to this in order to stay in character, becomes immensely frustrating and leaves me feeling increasingly vulnerable, powerless, and alienated.

The fact that Julian also happens to be the homosexual member of the group, does not help matters, but only amplifies the conflict. He expresses a genuine discomfort in the face of being intimate with Natasha in any way, even within the fictional setting. This certainly provides the opportunity for this actor to expand his performance repertoire (he says he has never even played a role which required intimacy with a woman) and explore novel behavior beyond the constraints of his innate tendencies. Dylan, who is played by a rather privileged young man (who actually has a maid in real life), feels no need to fix the situation at all. He fuels the conflict further, as if it were a game. Brenda comes to Natasha for comfort when Dylan is unresponsive to her, but drops her as soon as that changes. Natasha has no ally in this group at all, except for Vava, who is also an outsider, but in this Case, poses a structural threat.

At this point, I realize Vava is taking on my usual position as the soul and heart of the group - the peace maker, the one who wants to love all and resolve the conflict. However, since the actress playing Vava actually had a life experience very similar to her character's, it becomes increasingly painful for her to do so. Coming from a divorced family, having lived the experience of repeatedly arriving in new families after both her parents remarried, this is all too familiar. Aside from this, the actress's English is weak, which further alienates her since she is unable to fully contribute during improvised scenes.

Our conflict spills over to lunch, beyond the confines of the class. This feels so real - to Julian, Vava and I, anyway. Quite in character, Brenda and Dylan don't really care - they just want to have fun. The situation frustrates Julian, but he expects it to miraculously fix itself. He does not consider doing something about it himself, as in softening his detached and unsympathetic attitude, or asking the 'children' to be more cooperative. Clearly, Vava and I are having the problem, so the responsibility to solve it is ours. I try to point out that Natasha's only link to the family is through her husband; since the kids are close to her in age, they do not accept her as a mother, while being their peer is structurally difficult for her out of loyalty to her role as wife. However, due to his personal discomfort with my femininity, Julian cannot and will not draw me close (even in a fictional sense!). Furthermore, his personal experience is one of escapism, as well as being made to feel guilty for his own mother's cancer and other family problems. Thus, his instinct is not to be the responsible center, but to run away.

Unknown to us, Vava is actually taking this much more to heart than we know. A few days later, she quits the workshop! We learn that the other families secretly blame our group for this unfortunate turn of events. Although due to her limited English language skills, she was feeling increasingly withdrawn, left out, and unable to fully participate in improvisations, the fictional dynamic of our family certainly contributed to her departure. She privately expressed that our group came to symbolize Canada, in that she feels equally alienated and unprotected as a foreigner in this country! Clearly, we were moving into some dangerous territory where our performances were

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becoming more than acting, but crossed over into drama therapy. Since this was not the context, the actress felt most protected by withdrawing.

Now that she has left, Natasha is relieved, while I am feeling guilty. I feel for the actress, and empathize with her fictional role. Is this my past conditioning, since caring meant safety? Or is it genuine concern? The others seem to come to terms with it rather quickly - "she had personal problems, we can't be responsible for that" is their conclusion. Are they right? I would never be allowed to feel this way in real life - guilt would be piled on me by my real family.

I try to call the actress at home - she is impossible to reach. Miraculously, she calls me. We realize that in our approach to acting, we find it hard to distance ourselves from the role. We need to really feel what is being enacted in order to deliver a convincing performance. And, since we have a lot of past pain to draw from, this lends an uncomfortable reality to our performance. I realize I am less threatened by this experience than 'Vava', since I set out to transform - that was the goal from the start, to try on a new personality and free myself of habitual traps which have become painful and counterproductive. Vava had no such goal. For her, the transformation space offered was an unwelcome threat for which she was not prepared, and her emotional engagement rather than receiving support, became a further source of alienation. I can be my own container in this situation, whereas 'Vava' needed more support - a type of support which was out of context with the nature of the class. For her, leaving was the best protection.

The whole affair affects both Natasha and me. I am no longer as open with the others. I can feel my own boundaries better - this is what I came for, so maybe it's good. Perhaps there is less of a boundary between fiction and real life than we think. In a sense, it is all fiction. However, some of us seem to take the story more seriously than others - we are more engaged, more attached, more drawn in and tossed by the sea of experience. Others have access to a vessel - they are more protected in that they are more detached and separate. Maybe this is a good thing. That's what I want, to build a stronger vessel.

