

BELONGING:

Restoring Self, Soul and Spirit in an Age of Isolation

JEFFREY WOODARD HULL

PACIFICA GRADUATE INSTITUTE
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION
In

DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY

Copyright 2003

DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this work to my two moms—Lucille and Toni—for providing me with the perfect combination of nature and nurture that led to my having the ability and the desire to take up this project

AND

to Marcelo, for providing the container of love and safety that launched me on this doctoral journey, and to Judy, whose love of community, tireless partnership and creative heart flows through all the pages of this work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Back sometime in the mid 1990's, Judy and Larry Fox went on a pilgrimage to Colorado where they met and brought back East, Tom and Flame Lutes, the spiritual founders and teachers of what would become the "Old Growth" community. Not long after that, I did my first workshop with Tom and Flame, beginning what was to become a multi-year, multi-faceted odyssey into the darkest regions of my wounded soul, and into the most loving, healing and restorative group experience I have ever encountered. Having lived for thirty-five years ungrounded, frozen in the isolation of my intellect, my defended ego, and my corporate career, the arrival of this tiny troupe of amazing souls—a community of safety and acceptance and listening and love—gave me my life back.

Hence, it is only fitting that this project came about as an opportunity to give back to the community from which I have gained so much. Each and every participant in a workshop or community event has touched me in some way, whether it be through their endearing grief, sorrow or pain, with which I can deeply empathize, or their joy de vivre, their playful nature, their bountiful humor, or perhaps their stunning intellect. Being part of the NY community, I have been blessed to work and play with some of the finest people one could ever hope to meet. Many of them have supported me, or cheered from the sidelines as this project has unfolded, probably wondering all along how our little community troupe could carry the weight of a dissertation. In particular, I

want to thank the group of committed friends and co-researchers who gave their time and energy to be interviewed, probed, taped, cajoled to read transcripts and play at group art, as this project unfolded: Morgan McKeown, Julie McKeown, Larry Fox, Hugh Graham, Gordon Clark, Anne Weiss, Pat Larsen, Pat Colbert, Patricia Higgins, Serge, Katie, Dennis, Brian, Florence Magne, Jan Lichtenstein, Peter Grossman, Joanne, Judy Fox, Tom Lutes, and Flame Lutes. I love you and have tried to do you proud.

In addition, I want thank my classmates and teachers at Pacifica Graduate Institute whose keen interest in the topic nurtured me through the ups and downs of proposal writing and paperwork snafus, especially Tim Weitzel, Tamara Oxford, Alison and Maura Conlon-McIvor and Mary Watkins. And a special thanks to Xavier Roux and Kathleen Calabrese for their wonderful design and execution of our community art workshop, "Shaping Community", and for all the extra time it took to create a moving and beautiful video montage.

Finally, a special thank you to my advisor, Helene Shulman Lorenz, for her tireless support of the idea of researching community from the inside out; her patience with my ineptitude around modern versus postmodern epistemologies; and her gift for bringing the seemingly disparate worlds of feminism, liberation psychology and Jung together seamlessly.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1:	Introduction.....	8
	Review of the Literature.....	21
Chapter 2:	The Dialogues	66
	Introduction and Approach.....	66
	Tom and Flame Lutes.....	72
	Community Leaders.....	89
	Participant Conversations.....	135
	The Workshop: Shaping Community	183
Chapter 3:	Psychological Reflections.....	214
	Introduction.....	214
	Jungian Psychology.....	227
	Theories of Social Trauma.....	276
	Theories of Group Process.....	306
	Postmodern Process Theology.....	336
	Reflections on Play, Hermeneutics and Utopia..	388
Chapter 4:	A Manifesto for Belonging.....	415
Chapter 5:	Recommendations for Further Study.....	446
	References.....	454
 Appendices		
A:	Introduction to the Methodology.....	460
B:	Methodological Approach to Data Collection.....	463
C:	Limitations and Ethical Assurances.....	479
D:	Initial Categories and Foundational Questions.....	484

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1.....	187
Figure 3.2.....	194
Figure 3.3.....	198
Figure 3.4.....	203
Figure 3.5.....	208
Figure 3.6.....	212

Chapter 1

Introduction

I remember with particular specificity the first time that I thought about the power of a community to heal trauma and transform lives. It was in the first of a series of weekend workshops that were held over a period of two years with an on-going group of about twenty-five participants. The centerpiece of the workshop was an experience in which a volunteer goes “in the middle” of the entire group to work on an issue that seems to be “holding them back” in living out their goals, desires and dreams. In this instance, a middle-aged woman offered to work on her feelings of sadness and grief at reaching mid-life without successfully forming a long-term relationship. In dialogue with the group and the facilitators, she traced her relationship history back through a long and troubled series of unhappy and heartbreaking interludes that always ended with her feeling frustrated and angry with herself for not being able to “hold on to a man”.

Asked to explore how these feelings showed up in physical sensations in her body, she was able to describe painful moments in her broken relationships in terms of “tight knots in her stomach” and “feeling like her head would explode”; she recounted constantly feeling nauseous and on the verge

of vomiting. The facilitators then asked her to think back to when she had first experienced these symptoms of suffering in her early years, even before boyfriends had entered the scene. She recalled immediately that she had felt similarly when she was “molested at age seven”, but dismissed this experience as one that she had “put behind her” through years of talk therapy. It was then suggested to her that perhaps, in spite of her ability to “talk through” the painful memories of her childhood with a therapist, that some aspect of the trauma was unresolved. The facilitators asked her if she would be willing to “play a game” with the group. She was initially reluctant, but after looking around and taking in the feelings of support and safety and compassion from the rest of us, she relented.

What happened next remains a blur of powerful, enduring images: she was asked to “pretend” to be seven again, to imagine her assailant hiding behind a pile of pillows that were placed before her, and to allow the emotions—the fear, anger, rage, helplessness, and grief—that she had felt as a little girl during that horrific experience, to come to the surface. At first, even though she felt safe in the group, she had difficulty fully entering this artificial yet clearly charged scenario. However, at one point a male facilitator stood up and approached her, taking on the “act” of an assailant and bearing down on her with menace. She reacted with vehemence, even though she knew that he was actually a safe and loving teacher, erupting at him with anger and rage. He allowed her to fend him off—and through the pounding of

the pillows—she acted out her fury with the helpless abandon of a frightened little girl, fighting for her life and safety.

Later, when she had passed through this process and curled up in a ball on the floor, sobbing with grief and sadness, we all moved in close and held her, stroked her hair, and comforted her. Many of us were moved to our deepest core by what we had witnessed, resonating with triggered unconscious and repressed memories of our own traumatic experiences as children. Tears flowed and an energetic blanket of love seemed to fill the room. Time, as often happens in numinous moments, seemed to hold back from its headlong rush into the future. Finally, after what seemed like hours but was likely only a few moments, as the energy of fear, anger, and helplessness dissipated, I watched in awe as a twinkle of youthful vigor danced across her refreshed and glowing countenance. Clearly a watershed moment of transformation for her, this event remains, years later, potently alive in my memory also, as a powerful episode of catharsis, growth, and restoration for all of us who were fortunate to bear witness to her—and our—disowned pain and suffering. It represents the essence of community-based healing in action.

Soon after this event, I went to congratulate the facilitators on their work with her and to ask them what they “had done” to heal her, for I could tell that something profound had occurred. Their response surprised me, for they said that they had done little, only acting as catalysts for a healing process that she had already committed to by choosing to join the group in the first

place. In their minds, it was the community, enveloping her with love and support that had made the difference. By mirroring back at her an energy shield of safety and compassion, the community encouraged her to melt the frozen energy of the trauma and to release the pent-up emotions of anger and rage without harming herself or others.

I was at first reluctant to cede the healing or transformative power to the group, choosing what appeared more straightforward: the facilitators, as good therapists, had played the role of shamans and exorcised her demons. Yet, time and time again I witnessed—and experienced directly in facing some of my own painful memories—the moment of transformation as being directly connected to the interaction between the group and the individual. In fact, during moments of deep emotional catharsis, the facilitators would often recede into the background. It seems that the community itself emerged as the container for transformation and healing.

Over the next three years the participants in this series of workshops kept coming back together over and over again, and the scope and agenda broadened beyond workshops into social activities and retreats and a wide range of gatherings, ultimately blossoming into a fledging community. As for the female protagonist of my opening vignette, she continues to participate in these workshops and community activities with a deep commitment to her ongoing healing and restoration process. Of course, the true testament of the transformational potential of the community can be seen in the adoring eyes of her fiancé, for she is now engaged to be married, and though she still

struggles with life's challenges just like the rest of us, she is now able to engage in the deep rewards and challenges of a committed relationship for the first time in her life.

Throughout this time, as I have participated in the evolution of this communal body, a plethora of questions kept reverberating, growing and multiplying within me: Why do these people keep coming back together instead of moving on—to other teachers, other programs, and other workshops—like most people who participate in personal growth activities as “consumers”? What is it about the phenomenon of this group that nurtures healing and transformation? Is this a new form of group therapy? When does a group of people who come together repeatedly over a period of years become a community?

Of course, the term “community” is so overused in our society that it feels pejorative, on the verge of dissolution into meaningless jargon. In urban America, we are saturated with community; we belong to churches, schools, workplaces, and special interests groups that all clamor to label themselves “communities”. And, if in fact all of these may be called intentional—in that they bring individuals together around a specific agenda or purpose—it quickly becomes difficult and murky to discern what is unique about a community that calls itself “intentional”.

However, the distinction between an intentional community and these other community endeavors becomes clearer when we consider that the experience of community itself is not the prevailing theme around which

churches or schools or businesses form. The community experience, if it comes at all, is a result of some other agenda—religion, profit, education, etc.—behind which the community gets aligned. In the case of a truly “intentional” community endeavor, the experience of community itself moves to the front lines, as the *raison d’etre* for the gathering of individuals.

The phrase “intentional community” can in fact be traced back to the founding of a non-profit network of what were called “cooperative communities” back in the 1960’s. The Fellowship of Intentional Communities (FIC), still in operation today, brings together hundreds of far-flung intentional communities into a meta-community in order to share community stories, lessons learned, and community-building issues, through monthly newsletters, regional conferences, and a website. This fellowship network does not maintain a prescribed definition of intentional community *per se*, although the long list of definitions enumerated on their website do share many themes in common: small groups of people; cooperative living; land-based housing arrangements; mutual commitments to prescribed sets of goals, values, and beliefs, and so on.

In setting out on this journey with my newly formed, non-land-based intentional community, FIC’s network of information has proved helpful, but ultimately raises more questions than answers: is it possible for a community to grow and sustain itself without living communally? Can a community that is formed around personal growth and individual healing sustain itself without become exclusive and separatist? How does community-based healing and

transformation impact the greater society in which it operates? Do we risk becoming isolated—a communal version of the alienated self? Or can a group of individuals, who are intent upon healing themselves in community, be expanded into a model for cultural and societal transformation? As it became clear that I had unwittingly, yet fortunately, become involved in a unique social experiment, perhaps both evolutionary and revolutionary in scope, these questions have deepened their hold on me, ultimately solidifying into the cornerstones of this dissertation.

The timing of the birth of this intentional community, in light of the social and cultural climate in America circa 2002, would also seem to be particularly synchronistic and important. In the wake of 9/11 and the economic downturn following it, feelings of fear, isolation, and insecurity are rampant in America, and they run at a fever pitch in New York City. Amidst escalating feelings of loss and isolation wrought by burgeoning violence and astonishingly virulent and devastating acts of terror, it would appear to be no mere coincidence that people are hungry for the safety and nurturing possible in community fellowship and bonding.

A number of studies and journalistic forays into the local psyche of New Yorkers in the aftermath of 9/11 have shown a decided increase in patterns of civic involvement and community participation. (Stark, 2002, p. 12) In response to a shared experience of fear and pain and suffering, it seems that more and more people in the New York City area have joined together on their home turf to carry out the rarely noticed—but probably quite common—

communitarian agenda of volunteerism, neighborhood activism and charity.¹ Local church and synagogue membership in New York has sky-rocketed in the wake of 9/11, and community forums for dialogue around security issues, neighborhood safety, economic and social restoration agendas have re-emerged onto the front pages of local newspapers and political journals.

Is it possible that even though this phenomenon gets little notice in the globalizing coverage of CNN, we may be witnessing the incipient restoration of that other well-known and alternative figuration to the lone individual: the self as “citizen”, which is built upon relatedness, social integration, and caring for ‘other’? Perhaps, in the birth of new community forums taking place in normally complacent suburbs of places like New York City, we can glimpse the notion of a compensatory psychic movement alive in the collective. In Jungian terms, we might conceive of this phenomenon as a creative response of the human soul to dissolution, fragmentation and breakdown. As the rigidified state of the heroic American ego gets torn apart and defeated, new social structures will surely rise from the rubble. Just below the horizon of collective consciousness, not yet categorized or labeled, newly emergent forms of human organization may be in the liminal throes of infancy. Resplendent and awkward, like the beautiful but ungainly toddler who has just learned to walk, the path to future adulthood far from assured, these experiments might just hold the key to our collective salvation.

¹ See also the following articles in print: Densmore, S. (9/6/2002) “How we have changed since Sept. 11” in www.poughkeepsiebeat.com; NY Times Neighborhood Report 11/25/2001; Putnam, R. (10/19/2002) NY Times Op. Ed.; Gordon, D. (March/April 2003) “Teaching Civics after September 11”, Harvard Education Letter.

Within this framework, the goal of this dissertation has been to explore this phenomenon and its implications at the grassroots level, by going deep inside a suburban, recently-formed intentional community enterprise and participating in the building of its infrastructure, vision, values, and purpose. The Old Growth community, as it is informally called, is in the formative stages of growth and development in the suburbs of New York City. It came into existence only four years ago, as a result of a series of workshops like the one described earlier, which are led by spiritual teachers Tom and Flame Lutes. An interracial couple married for over twenty-five years, Tom and Flame have been designing and leading workshops focused on self-healing, personal growth and spiritual development for over two decades. In addition, as participants in a land-based communal living arrangement in Southern Colorado, they are particularly interested in harnessing the power of intentional community for sustaining the healing and growth practices of their work in the day-to-day world.

The Old Growth community is built around the foundational theme that rather than developing, healing, and growing as isolated individuals, all of these are possible only through the vehicle of relationship. Engagement between self and other is key, and much of the dialogue and most of the rituals and practices are focused around notions of self-reflection, candor, integrity, feedback, trust, intimacy, communication and mirroring. The thirty-five to forty on-going members (this number has fluctuated over time between a low of 25 and high of 50) of the community are generally affluent and white,

with two or three members identifying as mixed race or Hispanic. There is also some diversity around sexual orientation with approximately six gay/lesbian participants, or more than ten percent. In addition, there is great diversity around spiritual traditions and religious affiliation, and wide age range that runs between twenty-five and sixty-five. Most of the members live in what is known as the “tri-state” area of New York City and environs, although there are a few participants who come from as far away as Boston, western Massachusetts and Chicago.

Employing a participatory methodology and a depth-psychological interpretive lens, the intention behind this inquiry has been to explore the dynamic engagement of self-in-community in “real-time”—in an embodied, grounded, “live-action” context—to, in effect, see into these attempts at the compensatory and liberating cycle of transformation Jung points to as the response of soul to this period of cultural and social fragmentation. Ultimately, I have been interested in this project because I am convinced that the future of depth psychology depends on our carrying out re-configuration, restitution and restoration work around the postmodern rupture of the “self”. Without a phase-change in our perspective regarding individuality, individuation, and individualism—a broadening of the scope of what it means to be a self-in-the-world—depth psychology, as we know it, may become obsolete, a victim of practices that reinforce isolation and alienation rather than fostering that desperately needed link between the inner and outer worlds.

On the other hand, the opposite, from a Jungian compensatory perspective, may also be true: the emergence of an expanded, relational self-concept--a communitarian self—might offer us a new, post-colonial foundational archetype, thus establishing a twenty-first century cornerstone on which we may build a depth psychology capable of responding to the horrors of globalization, de-humanization and the destruction of the planet. My intuition is that the transformative power of post-modern intentional community enterprises may present an evolutionary next step for fields like depth psychology, offering a transformational, expansive move beyond dyadic therapy, towards the birthing of new forms of "cultural therapy" for an ailing world.

Statement of the Problem

This study undertook a psychological examination of the phenomenon of an intentional community enterprise, which was founded in 1996, and is currently operating in New York City and the surrounding suburbs. In a co-creative, participatory approach to the investigation, the core research questions were formulated in real-time with input from the participants/members of the community. The goal of this approach to the research was three-fold: 1. to explore the relationship between the individual and an intentional community by hearing from the members of the community so as to gather insight into the challenges, issues, and opportunities that emerge in the dialectic between them; 2. to further the goals of the community itself through participative dialogue with the individuals who are specifically committed to nurturing, sustaining and

building it; 3. To develop a theoretical understanding of intentional community building—opportunities, gifts, challenges and shadows—in a postmodern context. Based on this framework, the research findings are presented in two parts: 1. the results of the participatory, dialogical exploration of the experiences of the community members; 2. a creative/interpretive section based on a hermeneutic re-working of the research data through the lenses of depth psychology and social/cultural studies.

As a point of entry, a foundational question was: what is the meaning and purpose of this intentional community experience for you—individually and collectively—and how does being a part of the community influence and/or impact your sense of self? Specific research questions, which fell within the purview of this problem, included most or all of the following, depending upon the timing, flow and context of the conversation:

1. What is your experience of this intentional community?
2. How do you define community—as intentional, virtual, communal? What do you mean by these terms?
3. What is the meaning/purpose for you in belonging to an intentional community like Old Growth?
4. What are the practices that manifest, maintain and “build” the intentional community?
5. What characterizes the cultural environment that spawned this community?
6. Why do people join this intentional community?

7. How does one enter the community? Are all welcome? Who is excluded?
8. How do you distinguish between this intentional community and the normative community settings that you are culturally immersed in--church, state, school, and business?
9. What are the benefits and drawbacks that you experience in Old Growth in comparison with other community experiences in which you partake?
10. If an intentional community is to be truly healing and liberating, what needs to be present?
11. What is the distinction between group therapy and intentional community?
12. How does the community meet or fail to meet your expectations?
13. What could be done differently? Better?
14. How might the community fail?

Review of the Literature

In the second part of this dissertation, I explored the research data collected through interviews and dialogue in relationship to literature on community building and practice from depth psychological, psychoanalytic and cultural perspectives. The following review lays out much of the material on which the interpretive section has been based, focusing particularly on the psychology of the self-in-community as viewed by theorists and academics in Jungian psychology, psychoanalytic and post-Freudian psychology, process theology, eco-psychology, feminist and queer theory, liberation psychology, as well as social and cultural studies. The purpose of this overview is to point out some of the themes that provided questions and opportunities for reflection when I was working with the narrative texts and dialogical material collected from the community participants.

Jungian Depth Psychology

Research and writing on the relationship between depth psychology and community is still relatively rare in the Jungian literature. A search of psychological abstracts for Jungian psychology, analytical psychology *and community*, between 1970 and today, produces meager results. Jung and his followers have traditionally viewed the outer world influences of community and society with skepticism, considering these to be roadblocks along the path to individuation. Until recently, clinically focused Jungians have remained somewhat complacent in the face of a central paradox: they recognize the

formative impact of the collective unconscious as the historical, anthropological, and cultural dominion of ego-consciousness and myth-making, yet at the same time, they only reluctantly explore the impact of social context on the individuating self.

Jung himself is partly to blame, for although his philosophical writings recognize the important influence of the collective on individuation, he was himself a bit of an iconoclast, highly suspicious of communal behavior and in some sense over-protective of what he considered to be a rare jewel: the archetypal self. In fact, in his pantheon of archetypes, what are noticeably missing from alongside mother, father, divine child, shadow and the like, are archetypal images of those potent links to the larger collective: family, village, community. We can hear his ambivalence toward the collective even as he proclaims the undeniable truth of our embeddness in it: "Society by automatically stressing all the collective qualities in its individual representatives, puts a premium on mediocrity, on everything that settles down to vegetate in an easy irresponsible way. Individuality will inevitably be driven to the wall. This process begins in school, continues at the university, and rules all departments in which the state has a hand." (Jung, 1928/66, par. 240) Of course, it is appropriate to note that Jung, like New Yorkers today, was writing in the midst of an extreme period of cultural and collective dislocation, upheaval and social disintegration, as he witnessed the rise of fascism in Germany and elsewhere in Europe.

Some post-Jungians today, however, have begun to move through and tackle the apparent contradictions in Jung's work around the dialectic between

self and collective. They note that, by keeping the individuating self neatly wrapped in the intra-psychic container, the outside influences of community and society are carefully kept at bay. Recognizing that the goals of individuation may become flagrantly narcissistic and, in fact, moot, if achieved inside “apart”-ments of alienation and isolation, some Jungians have begun the project of bringing the “Self” back to the world. We can find steps being taken in this direction by 1985 when Jungian Analyst John Perry publicly articulated what was missing:

It is contended that the problems faced by society today grow out of a definition of individuality that has come to mean mere self-seeking and a democracy that has altogether lost its meaning. Immense numbers of people grow up without any sense of belonging to a community and so lack feelings of loyalty and caring. (P. 53)

Further, in the late 1980’s, James Hillman strongly advocated for the turn outward that is now becoming more commonplace in Jungian circles. His declaration that psyche’s container had become too small and myopic to be of service any longer in a pathological society woke up many in the field. In calling for a revolution in the consulting room, Hillman (1992) cleared the way for future Jungians to take up the gauntlet of social activism:

It begins with the realization that things are not right and an analysis of how they are not right—that’s the first step. And that is the job of therapy. Because therapy deals with things that are not right. It’s called dysfunction. The society is dysfunctional. The political process is dysfunctional. And we have to work on cures that go beyond *my* cure. That’s revolution. That’s realizing that things *out there* are dysfunctional. (p.218)

The irony, of course, is that Hillman has never become a mainstream influence in Jungian circles, and most analysts, although they read him, remain comfortable with the couch, a chair and a paying client. For exceptions to this

rule, we have to look even further to the edge of the circle, to the feminist, gay, and non-white fringes of the Jungian world, where writer/analysts such as Helene Shulman Lorenz (2000) dig deeply into Jung's work to resurrect his more comprehensive perspective on the inter-penetration of collective and individual forces. She reminds us that Jung was not only interested in transforming and developing the individual, but that he viewed individuation: "as a process of resistance and destabilization to collective norms that would transform both the individual and social environment." (p.231). It seems that although Jung himself was convinced that the ultimate goal of individuation was both self-serving and outward in focus, the second generation of Jungians has de-emphasized this undeniable and sacred dance between the individual and the collective, choosing instead to concentrate on the clinical applications of Jung's intra-psychic themes, such as active imagination and dream interpretation.

In retrospect, seeing how the self archetype has been reified by the Jungians who wished to extricate the individual from the collective, the work of Lorenz and others is a crucial compensatory move that Jung himself would have applauded, for ultimately, he recognized—and wrote about—the collective embeddedness of a self-in-community: "the individual is not just a single, separate being, but by his very existence presupposes a collective relationship, it follows that *the process of individuation must lead to more intense and broader collective relationships* and not to isolation." (Jung, 1921/71, par. 758) (italics mine).

More recently, Andrew Samuels (2001) takes this perspective further by articulating a call for Jungian analysts to become actively engaged with the political arena, bringing us up to the minute and pointing clearly in the direction of this dissertation project:

Whether one looks at the microcosm of an individual in a local community, or the macrocosm of the global village, we are flooded with psychological themes, often of an apocalyptic nature. Thinking about fundamentalism, nationalism, ethnic cleansing, poverty, planetary despoliation, child abuse and the war of the sexes might make one want to give up on the human psyche...In spite of this depressing litany, there are some grounds for cautious optimism. First of all, the definition of politics is actually changing. It is changing to make more of a place for psychology...The transformation of politics that I am proposing implies that outer world issues will not any more be looked at as divorced from the personal and subjective lives of the people involved. Transformative politics is also a profound form of self-expression, including the spiritual level, and it requires a new understanding of social action as part of the citizen's individuation. (p. 4, 8)

In this context, a participatory exploration into the meaning and impact of a local intentional community enterprise may provide a window through which to view this dance of engagement between individuation and civic transformation that Samuels is calling for. In a community setting where the individuals view their personal growth as inextricably tied to the mooring of community, the definition of individuation and the "separate self" figuration may undergo a radical transformation. What may in fact be happening at the grass roots level, in small, localized community containers, is the dissolving of a hardened and intractable ego consciousness—from which a new figuration—a self concept with permeable, interdependent borders rather than egoic walls of separation—may emerge.

For the bulk of this research into the relationship between the individual and intentional community, it proved to be important to delve into a broader spectrum of depth psychology and its offshoots, including cultural and social perspectives where the transformational potential of community enterprise is dealt with more explicitly: psychoanalysis and post-Freudian theory, humanistic psychology, eco-psychology, liberation psychology, feminist and queer theory, process theology, and social/cultural studies.

Psychoanalysis and post-Freudian theory

In conducting a review of psychological literature that informed this work on the evolution of the nature of self-in-community it was essential to conduct an excavation into psychoanalytic theory, for it is here, in response to Freud's writing about the forces of civilization and culture, where the seeds of most group and social psychologies were planted. Post-Freudians Melanie Klein (1975), Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) and David Winnicott (1986), although their work focused on the development of the individual self and the impact of the mother-father-child triad in particular, always acknowledged the pervasive influences of culture, community, and history (collective memory) on human development.

Sullivan especially, was convinced that the development of the individual was as much an inter-personal process unfolding between the self and its social environment as a process built upon the intra-psychic energies of internalized self-objects. He situated social interaction in the space *between* people, and

argued against self-contained individualism; his is the psychological ground upon which rests much of what is called “contextual” psychotherapy today (Cushman, 1995, p. 172). Unfortunately, at least for theories of interpersonal and social interaction as agenda items for psychology, the internalized social worlds of Klein and Winnicott won greater favor over time in American psychiatric circles. As Phillip Cushman points out in his history of psychotherapy in America, dyadic therapy in this country has generally focused upon the intrapsychic processes of self-contained individualism. (p. 161)

In the evolution of the theory of the self since Freud, psychoanalysts Erich Fromm (1955) and Wilfred Bion (1961), in particular, tilled the soil for much of the collective healing work we today call “group therapy”. Bion, in fact, helped identify the basic principles of group interaction that fostered a whole industry of healing and personal growth organizations, the most famous of which are the Tavistock groups, and more recently, the community-building work of M. Scott Peck (1987).

In his work with patients in a military hospital, Bion was one of the first therapists to try to apply psychoanalytic theory to what he termed, a “group mentality”. By modulating and varying his level of interjection, interference and interaction as leader of the group, and thus, somewhat superficially creating “leaderless” situations, he was able to discern the basic container--the collective mental activity-- that gets formed by different groups of people under different contexts and circumstances. Only by overcoming basic assumptions about the leader, the other members, and the group as a whole, does the group entity

"mature", moving beyond frustration and boredom and taking responsibility for its own success or failure as a "work group". The final outcome of this developmental process, as connoted by Bion's descriptive traits of a productive work group, is the establishment of a healthy, cooperative, growth-oriented community:

We are now in a better position to define the good group spirit that has been our aim. It is as hard to define as is the concept of good health in an individual; but some of its qualities appear to be associated with: 1. a common purpose...2. common recognition by members of the group of the 'boundaries' of the group...3. the capacity to absorb new members and to lose members without fear of losing group character...4. freedom from internal sub-groups having rigid boundaries...5. each individual member of the group is valued for his contribution...6. the group has the capacity to face and cope with discontentment...7. the group size must be three or more... (1961, p.25-26)

Bion's work demonstrates the rudimentary steps in the birth of a culture, and it is therefore an essential piece in the puzzle of the circular dynamic of the group vs. individual. Out of Bion's early observations of group process, we can extrapolate that the alienating culture in which we find ourselves, is born, and nurtured, logically enough, at the small group level. The profound point here is that *this is where it will also start to be changed*. Hence, it will be important to revisit the work of Bion and other psychoanalytic theorists who have developed theories of group dynamics, in order to tease out the essential qualities that map the conjunction of group and self. As Erich Fromm notes: "an idea must be expressed in the flesh of group feeling and action in order for it to become effective. It can be demonstrated that most ideas that have become influential

have been spread by small groups of enthusiastic adherents who impressed others by their enthusiasm and their way of living".

(1994, p. 58)

Likewise, recent psychoanalytic social theorists have picked up on the work of Klein, Winnicott and others, expanding and mapping their theories of individual loss, mourning and grief onto the emergent studies of collective or social suffering. This work, which arose originally in response to attempts by psychoanalytic therapists to work with holocaust survivors, has led to a growing literature on symptoms such as PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), that emphasize the similarities in response by both an individual and collective to extreme experiences of trauma and loss.

Peter Homans (2000), writing in *Symbolic Loss*, and Cathy Caruth (1995), in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, are in many ways finally integrating the seemingly disparate and paradoxical views that Freud promulgated in his writings about individual neurosis and symptom versus the pathology engendered by "civilization" itself. Using the individual and collective experiences of symbolic loss and trauma as bridges, these psychologists, in effect, bring us full circle back to the true implications of Freud's work: the intra-psychic and the social, the personal and the cultural, are continuous, overlapping streams of events where the work of memory and the assimilation of history are one and the same (Homans, p.13). In this context, it becomes possible to extrapolate the psychoanalytic theory of human development around

issues of loss, trauma, and suffering and apply it to community and other collective contexts.

As an example, Homans points out that clinical psychoanalysts like John Bowlby have re-worked Freud and Klein's theories of loss and attachment, shifting the emphasis away from the individual over towards the group:

...Bowlby shifted the focus of thinking about attachment away from the individual and in the direction of the group. The loss of an attachment is the loss of a social bond. That means that loss is first and foremost loss in the realms of sociality or community. And that in turn suggests that loss and mourning (and by implication, memory as well), are—first and foremost—about loss and gain in sociality and community. (Homans, p. 33)

This move towards recognizing the impact and influence of the “other” on the individual's perception of self has been evident in theories of childhood attachment to the breast, the mother, the parents and so on, who have always been “other”, yet the connection between this mirroring process of attachment and loss and community, has only recently become part of a larger notion of identity formation in the psychoanalytic literature.

Kai Erikson (1994) is perhaps the most explicit post-Freudian to map the vicissitudes of trauma and loss from the individual to the community, arriving at a specific definition of collective trauma:

By collective trauma...I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with “trauma”. But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective support and that an important part of the self has disappeared...”I” continue to exist, though damaged and maybe even permanently changed. “You” continue to exist, though

distant and hard to relate to. But “we” no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body”. (Erikson, in Homans, p. 28)

This expansion of Freudian theory reflects a re-working of psychoanalytic theories of trauma that, again in response to work with Holocaust survivors and subsequent work with Vietnam Veterans, has forced therapists to ask themselves difficult questions about how human beings, born into a Western cultural milieu of individualism and isolation, respond to extreme traumatic events. It seems that the nature of repression—the inability to assimilate events into consciousness—works similarly in a collective context to what Freud discovered as a regulatory defense mechanism in the individual. The key to healing the inter-psychic wounds of catastrophic loss and suffering associated with collective trauma is likewise found in the ability of an individual—or a group—to access and bear witness to their own repressed and repudiated memory. For this restoration work to take place however, one needs access to a lost narrative that the individual/group has defended against in order to survive—in effect, to access the unknowable, the impossible:

Since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time. If repression, in trauma, is replaced by latency, this is significant in so far as its blankness—the space of unconsciousness—is paradoxically what precisely preserves the event in its literality. For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence...It is the fundamental dislocation implied by all traumatic experience that is both its testimony to the event and to the impossibility of its direct access...it is not only the moment of the event, but the passing out of it that is traumatic; that survival itself, in other words, can be a crisis. (Caruth, p. 8-9).

In light of recent events in American life—the Columbine massacre, Oklahoma City bombing, destruction of the World Trade Center—this expansion of psychoanalytic theory to encompass collective trauma proved to be particularly relevant for an investigation into the healing potential of emergent forms of community like the Old Growth group in New York. As traumatic events become more common in American society, psychoanalytic theories of social suffering point to the essential ingredient of “witnessing” or sharing testimony—bringing to consciousness hidden and seemingly lost individual and collective narratives of pain and grief—as a powerfully effective path towards healing and restoration.

In this context, this literature provided a basis for exploring the following questions within the interpretive section of the dissertation: what are some of the unconscious motivators for the formation of small, localized intentional community groups? How might issues of collective trauma and shared suffering be relevant and/or meaningful to the desires and goals of those who are building these community containers? Is our social world in a “crisis of survival”? How might community be a crucial pathway towards resurrecting the dissociated and traumatized self?

Key to this exploration process was to discover whether these themes of loss and trauma and collective restoration are applicable in this context. As such, the inspiring work of cross-fertilization being carried out by psychoanalytic depth psychologists like Homans, Caruth and others provided rich soil in which

to dig beneath the surface of the relationship between the individual and his/her intimate community circle:

Currently, studies of collective mourning tend to examine large group formations such as the nation-state, the church, and the like, while using evidence drawn largely from close studies of individuals. I think more attention should be given to what I would call “intermediate social structures” or “social structures of the middle range”—for example, movements, generations, cohorts, and political parties. These are social structures that take shape and exist “between” individuals and institutions and in them, individual and collective factors, and especially the interplay between them, are more observable. (Homans, p. 29).

Humanistic Psychology

As an extension of psychoanalytic theory grounded mainly in the work of Erich Fromm and Abraham Maslow, early humanistic psychology was as equally committed to keeping a “self-focus” as depth psychology. It has been mainly associated with the psychologies of human performance and self-actualization. Yet in designing workshops, retreats, and encounter groups, as containers for the growth of the individual, humanistic psychologists have, perhaps unwittingly, been at the forefront of utilizing community as a tool to carry out their individualistic agenda.

We can look to community or at least group-based forums like Michael Murphy’s Esalen Institute, Werner Erhard’s EST training (now Landmark Education), and a plethora of self-development/growth/healing groups—Justin Sterling’s men’s and women’s groups, the Institute of Noetic Sciences, the Nine Gates Mystery Schools, Diamondheart—as examples of how the humanist

psychologists have forged a synthesis between self-development and communal engagement.

Michael Murphy (1992), for example, has written extensively about the healing power of group engagement at his transformational community center, the Esalen Institute. Esalen, perched on the edge of the Pacific near the frontier city of San Francisco, where the communal “love generation” of the sixties was born, has been very successful as a setting for experimental group encounters and communal therapy. It continues to thrive and spawn offspring around the U.S. like The Open Center in New York, and the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, New York.

In many ways, Murphy and the other supporters of this on-going collective container for soul-work have been the incubators for the birth and nurturance of local intentional community endeavors like the one I have investigated in New York. The essential difference, however, is that the group encounter/workshop format is a one-off experiential form of community, not an ongoing, sustained commitment of a particular group of individuals to a particular community endeavor. In this sense, humanistic psychology has often fostered more of a consumer-based approach to community, where the individual is invited to partake of community as a consumable “item”.

In contrast, the Old Growth community, and others like it, is attempting to grow beyond the foundational experiences of workshop formats and develop a deeper, more formalized container for social action, individual and collective healing and transformation. However, since they have chosen not to move into

a communal living arrangement, the Old Growth participants need to clearly understand this distinction between ad hoc community “retreats” and the building of a sustainable community. In this context, endeavors like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), probably the largest community-based healing program in the West, offer essential historical and social material for exploration of this issue.

Perhaps the best known and most successful example of a non-land based group healing project, AA has proliferated into a vast array of addiction-recovery and support groups worldwide, all of which consciously promote the community aspect of the work as an essential, core element of healing and growth. Today, in various therapeutic offshoots of the AA model and program, the community aspect of these recovery circles is becoming more important than ever:

Authentic Process Therapy (a form of addiction recovery) is a community-based individual process by which we learn to dissolve internal barriers to wholeness and complete recovery...In this process, we learn to connect with others and with our environment through healing community. Recovering people represent a community. We share a common culture that needs to be understood, respected and honored. Each participant brings with them the intention to begin a process aimed at fulfilling complex needs. Shared intentionality means that individuals join in community with express intention to heal.” (Picucci, 1998, p. 31)

In effect, what is emerging in this expansion and mainstreaming of support communities, may well represent a broader and deeper cultural phenomenon; one in which the ever-widening circle of “self-help” begins to encroach upon just about everyone in our over-addicted society. Is there a hidden message here? Certainly, post-Freudian psychologists like Homans would note the similarities in spiritual restoration groups like AA and the

collective witnessing processes being carried out by holocaust survivor groups, or groups of Vietnam vets. In each case, isolated “victims” are recognizing and taking action to accept, integrate and reconcile their personal experiences of symbolic loss and trauma with those of the collective. It is in this outward movement—towards the world not away from it—that the dissociated individual seems to discover the path toward healing and redemption. Addiction support groups, then, are a communitarian response to a culture of dissociation (as intentional community endeavors may also prove to be). They represent the rise of collective soul-work, emerging from the pathological depths--of despair, depression, and lost hope.

Eco-psychology

The field of eco-psychology is a recent offshoot of depth, humanistic, self, and feminist psychologies. The main concern of these psychologists is that as a society we must wake up to a sobering fact: the long ignored and dismissed container in which all human activity is conducted, the earth, is very sick. Eco-psychology is a direct response, if for now from the margins, to the ideologies of a separate self concept that, as was pointed out by Philip Cushman in his history of the self figuration in America, has become culturally ubiquitous and hegemonic in the fields of psychology and psychotherapy. People like David Kidner (2001), Theodore Roszak (1995), David Abrams (2001), and Elan Shapiro (1995) are beginning to re-build the psychological bridge connecting the

individual to the family, family to the clan, clan to the community, and community to the earth.

This call for remembrance and reconnection has a feminine, nurturing, inclusive ring to it. It involves our beginning to hear again the voices of the long repressed and de-animated natural world; it involves waking up to the truth of humanity's inextricable interdependence with and dependence upon the environment we call home; it involves restoring the dialogical balance between self and other by honoring the value of diversity and difference within a human community that has fallen victim to homogenization and globalization—at least in American culture.

Perhaps most importantly, as a reference point for the work of this dissertation, the work of eco-psychology is down-to-earth and localized in its efforts to break down the walls of separation between the isolated individual and the communities of “others”—people, nature, animals, etc.—with whom we live. In this sense, the New York Old Growth community is engaged in an eco-psychological activity as it attempts to bolster the strands of connection that have been severed between people in an urban community.

The work of the eco-psychologist is communitarian soul-work at its deepest core, as we can hear in the words of one of its strongest advocates,

Elan Shapiro:

Whenever I introduce a conscious psycho-spiritual dimension to restoration work, I acquaint people, implicitly or explicitly, with the eco-psychological concept of an “ecological” or “connected” self. Such a self expands beyond our human-centered conditioning and sense of being split off and separate, in order to engage intimately with other species,

culture, and people, as well as with places. To live in a relationship way requires a gradual opening to broader more permeable boundaries. In my work, I attempt to facilitate this transition from the isolated individualistic self that our culture reinforces to one whose boundaries are fluid enough to allow for both creative individuation and intimate connection. (p. 235)

Within the framework of eco-psychology, I asked the members of the Old Growth community to consider the applicability of the concept of “restoration” to their engagement with each other and the surrounding environs of New York City and suburbs, by posing these questions: what is being restored? What are the linkages between the “selves” in Old Growth and the larger communities in which the members participate? What responsibility do Old Growth members have for restoring and/or building these linkages? At risk here, is the possibility that even within the community container of a small, localized group, an individualistic, separatist—and ego-based—consciousness may remain, either overtly or covertly, in charge. The key issue is noted in the quote above: how does the community enterprise ensure that it continues to open, encourage and foster more permeable borders between self and world?

Liberation psychology

Born of the recent marriage between the political and social criticism of Paolo Freire (1970, 1989) and the activist psychologies of Ignacio Martin-Baro (1994) in Latin America, Mary Belenky (1997), Mary Watkins (2000), J. Scott (1990), and others in the U.S., liberation psychology is first and foremost a political undertaking; it is concerned with the issues of power, domination and

oppression. Liberation psychologists want to turn the mainstream discourse of human development upside down and ask questions like these:

Have we ever seriously asked what psychosocial processes look like from the point of view of the dominated instead of from that of the dominator? Have we thought of looking at educational psychology from where the illiterate stands or industrial psychology from the standpoint of the marginalized? What would mental health look like from the place of a tenant farmer on a hacienda, or personal maturity from someone who lives in the town dump, or motivation from a woman who sells goods in the market? (Martin-Baro, p. 28)

Of critical importance to the liberation psychologist is the voice from the margin. Many of these psychologists have worked closely with people in depressed and impoverished settings where the universalizing nature of psychological themes seems inappropriate, colonizing, even condescending. To speak of these individuals as isolated selves with neurotic complexes resulting solely from early childhood trauma completely ignores the social, the economic and the cultural contexts of poverty, discrimination, subjugation and social stigma. In many ways, liberation psychologists lead the field in arguing that all selves are communitarian selves. In fact, we can see the building blocks of my thesis being formed in the words of Paulo Freire:

I don't believe in self-liberation. Liberation is a social act. Liberating education is a social process of illumination...Even when you individually feel yourself *most* free, if this is not a *social* feeling, if you are not able to use your recent freedom to help others be free by transforming the totality of society, then you are exercising only an individualist attitude toward empowerment or freedom. (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 109).

For psychologists not to see their clients' pain as contextual, as the result of being a self-in-the-world, is just a form of collective denial. By not facing the need for healing at the margins of society, psychologists may remain in the

mainstream, but they are also silently aiding and abetting the on-going repression of the shadow elements of patriarchal capitalism. Liberation psychology has been an important source of research material for the exploration of what is essential in the nature of a truly healing and “freeing” community enterprise. As Mary Watkins poignantly explains, only by enfolding the voice of the “other” into our theories of individuation can we save depth psychology from becoming lost and disconnected from the world:

Liberation psychology argues that psychological work within a group is necessary for the development of critical consciousness. This difference between individuation and Freire’s “conscientization” is central to understanding what liberation psychology can contribute to depth psychology...Liberation psychology links interior with exterior, shifting the focus to community and inter-relatedness, from “Self” to “the other”, underscoring the self’s encounter and treatment of the other...(p.215-216)

Feminist and queer theory

It would probably not sit well with either queer or feminist scholars to lump them together, but for the initial goal of scanning the literature for theory pertaining to the self and self-in-community, these two perspectives overlap. In the past thirty years the rise of feminist theories of the self, or better, the rise of feminist counter-theories of the self, has placed the shadow of the normative, patriarchal, monolithic self-concept in full view. Feminist theorists have pointed out that, with few exceptions, what is typically being described in connoting an identifiable self-concept in the Western framework, is a culturally constructed reference point based on the dominant purview of the Euro-American, white male. If one looks under the covers of most psychological theories of the

twentieth century, in fact, we find a hetero-centric, masculinized sense of normativity, an ontological and epistemological framework of human identity built on foundation stones of a Judeo-Christian and Cartesian-Newtonian values: logical empiricism, subject-object duality, patriarchy, colonialism, hetero-normativity, heroic and salvational mythos, and most importantly, woman as “other”.

Feminist theorists, followed closely by their queer brothers/sisters, have pointed out that from within this discursive box of subjectivity, there is no place for an embodied feminine subjectivity, or for the homosexual lens on truth, to stand, except as pathology, or symptom. Yet, with the rise of a distinct feminine perspective on self, other, relationship, community, and culture, the patriarchal, monolithic framework of selfhood is being challenged and torn apart. In postmodern theory, the self fragments; it loses its heroic sense of unity and separateness and is forced to reckon with the voice from the margin. This breakdown of the hegemonic masculine archetype—even from which Jung has not been immune—has far-reaching consequences for any study of self as embedded in and interpenetrated by intentional community, for the diverse and urgent energies of the non-dominant mythos—the minoritarian view—can no longer be ignored.

Recent books by feminist scholar Rosi Braidotti (2001), queer theorist Jose Esteban Munoz (1999), and psychologist Edward Sampson (1993) take up the gauntlet of de-construction of all the pervasive normative forms of self that dominate Western discourse. In her book, *Nomadic Subjects*, Braidotti takes a

radically political stance with regard to what she considers to be the ongoing oppression and subjugation of the feminine self-concept by the omnipresent phallo-centric and logo-centric lens. We in the west live in a culture bound together by an architecture of understanding and vision that is permeated with Cartesian, Kantian, and Freudian views of subjectivity, ways of seeing and being that privilege the heterosexual, masculine attachment to and identification with a universalized concept of self: autonomous, logical, rational, heroic, procreative, isolated. In contrast, Braidotti, in trying to honor a newly emerging, poststructuralist feminine perspective, calls for the subject—the self—to withdraw, at least metaphorically if not literally, from the normative landscape of homeland myth—“truth, justice, and the American way”, for example—and to navigate the rivers of subjectivity from a nomadic, unattached, fluid and relational perspective. Her foundational theme is not just theoretical, however, for she pushes for an enactment, a political demonstration of movement across disintegrating and disingenuous borders of exclusivity and inclusiveness: “as an intellectual style, nomadism consists not so much in being homeless, as in being capable of recreating your home everywhere”. (p. 17)

Likewise, Esteban Munoz, writing in *Disidentifications*, describes a similar line of demarcation, a geographic borderland of nomadism in opposition to assimilation for the emerging selfhood of the non-white lesbian and gay minority. By studying the artistic performances of poets, musicians, and actors, all of whom identify as non-white, non-heterosexual forces of racial, cultural and spiritual diversity, through a political lens, Munoz, much like James Hillman,

“sees through” their performative engagement as a form of *disidentification*, a deconstruction, and de-valuation of normative subjectivity. His performers are political subjects, re-imagining themselves on the landscape of theater, de-claiming their attachments to “traditional” heterosexual value systems and consumer, late capitalist de-humanization. In their radical engagement with the “other”, that is the normal world as audience, they are re-defining themselves as subversive agents of transformation, presenting a mirror to the world that reflects the shadow of Western culture and ideology shorn of secrecy and taboo and pathology, recreating, live-on-stage, a new geography of what’s normal:

The version of identity politics that this book participates in imagines a reconstructed narrative of identity formation that locates the enacting of self at precisely the point where the discourses of essentialism and constructivism short-circuit. Such identities use and are the fruits of a practice of disidentificatory reception and performance. The term *identities-in-difference* is a highly effective term for categorizing the identities that populate these pages. (p. 6)

The importance of these dis-engagements, radical departures so to speak, from the traditional academic and psychological discourse on self and identity, cannot be underestimated: they explode the fragile fantasy of a “self-contained self” into a thousand shards of possibility. Unlike their de-constructivist brethren who decry the end of the self but can only see a cybernetic replacement—if it’s not white, straight, male, and all-powerful, then it must be an alien, a “world wide (white?) web” from cyberspace—the rise of subversive, creative, imaginal agents of hybridity, moving through the landscape as nomad, gypsy, and poet, is a deeply empowering signal that soul is emergent. This figuration of the self as communitarian, as multi-faceted, rich in

pluralism and diversity, receptive and reciprocal with all former “outsiders”, is refreshing.

What is interesting about the radical feminist and queer stance, is that it calls for the marginalized subjective self to separate from involvement and identification with traditional—read: corporate, globalized, heterosexual, hierarchical, conservative, Judeo-Christian, pseudo-democratic, etc.—community enterprise, to be supremely wary of assimilationist subjugations, and to denounce the distanced, inferiorized, and muted escape route called “exile”. Rather, they declare forcefully the *negation of normativity* and replace it with nomadic, relational, fluid and hybrid “communities-of-difference” (my term). This position, taken to its logical conclusion, would either result in anarchic disintegration of tribal connections on all levels—community, family, culture, geography, etc.—or as Braidotti hopes, will result rather in a “post-humanist view of subjectivity” that allows for and encourages the re-building of communities with diverse and multitudinous value substrata that will honor the pluralism and heterodoxical nature of humans whether together and apart:

I see feminism today as the activity aimed at articulating the questions of individual, embodied, gendered identity with issues related to political subjectivity, connecting them both with the problem of knowledge and epistemological legitimation...the central issue is the interconnectedness between identity, subjectivity, and power. The self being a sort of network of interrelated points, the question then becomes: by what sort of interconnections, sidesteps, and lines of escape can one produce feminist knowledge without fixing into a new normativity? (p.31)

This lens on subjectivity, and the migrational movement of the marginalized selves among us—homosexuals, non-white, non-male—away from

assimilative mainstreaming, towards a fluid deconstruction and restoration from within, points to an exciting aspect of what may be possible in localized, heterogeneous and diverse intentional community models. Long in coming, the liberation of the ghetto-ized marginal other, running parallel with the emergence of minority-led community endeavors that are participatory and non-exclusive, points to a transformational healing possibility in a world dominated by white Anglo-Saxon—and other orthodox—universalisms. The fragmentation of the unified self-concept, if carried out in parallel with the birth of new communitarian containers for a pluralistic psyche that welcomes all comers, could be the foundational shift required to move depth psychology—and all the psychologies—off the road to irrelevance and on to the path of community-based healing.

Given the feminist, post-structuralist context described above, the work of Edward Sampson (1993) in *Celebrating the Other: a Dialogic Account of Human Nature*, is particularly relevant for purposes of an investigation into the impact and meaning of intentional community. Sampson takes the de-constructionist stance to its farthest extreme, positing that all of our figurations of self-other-world are largely constructed through the dialogical nature of human conversation and relationship. Reality, according to Sampson, is built from the ground up between people—in the inter-psycho landscape of language and dialogue—such that the most powerful transformational tool that humans have available to them is dialogue:

What is essential about human nature is to be found between people in a social dialogue, talk, conversation, debate, and so forth, and not in the inner recesses of an individual abstracted from these ongoing transactions. To focus on conversations is to reject the self-celebratory monologic view that has dominated most thinking about human nature, knowledge, and understanding. (p.21)

This viewpoint is a powerful reinforcement of the validity of the core principles of most intentional community enterprises—a commitment to conscious speaking and listening—as tools for fomenting change and restoration.

Sampson agrees wholeheartedly with feminist perspectives like those of Braidotti and Esteban Munoz, but he takes the logic one step further, positing that the monological, monolithic, and masculine rubric of Western discourse cuts off the wings of any co-creative dialogical butterfly before it can take flight. The hegemonic “view from nowhere” (“just the facts, m’am, just state the facts”), which retains its powerful hold on the American cultural landscape in the language of science, politics, business and social interaction, reflects a God-like universalist view of reality that is anything but a perspective “from nowhere”, it is specifically a patriarchal, Caucasian, euro-centric lens, which maintains its power and dominion over discourse, cutting off the circulation, the breath of plurality, diversity—of life itself.

Process Theology

Just as the feminist and queer voice cuts like a knife through the hegemonic monism of “normalcy”, recent process theologians have broken through the Cartesian barrier of isolation and unification in the spiritual realms as

well, positing a radical shift away from the self/ego, self/godhead, self/world dichotomies towards a more participative, fluid, and creative confluence of the transpersonal and personal realms of experience. This transformation of the perennialist claim that all roads lead to one God, comes from a diverse set of voices, Charles Asher from depth psychology and process thinking, Chris Bache from consciousness studies and psychedelic experimentation, and Jorge Ferrer, from transpersonal philosophy, just to name a few.

Asher (1993), writing in *The Communitarian Self*, for the post-Jungian journal “Spring”, tackles the fallacy of the static, separate Self archetype and declares Jung’s foundational concept outdated and tainted with reformation religious overtones. Interestingly enough, Asher’s rejection of Jung’s self concept is based on the same ontological and epistemological frustration we see emergent in the feminist and queer theorists above. The self, or God, as some sort of ultimate reality, posited as a singularity, that is separate, unattainable, yet all knowing and somehow, illogically, loving, is based on the flawed fantasy to which many have been attached since the time when Descartes declared the final split between self and world: God is out there, and we are left, well, here, alone, but—he is a loving divinity. The route to spiritual transcendence, towards wholeness and individuation then, becomes a solitary, depressing path—heroic, masculine, normative, and “accepted” notwithstanding—towards an unreachable goal.

Even Jung, as with his interjected commentary on the importance of community relatedness, saw through the paradox in this endless battle between

self and God: "...man is indispensable for the completion of creation; that, in fact, he himself is the second creator of the world, who alone has given the world its objective existence". (in Asher, p. 84) However, as Asher points out, Jung is only attempting to mitigate his own theory's oppositional stance, whereby God and self remain wholly separate and unreachable to each other; he does not willingly discard it altogether. Process thought is Asher's fallback position, taken from the metaphysics of Whitehead, in which the ontological shift is away from self and God as static concepts of being, towards a fluid dance between partners—a becoming.

In the context of process thinking, the psychic motion of individuation is given a participatory container, in which the move towards transcendent connection with the ineffable becomes a two-way process of interrelatedness: as we individuate, so does God. In making this ontological shift towards life as process, as interrelatedness between moving bodies of agency and affect, Asher raises the volume on the self and God, bringing in a symphony of split-off voices, from therapy, community, culture, the world. For Asher, the process of individuation is a creative movement of communal interpenetration:

I have suggested, as have others, that the power of God is the expression of responsive love, which is sensitive to all of creation enhancing individual and communal relatedness. Our lives participate in this communal self. We are meant for "communividuation". This image of God or ultimate Reality is the power-to-be, to enable others to be, to support social being and becoming in process. (p.97)

In his interpenetration of transpersonal, process and Jungian theory, Asher has re-connected Jung with the inter-psychic processes of community

interaction, and provided one more lens, as in liberation psychology, through which depth psychological theory may be rejuvenated and re-interpreted with a eye towards bringing the isolated self back into the world. His work, and the concept of “communividuation”, represents another hermeneutic doorway through which this research has been interpreted.

Likewise, in the writing of Chris Bache (2000), in *Dark Night, Early Dawn*, we find a similar breakdown of the unitary ego/self trying desperately to attain an understanding, an experience, and a connection with the transcendent object. His journey ends up in a similar participatory, communal landscape as Asher, although his vehicle for the ride, psychedelic drug therapy, is dramatically different. The experience of the transcendent, while journeying intra-psychically with psychedelics, seems to mirror, at jet speed, the alchemical process of dissolution, disintegration and restructuring of the ego, claimed as the path towards wholeness by the Jungians. In fact, according to Bache, the experience of non-ordinary states follows a road downward, deep into the psychological and personal wounds of childhood and birth, only to emerge from the dark shadows of repression and oppression and alienation, into a field of unsurpassed interconnectedness, a planetary web of relatedness, that he describes as direct apprehension of God.

But this experience, much as Asher predicts, is not, even if held in the container of the body/psyche, a stopping point of unification or merging with one God, or an objective psyche. It is rather a dissolution of the self and of God, a merging of the two in multiplicity and unparalleled diversity; it is a communal,

interactive flow between the intra-psychic and inter-psychic and transpersonal realms of humanity and spirit: I am in the divine; the divine is in me. Bache's experiential data foment the theoretical constructs of multiplicity and diversity and movement and creativity that Asher, Braidotti, Esteban Munoz, Sampson and others are pointing to: the depth of connection with God, as experienced in non-ordinary states of consciousness, is an experience of wholeness, but it is also much more:

On the one hand, the self is being emptied of its private existence. Everywhere it is touched, our supposed separateness dissolves into fractal patterns of mutual participation. And yet in being emptied, the self is also being refined and transposed. As it dissolves, it is simultaneously elevated into altogether new modalities of experience. (p. 258)

It seems there is always something more—something beyond unity and wholeness: constant becoming and creating.

This radical shift, not just away from, but leapfrogging over the duality of subject-object, self and God, towards creativity, hybridization, and partnership, brings us to what may be a pinnacle work of transpersonal psychology at the turn of the millennium: Jorge Ferrer's *Re-visioning Transpersonal Theory* (2002). Ferrer's thesis and his exhaustively detailed description of the evolution and devolution of transpersonal psychology that brought it about puts a stake in the heart of the vampiric myth of monotheism. His desire is to re-frame, like Asher, the place of humanity in the scheme of our spiritual wanderings, to place (hu)man back into the arena of a diverse, and ever-changing panoply of the divine.

He spends most of the book debunking the legitimacy of claims of all modes of transcendentalism to any sort of hegemonic validity, for as he demonstrates, all of the world's religions that claim hold on the one, true path to the "all", as a separate, dis-embodied entity, fall victim to the subject-object duality of Cartesian epistemology. Likewise, their claims falter in the Kantian idealist quagmire of "structures of understanding" that determines the divine to be reachable only through mediation or structural processes of the mind—meditation, visualization, interpretation, discourse, scripture, fantasy—all of which are distinctive hermeneutic modes of ascent that prevent what may be our true aim: unmediated connection with the divine.

In a participatory cosmos, human intentional participation creatively channels and modulates the self-disclosing of Spirit through the bringing forth of visionary worlds and spiritual realities. Spiritual inquiry then becomes a journey beyond any pre-given goal, an endless exploration and disclosure of the inexhaustible possibilities of an always dynamic and indeterminate Mystery. Krishnamurti notwithstanding, spiritual truth is perhaps not a pathless land, but a goalless path. (p.157)

What is key here, for the purposes of this dissertation, is to discover in the disparate worlds of process theology, Jungian spirituality, and transpersonal psychology, that the severed connections between the divine and the self, self and the community, are being surgically sutured, re-woven together into a fresh fabric of pluralism and diversity. A newly emergent web of interconnectedness, brought down to earth in the guise of "a participatory turn" (Ferrer, p. 100), aligns perfectly with the theme of the dissolution of the monolithic concept of self, and the emergence of a new communitarianism, born of diversity and relatedness, not held static and separate from God, self, or other. In these community-based

containers, nurtured on the local level, seeds may be planted for a new form of cultural interaction, in which individual and social agendas align, nurture and grow together into a post-modern forest of health and well-being.