Since Vava left, our family is getting along. Strange. Life goes on - the survival of the fittest, no doubt. Our family continues on into the future, but I feel more distant. I don't expect as much from the others, since I know they are incapable of giving it. Not taking responsibility for the group was what I needed for a change. However, although no one else took up the slack, to my surprise, life goes on. There is little control of the outcome in this family, we are all free spirits who want to be happy, and who do not want others to stand in our way. So in this structure, as long as we give each other space and can hold our own, we can stay together. There is little point expecting anything from each other in terms of emotional support. In a way, this feels liberating and only accentuates everyone's freedom. The future will be jointly created, as our individual objectives weave the shape of what is to come - even though neither one of us knows what that shape will be.

I have a dream one night which summarizes how I feel about my fictional family. We are in a car. Julian is driving. However, he is going against traffic! Instead of being upset or scared, he manages to keep us from crashing head-on into oncoming cars. In

the process, the others around us crash - there are wrecks everywhere! But we keep going, not taking responsibility. This self-centeredness is the only thing we share - how utterly strange! We are free, and we are together. We are interdependent, but not dependent. Interesting, but definitely unstable. I am sure Natasha will leave this family soon if nothing changes in their attitude - the ties between us are far too superficial. They think Natasha is there because of the money - but she needs love and warmth, and a family she never had. Natasha's need for deeper emotional engagement is unlikely to be met by these individuals.

I come to realize that after a lifetime of trying to solve my real parent's marriage, it remains as flawed as ever. Maybe I wasted a lot of energy needlessly. And maybe by trying to help, I was interfering with another, more appropriate progression which may have emerged. By being self-less, I was actually being selfish because I needed the whole to continue as a whole. Maybe everyone would have been better off if it fell apart. Who knows, but considering the question opens up a wealth of previously unconsidered possibilities.

The above reminiscences are incomplete and sketchy, but they give some indication of the personal issues which were addressed as part of the workshop. The fictional family provided the opportunity to explore new styles of behavior and communication, and to witness an entirely new outcome. As a result, as a person, I grew. By finding new levels of personal expression, in a way, one is discovering the root shared humanity which unites us. In essence, we are each as 'stuck' in our respective realities; what separates us are the different reconstructions of that reality that we weave, depending on our personal perspectives. The transformation space offered within drama allows one to see the ground level which is universal, namely, that all reconstructions are merely single perspectives - partial, incomplete, ego-centric, and biased. By seeing this, our attachment to these projections can be diminished, and the quality of our future interactions with others improved, in that our openness to other perspectives is strengthened, and our humanistic empathy grows.

C O N C L U S I O N

INHERENT LIMITATIONS

Koestler (1964) argued that the reaching of higher levels of consciousness is possible under the type of conditions offered within liminal states. One can 'extrapolate' and suggest that such moments of heightened creativity or insight can in some respects transform the individual along with his or her 'contents of mind'. However, even if one is able to frequent and utilize such states, this will not guarantee that one will be transformed, that one will evolve mentally, or that one's ideas will be novel and revolutionary.

Having presented various examples of transformation space, what is consistent is that the space in and of itself does not guarantee transformation. The solitary or group 'visitor' must apply him or herself fully in order to benefit. Thus, a strong motivation must support their committment to the process. Within society, it is common to find such motivated 'seeking' individuals already occupying marginal social positions. Turner (1969) gives the example of prophets and artists.

[p]rophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, 'edgemen', who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men [and women] in fact or imagination. In their productions we may catch glimpses of that unused evolutionary potential in mankind which has not yet been externalized and fixed in structure. (Turner, 1969 p. 128).

Apart from motivation, other factors also play a part in dictating whether a visit to liminal space will be of maximal benefit. Koestler talks about ripeness, not only of the individual, but also of the collective consciousness. An analysis of history shows that certain discoveries seem to have come almost in sets across several disciplines - as if the collective field of human experience were fertile for the growth of this new set of insights. Thus, it seems that what we will call 'evolutionary maturity' is also a prerequisite for transformation.

Finally, even with motivation and maturity, the liminal period of incubation may not be fruitful if the natural defense systems operating within the individual are too powerful.

> Jealousy apart, the ... reaction directed against new ideas seems to be much the same whether the idea was let loose by others - or oneself. The defense mechanisms which protect habits against the intrusion of novelty account both for our mental inertia - and mental stability. (Koestler, 1964, p. 216)

Therefore, it is important to point out that inner constraints are as much a factor in the growth of an individual, as is the provision of a container within which to grow.