Social, Cultural, Anthropological studies

Even though this dissertation fundamentally employed a depth psychological perspective on the interplay between the individual and an intentional community, it was important to overlay my interpretations with the additional trans-disciplinary lens provided by social and cultural studies of community-in-action, for much of the compelling research available in the complimentary fields of community activism, social restoration, cultural critique and political “science” was to be found in the works of sociologists, cultural historians, critics and anthropologists. However, given the plethora of works that fall under this umbrella we might call “community theory”, the following represents a preliminary survey at best.

In sorting through this wide range of material, I divided, admittedly somewhat arbitrarily, the literature into a rough schema of four categories: 1. works that focus on the philosophical and psychological linkages between the individual/self and the community/tribe in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; 2. works that focus on on-going intentional community experiments in North America and Western Europe, their successes and failures, and their impact/influence on the greater society; 3. works that focus on the sociological and psychological dialectic between the individual and the collective in post-

industrial European and American settings; and, 4. broad-based sociological surveys of current trends in cultural, institutional, and localized community activism in post-modern American and Latin American societies.

In the first category, a rich and varied perspective on community can be found in the works of anthropologists and ethnographers who write about and explore the dynamic interplay between communal and individual identity in the few remaining tribal cultures of Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia. In the work of Malidoma Some (1998), Alberto Villoldo (2000), Jean Liedloff (1975), Sobonfu Some (1997), Marina Roseman (1996), and Victor Turner (1966), it is immediately evident what gets lost when we take up the banner of a Westernized, universal concept like “the separate self”: the notion of the interpenetration of self-in-tribe/village/community, which is often evoked as a spiritual felt-sense of communion---immersion, inclusion, belonging. In the tribal contexts of the Dagara in Burkina Faso, the Yequana in the Amazon, the Inca in Peru, and the Temiar in the Malaysian rainforest, among many others, self-in-community and the individual self as concepts are either not distinguished or are tacitly considered to be one and the same.

Whereas the historic lineage of individualism in the West is seen as always facing down the implications of alienation, isolation and distance, in many of these non-Western societies the agenda of the community itself, not the individual, is the primary driver of human action and experience. However, unlike in American culture, the formation and sustenance of a community as

such is not viewed as a reified goal or theoretical construct, but rather as a real, experiential, embodied sensibility, an emotional state of being:

It is as difficult for indigenous people to conceive of life without a community as it is for most Westerners to imagine life in a community. To create a community that will work for the people here, there is a need to look carefully at some of the fundamentals of a healthy community—spirit, children, elders, responsibility, gift-giving, accountability, ancestors, and ritual. These elements form the base of a community. And it doesn't have to start with a lot of people. I'd rather have circle of a few good friends and be a community with them than just get lost in a crowd of people who don't care at all. (Some, S. p.35)

Studies of non-Western cultures offer the West a prodigious amount of information regarding ritual, initiation, intimacy and dialogical communications, all of which can be an invaluable resource for small groups of community-seekers in urban America, who are trying to navigate the rough waters of community formation in a culture of extreme individualism. Yet, it is impossible and inappropriate for Westerners to simply co-opt the cultural values or traditions of African or South American tribal ways. Unconscious and insensitive acquisitiveness just takes us once again down the historically virulent path of colonization and domination. Consumption of so-called indigenous wisdom, as a pathological form of spiritual materialism and fetishism, can never replace the need for individuals educated within Western culture to face the shadow and symptoms of its own dissociated self concept.

On the other hand, as the worldviews of the non-Western peoples become less exotic and marginalized, more acceptable and available, more respected and honored as valid alternatives to the rising Western hegemony of "globalization", these alternative perspectives offer the gift of a mirror in which

the lone individual may see through what has been lost along the narcissistic roads of achievement and materialism. In our hearts and in our histories, we are all indigenous people, all potentially tribal, communal, and communitarian.

The gifts of the remaining tribal peoples, if we learn to receive them with reciprocity, take us back to our roots with fresh eyes, only to serve our way forward. It seems, in fact, that attempts by small groups like Old Growth at a communitarian response to the modern urban scourge of separation and isolation, represent an emergent Western consciousness that longs to remember and reconnect to the lost roots of their tribal ancestry. Perhaps these awkward movements are naïve and overly romanticized, yet the yearning for community is very real, and the desire to learn, with a renewed sense of humility and respect, from the remaining communal peoples of the earth, is a growing phenomenon. Perhaps in the technical prowess of the West and in the wisdom of the ancient peoples may be found all the genetic material we need for the makings of a truly communitarian world. This is how Malidoma Some of the Dagara tribe in Burkina Faso, and author of the best-selling book, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa* (1998), envisions it:

Where is community found in the West? To the extent that humans live better in community, there has to be community in the West in one form or another, otherwise Western society would cease to exist. Communities take many forms in Western culture, and most of them are struggling for their very survival. The struggle indicates that they need to change somehow...The hope for such change to occur comes from the fact that individuals in the West are deeply yearning for a more genuine kind of community that can offer a deeper sense of belonging...There are lessons in the ways that indigenous communities unite and sustain themselves that are relevant and adaptable in the West. Every Westerner who visits my village leaves with one thing, and that is the

experience of the intensity of human connection and attention. What would it be like if that intensity of human connection could be found here in the West, in addition to all of the material wealth that is available? Heaven could be created, right here. (P. 298)

Cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1966) and his work on ritual process, social dynamics and culture across a broad spectrum of societies, is of particular interest due to his attempt to designate stages of community transformation. In contrast to Jung's perspective on the self as a separate entity, which may be studied in isolation from a cultural or collective context, Turner never sees the individual as "isolated" in the sense of being alone in his work, rather each person is understood to experience two contrasting modes of social cohesion. Alternating between periods of high and low structural context, the individual moves back and forth between identification and dis-engagement with the collective, but never steps outside or becomes separate from it. Similar in notion to Asher's process perspective, Turner interprets the engagement of individuals within community contexts in terms of social processes that are always moving back and forth between non-structured and structured modes of engagement.

Turner's discussion of "liminal states"—periods of loose and permeable social structure—may be useful in understanding the undertaking of Old Growth as an on-going dialectical process of social cohesion and devolution, not a static or essential "thing-in-itself". Likewise, his categorical and qualitative description of "communitas" also provided an important lens through which to interpret the

phenomenological experiences of community that were difficult to describe in concrete terms:

It is as though there are two major “models” for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of “more” and “less”. The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders...From all this I infer that, for individuals and groups, social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, *communitas*, and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality, and inequality. (Turner, p. 96-97)

The second category of literature on community theory includes well known works like Corrine McLaughlin and Gordon Davidson’s *Builders of the Dawn: Community Lifestyles for a Changing World* (1985) and the business-oriented collection of essays by Kazimierz Gozdz, *Community Building: Renewing Spirit and Learning in Business* (1995), as well as lesser known, more “underground” material that explores and describes the workings of intentional community endeavors in the U.S. and abroad: Helen Forsey’s *Circles of Strength: Community Alternatives to Alienation* (1993) and Thich Nhat Hanh’s *A Joyful Path: Community Transformation and Peace* (1994). For the most part, these works research and “review” the workings of on-going intentional communities, most of which operate in rural settings, involve communal living arrangements, and demonstrate an explicit desire on the part of participants to withdraw either partly or completely from so-called “modern life”.

The intentional community settings that these books describe, given that they all represent experiments in communal living, are substantially different in look and feel to the “virtual” community endeavor of Old Growth in New York. Yet, it is in a comparative study of the similarities and distinct differences in various forms of intentional community, that this research is particularly useful, for despite the lack of common lands or housing, the descriptions of the meaning, goals and purpose of community may be surprisingly similar. For example, the following description of community by McLaughlin and Davidson would likely ring true for members of Old Growth in New York as well:

A conscious community, as distinct from a neighborhood or town, is a group of people experiencing a common purpose in being together, with an agreement to cooperate and create a sense of unity together. The new intentional communities of the 1990’s are a conscious response to societal problems and are working to restore a sense of community, intimacy and belongingness in our neighborhoods and towns....Communities serve as a necessary outlet for creativity in society. And they are a comfort in reassuring us that we are indeed a pluralistic society, since we freely tolerate the diversity they represent. (p.13-14)

In addition, many of the guidelines and “lessons learned” offered by these works may be useful in supporting the Old Growth community to understand what is required to build and maintain a true intentional community. Descriptions of experiments in intentional community such as offered by Forsey provide pertinent examples of other non-land based community experiments in urban settings, as viable alternatives to exile and escape appear to be on the rise. For example, Lucy Lavoie describes the urban community experiment she leads in a Northwestern Ontario:

The urban community to which I belong is not bounded by physical space. It does not exist within the confines of a neighborhood or a section of the city. Rather, our community exists in the relationships, which we build with each other all across the cityscape. Our community is one of shared perspectives and aspirations; it is built on true democratic processes, on processes where people are accountable to each other and to the planet, on processes which restore human dignity and improve quality of life. It is my belief that co-operative, supportive, empowering communities like these shine like beacons to attract fugitives from the exploitation and domination of the present economic system. (p.82)

Finally, this research category also provides well-documented notes on the darker, more unsavory sides of community, where issues of interpersonal conflict, ideology and power may undermine the co-creative, democratic intent of community. McLaughlin and Davidson, for example, provide an in-depth discussion of key risk factors in community building: issues of privacy and confidentiality, issues of private versus public “space” (both literal and figurative), issues with ideology and religious, racial, and/or sexual identity, issues with mandatory versus voluntary participation, issues of membership inclusion and exclusion, issues of agenda—goals versus process, and more.

In the third category, the emphasis shifts back to the individual, in research by social psychologists and cultural critics that examines the rich and complex dance between the self and the community that under girds—and often threatens to undermine—Western, post-industrial, society. In books like *The Protean Self* by Robert Jay Lifton (1993), *The Saturated Self* by Kenneth Gergen (1991), and *Les Identités Meurtrières (On Identity)* by Amin Maalouf (1996), and Philip Cushman’s *Constructing the Self, Constructing America*, mentioned earlier, each of the authors puts the relationship between the individual and the

collective center stage. In these works, the individual comes once again to the front, and issues of identity, separateness, and fragmentation are of particular importance. Unfortunately, as all of these writers, and many well-known others, are white, heterosexual and male, the lens through which they perceive reality tends to universalize and homogenize the nature of “I” into that all-encompassing subjective normativity—the post-modern Western view from nowhere—that the feminists and queer theorists (among others) deconstructed earlier. That said, however, their work is still important and relevant for purposes of this dissertation research, because they poignantly and accurately describe the historical, economic, and sociological factors that have resulted in the dissolution and breakdown of the relationship between the individual and the collective over the past fifty years in the U.S. and in Europe.

In each case, we see the formation structures of individual identity receding deeper and deeper into the internal, psychic spaces of a separate self concept, as a result of information and media overload (Gergen), economic and political oppression that foments religious and tribal fundamentalism (Maalouf), a legacy of American co-optation of the internalized object-relations aspects of psychoanalytic theory (Cushman), and an American history replete with the upheavals of war, socio-economic instability and increasing technological change (Lifton). And these, of course, are just the highlights.

What is salient about these kinds of social commentaries—as huge and over-generalizing as they may be—is that in each case, the research points towards the importance of social relations and communitarian efforts, especially

at the local level, as the vehicle for restoration of the lost connections between the individual and the collective. For example, Cushman calls for an overly internalized, self-focused psychotherapeutic field to broaden its contextual framework, opening the diagnostic lens on to a “three-person” psychology:

The third player I refer to is the ever present, interpenetrating social realm. By “threeness” I intend to convey that the individual, the dialogic partner, and the historical-cultural context are inextricably intertwined, that moral understandings need to be concerned with how various psychotherapy theories affect political structures and activities... with a three-person psychology might also come an increase in hope and a willingness to continue to fight for the very thing that most of us have despaired of, institutional change. (p. 350)

Likewise, Gergen offers his view of the compensatory move—“threeness” in the form of localized community interrelatedness—that must rise up in American culture, if the glue that connects a society together is to remain the interconnected “selves” that comprise its parts:

Communities are more fundamental than strong public leadership or private inner resources; indeed, without community there is neither leadership nor individual resources. Without the willing complicity of communities, leaders cannot lead; and one’s inner values remain firm primarily because the community supports them...The small, face-to-face community, where coherence and consistency are staples of everyday life, galvanizes its members against extraneous and corrosive influences. (p.211)

Finally, Lifton offers up his restoration mantra in the form of a “species self”. Representing a transformational turning outward of Western consciousness, away from intra-psychic fragmentation and victimization towards an emergent “protean” –multi-faceted, rigorous, flexible, permeable—self concept, the path towards social renewal requires that we re-emphasize and re-imagine our common bond as humans:

In a time of fragmentation and trauma, proteanism can awaken our species belonging, our species self. We can assert our organic relationship to each other and to nature. That assertion, for symbolizers like ourselves, is a matter of the psyche, of the imagination. We can come to feel what we (according to our best scientific categories) are: members of a common species. We can experience, amidst our cultural diversity, that common humanity. The diversity is integral to the process, as: “We are multiple from the start.”

(p. 213)

The fourth, and final category, represents once again a vast amount of literature by sociologists and social psychologists, but the emphasis turns back towards the collective, in the form of social analysis of community and communitarian themes on the institutional, governmental, political, and societal levels. These researchers are interested in exploring the evolution of Western—post-industrial, capitalistic—societies in Europe and North America, describing a tale of disintegration and loss of community structures alongside the rise of the oppressive, de-humanizing “machinery” of global industry. In works by Robert Putnam (2000), *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash (1998), *Grassroots Post-Modernism*, Zygmunt Bauman (1991), *Modernity and Ambivalence*, and Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985/1996), *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, the research focus is broad-based, with an eye towards general assessment of the current state of communitarian and social agendas in the modern nation states of Europe and America. And the result is anything but pretty. The pervasive theme we encounter in all of these works is loss; loss of social cohesion, loss of local and communal governance structures; loss of the inter-relatedness of people across

community, racial, and cultural divides; loss of individual freedoms and autonomy; loss of family, religious, tribal values and their attendant sense of belonging. In *Habits of the Heart*, the authors sum up, eloquently and un sentimentally, the social and political environment in which efforts like the Old Growth community are being born:

What has failed at every level—from the society of nations to the national society to the local community to the family—is integration: we have failed “to remember our community as members of the same body”, as John Winthrop put it. We have committed what to the republican founders of our nation was the cardinal sin: we have put our own good, as individuals, as groups, as a nation ahead of the common good. What we fear most of all, and what keeps the new world powerless to be born, is that if we give up our dream of private success for a more genuinely integrated societal community, we will be abandoning our separation and individuation, collapsing into dependence and tyranny. What we find hard to see is that it is the extreme fragmentation of the modern world that really threatens our individuation... (p. 285-286)

Given this prognosis—and the general theme of dissolution that pervades all of these works—it might seem that there is little value to be gleaned from them for purposes of this dissertation. Yet, the opposite is true. These social studies may provide crucial “reality checks” along the way lest the Old Growth members come to view their unique experience of healing, growth and belonging—in suburban New York City—as some sort of panacea for society’s ills. These researchers remind us of the huge, complex, and daunting challenge that “re-integration” of intentional community efforts into an industrialized, fragmented, oppressive society overrun by the individualistic hegemony of consumer capitalism is a mammoth undertaking. Old Growth is but a thumb pressed into the hole of a global dyke on the verge of collapse. If nothing else,

these works will serve to keep this project localized and humble in its communitarian aspirations.

In addition, the work of Putnam, Bellah, et. al, and Estevah & Prakash contains important descriptive details of the inner-workings, struggles, and triumphs of on-going localized and national community endeavors. As an example, in *Habits of the Heart*, the authors describe the characteristics of the many experiments in so-called community that appear, rise, and disappear daily across America. In their description of the “lifestyle enclave” as opposed to a “real” community, distinctions are provided that can help Old Growth participants gain a deeper awareness and understanding of the complexities and essential qualities of their undertaking. (p. 71)

Of course, even within a framework of practicality and realism—translated: pessimism—these authors also agree with those aforementioned social psychologists who focused on the individual within the context of community: the solution to our social and individual alienation and malaise will only be found through the re-generation of a localized, conscious and committed community agenda. The key to the restoration, healing and re-balancing of the relationship between self and other/community will be found first at the local level, in the efforts of concerned and energized citizens, as their activities re-awaken a profoundly essential aspect of their lost humanity: communal memory. So, even as these large-scale cultural critiques decry the loss of community infrastructure, they point to the profound yet simple act of gathering and re-

membering as the foundational springboard for all community restoration.

Esteva and Prakash capture the essence of this problem and the challenge:

Cultures may be seen as memories...wherever industrial memory replaces organic memory, it destroys and dis-members communities; replaced by the careerists of professional associations. Without the stories and rituals of community and commons, organic memory dies...the liberation of cultural and physical space depends upon resisting the apple of modern freedom: to break and destroy communal memory for the economic "goods" offered to the mobile "individual self" (p. 76)

The solution then, is found in the reclamation of that communal memory—through action:

A human community then, if it is to last long, must exert a sort of centripetal force, holding local soil and local memory in place. Practically speaking, human society has no work more important than this. Once we have acknowledged this principle, we can only be alarmed at the extent to which it has been ignored. (Wendell Berry, in Esteva & Prakash, p. 80)

Keeping these words in mind as I have framed this project, I attempted to keep this research grounded, localized and humble in scope and intention, all the while recognizing the profoundly restorative potential of community enterprise. In these efforts to explore the meaning, challenges and gifts of the Old Growth community, these broad-brush societal diagnosticians provide the community and myself a constant reminder of who we really are: one small drop of relatedness in society's overflowing bucket of pain, isolation and alienation.

Chapter 2

The Dialogues

Introduction and Approach

In the next five sections of this chapter, the results of the participatory data collection process are reported, analyzed and interpreted, with the intention of exploring the themes, moods, and evocations that emerged within and between co-researchers in the act of dialogue. The intent here is not to “finalize” a document of conclusions, but to layout one more step in an ongoing dialectical process of exploration and deepening understanding. By developing a living narrative that moves toward—but never arrives at—forming an integrative, multi-dimensional and pluralistic whole, each co-researcher can build upon and deepen his or her understanding of the value and meaning of intentional community. Gadamer’s concept of the “fusion of horizons” illustrates what is being attempted with this data analysis:

Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of a “situation” by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence, essential to the concept of situation is the concept of “horizon”...The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point...In fact, the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all of our prejudices. [...] *understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.* (1994, p. 302, 306) (italics author)

As stated in the methods chapter, the overall goal is not so much to obtain “objective knowledge” about the benefits or impact of the community

experience, but to collaboratively explore one localized phenomenon of community-building that is occurring in the New York city area at this particular time, through a dialogical encounter between participants in the study, as co-researchers. In this context, it is appropriate to restate the theoretical and philosophical grounding upon which this approach to the research has been undertaken. Following the work of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur, this research is based on three fundamental principles: 1. all human understanding is based on interpretation; 2. all human interpretation is grounded in language; 3. all language is experienced as a dialectical act of participation, either between humans in conversation, or between humans and narrative as text. According to Gadamer, the fundamental building block of understanding is language: “All kinds of human community are kinds of linguistic community: even more, they form language. For language is by nature the language of conversation; it fully realizes itself only in the process of coming to an understanding...and coming to an understanding as such, does not need any tools in the proper sense of the word. It is a life process in which a community of life is lived out.” (1994, p. 446)

Furthermore, it is in the process of dialogue where the praxis of hermeneutics comes into play, where individual and community horizons are expanded and fused, interpretations are generated and tested, and imaginative possibilities are liberated—between and among freely engaged human subjects. This approach to social science and depth psychological research, according to post-structuralist theory, requires a de-construction of

the positivistic ideology in which the so-called “objective” lens of a researcher is trained on the distinct and separate phenomena of the experience of study participants. The aim of the hermeneutic, participatory research framework is not to ascertain or acquire “facts” or even “data” per se, but rather to create and deepen understandings between participating subjects, of which the “researcher” —as participant—and the study subjects—as co-researchers— operate in a dialogical relationship of imaginative co-creation. The key to forming understanding is found in the agency and interpretation of conversation:

We say that we “conduct” a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it...Understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to us. All this shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it—i.e, that it allows something to “emerge” which henceforth exists. (Gadamer, 1994, p. 383)

It is within this philosophical framework that I have undertaken the steps as outlined earlier in the methods chapter, such that even this chapter of “results” is perhaps misnamed, for the word “result” implies some form of completion, but in this case the “results” are at best preliminary, and this narrative summary of the dialogues between myself and the co-researchers, is in itself a “fiction” subject to further dialogical reflection, interpretation, and expansion by the community itself.

We must always bear in mind that research is never without “interest” (intent)—and in this case, as outlined by Ricoeur (1991), the agenda of

participatory and hermeneutic research is to “emancipate” meaning, possibility and imagination from the repressive ideologies of the empirical-analytic sciences: “...the mode of being of the world opened up by the text is the mode of the possible, or better, of the power-to-be: therein resides the subversive force of the imaginary.” (p.300) In this regard, the dissertation project itself becomes a vehicle for nurturing creativity and purpose in the Old Growth community—not a sterile document of meaningless analytics doomed to the dustbin of history—but a living organism in flux and motion, capable of unlocking the limitless potential of a group of humans who come together to create a better and more meaningful way of life.

With the above statements as a reminder of the philosophical grounding of this research, this chapter lays out the themes that have emerged from the implementation of the participatory action protocol discussed in the methods chapter. Data collected from five sets of taped interview/dialogue sessions and one day long group workshop is presented in the following order: first, from the two hour dialogue with Tom & Flame Lutes, the spiritual founders of the Old Growth community; second, from the three two hour sessions (over 90 pages of transcribed narrative) with the leadership group of eight participants; third, from four individual one-two hour conversations with community members Judy Fox, Katie McCarthy, Serge Levy and Hugh Graham; fourth, from the combined spoken and written narrative and feedback generated both during and after the one-day creativity workshop entitled: “Shaping Community”.

The following procedures were employed to generate this thematic material:

1. The participants engaged in conversations that were constructed around four general categories: personal and cultural context; meaning, value and purpose; community practices; leadership and sustainability. The use of these four categories was decided in advance, based on a series of informal, preliminary discussions with the study participants and other members of the community. The same categories were used as permeable frames of reference during all of the following conversations;

2. Each conversation was taped and transcribed in its entirety, and the complete narrative text was provided to the participants for their reflection and feedback;

3. After a first-round of initial reading (which resulted in preliminary feedback that, in many cases, the transcribed texts were “too long and arduous to read”) each text was distilled down to a three-four page summary of themes, replete with enumerable direct quotes from each participant, based upon multiple readings and my personal reflections on the material;

4. These thematic summaries were again shared with the participants, and each was asked to validate, expand, and/or change any aspect of the material, in order to reflect and update their thinking with more present intuitions or concerns (this process took place over a four month period, in which the community and the individuals went through many changes);

5. The themes, as they currently stood in relation to the ongoing development of the community— in the spring of 2003—are reported and summarized, in a newly generated narrative framework as outlined below;

6. Finally, in keeping with the prescribed modality of openness and exploration, I have included, where appropriate, a summary of my own reflective process, both in the dialogical experience of conversation, as well as in my wrestling with the narrative “text”. My reflections include personal prejudices and limitations, depth psychological intuitions—symptoms, unconscious and conscious projection and transference issues—as well as theoretical issues of distance—“distanciation” from the text—, assimilation and appropriation of the material.

Dialogue with Tom and Flame Lutes

Personal Profile

Tom and Flame Lutes are an inter-racial couple (she is African-American, he is Caucasian), who reside in a community-oriented living arrangement on a large tract of mountainous land in southwestern Colorado. They have been creating and leading workshops and retreats around themes of personal growth and spirituality for most of their twenty-five year marriage. Originally invited to bring their work to New York City by Judy and Larry Fox back in the mid-nineties, they have been conducting weekend workshops on a quarterly basis for New York area participants for many years. Their backgrounds include over twenty years of co-creating and living with intentional community groups in northern California, as well as studying and working with Werner Erhardt and the EST community (now Landmark Education) during the 1970's and 80's.

Tom and Flame have a keen interest in community as a container for healing and spiritual growth, and their work always encompasses practices, teachings and engagement around four dimensions of human experience: spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional. Their wide range of experiences, teachings and study includes energy movement and Native American spiritual practices (e.g. vision quests, medicine work) as well as theoretical foundations in the humanistic psychologies of Fromm, Maslow, and Almaas.

They have named the content of their individual and group process work, “Stalking Truth”, and have a deep commitment to engaging and encouraging participants to use self and other—with a focus on the relationship between them—as tools for fostering greater awareness, holistic health, and spiritual wisdom. In addition, they are committed social and political activists with strong beliefs in using the power of community to effect transformation and positive change in the world.

They forged the Old Growth community out of a series of personal growth and spiritual development workshops, which were initiated upon their arrival in the New York area in 1996. These workshops took place on a quarterly basis, were held in Judy Fox’s home in a suburb of New York City, and were open to all. The success of these ongoing events culminated in a yearlong project of four weekend workshops during 2001, in which a group of twenty-five participants committed to come together repeatedly over a full year, and although the “community” had been in incipient stages as far back as 1997-98, its formal birth took place as an outcome of this yearlong project, which was, in fact, dedicated to the theme of “growing through community”. Additional themes that framed the yearlong program, from which the community was spawned, are best described in Tom and Flame’s own words (2000):

The Old Growth Community is all about understanding that we are evolving as human beings and consciously taking that on as our personal intent, not just leaving it up to chance or some force of nature. The real game of change is played inside-out where you are constantly stalking and recognizing that which grows you....Growing oneself into

a dynamic future sometimes means not just allowing change, but instigating it. To do that you must explore your growth edges...the Old Growth Community is about intentionally putting yourself on a conscious growth curve, inside an environment both challenging and safe enough to venture out beyond your usual limits of thought, feeling and expression. This territory gives birth to personal evolutionary change. (p. 3-4, unpublished documents)

In the next section, the thematic material that emerged from the dialogue conducted with Tom and Flame is presented. Based on their reflections and input on the conversation and the narrative texts (transcription and thematic summary), the following themes are laid out within the framework of the four dialogical categories.

Personal and Cultural Context

Reflecting on their enduring relationship as an inter-racial couple, as well as their many years of living and working in a wide range of community settings—from rural California and Colorado, to impoverished neighborhoods of Los Angeles and Oakland, to affluent, mostly white enclaves of New York City and environs—Tom and Flame identified three major themes which permeate the personal and cultural context of their work: 1. the power of communal living; 2. a consistent “lack of maturity” in the participant groups with which they work; 3. the false sense of inter-connectedness engendered by technology and the media.

The Power of Communal Living. The building blocks on which Tom and Flame developed their teachings on healing, growth, and relationship have been carved from twenty years of founding, building, sustaining and

living in intentional community situations. Beginning in the late 1970's with twelve people living all together in "the big house" in rural Marin County California, and later moving with fourteen people to land bought communally in Colorado, they have been fully immersed in the vicissitudes of intentional community: "We have, for many years, had the luxury of getting up in the morning and jumping right in to the process of 'community'."

In addition, their family, socio-economic, and cultural roots are quite dissimilar: she was born and brought up in the African-American neighborhoods of the Los Angeles; he, in a middle-class white neighborhood of San Diego. Hence, they have an enduring respect, understanding and facility with issues of diversity and difference, as they work through the plurality of experiences and belief systems within their own relationship, and face off continually against a world where racial and cultural pluralism is often a dividing line between communities.

Lack of collective maturity. From Tom and Flame's perspective, the cultural context in which they do their community work is such that they constantly run up against the limited maturity of participants in group situations. As Tom puts it, "people want to have the experience of belonging but they are not willing to stay and work through the inevitable conflicts that arise. I think that is part of our culture; we are all being big kids in some ways, wanting it all done for us". In keeping with this theme of immaturity, Tom and Flame note that people often seem more interested in acquiring and experiencing the pleasures of material comforts than consciously engaging in

their own personal evolution. For them, the experience of true intentional community is about actively growing and changing, not about being comfortable: “in a sense it is about being *less* comfortable, more revealed, more dynamically involved in one’s own growth. In today’s world, people are less and less in touch with themselves on a sentient level; unfortunately, in this culture the stress is put on how they can keep themselves more comfortable.”

Finally, they note the potential downside of collective immaturity in a community setting: that people will actually join an intentional community to escape the work of growth and healing and instead hide out, taking refuge in the security, dogma, and comforts of a gang, a church, or a sect. For Tom and Flame, this is a dangerous and counter-productive phenomenon, for “at some point there is always a short-circuit where you self-destruct and end up hating or resenting the community to which you have given yourself...a lot of people want to give themselves away to something without having any self to give away in the first place.”

False sense of connection. In today’s fast-paced high tech industrial America, especially in big city environments like New York, there abounds a plethora of sophisticated technologies for connecting people together—the internet, TV, mass media, cellular telecommunications—yet, Tom and Flame experience people as “hiding out” in fear and alienation, taking small, but false, comfort, in the transactional connections afforded through high-tech

gadgetry: “Everybody is more able to be ‘in touch’, but they feel less community and more isolated than ever”.

Tom and Flame are concerned that fewer and fewer people have any interest in or even understanding of the need to restore a sense of tribal unity and connection that has been lost in the rush towards technological sophistication, industrialization and globalization. Flame states: “in our culture we may have the Kiwanis or Rotary clubs, but we don’t have the same sense of tribe that can be seen in some non-western cultural contexts. In our culture, everyone is on his/her own—focused on his/her own personal agenda—and they don’t trust community. People who cannot define for themselves what makes it worth it (to be in community) will say: it’s ‘no big deal’, I’ll just go hang out with my pals...” In their view, this dismissive stance on community just reinforces the status quo of isolation and alienation that pervades the American scene.

Meaning, Value, and Purpose

In discussing the meaning of intentional community with Tom and Flame, I was struck by their continued insistence that the community must be engaged in “real world” applications and involvement; they are not interested in the sixties themes of community as refuge or “commune”, or in using community as an escape route for alternative lifestyles. On the contrary, their commitment is to build and participate in communities that have values and vision for doing the hard work of growth and change *within the normative*

cultural context. For them, the key issues around meaning, value, and purpose of the Old Growth community revolve around three key themes: 1. community is about shared values; 2. community process takes “therapy” to the world; 3. community requires vision.

Community is about shared values. For Tom and Flame, the success of their experiences with building intentional communities has been based around the early formation of aligned values: “living together and developing a sense of shared values was key in sustaining the community at the outset. We all had the same values. Our community was about processing relationships, building roads, cutting down trees, building houses together...whereas a lot of people just want to have something ‘fluffy’ and ‘close’. *Real community is not only about creating a safe haven.*” (italics mine)

Shifting from their own community to speaking about the Old Growth community in New York, Tom and Flame hold the same unwavering belief in the importance of defining individual and group values and making sure that these are in alignment. They see the Old Growth community as holding dear the value that individual growth is a function of relatedness, and that community is about experiencing a “growing edge”, not about being comfortable: “Community is rewarding and challenging because it puts people in a situation where they can become more of their true self. It is not about following a leader or letting somebody else define one’s values, it is about defining oneself and one’s values in relationship with others—creating

together. Community is where you can really experience yourself on a growing edge.”

Community takes therapy to the world. For Tom and Flame, community is clearly a form of therapy, or at the very least, it is a group process that is inherently therapeutic. Yet what is unique from their perspective, is the commitment to doing the work of healing while actively engaged in the world: “Community is a form of therapy that keeps you from obsessively ‘chasing your tail’, where you get deeper and deeper insights but never actually put it into play in ‘life’.” In this sense, community is a healing container that magnifies the context of relatedness, providing a multifaceted mirror for self-reflection and a broader base for feedback than dyadic therapy. In addition, community is designed to prevent one from becoming overly focused on self, and instead supports each person to grow through making a contribution to the whole: “the value of community is that it keeps you from being self-obsessed.”

Ultimately, Tom and Flame believe that individuation is impossible to do alone: “community is all about the possibility of accelerating personal growth through the interaction with the group, but most people settle for a ‘two-in-a-box’ situation where they attempt to grow only through their marriage or in a couple. The classic couple who live in suburbia and don’t know their neighbors is a recipe for stagnation, not personal growth.”

Community requires vision. Based on Tom and Flame’s extensive experience with intentional community, they are cautiously optimistic about

the sustainability of Old Growth over the long term. What is crucial in their view is that the group of ongoing participants create a vision and purpose for the evolution of the community that demonstrates a commitment to something bigger than themselves—a “for the sake of what”. Otherwise, the risk is that what began as “intentional” will devolve into just a monthly opportunity to get together and “feel good”. As Flame puts it: “a person needs a purpose that is bigger than himself, and a community needs a purpose that is bigger than itself too.”

Unfortunately, they have noticed that what Flame likes to call the “for the sake of what” conversation, seems to engender a great deal of fear and consternation in people. Tom and Flame believe there is a collective reluctance, a hesitation, whenever they suggest that the participants become more “activist”, in the sense of “making a contribution”, in their community aspirations. Yet, this may turn out to be a crucial factor in determining if there really is a community or just a social enclave of friends who get together to feel good: “There needs to be something bigger that you’re all rallying around; something bigger than the collective ego. If you don’t have a clear sense of ‘what we’re about’ then you are nowhere.”

Community Practices

In the conversation about what Tom and Flame consider to be the key practices that are important for the Old Growth community, they were hesitant to delineate what these should be, instead suggesting that the individuals

themselves, as a group, should co-create the community practices and support each other in focused individual practices as well. They do, however, believe strongly that an intentional community needs to have conscious practices that lay out how the group will work with conflict and other behaviors and situations that arise: “if there are no practices for working with a particular condition, then it’s like ‘we shouldn’t be having this’ and instead it could be placed in a bigger context where the group agrees that ‘the friction is good because...we are learning to be more of who we want to be together’.”

Although Tom and Flame are always cognizant of their unique position as teachers and leaders, and therefore reluctant to dictate values, vision, or practices to the Old Growth participants, they are not in the least bit hesitant about reinforcing the need for individual practices that foster healing and growth. They believe that for the community to flourish, each participant must also flourish, and this can only be accomplished by fostering individual practices around physical health, spiritual discipline, mental acuity and agility, and emotional flexibility. For Tom and Flame, a high-powered community is like a top performing team; everyone must grow beyond their personal ego agenda and look to how they can make a contribution: “people have to be able to say, ok, I am being me, in fact, I am being more than me—when I go home I feel like I am small me—but now, in the group, I’m being ‘big me’...and I have practices that are helping me to develop the depth of my full self so that I can contribute to this thing that is larger than me.”

Leadership and Sustainability

Issues of leadership and sustainability were at the forefront for Tom and Flame, as they reflected on the evolution of the Old Growth community. They talked about the need for participants to step up and take on leadership roles and for the community to keep alive an attitude of exploration and experimentation around values and principles and practices, so as to avoid becoming stuck or dogmatic or exclusive. They also voiced their thoughts about the delicate dance that they themselves must play: staying involved and available as leaders and teachers as the community goes through growth spurts and growing pains, all the while hanging back in order to avoid the group's tendency to turn them into gurus. In spite of the wide range of ideas and topics explored within this category, Tom and Flame agreed that their concerns could be boiled down to two basic themes: 1. everyone must be a leader; 2. community is a living thing.

Everyone must be a leader. As the community stumbles along from birth through infancy and approaches "toddler" stage—that is, finds its legs and learns to walk on its own, the issue of leadership inevitably emerges as a primary concern. Tom and Flame see themselves—and are generally viewed by the participants—as teachers, founders, and on-going spiritual guides for the community, but since they do not live in close proximity to New York, and are fully immersed in leading an intentional community of their own in Colorado, it is impossible for them to actively "lead" the Old Growth community on any kind of continuous basis. Therefore, there has been a

need to generate leaders beyond Tom and Flame, who would be instrumental in defining the vision, purpose, and goals of the community during their absences. Tom and Flame have consciously allowed this leadership selection process to unfold organically, such that early on the membership bifurcated into two camps: those who would rather look to leaders and follow, and those who were willing to become leaders. From the latter group has emerged a “sustaining council” of leaders, who have taken on the development of a community vision and purpose, as well as an additional group of volunteers—a rotating team of two or three people—who take on logistics and execution of community events on a quarterly basis. We will hear from this sustaining group in the next section.

In Tom and Flame’s view, sustaining the community in the long run—creating a collaborative, democratic, organic leadership process—will require that everyone, at least to a certain extent, step up and take on the mantle of leadership, declaring what they stand for and what they desire. This volunteer agency of leaders within the community is where the ‘rubber hits the road’ and the process of self-selection—weeding out—occurs: “there are always going to be people who don’t want to, or cannot, take on the vision, and they will sort of self-select out and you will be constantly faced with this thing of—gee, I thought we were so close to so and so, and yet they are never here; they are not in the fire with us.”

The community will not flourish if it falls into the trap of looking to a guru or a single leader to define the purpose and delineate the tasks. At the

very least, a small subset of the members, must be willing “to work their personal edges” of ego strength and humility, all the while taking on the task of building consensus and coalition: “people must be mature enough to admit, ‘here’s my strength...but what I’m not good at, I hand that over to you’.” In order for the community to evolve into an ongoing “leader-ful” environment, the participants must use the leadership role as a growth opportunity, a chance to push at the limits of their self-understanding around issues of power, authority, humility and action.

Community is a living thing. Tom and Flame were enthusiastic about discussing what in their minds is a crucial sustainability concern: the distinction between the desire of participants to “experience community” and the desire to actually build the structural container that sustains community. In their view, people today mostly just want to “consume” a community experience, which explains why “transformational communities like Esalen and Omega” are based around short, one-time offerings of retreats and workshops: “You pay your money and get your community moment...then just pack it up and go back to your apartment. It takes a tremendous amount of energy on the part of participants and leaders to buck the tide of cultural isolation and to do the work that will keep the community alive and growing...people, unfortunately, are often looking for what they can get and not what they can give.”

In fact, if we look at the analogy of the slow disintegration of the family unit that has occurred in some parts of American society, we can see the

same kinds of challenges and opportunities manifesting in the work of community building. For Tom and Flame, “Community is like family” and the evolution of a family dynamic goes through many different growth stages—infant, teenage rebellion, young adult exploration, maturation, adulthood, spiritual elder—and people need to commit to work through the stages and take on their respective roles in order to sustain the family.

Summary

It is difficult to encapsulate the wide range of topics and themes that Tom and Flame touched on in their dialogue with me. Yet, if I stop and reflect on the meaning of the name they chose for the community in the first place—Old Growth—it clearly encompasses, in metaphor, all their deeply held convictions, passions and concerns regarding the community. For Tom and Flame, birthing and nurturing people in a community is much like caring for a forest over the long duration of its natural life. They have planted the seeds of community here in the New York area, and brought to bear their energy and compassion to support each individual participant in the art of growing, healing and flowering into a mature, engaged leader/activist. As “proud farmers” however, they are concerned that their forest may be stuck in an early growth stage, doomed to dry up and wilt if it doesn’t come alive with vision, values, and most of all, practices to sustain it.

The question that lingers for Tom and Flame, is what their ongoing role should be, given that they are geographically distant, and, perhaps more

importantly, their desire for the community to take up the gauntlet of leadership. The forest saplings are at a vulnerable stage, and they may need more on-the-ground tending by the reluctant “parent”, before they are ready to stand on their own.

Personal Reflections

What is most immediately noticeable to me in reading, re-reading and reflecting upon the dialogue with Tom and Flame is the accuracy of Ricoeur’s notion that a “narrative text” has a life of its own. In “dialogue” with the text over a period of months, I have developed a relationship with the material that is different in each encounter, depending upon what is going on in the community—and with Tom and Flame—at the time of the reading. At various times, I have read the text and become incensed with feelings of Tom and Flame’s arrogance, their distance, and their paternalism—reacting as if the issues of immaturity and avoidance of engagement they describe, are actually their fault. Clearly, this prejudicial stance emanates from reading the text during moments of fear, vulnerability and insecurity with my own skill at taking on the leadership and activist mantle that they advocate.

At other times, I find myself agreeing with them in an almost collusive, subversive manner, such that I can conspire to make them the almighty keepers of truth, enabling me to place blame for the false starts and frustrations with the community’s evolution squarely on the shoulders of my community brethren. Herein, I fall into the trap of projective identification,

externalizing my feelings of anger and disappointment by scape-goating the community. Is it any wonder then that community—if it can be a safe enough container—presents an ideal laboratory for individuation? Engaging with questions of purpose, leadership, vision, values, meaning and sustainability, affords each of us as participants an opportunity to “look in the mirror” at our conscious and unconscious fears, dreams and desires. The challenge to stay present and related—to self and other—in the face of these symptoms, is where the gift of healing and growth can be found in the community context.

In any case, the idea of my attempting “neutrality” or “objectivity” with regard to “research and data collection” in relationship to these powerful—one might say archetypal—figures, is clearly nonsensical. Tom and Flame, as passionately engaged teachers, arouse strong feelings in the community and in me. Like good therapists, they are aware of this transference phenomenon, and they never shrink from revealing and facing off against the projections thrust upon them. From their perspective, this is the appropriate manifestation of what it means to “work at the growing edge”—to encounter and dialogue with our shadow material and egoic reactivity.

For me, the dance of relationship with Tom and Flame is best described as a struggle much like that which unfolds between a parent and his/her young adult offspring. I move back and forth, in the dialogue, and in the text, between looking up to them as much needed sources of knowledge and experience, and at times wanting to dismiss them as unimportant or unnecessary, as I—along with fellow leaders—step up to the task of building

and sustaining the community. In fact, reflecting more on the specific experience of the dialogue itself, there was a sense in which our respective roles were reversed: in that short span of time when I played “interviewer”, I became the teacher, guiding them through the meta-process, objectives, and conversational praxis of the dissertation. In fact, this research project itself may represent a turning point, an evolutionary leap for the community, as the leadership group—of which I am a member—generates, owns, and appropriates this text as “testimony”—of their acceptance of responsibility for the success or failure of the Old Growth community.

\

Dialogue with Community Leaders

Profile of the group

The participant group for this section, representing members of the “sustaining council”, is comprised of four women and four men—all Caucasian—with varying ages from mid-thirties to sixty. Two of the men are only peripherally involved in on-going leadership work for the community: the first, Peter Grossman, participated in these sessions as community member and fiancé of Jan Lichtenstein, who is an active member of the sustaining committee; second, Larry Fox, was a volunteer in an earlier “planning group” at the inception of the community, and his spouse Judy Fox is on the sustaining committee, but Larry himself has chosen to not actively continue in a leadership role. However, having been instrumental in hosting Tom and Flame at his home many times over the years, Larry is a highly visible and valued founding member of the community; hence his invitation to engage in these dialogues.

The group is equally divided between Christian and Jewish religious affiliations, although none of the participants are deeply religious; many, in fact, have deep reservations about their involvement with the church or synagogue. The group is generally affluent, and all live in close proximity within the prosperous New York City suburbs of Westchester County, Rockland County, and Essex County in northern New Jersey. As co-

researcher and member of the leadership group, I am the only homosexual; although, just within this small group there are married, single, divorced and recently engaged individuals. All of the participants are employed in white-collar, professional occupations: there is a management consultant, therapist, lawyer, writer, sales representative, human resource executive, and executive assistant.

The group dialogue, from which the following thematic material is extracted, took place during a two-day retreat, in which these eight members of the community engaged in three two-hour conversations. Each of the sessions was taped and transcribed in its entirety and the participants were given time to read and comment on the narrative text over a four month period, during which they continued to meet regularly to plan and execute community events.

Personal and Cultural Context

Given that each of these eight people come from different family, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, it is difficult to generalize about the personal and cultural contexts that may have inspired them to join Old Growth. However, based on their feedback on the written transcripts and my reading and reflecting on the dialogue sessions and narrative, four recurring themes do emerge, in various forms and attributions, which may provide a foundational backdrop to the group's interest in forming an intentional community. These themes can be summarized as follows: 1. Family is the

primary formative experience of community—with positive and negative repercussions; 2. Religious upbringing is an important secondary influence—again, with positive and negative ramifications; 3. Economic prosperity provides the requisite “container” for personal growth and community; 4. A cultural overload of “community” results in feelings of overwhelm and loss.

Family background. In conversation about each individual’s early, foundational experiences of community, most of the participants spoke about the powerful influence of family as the original and, in most cases, initiating encounter with community. For five of the six respondents who spoke about family, memories of this “community” as such were dark and painful: Judy, Jan, Pat, Larry and myself all recalled experiencing our family of origin as “unsafe” or “un-loving”; a community in which we mostly felt “alien”. Judy, in particular, spoke about her longing to experience the sense of safety that she missed in childhood, which led her to instigate work with Tom and Flame, and also to form an earlier—and still ongoing—community experience in the form of an annual spiritual retreat/vacation called “The Gathering”: “My only sense of community in the past had been family, but that was conflicted. There was always a lack of safety, maybe some feelings of belonging, but overlaid with a sense of not being accepted or approved of. What began [in The Gathering] to emerge was a space of the very thing that I had been longing for...a particular atmosphere where there was a lack of judgment, so that my fear of judgment was beginning to be reduced...and that started to be sacred to me.”

Likewise, for Jan, the key distinguishing factor in choosing to be involved with Old Growth, was having the experience of safety and belonging that she lacked as a child in her family of origin:

Growing up in a family that never felt safe, the desire to experience trust, comfort and safety in a group has always been buried deep within me. Tom and Flame workshops as well as The Gathering with Judy...gave me that first experience of having come “home”—to a place where I can feel comfortable, loved and accepted for who I am....this is what I had always looked for ...and even more...even more of being so comfortable with people...just getting together and doing things together...and also being safe enough to have people be straight with me and for me to be straight with other people, because so much of my life isn't like that.

In contrast, Julie had a fairly positive set of childhood experiences with community. She was involved in a loving family situation, and participated in a number of church, school, summer camp and sorority experiences, of which she holds fond memories. This positive foundation, in fact, led her to desire community so much that as a young adult she joined a communal living arrangement—a group house—where she was able to live, as she puts it, a “conscious community” life: “The purpose of the house was to have people come together, live together, co-create together, have less things, share our material belongings—so you could have less stuff and still live in the world comfortably—and we had a purpose to give back to the community in which we lived, through charity work...”

The group consensus was that early childhood experiences in familial contexts, both positive and negative, forged deep reservoirs of emotion—longing, sadness, desire, hurt and joy—that have resurfaced in adulthood,

motivating each participant towards community involvement. Yet, this undercurrent of the past also haunts the present: the group agreed that being part of an intentional community was not the “solution” that they might have hoped for. Conflict, frustration, and intermittent episodes of alienation and lack of safety were all part of the process of community formation and interaction. Old Growth, however successful at healing childhood wounds, is no panacea; at best, the group agreed that the community provides a forum for bringing old stories and hidden or repressed trauma around family issues to the surface, where the opportunity exists, as Morgan put it: “to re-write the script with a different outcome”.

Religious upbringing. Along similar lines as family background, most of the participants considered their early religious experiences to have had a powerful impact on their desire for spiritual growth and community. Again, there was a certain sense of ambivalence towards the dogma, ritual, and rigid philosophical constructs, mixed in with positive memories of holiday celebrations, musical interludes, and formation of deep, sometimes lifelong friendships and fellowship. The overall tone of the conversation around religion however, was of disaffection and alienation. Regardless of whether the upbringing was Christian or Jewish, the resonant desire that under girds Old Growth, is for a spiritual experience more aligned with the present day values of the participants. Pat and Morgan, having grown up in strict Catholic tradition, spoke defiantly about their frustrations with the church and their wish for something more spiritually enriching and nurturing. Pat stated:

My Catholic background was all about ‘sin and damnation’ and having to be forgiven all the time. My desire has been to find a loving, connecting conversation in the spiritual world, one I would want to go back to again and again. What’s important for me in joining a religious community is feeling embraced, loved and accepted, which I have experienced at the Unity Church and in this community. The key for me is to find teachers, like Pema Chodron and Tom and Flame...I’m not necessarily looking for people to be there for me but rather for the teaching. And in this community, I find a lot of teachers that aren’t necessarily “certified” teachers, but they teach me something that brings me back to an environment of development and growth.

Morgan’s personal history with Catholicism is likewise replete with feelings of disappointment and ambivalence. Although as the father of five children, Morgan is conscious of the need to provide some religious grounding and a context for spiritually centering his family, so he remains active in the church, doing his best to extract from the traditions those elements regarding love, service, humility and transcendence, that he can celebrate and share with his kids:

Most of us have roots in traditional religion—Catholic in my case—that have been either disagreeable or downright wounding. This community gives us an opportunity to re-frame our conditioning experiences, to choose those aspects of religion that are progressive—and to discard those that feel regressive. Some rituals and teachings from religion are important aspects of my personal traditions—and I believe in honoring them...while having this community creates a new way of practicing spirituality that can help me re-integrate my past; even heal the negative or oppressive experiences of my childhood with religious dogma.

Another aspect of the participants’ experience with organized religion emerged in the conversation as a shift in the way each now views his or her childhood conditioning in the wake of being involved with the Old Growth community. For many of these community leaders, work with Tom and Flame

and the formation of the community has provided them a spiritual foundation from which to re-engage and reconnect with the positive elements of Christianity or Catholicism. Judy explains it this way:

As a child, Judaism impacted me in terms of 'pure identity' but not as something that I felt or participated in any spiritual sense. There was more of a sense of "God" being present in a Christian church than in a synagogue. However, this changed for me with the birth of my granddaughter and the desire to be part of my daughter's expanded family, which meant sharing in their religious practices...My experience with this community has given me a different perspective on other communities, like the Jewish religion, that affords me the opportunity to experience the rituals and celebrations with less judgment, knowing that I can pick and choose those aspects of the dogma that align with my personal beliefs. This community is my spiritual home—and having it allows me to roam and share in others without feeling trapped.

Economic prosperity. As relatively affluent residents of upper-middle class enclaves in New York City and its suburbs, the group was particularly conscious of the fact that the Old Growth community is born of privilege. When the conversation turned to the general economic prosperity of the group—and of the community in general—there was an overall sense of gratitude along with an awareness that financial freedom may play a big part in determining the "look and feel" of the group. The consensus was that since the community was founded out of a series of workshops—and continues to welcome new "members" mostly through the pool of Tom and Flame's students, that the choice to spend money on personal growth would likely remain a potent barrier to entrance into the community.

However, the group generally considered this aspect of the community's make-up to be a natural outcome of self-selection and personal

values. Jan, with nodding approval from the group, summed up their position as follows:

Since becoming part of this community usually involves participating in a workshop or The Gathering retreat, both of which are not inexpensive...the biggest issue we face around exclusivity is probably economic. But this does not mean that we are not a community. People who do not have the money to do this are not going to participate because most of the people that join us start by paying money to do workshops... economic factors are out of our control to a certain extent and depend as much upon social values as actual financial capability.

Clearly, in spite of agreeing for the most part with Jan's summation, the group is awake to the fact that this cultural context of affluence could give rise to issues of exclusivity. Yet, they also spoke about their commitment to creating openness—to "being an invitation" as Peter put it—to anyone who holds a similar intent or desire for healing and belonging through community. Nevertheless, given that the community is not particularly culturally or racially diverse, especially in light of the demographics of the New York area—this issue is not so easily put to bed, and may point to a potential dark side of group cohesion—even to the nascent rumblings of a community shadow.

Too much "community". One common "complaint" that was voiced by the majority was that the term "community" has become so over-used in American culture and society that it smacks of jargon and can feel meaningless. There was a consensus that we all belong to many communities—and the term has been co-opted by the business world to the point where just having a credit card makes you part of the "American

Express community”. Pat expressed this sense of frustration with the ubiquity of the term as follows:

How can we bring meaning and depth to the word in the face of this trivialization of everything? Sometimes when I hear conversations about the ‘world community’ or the ‘global community’, they sound overwhelming, like a massive endeavor...I’m working on myself right now... It is not possible for me to feel ‘intimate’ with a group much bigger than twenty-five people—so community for me needs to remain small and manageable.

In this context, Larry pointed out that in the cultural milieu of the New York area, it is through our links with various communities—work-related, religious, social, geographical—that we develop our sense of individual identity: “much of what we are speaking about with regard to community has two components: what we participate in and what we identify with. All of our community experiences seem to have, at a minimum, these two parts. There is a lot here about identification—with the Jewish community, with America, or as a New Yorker, or living in the Larchmont community. The problem emerges then that it is not obvious what makes this community unique or distinct from the many others that we participate in and identify with...” This commentary launched the group into a rich discussion of the meaning of self and identity within the borders of the plethora of communities to which they all belong, and prompted deep reflection on what makes the Old Growth community special or unique for them. This subject naturally spills over into the next section regarding the meaning, values and purpose of the community, and yet, still within the context of the personal and cultural landscape, Judy and Morgan, in particular, noted some key marks of

distinction between the community construct of Old Growth and all the other communities. Specifically, the Old Growth community—as conscious, exploratory, experimental—is always inquiring about the nature of community itself, whereas typical community containers in our culture take their existence, purpose, and traditions for granted. Morgan pointed out:

Most of the communities we belong to have unconscious purposes—to achieve this or that goal, or to carry out this action—that may be tacit, unspoken or even unacknowledged. People don't even take time to ask themselves why they belong to a particular community—it is more about following the crowd and living up to someone else's expectations: family, business, children, friends, etc. But this community is different: there is an on-going conversation about what/why the community exists and what it is committed to doing/being. This creates an atmosphere of conscious communication and a feeling of co-creating that is very powerful and desirable for me.

In some sense the group felt that they are all submerged—to the point of drowning—in “community”, yet few of these are growth oriented, or allow for the expansion and exploration of self. In fact, most community settings, having strict boundaries around behavior and beliefs, operate to squelch the expression of individuality. For Judy, Old Growth represents the opposite experience:

In the outside world, we often split ourselves into a range of separate identities—professional, adult, parent, etc.—whereas, in this community I have the opportunity to reveal and express a wider range of my identities. Community affords the experience of taking risks in exposing unconscious identities and to experiment with taking on new and un-practiced ways of being, without fear of reprisal or judgment. I give myself the freedom to experiment and express here all of my conscious and unconscious identifications, which allows me to expand in many more places in the world too.

This conversation about the over-abundance of community in the culture struck a deep emotional chord in most of the group, and worked well as segue to exploring the meaning and value of the Old Growth experience. It also brought up a delicate and paradoxical insight about middle class, white, suburban culture in America that would linger and remain problematic throughout the sessions. The issue pertains to the task and/or results-oriented nature of the communities in which we are all a part. What is special about Old Growth is its focus on process and experience—the exploration and creation of an event, a “happening”—each time the community meets. This focus on co-creation in real-time is “intentional”, while less attention is placed on the outcome, or on attaining a specific goal. This process-orientation shows up in stark contrast to most other communities, where the “intent” to accomplish some goal remains the focus: win a game, make a product, buy or sell an item, expiate our sins, etc. In this sense, the Old Growth community is less tangible, more permeable, less structured, and hence, perhaps less sustainable than what passes in the culture as “community”. In the dialogue, the entire group acknowledged these qualities as representative of an inherent “vulnerability” of the community. Yet, similarly to their feelings about individual vulnerability, they ultimately resolved to view this trait as a strength rather than as a weakness.

Meaning, Value and Purpose

In shifting the conversation to their thoughts about the meaning, value and purpose of the community, the participants seemed to get rejuvenated, the energy in the space came alive, and the dialogue deepened. There was a noticeable downshift of the conversation, towards speaking, less from the intellect, and more from the heart. Again, it is difficult to summarize the wide range of feelings and insights shared during this session, but there were definitively four key themes that seemed to reverberate and get repeated over and over. Like four diamonds passed eagerly around the circle, each participant evoked and carved out his or her unique hue from the rainbow of ideas that refracted and gleamed off these four conversational prisms: 1. Community as restoration; 2. The power of witnessing/being witnessed; 3. The gift of love and acceptance; 4. Growing through relatedness.

Community as restoration. It is fitting to start with this theme of “restoration”, for this term, more than any other spoken during this part of the conversation, set the tone for everything that followed. First voiced by Judy in a powerful soliloquy about the meaning of community for her, the idea that the community was involved with “restoring consciousness” was something to which everyone seemed aligned. In fact, it may well be that all the topics which followed on from this—witnessing, love, acceptance, and relatedness—are all subsets, or piece-parts, as it were, forged from this foundational concept.

The idea of community as a vehicle for ‘restoring consciousness’ emerged initially out of a minor debate about the concept of healing versus “fixing”. Judy, and others, was concerned about calling the community a “healing community”, because she felt that it implied that there was something wrong with the members; that they needed to be fixed. She noted that the participants are for the most part highly functioning and successful members of society-at-large, and therefore, she was uncomfortable with the view that the purpose of the community was as “support group” or therapy group. Yet, that said, they all resonated deeply with the idea that each sought out community as a container for spiritual and personal growth—as a place for re-balancing their hectic lives, re-connecting to something they referred to as “essence” or “spirit”, and getting re-energized by being together in a loving, intimate manner—otherwise described as getting “restored”. Judy summed it up:

In indigenous communities where there is not a lot of technology to ‘do stuff’ for them, they rely on each other to work through the values and principles of how to live properly. Our community has a consciousness around exposing our bad habits to each other, as well as creating a sacred space in which we can break out of our routines of separateness and look at the ways in which we go unconscious. So there is something about restoring consciousness—we come together to become more conscious ...there is a sense of excitement and of growth that does fill us...which strikes me as a balancing energy to that insatiability, that hunger to consume something external.

Pat followed up on Judy’s remarks by personalizing this theme of restoration, revealing how her experience within the community has been restorative for her:

This experience of community has helped me to heal my feelings of separateness and fear of being alone. I feel like I now can choose to participate and to be alone—with less trepidation about feeling disconnected, apart, or lonely. I had held myself separately and therefore I was treated separately...I think that community has allowed me to learn to be one of the gang...so I have more confidence with being with people, and strangely enough I have also learned to be happier when I am alone.

Notably, Pat and others often used the terms “healing” and “restoration” somewhat interchangeably. It seems that what was problematic about the concept of healing for the group had everything to do with the cultural overlay—a sense that healing implies that one is broken or imperfect in some way. At the same time, there was little dispute within the group that our culture is at times debilitating in its focus on perfection and endless productivity. Each of the participants could relate to the idea that they are daily filled to the breaking point with work, kids, activities, things, and yet often feel spiritually bankrupt, emotionally underfed, and intellectually hungry. Hence, the call for restoration.

The power of witnessing and being witnessed. These next two themes—witnessing, love and acceptance—were interwoven in the dialogue that followed Judy’s expression of community as restoration. For Peter and Julie, this idea of being witnessed by self and other, being seen as a whole, complex, multi-faceted being, was a rich component of the healing or restorative power of the community. Julie described the act of witnessing and being witnessed in this manner: “In Philadelphia and now in the NY community, which started with Tom & Flame, the key for me has been the

unspoken intent to witness each other in a safe environment. There is an underlying commitment to our emotional well-being, our spiritual growth...we look out for each other in this way...we pay attention to our evolution as human beings on the planet.”

This idea of being a witness to the growth and development of others garnered support from the entire group. There was a sense in which the participants “hide out” in most other community settings, playing a particular role in order to succeed, but rarely letting down their hair, revealing the soft underbelly of their heart-felt wishes, needs and desires. In too many communities in which they participate, showing vulnerability is considered “inappropriate”—a sign of weakness. Peter expressed his experience this way:

I’ve always had a bit of a battle with vulnerability—seeing it as a negative—now I don’t see it that way and that has been an outcome of the experience of community settings where I’ve witnessed people speaking or being more open and vulnerable—expressing love, something beyond...I’ve had experiences where I’m almost taken to another “state”...where a new level of trust emerges and I break out of my linear perception.

He then followed up with a keen insight about the act of witnessing: that truly “seeing” the other, creates a process that works much like a mirror, reflecting back an opening of new and fresh viewpoints from which to know oneself:

I like to use community as a tool to ‘watch myself’ in a group setting. The community is like a mirror in which I can see my behavior reflected back at me and I can learn about different ways of being. This experience of growth then spills over into the real world, by making me more open to hearing something new or considering other options.

Love and acceptance. Larry jumped into the conversation around this topic of sharing one's vulnerability, and pointed out that "community must be grounded in love and acceptance". At this point, I felt a huge shift in the energy of the room; it was almost like someone had turned the key to unlock a door that we had all been pressing against: the door that hid our emotional selves. In the wake of Larry's words, it became obvious that the importance of having a simple, deep and profound experience of love and acceptance was crucial to any healing or growth effect that the community might have on us. It seemed like everyone had been thinking about—and feeling—the essential notions of love and acceptance, but because we were being taped, and the conversation was for a dissertation (e.g. an intellectual project), that love was perhaps too soft and idealistic, too New Age, to be discussed. This dynamic of reluctance to move the dialogue towards emotion and feeling was probably as much a result of cultural conditioning—e.g. expectations of what participant's roles should be in a "research project"—than a reflection on the intimacy of this particular group. Nevertheless, when Jan, after Larry, made the following comments, the overall tone and shape of the conversation changed dramatically:

My past experiences with community always ended when the fantasy hit up against the reality. In this community, the love and acceptance feels real. I've always strived for a place where I feel loved and where I can love myself being there...and for me, this is really the first place where on-goingly that's the way it is...like the family I never had, the community has given me the sense of being loved, being held, that has enabled me to be strong and free and emboldened to be who I am more...out in the world. For example, I now feel safe talking about my spiritual path—my psychic abilities and visions and stuff like that—

because the community has helped me to accept that part of who I am. I think that “the community” has changed my identity completely...changed who I even think myself to be...

Finally, Morgan, in supporting this important and revealing commentary by Jan, took the group to a new level of thinking about the meaning of love and acceptance by expressing these in terms of his commitment to personal growth and spiritual development. He pointed out that it is still not enough to form a community just around feelings of love and acceptance, that the purpose and vision that held us together was really about “using” this sense of safety and belonging as a grounding mechanism from which we focus on taking risks, working through life’s challenges, and fostering our expansion and growth as human beings in the world. He cautioned the group that a pure “love-in” was not a community, but an escape, a refuge, doomed to failure like the communes of the 1960’s:

I belong to many communities—sports teams, fraternities, churches, schools, associations, etc.—but what makes this community different is the depth of connections—a sense of safety, belonging. One of the things that has drawn me to this community is that...having a kind of ability to be in a different way in community, to connect with people, to have total expression, honesty, and lack of judgment...but what is special about this community is our commitment to...and investment in our growth and our truth. It is only partly about acceptance and safety, because what is also important is the expanded definition of love that I experience here. It is more like Scott Peck’s definition of love, which is about being really invested and committed to the spiritual growth of another person.

Growth through relatedness. What is assumed in Scott Peck’s definition of love, as Morgan aptly pointed out, is a commitment to being related, to being “in relationship” with the other. In this context, the group was

very much aligned with themes brought out by Tom and Flame regarding our cultural tendency to view personal growth and spirituality as individual, separate processes. This linkage to “the other” as “tool” for growth seems firmly embedded in the fledgling ‘culture’ of Old Growth. Pat summed up the group’s sense of this quite eloquently:

There is a powerful energetic shift that occurs when we “enter” the community space and re-connect with each other. A sense of relatedness, of belonging, emerges between us that doesn’t exist—at least for me—in most of my daily interactions with the world. It sometimes creates tension or anxiety...feels jarring...as I enter and exit the community space, probably because the shift represents a letting go of that individualistic stance...which is required to “survive” our culture...and welcoming in the feeling of relatedness that is so unusual and different—but ultimately, wonderful.

The discussion about how we use the impact of being-in-relationship to grow then digressed into a wide-range of reflections on the importance of listening to diverse and sometimes conflicting viewpoints, the value of introspection, the need to keep a tight rein on our egos, and the need to keep a lookout for our tendency to project onto others aspects of ourselves with which we feel incomplete, unhappy, or un-integrated. Some of these insights came from Judy, who, as a psychotherapist, is well-versed in themes of projection and ego defense; yet, the others chimed in too, for having all completed a series of workshops with Tom and Flame, they are conversant at a high level about issues relating to the ego, the personal shadow (the “dark side”), unconscious behavior and symptom, and the repercussions of unresolved childhood and adolescent trauma. All this talk about the hard work of personal growth in community prompted Julie to note—and this was

the first time anyone had spoken this theme that had been so crucial for Tom and Flame—that:

Being known is not always comfortable...safety and comfort are important elements of a community to which I am drawn...and participation is very crucial too. However, my feeling is that this community is much more than just comfortable...for the power of community really comes through in moments when I am uncomfortable. It is the level of vulnerability and truth-telling that marks a truly conscious community. . I love that you all know my crap better than me sometimes...which is not comfortable...but in the end it is always comfortable because there is that experience of being known, being held and loved and known.

The agency of growing in relatedness shows up as an act of generosity—sharing and exchange. As Judy put it: “it is an experience of reciprocity. You start from a place of knowing that people are going to open to my reality, such that I reciprocate by being open to theirs...” Being in the Old Growth community creates an opportunity for participants to come up against differing opinions and understandings and to be accepted and not judged. From Morgan’s perspective: “We get to practice standing in our own truth, while honoring and respecting the truth of others, and not making them wrong.” Interestingly enough, especially in light of Tom and Flame’s concern for the lack of maturity in the group, this game of reciprocity requires a fairly high level of consciousness and self-reflection—the ability to point the finger back at oneself rather than at the “other”—so that the experience of difference is used as an access point to connection rather than a place of breakdown. Clearly, levels of consciousness and maturity within the community will be

diverse—and claims, about self and other, in this regard, are at best, subjective, at worst, reflective of one’s own lack of consciousness.

Ultimately, the group arrived at a consensus that the deepest purpose and meaning of the community for them was this experience of continually fostering personal and spiritual growth. This theme, in fact, informs the purpose statement that they later co-authored and publicized to the entire community—about a month after this conversation: “*The purpose of the New York Community is to be connected in ways that support our personal growth and spiritual development.*” (They are still debating the use of the name Old Growth, since it circumscribed a specific group of people at the outset of the community—and may not be representative of all who have joined since.)

Community Practices

As in the conversation with Tom and Flame, the group spent a great deal of time on the question of what practices should be implemented to reinforce and help sustain the community. Interestingly enough, as emerging leaders, they—again like Tom and Flame—were reluctant to dictate what these practices should be. There was general agreement that a certain minimum set of “ways of being” and “ways of interacting together” was crucial to distinguish and separate Old Growth from other community contexts. Yet for many in the group, acknowledging this led them into a paradox: defining practices meant taking the risk of negating the power of flexibility, co-creation, and real-time spontaneity that had thus far characterized community events.

All of the participants were concerned that if they were to prescribe practices in a rigid, top-down manner, the life-blood of creativity could quickly get squeezed out of the fledgling community. So even though they all agreed on the importance of practices, there was a consensus that traditions and “normative behaviors” would develop organically with time, and that the most they could do in this conversation would be to lay out what practices had been meaningful for them up to this point; those they felt should therefore be reinforced.

One additional concern with the idea of “practices” was also brought up by a few of the participants: that the very concept of practices carries cultural baggage of “having to do stuff” – of work or labor or discipline or dogma. The question remained whether this need for practices might not reflect a cultural pathology—our attachment, some might say, addiction, to productivity. Needless to say, we did not even attempt to resolve this issue.

With the above caveat in mind, the group decided unanimously that practices in the Old Growth community might be as simple as “ways of being” and did not need to follow the cultural prescriptive of “rules of behavior” or “codes of conduct”. Again, we felt the push-pull dynamic that fluctuated between a desire to remain permeable, fluid and spontaneous, juxtaposed with the recognition of a need for structure, for some minimal scaffolding in order for the “house of Old Growth” to stand. Within this somewhat conflicted frame of reference, the conversation flowed back and forth between three

overlapping categories of practices: 1. Ways of being; 2. Ways of speaking; 3. Ways of relating.

Ways of being. There is perhaps little difference in the type of practices that the group discussed under categories of “ways of being” and “ways of relating”; however, I have separated them in this narrative for the purpose of distinguishing practices that focus specifically on the individual—what one brings of “self” to the community—versus practices that are commonly associated with what occurs between people—that is, what “we” practice in being related. In the first case, the group was quite adamant that people need to practice a set of behaviors, or as Morgan put it, “ways of showing up” that are consistent with the values and purpose of the community. This necessitates a commitment to “truth-telling”, as Pat described it, and sharing the group’s intention to explore, deepen, and grow oneself through revelation and sharing from the heart.

Judy seemed to speak for everyone when she pointed out that from her perspective, an individual’s choice to become part of the community had to be based fundamentally on desire: “the practices of this community are really all born of desire—desire to be available to connect and reveal oneself; desire to participate and keep showing up no matter what gets in the way; and desire to explore the very nature of community—to make it up as we go along...it is a commitment that we each bring to the community...to be a space for others to express into...” With individual intent agreed upon as the foundational practice, the group moved into conversation about the ways in

which they interact to reinforce, derive benefit, and sustain this intentionality, most of which centered on the importance of dialogue, of 'ways of speaking'.

Pat describe it thusly:

In the past, what drew me to the community was the opportunity to be in a 'managed' conversation that was educational and helped me to confront myself...in the circles of speaking and sharing, what often occurs is an opening or listening for something new that emerges from the silences and translations and exchanges of meanings and interpretations. Something occurs in the translation of ideas from one person to the next that will re-frame the ways in which I perceive reality, other people, even the world; this is a transformational experience. I think that what gets opened up in our speaking is what I've heard called 'the in-between'...the learning often occurs in this 'in-between' place for me.

Ways of speaking. It is unclear how familiar this group is with theoretical research on dialogue carried out by physicist David Bohm (1996), and others, yet they are all clearly well-versed in the rudimentary principles of dialogical practice: creating safe space, active listening, using a "talking stone", speaking from the heart, making room for silence, and so on. Various participants described these speaking practices as being somewhat loosely defined and as being implemented fairly informally. They were certainly not treated as rigid guidelines, yet the underlying purpose was clear: to create an environment where people would feel safe to speak from the heart, where power structures would be minimized and the energy of empowerment and freedom—to speak and to be heard—could be released. It is a testament to the sincerity—and ironically, given the comments by Tom and Flame, perhaps to the maturity—of the participants, that we can see much common soil being tilled in the following passages: one, from Julie, describing what the power of

dialogue means for her, and two, from David Bohm, describing what is possible for human beings, when they come together in dialogical communication. First, Julie speaking in the group session:

A key benefit of our community is an atmosphere in which we are allowed to experience our own emotional reactivity without being blamed or judged or shamed. We are encouraged to come back to reflecting on our negative stuff...our own shadow material...and to work it through with each other...this is a big part of the growth orientation of the community...to use each other to grow. It is not always about needing teachers...we can be each other's best teachers...we just need to give each other the space to have our reactions and not make it about each other...but to stay with it...and to work it out.

Note how aligned this extemporaneous expression of the importance of dialogical praxis is with the words of David Bohm himself:

If we can all suspend carrying out our impulses, suspend our assumptions, and look at them all, then we are all in the same state of consciousness...People tend to think of common consciousness as "shared bliss". That may come; but if it does, I'm saying that the road to it is through this...if people can share the frustration and share their different contradictory assumptions and share their mutual anger and stay with it—if everybody is angry together, and looking at it together—then you have a common consciousness. If people could stay with power, violence, hate, or whatever it is, all the way to the end, then it would sort of collapse—because ultimately they would see that we are all the same...and consequently they would have participation and fellowship...the whole thing goes differently. They become more open and trusting to each other. (p. 33)

At first glance, the principles of dialogue seem so simple: speak from the heart, listen intently, remain open to diverse viewpoints, be aware of bias and projections, etc. Yet, clearly, this form of conversation is not "normal" practice in the cultural context of debates, discussions, speeches, news reports, lectures and so on that comprise the majority of the "speaking"—the

performative expression of language—in the cultural contexts of white, middle class America. Dialogical speaking is a unique form of human interaction—one that can emancipate expression of marginalized or oppressed viewpoints, open up possibility, and nurture creative self-reflection within a group, but these effects do not just magically emerge when people come together and talk. It is profoundly simple to describe, yet particularly counter-cultural to enact, especially as a regular practice. Hence, this group, however unschooled they may have been on the theory, was deeply aware of the importance of dialogue for the community—and for themselves individually. It came through loud and clear as perhaps *the* fundamental community practice.

In fact, upon reflection about this salient characteristic of the community, Pat reminded everyone that there is usually an awkward transitional period around the feel and tone of conversation at Old Growth community events; a moment when someone—it could be anyone—typically notices that the speaking is not dialogue, but rather discussion or just ‘small-talk’. This individual will then make a direct request of the group to shift the tone, energy, and space of the interaction. This shift requires, in each case, a moment of leadership: an agency of desire spurs on one of the participants to generate a different kind of conversation. This decisive moment, a regular occurrence at most events, could be noted as an ongoing leadership practice of the community—although one not formally acknowledged by this group at

this session (which is indicative of the overall tenor of the conversation around leadership—see next section).

Ways of relating. The final set of practices enumerated by the group developed out of this theme of dialogue, for there turned out to be non-spoken actions and behaviors that the group considered equally important in the creation of the felt sense of safety and belonging that they returned to again and again. These practices, for the most part, had to do with the creation of intimacy and closeness; everyone seemed to have one or two that were of particular importance for them. Jan spoke about physical affection—the expression of love through touching and hugging—as something unique for her in this community: “In most social contexts in our culture, it would not be appropriate to go around touching, hugging, or showing affection in public, especially within a group. However, this is normal for us to do in the context of our community. Hence, it is an important practice—physical affection—that distinguishes us from other community settings.” Likewise, Morgan chimed in about the practice of sitting in a circle—as an equalizer, neutralizing the spatial power dynamics:

Sitting in a circle is important and sitting on the floor...not particularly unusual practices but different from social settings in our culture. In addition, we use music and movement to create safety and a sense of the sacred. Our community get-togethers usually have mini-rituals that make the experience feel like communion—even religious in a sense—but of our own choosing...it is a co-created form of spiritual practice.

Along these same lines, Judy spoke about the need for what she called “anchoring practices”:

Firstly, there is group meditation...the experience of meditating together is very important for it moves me very deeply...secondly, a practice of “including”...of being welcoming and not being exclusive. We always try to pay attention to the others...not leave people feeling alone, which is not typically done in the larger community...third, using practices that include music and poetry to ground the space...the reading of poetry and listening to music always brings me back to myself...and anchors the space of being together and being related.

In closing this conversation about practices, two participants offered comments that were particularly notable, and worth repeating, even though they don't fall comfortably within the parameters of these three neatly prescribed themes (but it should be noted that this process of chopping up the dialogue into chunks of “themes” is at best an artificial rendering of the actual encounter). First, Peter pointed out that part of the unique composition of the community events was that they inhibited or outright banned some of what might be considered “normal practices” at group gatherings: drinking alcohol, using drugs, excessive food consumption:

There doesn't seem to be as much drinking or doing drugs or other activities that are designed to deaden/alleviate pain in this community. This is a practice, I guess, of actually not practicing what are considered cultural norms of distraction. The community seems to have either moved on from those practices or already “hit bottom” and had the experience of their darker side. Here we seem to be in a new place...a better place or a new level where we want to be awake...to get down to the bear bones of what's going on...I mean, it's not so scary to be awake.

In a similar vein, Julie noted her fundamental ambivalence with the earlier discussion about the community as a place of comfort, safety and belonging. Like Peter in his remarks about “being awake”, she expressed her concern that without keeping alive a sense of vigilance, without fostering

discipline in the practices that we were delineating, the community was at risk of falling victim to cultural inertia: get-togethers could easily devolve into “party” events, “hang-outs”...and in that case the whole enterprise could quickly lose its momentum as distinct and intentional:

it is crucial that we put some practices in place—or become conscious and committed to the practices that we do have—in order that the community does not dissolve into a simple social group. As we become more comfortable with each other, it is easy for the people to forget the true purpose of the community and to fall into a comfort zone of socializing and avoiding discomfort... I’m feeling that this thing is teetering...my experience is that this community is at a critical point. The question is: what is the experience we are out to have as a community?

Answering her poignant question required the group to turn its attention to the subject—much ballyhooed and avoided—of leadership.

Leadership and Sustainability

In order to summarize the highlights of the conversation as it turned to the topic of leadership, it is necessary to bring the reader up to speed with what was happening in the community regarding leadership in the months before these group dialogue sessions took place. In the period of approximately nine months prior to this gathering, a rotating “leadership team” of three individuals had voluntarily taken on the responsibility for planning and executing monthly community events. In years prior to this “hand-over”, Tom and Flame had held the roles of leader/teacher, for the community was mostly focused around weekend workshops that they facilitated on a quarterly basis. These workshops, held in the homes of Judy and Larry Fox, and Pat and

John Kalfa, took place fairly consistently over a six-year period, starting in 1996. By 1999, a group of regular attendees had formed around these workshops. Numbering around twenty-five over the course of any given year in the late 1990's, these were the folks, who during 2001, stepped forward to claim the birth of an "intentional community".

It was in this transition period, between the fall of 2001 and the spring-summer of 2002, that Tom and Flame continued offering their workshops, yet simultaneously stepped back and began supporting a small cadre of volunteers to take the reins of the incipient community. Early adopters of the leadership role included Larry and Judy Fox, Jan Lichtenstein, Morgan McKeown, Jeff Hull, Julie Rhodes, Patricia Larkin, Anne Weiss, and Pat Colbert. This self-selected troupe set forth in groups of three, agreeing to be responsible for planning and executing community activities for three months before handing over the role to another troika of volunteers. At that point, the community membership—based on an informal tally of participation and interest—comprised approximately twenty regular participants and perhaps twenty-five additional "part-timers". These mini-planning committees had been operating for nine months prior to this recorded dialogue session, successfully interweaving evening and daylong programs with the regular weekend visits by Tom and Flame. Most of the events thus far had been comprised of theme-based "community circles" or dialogue sessions, interspersed with nature walks, potluck dinners, and celebrations of birthdays, weddings and holidays.

As they approached the topic of leadership and sustainability during this dialogue session, it was clear that since many of the early volunteers were present, they had, in effect, already declared themselves as “leaders” and were deeply engaged in the emotional, physical, and spiritual dynamics that “stepping up” their involvement with community naturally entailed. Hence, the conversation about leadership was framed not from the vantage point of “who” but rather “how” the agency of leadership should continue to unfold. A primary concern of the participants was that they not be perceived as “taking over” or “dictating” the meaning, method, or practices of the community; that leadership roles should remain voluntary and self-selected; and that leadership should always be shared among a team of collaborative partners, never held or handed-over to a single individual.

However, even with this basic grounding and alignment, the subject of the future of the community and how it would be sustained aroused strong and passionate feelings among the participants. It was perhaps the most difficult topic of the conversation, eliciting a tense dance between the desire and recognized need for leadership, alongside the heavy weight—some would say “burden”—of bearing responsibility for the ongoing success of the community. Yet, in spite of the perceived risks of backlash, of overwork, of resistance—for the most part—the overall tenor of this topic reflected and revealed the group’s energy of commitment and enthusiasm, which seemed to outweighed the dangers of fallout and failure.

So, within an atmosphere of seriousness, of humility, and some notable hesitation, the group declared the need for a “sustaining committee” that would meet regularly (to start every other week) to focus on building the “community container” – the principles, values, and themes that would undergird the future of the community. This group would be formed voluntarily and kept completely open to anyone in the community who wanted to participate. It would operate in addition to the ongoing quarterly troika of volunteers, who would still be responsible for the logistics, communications, and implementation of community events.

Overall, this portion of the two day discussion was particularly moving and powerful, fostering deep reflection and strong feelings—of fear, of enthusiasm, of worry, anxiety, and excitement all rolled together in one—that can perhaps be best described by Judy, Julie, and Morgan, each of whom declared their commitment and interest in joining in the creation of this new “sustaining committee”. Judy, in effect, set the tone for the entire conversation:

To sustain the community requires a core group of people who are committed to the work, effort, and time necessary to build the community. A leadership or sustaining group should emerge in an evolutionary process, which is non-exclusive and open to anyone who has the desire to step up and participate at a different level. I for one, am declaring myself, “that”, but I also feel strongly about taking this process one step at a time in small increments...it doesn't have to be a grand scale infrastructure.

Likewise, Morgan's comments reflect the general sense of anxiety, hesitation, inspiration and enthusiasm that seemed to permeate the dialogical field as the group worked through this sensitive topic:

Working with Tom and Flame and Judy and Jeff over the past year or so has opened up the inquiry for me about what it means to "be in community". I have always been a rather passive participant in communities...but this community has awakened my hunger for growth and given me a taste of what is possible when community is really safe and people are committed to being straight and being seen. My love for this community has made me want to be more intentional about how we create this community, so I have to ask myself: what am I willing to do to create that?"

In her remarks about the possibility of creating a sustaining committee, Julie demonstrated her natural ability and facility with leading and creating vision for a group of like-minded seekers; yet, at the same time, she seemed to hold back from fully expressing her power and her desire, ever cognizant of the dangers of putting herself—or the group—on a pedestal or creating separation:

I believe, that the focus of any leadership group that discusses the future and sustainability of the community needs to be on the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental practices that we want to keep putting in place to support the community being a place for personal growth. On the other hand, it is important that the leadership...that we...be a place of invitation and openness...or else there may be a backlash from the community.

In a sense, the level of anxiety produced by this discussion of leadership is a testament to two characteristics of this group: a high-level of consciousness around the importance of self-leadership; an awareness that being a leader means being a role model for others, juxtaposed with a deeply felt sense of skepticism and resistance to authority and hierarchy. In effect,

the choice to create a separate group of leaders at all—whether they call it a sustaining committee or a planning committee (it is telling that the group spent a great deal of time on the issue of naming these groups, in an all out effort to avoid using the term “leadership” or “leaders”), to a certain extent flies in the face of the modality of community relatedness that they all care so much about: non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal, non-pedagogical, collaborative, democratic, etc.

At issue here is the attempt by a group of self-aware individuals to effect the construction of a community container that is characterized by equality, parity, partnership and diversity, all the while fully aware that they are bound up in a cultural hegemony that still embraces patriarchal and hierarchical structures of power. Peter, in fact, pointed towards this dilemma, when in the middle of this conversation about leadership, he expressed his frustration with the whole endeavor:

My problem with this discussion about community is that there is too much thinking, too much ego. I try to fall back into more of a self-inquiry and note my personal issues with: desire for control...desire for approval. My desire for security. I need to “dissolve” these and then move to a space of opening up. Community should lead to an opening, an awakesness. Even the word “community” strikes me as somewhat jargon-y...I want to take the word and spit it out...bit I don’t really know how else to describe it...basically, I am still trying to think of this as something positive...I think...ok...let me be part of something that is ultimately positive.

One cannot help but hear in Peter’s remarks his frustration with the cultural overlay that impinges upon everything that this tiny troupe of community builders is trying to accomplish. And given this constraint, it would

have to be said that the conversation was a qualified success: the sustaining committee, which has now been operational for a few months, was born here, as was the declaration of the group's commitments—to the building of community, to the liberating experience of dialogue, to the importance of doing individual work, and most of all, to each other as brothers and sisters pushing at the edge of what's possible.

Finally, issues of geography, space and proximity were discussed briefly. Perhaps the group had run out of steam by this point in the conversation—six hours over two days—because this issue was only lightly touched on here. Jan and Judy spoke about their desire for a “center”, a community space where, as Jan described it, “everyone can come, to just hang out and feel welcome, have access, and utilize for the benefit of the community.” Yet, there were no immediate plans for acquiring or building such a space, at least in the short term. The consensus seemed to be—at that point in time—that bringing people together on a regular basis, in each other's homes, was enough of a container in which to grow the community. It is perhaps interesting to note, in retrospect, that the bulk of these folks live in close proximity to each other in Westchester County, just outside of New York City. So, the question remains: if participants from Long Island (over an hour by car from Westchester), Brooklyn, or Manhattan (home to a large number of community members) had been present, how might the conversation been different? Geographical issues of proximity and travel, essentially left on the

table by the participants, may very well prove to be critical components of any plan to sustain the community over time.

Summary

To a certain extent what is outlined above is already a summary, as an artificial distillation of what was a potent, content-rich conversation over many hours and two days. In fact, even the dialogue itself, and the subsequent transcriptions, are but summarizations of an actual experience—a community event—that unfolded over the two days when this group came to my home, cooked and dined together, walked in the woods together, watched television together, meditated together, and, of course, conversed at length. It is an interesting paradox, perhaps inherent in the nature of participatory research, that any attempt to capture the “essence” of an encounter between co-researchers, to recapitulate the essential nature of such an event, is impossible, for every act of explanation is but a post-script, a distant memory, a historical fiction, far removed in space, time, and truth, from what actually occurred.

Yet, at the same time, speaking with reference to the projected “goal” of this kind of hermeneutic, participatory research protocol—engagement of co-researchers in work that leads to deeper understanding and creative action for the betterment of people’s lives—the session would have to be considered an unqualified success. The timing was fortuitous, for topics like meaning, practices, and leadership, were already on the forefront of the

community agenda, and out of these conversations has come the formation of a leadership team focused on defining the vision, purpose, and issues of sustenance for the community. Hence, this commingling of a participatory research philosophy and praxis with an intentional community in flux, has already resulted in the successful deepening of understanding, collaboration, consciousness, and ultimately, community itself, just as Elizabeth Herda (1999), following Gadamer, predicts:

In field-based hermeneutic research, both the participants and the researcher are interpreters...The research work is part of a historical continuum, no matter what the research question is, and it is through the knowledge of history that we come to know ourselves and others. This knowledge is sustained by a speech community and is linguistic in nature. This knowledge is possible because what is said by a speaker (each person speaking in a research project) directs the dialogue, and the speaker fades away. The dialogue, which we are, and our prior understanding, become the "matter" of the text and stand apart from the speaker and the text. This matter of the text then stands ready to be used by community members...Consensual action based on participants who comprehend one another, share knowledge, trust one another, and share values is the action that should be...the basis for developing...our communities. (p. 69-71)

The above comments notwithstanding, the successful outcome of this two day dialogue session represents but a small stepping stone along a path of community building that continues to stretch and expand and repeatedly stumble against roadblocks as it gains access to more uncharted territory. There are still numerous fault lines of non-alignment, glaringly evident between the community's founders and primary teachers, Tom and Flame, and the volunteers who have taken up the picks and shovels to build the structures of community. Evidently, this fledgling leadership troupe is

primarily interested in creating a container for the mostly inward-focused work of personal growth and spiritual development. They also appear equally committed to forging an emotional holding container that will foster and reinforce their mutual sense of belonging, love and acceptance. There was virtually no attention paid by the group to questions of social activism or holding a “big vision” for the community along the lines of the more politically motivated intent espoused by Tom and Flame. So the questions remain: Are Tom and Flame correct—that without an externally-focused mission of transformation, the community is doomed? Is the creation of a container for individual growth and dialogical expression enough to sustain a community? Especially one that is geographically dispersed?

And what of the consciousness and maturity of the participants? Tom and Flame are concerned about the lack of leadership and the willingness of people to step up and risk losing the comforts of the social sphere in order to take on a larger, less individualistic “for the sake of what”, which is for them key to making a difference in the world. On the other hand, is it “immature” for a group to deeply reflect on the nature, purpose and responsibilities of leadership and community, to wonder aloud if the act of “stepping up” is not perhaps an act of separation and power? Is it immature of the group to reflect on the implications of community action and to consider the challenge of creating a truly co-creative, participatory, non-hierarchical community in the midst of a patriarchal society, a worthy, even potentially subversive goal?

In the next section, I reflect on my own struggle with these questions during and since the dialogues in question, turning inward towards my own emotional reactivity and prejudices, as example and model of the hermeneutic circle of distancing and appropriation, within self and with other, in action. I then continue the analysis and interpretation of additional narrative texts that were generated in one-on-one dialogues with specific individuals, some of whom operate in the inner sanctum of the community, while others linger on the margin. In choosing to converse with individuals in this wide range of participation and involvement, I hope to broaden, deepen and fuse our “horizons of understanding”, and ultimately, to offer in this text, a living organism that will feed back to the entire community food that nourishes and sustains the conversations that bring the community to life.

Personal Reflections

It has now been over four months since this series of group dialogue sessions took place, yet the text still feels very much alive and “at work”, in the participants (as they generate commentary and feedback), in the community (as themes from these conversations continually resurface at gatherings), and in me (as the inner dialogue rages). In this section, I want to take a ‘moment’ in which to step back and reflect on my own evolving viewpoints, feelings and prejudices, to examine how these may be influencing the manner in which this “narrative text” is being written.

It is here, in fact, with the sharing of my own reflective stance that the confluence of depth psychology and hermeneutic philosophy is revealed, and unfolds within this research protocol. For Gadamer and Ricoeur, as philosophers of critical hermeneutics, both recognize the impossibility of establishing any form of objectivity in reporting or interpreting research data, dialogue, linguistic phenomena, or text. Whether one is crafting and analyzing a “text” from transcriptions, or one is simply participating in a linguistic exchange—a communal act of inter-subjectivity, which Gadamer describes as the praxis of community—in either case, one necessarily brings to the act a whole set of personal and cultural baggage. Environmental and historical conditioning operates as a sort of background narrative, which gets expressed or withheld throughout any interpretive process of communication, in writing or speech, emerging as prejudice, pre-understandings, and pre-conceived notions. No bracketing, however vigilant, can ever relieve the subject from these constraints, for as Gadamer (1976) points out, the build up, recognition and discard of prejudice is embedded in the very act of interpretation:

And also only in this manner do I learn to gain a new understanding of what I have seen through eyes conditioned by prejudice. But this implies too, that the prejudgments that lead to my preunderstandings are also constantly at stake, right up to the moment of their surrender—which surrender could also be called transformation. It is the untiring power of *experience*, that in the process of being instructed, man is ceaselessly forming new understandings. (p.38)

Likewise, the depth psychological lens, with which I intend to view this project and the analysis of the “data”, is fundamentally concerned with what is

being left unsaid, what remains marginalized or unconscious within a process of reflection, a dialogue, or a community act. The goal of depth psychological research is aligned with hermeneutics in that both focus on the self-reflective nature of understanding, the circular process of interpretation that takes one out of oneself and into the “other”, yet necessitates a return to self, a plumbing of the depths of one’s own conscious and unconscious processes, in order for any transformational, meaningful “knowledge” to occur.

Hence, my inner dialogue around the issues raised by the conversations described above is a crucial link in the chain of narrative that creates understanding. In the act, as described earlier by Ricoeur, of “distanciation” from the text—stepping back and reflecting on the narrative text, not as a mirror of the dialogue it came from, but rather as entirely separate and distinct creative product subject to its own interpretations and limitations—and subsequent “appropriation”—taking possession of the projected interpretation, claiming and internalizing the dialectical process as one’s own—, only then can research material from both the subjective and inter-subjective domains of a community be assimilated and the possibility arise for new horizons of meaning to emerge.

Within this context, I read the transcripts, reflect on the texts, re-read and reflect on the rounds of feedback— in the form of more text—and I also “remember” being deeply connected to this wonderful, loving, tight knit assemblage of leaders, and friends. I resonate still with the calm, the quiet resolute depth of alignment that rose between and among us as we talked

passionately about our dreams, concerns, and visions of possibility for the community. Certain subjects, even specific words or phrases, seemed to take on an imaginal presence in the space—sparking emotions, reactivity, and energies that bound us tightly together, heating up the space between us. Connecting and synchronistic images, conjured in the speaking of words and phrases like safety, love, acceptance, belonging, “being connected”, “being-in-relationship”, and “being seen”, seemed to converge in the center of our circle, declaring us linked, protected, held in a communal unity of feeling. In those moments, the experience was of heightened vibration, of a dissolving of separation and distance between us; it was an otherworldly sensation, even transcendent, as an energy that we might, for lack of a better language have called “spirit”, or God, seemed to move through the room.

Likewise, I can also still feel, even today, the tension and anxiety brought forth in the space, embodied in a vibratory energy of conflict, however benign, around the raising of certain other subjects. In keeping with Gadamer’s notion that language is the expression of community in action, and the depth psychological idea that symbols are potent containers of psychic energy, I can point to certain words—and their representative images and thoughts—that continue to arouse my own prejudice and judgment. Words like “exclusivity”, “comfort”, “healing”, and “growth”, were and are still, fraught with tension within the community; they emerged as those “in-between” symbols of paradox and inconclusiveness, where perhaps, as Pat pointed out, the real act of learning, growth and transformation takes place. These

words seem to always require a question mark instead of a period when expressed in the context of the Old Growth community.

The word “exclusivity” is one, for example, that generated passion and anxiety for me, even in the context of this supposedly safe dialogue circle. As the only gay man represented in the group, I remember feeling dismissed and marginalized in the conversation about the community’s lack of economic, racial, or sexual diversity. There seemed to be consensus among the group that the mostly white, upper middle class demographics of the community, although somewhat exclusive, did not pose a problem; that, in fact, it was within the nature of community itself to always be somewhat exclusive. What was irksome for me was the lack of interest the participants had in probing this topic further. Like-minded as they were, there was little incentive for them to dig below the surface “truth” of their position, to mine for psychic material that might be deemed “radioactive” in terms of their blindness to their own stance.

Instead, it struck me that there was a certain stridency in the dismissal of the topic of exclusivity as unworthy of discussion; they seemed proud to wear the badge of openness and inclusion, but reluctant to look under the lapel on which it was worn. The fact that there are a wide range of ages, sexes and religious affiliations represented within the group, and even a few token homosexuals, seemed to suffice as proof of the goodwill and open-minded intentions of the group. There seemed to be an expectation that diversity, as such, was something that would get taken care of by itself

through a combination of having a welcoming stance towards newcomers and a natural process of self-selection.

Yet, I still feel ambivalent about what struck me as avoidance of a particularly crucial theme—who is in and who is out—amidst lingering feelings of having been marginalized, not heard, and worse—summarily dismissed in my provocation of this topic in the first place. It is also true that I did not force the issue, or bring my own “marginal” status to the attention of the group. I am tempted to say that I was simply too stunned by their lack of engagement around the topic, but upon deeper reflection, I cannot help but wonder about my own need to “hide-out” with the majority, to maintain my sense of belonging, not to risk setting myself apart, or inflicting upon myself that despised experience of outcast that I have so often avoided. This revelation, of course, smacks of residual internalized homophobia, and shame, that I might prefer to keep repressed, locked away in a dark chamber of my psyche; yet the choice to participate in community, especially one made up of a majority of heterosexuals, will likely continue to foster a tendency for these kinds of feelings to rise towards the surface. Ultimately, this represents a healing opportunity—in fact, one in which the safety and love of the container might very well hold. Time will tell. In any case, this issue of inclusiveness and exclusiveness clearly marks an entry point to the shadow of the community, and to my own shadow issues with regard to belonging.

Moving on to the word “comfort”, I had and still have a similar sense of unease around the consensual commentary that was presented initially by

Larry, who held forth that a community should first and foremost be a place of comfort, a place where the participants should “feel comfortable”. It is interesting that the word “comfort”, not safety or belonging, is psycho-active for me, in the sense that comfort fosters an image of complacency, where safety and belonging do not. I tend to align with Tom and Flame on the subject, and note that Julie also raised the question of how comfort and growth might be opposing forces within the community. Yet, my discomfort with the group’s desire for “comfort” remains, because at this juncture, many months after this word was first discussed and seized upon as noteworthy by the group, there has been little progress made in marking the distinction between community as a comfortable space in which to hang out, and community as a place to “push the edge” and grow.

In fact, the whole notion seems to have gone underground, into a collective repository of unanswered questions, to which the community leaders have turned a blind eye. It strikes me that pushing this crucial issue of comfort—as it pertains to the values, meaning and purpose of the community—into the margin, points towards a failure of leadership and maturity—on the part of the sustaining committee (and on my part also). Here again, I am faced with the conundrum of my own paradoxical psyche, for I too, long for the experience of ‘chosen family’ in my community, and though I may occasionally push the envelope—I have spoken my frustration that too many community events carry a “hang out and feel good” agenda—I’m not sure that I’d want to dispense with the emotional warmth and pleasure

associated with the comfort, love and acceptance available at these events. Hence, the paradox remains.

Finally, I can also feel in the words “healing” and “growth”, that same sense of emotional baggage and unfinished business for the community. I have written earlier about the group’s feelings of ambivalence around both these concepts and I bring them up again here, only to reinforce the quandary, for my own relationship with these terms is also quixotic and ungrounded at times. For me, “healing” tends to bring forth positive imagery of a return to wholeness; it connotes the foundational pull towards expressing our full potential as human beings, that Jung described in coining the widely accepted (and used by this community) term, individuation. I always tend to consider growth and healing as two sides of the same coin of individuation: the former fosters the unfolding of future potential, the latter helps us to reframe and release the hurts, wounds, and traumas that represent blocked potentials from the past. For me, the power of community is unleashed fully only by interweaving these two processes: together, we heal the past and grow in to the future, resulting in the full flowering of our humanity.

Yet, some of my brothers and sisters in the community are concerned about becoming overly stigmatized by a focus on healing, considering it a sign of our attachments to the past, a sign of our unwillingness to let go of past hurts and firmly face towards the future. The dilemma here is perhaps not high stakes for the community, yet I do want to point out my own sense of what’s being left out of the conversation: the possibility that the very

conditions under which we are defining “growth” in the culture may be potentially traumatic and wounding to the human soul. In the sense that our high-tech industrial, capitalistic culture, which is focused heavily on productivity and linear upward economic growth, may be unnatural and unsustainable—and inherently contradict the way that nature, including human nature, works. I will delve more into this potential conflict between growth and healing again, when reflecting on the research done on psychoanalysis and social trauma, but for now, I raise the issue as an expression of my own unresolved, inner tension.

For me, the community experience of Old Growth is profoundly healing, and in fact, as an antidote to the addictive forms of work and task-orientation that seem to link up with personal growth, I am tempted at times to hold back my support for the growth agenda of Old Growth. Yet again, I remain caught in the paradox of desire—for both.

Participant Conversations

Profile(s) of the participants

In this section, I analyze the transcripts and report the themes that emerged from four one-on-one conversations with individual members of the community. The choice of participants was deliberate: they include two men and two women; one individual who is only a “part-time” member; two individuals who have migrated back and forth between being active and inactive over a period of years; and an individual who is perhaps the key leadership figure after Tom and Flame. The following is a brief summary of their personal profiles.

Judy Fox, who was the only participant interviewed twice for this project—as participant in both the individual and group dialogues—has been involved with Old Growth since its inception. She and her husband Larry originally brought Tom and Flame Lutes to the New York area; they have been major supporters and subscribers to this particular form of personal growth work for many years. Judy is a psychotherapist by profession. She has always had a passion for community, having founded with four friends an annual community retreat mentioned earlier—“the Gathering”—some twenty years ago. In many ways, she has been my foremost partner and co-researcher in this project; she has supported its progression since the very beginning, helped to clarify the themes and categories of the investigation, and worked on the logistics of bringing people together in support of both this

dissertation and the community. Her input has been and continues to be invaluable.

On the other end of the spectrum, I conducted a dialogue session with Serge Levy, who is only peripherally engaged in the Old Growth community, but who has deep interest in communal process and, having grown up in wartime France, acquired a rich cultural and historical frame of reference around the many complexities of community. Serge, who was born in a small village in France and brought up steeped in the Jewish cultural and religious traditions of that region, emigrated to the U.S. a few years ago with his ex-wife and two sons. He is an entrepreneur and businessman, who has successfully managed and led small and large multi-national, and multiethnic teams of professionals. His involvement with Old Growth came about through work with Tom and Flame, both in New York workshops and personal “intensives” with them at their home in Colorado. Although he has not, as of yet, actively joined in many of the activities of the community, he is very interested in the general theme of community-based healing and growth, and remains engaged from the border. As he puts it, “I sit on the fence about the community”.

The other two participants in individual dialogues, Hugh Graham and Katie Kelly McCarthy, are active participants in Old Growth, and have each been involved with Tom and Flame’s work for many years. Hugh is a concert pianist, who, with his partner Gordon Clark, lives in Manhattan. In addition to Old Growth, Hugh is actively involved with another healing community—

Alcoholics Anonymous. Katie is an office manager and housewife, living in the suburbs of Westchester County, New York. She and her husband Dennis have done a great deal of work with Tom and Flame over the years; they were both participants in the yearlong program that spawned Old Growth. Over the years since its inception, Katie's involvement with the community has been inconsistent and quixotic; she has been at various times a fully engaged participant, a distant observer, and a vociferous critic from the sidelines. As of this writing—April 2003—she is actively involved in the sustaining committee, having just recently stepped up to acknowledge her leadership gifts. I chose to talk at length with Hugh and Katie, in particular, because they both have strong ties to Tom and Flame, and they have both been, at various times along the way, strong supporters and ardent detractors of the community project as it has unfolded.

Personal and cultural context

As a starting point for discussing their interest in and involvement with community, I asked each individual to talk about how their personal and cultural backgrounds, as well as other experiences with community groups, have led them to Old Growth. Judy, as one of the earliest and most engaged proponents of building the community, spoke about her feelings of alienation and isolation in the broader cultural context of suburban life in America. She and Hugh agreed that it was this deep sense of “feeling isolated and alone

even in the crowded metropolis” that fostered their desire for intimacy and belonging. Judy described it as a “yearning for community”, and more:

Our cultural context of patriarchy and individualism colors all of our social interactions. We long for a deeper sense of relatedness, for collaboration instead of power games, connection and dialogue instead of dogma and politics. I think that fundamentally we are all feeling alone and lonely...but on another level, we know that we are all one.

In addition, Judy noted that most of the participants in Old Growth are over forty years old and have been through the full range of ups and downs in trying to find the “perfect life partner” that the culture idealizes and continually reinforces through advertisements, film, television, and all forms of the media, in addition to peer pressure from within the work and social spheres:

The desire for community is often born of disillusionment and disappointment...it is often in mid-life when people “wake-up” to the disappointment with their partners...the illusion that their primary relationships and families will be the source of their happiness. One is often caught between holding on to the illusion of having that one perfect relationship and yet, at the same time, kind of knowing that one is asleep, that the focus of one’s yearning on a single relationship is really not being awake at all...and that just brings up the pain of disillusionment...”

Hugh was generally aligned with Judy’s viewpoint, although he added an interesting cultural overlay: the tendency of people to want to “consume” community and personal growth through one-shot offerings, workshops, and retreats. He was wary of people in the Old Growth community, who, in his perception, came out of Tom and Flame workshops with a sense that they “had the community thing nailed”; that they were in fact well on their way to being finished with the need for healing or personal growth: “There is a sense in which people in the community go to a Tom & Flame workshop or

community event, and come away with a feeling of having graduated, as if they are ready to ‘take ourselves out in the world’...this sense of being ‘finished’ strikes me as very ego-based.”

These perceptions, of community as something to be purchased and “consumed”, in order to alleviate feelings of isolation and alienation, are reflections due in part to Judy and Hugh’s exposure to and involvement with other growth-oriented communities, notably Landmark Education and Alcoholics Anonymous. Both of them had strong feelings about the cultural links that connect these communities—and people’s desire to participate in them—and the pull towards creating a community beyond the Tom and Flame workshops. Katie’s perception of Old Growth was also influenced and colored, in both positive and negative ways, by her participation in both the AA and Landmark communities, for she too had joined Old Growth as an evolutionary step after exiting these and other self-help groups. Hence, the themes that arose in these dialogues were partly a result of the participant’s natural tendency to “compare notes” from their experiences within other collective constructs and the Old Growth community.

Judy’s comments about AA in this regard, would seem to sum up all of their initial thoughts:

Old Growth has much in common with the spiritually based programs that have grown up around AA. There is a sense in which our community is a “recovery” community as well; that we have in common the same commitment to creating a container for self-exploration and an atmosphere of safety for the expression of vulnerability and suffering...there is a tremendous amount of overlap. They do take you

into self-exploration and get you to look at your ways of being and what you've done in the past...

In contrast to AA and Old Growth, Judy noted—and Hugh and Katie concurred—Landmark represents a more conceptual/intellect-based approach to personal growth. Although the emphasis upon self-responsibility and group support is a common theme, Landmark is more structured, more commercial—marketing workshop series and theme-based retreats—and less spiritually focused; hence, generally less of an environment for deep revelation and vulnerability.

Landmark Education, today a multi-million dollar business offering personal growth workshops and seminars all across the U.S. and internationally, originally grew out of a self-help “technology” known as “EST”, created by Werner Erhardt in the 1970's. Hugh, Katie, and Judy all described Landmark as a community much like Old Growth also, in that it is designed to help individuals to “break through” barriers and heal the past—particularly childhood trauma and dysfunctional family conditioning—and to empower self-expression and self-fulfillment. However, they all agreed that as a profit-oriented business enterprise, Landmark is less of a support community like AA or Old Growth; they all noted that its rigid organizational structure and emphasis on enrollment left them feeling ambivalent about the dual agenda of serving people and making money.

It seems that the Landmark, as a personal growth organization, may be committed to self-knowledge and self-expression, but for these individuals,

this community container felt less safe, more cerebral and ego-based. According to Hugh, power games and dogmatic thinking are more evident in that community, so that people maintain their persona or mask, even though the “pretense” (his word) of the community is itself about pushing through the edges of personal limitations. It seems that just because people align behind the goal of self-development does not automatically guarantee that an atmosphere of safety and trust will be created. Judy’s experience captures this concern: “[At Landmark], I would allow myself to go there (towards revealing) conceptually in their work, but I wouldn’t be fully vulnerable in revealing my most intimate dark side, because I couldn’t trust that it was a safe place to be fully vulnerable.”

Likewise, Katie, who had been involved with both AA and Landmark for many years prior to joining Old Growth, shared a mixed bag of emotions and reflections about the benefits and drawbacks of these forms of intentional community. For example, she noted that she believed in the mission of the Landmark organization and felt that in some ways it had offered her a greater overall sense of empowerment than AA, for she considered her personal experienced within AA, although profoundly healing, to be problematic:

...for most people in AA, it is a lifetime commitment. A lot of people never get to the point of being able to leave. For me, AA was where I learned to live my life sober, to live with other people and to depend on other people, but I took it a step further with Landmark...I guess I also realized that the fundamental thing that was not healthy for me in AA was continuously relating to myself as being broken...that something was wrong.

In contrast, Landmark offered Katie, as she described it, a community of people “in action in the world”, where she was able to step up, practice leadership and hone her organizational skills. She spoke glowingly about the sense of acknowledgement and accomplishment that she gained from Landmark, as well as the strong social ties that she was able to foster within that community. Unfortunately, the downside of Landmark for her came through its tendency to “suck her dry” in the seemingly endless call to do more work, enroll more people, and take more courses:

Eventually I became very burnt out with the whole volunteerism aspect of Landmark...because they basically take anything that you give...and I kept giving and giving until I didn't have anything left to give...that's why [with Old Growth] I didn't want to go into anything right away...because I was so afraid of what happened to me at Landmark...how brainwashed I became...it was very scary for me...so I was [and am] a bit wary of going into another self-help kind of situation.

Like many in the group dialogue sessions, Katie's history with community experiences—both the success and failures of AA, Landmark, and others—are colored and informed by the painful experiences she remembers from her community of origin, her family. Growing up as the youngest of five sisters, with distant and dis-engaged parents, she describes her formative community in a small Oklahoma town as “Darwinist”: “It was very much survival of the fittest...you didn't survive if you weren't strong enough to ‘take it’ and basically stand alone on some level, which led me to shy away from community for many, many years.” It seems that Katie is one more example of someone who seeks out community for purposes of healing the trauma of

the past and fulfilling the desire to create a “chosen family”. And like Judy, Hugh, and others, she is grateful, for the most part, for the communities she found in AA, Landmark, and Tom and Flame, for they helped her form a foundation of strength and functionality on which she has been able to engage and reflect proactively upon her involvement with Old Growth.

Ultimately, the gift of AA and Landmark, in addition to their intended outcomes of healing or self-help, is that even their attendant flaws and failings have helped create a baseline of “knowledge” about community building—what works and what doesn’t—that is invaluable for people like Judy and Katie, who are attempting to navigate the vicissitudes of issues like enrollment, structure, volunteerism, vulnerability and safety in the formation and evolution of Old Growth.

Serge, whose personal background is more steeped in French cultural traditions than American, and who has generally avoided community affiliations with groups like Landmark, spoke instead about his view that there is no one, universal way in which human beings confront suffering and pain. For him, it was somewhat ironic to watch Americans clamor after community, given that his perception of the culture was of extreme individualism and self-sufficiency. In fact, given that his formative years were spent fully submerged in a community-oriented small village in Western Europe, he was skeptical about whether what Old Growth represented was really “community” at all.

He acknowledged that the Americans seemed to carry a genuine desire for community—because it was something they lacked—but he also

held that their attempts to build it lacked authenticity, and smacked, in his view, of artificial and temporary construction that would quickly be torn asunder as soon as the participants' exalted individuality was threatened. The "bottom line" in his view, in stark contrast to his upbringing and subsequent disillusion with community endeavors, was that New Yorkers—or at least the Caucasian, suburban, middle class, secular group with which he associated—would never relinquish their ego-based attachment to self, in favor of the needs of a community:

Different cultures have historically evolved different ways of dealing with human suffering. In America, where the culture is individualistic, people are taught to be self-contained and self-sufficient. In Europe, especially in Jewish villages, there is an age-old cultural context that community is much more important than the individual. In the European Jewish village, there is no permeability in the community; the community is much more important than the individual, because the individual will not survive alone...so there are many things in the cultural and historical context that play into what the individual is ready to do—or heal—in a community context.

In addition to their perception of cultural influences, I asked each individual how they felt about the geographical dispersion of participants, and the non-land-based character of the community. They all seemed to believe that this issue had more to do with lifestyle choice than geography. It was out of the question for any of them to consider leaving their busy lives as New Yorkers to take up any form of communal living. They all indicated that those days of "communes and capitalist refugees" (Hugh's phrase) were long gone, and that today's challenge was to create community without trying to escape the world. None of them seemed to think that Old Growth community

involvement was incompatible with their lives or their geographies. There was, in fact, a sense that communing by getting together in each other's homes represented, in fact, a circling back to the days before the sixties counter-culture of communes became popular, to a time when gathering with friends at home was a powerful, if somewhat ephemeral rubric of community life.

Judy, as a leader in the community, was particularly aware of the challenge of keeping the community alive and growing even though it is not a land-based living arrangement like most intentional communities. She offered up her view that building Old Growth for people who do not choose to "go live on the land like Tom and Flame" provides an opportunity to experiment with new forms of intentional community: "It opens the possibility that we could be participants in the experience of a rich duality—of being firmly planted in the world *and* being part of an intentional community".

Finally, each of these individuals spoke at length about life in New York post 9/11, replete with its exaggerated fears of terrorism and increased violence. Yet, they all seemed to be up on the statistics too: that life in New York City is actually safer than it has been, in terms of violent crime, for over fifty years. Everyone—in the group dialogue too—was committed, for good or ill, to the high-tech, post-industrial all-American lifestyle: material success as defined by acquisition, of apartments, homes, boats, cars, and so on. Even Serge, coming from France, was convinced that the entrepreneurial, creative spirit of American business was a better bet for him and his family than a

sedentary, and in his view, stifling life in a more traditional European village setting, where the percentage of unemployment runs in the high teens.

None of these individuals, all prosperous by global, even American standards, seemed interested in questioning the fundamental nature of their American work and life situation, although they did express a felt sense of isolation, and at times, loneliness. In general, despite politically liberal leanings, they all seemed fairly complacent about the nature of work life in America, due in part, I'm sure, to their relative success within the system. It seems that the "American Dream" has become submerged in the collective psyche, at least of this set of individuals, such that its attendant values and beliefs structures—e.g. honest hard work leads to material and psychic success—has been fully assimilated as the norm.

The notable paradox, of course, is that all four of these individuals have, at various times, been diagnosed and treated for depression and been involved with various forms of substance abuse. Yet, when asked directly about the possible link between these two disparate conditions—material wealth, emotional poverty—they all seemed to accept, with some resignation, that depression, loneliness, isolation, and addictions are simply the "side effects" of a life-long pursuit of American-style success. For the most part, depression and addictions were viewed as resulting from the stress of office politics, parenting, failed romance, and unfulfilled creative aspirations; there was a noticeable missing link between these "stress-points" and the dictates of hard work, high productivity, and consumption foisted on them by the

capitalist system. Yet, perhaps Judy spoke for everyone when she did say that in her view, this yearning for community pointed towards a collective desire to find an antidote to this seeming bifurcated quality of modern life.

Meaning, value and purpose

When in each conversation the topic turned to questions of the meaning, the value and the purpose of the community, the responses from the participants were very much aligned. In fact, each co-researcher, even though they used different phrasing and terminology, summarized and circumscribed the core concerns of Old Growth as follows: community is about shared values; community is about deepening levels of safety and intimacy; community is about “being seen”; and finally, community is about expanding consciousness. In fact, the themes that were brought out in the individual dialogues were generally not dissimilar to those discussed in the group session. Issues of safety, heart-based sharing, vulnerability and “like-mindedness”, consciousness and “witnessing” (seeing and being seen), all re-surfaced again and again in all the dialogues with Old Growth members.

What *was* significant about these conversations for purposes of this project, was the depth of the skepticism, the ambivalence, and the concerns with lack of clarity and focus in the community, all of which were much more evident in the conversations with Hugh, Katie, and Serge than in the group dialogues. In fact, as I listened deeply to their hopes and fears regarding all of the above, I could not help but notice, that in speaking more from their

positions of engaged observer, outer-circle participant, and “fence-sitter”, these folks did not hesitate to delve into “danger zones” that they perceived as being ignored or avoided by the leadership group.

This distinction between the meaning, values, and purpose of the community for “inner circle” participants versus the more peripheral members, is notably visible in the differences between Judy’s remarks and the others. As aforementioned, there was generally much alignment about the core principles of the community—and Judy presents them beautifully—but in the response of the others to these themes, we can see the beginnings of cracks in the walls of Judy’s—and perhaps the entire leadership group’s—idyllic house of Old Growth. First though, we hear Judy, who as a key founder/leader of the community, clearly defines her sense of the purpose of Old Growth:

The power of the community experience is based on the alignment of the participants around their common beliefs with regard to relationships, people, trust and safety. Its meaning is derived from a shared intent to create and maintain a deep connection and intention to explore the healing and growth potential of community... There is a basic core connection... so that when I meet someone who is part of this community I know that I can count on their being interested in looking the way that I am...