EXAMINING THE WALLS: DO STRUCTURES REALLY EXIST?

Throughout this paper, liminality, instead of being viewed merely as a state, passing stage, threshold, or doorway to a defined social position, has been presented as an actual 'position' of its own - a 'space' between social structures where transformation takes place, and where communitas is invoked. The assumption has been that if the vacuum between the boundaries is legitimated in its own right, perhaps the notion that rigid, permanent social positions exist begs reassessment. Leach (1976) points out that although in theory, boundaries have no dimension, in the world of physical reality this is far from true. Thus, while the actual nature of structures and boundaries is denied, an abstract idea is upheld. In a sense

> a boundary separates two zones of social space-time which are *normal, time-bound, clear-cut, central, secular,* but the spatial and temporal markers which actually serve as boundaries are themselves *abnormal, timeless, ambiguous, at the edge, sacred.* (Leach, 1976, p. 35)

This creation of, and attachment to, the concept of an illusory, timeless, no-man's land between states and structures, manufactures an artificial tension in that whereas a safe island is offered, it is constantly threatened by the chaotic sea surrounding it. Perhaps rather than protecting the illusion, we should be applying our energy towards rediscovering the true nature of delineated temporal, social, or material space.

Although such esoteric Buddhist notions as 'form is emptiness and emptiness is form' (Rinpoche, 1992) may be hard for westerners to grasp, there is a growing body of scientific thought which supports this assertion. One may find examples in a variety of academic disciplines - whether the 'form' that is studied is identity and self, physical

matter, or numbers. For example, one may look to the work of nuclear physicist David Bohm, which is particularly illuminating. He suggests that the nature of the core elements of physical phenomena will appear different depending on what theory animates the method of observation - they are both wave <u>and</u> particle, depending on the perspective! This insight creates a new bridge between traditional western scientific thought, and eastern spiritualism. In a series of conversations between Bohm and spiritual leader Krishnamurti, they point out that thought, which exists in a temporal framework, is limited and faulty, and actually the root cause of much of the suffering and conflict which plagues humanity (Krishnamurti & Bohm, 1985). Rather than coming to terms with the universal ground of existence, human beings remain ignorant and continue trying to meet conceptual ideals, and strive to *become* and maintain the artificial, identified, fragment which constitutes the individual, unique self. However, maybe only a state of self-transcendent consciousness beyond the constraints of both ego and temporal perception can bring about this awareness - for instance, a state like zazen, described earlier.

Kosko (1993) presents another argument to support our questioning of the validity of positioned states, and which discounts boundaries and subdivisions, but one based on logic and mathematics, or what is known as *fuzzy logic*. He argues that

> Bivalence trades accuracy for simplicity. Binary outcomes of yes and no, white and black, true and false simplify math and computer processing. You can work with strings of 0s and 1s more easily than you can work with fractions. But bivalence requires some force fitting and rounding off [and thus, is an artificial construct]. (Kosko, 1993, p. 21)

Fuzzy logic begins where contradictions begin, and presents a world which cannot be contained in distinctions of either-or. Kosko argues that it is eastern mysticism which offers the only major belief system that accepts contradictions. It acknowledges reality as not bivalent, but multivalent, and expressed within a continuum.

So what is the use of creating such artificial categories within what is, in fact, a unified field of space and time? Leach points out that this merely concentrates our energy on the differences, rather than the similarities. The price of this arbitrary stability is that the crossing of frontiers and thresholds, or any temporary marginal existence between boundaries (as in the case of the homeless, the unemployed, the mentally or physically ill, etc.) becomes a source of anxiety, one which is avoided. However, by virtue of the fact that the same ground is being subdivided, why should the focus be on the differing subdivisions rather than the root essence which is shared - the common, fluid, changing ground, or transformation space. Such a re-conceptualization lends permanence to the transforming ground, while suggesting the subdivisions are that which is changing and impermanent. In a sense, by falling through the crack, and becoming part of that which is the source of fear and anxiety, can we not in a strange way alleviate the fear and anxiety? If we stop resisting that which we avoid, and accept it willingly, we will have nothing left to run away from or fear. This is a way of living described in certain mystical traditions (Buddhist, and native american for instance) as the way of the warrior (Trungpa, 1986). It is not that the warrior is fearless, it is that the warrior acknowledges and attempts to be master, rather than slave, of what is perhaps the ultimate human fear - the fear of the true nature of self.