As for the healing and growth potential of the community container that Judy describes here, she reminded me that the main value of the community for most people is the opportunity to practice being vulnerable with others, to share, discover, and uncover the deepest parts of their being. And all this is possible only by creating deeper and deeper levels of safety:

Due to the strong commitment in the community to be related, to be seen by each other, there has grown a deep sense of trust and safety amongst the group. This safety enables people to “drop the pretense”, to be more fully available to express a wider range of their full selves, both dark and light, good and bad, with less fear of being judged or excluded...there is more permission for me to be self-expressed, for me to be seen, for me to be known, for me to not worry as much about what others will think.

With these statements, Judy lays out her sense of all four of the core themes noted above. And like all the others, if we move on to Hugh and Katie’s general statements about the meaning and purpose of the community, we find that they are very much in sync. For example, Katie described the value and purpose of community in this way: “the community allows me to be a lot bigger than I would normally allow myself to be on an individual basis...and it is a mirror, of course, just as I look at other people and point the finger...but eventually see how I am pointing at myself...that is the growth part...and that is a huge breakthrough to see how we are all a mirror for each other.” So there does seem to be an essential baseline of values and understandings around the fundamental purpose of the community that is common to all the participants in this study.

However, picking up on Hugh’s additional thoughts on the subject (we see Katie’s concerns show up later under the banner of leadership), we can begin to uncover a sense of his unease, anxiety and hesitation around how these goals and values are being implemented in the real world:

The attraction to Tom & Flame’s work is similar to the AA community in that everyone is encouraged to be vulnerable, to drop the “act and pretense” of looking good, and to share their deepest fears, anxiety and humanity. This experience is healing and restorative. However, at

many community events, the energy seems to remain mostly ego-based, with lots of discussion about logistics and purpose and power. There is too little vulnerability and too much jockeying to be seen/heard...something very different happens when people drop down into their vulnerability and share from their place of fear, anxiety, and deep humanity.

In this context, Hugh talked at length about his other commitment, to being part of the AA community, and he noted many similarities—and notable differences—between the two endeavors. He spoke about what he considered the pretense of the Old Growth members as being “fully functioning”—always “fine” and “well”—in contrast to the starting point for AA members: they have all “hit bottom”. People in AA have reached a “point of no return” in which they have had to acknowledge their pain and suffering and ask for help. In the Old Growth community, Hugh noticed a reluctance to acknowledge the deeper sense of hurt, wounding, and trauma that actually drives people’s desire for community and Tom and Flame workshops in the first place:

...their egos largely remain intact and impermeable, except at particular moments. You see... it’s all about hitting bottom. That’s what is necessary for people to step into a deep place of vulnerability. But “hitting bottom” is not a black and white experience. In many ways, I’ve always been envious of the “crash and burn” bottoms, because they have a real stopping point, a watershed event which operates as a lynchpin of life and death, whereas for people like me—and many in the community I suspect—we can spin a web, and live in denial, avoiding that experience of hitting bottom for years and years...

On the other hand, Hugh considered the cornerstone principles of healing for the AA community and for Old Growth to be the same: recreating the experience of ‘being held’ in a safe space, symbolic of family. At issue,

according to Hugh, is the fact that similar wounding draws people into both communities—that sense of not having been loved or held from very early in life, coupled with a desire to reconnect, to reconstruct an experience of safety and loving through the artificial container of community.

However, Hugh was quick to point out the risks inherent in giving oneself over to a so-called “loving” community. This paradox manifests in the reality that it actually takes a very strong person—with a fully formed ego and sense of self—to benefit and grow without getting swallowed up by the community:

The key to healing from a place of vulnerability in community is getting to a point where you stop “caring” or paying attention to what others think of you—finding a place to stand that is true to your experience in spite of being surrounded by the perceptions and judgments of others. At the same time, the paradox comes in that this restorative process requires that others in the community be allowed to “penetrate” through your defenses and impact you at a deeper level. You must be touched, held, and loved at your most vulnerable spot, in your essential self...your fragility and woundedness...not just in a circle of egos. But...you also have to get to a place where you can feel that your own experience is valid...I’m closer than ever before to being able to do that, and yet, there is a contradiction, in that I’m letting the group move me too.

Hugh was also somewhat critical of what he viewed as a lack of consistency in the behavior and values demonstrated within the Old Growth community, which he does not experience as much in the AA community:

Sometimes in the community, with people drinking and playing, there is a lack of integrity between the “consciousness-speak” and what people are really doing. In AA, people show up over and over again with one goal in mind...to surrender their egos to something bigger, to let go and be healed, by the community, by each other, and by God.”

He went on to note that in his opinion, there is a danger in community members doing work that they believe will supposedly take them to the “next level”, or to a “higher level” of consciousness. The risk inherent in this “higher-consciousness” conversation is that it can easily lead to people believing that they are better than others—a consciousness elite—that becomes separate from humanity not more connected with it:

There is a pretense in our community at times that sounds like, ‘we’ve got it now and we should take it to the world’...whereas, in the AA group people show up every day at 7am and reveal their own self-reflections on their grandiosity and depression, their fragility and humanity...it serves to bring us all down to the same level as opposed to separating us into a higher club.

Reflecting upon these comments from Hugh, coupled with Katie’s earlier concerns about the fixation of AA community participants on remaining “broken” and in continuous need of “fixing”, we can begin to clearly discern the subtle paradox that intentional communities face off against in a culture where success, productivity, and growth, by definition, always head in the direction of a seemingly untenable choice: between boundaried structures that breed dependency or permeable structures that may lack permanence and sustainability.

The paradox inherent in Old Growth’s goal of expanding consciousness over against healing or “fixing”—may be that it represents a set-up for inherent instability, for if it is successful participants will tend to feel constrained by any collective boundaries that get erected around the community, and ultimately, want to break through them. The question of

flexible boundaries versus strict doctrines and elaborate organizational structures is in reality a leadership issue, for as Judy—as well as Tom and Flame earlier—discusses in detail in the next section on “practices”, the flexibility and expandability of the community container itself rests upon the flexibility and expandability of the individuals—as leaders—within it.

On the other hand, Katie and Hugh both point out, from opposite perspectives, the ramifications of community endeavors that hold tight to doctrines in which the participants always need—and therefore become dependent upon—the community structure and principles to support a never ending process of healing and/or growth are not always positive or empowering. In this case, the community is sustained—and may even proliferate—but at what price? Is perhaps the price for community sustainability and “success” paid for by the individual in the loss of his or her very soul?

Clearly, we can discern the emotional rumblings of dissonance and even dissociation in Hugh’s ambivalence around the tenets versus reality—*what he really experiences*—in the context of Old Growth, as well as in Katie’s disillusionment with AA and Landmark, both of which have sustained, thrived and expanded by reinforcing the programmatic and organizational “walls” on which they are built. Of course, these concerns just touch the surface of deeper issues that may lurk in the shadows of community and organizational life, for what is being pointed to here are the inevitable psychological gains and losses—the benefits and fallout—engendered

whenever the individual (within an individualistic cultural context like the West or a more communal context like in some nations in the East) confronts the inter-subjective minefield of “participation” and “belonging”. In later chapters, I will return to this theme and look to deepen our awareness around issues of subjugation, dependency and assimilation, exploring what is at stake, for the individual, for the community, when these two forces attempt to join together—from a variety of depth psychological and psychoanalytic perspectives

In this context, we can perhaps understand more clearly why the group dialogue participants were reluctant to emphasize the healing and/or therapeutic component of intentional community: they are fiercely protective of their individual concepts of “well-being”, subjectivity and functional independence—as well they should be—all while acknowledging and serving a deep pull towards communal belonging, and growth through relatedness. Certainly, Jung, as I explore in later chapters, was always warning of the dangers of the individual being subjugated by the psychological and cultural hegemony of a community, especially if it blossoms into a full-fledged bureaucracy or state apparatus. Yet, he also advocated for the inter-subjective and relational qualities of personal development as essential aspects if there is to be any individual or collective human progress. It is a complex dance.

For now, I leave the paradox—and the questions above—unanswered and instead segue into the dialogue with Serge around questions of meaning

and value of community, for his experience and background present a stark contrast to the cultural challenges of intentional community facing off against American ideological traditions of rugged individualism and the frontier.

Growing up in a Jewish village in Europe, with strong religious traditions, and as he put it, “indelible community ties”, Serge actually considered it necessary to “escape” from community in a sense, by coming to America, where the opportunity to discover and manifest one’s individuality could be found.

Likewise, given that Serge has now had a high-achieving career in America, he feels quite positive about the American cultural landscape, for it has enabled him to build a foundation of individual success upon which to return and face the demons of his past. He too, much like the other participants, wants to heal his own deep wounds with family and community, and to re-ignite his lost sense of belonging.

Hence, Serge entered the conversation about Old Growth, complete with his own sense of the paradoxical nature of an intentional community enterprise. Following Judy, and in particular Julie and Jan in the group dialogues, Serge spoke at length about the act of witnessing, about “seeing and being seen”, which he considered to be the true value and benefit of the community experience, as fostered originally by Tom and Flame:

The value of the community experience is in witnessing the other’s variation and unique qualities and experience, such that by ‘association’, one feels less different, less separate, and ultimately less alienated from the other. By seeing through differences you come to experience sameness and universal humanity—for example—hearing about the pain of being gay lessens my feelings of difference for being Jewish...the gift of community for me, is seeing the work of the other

and having that reflected back at me for me to process against my own experience.

For Serge, this agency of witnessing requires going beneath the words and as he puts it, “seeing through” to the emotions and deeper meanings. Being witnessed is about being seen and heard in a deeper way than just listening to the words that someone speaks. It requires a deeper energetic resonance and empathy: “Suddenly, in the conversation with Florence [his fiancée], I realized that I was very angry and wasn’t even aware of it until she stopped me and asked what I was so angry about. So I think that witnessing is way beyond the words.”

Serge then went on to speak in detail about his understanding of the underlying mechanisms that play out in this process of witnessing. His assessment, reflected back in memories from a number of specific instances in Tom and Flame’s work, was analytic and deeply psychological, for even though Serge is not himself a psychologist, he is familiar with psychoanalysis and depth psychology through reading and therapy. For him, Tom and Flame’s community-based work is “group therapy”. As he sees it, when one engages directly with the leader, or with the group itself, a process opens up and becomes much like therapy—a circle of revelation, listening, witnessing and feedback—which can lead to release of repressed pain and trauma. Additionally, what he has found specifically healing about community for himself, has emerged from the witnessing of others as they share their own pain and suffering: “witnessing the vulnerable expressions coming from

others always creates a 'mirror-effect' that enables me to learn more about myself. When I can see the others in a similar situation, there is so much that I gain in bearing witness to other's pain; ultimately, I can see myself in them."

Essentially, Serge believes that there are two key processes that take place in community, which, taken together, support the individual to access painful and denied memory or self-perception. The process operates like a feedback loop, wherein the act of being seen by others, through sharing and revelation, along with the act of witnessing the pain of others, creates a powerful opening for increased self-awareness and truth telling: "I always feel that because I have not been seen clearly by others, that I don't see myself clearly either. By being able to see another, I can see myself; there is an important connection between seeing and being seen."

Unlike one-on-one therapy, where the therapist is usually expected to remain neutral, and somewhat apart—not being transparent or sharing his/her own pain, but rather operating as a receptacle for the projection and transference of emotion from the patient—in the community situation each participant is encouraged to be as revealed and transparent as possible. For Serge, the community heals by enabling and fostering a re-engagement with one's own repressed pain, which is nurtured and encouraged to take place through witnessing the emergence of pain in others. Like an aerobics class, where the group's energy helps each individual keep motivated in the face of the inevitable desire to stop and rest—"in a community you are energized and supported to keep going deeper into your stuff because you establish a

relationship between the other person's suffering and your own suffering that is unique to the group dynamic."

Now, given that Serge was the first interviewee to take the concept of witnessing in the community context and deeply reflect on how the mechanism effects transformation, thus demonstrating his strong advocacy of the process—and of the community itself in principle—it is interesting to move on to Serge's concerns and issues with Old Growth per se, for he has many. For him, the decision to participate, to become a "member" of the community, is fraught with risk. He described at least three ways in which he believes community process work is potentially dangerous for the individuals involved.

First, since there is no 'neutral' or 'objective' person to monitor the level of safety, trust, and interaction, there is a risk that a person will reveal pain and hurt, and then, if they are not mirrored in an empathic manner but instead feel judged or ridiculed, the original trauma may be re-inflicted or reinforced. Secondly, if the participants happen to all carry similar—or the same—wounding or experiences of trauma (e.g. a group of war victims, or a group of abused children, etc.), then there is the risk that the group will "wallow" in the reenactment and re-experiencing of the trauma en masse, never moving forward towards release or restoration. In effect, they can remain "stuck" in a doom loop of suffering and pain in the present; remaining submerged in collective denial. Over and over again, they employ the same defense mechanisms used to repress the past: "sometimes a group...or a community... can be a means towards healing but sometimes it is just a way

of staying connected and immersed in the pain...the community of victims can become very repetitive and complacent.”

In the third instance, Serge noted that the healing potential of witnessing is always juxtaposed with the opposite possibility: that sharing differences will result in a “marking” of difference, which may reinforce a participant’s feelings of being judged or being separate. As an example, Serge pointed to his memory of a particular moment when he spoke during a community event and “I felt judged because of my difference...it was related to people actual reinforcing, in their looks and words, that they do see me as different...it was a reminder of being Jewish and how people still judge you for that.”

Along these lines, Serge was the first participant to share his experience of the creativity workshop that was held as part of this research, in which a subset of the community members came together to play and create artistic expressions around the theme of “shaping the community”. I will speak more about this workshop in the next chapter, but since Serge was interviewed soon after this experience, while the other dialogues took place prior to its occurrence, the timing of his feedback was noteworthy in light of this discussion of witnessing. For Serge, the creativity workshop afforded an experience of the difficulty of making community work when the values of the people are not in alignment:

This day was an experience of chaos, for me, for when it was clear that others did not share my values of group cohesion and consensus, it became very unpleasant and at times painful. Many of the individuals

operated more in a 'me, me, me' kind of style with very self-centered behavior and communications...which was frustrating and ultimately, not satisfying. I realized that some people are very individualistic...and I hold very strong community values...I would rather that we paid attention to the others...to see if everybody could make it together.”

This experience, although clearly a positive and enjoyable one for many of the participants, served at times to reinforce the sense of hesitation and ambivalence that Serge feels about Old Growth.

In drawing this part of our dialogue to a close, he noted that the future of the community, and whether he would continue to participate, depended upon our getting much clearer about the goals and purpose, and that this would necessitate strong leadership. Yet here again, we stumble further into paradox:

The leaders must be strong but not dogmatic, dictatorial or into power games, rather there needs to be consensus building and collaboration. Otherwise, the community becomes an imposition on the individual, which people will resist. On the other hand, the community could be a 'guide' or a mentoring kind of facility, allowing for sharing resources, exploring common interests, offering sub-groups for personal development...and the like. I would like to re-experience community and find my path inside a community— but a chosen community rather than an imposed one.”

Serge's deep convictions with regard to the possibility and the dangers of community—as well as his own personal fears—have served to clarify and enrich some of the issues brought forth in the group dialogues and conversations with Tom and Flame. His rich input around the issues of healing, witnessing and leadership add narrative complexity to the unfolding story of Old Growth, for he brings a unique cultural and spiritual dimension to the discussion, and given that he has yet to fully “sign-up” for membership in

Old Growth, he represents an additional challenge for the leadership group in their attempts to build and diversify the container. How can they allay his fears, and the fears of others like him?

Community Practices

In general, the individuals in these interviews did not spend a lot of time discussing the issue of practices, and only Serge and Katie showed a strong interest in the topics of leadership or sustainability. Most of the “best practices” brought forth in these individual dialogues were variations or repetitions of what had been laid out earlier in the group session. This outcome might have been expected given that the individuals had shared so many of the practices of ceremony, workshop, ritual, dialogue—ways of being, speaking, relating—together in the formative Old Growth events. Hugh, clearly happily ensconced in the AA community, seemed to be more in a “wait and see” mode regarding the future of Old Growth. He was skeptical—as noted earlier—about the mixed presence of individuals with varying goals and agendas, but nevertheless, did note his commitment to keep coming back. Not holding a perception of himself as a leader, however, especially in the context of Tom and Flame’s work or the community, he was only too quick to defer to the “expertise” of people like Judy, who he respected, “loved dearly”, and considered appropriately competent to take on “herding the cats” (of which he declared himself one).

In contrast, Judy, who was already primed by the earlier discussion with the group around practices, took advantage of this additional time with me to deepen her reflections around what practices would prove essential as we worked through some of the complexities of the individual and group dynamic—many of which have been noted by Hugh, Serge, and Katie above. In a sense, Judy’s position in these sessions is a classic one: the reluctant spiritual guide or prophet, whose charisma and eloquence and passion seem to infiltrate the collective in noticeable but unspoken ways. Of course, Judy might recoil in horror at this characterization, yet there is something potent in her role as undeclared heir to the community throne in the wake of Tom and Flame’s return to Colorado. On the other hand, Judy is collaborative and partner-oriented to the deepest core of her being; she has no interest in taking on a mantle of leadership within a patriarchal or authoritarian paradigm, so on the surface at least, her role is perhaps best described as “chief-influencer”, for she is adept at and committed to setting the community agenda and making decisions as part of a team.

That said, she does have strong feelings about the qualitative aspects of Old Growth that are necessary in order to set it apart from other intentional support and growth communities like AA and Landmark Education. For her, the practices that mark the distinctive flavor of Old Growth can be encapsulated in her phrases: “bearing witness” and “calling each other forth”. Through the combination of shared intent and mature self-responsibility—tall orders in themselves, of course—Judy envisions the community thriving as a

vehicle for both healing and growth, but only if these practices, without dogma, structure or dictates (e.g. “twelve steps”) become ingrained to the point of being “second nature” for the participants.

According to Judy, the practices of “calling each other forth” and “bearing witness” on each other are self-reinforcing. It is through the ongoing reciprocity of these activities that the container of trust and safety can be maintained. In this sense, despite the need for “leaders” to set agendas, plan events, and make logistics decisions, Judy really believes that we in the community must all be leaders—it must become a “leaderful” environment. In her estimation, this sense of full acceptance of self and group leadership is what is usually missing from the hierarchical structuring that occurs even in well-intentioned communities like AA or Landmark. As she puts it, “practices to keep the space safe are about constantly calling each other forth...if we weren’t calling each other forth in the community and bearing witness on answering the call...we would forget who we each are to each other and would lose that safety and trust.”

For Judy, the key distinction between other recovery and growth communities and Old Growth, is that those communities have a “program” of steps, processes and practices that have already been enumerated by a leader or founder(s) and everyone must subscribe and follow them. The Old Growth community, although it does have a range of evolving “practices”, is more committed to co-creating the work on an on-going basis, and using each other and our relationships more directly to “call each other forth”:

We are serving each other to grow more than in a twelve-step program. In AA, the program itself serves the growth of participants, and the community serves as the container, whereas in our community—as a stated intention—the invitation is to use each other...to serve each other in our growth and healing. We give each other feedback, call each other forth, hold each other accountable to who we know each other to be in our essence and spirit...

In a sense, what Judy is pointing to here is an attempt by the Old Growth community to “cut out the middle-man” in the process of intersubjectivity, to make the witnessing and relational aspects of community more direct and uninterrupted by theories, principles, dogma or programs. Judy is calling for a new level of dynamic interaction in a world where most people are used to finding themselves subsumed within an organizational structure and deferring their healing and growth to parents, doctors, politicians and other figures of authority. For Judy, the community is not an “objective thing”; it is not a static container in which to grow a person, but a dialogical and co-creative process unto itself:

The key to our community work is the “element” of “calling each other forth” to co-create the container of safety and trust that will enable us to do our own personal healing and growth work. We do not utilize or subscribe to a particular teacher [although Tom & Flame have been the spiritual founders], guru, or theory, but rather stay engaged in an on-going inquiry around the themes of dialogue and leadership and self-responsibility. This is the source of our liberation: we are creating this community together, without the trappings of dogma or principles from the outside. However, We may need to define more explicitly this “element” that we are talking about [e.g. calling each other forth in relationship], which is so powerful and is what distinguishes us from workshops, churches, and other communities...

In a sense, Judy’s delineation of such practices as bearing witness and calling each other forth, as nebulous as they may sound, perhaps represents

a shift in the very nature of “practices” as they are thought of in most community settings. Practices—typically considered to be regular, disciplined, repetitive acts that become engrained and inculcated into the fabric of a group—do not necessarily have to be set in stone by dictate or authority. They can be evolving, co-creative, and constantly transforming in order to serve the needs of a constituency that is also never static. This shift towards evolving, organic practices, if made manifest in a real community situation, could represent a radical move towards greater individual empowerment within a vibrant, permeable collective. However, in the wake of Judy’s “theory” on how we might reconcile the paradox of sustainability—building a community that does not foster obsolescence, rigidity, or dependency—a new, equally difficult question arises: can participants rise to the challenge and reach that elusive state of “leaderful” partnership that she envisions?

Leadership and sustainability

It would seem that all the possible solutions to the concerns and paradoxes raised in these individual dialogues ultimately lead us directly into questions of leadership. And again, most of the issues regarding leadership roles and the inherent dangers of separation, elitism, authoritarian and patriarchal infrastructures that came up during these sessions were generally similar to the concerns brought forth in the group session. That said, however, Serge and Katie, as individuals who have not (although Katie is in the midst of

changing this position) chosen to step up as leaders but rather have been engaged in observing the process of the evolution of leadership from the outside, brought forth some unique and fresh perspectives on the difficult challenges ahead for the “sustaining council”.

In dialogue with Serge over who should lead the community, I was shocked and surprised to hear that he was seriously concerned about what he considered a very real possibility—that Old Growth might become a “sect”: “Initially, I felt very much like an outsider...it [Old Growth] gave me the impression of being a sect...everyone knew each other and had their own language...that you all knew each other’s suffering...it was like a group of sick people, who were all defined by being sick together!”

Most of the participants in this study have, at some point, noted their awareness of the risk that an intentional community can create a stage, a dramatic backdrop, on which a dogmatic leader might take over, influence the members, orchestrate a “coup”, and ultimately play out his or her neurotic need for cult-like adulation. Along these lines, Serge pointed out that in his earliest exposure to the workshops of Tom and Flame, he saw Tom, in particular, holding forth as a “father-figure” who had strong, some might say, dogmatic views on spirituality, healing, and community in general: “This tendency of others to follow Tom’s words like a gospel was something I strongly resisted, having left France to get away from the dogma of my father and my Jewish roots.” For Serge, a community whose leader(s) are dogmatic and dictatorial may foment a cult-like situation where the emotional

experience of the individual is de-valued and the “truth” is tightly controlled. In his view, such a context would hardly manifest a community, but would more likely devolve into a container for continued abuse and re-traumatization.

On the other hand, Serge has been one of the few in the community to travel to Colorado to work intensively with Tom and Flame, so at some point along the way, he has relaxed his fear and anxiety around Tom’s leadership style, and even come to recognize that most of his concern was bound up in the projection of his internalized fear of his father’s tyrannical behavior. Serge recognized that the role of the leader is crucially important if the community is to be effective and successful as a container for healing and growth:

If the leader influences the values, behavior and norms of the community to be neutral, receptive to difference, permeable, and open, then the needed safety can be created to allow negative projections to be witnessed, neutralized, and turned around into positive, compassionate feedback—in effect, bringing to consciousness the hidden past, working through it in a witness/feedback loop, and releasing it to clear the way for a restored and rejuvenated self-perception in the present.

Nevertheless, in bringing up his concern about Tom—and possibly others in the future—Serge does the community a valuable service in proffering this important reminder: it requires a high level of vigilance to remain dispassionate and observant of those in leadership roles, to monitor their integrity and motivations, and to raise red flags when they blindly attract followers with empty phrases and banners of seduction. It is perhaps no surprise that a middle-aged European of Jewish descent would be the one to

warn the community, for unlike the experience of most Caucasian Americans, he carries the cultural wound of “bearing witness” to the kind of horrific collective insanity that can emerge when no one is paying attention.

Along these same lines, Katie brought up an interesting twist with regard to her concern about who takes on, and how they take on, leadership roles in the community. Her initial frustration showed up when Tom and Flame workshops started being augmented by monthly community events. As Tom and Flame could not attend, and did not want to lead, regular community activities, it fell on the participants to volunteer to create, plan and orchestrate evening and daylong events. Katie played host to a couple of these activities, and although she resisted taking on a leadership role at that time, she was always active on the periphery—and vocal with her criticism. For her, at issue was frustration with those who had somehow rapidly transmogrified from “students” of Tom and Flame into “teachers” in Old Growth; for her this was incongruous and ego-based:

Here is what occurred for me that year...I found myself getting less and less interested in participating inside the community because I was finding it very difficult to want to have anyone in the community be a teacher for me...I wanted to utilize the community as a “mirror”...but I didn’t need any teachers beyond Tom and Flame...you know what I mean by a teacher...someone who gets up there and delivers some sort of product...and I’m supposed to be enrolled and get what I’m going to get...but I just wasn’t interested in anything that those people were doing...I don’t need community to be about everyone getting to “play teacher”...

Over time she simply withdrew her involvement with the community and became an outlier—and at times a vocal detractor. However, given that

many of her best friends and allies in the deep healing work she had done with Tom and Flame were content and still enthusiastic about the evolution of Old Growth, Katie finally came full circle and re-ignited her passion for the group. As she says, “I realized that I was just not interested in anything that was going on in this stupid community...and that I was not generating anything positive around it...so I knew that I needed to leave the community or take on being a leader for one of the three-month periods. It was make or break time.”

What Katie discovered during that period in which she stepped up and, as Judy advocated, accepted self-responsibility for what she was generating—becoming “leaderful” in her response to frustration rather than disappearing or just whining from the sidelines—was that being a leader led to more complexity and paradox than she had ever imagined. Ultimately, she found herself caught up in the very dynamic that she had originally spurned: she was becoming a “teacher”. Her desire to create wonderful and deeply transformational events for the community during her tenure, led her—and her co-leaders—to design and execute two very successful evening events full of rich dialogue—one was around living with fear in the wake of 9/11—, ritual, movement, music and meditation.

By all accounts the events were a great success; yet they did not go off as she had planned. Her husband—of all people—and a couple of other spoilers, foiled her intricate design by getting playful and out-of-control (in her view), in a sense creating momentary chaos in the midst of her carefully

orchestrated transformative process. She was angry and disappointed, and ultimately, chose to step up and dress them down:

My participation in that event was very stressful. Just like it was the first time a year before when everyone came to my house...because I was so attached to it looking like the way I wanted it to look, which was...I had a whole structure planned...and then Larry and Dennis and Morgan...were just not in line with my structure...and they created havoc...and it just threw me...I was like, “fuck!”...”Who are these people?”...”And why am I here?”

Yet, in the aftermath of this cataclysm, she quickly became aware of how she had become the very teacher, leader—even tyrant in a small way—that she had most resisted in the community just a few months before.

In the wake of her leadership “failure” (her word), Katie became even more resentful, angry and cynical about community in general. It was only when she had a “sit-down discussion”—a deep and difficult talk with her friends and community sisters, Julie, Jan, and Judy—that she was able to break through the emotional roadblock. In that conversation, she awoke to a new “fusion of horizons” of interpretation around the whole concept of being a leader. Here’s how she relates the tale:

One thing that Judy had to say to me...she said, “You are not even listening to how powerful you are”...and I said yeah, yeah, same old blah, blah, blah...and she said, “No. What I am pointing to is that people listen to you. People listen to you when you are excited about something and people listen to you when you are resigned about something...and that’s the power that you don’t own”...I just sat there and stared at her. I was so pissed because she just pointed her finger and poked it right into my heart. What Judy and the others were able to bring me to was that my power was there for a reason...and I could use it for something positive or I could use it for something negative...the choice is actually mine. And the thing that I wasn’t actually doing was being responsible about the choices that I was making in that moment about this community...and that was a huge

revelation...once I decided that I was going to stop using my power to bring down the community...and get behind it instead...it was almost like a physical shift... a physical and emotional transformation for me...so the next time we had a community event... it was really about letting go of the outcome and letting be whoever was there... putting my creativity and my heart on the line. I guess that's what is what we mean by leadership...

In hearing this story of Katie's evolution in the community, from participant insider to disillusioned outsider to ardent foe and finally back inside once again, which has recently culminated in her joining the sustaining council, I was deeply moved by her willingness to bear witness on herself as she moved through the whole gamut of emotions. In essence, this narrative encompasses the best of an intentional healing community in action; it presents eye witness testimony, so to speak, of the gifts, dangers, risks and the potential rewards available through engagement in what Judy spoke about earlier: bearing witness and calling each other forth. In the final encounter described above, we peer in on the agency of witnessing—seeing and being seen—as it unfolded for Katie when faced with the “truth” of how she withheld and denied her own inner power, essence, and beauty.

Summary

Clearly, the inter-relational dynamics described in Katie's story—between Katie and the community, Katie and her “sisters”, Katie and herself—are all demonstrative of the core issue that lies beneath most of the these individual dialogues: the issue of power. All the anxieties about the community shared by these participants seemed to reflect their internalized

and projected fears with regard to misguided, un-tethered, inappropriate or re-traumatizing experiences with authority figures. For example, Hugh's skepticism around the community was mostly born of his fear that the group lacked vulnerability, that there was too much ego-based behavior. Whereas, Serge and Katie's concerns, although unique in form, were not that much different in substance: Serge was fearful of a dogmatic, patriarchal leader coming to dominate the community; he was worried that the process of witnessing could be dangerous and wounding if those in power were not "monitored", or if they chose to "mark" differences rather than mitigate them; and, like Hugh, he was concerned about the American tendency, as he put it, "to be me, me, me," which is surely another version of "ego-based behavior". Likewise, Katie was initially put-off by what she perceived as the power trips, the power games, and the power dynamics of a community left in disarray (in her view) with the withdrawal of Tom and Flame. Her natural tendency to project power, as pointed out by Judy, wound up backfiring and throwing her back on herself; until finally, her cynicism around and resistance to those in positions of power—"those so-called teachers"—became a perfect metaphor for the inner and outer dance with authority that she was forced to take up.

As I discuss in the following chapters with the help of Jungian and psychoanalytic theories of groups, Old Growth seems to represent an experiment in the evolution—or perhaps, revolution—of power relationships within Western-style community settings. An intentional community that determines its purpose, structure and leadership roles through dialogical, co-

creative and collaborative processes—in which all participants are encouraged to partake—is still a rare property on the Western social scene. The conventional wisdom that every group needs a single, dominant “boss”—though no longer always a man—is still considered *de rigeur* in most American organizations, no matter how progressive. Truly participative democracies, which open their doors to all the diverse voices of their constituency and call forth each participant to express their individual gifts and leadership abilities, are perhaps visible at the edges of the cultural horizon, but hardly the norm.

Old Growth’s attempt to navigate the vagaries and vicissitudes of shared leadership—voluntary, collective, non-hierarchical—will require a high degree of maturity on the part of participants: we are called upon to lead ourselves and each other in partnership, not to hand the power over to figures of authority in the guise of teachers, visionaries or prophets. Judy’s final reflections on the nature of collaborative leadership as it is evolving within Old Growth summarized the issues that those who choose to work through the challenges of leadership will face:

Entry into the community is about self-selection and desire, not enrollment...the reality of co-creating community through relatedness and self-responsibility is that it involves a high degree of commitment, engagement and work. Many are interested in the “conversation” but do not necessarily have the hunger to continually show up. We are all called upon to lead...whereas, many people would rather look up to a leader to tell them how to grow, what to do, what to think, etc. This community is different, in that it should not be about enrollment and persuasion, but rather it should be sustained by the self-selection of people who are really interested in doing the work.

Ultimately, successful and sustained leadership of Old Growth will rest on the emotional and intellectual maturity of the participants. All the way back to the reflections of Tom and Flame, those interviewed for this project have declared the need for leaders to cross a bridge of ego-development and enter a psychic space that involves a high degree of introspection, self-witnessing, and accountability. Needless to say, the difficulty comes in facing the reality that every participant stands on a different rung of this developmental ladder, each is constantly lurching backwards and forwards, teetering with the disaster of regression, entangled in an endless cycle of expansion and contraction.

Perhaps, it is inherent in the nature of the community, as a living organic web of humanity, to be constantly in flux. Yet, as Judy surmises, if each community member could reach up and grasp that sense of his or her own potential as a leader, and not back away from the responsibility that this realization entails, the impossible could become possible:

...it could become a self-sustaining thing, if we can clearly articulate what we are doing, for it speaks to the longing, the hunger, that each one of us has...the fire within us towards self-discovery and growth....But nothing is ever black and white...the community is not an artificial world, but rather an experiment in changing our mode of being in a real way; hence it will always be in process, moving back and forth from a space of safety and love to a space of fear and mistrust. How could it be otherwise? That's just life. The key practice for all of us—as seekers of wisdom and consciousness—is to not run away...or avoid in those moments when trust appears broken. We need to stay with this inquiry and really get grounded in this distinction between calling forth essence and living in ego...it is a dance of our commitment to keep creating that space of essence, vulnerability and love...we just have to keep coming back...and back...and back again.

Personal Reflections

Foremost in my heart, as I reflect back on the personal aspects of these rich interactions with fellow community members—and dear friends—is a deep sense of gratitude. It is not lost on me that in some ways the participants in these individual dialogues have been more forthright and candid than the group of leaders had been. Perhaps this was because of the more intimate setting of a one-on-one interview, or perhaps their openness ensued because there was less personally at stake for participants who have not “signed up” to be “responsible” for the success or failure of the community, as have many of us in the “leadership” group. In any case, I was struck by their willingness to share with me their concerns, fears, and hesitations around Old Growth, as well as their dreams and hopes.

Many of the concerns that were voiced by Serge and Hugh in particular, with regard to the issues of safety, leadership, power and control, and spiritual versus ego consciousness, all resonate with my own feelings of ambivalence and hesitation in being part of the community at times. Just as Tom and Flame noted in their dialogue with me, it is not obvious that, on an individual level, a substantial number of people have taken to heart the idea of shared leadership and self-responsibility. We can see, in Katie’s poignant story, the challenge and complexity involved in “stepping up” and claiming the power and responsibility for leading others. I feel honored by her willingness to share this intimate tale of self-reflection, humiliation and ultimate triumph. Her vulnerability in this context is clearly a mark of distinction—an example of

the leadership strength that Judy and Tom and Flame are advocating—that is still rare in the community circle. I have been thrilled to witness Katie join the sustaining council and engage with the leadership group on a new level, and I cannot help but imagine that this project—the telling of her story—and her “ascension” to a power position will undoubtedly have a broader impact—perhaps as an inspiration for others—on that group in particular than she may realize.

Of course, I am also cognizant of the potential backlash that she may experience, for given the wide range of consciousness and emotional maturity that exists in the community, as noted by Tom and Flame—and which I can corroborate—there may be those who will resist her shift in stance or even seek to judge and denigrate her position. Having felt all of these reactions myself at various times (I even felt the emotion of judgment and derision from some in “announcing” that I would be writing about the community—which I suppose was viewed as an audacious and egoic act by some), my heart goes out to her. Leading is fraught with risk.

Not even Judy, despite her eloquence and advocacy of “calling forth” the leader in each of us, has consistently stepped up to the pulpit and spoken as a leader of the team. My experience of her is that she often speaks “like a leader” in one-on-one or small group situations, where she feels safe, but when it comes to stepping up and “running the show” or pushing forward an agenda, she often hesitates. I have at times been frustrated with her for this very reason; in that I see in her a mirror of my own fears and tendency to

avoid the role, given the complexity and risks inherent in self-proclaimed leadership: there is always someone waiting in the wings to tear you down.

And to make matters worse—as I often commiserate with Judy: if you carry a modicum of humility, self-effacement and self-consciousness around the agency of your own power vis à vis others, you are just as likely *to tear yourself down* as have others do it for you. I have, in fact, witnessed Judy in this act of self-devaluation, and felt those inner pangs of self-judgment myself. So it is not a simple equation: one participant plus vision plus consciousness plus desire equals one leader. There are many emotional ghosts and repressed memories of trauma, subjugation and marginalization that keep us held in check. Of course, given what Serge had to say about dogmatic and patriarchal leadership styles and the potential for community to morph into a cult, this too—some residual barrier to ego control and unbridled power—may not be an entirely bad thing.

I cannot help but notice that in the dialogue with Hugh, the fact that he and I are both in the homosexual minority within the context of Old Growth, did not even emerge as a topic of conversation. Likewise, in the discussion of issues of power and leadership that I have been reflecting upon above, the conversations with Katie and Judy never once ventured into the territory of sexual identity, nor did we entertain ideas of female subjectivity, or question whether they had specifically feminine perspectives on power. For these gaps in the interview content, I must notably take responsibility, in the sense,

simply enough, that I was ultimately in control of the tone, content, and direction of the conversations.

On the other hand, the nature of participatory research praxis, as I understand it, has been to conduct the interviews in a dialogical format that fostered a collaborative, free-flowing context in which the participants were “co-researching” with me, exploring the terrain around community issues that was most interesting and compelling for them. Hence, they were in as much “control” of the discussion as myself. In fact, I remember that in the group dialogues, no matter how much I may have desired to provoke a particular topic of discussion—exclusivity, diversity, geographical isolation or separation—if the participants were disinterested or put off by the themes that I raised, they were quick to either divert the dialogue, rebuff my assertions, or to simply ignore my question. So, who was really in charge?

Of course, at the end of the day, the artificial construct of dissertation research is just one more example of how power issues get navigated within an inter-subjective space. The good news is that, within the philosophical grounding of Gadamer and Ricoeur, these conversations themselves have only been starting points for research and exploration. The transcripts, the follow-up dialogues, and the summarized texts in newly minted contexts (e.g. published material perhaps), all provide space and opportunity for deepening the circle of enquiry.

In this particular space of personal reflection, however, I think what is more important than who is responsible or how some important element of

subjectivity got left out of the mix, like homosexuality or the feminine voice, is the nature of the unconsciousness involved: why did I and the others choose—or seemingly “forget”—these elements of personal identification that in other contexts are often deeply important to us?

I surmise, at least on the surface, that in the case of *the presence of the absence* of our “special” identities as homosexual men, at issue is a confluence of multiple, emotionally dynamic forces, all of which unconsciously conspire to keep the surface conversation “clean, white, and bright”: there is a sense in which gay men like Hugh and myself (unlike the men written about in Munoz’s *Dis-identifications*, for example) feel fully accepted and “mainstreamed” into the white, middle-class American community, hence demarcating the “territory” of homosexuality feels superfluous and unnecessary. There is also a sense of hesitancy to declare the voice of the homosexual as unique or different. Given the level of assimilation—and perhaps subjugation—that we have experienced within the context of our economic prosperity and high levels of education (mainstream academic backgrounds), I’m always at a loss to even describe what the “homosexual voice” sounds like. Nor am I sure that one exists. (Until I read about it and sometimes wonder if should “ghetto-ize” myself in order to learn it; after all, my thinking goes—I’m not being a very good “gay” by not developing a “gay voice”, when in fact, the opposite is true: this identity as gay seems to mean less and less to me as I get older. Now is this a loss...or a sign of maturity?)

Finally, there is undoubtedly residual and repressed fear of “being different”—and therefore “less than”—that suffuses conversations between white homosexual men (who can assimilate and hide their difference as a matter of conscious—or unconscious—choice) even when there are no heterosexuals present. In this third instance, this kind of collusive denial and “forgetting” is reminiscent, it seems to me, of the depths of unconsciousness into which issues of economic stratification, racial diversity, material consumption, and work related stress, get submerged in Caucasian, middle class circles. Even with our so-called “freedom” to be different and unique, we rather choose to remain tethered to the “norm”, feeling more comfortable with identifications such as “consumers” and “normal white folks” than risk being outcast as “other” by crossing the border into emotional or geographic landscapes of difference, diversity, or poverty. I will explore this issue of unconscious collusion around cultural and social issues of identity in later chapters, with the help of depth psychological and liberation psychological theory, but for now, I just wanted to reflect on my own sense of the “missing pieces” that showed up in these dialogues.

In the case of the missing voice of the subjective feminine, it is less clear to me that what occurs is a form of collective or collusive denial. Rather, my intuition, based upon many hours of non-research conversations with a number of the female leaders in the community, is that these women do not really have a sense of themselves as having a “unique” perspective or “voice” around leadership issues based on being a woman. Perhaps, not being

scholars of feminism—and surely not interested in working through academic tomes like those written by Braidotti and others—they are simply “ignorant” of the subject matter. Yet, this feels too easy an explanation. I cannot help but wonder if the reason for the “missing voice” of feminism in the dialogues is more akin to that desire, also noteworthy in the white homosexual, to reap the benefits of emancipation and not incur the cost.

Being white and economically prosperous, in essence, seems to represent the ultimate in privilege; it is the identity of status, at least in New York City and suburbs—the one that counts—under which all other identifications must be subjugated and disavowed. As these women have climbed the corporate and professional ladders of success in financial, geographic, and material terms, their need to proclaim their difference as “embodied feminine” seems to have receded and been replaced with the complicity of acceptance: they are members, like Hugh and myself, of a gilded American club.

In closing these moments of personal reflection, I cannot help but feel saddened by the depth of unconsciousness that starts to become evident—in me and the others—as I look deeply at how tightly circumscribed these conversations really have been around issues of privilege, diversity, exclusivity and power. I wonder if, as a drop of white affluence in a sea of poverty and destruction—of the local sphere and of the planet—we may be fooling ourselves in thinking that our adventure in community is ultimately transformative or empowering. Are we just deepening our collusion with the

globalizing hegemony of consumer capitalism? Has the reward of elite status covered over any hope of our throwing off the mantle of patriarchy and male-dominated discourse?

I'm not sure that I can be overly optimistic about the community's aspirations in this regard; however, the conversations are underway—and the topics have been raised. It will be interesting to hear how the participants respond to this narrative and my reflections in text format. Perhaps, the best that can be hoped is that the narratives that have been generated, especially by these individual dialogues and the heartfelt concerns of Katie, Serge, and Hugh, will be taken up by the group leaders—and taken to heart. Clearly, there is much potency and transformational potential in the gift of intimacy and sharing and partnership that has been born in the rise of Old Growth. It is early in the life of the community, so perhaps these voices of resistance, even dissent—along with my inner turmoil as well—may inspire the overall project to be dissected and investigated more deeply—with an eye to the ground of unconsciousness and an ear for the marginalized voice—from the inside out.

***The “Art of Belonging” Workshop:
Shaping Community***

In this section, I want to shift the readers’ attention away from linguistic emphasis of the participants’ individual and group commentary with regard to their experience of community, and attempt to share and explore the meaning, nuance, and interpretive possibilities that emerged from a collective submersion in the symbolic and aesthetic realms of communication. In late December 2002, a group of fourteen community participants came together in a daylong workshop format, entitled, “Shaping the Community”. At this custom-designed event, participants were provided an opportunity to experience the highs and lows, the joys, pains and drama of community in ways that reached beyond the normative modalities of dialogue and discussion, through individual and collaborative design, drawing, sculpting, and play.

To a certain extent, the act of reporting, in text, on this imaginal encounter of community is paradoxical, and well-nigh impossible, for to capture, derive or distill any essential meaning from the collaborative works of art that were created, I undoubtedly risk falling victim to the egotistic traps of colonization and reductionism. In addition, since I was a participant, just one in the mix, at this event, my perspective on the symbolic “meaning” of the experience and of the works that were created, however useful, must necessarily be considered preliminary and provisional at best.

Henceforth, in consideration of all of the above reservations and restrictions, I am left with only one alternative: to resuscitate the event from the repository of community history as folklore, in the form of imaginal memoir. However, even within this circumscribed context, it should be possible to expand and deepen our understandings with regard to the praxis and themes of intentional community, by reflecting on the workshop and its products—the artworks themselves—in a dialogical manner, using Jungian tools of amplification and active imagination. Following Jung’s approach to symbol interpretation, in which the images are not reduced to a particular or inherent “meaning”, but are viewed as living, organic projections of the individual and collective unconscious of the community, my intention will be to reflect with, not “on”, the imagery, to explore how the images may mirror, expand and expose the hidden psychic underground of the community landscape, thus tilling the soil for the following chapters of theoretical hermeneutics. In addition, as part of a participatory process of distancing and appropriation of the event—as “text”—, over the last few months I have shared the slides, videotape, and photo renderings of the workshop with many of the participants and asked them to share their memories, reactions, critiques and reflections with me on the overall experience of the event, and this repository of feedback has been added to the mix.

Hence, my approach to the participatory hermeneutic in this case, will be two-fold: 1. To draw out, through a combination of participant comments and my own observations as participant-researcher, the story of community-

in-action that unfolded in the moving, creative, at times exasperating, but ultimately, fascinating journey of “shaping community”; 2. To interweave the “text” of the artworks themselves, as co-participants in the story, not for purposes of discerning the “meaning” of the symbols, but rather to dialogue with them, considering their impact as mirrors for the engagement, disengagement, chaos and order, birth and destruction of “the community doing community”.

The story of “shaping community”

The idea for this workshop was born from conversation with a friend and professional artist, Xavier Roux, and his creative partner, psychologist Kathleen Calabrese, Ph.D., who work together using collaborative art projects in order to foster creativity and change for their organizational and corporate clients. I had told them about the unique constellation of intentional community that had emerged in the wake of Tom and Flame’s workshops, and they were enthusiastic about witnessing the community firsthand. Likewise, I was interested in exploring ways of deepening and expanding the field of participation for this research project, to engage the community in collaborative work/play that might support us in breaking through conscious, bounded patterns of language and conversation.

Xavier and Kathleen were also interested, as am I, in exploring art as a method of transformation, reconnecting people to self, other, and world. Healers and shamans have employed art therapy to ameliorate symptoms of

depression and cure physical and mental illness across cultures for centuries. Yet, The intent behind this particular project, was not so much aimed at transformation or healing, per se, but rather to focus on deepening the experience of community as an agency of relatedness, intimacy, possibility, and belonging. The idea was to develop a format for creating art collaboratively, and then just allow the process itself to lead us wherever it would, to allow whatever symptoms, feelings, longings, or unspoken yearnings to emerge. In my desire to enter the collaborative, imaginal space as fully as possible, as co-researcher and full participant, I handed the reins of structure and leadership over to Xavier and Kathleen, encouraging them to design and execute the workshop as they saw fit. The resulting day-long exploration of art and community involved fourteen members of the community, including myself, and the “narrative”, which the facilitators “co-authored” by providing structure, materials, and guidelines for play—rules of the game, so to speak—unfolded in a seamless, organic fashion that is best laid out, somewhat artificially, in six consecutive “chapters”.

Chapter one: the square. Our first step in coming together as a group, stepping on to the playing field of the imagination, required that we cross that inimitable, initial threshold where individuals first subjugate their separate identities and attempt to form a team. This first stage—community in formation—represents a formidable challenge, for the individualistic cultural milieu in which we are all steeped, places a high degree of emphasis upon solo performance. It seems that solitaire, especially in the language of artistic

expression, is the game we all know best. Hence, the instructions for the first awkward steps into the sphere of collaboration, were incremental: we were asked, using drawing and painting materials, to create an individual work of art—any symbol we liked—within the shape of a square, so long as we kept in mind that our finished product had to then be joined together into a larger, but also bounded shape to form a communal square.

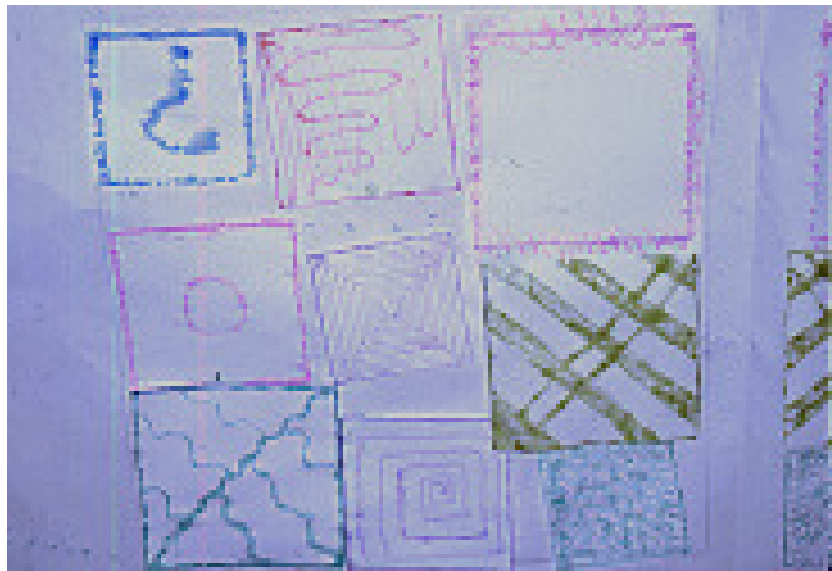


Figure 3.1

The resulting piece, figure 3.1, shows the fragmented and only partially successful attempt to bring together the individual images under the umbrella of one, integrated whole. In fact, there were a number of artful squares that got left out of the mix—and the time involved in making the larger, incorporated square, was inordinately longer than was necessary for each

solitary expression of “squareness”. Although there was plenty of time for each person to design and execute their own piece, when the same amount of time was allotted for coming together and creating one work, it quickly ran out. Frankly, we were all flummoxed as to how the time got away from us, and were at a loss to explain why.

Reflecting on this question, as I peer closely and ruminate on the image in figure 3.1, it helps to point my interpretive lens downward, to just below the surface, to the first subterranean layers of emotional and cultural conditioning which we, as amateur artists, encountered upon stepping, gingerly, on to this communal playing field of the imagination: we were all accustomed to creating alone. From an energetic perspective, the shift from talking—setting the stage, introductions, instructions, explanations, and goals—to actually drawing or painting the initial works, was quick and fluid: everyone seemed anxious and excited to “get to work”. The participants who had chosen to come to this workshop were all “good players”, viewing themselves, in some respect at least, as “children at heart” or tentative artists, or at the very least, as “harboring some artistic ambitions” (all the quotes in this section come from various participants, as recorded on the videotape): they wanted to play. Hence, the jump over the threshold of discourse into the playing field of art was easily accomplished, and the energy in the space came alive with furrowed brows, journaling, and deep meditation on the colors, schemata, and designs that would emerge to express each person’s view of their “ideal square”; time felt fluid, expansive.

Yet this same flow of time, like the flow of creativity, slowed to a trickle, and became insufferably interminable when the participants were asked to shift into the collaborative space of combining each unique square into one larger composite. The first glint of conflict emerged as we attempted to navigate the vicissitudes of length and width, seemingly lost in the rigidity and, literally and figuratively, the “boxed-in”, feeling of trying to “fit them all together”.

“This is impossible!”, shouted one participant during the most trying moments of jerry-rigging the little squares into a bigger one: “There is either not enough space for all of us, or too much empty space. It won’t work”. Such was the tone and trial of our first attempt at collaboration.

Pondering the square in figure 3.1, it seems to speak loud and clear to the fragmentation, the schism that we all experienced between the individual and the community, which, despite the fact that we all knew each other as members of Old Growth, was far from fully formed at the outset. In the final image, the spaces between the individual squares loom large, and with their uneven and ragged edges, leave the impression that the smaller individual works are, in effect, fighting to stake out a territory within the larger whole, however unsuccessfully. Much like this dis-jointed, awkward array of disparate “squares”, it seemed that once enmeshed in the persona of “artist”, we too became uneven and ragged around the edges, strangers to each other, navigating the borders of trust and safety, inclusivity and belonging, as if for the very first time.

It is interesting that the square shape, born of straight lines that must be of equal length, forms a closed symbol, a rigid grid-like image that evokes stability, perhaps solidity, but offers little flexibility, no room for expansion, wandering, movement: it is a bounded space with strict borders. A mirror image of the participants themselves, in many ways, this flawed attempt to bridge the gap of separation seemed to personify and reinforce the wound of isolation: there is very little room in which to find a home here, no place to belong; some individual “squares” never even made it into the final product at all. Talk about feeling left out: they were just shunted to the sidelines in order to satisfy the rules. The borders held; the individuals lost.

In Helene Shulman Lorenz’ study of complex systems and the human psyche (1997), *Living at the Edge of Chaos*, she draws on the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas to make an assertion about life in highly-structured, hierarchical cultural contexts, stating that in more rigidly circumscribed, “high grid” social environments, individuals will tend to be more isolated, separate, and individualistic:

Social worlds can be ranked according to “grid” requirements. The grid of a social environment is the network of obligations and customary rituals that constrain individual behavior and communication. In a high-grid subculture, almost every action is considered in reference to the expectations of others. Information is very carefully controlled and hoarded. A “stiff upper lip” is valued over expressive freedom. (p. 63)

At least in this initial attempt at creativity and collaboration the wards of authority and the pressure to conform won out over any “expressive freedom”. There seemed to be little energy or incentive for individuals or the group to

break the rules, or to re-define them. The square motif, as a reified metaphor for the patriarchal power grid of conformity and unseen authority that permeates life in urban America, successfully squelched—“stay within the lines”—any attempt at individual or collective expression. I will discuss this cultural issue more deeply in the context of group process and psychoanalysis in Chapter 4, section four.

Returning our gaze on the imaginary prison that the facilitators consciously foisted on the unwitting participants, can we not clearly see the grid pattern at work in this initial attempt at collaboration? Surely, the colors and curves and play of images represented by each individual’s drawing are complex and evocative, yet even they feel bounded and limited. There is a sense of frustration, of feeling held back and controlled—in the question mark, the scribbles at the borders, the suggestion of subversive placement of a circle inside one of the squares (positing, within the guidelines, the square’s antithesis); yet the participants still kept within the boundaries, and in fact, even chose to jettison the work of their own comrades in order to comply with the “rules of the road”.

Thus, in this first “chapter”, we get a sense of the daunting task ahead: how do we fill in the spaces that separate us as bounded, isolated selves? How do we resolve the paradox of leadership we initially encounter in being told that we are “free to shape a community” yet must “obey the authorities”. I will investigate these issues more deeply in the interpretive reflections in the next section, but suffice to say, just in this opening sequence, the subtle

complexities and cultural constructs of belonging, welcoming, ostracizing, and facing down authority all come in to play in the grid work here on display.

Chapter two: the triangle. In the next section, we were given our first opportunity to reflect, design, and collaborate on an artistic work en masse, right from the start. Working again with a universal symbol of human expression—one that evokes the power and strength of mountains and pyramids—we were asked to use pipe cleaners, in a multitude of colors, to create a work of art in the shape of a triangle. Suffice to say, this chapter began with the high-spirited energy of enthusiasm and play and then quickly dissolved into a morass of conflict, avoidance, resentment, and resignation. The initial atmosphere of excitement seemed born of the confluence of two beliefs held consensually by the group, at least initially: 1. that forming a triangle together would be easier than creating individual triangles and trying to bring them together (there was a great deal of residual fear that this would be the ‘rule of the day’); 2. that the material limitations—only colored pipe cleaners) again, would make the creation easier and more “controllable”. Of course, this initial foray into collaborative creativity without the requisite quiet moments of individual reflection and expression proved much more challenging than the group had anticipated. In fact, the physical manifestation of this shift towards group play, took on an urgency and symbolism of its own: everyone was on their feet, moving around with excitement at the idea of creating a three-dimensional triangle, a mobile of sorts. The fantasy seemed to be that forging a three-dimensional sculpture would afford the group

greater flexibility, move us off the bounded grid of paper and pencil/crayon and out into a wider, imaginal space. Unfortunately, all this good intent quickly devolved into disagreements about how such a triangle would hold together:

“How can a bunch of pipe cleaners form a pyramid?”

“Does building a pyramid work as a triangle?”

“Does the triangle have to be three-dimensional?”

“Why can’t we just lay the pipe cleaners out on the floor...wouldn’t that be much easier?”

“Yeah, and boring.”

“How does each sub-component of the initial structure hold together in the formation of a triangle?”

“What? You sound like such a tech-weeny! This is no fun at all...and it certainly isn’t pretty.”

“Who says art has to be pretty?”

It quickly became clear that for this wonderful idea to be realized would require the full-scale assistance of a qualified structural engineer and an architect, neither of which were to be found among the group. Chaos ensued.



Figure 3.2

If we look at the product of this haphazard attempt at collaboration, figure 3.2, we get a sense, a feel for the creativity involved, but also the fragmentation, the tension, and even the anxiety that joined in the fray as unwelcome participants. The design—its symbolic figuration—of a triangle is evident in the multitude of little triangles that form the superstructure: but where is the overall triangle? There is none. Yet, this spectacular failure, in another example of the paradox of community, left the group feeling refreshed and exhilarated and, much more than with the foray into square-dom, content with the result.

How is this possible? It could be pure interpretive speculation on my part as a participant, but I surmise that in the free-for-all movement that engineered this sorry contraption we call a “triangle”, a shift towards real

collaboration occurred. There was a distinct movement away from solitary expression as the group process flowed towards, at least incrementally, what Lorenz calls a “low-grid” social environment, where themes of egalitarianism, communication, emotional expression and group identity begin to emerge. (p. 67)

In a sense this triangular project represented a major shift of emphasis, and energy, for the group (hence, it is noteworthy that it was carried out more like a dance—with everyone on their feet, moving around): the rules of the game were less rigid and more open-ended, only the materials and the resulting shape were dictated. Hence, the group may have entered what Lorenz likens to a “liminal state”—an in-between space of high energy and focus, which is usually temporary, but can be transformational, even liberating: “Liminality is a context-dependent quality. Often, the habitual defines order, and then a partial reversal of what is rejected can symbolize the liminal. Liberating enslaved schemata through the liminal experience can bring a new rush of energy to the psyche.” (p. 66)

Indeed, it was clearly the case that in rejecting the “lines of demarcation” around the triangle exercise—on our feet, dancing together, we created a sculptural representation that surely pushes the envelope of what constitutes a “triangle”—the group was much less cerebral, subdued, and mechanistic than with the square, and emotional expression was evident as well, as built up resentment and frustration from the oppression of the square,

bubbled over into the mix. Overall, the release of emotional energy—enthusiasm, passion, opinion, even anger—fueled a rejuvenation and enlivening of the scene, that, in some sense, got the whole day back on track. Looking at the image in figure 3.2, we can begin to see the aliveness, however chaotic, of the group itself—fragmented, un-structured, tenuous, but bordering on coherence—the kinetic, free-form three dimensionality of the sculpture seems to mirror the group’s incipient trial at collaboration. To this day, most of the participants proudly hail this work as the first and primary example of ‘community art’, however born of strife and strangulation, as much as love and triangulation.

Chapter three: the cross. By this point in the day, the participants were highly energized and ready to “make art”. Hence, when the next set of instructions placed them back on the floor, on hands and knees, tightly circumscribed once again by the limiting instruction to “create a cross-shape utilizing only this one shape (already pre-determined) and these colored, styrofoam ball-like materials, the group was immediately resistant. “Why do we have to use your idea of a cross”, asked one participant. “there are lots of universal symbols for a cross, I want to make up our own”. Of course, that was not allowed, and thus began the next chapter in the saga of facing down authority: the interactive engagement and disengagement between the participants and the facilitators generated a love-hate dynamic throughout the day. However, Kathleen and Xavier had already warned me that this was part of the plan: community, as we have heard reflected in the dialogues, is

always partly about the face-off against authority, structure, freedom and transformation; any exercise in community, collaboration, or belonging, requires navigating them all.

Hence the chapter on the cross, surely not coincidentally a universal symbol carrying religious overtones and the burden of cultural history, set the group off to take up its own form of martyrdom, by grudgingly following the rules, forming coalitions of subversives and conformists, and by pushing the envelope of acceptability wherever possible. During this part of the day, there was a great deal of tension in the air; there were moments when it seemed like the whole project would unravel, as rather than working in a coherent group, factions formed, alignments for or against the facilitators, in which each subset cordoned off one section of the cross image, and set about either breaking the rules or following them with a fervor (a sort of creative fundamentalism appeared in a subset of the group, which in retrospect feels potent and portentous, given the synchronistic nature of the image itself!) that threatened to boil over at any moment, leaving the entire project in chaos. Yet, somehow we never crossed that threshold.

Along the way, as I describe later in detail in the section on psychoanalytic theories of group process, it seems that the community had broken down into a defensive posture that psychoanalytic scholar Wilfred Bion (1961) has called “pairing” where dyads and mini-alignments form among a group in a reaction of either strong resistance or strong adherence to the behavior of the leader. These factions operate in a form of emotional

reactivity, unconscious to the fact that they are acting out a projective response to authority, either co-opting the leader as “guru” or unconsciously conspiring to have him or her removed and replaced with someone better. In the group’s response to the instructions regarding the cross, this behavior became evident: each little group of two or three people, those who were “highly in favor of just doing the work” versus those who were “fed up with all these confounded rules” took up arms—in colonizing separate sections of the cross—and proceeded to “act out” their frustrations in the artwork.



Figure 3.3

In figure 3.3 we can immediately see the result of the work of factions: each quadrant of the cross is unique; even the center was co-opted by a subset of the group and turned into a circle—again very likely meant to be a subversive statement against the hegemony of high-grid structuring and limitation posed by a symbol that is, in its remedial structure, composed of squares. In the lower quadrant, we can even glimpse perhaps a

foreshadowing of overt resistance, as this subgroup went so far as to break the boundaries and extend their work down below the grid, and then, in a final symbol of revolt, gave it a subtle curve, almost a tail. Thus, they have made—unconsciously since there was no discussion of dissent—a bold statement that jeopardizes the entire image, putting in question the figurative integrity of the cross. It reminds me of the political symbolism inherent in the famous painting of a pipe by Rene Magritte, in which he inscribed the words “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” (this is not a pipe) just below the drawing of a pipe. In essence, the image expresses the group’s resistance to domination and perceived oppression. By “pinning a tail on the cross”, as one participant eloquently summed it up, they have memorialized their hidden resentment, in the symbolic declaration: “this is not a cross”.

In Lorenz’s work on grid-like social environments, she points out the opportunity for transformation emerges when the threshold of rigid bounded space is made permeable, broken through, if only temporarily, and through symbolic means, repressed anger, sadness, shame—all forms of shadow material—are allowed to erupt into consciousness. Hence, the symbolic potency of one further sensorial, tactile expression of this liminal state that occurred during the “cross-section” (no pun intended), is perhaps synchronistic, or at the very least, evocative: the small blocks of styrofoam, which came in multi-colored hues including dark brown, kept dissolving into mush when water was added to them (to make them stick to the canvas). This dissolving material, had the effect of making the craftsmanship of the

cross exceedingly messy—such that the chaos of the energetic fractiousness was only exacerbated by the mess made by the styrofoam. Poignantly, with a hint of irony and dark humor, it was the brown styrofoam blocks that seemed to be particularly susceptible to the acidic dissolving agent known as tap water: they quickly turned to mushy, turd-like balls of gook, that only a child could love. These “little shits” as the group came to call them, took on an exceedingly powerful symbolism: the scatological chuckles they spawned seemed to carry the entire group over a threshold to embrace the chaos of play. In effect, the faction-forming, disorderly, messy, play of the cross, wound up birthing a spectacular, colorful and vibrant product, which transported the group to a new place of willingness to “play with the shadow”. With the “little shits” as the psycho-pomps, opaque, shrouded windows onto the dark, unsavory aspects of the individual and collective unconscious were thrown wide open, their panes becoming transparent: everyone seemed to recognize, and accept with humility and humor, how overly serious, self-important and stubborn we had all become—myself included—as we marched, in mini-armies of two and three, to the strident tune of the cross.

From this point forward the atmosphere shifted; the mood lifted, and the whole experience became lighter and more playful. Energies of frustration, anger, even resentment towards the facilitators took on a wholly different feeling-tone, as each individual—and the group—began to take responsibility for what came up emotionally, to discuss and reflect on their own reactivity, and to move through emotional states with greater flexibility

and fluidity. It seems that *the experience of community itself*, had perhaps finally entered the space, through the backdoor, by way of shadow and humor, dark and light, factions and fractions. Chaos brought order.

Chapter four: the circle. Coming at the mid-point of the day, the next “project” proved to be a watershed experience for the group: the co-creation of a work of art within the confines of a circular shape on canvas. It seemed that the fragmented but ultimately collaborative work on the cross, had shifted the group into a more spacious, vulnerable, expressive, and less withholding posture, such that the fairly circumscribed instructions—use colored pens/paints/pencils, stay within the circumference of the circle—did not raise, at least at the outset, a great deal of resistance in the ranks. The group dove in, on hands and knees, everyone feverishly grabbing up the pens and crayons and playfully entering the circular space, and the atmosphere was charged with frivolity, fun and partnership.

Soon enough however, what transpired wound up demonstrating what I might call “the lie of collaboration”, for as each individual became more and more deeply engaged in self-expression—colors, lines, shapes, etc.—all within the so-called “confines” of the circle, any sense of “partnering” seemed to fly out the window, and the entire procedure devolved into a push for “getting my ideas on paper”. The experience of the circle was perhaps the most perplexing and paradoxical undertaking of the entire day: the aesthetic expression of the union of the group seemed to come through in the result, yet the means to get there were almost entirely individualistic. As one of the

participants remarked, “I love what we came up with, but I felt like I was fighting tooth and nail to toss my scribbles into the mix. Besides, who can tell what part of the image is mine?” So, was this an example of the best of both worlds? Or was it rather an expression of complete and utter isolation under the false guise of unanimity? The answer is far from obvious.

What was, of course, even more startling was the result: a multi-colored, multi-dimensional, complex, and dynamic expression of the whole—a mandala of sorts. Indeed, within a Jungian frame of interpretation, the mandala represents a sense of wholeness and integrity; it hints at the potential marriage of opposing unconscious and conscious aspects of the psyche—shadow and persona, male and female, ego and Self, and in this case, perhaps, individual and collective. For Jung, the mandala symbol, when it arises in dreams, points toward the future, it is a numinous hallmark of transformative change and integration: an imaginal representation of the process of individuation.



Figure 3.4

Indeed, the resulting work, figure 3.4, created through what appeared on the surface to be disparate, unconnected expressions of individual creativity, mirrored, upon completion, not disunity and dysfunction, but rather coherence, diversity, and a profound sense of wholeness. The image contains a clearly marked center, which grounds it and ties all the movement and seeming disorder together into something resembling a starburst or sunflower. It is bounded by concentric circles moving outward away from the center, yet it also breaks the bounds of circularity, dancing around the edges with lines, scribbles and a cacophony of color that pushes beyond the fringe, over the edge, making the borders permeable. The aesthetic complexity of this image is powerful and evocative, of wholeness and multi-dimensionality, much like the behavior and energetic space of the group during its creation.

There is something else too: a sense that some “other” joined in the mix between the individuals and the group as a whole; an unseen, mysterious force of energy seemed to infiltrate the space, moving the participants over a threshold of subjectivity and separation into a place where the emergent whole of the work transcended the agency of each individual part, as noted by comments like these: “I got swept up in the energy of us all working together”, “I lost myself in the process”. Here, as a number of the participants noted afterwards, our first truly collaborative “work of art” burst forth. The borderlands between self and other seemed to become permeable—truly a fusion of imaginal horizons occurred—, which is mirrored in the resulting image, with its intricate beauty, multi-hued sonorities, and delicate balance between space, color, line, and shape. Ultimately, it would probably not be too much of a stretch to describe chapter four of this narrative as the moment in which the individuals crossed the threshold and entered communal space: the mandala, as a symbol pointing towards wholeness, became the engine of integration, pulling us together, as one.

Chapter five: the spiral. Of course, the ensuing moments of admiration for all of our hard work on the circle did not last long, for we were soon urged on to the next project: to create a spiral shape, in any way we saw fit, as long as we utilized a great rolled sheet of plastic along the way. By this time in the day, the energy of the group, following the “success” with the circle, was upbeat and convivial; everyone seemed to have broken through their frustration, anger and resentment at the facilitators and at each other; there

was a felt-sense of community, perhaps for the first time, that permeated the energetic field as we faced down the challenge of the spiral. The irony of the spiral however, turned out to be that in spite of the fact that this project was arguably the most successful, collaborative and collegial undertaking of the day, the result, in terms of artistic expression, was undoubtedly a flop.

With a newly emergent sense of safety, trust and vulnerability pervading the room, the participants were enthusiastic to “try new things”, to “break the rules”, and to “make it up as we go along”. As we gazed upon the huge roll of plastic, and playfully tossed out ideas for a work of art in the shape of a spiral, there was a felt-sense among the group that the possibilities were endless; that chaos and disorder would not only be tolerated but encouraged; that in fact we had arrived at a place of acceptance and tolerance of diversity, recognizing that disarray and disorder were just part of the process. Indeed, this newfound willingness to “play at the edges”, with the instructions, with the materials, with each other, propelled the group to a heightened sense of awareness, inventiveness, and creativity, which culminated in the decision to collapse the borders between community and art: we decided to sculpt a spiral using the plastic sheet *and our own bodies*, in essence, to make ourselves the work of art.

For Xavier, as a facilitator and professional artist, this shift of perspective on the part of the group—tearing apart the artificial, socially constructed walls that define what is artistic, determine what is “art”, and separate artists from their work—represented the group’s entrance into what

he called, “the deterritorialized space of artistic integrity”. With this reflection, he was making reference to the work of French philosopher and social theorist, Gilles Deleuze (1987), who is well-known for his critique of Euro-Western culture with its mechanistic, socially constructed and constricting machine-like “assemblages”: communities that are so rigidly circumscribed by lines of authority, scripted behavioral norms, and social customs—all passed on unconsciously as historical “flows of tradition”—that the spark of human creativity is snuffed out at every turn. According to Deleuze, it is only by opening up the bounded “territories” of Western society and “deterritorializing the social sphere” that human creativity can be liberated:

Every assemblage is basically territorial. The first concrete rule for assemblages is to discover what territoriality they envelop, for there always is one: in their trash can or on their bench...The territory makes the assemblage...The assemblage is also divided along another axis. Its territoriality is only a first aspect; the other aspect is constituted by lines of deterritorialization that cut across it and carry it away. These lines are very diverse: some open the territorial assemblage on to other assemblages...Others operate directly onto the territory of the assemblage and open it onto a land that is eccentric, immemorial, or yet to come...(p. 504-505)

In this context, it is interesting to note that Xavier believed he was witnessing an act of deterritorialization: the choice to ‘be the art’ as opposed to making, crafting, or executing a work of art in normative fashion, represented, for him, the liberation of individual expression—thus pointing towards the emancipatory power of intentional community. In this safe space of collective belonging, in the wake of the cacophonous breakthrough of the circle, having crossed a threshold of conscious disarray and entered an

energy of grace and numinosity, the community was freed up to integrate head and heart, body and soul, in the spontaneous decision to create a sculpted spiral of plastic, using no colors or canvas or materials other than our own bodies. In the playful, high-spirited romp that followed, time seemed to stand still and artistic expression became a game: we followed the rules by making up our own. Herein, I would also suggest, lies the healing, transformative power of community to foster new, holistic, convergent ways of thinking, being and relating, for across the threshold of chaos and uncertainty, a “clearing” seemed to emerge—a space for wandering, wondering, reflecting and connecting—in which the walls of separation between subject and object, inner and outer, seemed to dissolve, and the spiritual essence of communal participation—with each other, with the entire group as a whole, with the universe—emerged.

Unfortunately, the resulting piece, figure 3.5 does not even begin to capture the aspiration, the energy, or the essential character of the work that was created, for without our continual presence it quickly deflated into an empty, transparent swirl of plastic, a mere tracing of the exalted sculpture that



Figure 3.5

we had constructed. Perhaps this shadow rendition, all that we have left to memorialize, is a perfect symbol for the transient nature of the ineffable, fleeting territory of communal space, for that pure moment of creative inspiration, of deterritorialization—when the fish catch a glimpse of the water in which they swim—is ephemeral at best: taking us to the heights of transcendence for a connective moment with the divine, only to quickly posit us back on the cold hard ground, back in the strait-jacket of our culture of rules, logic, bureaucracy and separation. As Deleuze would surely note: with acts of deterritorialization, the flights away are fleeting, and the moment of “reterritorialization”, inevitable.

Chapter six: the shape of community. Coming down from the high of the spiral—which in a sense, “spiraled” beyond our control to great effect, and

joyous affect, was, as might be expected, a challenge. There was a sense among the group that the climax of the day had been reached, and as we all glanced at the empty tracing of our residual spiral, feelings of loss and sadness—and the requisite exhaustion—showed up. Nevertheless, the narrative continued unabated; there was still time for one more excursion into creative delights: we were instructed to take time, as a collective, to reflect back on the day, and collaboratively create something that would best represent the “essence of community” for all of us. No shape, design, materials, or rules were assigned; in effect, we were at last given our dream job: do whatever we want so long as the theme of community comes through in the “shape”. Ah, were it only that simple.

Needless to say, just like a child who quickly becomes frustrated and bored soon after receiving the longed for object of desire, the group’s sense of cohesion and partnership dissolved within minutes of receiving the long sought after directive: do whatever you want. Another round of chaos ensued, this time even more divisive and aggressive than before, perhaps due to the projection of internalized guilt and shame at not being better “students” (always wary of the perceptions of the facilitators as figures of authority), or perhaps due to simple disappointment in the presence of our deflated spiral—now seemingly just a mass of useless plastic.

At one point, when it seemed that the group had reached an emotional ebb of malaise, dissonance, and discontent, one participant (Julie, of the group dialogue) came to our rescue. She simply requested that the group sit

together in a circle, in silence, and gaze into each other's eyes, in an effort to reconstitute our sense of community, to remember who we had been for each other just moments before. In following her request—and thus admitting a subtle form of authority to once again emerge—the group was able to recapture the spirit of empathy, familiarity and cohesion that had so quickly arisen and then abated in the wake of sculpting the spiral.

Through the agency of this spontaneous ritual of meditation and witnessing, the group once again found its footing, regained its center of gravity, and the field of the imagination was re-opened for business. Deciding to utilize all the materials that had been provided throughout the day thus far—the colored pipe cleaners, the Styrofoam balls, the crayons and pens and paper, and the transparent rolls of plastic—the group, for the first time, reached a consensual decision: to make another three-dimensional work—a “tubular shape”—that would enable each individual to create tiny symbols of community—as each of us saw fit—to be rolled up together, literally encapsulated, in a transparent whole.

Upon reaching this decision, a sense of relief engulfed the space, and in an atmosphere of calm, with renewed industry and focus, each individual set off to create miniature symbolic renderings of the meaning of community: pipe cleaners in the shape of a heart, styrofoam balls shaped together in a spiral, human stick figures tied together with strings, even a pile of brown, mushy styrofoam stuck together in a mass (symbolizes the “shadow side of

community”, according to one participant), and so on, all were laid out in a long line on the flattened surface of the transparent plastic.

The paradoxical outcome of this layered approach to individual and collective expression, however, was that even though the idea was generated and inspired by the group, the procedure for carrying it to fruition seemed to break us up, once again, into separate units of individuality—each person went off on their own to reflect, play, and work out their unique symbolization of community. In what had clearly emerged as the theme of the day—the ebb and flow of communal engagement—the final challenge arrived when the individual creations were all complete. We all stood back and looked at the work in progress, suddenly stung by the question: how does this side-by-side configuration of separate symbols all come together into some “assemblage” of unity?

It was a perfect reflective moment, pervaded by a sense of powerlessness and loss at the seeming impossibility of garnering unity out of such multiplicity, however neatly juxtaposed. Yet, in the rush to avoid despair, the group, having come once again up against the threshold of dissolution, seemed to have access to a set of newly acquired skills for grappling with the impossible and the unattainable. In the spirit of the mandala, which points towards an imagined possibility of wholeness, the group came together in a circle formation, turned inward and reflective one final time, and, with that mysterious “third” force pulling us towards full participation and collective imagining, came up with the idea of rolling the plastic into a tube—containing

the individual symbols—and then taping the snake-like piece together to form a “wreath of community”. The final product, in the communal fantasy of the group, would become an emblem, a mascot of celebration, a transparent, permeable, bounded space of individual and collective expression that could be hung on a wall—like a Christmas wreath—to ritualize and make sacred the space of community.



Figure 3.6

Now as to whether the reader can discern this dream of ‘shaping community’ in the final image (figure 3.6) that was born of this amazing synthesis of dialogue, intimacy, and shared vision, well, that remains to be seen. It proved much more imaginal than practical to roll up the plastic sheet and fold it into a coherent whole: the material proved to be fragile, delicate and prone to schism. Yet the intent was clear. So the question remains:

does the symbol have to be “real”—to be “realized”—in order for it to be transformational?

It seems that artwork, like community, is vulnerable to the vagaries and vicissitudes of the materials, the context, and the glue that holds it together, all of which are prone to slippage, breakage, and degradation over time. The final rendition is but a mere shadow of its utopian ideal, which was born in the communal field of the imagination, and also laid to rest there. In its place remains a marker, a transparent, shadow memorial to the once-achieved pinnacle of communal imaginings. Depending upon whose looking, the image can be viewed as “an translucent emblem of love” as one participant put it, or as “a transparent pile of dog poop” as eloquently summed up by another. It is, of course, neither and both. If the group learned anything about the nature of community during this glorious excursion onto the musical, rhythmic, dissonant and reverberant dance floor of individual and group expression, it was this: community, like the images created by it, is a complex, ephemeral, challenging and exhilarating attempt to fuse the inner and outer landscapes of the one and the many, you and me, the fantastic and the real.

Chapter 3

Psychological Reflections

An Introduction to Depth Psychology

In the previous chapter, I have attempted to describe and interpret thematic material derived from a series of conversations, narrative and aesthetic texts that were co-created with selected members of the Old Growth community. Based on the phenomenological hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur, as previously discussed, the purpose of these sections has been to explore the nature, experience, and meaning of community for myself and the participants, as co-researchers, through dialogical and interpretive reflection.

By interspersing themes, commentary and direct quotations from the participants alongside my own “working through” of prejudice, bias, and pre-understandings, the intent has been to create a “fusion of horizons”, such that we expand and deepen our understanding of the power, impact and complexities of building an intentional community together. Thus far, the interpretive lens through which we have viewed the “data” has been both personal and inter-subjective; we have engaged in a collaborative act of learning using conversation and narrative texts to engage a hermeneutic circle of self-reflection, projection and feedback, in large part influenced by and grounded in our personal and cultural conditioning.

As might be expected from a qualitative and participatory approach to research, the process outlined above and shared in detail in the previous

chapter has not brought me to any particular “stopping point” or conclusion. I have by no means answered the questions framed at the outset of this project; I have not nailed down knowledge or “truth” with regard to the meaning or benefits of intentional community, neither in this specific localized phenomenon nor in the general world. Rather, in keeping with the purpose and framework of postmodern, collaborative approaches to learning, my participant companions and I have at best begun a process of exploration that has deepened and grounded our understandings of crucial aspects of intentional community process to which we are all committed: creating a vehicle for safety and belonging, de-constructing hierarchies, healing through processes of witnessing and mirroring, growing through relationship, and exploring non-patriarchal, alternative leadership configurations.

This dialectical process of interpretation has also left us with a deeper sense of the complexities and paradoxes inherent in community enterprise: the desire for comfort and safety which may then prohibit growth, the need for leadership which may create separation and distance, the call for an agenda and an structure—even a socially focused purpose—which may impose an external result on what is supposed to be a living, collaborative unfolding. Needless to say, at this point in the project, we are left with many more questions than answers as to the potential impact of intentional community experiments like Old Growth on individuals, the local environment, even the culture at large.

It is in this context of ongoing and deepening exploration, that I want now to widen the hermeneutic circle, to broaden beyond the internally generated insights gleaned from co-researchers in the community to include interpretive reflections from an array of theoretical and psychological perspectives, such that each may offer Old Growth information—through example, metaphor, historical and cultural analysis—that enriches and deepens our horizons of understanding.

However, in order to make this simple shift from the localized, community focused circle of interpretation, to reach out and bring to bear the insights of so-called experts in the study of humans in community, it is important to build the delicate theoretical bridge between critical hermeneutics and depth psychology. The reason for this is obvious, because given that the foundational grounding of participatory hermeneutics is generally opposed to being circumscribed by any particular epistemological stance, it is essential that we deliberately frame the possibilities, limitations and purpose of viewing the community process through the lens of depth psychology, social and cultural studies, or any other interpretive frame of reference.

So, we ask: why depth psychology? How might a depth psychological perspective deepen or expand our understanding of this particular community experiment, with all the paradox inherent in its complex interplay between self and other? The answer to these questions is fairly straightforward as long as we keep in mind that depth psychology itself is too big, too unfinished, too paradoxical a study of human individuality and collectivity to solve the

dilemmas raised by this particular project. It will be enough—in fact, it will only be appropriate—to employ depth psychological frames of reference as tools for reflection, as just one more pair of eyeglasses through which to view the complex nature of community. We welcome depth psychological viewpoints into the hermeneutic circle, as if we were initiating new community members, for in essence, they are no more and no less than syntactic, synthetic, semiotic individuals—co-researchers—with their own biases, offerings, insights, and prejudice.

At the same time, as the lineage of social science research has moved away from empirical, positivistic approaches to studying human behavior and arrived recently upon the postmodern shores of participatory and hermeneutic inquiry, so depth psychology has run parallel with developments in the exploration of human consciousness and unconsciousness that trace back to Freud and Jung. From the very beginning of what has been dubbed “depth psychology”, the core praxis of all forms of psychoanalytic and analytical (Jungian) therapy has been hermeneutic in nature: to uncover, explore and deepen an understanding of human behavior by investigating and interpreting the symptoms, symbols, and images that arise within the individual and between the patient and therapist through dialectical inquiry. The purposes of therapy, whether they be to cure neurosis, to restore an individual to health, to integrate conscious and unconscious material—all these are likewise interpretive frames of understanding that derive their power and efficacy from the container of human relationship.

Despite the residue of historical claims to empirical “fact” and scientific objectivity, most postmodern depth psychologists have long since abandoned attempts to objectify knowledge of the human psyche and have shifted their epistemological stance, moving their agenda towards alignment with critical hermeneutics in general: to use the tool of human relationship—through transference dyadic, community and group process—for the exploration, restoration and emancipation of human potential. Christopher Hauke (2000), in his recent re-working of Jungian depth psychology from a postmodern perspective, describes the shift in this manner:

As for the particular characteristics of the postmodern which are the focus of this book, the aspect most frequently encountered is: a critical questioning of the values, ‘truths’, and belief systems held by modernity since the Enlightenment... This critique brings with it a pluralistic attitude to ‘truths’ that sees these as various perspectives of equivalent validity, and consequently forms an attitude which is not supportive of the hierarchising of views and knowledge but welcomes the celebration of their difference and multiplicity. (p. 15)

We can draw a parallel line through the historical evolution of social science research theory and method, from Heidegger, who pointed out from a philosophical reference point what Freud intuited through his clinician’s lens: that all human understanding—and anything we decide to call “knowledge”—is first and foremost the result of an interpretive projection of our ground-of-being out into the world, which then reflects back to us as a phenomenon of experience—a symptom, symbol, association, feeling-tone—of which we become conscious. This move away from the steady-state dynamic between a knower and the known, as based on the Cartesian subject-object duality,

over towards an inter-subjective process of human understanding, is then further developed in the theories of Gadamer and Ricoeur, who show where the sturdy but fluid and reflexive house of engagement between self and other truly stands: in the communal act of language and interpretation. As Ricoeur states: “we have before us the opportunity to understand, shape, and direct the structure of being which underlies the problem of choice...we have this possibility because we can use the process of interpretation to project a possible world, a potential mode of human existence...understanding is not concerned with grasping a fact but with apprehending a possibility of being”. (1981, p. 56)

Setting the stage then, for this outward turn of our hermeneutic circle, social scientist Elizabeth Herda (1999) neatly ties together the psychological approach to understanding as investigated through depth psychology—in the dynamic relationship between therapist and patient—and the relational engagement of learning and growth that occurs when humans are free collaborators in the building of pluralistic, diverse, multi-dimensional—postmodern—containers of community:

Another way of looking at this [critical hermeneutics]...is to say the world is always organized around fundamental concerns that derive from or are expressed through language, such as human understanding, prejudices and interests. The world depends for its continued existence upon these projects that give it being and organization. Within this dynamic system... meaning is continually created through a mutual interchange involving active listening and speaking, which in turn provoke interpretation...(p. 28)

And furthermore:

Two people in conversation provide a setting in which learning can take place. It does not automatically happen; it is an intentional, reflective and imaginative act. Field-based research in the hermeneutic tradition can help bring forth community motifs that engender conversation, reflection, and new bases for action. (p. 131)

Within this context, we can begin to forge a view on the value of bringing the depth psychological perspective to bear on the “unfolding world” of the Old Growth community, for the thematic motifs of healing, learning and growth through community overlap and reinforce each other in the emancipatory act of engagement between self and other advocated by both critical hermeneutics and postmodern depth psychology.

Further, given that participants in Old Growth bring themselves to the community—in the exercise of free choice and autonomy—much like the vast majority of seekers of psychoanalysis and therapy, there is additional common ground to explore around themes of individualism and the growth of the self. Herda’s work helps to discern the through line—the dance between individual and collective—that runs concurrently through a critical hermeneutic approach to research and Jung’s perspective on individuation:

...the identity of an individual does not arise from a development process resulting in a separate unit that when united with many others makes up a group, society, or community. Rather, the identity of an individual is found in a moral relationship with others which, when in aggregate form, make up more than the sum of the membership. A full and mature sense of self does not stem from a development process grounded in individualism but instead arises from a recognition that in one’s relationship with others there resides the possibility of seeing and understanding the world, and therefore, one’s self, differently. When I change, the rest of the world changes. (Herda, 1999, p. 7).

Likewise, Jung's reflections on what he calls the process of "individuation", which refers to the evolutionary trajectory towards the manifestation of an individual's full potential—the realization of one's whole "self"—resonate definitively with Herda's critical stance over against the alienated and self-contained prison of individualism. Both of these writers would sooner see the individual wither and die as remain stuck within the separate-self paradigm of Cartesian philosophy—"I think therefore I am"—, which is far from viable as a container for health, growth, or community development:

Self-realization seems to stand in opposition to self-alienation. This misunderstanding is quite general, because we do not sufficiently distinguish between individualism and individuation. Individualism means deliberately stressing and giving prominence to some supposed peculiarity rather than to collective considerations...but individuation means precisely the better and more complete fulfillment of the collective qualities of the human being...in so far as the human individual, as a living unit, is composed of purely universal factors, he is wholly collective and therefore in no sense opposed to collectivity. Hence, the individualistic emphasis on ones own peculiarity is a contradiction of this basic fact of the living being. (Jung, CW 7, par. 267-268)

And there's more common soil to till. One of the salient themes of depth psychology since Freud has been that discovering and uncovering what is most meaningful and useful for the healing and development of the individual—and perhaps the collective—requires an excavation into that unfathomable repository of personal and human history called the "unconscious". The contents of the unconscious have often falsely been reified as psychic objects—repressed wishes for example in the Freudian

lexicon—that can be “studied” or in some sense gleaned through reflective and dialectic processes of analysis. Yet, despite the obvious contradiction in terms implied by naming something unconscious an object (thus by inference making it a part of consciousness), what is useful for our purposes in the exploration of community process is the focus of the depth psychological lens on the shadows, margins, and edges that form and dissolve along the way as a community is born, expands and contracts.

To a certain extent, nothing can really be said of the unconscious—in an individual or in a collective—for as Hauke (2000), following Jung, reminds us: “ultimately, all these so-called unconscious contents and unconscious processes are all, and always unknown.” (p. 201). Yet, at the same time, what is powerful about employing the “theory of the unconscious” in view of the community is that depth psychology offers us a tool with which to become sensitive and awake (e.g. conscious) to the missing parts of conversations, the unspoken topic, the elephant in the room that no one wants to acknowledge. This interpretive lens gives us access to a Jungian, Freudian and post-Jung/Freudian toolbox which attempts to derive meaning from seemingly meaningless events, symbols, and synchronicities that a more narrow, rationalistic stance might completely ignore.

This focus on the unconscious or marginalized aspects of the community process is particularly important when, as in this project, the tool of choice for investigation is rooted in language and text, for it is all too easy to marginalize, eliminate, or simply forget about other forms of human

communication and other methods of deriving meaning between humans: dreams, images, sounds, symbols, even touch, gesture and movement. Wordless, language-less communication is always and everywhere evident—and depth psychology enables us to prevent these potent modalities for understanding from being held subservient to words, concepts, and text, or worse: from being ignored altogether.

Ricoeur, as the major philosophical proponent of text interpretation as an agency of understanding was not unaware of these dangers of linguistic colonization. He was always cognizant that the power of language rests on its translation of symbolic meaning from human to human:

I am convinced that we must think not behind the symbols but starting from symbols, according to symbols, that their substance is indestructible, that they constitute the revealing substrate of speech, which lives among men. In short, the symbol gives rise to thought. (in Thompson, 1981, p.45)

The depth psychological lens is useful in opening up my powers of reflection to include what lies beyond the spoken and written words of my companions. By holding this project in fact, not as a contained effort at binding up the community as “known” in any way, shape, or form, but rather, as always moving in circles, bringing more meaning in from the margins—up from the unconscious if you like—into the light of understanding, then the concentric circles of critical hermeneutics are never required to stop at an ‘essential’ moment of clarity but can forever expand: there is always something hidden on the other side of the fence.

In this manner, the unconscious—however we may understand it—is a useful perspective from which to investigate the symbolic works of art created by and in community; it is a tool for self-reflection and interpretation of my own blind spots with regard to my personal agenda, biases, and projections; and, perhaps, most importantly it is invaluable in providing a roadmap for entering the dark forest where the beasts of destruction, aggression, hatred, and repulsive human traits—what Kristeva calls “the abject”—may be found.

In any case, were we concerned that exploring the hidden, repressed, or unconscious elements of Old Growth might take us off the beaten path of critical hermeneutics, we only have to re-visit Ricoeur’s approach to interpretive process, to find that he is well aware of the colonizing dangers of an attachment to the spoken or written words of ego:

This concept of concrete reflection is enriched by Ricoeur’s encounter with the hermeneutics of suspicion...Psychoanalysis, for instance, firmly castigates the pretensions of the narcissistic ego, leaving behind a wounded and humiliated *cogito*, a *cogito* which understands its primordial truth only in and through the avowal of the inadequacy, the illusion, the fakery of immediate consciousness. Thus, reflection must incorporate hermeneutics not only because existence must be grasped in its external manifestations, but also because consciousness is in the first instance a realm of falsehood...so that true consciousness must be achieved by means of a demystifying and corrective critique. (Thompson, 1981, p. 51)

If we listen deeply—admittedly difficult for the ego—to these words of Ricoeur, then it becomes immediately evident why the varied and rich perspectives of depth psychology are really essential markers for realizing an authentic understanding of a human endeavor like Old Growth: they serve to keep us (and me) honest. Perhaps the greatest danger in undertaking a

participatory methodological approach to understanding human behavior is that within the closed hermeneutic circle of co-research, it is all too easy to mistake “understanding” for hubris, spiritually-based self-awareness for narcissism, and/or magnanimity for grandiosity.

Who will contradict the collective ego of the community—and each of its participants—if all understanding is relativized, created, and dispensed within its perhaps not-so-permeable borders? As anyone who has read about, participated in, or known a member of a cult-like community or organization can attest, this fall from grace is not a lightweight concern. Old Growth is not immune to the vicissitudes of a colonizing, inflated collective ego consciousness; in fact, as we shall investigate with the help of depth psychology, it may be particularly vulnerable to a fall.

We can think of all of these introductory remarks as foundation stones, as bridge and lattice work designed to connect the personal and collective interpretations of the Old Growth intentional community enterprise offered in the previous chapters over to the new entrants on the collective scene: the theoretical, academic, and psychological voices on which we now call to deepen our understanding, raise our awareness, reinforce our contributions, and most of all, keep us humble. In the following chapters, using a critical hermeneutic frame of interpretation, I want to traverse the rich and varied landscape of depth psychology and cultural studies by exploring, excavating, and navigating the vicissitudes of five specific territorial domains: 1. Jungian psychology; 2. psychoanalysis and theories of social trauma; 3.

psychoanalytic theories of group process; 4. postmodern process theology, liberation and archetypal psychologies; and finally, 5. reflections on a methodological missing links: Gadamer, imaginal psychology, and the transformational power of “play”; Ricoeur’s social imaginary and the “hermeneutic spiral”.

Jungian Psychology

In spite of all the “logical” and intuitively resonant parallels that we can uncover between Jungian depth psychology and the Old Growth community’s individual and collective philosophies, it seems appropriate to state, right up front, that there are innumerable obstacles to deriving a useful interpretive overlay from Jung. Just to name a few: 1. According to David Tacey (2001), and others, Jungian psychology has become a rarely noted, yet nevertheless ubiquitous philosophical underpinning of most New Age spiritual endeavors—of which Old Growth might be named as one—and therefore it is difficult, at best, to distinguish what in the public sphere is “true to Jung” and what is hyped, distorted, over-simplified Jung for the masses; 2. There are multiple Jungs and multiple post-Jungians: the differences between Jung’s early and late writings, as well as the theoretical focus of early post-Jungians versus the recent emergence of postmodern Jungians, makes any general interpretations that might be called “Jungian”, dangerous and pejorative; 3. Jung himself was, as described in the literature review, not particularly optimistic about humanity as a communitarian or social animal. Hence, his work, although certainly not anti-collective, was limited in this sphere and definitively slanted by the discord, disarray and breakdown of the European cultural milieu—pre and post WW II—in which he lived. In this frame of reference, some might question whether Jung’s perspective on community

formation and development is too narrow, pessimistic, and limited in scope to be useful.

Getting at least a few of these obstacles out on the table up front, opens the way for me to choose the Jung and the Jungian theory that may still deepen and enrich an understanding of the Old Growth community enterprise. This selective interpretation maps the dialogue, narrative and reflections of the community participants against five of Jung's basic and foundational concepts: individuation, shadow, projection, the transcendent function, and synchronicity. In this approach, I employ the "classical Jung" to discern what aspects of his work have relevance and may offer insight to the Old Growth community, and what aspects may have been split-off or rendered inert through the cultural filter of New Age spirituality and consumerism.

Using this discussion of major depth psychological themes from a Jungian perspective as a foundation, it will then be possible to take up post-Jungian as well as other postmodern interpretations—psychoanalytic, liberationist, imaginal—in later chapters, incorporating the theory and writings of more recent Jungian scholar/analysts such as Charles Ascher (1993), Helene Shulman Lorenz (1997, 2000), Mary Watkins (1992, 2000), Lorenz & Watkins (2001, 2002a, 2002b) and James Hillman (1975, 1981, 1983). These authors, having taken up the gauntlet to bring Jungian psychology out of the clinician's office and back into the world, offer a plethora of support and insight for the application of crucial Jungian concepts to the relational and

communitarian themes of intentional community. Finally, by way of justification for using Jungian, as opposed to Freudian or other depth underpinnings as the through line in these chapters of interpretive reflections, it strikes me that Jung was instrumental in valorizing the complex and multi-dimensional relationships between the psychology of the individual, the group, the society and the culture over most of his long and distinguished career. It is notably worth keeping in mind as we venture across theories, analyses, and years of the twentieth century, that Jung, as far back as 1953 understood that every aspect of the individual psyche was only a microcosm, a mirror reflection of psyche in the world. Perhaps, as some scholars have suggested, forty or so years of keeping Jung's prophetic ruminations about community, society, and humanity on the bookshelf, for the sake of earning a living in the comforts—and confines—of a “two-in-a-box” dynamic called psychoanalysis (to steal Tom and Flame's admonition), have been merely a necessary digression: Jung was always interested in the world, and now, finally, so are we:

We shall probably get nearest to the truth if we think of the conscious and personal psyche as resting upon the broad basis of an inherited and universal psychic disposition which is as such unconscious, and that our personal psyche bears the same relationship to the collective psyche as the individual to society. But equally, just as the individual is not merely a unique and separate being, but is also a social being so the human psyche is not a self-contained and wholly individual phenomenon, but is also a collective one. (Jung, 1953/66, CW 7 par. 234-235)

Individuation

I begin with a reflection on what is perhaps the foundational and most commonly understood—and misunderstood—Jungian concept: individuation. As stated earlier, Jung's belief in the purposive nature of human existence led him to investigate the meaning of pathological behavior and symptom in his patients, not merely for purposes of re-dressing imbalance or attempting a "cure", but from the decidedly spiritual perspective he called "tending the soul". For Jung, individuation represented a shift—usually occurring in mid-life—away from the regressive nature of psychological processes—e.g. the return to repressed childhood memories and trauma for purposes of effecting a release of psychic blockage—over towards a progressive evolution of the human psyche towards ever greater wholeness.

Taken up in the humanistic psychologies of Fromm and Maslow, among others, and "mainstreamed" in the New Age movement through a proliferation of workshops, retreats, and centers for human potential, as well as support communities like Alcoholics Anonymous and its offshoots, Jung's theory of individuation has been packaged, manipulated, and dispersed throughout the American cultural landscape, to the point where most people, including many in Old Growth, are familiar with the terminology, even though they may have been only minimally exposed to Jungian theory and have no distinct memory of how they came to be so "growth-oriented".

Personal growth has become a huge consumer business in America and a mantra for those disaffected souls who, having lost their connection with organized religion, and finding the endless cycle of material consumption

unfulfilling, long to transcend the banality of their lives, to find deeper meaning and spiritual fulfillment. This characterization, to a certain extent, describes fairly accurately the viewpoint of most members of the community under investigation here, as we can discern from their commentary on what drew them to the community in the first place.

In fact, many of the Old Growth community participants do have at least a cursory—that is, “pop”—knowledge of Jung’s psychology and his theories of individuation, dream interpretation, the soul, and in some cases—since there are a few therapists in the mix—a basic understanding of projection and transference; many have, in fact, come to view a neurosis like drug addiction, for example, as a spiritual dis-ease, which is a decidedly Jungian view on pathology. Jung, it would seem, remains a ghostly inhabitant of communities such as Old Growth, at least insofar as he has become, perhaps unwittingly and unwillingly, a mechanism of popular culture. Of course, this popularization of Jung is where the trouble starts, for what passes for individuation in most community experiments is a far cry from what Jung probably had in mind—and in the Old Growth situation we can point to both the gifts and dangers of co-opting Jung’s theory.

Jung was first and foremost interested in the delicate and profound relationship between the ego-consciousness, as the directive and seemingly ubiquitous landscape of awareness, and the unfocused, volcanic and seemingly bottomless psychic repository he called the unconscious:

Because the unconscious is not just a reactive mirror-reflection, but an independent, productive activity, its realm of experience is a self-contained world, having its own reality, of which we can only say that it affects us as we affect it—precisely what we say about our experience of the outer worlds...it would, in my view be wrong to suppose that the unconscious is working to a deliberate and concerted plan and is striving to realize certain definite ends...the driving force, so far as is possible for us to grasp it, seems to be in essence only an urge towards self-realization.

(1953/66, CW 7 par. 291-293).

Individuation, as taken up by a strong-willed, well-functioning individual in society, is, for Jung, a deliberate attempt to topple the dictatorship of ego consciousness and to construct a marriage—a *coniunctio*—between unconscious content and the ego, such that the hegemony of consciousness is humbled and the ferocity of the unconscious—when repressed and ignored—is tamed through a respectful and engaged process of integration. This undertaking is not to be taken lightly—in fact not to be undertaken at all by people of unformed or weak ego strength—and it requires a precise set of analytic tools—dream amplification, active imagination, generating and working with personal and collective symbols, rituals, and dialogue—that is best carried out, according to Jung, within the container of psychoanalysis, supervised by a suitably trained, and analyzed, therapist.

Ultimately, Jung's view of the individuation process—and his writings reflect this—was at once simplistic and deeply complex and hence easily subject to co-optation and subjugation. For example, in the section on individuation in his essay, *The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious* (1953/66), he makes both the following statements about the

process of becoming a fully realized “self”: “Individuation means becoming an ‘in-dividual’, and insofar as ‘individuality’ embraces our innermost, last and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one’s own self.” (par. 266)

This straightforward, easily understood definition is then followed soon after by this: “There is little hope of our ever being able to reach even approximate consciousness of the self, since however much we may make conscious there will always exist an indeterminate and indeterminable amount of unconscious material which belongs to the totality of the self. Hence, the self will always remain a supraordinate quantity.”(par. 274)

Surely, this latter admonition is meant to restrain those readers from raising too high the banner of selfhood so blithely proclaimed just a few paragraphs earlier. Yet, how many people really grasp the thematic notion of “the totality of the self” without recourse to some knowledge of metaphysics, or likewise, recognize and assimilate the ineffable and mysterious quality that Jung is seeking to describe with a clunky phrase like “supraordinate quantity”? Can we really blame the consumer if he/she decides not to fully entertain the ambiguity and paradox inherent in Jung’s latter linguistic efforts? Surely, some of the responsibility must be placed squarely, albeit posthumously, on his own doorstep.

I state the above for purposes of retaining a semblance of balanced argument, as I now delve further into the notable benefits and obvious drawbacks that result from the skin deep assimilation of Jungian concepts into the dirty work of community-in-action. There is much to criticize and find

fault with in applying Jung's theories to the community participants' ungainly attempts at "personal growth", but there is gold to be mined as well. The fault for the misunderstandings and misapplications of Jungian concepts lies on both sides of the written page. There are perhaps three major undercurrents to Jung's concept of individuation that line up perfectly with the work of the community and provide a solid foundation for the occurrence of the very real and transformative experiences of participants. In the first place, Jung believed, as noted earlier, that individuation was not the same as *individualism*—that personal growth, as a movement away from a one-sided ego stance towards an integrated embodiment of self or soul, was a collective event. In fact, Jung goes so far as to state explicitly that the development of an individual cannot be carried out in isolation, but must necessarily be confronted in contact with the world, through dialogue:

It is obvious that a social group consisting of stunted individuals cannot be a healthy and viable institution; only a society that can preserve its internal cohesion and collective values, while at the same time granting the individual the greatest possible freedom has any prospect of enduring vitality. As the individual is not just a single, separate being, but by his very existence presupposes a collective relationship, it follows that the process of individuation must lead to more intense and broader collective relationships and not to isolation. (1921/71, CW 6, par. 758)

Secondly, Jung believed that the urge towards individuation was a teleological imperative of the human soul—that the growth of an individual away from dissociated and fragmented psychic states of consciousness over towards wholeness, represented an attitudinal quality, a future orientation of human life. In this environment of possibility, healing takes on a purposive

character—a movement towards something bigger, better, deeper—that is reflected in the “longing” for intimacy, growth, and connection exhibited by participants in the community. It is the kind of question Jung would have relished: why would fully-functioning collective beings not rest in the stasis of material success as dictated by their society, but rather push at the edges of their complacency—with no immediately obvious payoff—to creatively foster experimental and messy containers of community? Perhaps his answer would have been that the souls of these individuals can not help but push towards building containers for initiation and breakthrough beyond ego-stasis: it is inherent in the apparatus of psychological functioning, a teleological imperative of the soul to seek incarnation in the form of expanded understanding (e.g. consciousness).

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the pull of individuation is for Jung a spiritual, mystical, and ultimately religious undertaking. In Jungian terminology, “the incarnation of soul” through the integration of unconscious contents and the expansion of consciousness reflects an innate desire of human beings to seek the ineffable, the transcendent and the numinous—to grasp for God. Yet, even in Jung’s time the dis-identification of this trajectory with organized religious practices was well underway, such that by the turn of the century, it has become almost “normalized”—at least in Caucasian, middle class, educated suburban circles—to view spirituality in a New Age, secular framework.

Most of the individuals in Old Growth have spoken about their disaffection and alienation from the traditions of their childhood churches; they may still satisfy their familial or social aspirations in the liturgy as story, or the ritual as celebration, or the music as soothing, but for what is considered a true spiritual path, they choose to do the work of community. The gift in this form of spirituality, that Jung may well have championed, is that each individual is supported to encounter the numinous in a way that reflects and reinforces, as opposed to denigrating and usurping, their individuality. Each participant in Old Growth is encouraged to share their struggle with mortality, their face-off against a patriarchal, distant God image, and to co-create experiences—rituals, meditations, practices as simple as cooking or walking—that enable personal and collective encounters with the transcendent, transpersonal aspects of self and world. There is, in fact, perhaps a minor Jungian miracle playing out in the experimental acts of communities like Old Growth: fully-functioning individuals working to embrace all the vicissitudes of their individual selves and endeavoring to discover and experience *the numinous* ensemble, all while communing in a non-hierarchical, fluid and flexible collective structure.

The first few sentences of the following quote from Jung are often cited to reinforce his anti-social, anti-collective stance over against a purely individualistic means (through the relational, but isolated container of analysis) of human development. Yet, if we do not truncate the paragraph to reinforce a particular dyadic or New Age agenda, we find that in the very next

sentence, Jung is espousing the potential blending of individual and group expression that he might have considered the ideal container for individuation:

Society, by automatically stressing all the collective qualities in its individual representatives, puts a premium on mediocrity, on everything that settles down to vegetate in an easy, irresponsible way. Individuality, will inevitably be driven to the wall. This process begins in school, continues at the university, and rules all departments in which the State has a hand...[however] in a small social body, the individuality of its members is better safe-guarded, and the greater is their relative freedom and the possibility of conscious responsibility. Without freedom there can be no morality. (1953/66, CW 7, par. 240)

Perhaps, in 1953, Jung did not hold out much hope, beyond his fledgling institutes—towards which he was increasingly ambivalent—for the kind of communitarian enterprise, on a broad landscape but a small scale, to manifest in the short term. But times have changed.

Of course, even before weighing down the community with more deeply psycho-analytic concepts like projection and the transcendent function, and archetypes like the Shadow, I must stop and be at once rigorous, with myself and my co-researchers, and take note of the potential downsides of applying Jung's concept of individuation too liberally and without discernment in the case of Old Growth. David Tacey (2001), in his critique of the false assimilation of Jung by the New Age movement, points out the two major risk factors inherent in plundering Jung for our purposes: first, the danger of traipsing down a spiritual path towards a secular, non-traditional God image that results in the declaration of ourselves as God; and secondly, that we employ the relatively easy to swallow terms of self and soul without

discrimination or a true sense of differentiation from ego consciousness, which results in an individual and collective inflation—a colonization of the entire process of individuation and spirituality for the sole purpose of bolstering the ego's defensive barricade of separation:

Jung advocates renunciation and self-sacrifice as essential ingredients in the process of spiritual development, whereas the New Age relationship with religious realities is broadly narcissistic, producing states of being and attitudes that Jung would roundly condemn as inflationary and dangerously regressive. (p. 15)

As a participant in the community under observation here, it is with gratitude and great humility that I think we in Old Growth need to take on Tacey's warnings. I have witnessed far too many community situations where Jung's darkest intuitions of collective humanity have been manifest: temper tantrums where a self-absorbed participant stormed from the room in protest of "hating that woman", when the collective chose to play Barbra Streisand as a ritualistic closing song; fundamentalist diatribes denouncing the "lost souls" of America: those who watch television, and are fat, lazy, religious, overtly politically right-wing (and not interested in community!); self-satisfied dismissals of issues of social responsibility, even local, let alone global, concerns for racial equality, poverty or environmental degradation, all in the name of spiritual transcendence, e.g. "I can only do *my* inner work and just let it be"; and finally, claims of having achieved "higher consciousness" through the power of community ritual and dialogue that are not adequately countered by the humility Jung would have considered crucial:

It is highly probable that we are still a long way from the summit of absolute consciousness, presumably everyone is capable of wider consciousness, and we may assume accordingly that the unconscious processes are constantly supplying us with contents which, if consciously recognized, would extend the range of consciousness. Looked at in this way, the unconscious appears as a field of experience of unlimited extent. (1953/66, CW 7, par. 292)

So which is it? Is the community a progressive haven for individuating souls? Or is it a hotbed of infantile narcissism and over-heated spiritual inflation? Clearly, as a dynamic container of both individual and collective psyche, it is both; it is a powerful modality for the soul work of highly differentiated individuals, as well as a cauldron of sludge that clings to the walls of even the most well-developed and permeable ego membranes, always threatening to boil over and tear asunder all the good works of the community spirit. It seems to me that what is crucial in these reflections upon the use or mis-use of Jung's theory, is that we recognize that Jung himself never advocated a black or white world—he was committed to raising the awareness of the gold to be mined in the individuation process all the while pressing us to be ever mindful of the pitfalls that await us in any inner or outer engagement that heralds “the defeat of the ego”.

Tacey points out that the cooptation of Jung by the New Age spiritualists represents a mixed bag of progress and regress, and that the key to reconciling with Jung's work demands three things: a spiritual path that leads to greater humility not hubris; a willingness to do the work of facing down and taking full responsibility for both sides of the psychic enterprise, as the defended ego faces off against the nether regions of soul; and a

recognition that spirit, God, objective psyche, or whatever we choose to call the ineffable mystery of life, exists both inside and outside of our realms of conscious awareness---and as such, makes claims upon us beyond the subjective experience of ecstasy and transcendence:

The message of Jung is almost identical to 'unfashionable' traditional religion: not my will, but Thy will be done. The New Age imagines that because Jung has located the mystery within the self, it must belong to the self and work toward its enhancement and glorification. What the New Age fails to understand is what Jung calls the 'objective psyche', namely, the idea that there is an objective reality within and beneath our subjectivity, which is far more important than subjectivity, and that subjectivity is entirely subordinate to this objective realm, and not the other way around. (p.19)

In Jung, there is no transpersonal object to reach and claim for ourselves; just as there is no God in "here" to grab on to and wave as a banner to stave off the lowly masses. Yet, at the same time, before we diminish the significance of the community's attempts at creating a postmodern, sustainable, if flawed vehicle for spiritual and personal development, I also want to note the maturation of consciousness evident in the lack of dogma, institutional structures, and dictatorial leadership that characterize the community, as well as the atmosphere of inquiry that envelops dialogue, ritual and symbolic acts around spirit.

As I now expand and reflect on the community's use—both consciously and unconsciously—of Jungian theoretical tools—shadow, projection, the transcendent function—it behooves us to remember that the community arose at a time when people have lost their sense of direction: religion no longer holds promise of salvation or numinosity for most

participants; capitalist success and material prosperity leaves them feeling empty and adrift in a sea of useless gadgets; and the collective ideology of the times—in post 9/11 America—represents a regressive retrenchment of the collective ego: the politicians, mass media, and a docile populous all hunker down behind the walls of a Kafka-esque state apparatus—homeland security—overwhelmed by fear of the fanatical “other”.

In this cultural context, the words of Edward Edinger (1972), as he describes the most benevolent and progressive of all possible outcomes of a breakdown in religious projection, sound positively prescient:

If when the individual is thrown back on himself through the loss of a projected religious value, he is able to confront the ultimate questions of life that are posed for him, he may be able to use this opportunity for a decisive development in consciousness. If he is able to work consciously and responsibly with the activation of the unconscious he may discover the lost value, the god-image, within the psyche. The connection between ego and Self is now consciously realized. In this case, the loss of a religious projection has served a salutary purpose; it has been the stimulus, which leads to the development of an individual personality.

(p. 68)

Perhaps, in the community work of Old Growth, we can glimpse the nascent, mostly underground, rumblings of individual souls that long for more creative solutions to the loss of traditional religious doctrine and for a more proactive and measured response to the threat of terror than the collective paranoia projected on to the “the axes of evil”.

The Shadow

If Edinger's pronouncement, however, is to have any validity whatsoever, at least within a Jungian frame of reference, then the manner in which the community approaches the rupture of the negative contents of the individual and collective unconscious, what Jung aptly termed, "the shadow", is an essential marker of its authenticity. Jung painstakingly attempts to circumscribe the process of individuation as an arduous, lifelong struggle to integrate unconscious psychic contents through an expansion and humbling of ego consciousness, pointing out that the hallmark battles along the way involve the ego's face-off against the deepest, most disturbing archetypal contents, those that reach far back beyond the personal unconscious into the depths of the collective unconscious, which he termed the anima, animus, and the shadow.

The complexes that spin forth from the contra-sexual psychic energies of the anima and animus, especially if divorced from specific attribution to men or women, and examined in light of the rich swirl of feminine and masculine libido that spawns creativity and at times wreaks havoc in the community enterprise, would make for wonderful further study. However, for my purposes here, I want to focus specifically on the relationship of the community to the more obvious, but no less tenacious, complex of the shadow. Much like the theory of individuation, the concept of the shadow is both simple to grasp and inordinately complex to understand in depth. At ground level, it represents that dark side of the personal unconscious—those

aspects of the individual personality that have either been stunted in development, repressed as unsavory, or simply neglected by the ego in its relentless one-sided approach to survival. Below ground, however, the shadow contains the residue of all human evil; it holds the collective memory of the deepest, darkest acts of destruction and devastation that humanity has been known to commit. Hence, at best the shadow represents the opportunity to individuate through the integration of those aspects of the personality that we would rather not look at directly, but that emerge of their own will when ignored or repressed. At worst, the problem of the shadow is a deeply complex and paradoxical moral dilemma—the question of human evil itself—and how any individual or group stands in the face of a historical continuum replete with the immoral, unspeakable acts of humanity.

In general, Jung is cautiously optimistic about the possibility for individuals to become awake to their shadow side, but he is clear that the work involved is not to be taken lightly:

The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance. Indeed, self-knowledge as a psychotherapeutic measure, frequently requires much painstaking work extending over a long period. (1959, CW 9ii, par. 14)

The last sentence of this quote betrays Jung's bias for psychoanalysis as the modality of choice for engagement with the shadow. Yet, what I want to consider here, in light of the fact that few can afford the time or cost

associated with psychoanalysis, is the possibility that shadow work could become part of the regular exercise regimen of any conscious community.

In the case of Old Growth, it seems to me that the inclusion, at appropriate times and places, of deep reflection on the dark aspects of the personality, has been a distinguishing hallmark of the work of Tom and Flame Lutes. As teachers and leaders of the Old Growth community, their particular focus on enhancing self-awareness and self-responsibility, has regularly included reflection and introspection on the negative aspects of the self. By fostering this agency of reflexivity in their work, and in the community, they have elevated the community endeavor beyond the “feel-good”, spiritual narcissism that Tacey consider the by-product of most New Age packaging of personal growth.