If life is, indeed, an ongoing process and not a succession of states of belonging and arrival, then it is the social positions we create which should be the source of anxiety in

that they are 'ground-less'. By destroying these illusory islands of stability and permanence, we are in fact finding that state which is stable and permanent - that being the changing, impermanent ground of existence, the bardo described by Rinpoche (1992). To a western mind, this may be quite a distressing proposition - a depressing one perhaps. However, Obeyesekere (1986) points out that what is called depression in the west, is accepted and even cherished in Buddhist cultures. He proposes that the cultural definition that such a state receives, either acceptable or unacceptable, will have a great influence on how it is experienced. What is dysfunctional in one culture, is utterly functional in the other. Is it possible that the only disease associated with depression, is its definition as a 'disease'? If one comes to realize that the striving for artificial security is useless, while the whole culture celebrates such endeavors, would it not make one unhappy and alienated, and make it difficult for one to relate to others within that culture?

The idea that identity and self are fluid is not new[18]. Kofman and Senge (1993) point out that "a systems view of life suggests that the self in never 'given' and is always in the process of transformation" (p. 14). And, since human beings are not alone in being in a constant state of change and renewal - all phenomena share this characteristic - perhaps "the best constructs for explaining and organizing the world will imitate life itself. [Like their creators,] [t]hey will be in a continual state of becoming" (Kofman & Senge, 1993, p. 15). Thus, a process such as dialogue, which thrives in what are called 'learning organizations', is an attempt to acknowledge and find ways of working within such a changing world. The method chosen is one which supports and generates: 1. the search for a shared field of permanent transcendent human values to which we all aspire; 2. a vehicle which stimulates and facilitates genuine communication and coordinated action, and; 3. an awareness of the world as an interdependent system, within which each individual is offered a somewhat limited view based on their own conditioning.

Murphy (1971), in his analysis of what he calls 'the human dilemma', also refers to human existence as a process of becoming and transformation. Identity or self is more a "set of potentialities, rather than ...a fixed group of characteristics (Murphy, 1971, p. 131). Basing his argument on the work of German sociologist and philosopher George Simmel, he suggests that human beings are in a constant state of conflict not only with the structures of society, but also with the fixed (or stagnant?) components of their own conditioned perspective and personality. Since fixed social structures and cultural objects take shape despite human nature which is in a state of constant evolutionary growth, the very products which emerge as a part of process of human transformation, become the obstacles to that process. The notion that dissatisfaction with this reality and depression about its constricting hold is a permanent human dilemma, is also part of Murphy's argument. Thus, as in the position presented by Obeyesekere, the point is not to try and escape, or deny this, which would only increase the discomfort and pain, but to accept it as a natural aspect of living.

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[18]The paper mentioned in footnote 1, based on the work of social theorist George Herbert Mead, deals with this issue in depth.

THE NEED FOR SANCTIONED TRANSFORMATION SPACE

This brings us back to the original question raised at the onset of this paper; namely, would the legitimation of transformation space be of ultimate benefit, or would it by definition destroy that which it seeks to generate? Based on this discussion, one can indeed argue for the sanctioning and support of such space. Not only does such a space allow for the emergence of a more 'correct' understanding of the nature of existence, but the detrimental effects of the lack of such a space are evident within society. If we are all transforming beings, then the price of denying this in terms of our well-being is immense.

Schein (1993a), in the context of organizations, points out that by creating such a space where learning is empowered, where mistakes can be made, and where judgments are suspended, and by using it systematically and frequently, one enables people to gradually learn to deal with an ongoing, often uncertain learning process which previously filled them with anxiety. At the very least, if processes of transformation were not seen as dysfunctional, but were accepted and socially valued, perhaps the real benefit would come not from the actual entrance to these sanctioned places, but from the spill-over effect they might have on our everyday life. Like after a zen sesshin, when mundane, daily life is transformed into something sacred, rather than rushing back to the constraints of one's previous perspective, one is able to prolong and sustain the deeper awareness of the interdependent, changing nature of life. Gradually, this new perspective takes root and does not need to be discovered anew, but by being celebrated at regular intervals, it evolves and is strengthened. If such minimal excursions became more commonplace, would not the grip of stagnant, illusory structures, or limiting, biased habits be weakened? In a world society which is increasingly heterogenous (in terms of culture, race, socioeconomic status etc.), where multiple career changes and the accumulation of a variety of skills might spell survival, perhaps this is the only view which makes sense!

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