Let me be specific. In the early days of the community’s formation, during a year-long “course” of study in which twenty-five members of the community met for four three day workshops with Tom and Flame, one of the most memorable and enduring processes involved a playful—but serious and sincere—engagement with one’s alter ego or dark side. Each of the participants was ‘witnessed’ by the group in bringing forth all manner of unpleasant behavior, the critical judges, malevolent fantasies, and unacknowledged negative traits—most of which were well known and easily recognizable to everyone except the owner. This exercise of welcoming to awareness those unsavory characters that have a tendency to take us over and swamp our faculties of mature discernment with wantonly immoral

thoughts, feelings and acts, was by itself, a revelation. Further, we were asked to go through a variety of dialogical encounters with these dark portraits—we painted and drew pictures of them, named them as characters, and even went so far as to dress, for an entire day, exactly as we'd imagine they might dress in the world, however embarrassing or uncomely. The process was excruciating and at times humiliating, leaving all the participants openly raw and vulnerable. Yet, at the same time, there was a powerfully evocative presence of truth in the space—a humbling, equalizing recognition of the naughty, ungainly children that reside just below the surface of the mask we wear in society—what Jung calls the *Persona*. As he points out:

Closer examination of the dark characteristics—that is, the inferiorities constituting the shadow—reveals that they have an emotional nature, a kind of autonomy, and accordingly an obsessive, or better, possessive quality. Emotion, incidentally, is not an activity of the individual but something that happens to him. Affects occur usually where adaptation is weakest, and at the same time they reveal the reason for its weakness, namely a certain degree of inferiority and the existence of a lower level of personality. (1959, CW 9ii, par. 15)

I describe this experience in detail for a reason: its effects have lingered, evolved and expanded such that the inevitable ruptures of these alter egos into the day-to-day life of the community is now, usually, met with magnanimity and equanimity, evoking a humorous, confessional attitude in the perpetrator and a response of tolerance and compassion from the witnesses. In fact, the communal act of welcoming a newcomer's alter ego—a process of revelation, vulnerability, and reflexivity that tests every individual at his/her core—has become a traditional practice, an informal initiation of

sorts within the community—akin to what Tom and Flame like to call: “stalking the truth”.

When Julie relates in the group dialogue: “you guys know more about my crap than I do myself”, she is making an oblique reference to just this sort of “stalking” activity, in which participants give each other permission to point out to the individual the appearance of this shadow figure. When the participants speak about the depth of safety and intimacy they feel in the group—surely not at all times and places, but with some regularity—what they are referring to is the space of communal respect and tolerance that enables the individual to notice the appearance of his or her shadow component, to face off against it, and to take responsibility, with humor, for its acts of malevolence and the chaos that often ensues.

Now suffice to say, this engagement with the dark side of our humanity is hardly a panacea for reconciliation with the evil inherent in the human species of which Jung is duly concerned, yet in the context of a political and social atmosphere in which the powers that be have an egregious tendency to project all evil on to the “other”, it is a welcome step in the right direction. There are potent questions that remain hidden and marginalized by the community as a whole, and in that compensatory tendency of the group to want to have “fun”, stay “comfortable”, and avoid conflict, as we saw come through in the dialogues, evidence emerges of deep individual and collective excavations into the unfathomable pit of unconscious material that we still manage to avoid. Jung would have expected this to be the case, though, for

the process of individuation and the requisite shadow work it entails is a lifelong pursuit with no completion; for unlike the New Age agenda of achieving transcendence, ecstasy or Nirvana, in the Jungian framework there is no final resting spot, no pinnacle to ascend and plant the flag of enlightenment.

Nevertheless, having attended many so-called spiritual development workshops over the years, I still find the Old Growth community to be the only place where a conscious attempt has been made to integrate the shadow into the trajectory of personal growth. Perhaps, as Tacey points out, the consumptive quality of most New Age retreats is part of the problem, for in a one-stop shopping approach to individuation it seems highly improbable that participants would reach the level of safety necessary to lower the walls of defense enough to shine a light on the most unsavory aspects of their nature. Perhaps only in long term therapy, as Jung advised, and in the longer term process of building conscious community, as I suggest here, can the continuous deepening of engagement with the unconscious and its affects safely occur without threat of tearing apart those delicate membranes of ego protection. There is always a risk that the group's response to ones' expression of vulnerability will be traumatizing or even re-wounding; hence, the danger exists of shadow work having a regressive impact on the individual if it is not carried out with extreme care—as is supposed to be the norm in psychotherapy.

On the other hand, it must be noted, perhaps with a touch of irony, that with the rise of managed care and short term therapeutic modalities, and the emergence and widespread use of anti-depressants, most containers for shadow work are becoming less and less inclined to venture downward, to swim in the murky waters of the unconscious, where the real monsters live. The key to “successful” therapeutic interventions these days seems more and more to be about recovering functionality—getting back to work—and doing whatever it takes to “feel better”, even if the quality of life that results is flat, domesticated, and lifeless. Hence, the rich and risky drama of Tom and Flame’s work, and its spread into the social sphere of the community is perhaps what is unique in this community figuration. It is notable that the community often works with shadow issues using creative and playful acts of symbol formation and dialogue. In one exercise, for example, the participants were asked to choose “shadow music” and to dance like their alter egos, and to talk directly to them, creating dramatic playlets—much as Jung would have engaged, in analysis, with shadow characters through dream amplification or active imagination.

In an unschooled, preliminary form, this communal shadow work reflects a compensatory move against the loss of authentic individuation processes in psychotherapy, through re-engagement with these activities out in the world. This collective shift, however slight and unrefined, is no small achievement. It may well may represent an evolutionary leap of collective consciousness—at least within the laboratory of middle-class New York

suburbia—that Jung himself might have been astounded to see happen beyond the confines of the controlled environment of analytic therapy. Simply put: introducing the chaos of the shadow into the chaos of the group clearly reflects some new measure of consciousness and maturity.

Projection

In Jungian, and for that matter, most psychoanalytic schools of psychology, an authentic sign of healing, growth and maturation within an individual is the appearance of a level of reflexivity that takes into account projection. Projection is fundamentally the act of expelling internally generated psychic contents outward into an “other”, such that the perception of that other is colored, disguised, and filtered through the lens of these contents, and as such, is no longer seen clearly or even, in some cases, as a distinct entity unto itself. To a certain extent, the simple act of interpretation has always within it an element of projection. As Heidegger reminds us, all knowledge of the outside world is generated in the form of an interpretation, whereby some essential part of our “beingness” is propelled—projected—into the world and reflected back at us in a mirror image effect that we then call “knowing” or “understanding”. All communion with the world beyond the self—including the body, as “other”—involves the agency of projection and interpretation; these are what enable us to celebrate relationship and to ‘be-in-the-world’.

What Jung is interested in studying from a psychological perspective is the process by which we recover an awareness of how we project an image of psychic material that we either deny in ourselves, or wish ourselves to be, onto another person, thereby clouding our ability to see the real person before us. Becoming awake to the continual manner in which we process our relationships through projection is, like shadow work, no small undertaking:

Let us suppose that a certain individual shows no inclination whatever to recognize his projections. The projection-making factor then has a free hand and can realize its object—if it has one—or bring about some other situation characteristic of its power. As we know, it is not the conscious subject but the unconscious which does the projecting. Hence, one meets with projections, one does not make them. The effect of projection is to isolate the subject from his environment, since instead of a real relation to it there is now only an illusory one. (1959, CW 9ii, par. 17)

In the case of the community situation, there is a particular application of this agency of self development—the withdrawal of projections—that the participants have spoken about as “witnessing myself in the other” or “seeing and being seen”. In what may sound like a very simple process of engagement, a very specific and sophisticated technology of relating is being utilized: each individual in the community takes responsibility for watching him or herself vigilantly, for giving and receiving feedback, all in the service of raising to consciousness and ameliorating the isolating effects (as Jung points out) of that natural tendency to interact with others through projection. In its most noticeable, and perhaps potent ramifications for healing and growth—as well as fostering intimacy—the on-going “stalking” of shadow projections has become an integral practice of the community, so much so, in fact, that there

is little discussion about the method or the process itself, rather, people speak about it in action: as they catch themselves projecting onto others or witness someone being the object of projection.

In its simplest form, the work of “taking back projections” shows up as self-responsibility in the aftermath of any kind of conflict, whereby each protagonist is expected to ask him or herself, not who is at fault, but how he or she contributed to the problem through misperception and most commonly—projecting. In this manner, shadow work, rather than just manifesting as an orchestrated exercise of confrontation with the unconscious, can be folded into the minute-by-minute interactions of any group process. As Jung reminds us:

Although, with insight and good will, the shadow can to some extent be assimilated into the conscious personality, experience shows that there are certain features which offer the most obstinate resistance to moral control and prove almost impossible to influence...in this case both insight and good will are unavailing because the cause of the emotion appears to lie, beyond all possibility of doubt, in the other person. These resistances are usually bound up with *projections*, which are not recognized as such, and their recognition is a moral achievement beyond the ordinary. (1959, CW 9ii, par. 16) {italics Jung}

Clearly, it would be impossible for humans to withdraw all projections, for there is a paradox inherent in Jung’s theory: we need projection in order to reach out and experience the world. Yet, the agency of projection, when employed through ego consciousness from a rigidified position of fear and defense, tends to wall off the truth of the other, and close down any opportunity for communion. Hence, the challenge, as Jung points out, is to develop a faculty of discernment, in which the projection of unconscious

material is recognized and withdrawn, while the conscious projections of empathy, trust, and love are reinforced, bridging the chasm of separation between soul and world.

In this light, much like the shadow work discussed above, it seems to me that the community container is particularly well suited for this difficult and strenuous activity, for unlike dyadic therapy, the group provides a stage on which our acts of projection may be witnessed by an audience much greater than one. If the participants are willing to engage in “seeing and being seen” with humility and forthrightness, then the practice of spotting one’s projective tendencies—“oh, there I go again, making you out to be the enemy”—can become assimilated as part and parcel of everyday life, not as something to be avoided or denied in the present, and then “saved up” to be processed with immunity and anonymity in the therapist’s office hours or even days later. The community offers the chance for this aspect of the individuation process to be accelerated in real-time, enabling us to take the work of self-realization a few tiny steps out into the world.

The Transcendent Function

This concept of Jung’s is somewhat more esoteric and not specifically part of the daily lexicon of the Old Growth community, as are shadow, individuation, and projection. Yet, I want to discuss it briefly, for it allows me to shed light on an additional aspect of the individuation process that may be better suited to a community setting than the dyadic therapeutic vessel

originally devised by Freud and his followers. For Jung, the transcendent function refers to a specific occurrence whereby the integration of unconscious contents into conscious awareness results in an overall shift in the make-up of the entire psyche, such that some “third” or new thing—a new attitude or way of being—may be born:

The shuttling to and fro of arguments and affects represents the transcendent function of opposites. The confrontation of the two positions generates a tension charged with energy and creates a living, third thing...a movement out of the suspension between two opposites, a living birth that leads to a new level of being, a new situation. The transcendent function manifests itself as a quality of conjoined opposites. So long as these are kept apart—naturally for the purpose of avoiding conflict—they do not function and remain inert. (1916/60, CW 8, par. 189)

For the most part, Jung is speaking to a process that usually unfolds in later stages of psychoanalysis when the patient has reached a modicum of understanding of the dual, compensatory, and dialectic nature of psyche, and is engaged in attempts to reconcile—or at least make peace with—a key paradox of individuation: accomplishing a sense of balance, equilibrium and ego strength (otherwise known as successful functioning in the world) such that the ego is then able to lower its threshold of defense and the irruption of unconscious material can be “seen and met” directly. This newly won permeability of the ego consciousness (which typically arises from a shift in attitude towards the very existence of the unconscious—as, for example, when individuals begin to seriously examine their dreams) leads to an integration process in which the horizon of ego consciousness is widened, and a new attitude is achieved.

The transcendent function evokes a dynamic and sometimes antagonistic encounter between the disparate sides of the psyche, as the unconscious material—in the form of undesirable behavior, critical inner voices, symbolic action (e.g. repetitions, tantrums, rituals), dreams, and feelings—may take the lead and flood or overwhelm the ego consciousness:

Once the unconscious content has been given form and the meaning of the formulation is understood, the question arises as to how the ego will relate to this position, and how the ego and the unconscious are to come to terms. This is the second and more important stage of the procedure, the bringing together of opposites for the production of a third: the transcendent function. As this stage, it is no longer the unconscious that takes the lead, but the ego...it is confronted with a psychic product that owes its existence mainly to an unconscious process and is therefore in some degree opposed to the ego and its tendency....the position of the ego must be maintained as being of equal value to the counter-position of the unconscious, and vice versa. (1916/60, CW 8, par. 181-183)

Sometimes this irruption of unconscious material evokes a dissociative or temporary psychotic reaction in the individual—a loss of bearings, shocking behavior, extreme yet unfounded anxiety or panic, a deep depression—yet, the regulating principle of psychic functioning, as Jung calls it, will usually, over time, mediate these episodes, such they can be viewed as purposive and forward directed movements of the soul towards incarnation. Of course, the holding container in which these processes occur is key, for they must be tended with care and safety in order for progressive benefits to be obtained. Otherwise, as we all know and have seen too many times, rich opportunities for growth can be bypassed completely or leave an individual stuck in a regressive, repetitive cycle of neurotic symptoms that lasts for years (or a

lifetime). This is why Jung advocates the activation of the transcendent function within the safe container of therapy, where the analyst can support and help bolster the patient through the regressive and progressive dance of opposites that occurs as repressed and denied unconscious contents emerge and become integrated.

In the clinician's office, most of this engagement with the transcendent function occurs through the process of the *transference*—a relational dynamic in which the patient is enabled and encouraged to “use” the therapist as the receptacle for the projection of repressed psychic contents most often associated with early childhood, mother and father figures. The transcendent function, in this situation, is fostered and nurtured in patients as they work through traumatic memories and unresolved issues of desire, competition, and repulsion (including the Oedipal drama), with mother and father that have manifested in energetic blockages or neurotic symptoms Jung called complexes.

We can see this same kind of process take place within the community environment, when someone unconsciously projects the negative image, behavior or characteristics of one of their parental figures on to another community participant. “You treat me like my father did”, or “I hate that...that's the way my mother did that”, are not uncommon ‘complaints’ in the community circle, which, when responded to with equanimity and compassionate feedback, can often nurture an event much like the transcendent function in real-time. In this situation, the individual who

discovers themselves in a regressed moment, expelling unconscious material or repressed memories from their childhood on to a loving friend or partner, can sometimes, through dialogue and creative expression—dance, poetry, ritual—experience a powerful breakthrough in awareness: seeing the “other”, on whom they have overlain a primordial mother/father image, more clearly as a distinct individual, and how the relationship with them has been informed or broken down by the projection. In the aftermath of this revelation, the possibility exists for the individual to reach a new plateau of self-awareness as “adult”, no longer in need of, or in the throes of “the parent”. In these cases, which occur with some regularity in the community process, we see the transcendent function in action: therapy in real-time.

Realistically however, given that the protagonists in this projective drama are not usually trained therapists, the likelihood of success or failure in this kind of interaction within the community depends upon the circumstances, the volatility of the players, and the emotional charge of the unconscious projection. Of course, much of what transpires between individuals in the community remains below the threshold of awareness; it requires high levels of discipline, vigilance and tenacity, along with an on-going interest in self-exploration, for the players to work through the fallout of projective dramas that may seethe with unconscious affect: how often do we recognize when we have turned our community brother or sister into the monster mother or neglectful father? Hence, the work of the transcendent

function within the community context presents a potential opportunity for healing and growth; it is not a panacea.

It is important to keep in mind in this discussion that any narrative attempt to draw strict boundaries around the concepts of consciousness and unconsciousness risks being caught in a snare of inconsistency and paradox. It is hardly ever obvious where the border should be drawn between conscious and unconscious affects or their effects, for that matter, in a relational episode. In fact, as mentioned earlier, there is no essential “thinghood” or objectivity to the unconscious, it is at best a linguistic marker for what Jungian analyst Helene Shulman Lorenz (1997) calls “that which is not yet”. If we can hold a picture of a dynamic and permeable borderland between conscious awareness and the irruptions of the unconscious, then we can imagine into those states of liminality; watershed moments when seemingly new (yet usually very old) parts of our being appear on the horizon of awareness, which, though they may look crazy, awkward or even neurotic, are actually purposive and creative markers of a not-yet-realized future.

Especially in the highly dramatic and deeply entrenched archives of mother and father relationships, I would never suggest that the community version of a transcendent function could or should replicate or replace the requisite container of safety and focus afforded by one-on-one therapy. However, that said, there *is* a particular modality of interaction within the community sphere, that is both highly charged and emotionally laden with opportunity for the emergence of healing, growth, and transformation in the

form that Jung is proposing—through a transcendent function, a union of opposites—and that is the constellation of *family*. Family, as most of the participants have shared in the dialogues, is where we have all had our earliest experience of community per se; it is where we first encounter that rich and complex interplay of more than two or three egos bumping up against each other in the drama of daily life. As such, it is also a rich repository for repressed memory, trauma, and unlived desire that is often overlooked in the depth psychological framework, with its strong emphasis upon the triad of mother-father-child.

As witness to the unfolding of what can only be called “family drama” at many community events, I want to hypothesize that when the participants speak of the community as representing “a chosen family” or “the family I never had”, they are making a profoundly important reference to the transcendent function at work. Turns out that community interplay seems to provide a wonderful, if volatile, outlet for repressed unconscious contents around family issues, which may then be integrated with ego consciousness in the formation and manifestation of new and unforeseen ways of being, acting, and feeling within an intimate group setting, e.g. at work, at home, and in the community.

Jung does not spend a great deal of time discussing what we today might call “family dynamics”, yet he does write of the inevitable obstacles to individuation that arise as one moves through and beyond the original family of identity:

Identification with parents or the closest members of the family is a normal phenomenon in so far as it coincides with the *apriori* family identity. In this case it is better not to speak of identification but of identity, a term that expresses the actual situation. Identification with members of the family differs from identity in that it is not an *a priori* but a secondary phenomenon arising in the following way. As the individual emerges from the original family identity, the process of adaptation and development brings him up against obstacles that cannot easily be mastered. A damming up of libido ensues, which seeks a regressive outlet. The regression reactivates the earlier states, among them the state of family identity...all identifications with persons come about in this way. Identification always has a purpose, namely, to obtain an advantage, to push aside an obstacle, or to solve a task in the way another individual would. (1921/71, CW 6, par. 740)

This type of identification with family—a regressive return to ways of being that are constituent of the original family dynamic—seems to me to be a fairly common occurrence at community events. As an example, in the workshop in which eleven community participants came together to “shape the community” by playing with childlike creative tools—clay, crayons, paint, colored paper and glue—, the charged emotions, both hot and cold, of the group often seemed to manifest as symbolic representations; re-enactments of long forgotten sibling rivalries, playground dramas and family ritual. Of course, without a proper container of holding and safety, this scenario might have been a stage set for chaos and conflict—as well it was in moments—but given that the participants all knew each other quite intimately, and the facilitator was a licensed clinical psychologist, the dynamic conditions also provided a unique vehicle for healing and growth.

Since the workshop was designed to alternate play and creative intercourse with writing, reflection and dialogue, each participant was afforded

that rare opportunity to work through the pain and discomfort of volcanic eruptions and tantrums—some shockingly unexpected even by the protagonists—that took place between and among the group.

Speaking for myself, I remember this event as one of the most emotionally charged experiences I have ever encountered in which I was able to watch myself interact—and play—with others, catching myself acting out and expressing all manner of unexpected feelings, judgments, criticisms and desires around who should lead, how we should behave, what was acceptable creative expression and what was unacceptable. I found myself swinging back and forth, with no rhyme or reason, between the desire to connect and play and the visceral reaction of avoidance. By being in a position to both play-act, and witness—and subsequently writing and reflecting and sharing—the process, I found myself taking note of the potency of transformative engagement that was occurring. I seemed to move through a rapid dance of regressive (e.g. anger, loneliness, victimization) and progressive (e.g. trying out new practices of interacting, stepping back, listening, not taking things personally, feeling empathy) modes or states of being that shocked and flustered me, and not a few times, completely knocked me off balance. A similar experience seemed to occur for others, which was then validated in our dialogues, as Serge, for example, recounted his feelings of anger, disappointment and abandonment by the group, which he later recognized as an unconscious response to childhood memories of feeling ostracized by his father, his family, and his community.

Upon reflection, I believe that the transcendent function, as Jung describes it, was at work, in me, and in the group. The container was relatively safe; we were all tuned in and aligned behind an agenda of using creative process and dialogue to further the evolution of community. In Jungian terms, this dynamic was an ideal stage on which the transcendent function could be evoked:

...it is only when the conscious mind confronts the products of the unconscious that a provisional reaction will ensue which determines the subsequent procedure. Practical experience alone can give us a clue. So far as my experience goes, there appear to be two main tendencies. *One is the way of creative formulation, the other the way of understanding.*
(1916/60, CW 8, par. 172) {italics mine}

In this case, as is true of many events where the community creates rituals, discusses dreams, or engages in artistic expression—singing, dancing, drawing, collaging—the possibility for working through unconscious projections and irruptions through dialogue—for understanding—and “creative formulation” (artistic expression) has become a normative practice. In this manner of engagement, the demons and dark dramas of childhood family dynamics may get unearthed and revisited, but not in a ways that reinforce or repeat the trauma, rather in a spontaneous and unplanned cycle of emotional trigger, revelation and feedback (which might be another way of describing this transcendent function: as an uncoupling of a historical feedback loop between the conscious attitude and repressed memories of what constitutes the family dynamic, such that a new, updated “tape” can be recorded).

In moments of group process, everything described above can appear quite chaotic and disorderly. The emergence of the “not yet” into the “already known” often brings painful feelings of discomfort as well as issues of control front and center on the radar screen of consciousness, which may partly explain why participants had so much to say in the interviews about their feelings and need for being comfortable and safe in community settings. Of course, the ego wants to stay comfortable and narrow in focus; all acts of widening and expanding initially represent a threat to its worldview. On the other hand, the fact that the desire to get down and dirty, to play in the mud of community, to creatively and spontaneously put ourselves at the edge of what looks like chaos and breakdown, often wins out against a defended ego, would seem to prove that the soul’s quest to press forward into the world of “not yet”, gets genuinely activated and reinforced within a community framework.

It may very well be, in fact, that an intentionally community enterprise turns out to be the relational construct best suited to engage the transcendent function in healing trauma and wounding around family systems, for the pluralistic, multi-dimensional nature of community interaction fosters the activation of the full compliment of familial dynamics, all within a zone of safety and support. Through creative acts of artistic expression interspersed with dialogue, physical affection, nurturing, and sharing—as opposed to distancing from the affect through rationalization and distraction: the more common societal coping mechanisms—the work of community provides each

participant an opportunity to re-frame and expand his or her repertoire of learned and conditioned behavior and attitudes in a group. In Lorenz's description of the healing modalities of creative expression and witnessing in the mentally ill, we can envision a similar process unfolding in our supposedly fully functioning group:

When people who are ill can find a way to express in creative plastic forms the first outlines of such not-yet impulses, and if they are lucky enough to be able to do so in the presence of healing witnesses who see and understand, symptoms can often rapidly disappear. I know of many healers who do this type of work in a great variety of ways. It can be based on group work, body movement, dance, visualization, creative writing, journals, meditation, art therapy, sand play, or many other outer forms. It is the shared concentration and expression that seem to be the key. The important thing in this work is never to reduce the expression of the not-yet to an "already known" formula in the ego world, whether a clinical category like narcissism, a theoretical construct like mother complex or Oedipus complex, or a pathological local cause such as early wounding. Though each of these schemata may represent "what is" in some way, the human spirit has the capacity to reach beyond any what-is toward a not-yet...Jung called this unifying process in the individual, which heals through creative images, the "transcendent function." (1997, p.205-206)

Synchronicity

By way of bridging over toward some of the postmodern frames of depth psychology, which I will endeavor to reflect upon in the following chapters, I want to close out this section on Jung with some interpretive commentary on what is probably the best known theory from his later work, the concept of synchronicity. In many ways, Jung was ahead of his time—and hence criticized for being mystical and difficult—in that he foresaw how the seismic paradigm shift in positivistic science brought about by quantum

physics would have major repercussions for the study of depth psychology. His theory of synchronicity applied the basic concepts of quantum physics—discontinuity, non-locality, a-causality—to phenomena that occurred between him and his patients—and in their lives apart from him—that he had not been able to explain with empirical methods aimed at objectivity or repeatability. These occurrences usually showed up as “meaningful coincidences”, happenings that he felt held deep, and often, transformational meaning for the patient, but which had no outward or obvious cause or connection to the individual:

Synchronistic phenomena prove the simultaneous occurrence of meaningful equivalences in heterogeneous, causally unrelated processes; in other words, they prove that a content perceived by an observer can, at the same time, be represented by an outside event, without any causal connection. From this it follows either that the psyche cannot be localized in space, or that space is relative to the psyche. The same applies to the temporal determination of the psyche and psychic relativity of time. I do not need to emphasize that verification of these findings must have far-reaching consequences. (1916/60, CW 8, par. 996)

Today, synchronicity is one more elegant and perhaps oversimplified concept that has been co-opted by New Age spiritual seekers in search of mystical experience, and it is a common phrase in the lexicon of the Old Growth community. The downside of this cultural assimilation shows up with the challenge of determining what is truly a synchronistic collapse in the duality of time and space in the inner and outer worlds of psyche, as Jung proposes, and what is simply psychic opportunism: individuals constructing meanings from happenstance that suit the defensive needs of their ego.

Unfortunately, the ubiquitous colonizing nature of ego consciousness has yet to be overcome, even by quantum physics.

Yet, even with this caveat placed squarely before us, so as to prevent—or at least minimize—hubris, I submit that there is good news too: the ease with which lay people have come to understand and almost expect synchronistic experiences has also enhanced the likelihood of their occurrence, often to salutary effect. In this context, I'd like to share a community experience that took place about three months after the taping of the dialogues for this paper, that held both the qualities and resonance of a synchronistic phenomenon and the transcendent function interwoven in one powerfully evocative event.

Now, as to whether the following events are correctly interpreted as satisfying the transformational requirements of synchronicity, or are instead just a grab at psychological straws, I must defer to the reader. However, already before I jump into the narrative, I can note the beneficent, validating and valorizing effects of the community itself on this kind of phenomenon: much like the verification process in so-called “objective” science, corroboration of multiple witnesses adds credence to the theory. Communal synchronicities, it would seem, are much harder to dismiss.

My story begins the night before eighteen members of the community came together for their first spring retreat in the Adirondacks. The event, to be held over a long weekend at a secluded mountain enclave, was planned by the sustaining committee, and consciously designed with minimal agenda: it

was first and foremost an opportunity for participants to hang-out together—to cook, hike, meditate, co-habitate, and commune—with ample time for co-creating whatever activities, rituals, or gatherings the group desired.

During a fitful night sleep that was replete with an intermittent mix of excitement and dread over the coming gathering (everyone has shared how they often feel anxious and emotionally resistant to community as scheduled events draw closer), I dreamed about a huge fish, most likely a whale but not entirely clear, that was swimming side-by-side with me in a giant ocean. During the dream, I distinctly remembered feeling thrilled by the size and shape and awesome dimensions and beauty of this fish, along with fear and trepidation about swimming juxtaposed with something so big and dangerous. As the dream unfolded, I became more and more anxious about the fishes' size and weight. It seemed to grow bigger and swirl ever faster around me, pulling me into the vortex created by its tailfin and down deeper into the dark water. As the fish swam in circles, overpowering me and in a sense flushing me down the drain of this gargantuan ocean, I awoke stunned and frightened, sure that I was going to drown.

Jump cut to the next evening, after most of the participants had arrived at the retreat center, and we were busy handling the logistics of preparing for the first evening meal. Judy, as a logistical leader of the community, was engaged in cooking and food prep in the kitchen. At one point, she looked over at me and started speaking about her feelings and desires for the weekend. She told me that she was concerned about the state of the

community overall—we had discussed this before—for as she saw it: “the community was like a fish that had leapt on to the deck of a boat and was floundering around—a fish out of water—and we (the boat’s crew) were standing around gaping at it, doing little but watching with increased anxiety as the life drained from its beautiful, precious flesh”. She thought that this retreat would be a pivotal moment in the life of this fish, for we would either pick it up, all together, and toss it back in to the ocean, or we would let it die, and, she chuckled as she said this last, possibly just eat it.

Initially, I found her metaphor a bit strange—I wanted to know immediately why a fish would jump out of the water onto a boat—yet, at the same time, I agreed in principle with her analogy, as I too was concerned that the fluid and unstructured manner in which the community was evolving sometimes felt like “floundering” and that the future was not at all assured. However, I did remind her that eighteen people had volunteered to drive four hours to retreat with us in the vast wilderness of upstate New York, so there was still a bit of life in the old fish yet. At that point in time, I made no conscious connection to my dream.

On the evening of the next day, after the group had settled in together, relaxed and frolicked by the lake, walked among the pristine silences of majestic pines, and been rejuvenated by the resplendent beauty of the Adirondack backdrop, the stage was set for a co-created evening of community. Nothing was planned by the leadership team, for the idea was to allow the community to find its own footing and deepen its exploration of what

it means to be a community by distributing responsibility for the success or failure of the retreat to everyone. After dinner, in the transitional space in which the evening event was being discussed, this lack of agenda started to look like a really bad idea: the group broke down into factions of competing interests. Some people wanted to just have fun, play charades or build a campfire and cook marshmallows, some wanted to “do something meaningful” and co-create a ritual or conduct a deep, connecting dialogue around some theme or topic. Soon enough, the fragmented conversation devolved into wholesale chaos, with people becoming irritable and frustrated and emotionally distraught.

Finally, one of the participants, Katie (also one of the interviewees) started to cry, immediately grabbing the attention of the whole room. She then spoke, haltingly and with much emotion, about how she had hoped to use this community gathering as an opportunity to create a ritual in which she could “discard forever” the unfulfilled fantasy of having a child—and being a mother—that she had been carrying as a heavy burden for many years. She and her husband had been unsuccessful in having children; she had had a number of miscarriages, and for a whole host of medical—and probably psychological—reasons they had thus far been unsuccessful in completing a pregnancy. It turned out that Katie had brought this intention with her to the retreat: to use this particular gathering—for most of the group was familiar with her suffering and sorrow and had been extremely supportive over the years—to symbolically let go of her attachment to having a baby.

Of course, the room became silent in the wake of such a vulnerable and heart-felt expression of her longing. Everyone was deeply moved and we all downshifted quickly into a space of love and alignment behind her dream. Very quickly after that, the entire group moved into a space of collaboration and creative inspiration—co-creativity at its best—designing a ritual in which each participant, following Katie, would write on a piece of paper something(s) that they wanted to “let go of” – obstacles, emotions, behaviors, dreams, etc.—that had outlived their usefulness or become a barrier to the future evolution of the individual. The plan was that we would then share these intimate reflections with the group, be witnessed in our declarations, and ceremonially burn them.

The ritual unfolded from this place of intent and compassion, initially for Katie, but ultimately, for everyone, for she became a psycho-pomp, analogously activating all of our broken and unrealized dreams. We all had babies that would never be born—some real, some figurative. They were all fantasy love-objects that we were loathe to abandon, but we could also, through Katie’s vision, intuit the healing power available in such a courageous, symbolic act. With this shift of energy, the evening took on a sacred atmosphere, and there emerged a sense that something profound was about to occur—we could all feel it. Over the next few hours, during which we each meditated on our own “lost children”, wrote and shared from the heart, there was little discussion, no conflict, and an atmosphere of shared intent, compassion and love. As Jung might have put it: we all shared in the

experience of the numinous that enveloped the space. Time seemed to stand still; vociferous communication seemed superfluous; consciousness broadened and deepened and images and feelings took over for words and thoughts.

At one point, there was a hesitation in the group, a flicker of anxiety, as it became unclear how we were going to facilitate the burning of these symbolic representations—images and words on paper—in a fashion that would be seamless and efficient but at the same time do justice to the solemn nature of the ritual. At that moment, it struck me that it would be best to burn the papers all at once—using the woodstove that was already up and stoked—so I glanced around for something that we could collect the papers in that could be burned. My eyes fixed almost immediately upon a paper napkin or paper towel (to this day I'm not sure exactly what it was—I have actually never seen another paper product like it before or since!), that seemed like it might be perfect. I got up, retrieved it from the table, and laid it out in between two candles in the middle of the floor where we had been piling the discarded papers. The paper “mat” that I had found fit perfectly into the space created as if it were already pre-packaged for our purposes, and better yet, its white background was stamped—sort of embedded—with a particular design: large and small fishes, all swimming in a wave pattern, as if crossing a rough sea!

Everyone agreed that this mat would make the perfect vessel for the symbolic burning. Another participant noted—just as an aside—that she was moved by the cloth that I had found (she probably couldn't tell that it was

paper) for it reminded her of the “despacio” used in shamanic cleansing rituals in Peru, where the shaman would enclose the “stuff” of illness or blockage in a brightly colored, usually embroidered cloth, wrap it up and burn it or bury it in a sacred ceremony of healing. All of a sudden, in the wake of her powerful and evocative words, it dawned on me that the cloth was outfitted resplendently with the imaginal fish of Judy’s speech the day before, and the awesome, overpowering fish of my dream.

In the moment of this realization, I was also astonished to note that one of the four items that I had written down on my paper for release, was “my picture of what this baby community should grow into”. I had been inspired by Katie’s image of the lost baby, and even before the fishes appeared, had made the emotional and mental leap to see how I had held the manifestation of the community structure much like a baby that was struggling to get born and grow—all the while resisting all our attempts at good parenting. Between the appearance of the multi-colored fish and the imaginal presence of the lost baby, I was emotionally overwhelmed by the meaningful coincidences. It was stunning.

And as if this synchronistic widening or breakthrough in my own individual consciousness was not enough, there was more. Soon after the ritual was brought to closure, with us all ceremoniously enclosing the papers in the fish-mat, then burning the whole packet in the woodstove, Judy shared with me that she too had comprehended the profound symbolism of the ritual and the connection between Katie’s mourning the loss of her unborn child and

our need to give up false and idealized dreams about our fledging community. She seemed not to be aware of the fish symbols that had spontaneously emerged to reinforce the point, and yet still, turning to me with a mischievous grin, she said: “You may have just thrown your picture of this community into the fire, but perhaps, in this ritual, we just threw the fish back in the water.”

Sobonfu Some and her former husband Malidoma, in their work and writings about community healing practices from the Dagara tribe of West Africa, describe ritual as the most important agency of restoration and growth in the communal landscape; it is that special moment when individual and group consciousness is humbled or opened up to welcome the presence of a “third”. For them, as for Jung, this very real entity represents spirit, essence, or perhaps God, as we usually call it. Sobonfu puts it this way:

What is ritual? A ritual is a ceremony in which we call in spirit to come and be the driver, the overseer of our activities. The elements of ritual allow us to connect with the self, the community, and the natural forces around us. In ritual, we call in spirit to show us obstacles that we cannot see because of our limitations as human beings. Rituals help us to remove blocks standing between us and our true spirit and other spirits. (1997, p. 40)

Clearly, in this example, it was the pivotal shift of the community from heady discussion and conflict—the most common form of group process in the West—to symbolic action in the form of ritual, that enabled the confluence of earlier events in space and time—my dream, Judy’s image—to combine in an explosive dance of transformation and renewal. In a classic moment of both individual and collective individuation, Katie, as well as each of us, and the whole community, projected our attachment to those psychic unborn

infants that lay deeply buried within us for the last time, expelling them literally and figuratively into the fire, so that something could be born anew. It was the ritual that provided the container in which individual and collective ego consciousness was made permeable, allowing the numinous emergence of spirit—in the archetypal imagery of the divine child and the sacred fish—to emerge, heal and transform the collective psyche of the community, as well as the conscious attitude of each participant.

Now is what I have described above an example of synchronicity? Surely, as an unplanned, seemingly coincidental overlap of images, matter and events from both the inner and outer worlds of individual and collective psyche, the experience has the hallmark of classic synchronistic phenomena. Yet, what really matters is what Jung considers to be crucial: that as witnesses to or “receivers” of these strange and anomalous occurrences, we ascribe meaning to them and are impacted by their depth and profundity. In this situation, I would argue that synchronicity became a tool of the transcendent function at work in the community—and that the alchemical vessel of ritual fostered a cycle of death and re-birth on both the individual and collective levels. As Lorenz points out:

The ceremony is transformed to ritual when we leave a place open within it to be joined by a spiritual or unconscious “other” a not-yet which we do not control...Jungian psychology, as practiced by Jung, is based on a similar notion. Jung believed that it is only when we let the symbols work in a living way, as symbols—that is, as the best possible representations of something that is still unknown—that they can begin to heal painful dissociations of personality. (1997, p. 208)

So it has unfolded that with the success of this retreat, and in particular, the lingering effects of this powerful experience, that the conversation among Judy, myself and others, notably Katie, has shifted to optimism and possibility, where before the heavy weight of failure and dissolution of the community had held sway. The providential appearance of spirit has now shot the community through with new lifeblood, and the fish once more seems to be back in the water. Yet, it is not the same water.

As I move now into a discussion of psychoanalytic and postmodern contexts of interpretation around community themes, we would do well to keep in mind that Jung may well have become a guru for the New Age for good reason: he was out front in breaking down the psychic walls of separation that under gird our essentialist, materialistic, secular, hyper-rational perspectives on the world. Jung's concepts of individuation, synchronicity, and the transcendent function, provide a foundation on which the flexible, fluid, non-hierarchical, non-rigid structures of a conscious postmodern community may be built. Although a scientist and doctor himself, Jung never lost his interest or feeling for the mystical nature of life. He was open, curious and committed to the collapse of rigid categories of inner and outer, space and time, causality and linearity. Above all, he was always cognizant of the underlying mythic quality of our exalted dualities: between man and woman, the individual and the collective, the human and the divine. In his recent work, *Jung and the Postmodern* (2000), Christopher Hauke sums up this distinctive quality of Jungian psychology:

Jung applied his psychology—the method of the individual—as an overall cultural tool to critique not only the modern psyche but its cultural setting as well. In doing so, Jung's psychology challenges the splitting tendency of modernity: the splitting of the 'rational' and 'irrational', the splitting of the social, collective norm and individual, subjective experience, the splitting of the Human and the Natural, of mind and matter, and perhaps above all, the splitting of the conscious and unconscious psyche itself. (p. 2)

Theories of Social Trauma

The story told above, about the synchronistic appearance of symbols of transformation within the ritual context of a community retreat, works quite well as an example of Jungian theory in action. Yet, it might have been just as appropriate—and meaningful—to interpret the experience from a psychoanalytic reference point; that is, to view the community dynamic in this situation as an example of a group process, in which the ritual is not simply a transformative, numinous experience for the participants, but is also a therapeutic act—the healing of symbolic loss.

In describing the ritual, I focused my attention on the shift that took place from discussion and conflict to the symbolic acts of writing on the papers and burning them, but I might just as well have turned the interpretive lens on the affective energy of the experience, where the shift went from head to heart, from intellectual defensiveness to grief. For example, there were at least two powerful, and long, moments where I became acutely aware of the transformative agency of affect. The first was when Katie initially began to cry: the tension of anger and frustration immediately dissipated; the arguments ceased, and the room became silent. People seemed to shift downward into a communal energy of sympathy and empathy, although at this point, their feelings were focused outwardly, on her. The second, which unfolded in a series of emotional “moments”, took place as each individual spoke about what they had written, sharing the “item” they had chosen to symbolically release. At that stage in the ritual, almost everyone was in tears; the

emotional container of the group seemed to fill up with grief, sadness, and an overwhelming sense of loss. Witnessing Katie's pain seemed to open a doorway, through which each individual passed into a deep well of sorrow and suffering, disillusionment and despair, that lay hidden just below the surface. Entering this dark, psychic space of grief was clearly cathartic, moving, and I suggest, healing, for everyone involved, not just Katie, for we were letting go of things that mattered: unfulfilled dreams, unresolved conflicts, unhealed wounds, and ghosts of the past.

In the parlance of indigenous community practice, what we conducted on that evening, perhaps unwittingly, was a classic "grief ritual". Malidoma Some (1998) describes the importance of grieving in this manner:

In indigenous Africa, one cannot conceive of a community that does not grieve. In my village, people cry every day...Grief must be approached as a release of the tension created by separation and disconnection from someone or something that matters. The average Western person is grieving about being isolated. Western men in particular are grieving about the dead they didn't grieve properly because they were told that men don't cry...Grief is not only expressed in tears, but also in anger, rage, frustration, and sadness. Sadness and the feeling of heaviness within are symptomatic of a deep well of grief in the psychic underground. (p. 219)

Hearing these words, I cannot help but be in awe of the power of the opening to deep feeling that took place in that ritual space. Clearly, feelings of pain and sadness—which are more commonly expressed through anger and frustration in Western culture—were ripe for release. Even the men, who were perhaps the biggest protagonists of the conflictual atmosphere prior to the shift, allowed the affective force of the event to open floodgates of tears.

By looking at this event through this new window of grieving, it takes on an interpretive possibility different from the Jungian agenda of individuation: intentional community might also provide, through ritual and symbolic action, a container for restoration and healing in which individuals access, experience, and release denied and buried pain.

In order to explore this hypothesis further, I want to shift now to a psychoanalytic interpretive framework and peruse the landscape of the community from the perspective of post-Freudian theories regarding symbolic loss, social suffering and trauma. My purpose here is two-fold: 1. Just as viewing the community process through the classical Jungian lens provides a deepening of our understanding of the growth and transformative—individuating—elements of the community enterprise, I believe that the psychoanalytic perspective may expand our “knowledge” of another crucial aspect of the community: its focus on healing and restoration; and 2. Recent psychoanalytic theories have emerged from therapeutic work with Holocaust survivors and Vietnam Veterans afflicted with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), in which research has demonstrated the healing potential of a process mentioned by many of my co-researchers as key: the process of witnessing—or as they commonly put it, “seeing and being seen”.

Healing and restoration

I have to acknowledge right from the start that the term “healing”, when associated with the community, is profoundly subjective and

problematic. As we have heard from a number of the participants, it is not necessarily generally accepted that Old Growth is a “healing community”. Judy, Katie, Pat, and others have, at various times, voiced their concern that the idea of healing, for them, implies that there is something wrong with the participants; that they are ill, neurotic, dysfunctional, and need to be fixed. Yet, the paradox remains: it is also common for participants in Old Growth to describe their experiences with the community as “profoundly healing”. I believe that this dilemma is a result of a complex interplay of cultural and social factors—only a few of which can be brought to light here—that result in participants’ negative associations with phraseology like “healing community” or “support group” or “group therapy”.

In addition, if we look for what is missing in the conversations—peering around the corners of those topics that the group and individuals avoided or steered clear of—and delve into the unconscious, or not-yet-known aspects of the community process, we may find that the paradox of healing represents a broader narrative of denial and avoidance, a splitting or numbing out to the pain and suffering of losses that, although very real, may be much too disempowering, elusive and egregious to be handled directly. And this, in turn, is likely to bring us full circle back to the healing power of symbolic action, offering us an explanation for why ritual and dialogues turn out to be the community vehicles of choice in the drive towards restoration.

Before going any further into a correlative discourse on theories of collective trauma and their applicability to the Old Growth community, a

methodological caveat is in order, however, for it must have been noticeable to the reader just how little discussion of personal loss, pain or suffering, emerged within the context of the conversations for this project. So very few of the participants spoke, on tape, about the connection between their personal histories of trauma or wounding and their experiences as a part of community, that one might be tempted to surmise that they have not, and did not, experience much trauma in their lives. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. I suggest that this apparently “missing link” is partly due to a “flaw” in the praxis of conducting research within a community in which I am currently a member: I already know most of their stories. In effect, the rich heuristic gift of intimacy with the co-researchers, which afforded me access to a powerful subjective and inter-subjective landscape of openness, vulnerability, intellect and affect, also resulted in certain aspects of personal narrative being left out.

I wanted to make note of this dynamic inherent within the qualitative and participatory nature of this research protocol of embedded co-researchers (including myself), in order to acknowledge that it may not always be obvious what, in the missing pieces of a participant’s conversation, represents specifically conscious material—that is, known to all parties, myself included, just not spoken—and what is truly unconscious, or not-yet-known. I will do my best to mark the distinction, but even within the broader interpretive frame of “knowing” the individual’s involved, what I may “know” and what may be real for the “other”, is, again, always subject to

interpretation. Fiction abounds: it is a hazard of the game. Nevertheless, I do want to explore this theme of healing and restoration within the context of “real data”, insofar as is possible, so let me recount at least a few of the areas in which the participants hinted at their experiences of suffering, and then note what I glean to be matters of pain and sadness that may “not-yet-be-known”.

First off, we remember the commentary from most of the leadership group about their dismal childhood experiences with organized religion. Pat, as an example, spoke at length about her disillusionment with the Catholic Church and the pain of always being labeled “a sinner”. Likewise, Peter and Jan and Judy all spoke in varying ways about the conflict they experienced between their own sense of spirituality and that imposed on them by the Jewish faith. Morgan described his pain at being considered an “outcast” in his social community due to his divorce and separation from his five children. Later, Katie described in detail her sense of isolation and loneliness as one of five sisters who lived by the sword of competition and separation. Serge mentioned, a number of times in passing, that his relationship with his father—and his Jewish community of origin—was stormy and profoundly stifling; that he had spent the bulk of his adult years—in therapy and in seminars (e.g. Landmark, Tom and Flame, etc.)—attempting to sew shut the gaping wounds left in the wake of his upbringing.

Finally, turning to Jan, who described the lack of love and affection and support that she experienced within her family of origin, we get a glimpse

into the felt sensibility of loss that in some sense (given my privileged vantage point) resonates for the entire group. In fact, the consensus seemed to be that the desire for community in itself was a reflection of something missing—both past and present: a loss of that deep, familial connection to safety and belonging that each of us had either claimed and then lost, or perhaps never held at all, as we stumbled along from childhood through painful and awkward adolescence on into the trials and tribulations of adult life in America, with its overwhelming pressure to “succeed”.

And, there is more: powerfully evocative obfuscations and detours that emerged in various conversations; pointers, I surmise, at the unconscious field of denied pain, individual and collective trauma that lay below the surface, that popped through in the form of criticism, judgments, irritations, and annoyance. For example, we may remember that on two occasions Larry was rather incensed by the discussion topic within the group dialogue: the first was around the topic of “comfort”, which he considered to be “very important” for him to feel part of a community; he was decidedly not interested in exploring how a community might be challenging or confronting. He seemed, in fact, to have consciously chosen to remove himself from community situations in which he might be “triggered” or uncomfortable (e.g. in a Tom and Flame workshop, which he had not attended for over a year).

Secondly, he was irritated by my suggestion that the community might not be particularly inclusive and open; that we had not adequately addressed issues of exclusivity. He retaliated vehemently that whether we were open or

not was of no interest to him—whoever elected to show up was fine with him. Likewise, Jan and Julie, lining up behind him, chimed in that even exclusive enclaves—like all-white country clubs that exclude people of differing races—were still communities. So who were we to judge? Yet, despite the seemingly thoughtful and open-minded nature of these rebuttals, something still struck me as missing from the picture. Their words spewed forth with the energy of defensiveness, more rationalization than rational, landing in the circle dismissively rather than with the reflective feeling-tone of heartfelt inquiry. I could not help but wonder what unconscious layer of anxiety and fear they might be trying to protect.

Now, in both of these examples, most of the other participants aligned themselves behind Larry's comments. I remember there being a sense of the entire group, perhaps unconsciously, colluding with his desire to stay on more lighter, less controversial subjects, perhaps, in order to stave off conflict, disagreement, or more likely, *discomfort*. I remember asking myself: why this fixation with being comfortable? In a sense, (and Julie remarked on this later), it is a contradiction in terms for an intentional community to be "comfortable", for by its very design people with differing perspectives and beliefs are thrown together in a complex dance of relationship. To want community to be "comfortable" is akin to seeking a marriage that is comfortable, or having a comfortable child, or opening a comfortable business partnership: it does not jive with the way human beings actually work in

relationship. So what was Larry not saying here? What was the collective ego denying and avoiding in brushing off my provocations?

And what of their insistence that issues of inclusivity and exclusivity were irrelevant to the nature of Old Growth as an intentional community? I am tempted to step out on a speculative limb here, and suggest that unconscious fear drove that part of the conversation as well: their rebuttals may well have been an unconscious reflex—a response to deep-seated anxieties around that unknown “other” for whom I wanted the doors of community flung open. In a world of terror and violence and racial and religious fanaticism, how could I be so naïve? It seemed that they would go to great lengths to deny and avoid facing their fears of this phantom “other”, especially if that other happen to appear in cultural, religious, socio-economic, or spiritual garb much different from their own. And what about my fear? As I stated in earlier reflections, I was reluctant to push the conversation too far, not wanting to alienate my colleagues, to disrupt the flow of good will that permeated the circle. Surely, I just wanted to remain comfortable and “exclusive” as well. It is always easier to point fingers—to project—outward rather than do the hard work of introspection and reflection: what pain, what shame or loss might I have been denying as I sat in judgment of my peers?

Rather than speculate on this question at this point (one might ask, of course, if this narrative diversion is not one more example of avoidance...), instead I want to peer into one more example of what would seem to be unconscious avoidance of pain and suffering: the conversations around 9/11.

In another series of paradoxical interactions, participants spoke about their increased fear and anxiety in the wake of this horrific act of violence that had occurred, literally, right in their backyards. Surprisingly however, in spite of the grave nature of the violation—the first foreign attack on the U.S. mainland in over two hundred years—most of their allusions to 9/11 were short, quickly rationalized, or as Larry put it, “put in perspective”: they rapidly shifted away from tales of horror and onto the seemingly benign story of statistics that declared New York City “safer than ever”. Now, as I sit here in New York, in May of 2003, under siege by the imminent invasion of the deadly respiratory virus SARS and enveloped in the dark cloud of an “Orange Alert” from the Department of Homeland Security, I am left with deep reservations about the validity of those conversations as being reflective of how participants truly felt. It seems likely that the repressed and unconscious component of the experience—the vast, submerged block of fear, pain, and traumatic injury—was much larger—more terrifying, more disturbing and real—than the surface banter that took place: were the words expressed merely the tip of the iceberg?

Clearly, the equivocation inherent in all these examples represents a quixotic state of mixed and contradictory emotions; a paradoxical situation that I would suggest is characteristic of the very nature of avoidance mechanisms like repression and denial. In these instances—and I could recount numerous additional examples—we can observe all the classic symptoms of what Melanie Klein, after Freud, called the “manic defense”.

Peter Homans (2000), in his work on symbolic loss and the inability to mourn, captures the essence of this theme:

This term, the manic defense, is often used in psychoanalytic theory and practice today. It evolved from the work of Melanie Klein and her interest in depression and was later used by Winnicott not only clinically but also culturally. This defense begins with a loss and the refusal to become introspective toward oneself in the face of that loss. Denial of the loss ensues. Then, denial shifts into an interest in depersonalized aspects of the external environment, such as technology [and other “comforts”]...Successful closure [walling off of affect] is accompanied by an enormous sense of relief, and the final state of affairs is rightly described as “the inability to be depressed”. (p.12)

In this theoretical frame, the group’s fixation (and mine) on comfort and the desire to “feel safe” in spite of the very real threat of terrorism, may signal the engagement of powerful tools of defense that are designed to ward off the overwhelming flood of emotion that would be associated with major loss. In a sense, participants seem to not have the volition, the skills, nor the cultural containers of support to hold or work through emotions of fear and anxiety and disillusionment. But then, how is this suffering to be alleviated? How are the wounds left in the wake of trauma to be healed? Perhaps, this is where the community enters the landscape of possibility—but from both sides of the border. But we have to ask at this point: is the community really a container for healing or is it merely designed to hold back the flood, garnering co-workers in the building of fortresses of comfort that keep fear at bay? Perhaps, the answer, depending upon the context, may be both.

In a recent conversation with an “off again, on again” Old Growth participant (not one of the co-researchers for this project), I heard the

following statement: “I am trying to forget what I cannot remember”. I was initially flummoxed by the words and asked him to clarify for me what he was trying to say, and so he went on: “I know that I am supposed to be looking at some deep, dark truths about my past, but I’d rather not look, I’d rather not know, because there’s no finding the “truth” anyway. So what’s the use? I’d rather just have a stiff drink and call it a day!” Of course, this is but a snippet of a broader conversation about his reluctance to engage in the “healing” (my word) work of Old Growth, yet it struck a chord in me: he had encapsulated, in one sentence, what I believe to be the core issue around the community’s inability to see itself as an agency of healing.

At the bottom of the controversy sits a complex, dynamic interwoven pattern of emotional trauma, suffering and loss—on individual and collective levels—that is so difficult to circumscribe and name, let alone confront head-on, that it can only be approached through symbolic means—in ritual, dream, art, poetry, music. Words, even though they are linguistic symbols, carry too much weight and portent within a Western scientific paradigm that likes to believe in “objective truth” and “diagnosis” and “cure”: the truth of this individual’s pain and suffering was too rich and complex to be reduced to mere words; for him, to “remember” was a dangerous act. Hence, we can begin to glimpse into the transformative potential of ritual, for here we create a sacred space of emotional cleansing; a space devoid of intellect, concepts—words—that is filled instead with symbolic and embodied acts of

silence, sharing, and communion that make catharsis and restoration possible.

In a sense, what my friend was referring to reflects the core paradox of psychoanalysis in general: Freud's approach was to access, raise to consciousness, and confront repressed memories of actual (or fantasized) trauma in order to release the psychic binding to an unobtainable or unrealizable object of desire—a parent, for example—from the past, which was the cause of neurosis, symptom and suffering. This re-enactment or restitution of memory, however, is always painful in and of itself; it seems that re-experiencing the pain and suffering of original trauma is to a certain extent required if any healing is to occur. Is it any wonder then, that a rational, defended ego would be, at the very least, ambivalent about entering this psychic space?

On the individual level, Melanie Klein developed and broadened Freud's theories of neurosis by posing that all psychological growth and development comes about as a result of the struggle with different kinds of loss over the course of a lifetime. Beginning with the painful recognition, around age five, that mother is truly a separate being, who is not on earth for the sole purpose of satisfying the child's needs, success in life becomes dependent upon the ability to take up what she calls "the depressive position"—that is, the acceptance and expression of life as a long series, among other things, of disappointments (Homans, p. 18). In Klein's view, it is through the successful navigation of this emotional minefield of trauma and

loss that one tallies up a scorecard of health and wholeness over against depression and despair. The problem, however, that we can see evidenced by the participants' contradictory statements about comfort and safety, is that capitalistic and individualistic culture, with its focus on productivity, consumption and functionality, as Malidoma pointed out earlier, does not place much credence in, nor offer much support for, the working through and expression of emotion. Emotion is messy, chaotic, uncontrolled and seemingly uncontrollable; something to be contained, held in check, submerged and internalized in order for us to remain "functional" in the world.

To clarify this dilemma, let me pick on Larry again—as an example but not an exception—and his quixotic behavior around the specific topic of fear and anxiety in the wake of 9/11. At a recent community event, the topic for dialogue was just this matter at hand: how were we each, as individuals, and collectively as a community, to face and bear the emotional stress of living so close to terror? As the evening unfolded, the participants—including many who were part of this project—expressed their experience with "working through" their fears in rational and not-so rational ways. Yet, the dialogue remained on the level of event and action—what we *should do*—interspersed with occasional irruptions of anger and frustration—at the media, the government, the politicians and all those "others" supposedly responsible for our security. There was a pervasive sense of powerless in the room that soon dissolved into apathy. At one point, Larry spoke vehemently, with a trace of anger and bitterness in his voice, that the discussion was "going

nowhere” and would only serve to foment fear, not to alleviate it. With that, he got up and stormed from the room, declaring that he had had enough of this “victim stuff”. In a sense, he had spoken and acted on feelings that many of us were experiencing, such that some got up and followed him while others remained, able now to project their internalized anxieties on to him, as a form of scapegoat. But what about the deeper emotions of sadness, grief, and loss that were surely part and parcel of the violation? After all, the hi-jacked planes had flown over our neighborhoods, into our offices (in some cases literally), and through the ubiquity of TV, into our living rooms.

In this situation, I would suggest that in this Western-style format of discussion—even though the intent was dialogical, the conversation remained heady—, Larry simply acted as a receptacle for collective projection. Symbolically, he became a psycho-pomp, a repository for the group’s inability to dive deeper into the painful psychic space of real, raw emotion, and at a certain point, filled to the brim with his own and the collective denied rage of the group, he exploded. Navigating the vicissitudes of emotion, it seems, is not something white, middle-class, Americans are schooled in or adept at within their cultural sphere; in fact, quite to the contrary, the ego-state of “functional” adults is designed to ward off affect—to avoid feeling or expressing despair, pain and suffering—, to put on a brave face and “hold it together”. On that evening, stoicism reigned, and the result was fragmentation, loss of group cohesion, isolation, and for Larry, quite likely—rage (which he was wise enough to keep to himself).

In Homans' study of symbolic loss, he theorizes that in the West we have lost our ability to mourn, to grieve, and to express our fear and anxiety. All of these must be internalized—handled alone or repressed through pharmaceutical intervention; public outlets for the expression and release of negative emotions have become few and far between:

In a sense, the sweeping socio-historical process of modernization and the consequent waning of community brought about the decline of mourning practices...gradually, the burden of mourning became the responsibility of the individual...Mourning gradually came to be recognized as an internal, and principally psychological activity...The burden of loss, once supported by the community, is now carried by the individual alone. (2000, p. 7-8)

In addition, what makes matters worse, according to psychoanalytic theory, is that time lapses after the experience of trauma tend to generate doubt: did this happen to me or did I invent it? According to psychoanalyst Peter Shabad (in Homans, p.37), the more time passes, the more doubt creates the necessity that we bear our suffering alone, so as to not “appear” insane or unstable. The result: symptoms of denial, anger and anxiety build beneath the surface, threatening to boil over—as they did in the example above.

As if this composite picture of how individuals deal with trauma and loss were not complex enough, we can note a further distinguishing characteristic of repression in the face of trauma: the distinction between the individual's experience of trauma and what has been recently dubbed “collective trauma”, of which the terror attack of 9/11 is surely an example. According to psychoanalyst Kai Erickson, the defense mechanisms employed in the individual repression of traumatic memories—mania,

projection/repression, rationalization—are all similarly called upon by a group that experiences trauma en masse, resulting in wholesale collective denial and seemingly irreversible suffering:

One can speak of traumatized communities as something distinct from assemblies of traumatized persons. Sometimes the tissues of community can be damaged in much the same way as the tissues of mind and body...Trauma, that is, has a social dimension...people withdraw into themselves, feeling numbed, afraid, vulnerable, and very alone...if the disaster they experience is thought to have been brought about by other human beings and if it is motivated and mean-minded, collective trauma easily becomes irreversible...People begin to think that the world is ruled by a kind of natural malice that lurks everywhere. (in Homans, p. 28-29)

In the final analysis then, the roots, qualities and features of suffering on both individual and collective levels seem to weave together into a complex web of hidden, ominously dark and untenable emotion: is it any wonder that the attempt to tame this bubbling cauldron of affect sometimes results in release and catharsis—e.g. in the group ritual—while at other times results in chaos—e.g. in the group discussion—and a further deepening of isolation and alienation?

Recently, a poignant example of this cultural and collective symptom of un-ease and discomfort with mourning and grief was brought to my attention by a psychotherapist member of the community: it seems that the free grief-counseling services offered in the wake of 9/11, of which my colleague is a supervisor, are scheduled to be shut down two years before the expiration of their government contract. The reason he gives for this unusual curtailing of a government handout is noteworthy: lack of clientele. It seems that only

about 1/10 as many individuals and groups have come forth in need of grief support as had been expected, given the levels of death and destruction. My friend's explanation for this phenomenon just amplifies my points here with regard to Old Growth:

People just don't know that they need help. And when they do come for counseling, they don't have any idea, in most cases, that their anxiety and depression is an aftereffect of 9/11—they just don't get the connection. My people wind up giving career counseling most of the time, because the clients seem to have wiped the tragic event from their memories: it is as if it never happened...of course, I don't buy that...but what can I do...if they don't come, they don't come.
(personal communication, 2003)

To a certain extent, the community participants can perhaps be forgiven if they are of two minds regarding the subjective and qualitative experience of safety and comfort in a group setting: they bring to the situation all of their forgotten and unexcavated memories of childhood and family trauma, as well as the more recent, close-at-hand experiences of social suffering at the hands of terrorists and viruses, not to mention the malevolent scions of capitalism whose egregious deeds have recently wreaked havoc with their bank accounts (e.g. executives at Enron, Worldcom, MCI and others). In a very real sense, even for these privileged—by material standards—individuals that I interviewed for this study, the world has become a very dangerous, unstable, and unsafe place replete with a pervasive, overwhelming sense of loss—of identity, values, security, and peace of mind. Homans describes this loss of faith in the systems, structures and ideologies of a culture, as “symbolic loss”:

Typically, symbolic loss refers to the loss of an attachment to a political ideology, or religious creed, or to some aspect of one, and the inner work of coming to terms with this kind of loss. In this sense it resembles mourning. However, in the case of symbolic loss, the object that is lost is, ordinarily, socio-historical, cognitive, and collective. The lost object is a symbol or rather a system of symbols and not a person. And the inner work of coming to terms with the loss of such symbols is by no means always followed by generative or creative repair or recovery, but as often by disillusionment, or disappointment, or despair. Some sort of combination of “resignation” along with some mourning, is the best way to describe the most common form of this kind of “coming to terms with the past” (p. 20)

Bearing this over-arching link between individual, social, and now, societal loss in mind, let us turn back, one final time, to my friend Larry, who recently summed up his general view of the world, in terms that surely point to the hidden pain and fear that he carries within, as well as his all too conscious awareness, of how the world for him—and others in the community—has ineluctably changed: “I think that the world has gone completely crazy and that none of us ever feels secure anymore. Sometimes I just want to join the hit parade of American gun owners and hole up in my house with a rifle, ready to take out anybody that threatens the only security I have left: my four walls...” Surely, we cannot help but hear in these words, even without the tone of resignation that accompanied them, all the anger and hurt and overwhelming sense of loss that permeates his worldview? It would seem no surprise then, that even in the midst of community situations where the opportunity for healing and release of such pain might be available, Larry—and others—will often turn away in disgust, experiencing in those moments of discomfort the very un-ease that they spend so much effort trying to avoid:

wanting to forget—like the close-in victims of 9/11—what they cannot—or will not—remember.

Healing, it would seem, is not a simple matter of remembering, talking it through, and release; there are multiple layers of access involved for both the individuals and the collective, and the wounds—some gaping open, some covered over and locked away—are equally noxious and resistant to cauterization. The healing potential of the community has to cut through very thick walls of defense, and then, once the bolted doors of individual and collective memory are opened, the container needs to be ready to handle the deluge—of anger, pain, suffering, and if necessary, rage.

On the other hand, in those unique and ineffable moments of symbolic action—as in the grief ritual—pain does seem to get transformed and suffering dissolved. How is this possible? It is clearly a miracle, which is why Jung, as witness to a life-long series of miraculous interventions—for which he never took responsibility and by which he was always humbled—theorized with conviction that something unknown, or not-yet-known—a mysterious, mystical “third”—was always present in the agency of transformation. He called this numinous vehicle of healing, the archetype of the “Self”, or the objective psyche, pointing to a spiritual dimension of consciousness that eludes the ego, but nevertheless enjoins the soul towards wholeness, towards reparation, in the presence of dialogical connection, relationship, and love. Yet, Jung’s spiritual perspective carries us only so far in coming to understand how the miracle of healing works, in order to delve more deeply

into the mechanisms of healing in action, we must turn to the second focal area of this chapter: to the act of witnessing.

Witnessing

Thus far, we have explored how delicate, paradoxical, and challenging it is to engender the agency of healing in the community container: it seems to appear miraculously in the sacred and symbolic space of ritual, but likewise disappears in the fallout of intellectual discussion. Yet, there is another form of community interaction, an in-between space that participants have spoken about as “bearing witness” or “seeing and being seen”, in which transformation occurs, and this is the space of dialogue. Dialogical intercourse, to which I referred earlier when referencing the work of David Bohm, is perhaps best described as a Westernized form of ritual, where listening and speaking occur much like in a discussion, but where the participants consciously tend to the energetic and atmospheric elements of space, silence, proximity, and emotion. By sitting in a circle, facing each other, using a talking stick—or other device for respectful tending to the one who speaks—and simply shifting the tone and quality of the interaction from head (intellectual banter) to heart (vulnerable sharing), the act of speaking and listening becomes more like a performance—a stage set for story-telling, creative expression and emotional release. The energy of competition, so common in Western-style discourse, dissipates, and an environment of partnership and intimacy is born. It is here in this dialogical space that

participants experience the healing and restorative power of bearing witness—through the empathic attendance to their own and other’s testimony.

Alongside research by Homans and other theorists on the nature of symbolic loss and social suffering, additional psychoanalytic writers have discovered and begun to categorize the healing elements involved in this transformative agency of witnessing. Kelly Oliver (2001), in her book *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, describes witnessing as a form of ritual performance, whereby the subject (performer) is enabled to break through walls of defense and see deeply into the pain of his or her own repressed memories of trauma and suffering:

It is the paradoxical nature of witnessing oppression that makes it so powerful in restoring subjectivity and agency to an experience that shamefully lacks any such agency. The act of witnessing itself can help restore self-respect and a sense of one’s self as an agent or a self, even while it necessarily recalls the trauma of objectification. Witnessing enables the subject to reconstitute the experience of objectification in ways that allow her to reinsert subjectivity into a situation designed to destroy it. Even so, the paradoxical nature of bearing witness to your own oppression makes it difficult and painful to testify. (p. 98)

Here we begin to get a sense of the complex but amazing potency of what the Old Growth participants are pointing to: the restoration of one’s sense of self—as an independent, complete, worthy human being—is nurtured through the process of sharing one’s story in such a way that it is fully seen and heard, as opposed to being criticized, judged, or re-traumatized (by being dismissed). In the performative act of offering to the community one’s “testimony”—that is, the full, unedited expression of what may have been

repressed, forgotten or never known—what ensues is an integration of unconscious and conscious material that signals the birth of something new—a new attitude, a new way of being, a new image of self. As an agency of transformation, this process occurs much the same way as the Jungian mechanism of the transcendent function.

However, what is uniquely helpful for my purposes of deepening an understanding of community praxis, is that the psychoanalytic frame of reference enables us to understand more deeply the very nature of what Jung considered mysterious, numinous, and usually, synchronistic. By investigating the healing process as it unfolded for victims of collective trauma such as survivors of the Holocaust or Vietnam Veterans (and more recently, groups of women, homosexuals, and other oppressed minorities) these researchers have identified crucial additional pieces to the multi-dimensional puzzle of witnessing.

First, there is the recognition by psychoanalysis that the pathway to the unconscious material is through dialogue: “the inner witness is produced and sustained by dialogic interaction with other people. Dialogue with others makes dialogue with oneself possible.”(Oliver, p. 87) In this transformative situation, what is meant by dialogue is very specific: it is a communal engagement in the excavation, re-enactment, and re-telling of a story that to the story-teller *may not even be known*:

It is essential for this narrative *that could not be articulated* to be told, to be *transmitted*, to be *heard* ...To a certain extent, the interviewer-listener takes on the responsibility for bearing witness that previously

the narrator felt he bore alone, and therefore could not carry out. It is the encounter and the coming together between the survivor and the listener, which makes possible something like a repossession of the act of witnessing. This joint responsibility is the source of reemerging truth. (Laub, D. in Caruth, 1995, P. 69) [*italics Laub*]

It is in this process of “re-capturing the unknown” that we begin to get a sense of the paradoxical nature of individual and collective repression: the experience of trauma is to a certain extent lost to the victim; survival, or at the very least—in the case of 9/11 for example—continued “functionality”, requires that the physical, emotional moment of impact be negated to the point of being obliterated by consciousness: the painful affect is just too overwhelming. But the resulting loss is more than just symbolic: it is a cutting off of a part of the self, like chopping off a limb or cutting out one’s own heart. Hence, the desire to reclaim that lost part is strong—and the pull towards community is surely demonstrative of that desire—but the dangers are great, for to reconnect the psychic limb requires re-living, at least temporarily, the trauma of the story itself, and therein lies the paradox. What appears in the community as avoidance, denial, and reluctance to give up ones’ zones of comfort is by its very nature a conundrum, for the very thing that a community participant needs in order to “testify” and to bear witness on him or herself, is to both relinquish and simultaneously be held in that same container of safety and comfort. Herein lies the healing power of dialogue, for as in ritual, creating a sacred space of listening fosters a uniquely designed territory of safety that encourages risk. Like when a “spotter” enables a weight-lifter to

risk lifting poundage way beyond what is considered routine, as witnesses we become “spotters of the heart”.

Secondly, psychoanalytic researchers, in particular Julia Kristeva and Shoshan Felman, have examined the nature of the dialogue in this process of witnessing and concluded that there is much more involved, for both performer and listener, than mere words or concepts. The performance of testimony involves a form of listening in which the listener must suspend judgment around what is “true” or “false”; poetry, metaphor, song, silence and symbolic acts—tears, movement, touching—must all be received, held and contained as story elements: everything has meaning, nothing is invalid or dismissed. The intimate act of engaging in “testimonial” brings each party—or the entire circle—into a psychic space of the imagination, where the mode of communication is free-flowing and diverse, and narrative is made relevant, meaningful, and transformative as it re-establishes the links between affect and event, whether real, remembered, or imagined. What matters is that the story, in whatever form seeks expression, connects the “forgotten” emotional pain with its cause:

To seek reality through language “with one’s very being,” to seek in language what the language had precisely to pass through, is thus to make of one’s own “shelterlessness”—of the openness and the accessibility of one’s own wounds—an unexpected and unprecedented means of accessing reality, the radical condition for a wrenching exploration of the testimonial function, and the testimonial power, of the language: it is to give reality one’s own vulnerability, as a condition of exceptional availability and of exceptionally sensitized, tuned in attention to the *relation between language and events*. (Felman, 1992, p.29) [italics author]

In any case, the re-telling of an event through language is always a fictional product on some level, for the so-called reality of past traumatic events is long lost anyway, and all acts of restitution or resurrection are *in memoriam*.

What the psychoanalytic perspective has shown us is that it is not the historical event that matters in the agency of healing, it is the act of bringing forth content—however remembered or imagined—from deep within the psychic interior of the individual, outward into an exterior landscape where it can be seen and held and received with validation. In the safe space of collective witnessing, the healing mechanism of the imagination is activated—such that long buried truth can be put into words and released in symbolic form:

Following the psychoanalytic vision of the human being, the imaginary increasingly appears as an essential part of our psyches, but also, and above all, as the very site of the version of freedom I am in the process of defending before you. We are alive because we have a psychic life. The psychic life is that interior space, that *deep down inside* that permits us to take in attacks from both within and without—that is to say, physiological and biological traumas, but also political and social aggressions. The imaginary metabolizes, transforms, sublimates, and works these attacks: it supports us as living. (Kristeva, in Oliver, p. 73) [italics Kristeva]

From this vantage point, we can discern more clearly what is happening psychologically within the seemingly contradictory dynamic of community interaction: the ego function of survival and homeostasis remains vigilant in the face of discussion, conflict, competition, and stress, all of which are part and parcel of everyday life. In these situations, regardless of whether they happen within community contexts or not, the deep psychic spaces of

pain and suffering are walled off and inaccessible, for good reason. Yet, on other occasions, when the safety zone of empathy and listening is nurtured through dialogical means, the imagination is activated, breaking through the ego's defensive borders, and a liminal world is created, a transitional psychic state, in which the symbolic act of testimony—in whatever creative form wants to emerge—becomes the agent of transformation. In this permeable psychic borderlands, that “in-between” place to which Pat referred in the group dialogue, which is a place of vulnerability and intense affect that must be held with delicate listening and timeless silence by the community, the miracle of healing occurs.

Finally, there is a third piece of the puzzle that psychoanalytic theory makes clearer: why witnessing works best in a group or community situation. It seems that just as the dyadic healing container of psychotherapy offers an environment of intimate recreation that approximates—through the transference—the core family structure—likewise collective trauma is best healed in an artificially safe collective container that replicates the social context in which the trauma was experienced. As psychoanalyst Eric Santer points out, “the missing affect can be recuperated only in the presence of empathic witnesses who co-constitute the space in which the loss may come to be symbolically and affectively mastered” (in Oliver, 2001, p. 110). Santer emphasizes that it is not enough simply to heal social suffering through engagement with Kristeva's “imaginary psyche” as a solitary individual, for the necessary affect and symbolism must be nurtured within a “social sphere”

that mirrors the environment in which the trauma occurred in the first place—in the collective.

In studying oppressed groups whose community-based actions have proven empowering and transformational, feminist and queer theorists have also found that collective witnessing is the social dynamic requisite for the re-empowerment and release of collective oppression and social wounding. In fact, these psychoanalytic writers are strong advocates of the reemergence of collective means for the expression of grief and mourning throughout Western society. Feminist theorist Judith Butler (1997), sums it up this way:

Insofar as collective grief remains unspeakable, the rage over the loss can redouble by virtue of remaining unavowed. And if that rage is publicly proscribed, the melancholic effects of such a proscription can achieve suicidal proportions. The emergence of collective institutions for grieving are thus crucial to survival, to reassembling community, to rearticulating kinship, to reweaving sustaining relations in the world. (p. 148)

In the context of the social sphere described here, we can begin to glean a deeper understanding of the potential gift of the intentional community experience over against the dyadic engagement of psychotherapy: the effect of witnessing is multiplied and expanded to encompass a wide range of intrapsychic and inter-psychic relational and social dynamics; the community participants are supported in “seeing and being seen” in dyads, triads, quads, and all manner of small and large group settings. If we think back to the transformative conversation that Katie described when she engaged for many hours of deep, reflective talk—high witnessing—with Judy, Julie and Jan, clearly she was working the edge of healing on multiple levels: the scene

recreated her family of origin (four sisters!) and also operated as a microcosm of the community itself, finally resolving into a powerful dyadic encounter between herself and Judy.

The individual responds to personal and collective trauma by employing a complex continuum of psychic defense processes that require an equally variegated series of one-on-one, small group and collective interventions in order to foster transformation and release of blocked psychic material. Old Growth, as an emergent, relatively unstructured form of group process, is still forming the bonds and navigating the boundaries of intimacy and safety and creative expression, as well as emotional vulnerability, and is therefore prone to awkward gyrations of progress and regress: it is like a gangly infant just learning to walk. Yet, if Old Growth participants successfully harness the transformational and restorative tools of witnessing, dialogue, and ritual, while exploring and developing others forms of symbolic action in a creative, collaborative manner, the “adult” form of Old Growth just might succeed in establishing a flexible social structure that is healing and support-oriented like other recovery communities, but which encourages participants to stretch along a broader spectrum of possibility that includes personal growth, restoring and expanding consciousness, and collective empowerment. This experiment in postmodern collectivity might then become a local representative, a model for New York City and environs, of the kind of political and social organization that Butler and other social theorists consider vital for restoring health and humanity to society.

Yet, there remain innumerable issues, challenges and obstacles left to tackle as our young experiment in postmodern collectivity matures and evolves. Two of these concerns, leadership and sustainability, comprised a large part of the attention of the participants in all of the interviews and dialogues. Clearly, the following questions are of primary concern to the Old Growth members: How do we want to lead or be led? And how can we ensure that the community is sustainable? In order to explore these concerns more deeply, I want to focus, in the next chapter, on the community enterprise through the lens of additional psychoanalytic and post-Freudian theorists like Erich Fromm, Wilfred Bion, Scott Peck and others who have made particular contributions in the area of study known as “group process”.

Theories of Group Process

Up to this point, we have expanded the hermeneutic circle to include Jungian and psychoanalytic frames of interpretation, in order to explore and deepen our understanding of specific themes that emerged in the research dialogues around personal growth, expanding consciousness, healing and restoration. Nevertheless, all the participants, way back to Tom and Flame, recognized that additional issues of structure, binding principles, and in particular, leadership, must be adequately addressed as well, if the community is to grow, expand, and be sustainable over the long run. Fortunately, an early benefit of this research project has been that it has given the volunteer leaders of the community—and a few others—an opportunity to reflect and share their views on these very crucial concerns. Born of the group dialogue sessions has been the “sustaining council” and a commitment to rotating “managerial” roles in the execution and logistics of community events. Likewise, many of the participants have chimed in with thoughts and comparisons of the benefits and drawbacks from their other community involvements, including land-based communal arrangements (Tom and Flame) and other healing and educational communities like AA and Landmark.

Picking up where these participant commentaries leave off, I now want to enrich the conversation around issues of (1) leadership and (2) sustainability, by welcoming into the interpretive fold psychoanalytic theories of group process and dynamics that have been used with varying degrees of success in the

formation and structuring of many of these other group containers. With this theoretical grounding in the evolution of leadership theory since Freud, it will be possible to conduct a tour of group endeavors that share common attributes with Old Growth, moving along a spectrum from group therapy, to recovery groups like AA, to community-based therapy practices (e.g. Authentic Process Therapy), to educational, psycho-spiritual practice groups like Scott Peck's Foundation for Community Encouragement, in order to glean useful information with regard to the practices and principles that may help ensure sustainability without undermining the flexibility, permeability and collaborative qualities that make Old Growth unique.

Leadership

One of the distinguishing features of the intentional community dynamic inside Old Growth is the commitment to practicing *shared leadership*, such that acts of leading, facilitating, coordinating and planning are constantly being rotated among members. It is not a leaderless group, nor do I believe there is any such thing despite what current management gurus may proclaim, but rather, its shared leadership practices might better be called "leaderful": everyone is called forth to lead on some level. As reflected in the group dialogue around the formation of the "sustaining council", this desire for a progressive approach to leadership reflects a resistance on the part of Old Growth participants to traditional, dominant leadership roles—even elected "officials".

At issue here is the group's collective response to an insidious form of alienation that psychoanalyst and social theorist Erich Fromm deftly identified many years ago: alienation from false democracies and entrenched authority figures.

Authority in the middle of the twentieth century has changed its character; it is not overt authority, but anonymous, invisible, alienated authority. Nobody makes a demand, yet, we all conform as much or more than people in an intensely authoritarian society...The mechanism through which the anonymous authority operates is conformity. If I am not aware of submitting, if I am ruled by an anonymous authority, I lose the sense of self, I become a "one", a part of the "it". (1955, p. 153)

The fact is that few of the participants in Old Growth have much opportunity in today's rapid-fire business and organizational arenas to develop, practice or engage in broadening their spectrum of leadership skills much beyond typical patriarchal forms of directing and controlling, in spite of having received, in many cases, a great deal of management "training". Even the women in the group who have management and leadership roles in fast-paced New York business environments, are hard pressed to flex their participative, inclusionary, collaborative muscles in settings where the keys to success are action, decisiveness, and control. In the socio-economic sphere, there is little room to expand the definitions of power and strength to include vulnerability, intuition, and consensus. Conformity, to the silent authority of patriarchy, is still the norm in Western institutional settings.

In a sense, therefore, the community has become a haven for experimentation with diverse approaches, a leadership laboratory, where time is more expansive and flexible, and value is placed on processing decisions that

take into account individual feelings, power struggles, and issues of consensus and participation. There may be little direct discussion about leadership per se, (that is, until this research project came along) but the nature of the interaction between leader, facilitator and/or follower, is open to discussion and review at any given moment. It is an empowering and restorative experience for Old Growth participants, who despite their apparent prosperity and individual sovereignty, as Fromm predicted, still feel deeply insecure and skeptical about what is foisted on them by government and corporate authorities—often with questionable intent—through the mass media or institutional manipulation.

Back in the fifties and sixties, Fromm's solution for the alienated worker in the U.S., who had lost his humanity by becoming a cog in the machinery of industrial production, was to be drawn from the "Community of Work" groups that were founded and proliferated in post-World War II Europe, especially in France (Fromm, 1955, p. 307). Key attributes of these groups were a more humane work environment, shared profits, de-centralized decision-making, along with greater commitments to collaboration and education. Ironically, many of these seemingly re-humanizing and democratic practices have become the norm in today's corporate environments, yet the level of alienation and unhappiness has hardly abated.

The problem with Fromm's solution, though progressive in many respects, has been its inevitable naiveté, for these liberatory policy shifts have been piled on top of a bedrock, implacable cultural paradox: America is a democracy whose *core operations*--big and small businesses--have never been

democratic. There may have been a shift over towards more humane work environments, with ever increasing wages (to propel consumption) and many perquisites and benefits; yet, all the material rewards are still doled out exclusively by the owners and the senior corporate executives, who by virtue of their highly sanctified and safeguarded power to hire and fire "at will", keep just enough insecurity alive to avoid wholesale insurrection. In a sense, the oppressive stance of authority has continued to go further underground—making Fromm's statement amazingly prescient—until now it is buried deeply in the collective unconscious of most Americans. Old Growth participants may sense that something in the American modes of production is unhealthy and repressive, and may even tacitly resist through communitarian expressions like Old Growth, but since they, as white, skilled and educated laborers, gain substantial economic benefit from the system (we remember how little interest the participants had in discussing the implications of their economic prosperity), concerns with oppression are quickly squelched by the "internal regime" (colonizing ego), pushed below the horizon of consciousness.

In this context, I would suggest that the participants' complex and paradoxical views on leadership and authority are also partly a result of the evolution of leadership practices in American institutions since Fromm conducted his cultural analysis. Old Growth members have surely benefited from the surfeit of managerial and leadership training programs that have proliferated over the past twenty years or so in business and governmental organizations, such that it is considered normal procedure to attend skills training in leadership

effectiveness, diversity and cultural sensitivity, facilitation and managing group process. Nevertheless, the environments in which these practices are preached rarely personify the kind of leadership qualities, collaboration and intimacy that exemplify Old Growth in action; they are still ripe with insecurity, replete with an almost robotic attachment to machine-like efficiency and a focus on every-increasing levels of productivity.

The paradox lies in the fact that institutional approaches to leadership development have focused almost exclusively on rational, scientific interpretations of group process, which are designed to reign in or minimize the influence of emotional, unconscious aspects of human interaction, in order to accomplish some explicit task. For the community participants this task-orientation is secondary, if important at all, rather the emphasis is on group processes that actually foster and support the expression of affect over against intellect and ways of being together over against accomplishing tasks. Hence, the issue of leadership for Old Growth is less about skills and styles and more about exploring ways of fostering communion, safety, and vulnerability.

In this regard, the communitarian work group solutions proffered by Fromm, which focus on relieving the oppression of patriarchal and authoritarian regimes in the political and economic spheres, are of limited use for understanding the inter-subjective dynamics of a small community group like Old Growth. In fact, with the reign of positivistic, rational and behavioral approaches to management still firmly entrenched, Fromm's solutions have essentially been co-opted by the techno-industrial complex in ways that may actually reinforce

the social trauma of oppression and colonization, instead of restoring and liberating human capacities. We will delve further into this phenomenon in the next chapter.

Another offshoot of the social aspects of Freudian theory, the work of Wilfred Bion (1961), may be more applicable to the group process aspects of Old Growth, for it takes into account the dualistic nature of groups, with their conscious focus on task and their unconscious “basic assumptions” and resistances regarding figures of authority. From his work with small therapeutic groups inside a mental institution, Bion identified the basic principles of group interaction that fostered a whole industry of healing and personal growth organizations, the most famous of which are Alcoholics Anonymous, the Tavistock groups, T-groups, the Esalen and Omega centers for group process, and more recently, the community-building work of M. Scott Peck.

Bion was an early advocate of applying psychoanalytic theory to group process. He discovered a phenomenon he called the “group mentality”, in which the group itself seemed to take on a personality—a collective emotional quality—that evoked many of the characteristics of an individual, including both conscious and unconscious components. By modulating and varying his level of interjection, interference and interaction as leader of the group, and thus, somewhat superficially creating “leaderless” situations, he was able to discern the basic container--the collective mental activity-- that gets formed by different groups of people under different contexts and circumstances. Much like a developing child goes through a range of conflictual scenarios with mother,

father, and other authority figures as part of his/her normal development process, so too, Bion discovered, a group undergoes a development process by working through primitive emotional states—fears, envy, hostility, magical fantasies—that emerge, for the most part, as unconscious responses to the behavior and personality of the authority figure. Only by overcoming basic assumptions about the leader, the other members, and the group as a whole, does the group entity "mature", moving beyond frustration and boredom towards responsibility for its own success or failure as a "work group"; that is, a healthy, cooperative, growth-oriented community. (Bion, 1961, p. 165)

What is interesting about Bion's work, much like in Jung's theory where the responsibility for shadow work begins within each individual, Bion takes the onus back from Fromm's cultural and societal prescriptions, and puts the responsibility for the health of the group back on to the group and the individuals within it. Bion's work demonstrates the rudimentary steps in the birth of a culture, and it is therefore an essential piece in the puzzle of the circular dynamic between group process, community formation and individuation.

In more recent studies of group process, which are still based essentially around Bion's work, overlaid with systems-oriented theories enumerated by Kurt Lewin, David Jenkins and others (which tend to reinforce the idea of a group as a rational entity), Yvonne Agazarian and Richard Peters (1981), have developed a roadmap for group development and evolution that may be applicable for communities in formation, like Old Growth. In their work, Agazarian and Peters distinguish what Bion termed the "group mentality" as the "invisible group", while

the individuals within the group, when operating as separate and decisive entities, form the “visible” group. This distinction is particularly useful for interpretive reflections around the Old Growth community-in-action because it supports the depth psychological notion of unconscious, “unknown”—or at the very least not-yet-known—undercurrents of affect and behavior existing beneath the rational exterior of the group’s interactions, as well as pointing to Bion’s idea that the group itself takes on a psychological identity, almost as if their were an elusive, phantom member—some theorists call this “the establishment”—present whenever the group meets.

Agazarian and Peters expand Bion’s theories of task-avoidance or “basic assumptions” and offer a six-step process of group evolution that they believe exemplifies the typical route that leaders and groups follow in their efforts to become mature, flexible, and sustainable. What is important about this developmental path for my purposes, is that the “invisible group” moves through a variety of stages in its progress towards becoming a “flexible work culture”, and most, if not all of these stages involve working through the anxieties, frustrations, and unconscious effects—and affects—brought up by the variable permutations of authority:

Both Freud’s observations [of groups] and the revision of Bion’s basic assumption groups into developmental phases supports our own observations that the primary concern in groups in the initial phases is the response to authority, whether that authority be the person leading the group, or the rules that represent the “authority” of socialization, and the second concern that surfaces only when some compromise is reached with the authority is concern with peer relationships. (p. 125)

With this in mind, given our goal of elaborating and deepening our understanding of the leadership issues that the participants spoke about, it may be particularly useful to juxtapose the trajectory of Old Growth against Agazarian and Peter's six developmental stages: 1. dependence: flight; 2. counterdependence: fight; 3. power: authority issues; 4. overpersonal enchantment; 5. counterpersonal enchantment; 6. interdependence: work. (p. 132)

However, one caveat is in order even before we start down this path: the methodological bias held by Agazarian and Peters—as well as most schools of psychology for that matter—is that “developmental processes” are by their very essence always linear. My experience with Old Growth tends to contradict this position, for at least in this instance, the six stages seem to be more accurately manifest as circular or concentric. Perhaps a through line of linear development does exist underneath—I suppose we should hope so—yet, in actuality the phenomena described in these stages seem to pop up over and over again, in a group dynamic more akin to the springboard motion of progress and regress, as opposed to a linear progression where stage two leaves behind stage one and so on until the group simply “culminates” in the ecstasy of stage six, as if that were possible. I can not help but ponder how the myth of “development”, as held in the vision of psychological researchers, may tend to oversimplify the results of their laboratory experiments: groups, like Old Growth, appear to be much more messy and chaotic in the real world.

This caveat notwithstanding, let us now map the six stages of group process as devised by Agazarian and Peters against the experiences and themes expressed in the conversations with Old Growth participants. In the first stage, the invisible group is in formation and the unconscious attitude of members will be dependence upon the leader(s) or upon abstract fantasies about what the group “ought” or “should” be doing, otherwise known as “flight”:

The theme of the flight phase is that all will be well if only no one rocks the boat, and the basic assumption of the flight phase is that the benevolent leader will somehow rescue the group and each and every one of its members. The dynamic force is that of dependence and the wish is for conformity...Typical of this phase is the emphasis on rules and regulations and proper behavior...an outside “authority”, personified by “the rules”, is relied upon to maintain the status quo. (p. 133)

It seems to me that this kind of group functioning shows up continuously in Old Growth whenever the topic of discussion turns to Tom and Flame. There is a lingering yet ever-present hint of anxiety, hope, and resentment in the conversation when participants are asked how they feel about Tom and Flame’s leadership: some participants “wish” for Tom and Flame to continue to provide ongoing leadership and direction for the group as it becomes a community; others resist and actually “wish” that Tom and Flame would disappear, so “we can do it ourselves”. Even Tom and Flame have winced at the emotional reactivity they seem to engender in offering to lead the group, even at a distance. Yet, as founders of the community, they too equivocate about their own role: calling forth each member to “be a leader”, while at the same time “wishing” that they would be “better utilized” by the group.

In a sense, the group dynamic seems to reflect a circular path of forward and backward movement between stage one and stage two—counterdependence: fight.

Dependence behavior results in compliant followership of the leader's wishes (real or imagined). Aggressive dependence is the behavior that induces the conformity of other members to the leader's imagined or real leadership, and counterdependence is the behavior of non-conformity or rebellion against the leader's real or imagined rules. The common theme in dependence and counterdependence is that the inferred wish of the leader is the reference point around which group process revolves. (p. 135)

It is interesting to see how this idea of “wishes”—truly fantasies of desire for the object-fulfillment of the leader—shows up in the fight-flight reactions of Old Growth participants. Clearly, the circular dynamic of desiring to be led and resisting it at the same time is reminiscent of childhood dilemmas we all navigate through our developmental engagement and dis-engagement with parental authority. In this sense, no one has improved upon Bion's basic notion that group process is analogous to childhood developmental processes.

We can see the unconscious affect of dependence and counterdependence being played out by Larry, when he actively resists participating in Tom and Flame workshops after doing so for several years—“now that we have the community, I don't need them”—and Katie, who is “waiting for them to come up with something really new and big before looking to them as teachers again”. Clearly, Tom and Flame, who may not be aware of their own unconscious wishes for power, influence, to be needed, etc. are in a difficult place vis a vis the community in formation. For, on the one hand, they

appear as the community's greatest benefactors, receiving gratitude when the group is "behaving" according to "rules" set in motion by Tom and Flame themselves—expressing gratitude, forgiveness, compassion, and self-responsibility—and on the other hand, the community is quick to take unconscious swipes at them—to knock them off their pedestal of omnipotence and power. It is a complex dance.

Likewise, in the onset of stage three, we can begin to see the emotional burden of leadership start to shift on to other members of the community, namely Judy, myself, and Morgan. Stage three is represented by the group's move into an overt appropriation or resistance to whomever is in a position of power at any given moment. The first sign of this shift to a higher level conversation around authority issues is the entrance on the scene of an indistinct, or at least unnamed, "they". In the first stages, which keep coming up over and over in Old Growth dynamics, perhaps because the leadership role of Tom and Flame remains undetermined at this point, the group's attention focuses specifically on them as obvious figures of authority, whereas in stage three the group begins to face the challenging dynamic of leadership emerging from within.

Those that "break ranks" with the minions, and step into power positions, no matter how good their intentions, become a separate category for discussion, approbation and ridicule—becoming a "them". These suffering souls then become subject to all manner of ambivalent and anxious emotional responses, as other participants grapple with the loss of group equilibrium—and of Tom and

Flame as parental figures— while, for the first time, the participants are forced to consider the leadership potential of their peers and themselves. The shifting sands of group mobility during this phase usually show up in unconscious “pairing behavior”, in which participants form alliances—there is strength in numbers—and start to fantasize about great things that will occur under the newly established authority (however fleeting).

This phenomenon has occurred within Old Growth on a regular basis, for as the emotional ties to Tom and Flame have been slowly released, individuals like Judy and Morgan—and to a certain extent myself—have taken up the gauntlet of authority. Pairs and triads have formed in allegiance to Judy, who has at various times been treated as a newly found “savior”—a replacement for Tom and Flame—but she always resists taking on this projection, stepping out of the limelight until the group moves on to someone else.

In a sense, Katie’s story of her rise and fall and rise again as a leader in the community is a great example of this third stage of group development in action: her work of individuation—working through her unconscious projections and coming to terms with her own power—is a reflection of the group’s engagement with different figures of authority, their subsequent rebellion—remember Dennis and Larry’s trashing of Katie’s group encounter—and finally, acceptance. In fact, in Katie’s willingness to listen to Judy’s powerful insights, she was “submitting” to Judy’s authority, and Judy did not hesitate to take it on, all in service of individual and ultimately—with Katie’s formal ascension as an accepted figure of authority in the group—community development.

In stage three then, we witness the blossoming of adolescent behavior—the push for autonomy, rebellion, resistance, and self-aggrandizement—that accompanies the group as it shifts the lens on authority from an outward to an inward sense of itself as a community:

Resolution of any instance of the power struggle that exists in the authority issue must, by its very nature, be a major victory for the group in an ongoing process, which, in and of itself, never comes to an end...The authority issue centers around the issues of power and influence, of outer-directedness versus inner-directedness, of separation and individuation at the level of adolescence, of separation from fusion at the level of infancy. Each time a group works through a crisis in the authority issue, the potential for work on separation and individuation is increased. This work is usually done in two distinct and successive sub-phases, enchantment and disenchantment.
(p. 141)

Agazarian and Peters view stages four and five, as they state above, as ways in which stage three issues of authority are “acted out” by the group. Stage four, which they call *overpersonal enchantment* is organized around the group’s experience of mastery and independence. In this stage, the group in general, and the individual members in particular, feel potent, resourceful, accomplished, and triumphant. It is represented by a time of good fellowship and group cohesion, which has shown up repeatedly in Old Growth scenarios: in evening programs at Judy’s home, at the retreat in the Adirondacks, even in my home during the group dialogue sessions, just to name a few.

However, the compensatory dynamic of *counterpersonal disenchantment*, stage five, lurks just around the corner at all of these events. In fact, it is the overt energy required to keep this counter-reaction at bay—the energy of denial—that Agazarian and Peters believe ensures that it will eventually raise its

ugly head. The issue in this conflictual dynamic is the group's attachment to the pleasures of intimacy and belonging—a sense of “oneness”—and the requisite squelching of individuality that is necessary to maintain those feelings. When the experience of oneness reigns, the experience of “me-ness” must be denied. Likewise, a parallel enchantment and disenchantment process occurs in the affective response of leaders to their own newly emergent leadership roles: when one becomes a leader it feels powerful and empowering, but soon you realize that you cannot also be a follower (e.g. cannot relax and let someone else do the decision-making), which suddenly feels like a significant loss of autonomy and fusion—that delicious feeling of “being just like all the others”. (Agazarian & Peters, p. 142)

In organizational consultant Diane Hatcher Cano's work based on Bion's legacy (in Talamo, Borgogno & Merciai, 1998), we get a deeper interpretation of this reciprocal experience of “oneness” and “me-ness”, which she considers the foundational dynamic of a workgroup that has built some sense of ongoing cohesion and trust, but that still faces nagging questions of purpose, future work, leadership and sustainability. Her theory in this regard, as an adjunct to the road map of Agazarian and Peters, seems particularly relevant here, for it appears to accurately describe the phase in which the Old Growth community has been stuck throughout the time of this research project. Here is how Cano describes the phenomenon:

I think of it as a *ba grouping (baG)*, tending to arise in response to situations where the formation, reformulation, or dissolution of a group is in question; a basic assumption in which Oneness and Me-ness function

alternately and indifferently...one where fantasies of total union or total independence take the place of achieving realistic interdependence [stage six]...And why [does this happen]? Whether it appeared in the form of a fantasy of seamless union or of a fantasy of self-sufficient individualism, this “something else” pattern often seemed to serve the group as a whole in avoiding (or as an unconscious preliminary to?) dealing with the great stress and practical difficulty of conscious, rational, wrestling with the formation, reformulation, or dissolution of an actual group of anxious, struggling individuals. (p. 93)

This description of the extremes of “total union” and “total independence” reflects the quixotic and unpredictable emotional qualities that have been evident at recent community events, such as Jan’s wedding—an experience for the community of celebratory bliss and union—and a sustaining council meeting—where the tone was far from unified, Old Growth appearing instead in the guise of a whiny group of individuals who have “too much to do in our own lives” to worry about the community. In an additional example of this counter-intuitive and paradoxical dynamic, Judy and I had shared our feelings of disappointment and disillusionment at the possible dissolution of the community only days before the Adirondack retreat—due to the seemingly unending struggle we encountered just trying to move the group logistically and emotionally towards the big event. Our concurrent despair as beleaguered leaders was then followed by the most powerful experience of communion ever experienced by the community (complete with a feeling of “oneness” that we both acknowledged carried the feeling-tone of a miracle) without the strong facilitation skills of Tom and Flame. It is enlightening to view this seemingly paradoxical dynamic in psychoanalytic terms as a form of collective denial and avoidance, because it does seem to ring true, given the extreme tenor—both

good and bad—of the emotional qualities of recent Old Growth events, that a new inter-psychic threshold has been reached. We seem to have arrived at the doorstep of stage six, only to find that the door is locked.

The next phase, or the sixth step in the development of the group, is described by Agazarian and Peters, following Bion's "work group", as *interdependence: work*. Here the fruits of the labor of maturity and self-responsibility supposedly pay off, culminating in a flexible and mature group dynamic, where the individuals are able to work through issues of authority, power, and regressed behavior—movements back to fight/flight stances brought on by recurring anxieties. However, in the case of Old Growth's potential ascension to stage six, we seem to have hit a roadblock, to be caught up in a continuous, circular detour through stages four and five. Once again, I sense a paradox: the members of Old Growth, surely unlike most of the patients in therapy groups that these writers are studying, come to the game already willing and able to reflect introspectively, to work through conflicts and navigate the vicissitudes of leadership and authority with a great deal of conscious awareness and maturity. So why should the "invisible group" remain stuck in a stage four-five dynamism, which, if Cano is correct—and I suspect she is—reflects a sense of collective denial, a group culture of avoidance that overlays what may very well be a "visible group" of highly developed individuals?

For the answer—or at least a potent suggestion—I turn back to Bion's basic thematic position with regard to a group's shift from unconscious operation

within the confines of basic assumptions—as outlined above—to a highly reflexive modality of collaboration and cooperation:

The ability to suffer one's pain allows for the emergence of depressive organization, with its capacity for reparation, gratitude, and love of differentiated others. In *Experiences in Groups*, Bion emphasized the dialectic relationship between the basic-assumption group, steeped in non-reflective instinctive reactivity of its members, and the work group created through the use of the developed capacities of its members for differentiated cooperative behavior...which then coheres into a more depressive organization. (Skolnick, M. in Talamo et. al., p. 71)

What is required, according to Bion, is for the group to take up the “depressive position”, that is to let go of its infantile fantasies of oceanic holding (maternal bliss) and benign paternalism (fatherly love). Based on Melanie Klein's object relations perspective on individual development, the essential process that the group must undergo is similar to that necessary leap a child must take in recognizing the “reality” of its parents as separate and needy and far from perfect providers. What the invisible group has been avoiding is the experience of collective grief and mourning of the loss of the ultimate fantasy, of the community itself as savior.

We can glean the nascent awakening to this phase of group development in the grief ritual discussed earlier: Judy and I, and perhaps a few unknown others, were moved into this place of symbolic mourning for the “ideal community” that will never come to fruition, despite our best efforts at molding and nurturing it. Yet, the entire group has yet to face this inevitable loss and they may in fact rather let the whole thing disintegrate than go into the fire of despair and disappointment that might erupt with the release of deeply

entrenched, unconscious fantasies of the community as redeemer. Given the cultural context of fear and anxiety—and terror, especially in the New York region—that has enjoined the community participants to bond in the first place, it is no small undertaking to move the entire group into this realistic, if less than ideal, level of expanded consciousness. It was Bion, who in fact, described this aspect of individual and group development as facing the reality of “indigestible elements” of collective trauma that must, in order for the group to remain intact, be kept “unknown”.

The use of the term “indigestible” is taken from the sphere of the organism, but Bion uses it metaphorically rather than concretely...It seems that just as in the life of a person, whose past holds substances that are too difficult to digest, so, too, in society, in the life of a people [or in a group], there may have been historical processes that have not been digested, and for that reason it is impossible to learn any lessons from them...they remain frightening and painful and are therefore outside the scope of the collective public thought. (Biran, H. in Talamo et. al., p.99)

In effect, we have another example of the issues addressed in the previous chapter, where the inability to let go and mourn the idealized picture of the community may, in fact, become the barrier to the community’s ability to flourish in the future. Perhaps, the leadership group will create an opportunity to expand the freshly acquired skills of the grief ritual into a full-fledge initiatory rite of some sort—whereby the idealized “state of Old Growth” can be released and mourned, and a flexible work group can be born. To put it another way; perhaps one day, the needy “One” and the demanding “I” will drop arms and fold into a dynamic “We”. Time will tell.

The state of leadership within Old Growth, to date, remains undifferentiated and unclear, although the ambiguity has been covered over to a certain extent by the oligarchic rise of a fiefdom of five individuals, who have nominated themselves as temporary collective authority. Yet, the call from Judy, and from Tom and Flame, for “everyone to become a leader” has not yet been heard. In fact, it is not clear at all that participants really want to become a “work group” in a Bion-ian sense, for the conundrum of the healing community is that it can never be fully healed itself—taking up the “depressive position” of normalcy—for it might thereby lose its very reason for existence. We have heard this “complaint” before—in Katie’s frustration with AA and Judy and Pat’s refusal to label the Old Growth as a healing community—yet the paradox remains if we carry the logic to its endgame: we all become leaders only when the need for follower-ship has ended.

Psychoanalyst Chris Oakley, in his recent book, *What is a Group?* (1999), brings us right up to date with the seemingly impossible leadership challenge facing Old Growth: it seems that leaving some aspect of the group process in the collective unconscious—comfortably floating in the group’s dream or fictional story of itself—is essential if the community is to remain successful at doing the work of individual and group individuation. For we can never fully grasp the nature of inter-subjectivity or inter-psychic space, nor can we fully know the “other” or claim any true knowledge of “the group”. Rather, in the moment-by-moment dialectic of even the most sophisticated community enterprise, someone will take a power position and turn the mirror of projection or reflection

on another or on him/herself and the regressive cycle of stage four and five work will be, if only for a moment, re-activated:

Any group or community is inevitably vexed by the problem of our ultimate inability to gain access to the “other”. The “other” is always alien, irreducible, and incomplete, and therefore unknowable as a whole...Perhaps what is communal—the common ground that is to be shared with others—is precisely this recognition that we are never self-transparent, never complete, nor even wholly bound to our own cultural context, for we are always to some extent out of sync with it...Thus, a communality may be built upon realization that there will always be that which eludes our grasp, and that it is in the overlap of these multiple absences that a possibility of a meeting can arise. (p. 70)

Sustainability

In light of the above, if we turn specifically now to the subject of sustainability, we begin to see that the idea of a community as “sustainable” is suffused with its own particular and specious assumptions around infallibility, “success” and “failure”. At the end of the day, the manifestation of a truly leaderful workgroup, in the Bion-ian sense, would very likely “work” itself right out of existence, perhaps suffusing the successful leadership qualities of its members back into the society-at-large, in a concentric step towards broader and deeper liberation within the human community. This phenomenon, if it were to take place, would surely look like failure to those with a traditional, western mindset, where success is predicated on linear, upward “growth” and cycles of birth and death are either ignored or denied.

Hence, when looking at the sustainability of Old Growth through a depth psychological lens, we would be wise to keep in mind the admonition of Jung—that individuation is never “achieved”, wholeness is never attained—and Bion—

that groups never fully “mature” so long as some aspect of collective memory remains “indigestible”. In effect, the evolution of Old Growth as an entity is likely to always be in flux—in some precarious state of dissolution and cohesion—no matter how long it endures or how large it becomes. With this in mind, we can quickly ascertain how other healing and support communities have solved the mystery of leadership and sustainability: mostly by securing either a strong leader role—thus keeping the participants in stages one and two in perpetuity— or by sharing leadership within a formidable structure of strong principles and clear role definitions—thus keeping the community stuck in stages four and five, much like Old Growth (but for differing reasons). A third alternative, which is a variation in some sense of the first above, since there is usually a strong leader/facilitator involved throughout, is to build and manifest community “experiences”, but not to foster sustainability at all: community workshops and retreats fall into this category.

In the first situation, which I would argue is the leadership dynamic engaged in all forms of group therapy no matter how mature and workgroup-like (there is always an identifiable therapist(s) in leadership role), a good example of how this therapeutic use of community themes has evolved since Bion can be seen in the work of psychotherapist and addiction-recovery specialist Michael Picucci. Picucci’s work (1998), which he calls “authentic process therapy”, explicitly engages community-based healing principles and practices in workshops and ongoing dialogue groups aimed at reclaiming emotional, spiritual, and sexual wholeness. Many of the values and principles that underlie

the Old Growth community are similar to those stated by Picucci in the community orientation of his workshop and group sessions. Under the rubric of “shared intentionality”, he identifies ten specific intentions or principles that form the foundation on which community-based healing processes are conducted:

1. To create and commit to a “healing community”;
2. To identify and acknowledge needs;
3. To pierce through personal isolation;
4. To acknowledge resistance;
5. To disarm primary defenses in the community setting;
6. To create group rituals and projects;
7. To “mirror” with peers;
8. To identify and acknowledge transference;
9. To learn about “reality checks” and “checking in”;
10. To experiment with “community” support and participation outside the group. (p. 45)

Clearly, there are many items on this list that neatly overlap with the values of the Old Growth community, with one glaring exception: there is to be no shared leadership. It seems that even though this work represents an advanced use of dialogical, ritual and mirroring techniques for group process, much like in Old Growth, the issue of authority is consciously—or unconsciously—skirted, the reins of power held tight by one or two individuals, as “trained” facilitators. In this sense, the communities here are sustained much the same as group therapy is sustained, whereby the group may grow and develop and even approach “work group” status, but so long as it still operates under the shadow of a particular aegis of authority, it will likely remain in a perpetual cycle of dependence and independence.

Likewise, the support group dynamics of Alcoholics Anonymous and its offshoots have demonstrated a high degree of sustainability and expandability over their short span of existence by keeping issues of power and authority off the radar screen for the most part, maintaining a homeostatic dynamism

between stages one and two. In thirty years or so, AA has grown to comprise thousands of community-based healing centers and groups all across the U.S. and throughout the Western world. In contrast to the community-based approaches of group therapy or “authentic process therapy”, AA is structured as an all-volunteer group, with some semblance and commitment to principles of shared leadership. It is not hierarchical in the same way that group therapy or community-based healing formats rely on a sole leader for facilitation, instead the role of leader rotates among volunteers and, depending upon the level of “seniority” within a particular community group, everyone is welcome to “lead” a meeting.

What is interesting and unique about the AA format is that it seems held together, not by strong leadership but rather by what might be considered “dogmatic” principles: the twelve steps. It is a highly structured, even rigidified approach to community-based healing, where the practice of dialogue is circumscribed and enveloped within a closely held, almost secretive “program” that in many ways resembles a church liturgy. In fact, with its heavy emphasis upon Christian principles, AA does carry the aura of a church or religious community. It is an unusual hybrid community situation, in which a fluid and flexible community format—of volunteering, one-on-one support (in the form of a “sponsor”), dialogue, and story telling—enables participants to grieve, witness each other, and be witnessed in their personal testimony, which is profoundly healing and recuperative for those afflicted with drug and alcohol addictions.

However, as an intentional community it is not a collaborative workgroup by any measure, nor does it, in fact foster that goal. Since its principles and values are not open for inquiry—they have been proven successful and therefore should not be questioned (the very definition of dogmatic by most accounts)—the voluntary and changing dynamic of authority figures, by itself, does not hoist the group beyond the cycle of Agazarian and Peters' stages four and five. AA's dependence upon the "program" does seem to keep its members stuck in a cycle of enchantment and disenchantment—remember the divergent reactions to the AA experiences of Katie and Hugh—, yet it may also be responsible for its huge success and sustainability (learned, surely, from the best: the Church).

In contrast, Old Growth's "program" seems identifiable only by its general opposition to programs, even though it does share common attributes of volunteerism, dialogical and spiritual practices, and a commitment to shared leadership (even if only so far in a subset of the community). So what can the community glean from the practices of these support and recovery vehicles that employ many, if not all, of the same themes and values as Old Growth? Before addressing this question, I want to briefly examine one more example of a community-based group process, one that may provide the closest model to what Old Growth is attempting to foster and sustain: Scott Peck's Foundation for Community Encouragement.

The work of M. Scott Peck (1987), in taking Bion's theories and putting them to work in his Foundation for Community Encouragement, represents a

twenty year experiment in developing, testing and fostering “best practices” for building intentional community. His work has taken an impressive step in the direction towards a real-life recurrent manifestation of a stage six workgroup, and in fact, there are a number of similarities to be found in Peck's approach to community building and in the evolution of Old Growth as an intentional community in formation. Both are formed for the purpose of exploring and nurturing the community experience itself, ostensibly not following a prescriptive healing program or agenda, both are open—or at least ostensibly welcoming—to individuals from across all bands of the social strata, both are designed as opportunities for healing through dialogue, ritual, experiencing and witnessing vulnerability, and both operate, for the most part, as experiments in shared leadership. Peck’s remarks on the leader role certainly dovetail with the Old Growth group’s discussions on the topic: “to achieve genuine community the designated leader must lead and control as little as possible in order to encourage others to lead. In so doing, she or he must often admit weakness and risk the accusation of failing to lead.” (p. 164)

There are two crucial differences, however. The first, in spite of Peck's sharp criticism of New Age "drive-through enlightenment" (p. 218), is that his community-building workshops are in many ways, just that. They are usually one-time affairs, over a weekend, whereby people can "purchase" the experience of community, bond with a group of perfect strangers, be "processed" through Peck's four stages of community-building (an adaptation of Bion's work), and then go on their way. It is certainly a step in the right direction

towards stage six, but nevertheless, remains fast food for the community-deprived: barely nourishing, certainly not sustainable. Secondly, Peck has adapted Bion's theory into a four stage "program" of sorts, just with four "steps" instead of twelve—1. pseudo-community, 2. chaos, 3. emptiness, 4. community—and like a good empiricist repeating an experiment over time, has designed his workshops to follow through with this methodology in short order (over 36 hours). The theory is great, but the practical limitation is that real life does not always "stick to the program"; human beings are not particularly linear creatures in spite of what the scientists—and psychologists—would like to believe based on laboratory experiments: what happens if the group fails to go through the four stages? What if there is an unforeseen fifth? Where is the freedom, the creativity, the spontaneity to *re-define* community on the fly? Cookie-cutter community, purchased for three hundred dollars over a weekend, is probably not what Peck ultimately wants to promote.

The Old Growth community, similar in goal and values to Peck's foundation, attempts to take the principles of community building one step farther: to keep the community going over time, with members entering and exiting, activities constantly changing, leaderships roles evolving and transforming, and members trying wherever possible to integrate the community into their lives in a sustainable fashion. Ironically, this issue of sustainability is front page news, not only for Old Growth, but for Peck's work as well, since he recently closed down his foundation and stopped offering community-building workshops. Has his attempt to foster healing and transformational community

experiences, in a culture of isolation, failed? Not according to his volunteer board of directors, who all unanimously voted to close down the foundation, supposedly *due to its success*—of breeding community organizers and facilitators all across the country—not because of its failure. (www.fce.com, april, 2003) It seems that there are enough FCE trained community facilitators across the nation now that the foundation has become superfluous, perhaps even an obstacle to innovative and futuristic experiments with more sustainable community formats. Perhaps the trained Peck-ian facilitators are out there nurturing longer term community containers—no longer just over a weekend—and the social phenomenon of convergence is well underway: it may be only a matter of time before Old Growth and an intentional community formed under the aegis of the former FCE collide.

So the question remains for Old Growth: can stage six be far off? Is it possible for the community to release the duality of fusion and dissolution and become a truly leaderful enterprise without taking on the structural baggage of those groups described above? Surely, the work of group and community-based therapies, as well as AA and all of its offshoots, is much needed, humanely altruistic and effective in helping many people in pain; yet, there is nowhere among them a true stage six intentional community. Given these role models, it is surely not obvious that Old Growth will ever arrive at stage six, let alone be sustainable, even if it does succeed in breaking through the glass ceiling of dependence upon leaders and programs, de-territorializing the cultural landscape of patriarchy and hierarchy, and bringing the theory of group process

onto the messy, chaotic, organic playing field of real life. It is nonetheless a potent experiment, prompting a bunch of dedicated New Yorkers to push at the edges of what it means “to gather”, regardless if it succeeds or fails.

Scott Peck’s work on community has surely succeeded beyond his wildest imagination, spawning a best-selling book and a nationwide proliferation of workshop and trainers (continuing the work), and yet, his group has been shut down. So perhaps sustainability is not really the issue after all: it is the work, the risk, and the attempt to fly that counts. As Peck reminds us, just making the ascent is worth the inevitable fall, for the stakes indeed are high:

We know the rules of community; we know the healing effect of community in terms of individual lives...if we could somehow find a way across the bridge of our knowledge, would not these same rules have healing effect upon our world? We human beings have been referred to as social animals. But we are not yet community creatures...we do not yet relate with the inclusivity, realism, self-awareness, vulnerability, commitment, openness, freedom, equality, and love of genuine community...Now it is our task—our essential, central, crucial task—to transform ourselves from mere social creatures into community creatures. It is the only way that human evolution will be able to proceed. (p. 165)

Postmodern Process Theology and Liberation Psychologies
(community as cultural work)

Introduction

In the past three sections of this chapter, I have attempted to focus the interpretive lens fairly narrowly on Old Growth community issues and concerns that were specifically brought out by the participants in the research dialogues, namely themes that plumbed the depths of the rich interplay between the individual and the group—individuation, healing, restoration, leadership and sustainability. By welcoming in to the hermeneutic circle of interpretation the voices of psychoanalytic and Jungian scholars with knowledge, breadth and depth of understanding around these themes, my goal has been to offer insights to support, nurture and strengthen the community container.

To this point, however, we have only skimmed the surface of broader cultural and social issues that emerged throughout the conversations: issues such as “community overload”, the oppressive nature of globalization, loss of localized interconnectedness, hyper-activity and overwork (too much “doing”, not enough “being”), and feelings of isolation fomented by the omnipresent threat of terror. And these, of course, are only the social ills that the participants chose to name explicitly. In this section, I want to shift gears and widen the lens of interpretation to encompass a broader view on the nature and work of the community, continuing to use an array of depth psychological

frames, but this time to explore more deeply the cultural context and the meaning, influence and potential impact Old Growth may have on the local social and political landscape in which it operates. My intuition in this regard, is that the work of intentional communities like Old Growth, although profoundly transformational for the participants, represents in addition a broader form of social activism than the community members may even realize: we are culture workers as well. Working to re-conceptualize, expand and re-configure the borders of the known—that is socially accepted—territory of Western-style organizational forms, the community serves as an agency of liberation and cultural experimentation. In its attempts to discover and create new ways of being together, building bridges across the fear and anxiety that divides people, the community reflects a potential breakthrough to new levels of interdependence, cross-cultural integration and intersubjectivity. In a sense, in a small, localized manner, Peck's call is being answered: we are forging new access routes through the wilderness of belonging.

In this section, I will argue that this phenomenon represents a political act—an unacknowledged yet potent form of social activism. Of course, for me to extrapolate any broad-based social or political ramifications from the work of Old Growth is a high-risk proposition, for not only is there no one monolithic “culture” in which Old Growth operates, there is no consensual voice within the community about its role on the cultural scene. In fact, the participants may very well be resistant to calling themselves “social activists”

or to envisioning the community as an agency of political action, for they have always disavowed—with the exception of Tom and Flame—any providential call to take up arms for social or cultural change. Yet here is where the interpretive frames of depth psychology, with their attendant focus on the unconscious, unrecognized and marginalized aspects of psychological and social development, come to my aid. For just because the participants in this study do not necessarily mark themselves as activists in the typical sense does not mean that their community affiliation does not make a difference or have substantial impact on the broader social network in which they live: every conversation about Old Growth—in the beauty parlor, in the grocery store, or in the long lines at Wal-Mart—touches someone with intrigue and possibility, reverberating out into the world. As the grounding for the methodology on which this research project rests, we know from Gadamer, Ricoeur, and others, that it is *conversation*—humans telling their story in word, text, and deed—that creates, and transforms, the world.

Now I do not purport to take up this potentially charged theme of social activism—arguing that our community work is also cultural work—with the same urgent necessity for outward action—the “for the sake of what” requirement—expressed by Tom and Flame, rather I want to consider the possibility that by its very existence—and the values, practices, and leadership qualities that it pursues—Old Growth represents, in effect, a subtle, perhaps even subversive, form of social activism: it is a grassroots manifestation of cultural transformation in action. To aid me in framing and

deepening this interpretation of the community, I want to bring into the hermeneutic fold a multiplicity of depth psychological voices that includes the following: 1. The spiritual perspective of Charles Ascher's Jungian-oriented process theology; 2. The perspective of "liberation psychology" as defined in the work of Mary Watkins and Helene Shulman Lorenz; 3. The deconstructionist paradigm (he would probably prefer "de-literalizing") of "seeing through" prescribed by James Hillman. My goal here is to utilize these wide-angle frames of reference, to turn the inward focus of Old Growth outward for a time, to support the community in re-visioning itself as a cultural phenomenon, to see if perhaps the theme of restoration, as brought forth by the group participants, might be applied to the broader community in which it exists.

Process Theology

I choose to begin this exploration of the cultural implications of the community endeavor by peering through what will perhaps be the least "activist" theoretical lens: process theology. Yet, there are two reasons for using the work of Charles Ascher (1993) as my starting point here: 1. His theory of God/Ultimate Reality as multiple, creative and communitarian provides a direct link between the spirituality espoused by Old Growth community participants and postmodern depth psychology, and 2. He reintroduces, with sincerity, profundity, and clarity, a "concept" typically banished from academic discourse in psychology and dismissed from high-

brow cultural contexts, but which has direct applicability and potency for the participants in Old Growth: the concept of love.

My aim here is to utilize the work of Ascher and other postmodern views on spiritual practice to build a bridge between the grounding principles and actions of Old Growth participants and the broader cultural milieu of New York and American suburbia. Now you might ask: why spirituality? Surely, there are other more obvious cultural attributes that ground the community in its cultural landscape. Yet, herein lies the difficulty, for unlike most community undertakings that have their roots in a cultural context—music lovers groups, theatergoers and supporters, artist/writer's groups, ethnic enclaves, women's dialogue circles, even neighborhood watch groups—Old Growth participants are not bound by ethnic, artistic, or other aesthetic linkages. In fact, they would probably say that their interest in Old Growth is partly in response to the fragmentation and overwhelm they experience in a multi-cultural cosmopolitan area where all of the above—and more—abound.

Many of the participants do, in fact, participate in any number of additional community activities around the arts, eastern philosophical practices (Siddha Yoga, Buddhist meditation), men's and women's groups, not to mention business and networking groups. So, despite what scholars like Robert Putnam (2000) see as the disintegration of community in America, Old Growth is not a response to a lack: New York City and its environs offer a surfeit of extremely active, vocal and vibrant community groups. Yet,

somehow this plethora of community opportunities does not prevent—and may in fact motivate—an ongoing interest in Old Growth. Why is that?

I suggest that the principle desire under-girding the participants' membership in Old Growth, aside from the healing and growth opportunities discussed at length earlier, is the intentional focus on exploring, from a spiritual perspective, the meaning and value of community itself. And this kind of open-ended, creative, task-less form of community is rare on the cultural scene in an environment where accomplishing tasks—even in artistic (writing, composing, performing) and ethnic (e.g. parades, celebrations of ethnicity, etc.) communities—is the primary focus of most groups. Old Growth, with its attendant focus on exploring “ways of being” and “ways of relating” is different, perhaps less than—or more. It is, at the very least, an experimental form of spirituality—an exploration of transpersonal and spiritual ideas and themes—in which art, ethnicity, play, and support practices are all tossed together and creatively and spontaneously fused. This kind of multitudinous community project is not readily available in most other community settings, where the guru's teachings, the principles, program, and liturgy have already been written. As a general rule, Old Growth participants are not interested in “consuming” any externally designed form of worship, ritual, or celebration—with the exception that they are open to various “teachings” and teachers, having “followed” (I use this term very loosely, as they would expect me to) Tom and Flame, and brought in Malidoma Some, Kathleen Calabrese, and a wide range of others over time.

As the reader may recall, the research participants all generally shared a genuine disaffection with their traditional religious upbringings and had a yearning for a form of spiritual practice that was trans-traditional, non-dogmatic, and directly linked to the individual. Now as we noted earlier, in an individualistic cultural context like upper-middle class, Caucasian America, this subtext raises the potential danger of New Age appropriations of Jungian and other quasi-religious (e.g. Native American) and Eastern forms of spirituality, which can culminate in extreme forms of narcissism, neo-colonialism and grandiosity. Yet, this “direct transcendence” approach to God is not what Old Growth is really about (most Old Growth’ers are acutely aware of the gimmicky and ego-centric feel of New Age spirituality), it is instead the relational, communal essence of spirit—and spiritual practice—that keeps Old Growth participants humble, grounded, and growing in a confluence of the numinous with the expansive nature of human consciousness. This dialogical approach to spirituality, which was born of conversations and work with Tom and Flame, is highly reminiscent of Jung’s approach to God, with a postmodern twist. Hence, if we look to the examine the theoretical bridge that connects Old Growth’s approach to spiritual concerns with the broader collective, we see that the community is, perhaps unwittingly, forging an innovative hybrid of Jungian spirituality and process thinking that I suggest may be best described as post-Jungian process theology.

Process philosophy is a relatively new addition to the Western lineage of metaphysical philosophies, being less than a century old, whose most well-

known proponent is Alfred North Whitehead. Originally brought out in response to the extreme dualistic views of logical positivism and scientific rationalism, process thinking can trace its routes back to the Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, whose famous dictum, “you cannot step in to the same river twice”, heralded an ontological shift in perspective, from “being” as static and unified, to “becoming”, where all is in flux, that has come in and out of vogue in Western philosophical circles many times over the centuries.

In its modern theological guise, process thinking takes the traditional Judeo-Christian idea of God as a separate and distinct entity—out there—with which humans yearn to connect but never can (at least in this life) due to his position as transcendent, and brings it down to earth, where the Godhead is not an entity at all, but rather a creative process that is ineluctably intertwined—humanity, nature, heaven and earth are all divinity in motion—with its own creation. In this move away from the duality and mechanistic perspective of scientific rationalism, which requires the world be devoid of meaning or divinity in and of itself, Whitehead’s process philosophy dovetails nicely with Jung’s belief in the inter-penetrability of psychic energy—divine energy, soul energy—between humans and nature, nature and the cosmos. In effect, the work of process thinking confirms metaphysically what Jung, in spite of his empirical bias, intuited throughout his work: that the human and the divine are interwoven.

This rejection of the reductionistic materialism of later modernity is not accomplished, however, by a return to the dualism of early modernity. Both men [Jung and Whitehead] suggest that ultimate stuff of the

world, called “energy” by Jung and “creativity” by Whitehead, is the source equally of what we ordinarily call the “physical” and the “mental”. Everything from electrons to the human psyche, embodies this creative energy. Something analogous to human experience must be present, then, in the entities studied by physics: modernity’s mechanistic, anti-animistic doctrine of nature is rejected. (Griffin, 1989, p. 8)

In Ascher’s work as a post-Jungian psychotherapist, he takes this theme of God as process, God as always “becoming”—Whitehead’s “creativity principle” –and applies it to the process of individuation and spiritual yearning in his patients. What he comes to realize is that all acts of transformation seem to have three unvarying components: they are creative, inspired by spontaneous acts of the imagination; they are relational, always involving the dynamic interplay between self and other; and, they are born of a flow of experiences—discrete moments of embodied sensation, noticings, remarks, images—that never ceases and is always in motion:

An alternative imaging, following process thought, is that *what is absolute is relatedness*. A process perspective God...may be envisioned as continuously relating to all that is occurring in the universe...what is experienced as numinous is not a self or God image that is independent, fixed, unrelated and exercising external power over the world, but the capacity for relatedness...[and] creativity results from the inter-relatedness of all existence including God’s relatedness to the world. According to Whitehead’s vision, God, “is not *before* all creation, but *with* all creation.” (Ascher, p. 78, 85) {italics author}

Were these writings accessible to the majority of Old Growth participants, it is highly likely that they would find them fundamentally in alignment with unspoken spiritual principles that ground the community. Most of the participants long to heal their alienated relationship with the unreachable, dead, and distant Godhead of their cultural conditioning, and Old Growth, as

an un-circumscribed, permeable communal vessel, provides a means for experimenting with new modalities, expressions and images of God through the same avenues as Ascher describes here.

When Judy speaks about her longing to “meditate together because it is so much more powerful than meditating alone”, or Julie speaks of “loving the experience of looking into each other’s eyes—I see God there”, we get bits and pieces of an experience of what Jung called “the numinous” that are a direct result of the communal process of relationship. There is little emphasis in the community upon liturgical paraphernalia—incense, ceremony, icons, or bibles—rather the participants are content to nurture the spontaneous connection with what is typically called “spirit” through the unpredictable and creative experience of “watching what happens” in those “in-between moments” (Pat’s words) of intimacy and conversation.

In classical Jungian thought, the process of individuation involves the emergence, through the integration of unconscious material into consciousness, of the “Self”, represented archetypally as a universal, psychic pattern of wholeness that manifests in the pull towards self-realization. Jung believed that the process whereby the Self evolves, reflects the ultimate interconnectedness between man and God—and that the act of surrender necessary for man to experience the divine, must of necessity be accompanied by a ‘defeat of the ego’. Yet, it is in this act of subjugation of the ego where the Old Growth participants and the postmodern approach to Jungian individuation of Ascher, and others, takes a participatory twist, for we

have come to realize that the separation of Self and ego is a false-duality: one cannot really individuate without the other, just as “I” cannot be fully realized without “you”.

When Tom and Flame discuss the distinction between ego and spirit (in the language of the community they speak of “spirit” rather than “God” or “Self”), they make the point that the relationship does not have to be adversarial: one needs both. The themes that get tossed around in community conversation are more typically about the “humbling of ego” and the “awakening of spirit”, which can occur, it would seem, most readily in the dance of relatedness, partnership, and collaboration. Let me share a specific example: in the most chaotic moments of the creativity workshop, when the egos of all concerned were boiling over with feelings of separation, loss of control, and frustration, Julie simply asked that we sit in a circle, in silence, look directly into each other’s eyes for a few moments, and breathe. In this simple, off-the-cuff shift of relational modality, from isolation to connection, witnessing, and vulnerability, we all noticed the energy in the room change: something unexplainable happened, and in a short few moments, we became humbled, respectful and playful once again. As Julie succinctly put it: “spirit entered and took up the dance with our ego-selves”.

It is in moments like these, which are fairly common in the community, that a truly communal process of individuation is activated, a process Ascher has called, “commundivuation”: “What this shift to communal consciousness suggests is the transformation of the clinical Jungian idea of

individuation into what I call commundivuation. The stress is irrevocably put on the interrelatedness of our existence...” (p. 77) Herein we can glean the crucial step that David Tacey calls for to ensure that any cultural appropriation and assimilation of Jungian precepts be undertaken with humility, hard work, and a recognition, not of the ego as divine in and of itself, but of *the participation* of human beings in the divinity of the inner and outer worlds. I suggest that in cultivating this participatory relationship with the divine, as opposed to cooptation of the Godhead in heroic fashion, the community participants are experimenting with a new level of communal consciousness: an incipient vision of self, spirit, ego, and other as moving in parallel, without hierarchy, rather with humility and gratitude for the dance, not aggrandizement over self or other. We seem to be moving in the direction that Ascher describes: “I propose a communitarian process self as an alternative to the classical God image...Theologically, God is viewed, not as an isolated entity, but rather as soul of the universe involved with a world...This means...every aim of God will be toward that which builds up the richness of community, and the structure of temporal redemption will be and must be essentially communal...” (p. 77) Or, as Judy puts it, “what matters to me is that we are sharing in life’s story together—births, marriages, deaths, and mourning together—otherwise, what is the point, what is true community for if not to give us meaning, to help us access spirit...”

In this context, the second aspect of Ascher’s process theology that dovetails nicely with the consciously engaged spiritual practices (even if they

are not often spoken of in this way—they are conscious, not marginalized or hidden) of Old Growth, is his invocation of the agency of love:

Ultimate Reality/God is supremely responsive love...[however] love is not all powerful, not static, nor is it evoked as a cure-all for whatever ails us. The extreme of this is the frequent language that we *ought* to love others. Love cannot be divorced from feelings and interpersonal contexts where other feelings such as anger, hate, jealousy, enable love-to-be. *Love may be precisely an enabling of others to be in the complexity of their individual and relational feelings.* (p. 95) {italics mine}

This view of love as the glue that holds the circle of community together, strikes me as quite similar to Morgan’s description of Old Growth during the group dialogue: “it is only partly about acceptance and safety, because what is also important is the expanded definition of love that I experience here...which is about being really invested and committed to the spiritual growth of another person”. In the willingness of Old Growth participants to “come out of the closet”, so to speak, and reveal their yearning for love, affection, caring and nurturance—to own their sense of isolation and loss of traditional religious and spiritual homes—illuminates a profound shift in the focus of self-other dynamics, away from the separate, subjective, ego-based individualism that pervades the broader collective over towards a relational, inter-subjective imaginal field of relatedness and vulnerability. It is love, in this case, that opens up the community circle, connects self to other, and welcomes back the experience of spirit, as *numinous*, healing, restorative—transformative—through a wide range of activities, from the simple to the complex: cooking together, dancing together, meditating together,

intellectually sparring together, creating art, poetry, and ritual together. As Tom and Flame put it at the outset of this project: “The community process takes therapy out in to the world”.

Now, as I stated at the outset of this chapter, my interpretive goal here is to ascertain what cultural and wider societal implications may be gleaned from the tiny footprints of Old Growth’s communal experiment, and I started with the spiritual practices of the community for they seem to best exemplify the providential shift, the “participatory turn” that has accompanied the religious impulse partly responsible for the community’s formation. By itself, this exploration of spirituality as a relational, communal, creative and spontaneous event is unusual within the Western cultural landscape: even strongly community-based Judeo-Christian churches do not rely necessarily upon the community aspects of the religious experience as a foundational precept of their spirituality. In most cases, the sense of community that people garner from their religious affiliation is secondary to their distinctly linear connection to God—as separate—through the divinatory intervention of a minister, guru, priest or rabbi. Ironically, many Americans today, it seems to me, when asked about their church attendance or religious experience, will note the importance of the community aspects as essential, perhaps key, to their participation. Yet, the fundamental shift has yet to take place in most cases, whereby the community itself becomes the conduit to spirit; spirit is born in community, expressed through community, and reinforced by community. Were this shift to occur, then the hierarchical structure, the

patriarchal traditions, and the rigidified rituals would all dissolve, and in their place would emerge co-creative, spontaneous and loving acts of spiritual communion.

The process view of God, which aligns perfectly with the perspective of Old Growth participants as being in a divine dance with spirit, represents an agency of healing—of religious alienation and disillusionment—for the community, yet it also points towards a communitarian way of being that, as Ascher puts it—“has important implications for psychology and more broadly for education and our life together. These social, communal imaginings become worthy of cultivation and attention. I find such a vision critical to our survival as well as to the possibilities for our common life.” (p. 96) Likewise, transpersonal theorist Jorge Ferrer (2002), in his monumental re-assessment of the Western perennialist traditions of spirituality, considers this “participatory turn” to be the fundamental shift required to break down the seemingly intractable divisions between culturally circumscribed and myopic paths to God. Only by de-constructing the impermeable walls of dogma that separate religious vocations, and reconstructing more permeable and porous “webs of inclusion” that acknowledge and respect the fundamental interrelationship between self, other, and the divine, can social organizations hope to re-invigorate the religious impulse of society in a way that proves liberating and empowering:

...the validity of spiritual knowledge does not rest in its accurate matching with any pre-given content, but in the quality of selfless awareness disclosed and expressed in perception, thinking, feeling,

and action...Grounds to decide the comparative and relative value of different spiritual truths can be sought, for example, not in a prearranged hierarchy of spiritual insights or by matching spiritual claims against a ready-made spiritual reality, but by assessing their emancipatory power for self and world, both intra- and interreligiously. By the emancipatory power of spiritual truths I mean their capability to free individuals, communities, and cultures from gross and subtle forms of narcissism, egocentrism, and self-centeredness. (p. 168)

In a sense, the community's unstructured, spontaneous, un-tethered and co-creative approach to spirituality, represents a powerful social statement, a dis-engagement with fundamentalist colonization of the divine for political, religious or economic purposes, and a return to love.

I now want to turn to the work of Helene Shulman Lorenz and Mary Watkins, and others in the emerging field of liberation psychology, who call the experimental nature of dialogical, communal spiritual practices like those of Old Growth, "utopian imaginings". These writers invoke the personal, social and cultural questions that, though unspoken in the normative activities of Old Growth, underpin the fantasies, dreams, and reflections that envelop the closing circle at every community event:

Can we begin to imagine the norm of both individual and community life as evolving interconnected systems of multiple elements that are potentially chaotic and discordant, that is, not as necessarily moving toward order, unity, reason, progress or enlightenment? Can we envision alternating rhythms of seeing-through and utopic imagining as liberatory to both psyche and culture? Can we bear to acknowledge the complete interdependence of psyche and culture, while working to differentiate ourselves from identifications with collective norms and ideas? (2001, p. 15)

Liberation Psychology

When Ferrer calls for a participatory transpersonal spirituality that is emancipatory and empowering for individuals, communities, and cultures, he is asking us to remember the fundamental overlapping, the interpenetration, of these social strata of human existence: no individual, community or culture exists in isolation. Likewise, we will remember that Jung's definition of individuation called for greater engagement with the social and communal body not isolation. Jung, as I discussed at length in the first chapter of these reflections, was always acutely aware of the paradox inherent in his call for individual realization in the midst of the potentially numbing and soul-crushing hierarchies of state and society, for he knew that only through empowerment of the individual—with the expansion of consciousness—would the larger social collective ultimately be transformed: “Once the individual is thus secured in himself, there is some guarantee that the organized accumulation of individuals in the State...will result in the formation no longer of an anonymous mass, but of a *conscious community*. The indispensable condition for this is conscious freedom of choice and individual decision-making...” (Jung, in Slattery & Corbett, eds. 2000, p. 208) {italics mine}

So it is with the emergent field of liberation psychology, born of the confluence of educational theory, depth psychology, and social activism of writers like Paolo Freire (1970) and Ignacio Martin-Baro (1994), that we can enrich our interpretive understanding of communities like Old Growth as markers for a postmodern revisioning of the Western notion of the “separate

self". By "postmodernism" in this context, I am specifically referring to a "way of seeing" the world in which we focus our interpretive lens in order to tease out dualisms, splitting mechanisms, ideological positions and all forms of so-called "objectivity" that serve to demarcate or reinforce the schism between self and other, breaking through the universalistic modes of both ontological and epistemological thinking that undergird Western materialism and rationalism. Postmodernism approaches the self as a composite figuration born of multiplicity, a socially constructed being that is integrally related to, influenced by and mediated through the social and cultural worlds in which it operates. Nancy Hollander, in her book on liberation psychology in Latin America, *Love in a Time of Hate* (1997) sums up this perspective perfectly:

The postmodern impulse, which pervades scholarly research and popular culture alike, stresses the need to expose the assumptions within all systems of thought and to reject the tendencies of all theoretical models to construct exclusive bipolar categories (bourgeoisie/working class, male/female, white/black, oppressor/oppressed) because conceptualizing the world in this way overlooks the shared and overlapping attributes that move fluidly back and forth between such categories. Postmodernism focuses on knowing the social context that determines any individual narrative of reality and encourages a critical awareness of the kaleidoscope of perspectives and points of view that together constitute the multiplicity of human experience. (p.214)

Liberation psychology is a postmodern extension of depth psychology in which the traditional Western emphasis upon intra-psychic development is placed within the broader context of social and cultural spheres of influence that either foster empowerment or shut it down. Within a liberation psychological perspective, the individual is no longer viewed as an isolated

entity, rather each person is inextricably linked back through concentric circles of social and cultural strata, from family to community to culture, history, and society, out of which the very notion of individuality has evolved. Now to venture down this liberatory path of interconnectedness, we must begin, however, by returning to the implications, this time cultural, of the normative notion, in Western culture at least, of the “individualistic self” that I have examined through various interpretive lenses in earlier chapters.

Psychologist and writer Mary Watkins (1992) centers her reflections on the socially constructed idea of “the self”, and then moves outward from there:

The first step is to understand cultural determinants of the individualistic self. We are all being called upon to become conscious of our cultural constructions of the self. As we attempt to climb out of our identification with the prevalent paradigm of the self and peruse with fresh eyes the multiplicity of ways of being a self present in other cultures, subcultures, and historical periods, we may be struck by the oddness of our former assumptions about selfhood...To become conscious of this paradox requires us to expand our views beyond the dominant reductionistic interpretations of mother-child interaction...To enlarge our interpretive frame we need to see past the parents' actions and behavior to the cultural myths of self and reality that not only shape but contort our experience. (p. 55-56)

What Watkins is pointing at here has profound implications for intentional community endeavors, for she is reminding us that traditional psychological interpretations of health and development of the individual have relied too heavily on a circle of influence that extends no farther than mother and father. We are, in reality, all products of a much broader sphere of cultural conditioning, and if we do not begin to listen to our pain and suffering—“to hear the culture in it”—in ways that include the distillation of

inner and outer influences, we are clearly missing the forest for the trees. Liberation psychology asks us to widen the scope of our view and attention on symptom and suffering, such that we begin to link the healing of an individual to the healing of the culture—which thus “fuels the transformation of society in general”. (Watkins, p. 56)

The obvious question that emerges, in the context laid out above, is how are we to make this shift—to widen our scope of view—given that the separate self figuration, *is itself*, to a certain extent, culturally enabled and we are firmly embedded in it. Even psychotherapy, exalted as the modern pathway to expanded consciousness, is inextricably tied—its economic lifeline at least—to the exploration of the patient’s inner world. Interestingly enough, long before Old Growth blossomed organically, out of workshops ostensibly designed for individualistic growth and healing, into a container for belonging and communal restoration, Brazilian educator and social activist Paulo Freire, had already written extensively on what he considered to be the necessary method and praxis for people to emerge from behind the individualistic smoke screen of mass culture: group work and dialogue. In his work with impoverished and marginalized communities in South America, where the state apparatus had, for the most part, obliterated all possibility of individual or collective autonomy, Freire noticed that in dialogical group interventions, people began to hear, see—to be witnessed (as in Old Growth)—and experience the true suffering and pain being perpetrated on them by the regimes of oppression in which they lived. Through the two-stage mechanism

that he described as “conscientization” (becoming aware) and “annunciation” (imagining possibilities), individuals, would awaken to the cultural trance that kept them locked in a cycle of separation and despair, in which they would ascribe to themselves blame for their suffering and deprivation, unable, until they became empowered within a group context of safety and deep listening, to see the cultural hegemony of power and domination that kept them blind to their own stance: “Humans, because they are aware of themselves and thus of the world—because they are conscious beings—exist in a dialectical relationship between that which determines their limits and their own freedom...as they locate the seat of their decisions in themselves and in their relationship with the world and others, people overcome the situations which limit them: the ‘limit-situations’. (Freire, 1970, p. 80) So the seeds of liberation, of freedom from the culture-spread dis-eases of oppression, isolation and deprivation, are sown through a process of “coming to awareness and then into action” that is most assiduously cultivated through group and dialogical processes—much like in Old Growth.

Liberation psychology values the coming to awareness through dialogue within a group, because it is in the group that we can most clearly see that much of what we have thought of as individual fate, virtue, failure, and suffering is shared beyond the individual. Such insight links individuals so that they can work together to address the cultural conditions that impact their well-being. In the group it is easier to see how the culture has gotten into our hearts and minds, into our intimate relationships –as partner, as son/daughter, parent, and friend (Watkins, in Slattery & Corbett, eds., 2000, p. 214)

Given this philosophical grounding in the principles and praxis of liberation psychology, we should be able now to examine the deeper, perhaps

unacknowledged elements of social suffering that may have provoked the collective response that formed Old Growth. On the surface, we can point back to comments made by the participants with regard to their sense of living in a culture of isolation. They spoke about the proliferation of technological gadgets that promote so-called “connection” but seem to foster distance instead, feelings of overwhelm brought on by globalization and the endless push to consume, as well as feelings of anxiety in the face of real or imagined threats of terror. To a certain extent, we could say that Old Growth participants are “awake” to their cultural and global oppressors—and in the acts of ritual, dialogue and witnessing that I discussed earlier they are learning to mourn and grieve their pain.

Yet, liberation psychology is not just about healing social and individual suffering brought about by cultural domination, its theoretical ground is also based on a deeply felt political impulse, a stand for empowerment and freedom. Of course, in the case of Old Growth, in which most of the participants, as educated members of the dominant racial and economic classes that derive great benefit from the state system of capitalism and consumption—all are fairly affluent by American standards and extremely well off by global standards—the question must be posed: freedom from what?

To answer this question requires that I skip back for a moment to an earlier chapter and restate a fundamental tenet of collective trauma: that we choose to forget what we cannot remember. Here is where we once again enlist depth psychology to uncover the hidden storehouses of suffering

brought on by the buried, colonized, and denied aspects of our cultural conditioning, with its attendant focus on what has been marginalized, made unconscious, or—held in a form of cultural trance—may not-yet-be-known. In the case of Old Growth participants, the work of community has evoked a certain level of conscious awareness of the nature of oppression and deprivation—pain and suffering—brought on by a culture of excess—urban, driven, material, technological, intellectual—that feels all-encompassing. At the same time, there exists a relative complacency with regard to our sense of prosperity, entitlement, and individual freedom—but at what cost? Everyone in Old Growth is acutely aware of what is going on in the world: extreme poverty, environmental degradation, torture and violent crime, endless spread of famine and malnutrition, over-population, the devastation of epidemic diseases like HIV-Aids and SARS, not to mention the breakdown of the human community into isolated, terrorized and frightened centers of isolation. Helene Shulman Lorenz and Mary Watkins put it this way:

...the bonds of community gradually loosen leaving people alienated and isolated in private spaces. That we are seeing children shoot their teachers and classmates at schools, participate in an epidemic of legal and illegal drug and alcohol use, run away from home in increasing numbers, and develop a rising suicide rate are evidence that something is amiss in the communal body. In this situation we have all become victims of a dissolving public space that offers us few invitations to speak and participate in community building apart from our assigned and silencing roles as spectators and shoppers. (2002, p. 11)

How do we in the Old Growth community reconcile our relative autonomy and wealth in a world with so much pain and suffering? The

answer, as we lower the periscope of interpretation, diving below the surface issues that the participants in this study spoke about, is that to a certain extent, we do not. To see beyond our comfortable inner sanctum of privilege, to peer into the deeper truth of all the suffering and tragedy that occurs in order to bring about and maintain what is enjoyed by only a tiny minority of the planet's citizens, well, this is just too egregiously painful even for well-intentioned, well-educated members of the dominant class to "remember", let alone discuss openly. Lorenz and Watkins again:

As carriers of internal colonization, we may have developed the habit of silencing our own and others' suffering, resistances, and creativity when they come into contact with the official mythologies of normalized culture. Many of us have learned all too well what not to say and when not to speak. Carried too far, this split may produce a dissociated sense of a magic interior world where everything is possible, living alongside a harsh outer world where nothing can be altered...sustained dissociation creates a sense of an impoverished and empty interior, yielding a sense of inferiority and alienation. Feelings of impotence and fatalism can become linked with despair, addictions, and violence. (p. 5)

This quote immediately returns me to the memory of feeling silenced in the group dialogue when I tried to pursue the issue of exclusivity, or to the feelings of powerlessness that I experienced when Larry declared, reflecting common feelings in the whole group I'm quite sure, that our discussion of terror was a complete "waste of time". The form of dissociation that Lorenz is describing here is also known as "percepticide", a term coined by Diana Taylor in her study of the military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983) that describes the emotional and intellectual renunciation required of individuals in order to survive the social trauma of murder, violence and mayhem that

included the “disappearing” of untold numbers of people. (Lorenz & Watkins, 2001, p. 4)

“Percepticide” is a form of deep forgetting, in which a whole group of people may renounce their association with atrocities, injustices and tragedies, in order to avoid the danger inherent in speaking the truth. In the case of the U.S. system—the risk, of course, is that the whole system propping up those who benefit the most—including participants in Old Growth—might fall like a house of cards. This cultural and individual amnesia requires a splitting of ego-consciousness, a shutting off of the breath of truth; it is a form of internal colonization that ultimately re-inflicts the very same pain of oppression: what is avoided on the social level is instead carried out by the “internal regime” perpetuating the violence, this time on the self. In the community participants—myself included—I suggest that there are a number of “active cases” of social and cultural dissociation—in which we all collude—whereby the deeper source of suffering is routinely kept at bay (e.g. you will remember how reluctant the participants were to discuss the problematic repercussions of economic advantage) while the social ills that do emerge in the conversations are less controversial or culturally “loaded”. For purposes of this discussion, I want to discuss four examples (with the caveat that my choices are necessarily circumscribed and limited to the cultural afflictions that I, myself, have become aware; I am as “suspect” as anyone else in the community, of committing acts of percepticide with regard to my own

unconscious wounding): 1. percepticide of the present; 2. percepticide of the past; 3. economic insecurity and isolation; 4. cultural and racial homogeneity.

Percepticide of the present. In the first instance, the Old Growth participants might argue that they are quite conscious of the violence, the oppression, the dysfunction and trauma that pervades the social sphere of contemporary American life. In fact, they are quite capable of becoming incensed, enraged, even socially and politically active, especially Tom and Flame in their call for activism on a global level: some join political and social action committees, send off checks to charities, and even work for non-profit organizations, all in the name of social conscience. Yet, in the face of a seemingly endless barrage of nightly news that includes snipers, bombings, homelessness, suicides, drug abuse, homophobic and racial attacks, and so on, the individuals in the community remain, to a certain extent, safe and sound, walled off by the protected surroundings of life in suburbia. The social landscapes where most of the cultural deterioration proliferates are kept mostly at a distance, untouched by middle-class, white suburbs, where the spoils of consumption appear in the guise of huge homes separated by high fences with acres of lawn. Even the city-dwellers in the community, myself included, remain tightly circumscribed in fairly well appointed “apart”ments, safely ensconced in the “right” neighborhoods of Manhattan and Brooklyn, never the Bronx.

Now I am not suggesting that the community members need to pack up and move to the inner city, but I do want to point out how we commit a

form of “percepticide of the present” by distancing our physical and emotional selves from the suffering that surrounds us, compartmentalizing our consciousness of society’s ills into one box of awareness: the intellect. In the dissociative act of living in relative isolation from, but being readily cognizant of, the social disintegration going on all around us, we may soothe our fear, anxiety and sense of powerlessness by being intellectually activist: speaking out about social ills, writing about them, studying them, all the while being sure to live one step removed from them. We only awaken to the folly of this illusion when the suicide or murder or sniper attack occurs right next door—which is becoming more and more common. Only then does the “external regime” infiltrate the protective defenses of the internal regime, connecting us—head to heart—through affect and suffering, to the gaping wound that has been hidden inside all along.

By withdrawing to particular urban and ex-urban enclaves of sameness, we enable an illusion of safety and cohesion that may only be skin-deep. In fact, social theorists (Bellah, et al.1996) have pointed out how the prosperous lifestyle of many mostly Caucasian American suburbs, has grown into a nationwide social phenomenon in which the ideal of community-living has been colonized, split-off into a neighborhood protectorate of sorts that sociologists have defined as a “social enclave”:

Whereas a community attempts to be an inclusive whole, celebrating the interdependence of public and private life and of the different callings of all, lifestyle is fundamentally segmental and celebrates the narcissism of similarity...For this reason, we speak not of lifestyle communities, though they are often called such in contemporary

usage, but of lifestyle enclaves...the contemporary lifestyle enclave is based on a degree of individual choice that largely frees it from traditional ethnic and religious boundaries...many once genuine communities, though still referred to as communities, may well be on their way to becoming lifestyle enclaves...in a period when few of us find a sense of who we are in public participation as citizens, the lifestyle enclave, as fragile and shallow as it often is...fulfills that function for us. (p. 74-75)

The potency of this form of percepticide must not be underestimated, for it calls into question the very existence of Old Growth as a “community” at all. We have to at least be willing to live with the questions: does our upper-middle class urban and suburban lifestyle actually deny us the true experience of community? Is it possible that the community we think we have is but an enclave of privilege, a convenient fiction that actually reinforces the deadness of our culture rather than bringing it to life? No wonder the group chose not to linger on issues of exclusivity and economics—these are deeply challenging questions, in which we would most likely rather “forget what we cannot remember”. Yet the questions persist, and it is in the act of asking—reflecting, dialoguing, looking—not in the declaration of an answer, one way or the other, that freedom is found.

Percepticide of the past. At this point, rather than attempt to answer these questions, I want to delve into the other three cases of percepticide and see how they may further our wanderings into the territory of suffering and the geography of denial, so that, ultimately, we may land in newly imagined landscapes of opportunity. In the second case, “percepticide of the past”, I suggest that the harrowing history of colonialism, slavery, death and

destruction wrought in the name of Western progress, is something that most white Americans, and Old Growth'ers are therefore included, learn to deny and repress from very early on. Our violent history of racism and sexism and homophobia, of all the lives lost supposedly in the name of freedom, of the oppression of children and woman on whose backs (pre-1930's) have grown most of the world's largest corporations, these are the egregious acts of inhumanity in whose wake has emerged the one great superpower of the world, the United States of America.

In some sense, as with the present situation described above, there is an element of awareness in the collective consciousness of Old Growth with regard to this sordid history that we all carry around as ancestral baggage, yet the powers of normalization in which we are all enveloped, are great. We collude with the powers-that-be, in order to maintain a certain numbed distance from the real pain of the untold and unacknowledged suffering wrought in the name of capitalist and religious progress. As Foucault, in his studies of power and institutional legitimacy, points out,

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the social worker judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his achievements. The carceral network, in its compact or disseminated forms with its insertion, distribution, surveillance, observation, has been the greatest support, in modern society, of the normalizing power. (in Lorenz & Watkins, 2002, p. 6)

I want to expand on Foucault's concept of the "carceral network" here, and offer a short digression into another landscape of percepticpde of the

past, namely my own personal history, for the gulag of denial and self-censorship operates on multiple levels, as we shall see. I was born in 1959, and immediately given up for adoption by my nineteen year old, unmarried birth mother. Over the next two years, I spent time in foster placements, awaiting a final adoption that did not come through until I was already two years old. Over the next thirty-five years, I kept the story of my adoption—that I was old enough to walk when I met my adopted parents, that I went up and shook their hands: “hi, mom, who are you?”—a secret, in order to maintain the illusion of “having an all-American family of origin” as was dictated to me when I was seven: “Now that you’re old enough to know the truth, we will tell you, but you must never speak about it.”

Needless to say, this form of externally generated but internally maintained percepticide led to all sorts of dissociation, extreme childhood and adolescent grandiosity and depression. For example, given that I was ‘supposed’ to be descendant from the Hull clan—of Mayflower origin—I remember proudly proclaiming as a teenager, to anyone who would listen, that I was of “royal” puritan lineage, pure blue blood WASP, linked by history to the captain of the U.S. S. Constitution. Only many years later, after much therapy and protracted “discussions” with my adopted mother, did I succeed at “remembering” the falsehoods on which my heritage was based, and begin to explore my real roots. Finally, after forty years of living according to a false, ungrounded, distorted narrative of self, I stitched together the schism within by finding my birth mother and revealing the truth—I am half French,

half Irish, not related to the Puritan history of America in any way, shape, or form—to myself.

In a sense, my own process of conscientization, of coming to grips with my past, is but a microcosm of the false social and cultural histories that we all have buried and kept out of reach for centuries. It was a painful journey, of confrontation with the inner and outer “establishment”—myself, my adopted parents, my birth mother—but the transformative re-configuration of my self-concept, into a wider-angle composite of multiple influences—nature, nurture, and socio-cultural environment—has ultimately released all that pent up energy of rage, denial, and hurt, fostering a fresh, creative spirit—one committed to empowering others on their journey to wholeness. Hence, to grapple with the percepticide of the past, on personal or cultural levels, is a huge undertaking, but it is also the very hallmark of individuation, transformation and the quest for freedom from the tyranny of oppression. In my utopian imaginings, this empowering dynamic is what “conscious community”—as Jung reminds us—is all about.

Economic insecurity and anxiety. In this third instance, where I suggest the issue concerns economic instability and threats to our so-called “way of life”, the Old Growth participants, and myself to a certain extent, commit percepticide on a daily basis, preferring to hold tight to the illusion that economic prosperity is first of all, our right as educated, white-collar professionals, and second, a foundational premise of global capitalism—something that we can count on. Of course, neither of these even

approximates a truth, and so, as the participants demonstrated—and I colluded with minimal resistance—it is better not to explore this topic too deeply. Below the surface of what *is* acknowledged—stress, overwork, pressure to perform—lies the incalculable price that each of us pays for playing the game of denial about our economic insecurity: divorce, alcoholism, cancer, heart disease, depression. I have only to point out the latest musings in the New York Times (June 8, 2003) on the pervasive anxiety and fear that is an instrumental component of that much exalted state polemic “economic growth”, to make good on my claim that our inability to examine the emotional and psychic wounds inflicted on us by the system is one more example of percepticide. We read the headlines, but run from the truth, that our own material success may be killing us:

Economists love maximum efficiency. But people don't. We want market efficiencies to make us rich, but we don't like what an efficient market feels like...There are no “core jobs” anymore. Management has the whip hand. In the name of efficiency, volatility has trickled up to middle management rung and beyond...and resistance is futile. Unable to predict or control the shocks that life administers, we respond to chronic, unrelieved stress [and fear] just as unfortunate rats: muscle atrophy, diminished sex drive, hypertension and all the other ailments that ensue when we shut down all processes except those needed to deal with...danger. This is what leads researchers to predict that 50 years from now the biggest public health problem in the developed world will be depression. (Collingwood, H. p. 44-45)

Harkening back to Eric Fromm's prophetic work from the 1950's, which I discussed briefly in the last chapter, we can now see clearly how the “invisible hand” of authority—in the guise of economic aggregation—ultimately swoops down to crush the very thing it seeks to fortify—the individual. Yet, tiny,

separate and insignificant, a lone self is never to take on the demons of economic growth—especially while enjoying the fruits of the devil—let alone confront the omniscient phantom in any way that might be healing or transformative. It is truly an insidious and insufferable form of percepticide, in the self and in the collective, which we can see most blatantly in the commitment the pharmaceutical companies have made to keeping us complacent and submissive with their latest alchemical elixirs: Anti-depressant medications like Zoloft, Prozac, Solecsa—those “little purple pills”—are all designed to keep us in comfortable denial, asleep at the wheel, and sadly, fifty years after Fromm first made the prediction: still cogs in the machine.

Cultural and racial homogeneity. Finally, I want to plumb a little deeper into one aspect of the cultural and community landscape that is perhaps the most prickly, sensitive and difficult to pull to the surface, for it bears the mark of the suffering and trauma associated with America’s most dismal track record in the field of human development: race relations. Unfortunately, the community is, for the most part, racially homogenous, with the exception of Flame Lutes, who is African-American, and currently two other participants who are of mixed race/Hispanic. The issue of percepticide here is a delicate one, for the community does foster an environment of diversity and invitation; no one actively attempts to advocate or impose exclusivity or to delineate lines of demarcation around who is or should be ‘in’ or ‘out’. Yet, the truth remains: it is pretty much an all-white club. Hence, the question lingers in the

air whenever diversity and openness cross the boundaries of dialogue and enter the circle: does this really pose a problem?

I want to address this concern from two angles, one personal, the other, academic. In the first instance, as a gay Caucasian member of the community, in which there are a small, but noticeable number of other gay and lesbian participants, I can speak from my own experience of the gifts and drawbacks of having the community “bear witness’ to my ‘difference’. Let me illustrate the paradox with an example. I remember a dinner party that I attended in which all the other attendees, except my female companion, were heterosexual, Caucasian married couples. Since I was attending with a single, heterosexual, Caucasian woman, the group looked, on the surface at least, like a typical gathering of straight couples—and we probably behaved in like fashion. Now, about half-way through dinner, one of the men—a community pal but not an intimate friend—turned to me and said, “I love that your gay, Jeff...it is something that I often forget, but it does me good to remember...for it reminds me how we are all unique.” I was struck by his turn of phrase—that he “forgets” that I’m gay—for upon reflection it points to the dualistic and quixotic nature of “forgetting”.

In this case, he was pointing to what I would call a “second-order” level of forgetting, one in which he was able to forget about my difference, in fact sort of playfully dance with remembering and forgetting at will, because he had faced the deeper truth and reconciled himself to seeing me, to witnessing who I really am beneath the labels and the categorization. I received his

words as a backhanded compliment, as a form of welcome and belonging to a reciprocal appreciation of our sameness—as white guys—and difference—as straight and gay. In a sense, this exchange reverberates with just the sort of conscientization that liberation psychologists believe is possible in the act of awakening to, and hearing about, the reality of the marginalized “other” through the practice of conscious listening and dialogue.

Yet, I will argue that this level of consciousness, in which the awareness of difference is so profoundly accepted and integrated by consciousness that it can become transparent—remembered and forgotten at will—is only available to community groups that encompass the kinds of diversity that they have historically, ignored or denied. And herein lies the problem with the Old Growth and the cultural wound of race, for as it fosters a higher level sense of awareness around issues such as male-female, straight-gay, Jewish-Christian, young-old, and so on, the community assumes a false sense of pride around issues of diversity, all the while remaining unconscious to a key fact: the racial divide has yet to be crossed. Unfortunately, fostering dialogue around these other kinds of diversity, as liberating as it may be for those whose voice has long been swept under the normative and hegemonic rug of masculine patriarchy (e.g. it is healing for me to be seen in all my difference and complexity), it is just not enough. These examples, no matter how progressive, are too often utilized by “the establishment”—the group culture in Bion’s sense—to avoid facing the ineluctable truth that Caucasian groups in America like Old Growth are undoubtedly still in denial of their

deep-seated fear, guilt and shame when faced with the African “other” (e.g. is it an ‘accident’ that little or no press or Government attention has been focused on the recent genocide of 3 million Africans in the Congo or the 20 million Aids victims all across continent?), no matter how consciously aware and politically correct they may appear.

Nevertheless, from a liberation psychological perspective, the act of welcoming the unheralded reverberation of marginalized voices from the edges of society, is more important than any one issue, like race, for what matters is that communities take that first step, to engage in opening, speaking and listening to those voices, through dialogue, for then, and only then, like the slow-moving tumble of a line of dominoes, the rest will follow. This expansion of the normative, to include listening to those whose voices have been repressed, is the only way that dominant groups will be able to move through their repressive tendency to shout down difference in the name of “safety” or “comfort”. Watkins, is in fact, wary of employing liberatory techniques in settings where the diversity of voices is tightly circumscribed, for she suggests that this kind of communal boundedness may actually foment isolationism not liberation. It may even deepen alienation, and reinforce a deep-rooted projection of shadow consciousness—a scape-goating mentality in the collective—if “sameness” becomes a cause for celebration (we see this happening all around us, with militant white anarchists, the KKK, the skinheads, and the like):

Those who have enjoyed colonizing situations, often employing silencing techniques (consciously or unconsciously) need a group context where socio-cultural differences are encountered. Such encountering demands that ones' usual stance of speaking and holding power is bracketed, allowing others to speak who bring awareness from the margins. Relying solely on intra-psychic confrontation in an upper-middle class white population isolates the individual from more radical challenge of [the other's] standpoint. (Watkins, in Slattery & Corbett, eds. 2000, p. 215)

Now perhaps we can glean a deeper understanding of why Jan's argument that "exclusivity should not be an issue for Old Growth"—a hearty welcome and self-selection is enough—along with Julie's admonition that "all-white country clubs are still communities, I belonged to one as a little girl..." represent the most dangerous tendencies of the collective—towards uniformity, conformity and exclusivity, under the guise of "community". On the other hand, I also know the individuals who made these statements to be well intentioned, compassionate, and loving souls who carry no gripe with "others" of differing race, religion, or cultural difference, so how do we reconcile the contradiction? Would this country club approach foster the kind of "conscious community"—a healing, transformative vehicle for individual and group growth—for which these individuals really yearn? I doubt it. Something else was at work in these off-the-cuff diversionary tactics: centuries of reciprocal suffering, as victims and perpetrators alike, leaves even the best-intentioned Caucasian in America running for the door, hard pressed to face the dicey geography of racial separation that still configures the present, and wholly unable to "remember", let alone reconcile, the past.

My intention with all of the above, in speaking of these difficult, sensitive, potentially agonizing and antagonizing forms of percepticide, has been to raise the threshold of our awareness, not to provide the community or the reader an excuse to bolster already active mechanisms of guilt or shame; these only reinforce our sense of isolation. No, my goal in plumbing the shadow elements of unconsciousness that seep through, in criticisms, disavowals, disagreements and dismissals of responsibility, even in the loving context the Old Growth endeavor, has been to provide the community—and myself—a felt-sense of the challenge, the impossibility, inherent in any attempt to forge deep community: we will find here no answers to these dilemmas, no easy resolution to the paradoxes of shadow and light, spirit and ego. Only now, perhaps we can recognize that the idea that we may be lost in a “wilderness of belonging” is not just an intellectual turn of phrase, but rather underscores a vast expanse of denial, suffering, and collective wounding in which we are all wandering, for the most part, in the dark. Ultimately, the dialogical approach to community exemplified by the participants in Old Growth, is an attempt to uncover and banish forever what Edward Sampson (1993), in his postmodern investigation of the self, calls “the lie”:

If we examine the conditions of modern life in the West, we would see how much they affirm our mutual dependence and interconnectedness far more than the kind of self-sufficiency and autonomy that characterize the self-contained ideal. Furthermore, if we give close consideration to the devices and technologies of power by which the dominant groups sustain their self-sufficient, self-contained ideal, we would see just how many others have to be held down and in check for

this act to continue without disruption. In other words, we would see not only *the lie* of self-sufficiency and self-containment, but the power that undergirds that lie. (p. 75)

The truth, which the work of Old Growth attempts to make manifest, is that we are all multiple, fragmented shards in a prism of connectivity; in essence, we are all interdependent, and ultimately, one. Herein lies the good news: the praxis of community groups in which the conversational context is broadened to at least touch on sensitive issues of collective trauma, oppression and denial, like those described above, *is in itself disruptive of the normative*—it represents a breaking down of the walls of that metaphorical gulag of hidden power and invisible authority in which we all, unwittingly, participate. In the third space, the space of silence and absence, between the words, where vulnerability, grief, anger, rage, and deep, deep sadness, are allowed to emerge, what Old Growth participants welcome as “spirit”, the walls that falsely separate our private prisons may occasionally tumble down and open to “liminal spaces of communitas” (Lorenz, in Slattery & Corbett, 2000, p. 237).

It is from the edges of these permeable, transitional, borderland spaces where Lorenz’s “utopian imaginings” spring forth; places of creative restoration where the personal, social and political wounds of shame and guilt can be cleansed, and a true experience of human interdependence may be brought to the light of day. So, the agency of participatory and dialogical engagement within self, and between and among as diverse a range of ‘others’ as possible, not only represents a potent tool for healing the

individual, it may as well hold the key to the transformation of society. As Martin-Baro reminds us, the act of becoming conscious of what has been held as “forgotten”, unknown, or simply too frightening, distant and obscure to grasp, is what matters most:

The now well accepted concept of the awakening of critical consciousness joins the psychological dimension of personal consciousness with its social and political dimension, and makes manifest the historical dialectic between knowing and doing, between individual growth and community organization, between personal liberation and social transformation. (1994, p. 18)

In this context, we can see more readily how the act of bringing self to consciousness, specifically within a community setting, becomes a powerful form of political and social activism.

However, an important caveat remains, before we go too far in framing and hanging a portrait of dialogue and group engagement on the wall as a panacea of transformation: the risk of “normative restoration”. (Lorenz & Watkins, 2001, p. 16). In this cautionary postscript, Lorenz points out that there are always two possible outcomes in every step forward into greater consciousness: expansion and contraction. Creative acts of restoration may inevitably lead to new—or return us to old—places of stuckness: “in normative restoration, we cling rigidly to the constructs of the past, ceremonializing them and rejecting all new elements as polluting. Facing an unwanted rupture or social change...we can use the arts of restoration—performance, story-telling, ceremony—to defend against what is new and nearby...”

This darker, regressive outcome in the wake of transformative change represents a warning that Old Growth participants would do well to heed, for even in its short lifespan, alterations of community “traditions” have been known to spawn the unsavory refrain: “I like it the way it was”. In moments of possible dislocation—talk of enrolling newcomers (“that’s a bad idea, how would we control the ‘quality’ of who gets in?”), or rotating to new home spaces (“I’d rather meet at Judy’s, I feel safe there”), or talk of becoming more socially activist (“we’re not ready for that yet”)—it is all too easy for the community to re-trench into spaces of familiarity and comfort, to take the fallback position and avoid the challenge of change.

Likewise, on the individual level, again a microcosm of the larger whole, I want to share my own personal experience with normative restoration and its attendant dangers. In my initial “restorative stance” with regard to finding my birth mother and bringing to consciousness the truth of my familial roots, I held tight, for a few months, to the illusion that I had been born anew: I had the truth now, could forge relationships with my “real” family, and could dispense with the past. Of course, this shift of perspective, however expansive, quickly showed up as denial in a new guise: I may have been “freed” from the past, but I was certainly not free of my adopted family, or its loving, quarrelsome, and complex influence. Fortunately, with the help of my community brothers and sisters, I was able to rapidly re-awaken—which we must all do, again and again—to the evolving truth that I was gaining *an additional family*, not losing the old one. I am, as is everyone, a multitudinous

configuration of adopted, adapted and inherited factors, and given that I attribute terms like “brothers and sisters” in the community with deep meaning as well—they are my “chosen family”—I now recognize that my entire familial and social identity is in *a continuous process* of expansion and integration. As Ascher reminds us: we are all in essence relational, interdependent figurations of “becoming”, never static, never final, never done.

In closing this section on the theoretical implications of liberation psychology, I wanted to share this example of regressive restoration as a segue, taking us first for a quick glance back through the lens of process thinking, and then forward, shifting the view towards the next frame of reference, the work of James Hillman, for it hopefully serves to remind me, the reader, and the community participants, that the formation and dissolution of self—as an identity—like the back and forth evolution and devolution of Old Growth—as an identifiable “community”—is always a work in progress/process. In fact, the key to maintaining a restorative consciousness, it seems to me, is the demonstrated willingness of the individual and of the group to let go and release identities as soon after they are formed as possible. Now this may sound like an insurmountable task, but when Hillman points out that the whole notion of identity is mythic and imaginal—nothing more than a perspective—we will get what we most need in order to keep this whole idea of “identities-in-motion” afloat: a tool for “seeing through”.

Seeing Through

In the evolution of analytical psychology since Jung, there have been many shifting strands of emphasis, most notably, the clinicians' developmental focus on the intra-psychic processes of individuation, the academic extensions of Jung's views on synchronicity and the religious function of the psyche, and finally, the archetypal re-visioning of Jungian psychology with its attention on the importance of symbols and images, not as "things" to be dissected, interpreted, or known in themselves, but rather as experiential agents of transformation. James Hillman (1975, 1983), as a major proponent of this third strand, is largely responsible for the emergent field of archetypal psychology. His many books cover a dizzying array of topics from re-vitalizing Greek mythology to de-bunking metaphysics, yet in all of Hillman's work there is a through line, a passionate commitment to carrying out two parallel agendas: first, re-storing soul as a valid and valuable component of the psychological and cultural landscape, and second, de-literalizing the normative tendency in the Euro-American West of objectifying, reifying, and naming—thus deadening—everything in life that we hold sacred.

Hillman offers us the means to cut through the illusion of objectivity and scientific knowledge, by asking us to ride with him in the chosen vehicle of the soul—*the imagination*—and in so doing provides us tools for the road, so to speak, in the form of "soul-making" and "seeing through". These, I venture to guess, in light of the difficult, painful and subtle work of facing downward into the unconscious chambers where we have been carrying out

the rampage of percepticide, may provide invaluable support to the community as it enters the dark forest of collective memory, trauma and loss and takes up the task of communidivuation (now, as to whether the community participants will ever make friends with this terminology—of course, that remains to be seen).

The term “soul” is fairly common in the lexicon of Old Growth participants; it tends to emerge in places where “spirit” might feel too big, too transcendent or distant from the vulnerability of affect and the intimacy of relationship. It comes up in the poetry of the participants, and it comes up to denote a “soulful” exchange, usually a grounded, emotional experience—sometimes just tiny moments—where a swirling admixture of dark and light affect resolve themselves into what the participants often call “a moment of grace”. Soul is also commonly invoked when the community takes a break from intellectual pursuits and engages in playful, child-like activities—games, creating art, play-acting, dancing—wherever *the imagination* is at work. These are the places of soul. Here is how one community member puts “soul” to use in her poetry:

Community

*Looking out into the world
What I see is you and me
Neighbors in reality
Longing for connection
We are seekers of the soul
Families torn apart by life
Wanting to be whole.
(Pat Colbert)*

It is interesting that even without a particular knowledge base in Hillman's theory regarding the shift from a rational to a poetic basis of mind, the community participants tend to use the language of soul in ways that align perfectly with his perspective. Soul is used typically to describe a particular moment or experience of somatic sensation—an intimate encounter with nature for example, like a rock, a river, a tree—and it is used by participants to describe interior experiences of dream imagery, fantasy, or romantic yearnings: "he sets my soul on fire". Spirit, on the other hand, tends to be used to denote a larger, more holistic—both cerebral and affective—presence that emerges and dances with the collective. These are not easily distinguishable at times, but it is useful to recognize that in either case, experiences deemed soulful or spiritual by the participants usually point to a deepening, broadening, opening of consciousness, a reflexive awareness of the entrance on the scene of some mysterious 'third'—an ineffable presence—that, as Hillman puts it "deepens an event into experience". (1983, p. 25)

The reason that Hillman places such an emphasis upon the reemergence of soul and the faculty of the imagination over against intellect, is that he believes that our normative means of understanding, here in the Euro-centric West, has exalted the rational to the point where we have killed off the soul in ourselves, in nature, and in the world. The soul, along with works of fantasy, play and the imagination, is typically expected to be tossed in the dustbin around age twelve, so that we can take up the weighty Western

need to conceptualize, cauterize and “study” anything even remotely mystical, life-enhancing, or demonic. Pound for pound, the soul has no chance to survive when we accumulate our “adult” means of understanding, using conceptual tools that, for the soul, represent instruments of torture: measurement, calculation, mathematical precision, categorization, and of course, the motherlode: knowledge.

What Hillman is attempting with his archetypal psychological perspective is to re-awaken us to the mythic enterprise that we have accepted as “fact”: “the entire procedure of archetypal psychology is imaginative. Its exposition must be rhetorical and poetic, its reasoning not logical, and its therapeutic aim neither social adaptation nor personalistic individualizing but rather a work in service of restoration of the [individual] to imaginal realities”. (p.12) By invoking the phrase “imaginal realities”, Hillman is pointing us in a direction away from certainty and back towards the lost realms of the imagination, where accumulating “knowledge” becomes less important, and discovering and exploring “meaning” with all its attendant variation and multiplicity comes to the fore.

The soulful perspective that Hillman advocates, what he calls the act of “soul-making”, or psychologizing, refers to a way of being where every act of the imagination, every movement within the collective—serious or playful, intellectual or artful—is taken seriously, and taken lightly, in the exploration, discovery, and deepening of what is to be considered “meaningful”. Hillman offers his critique of our tendency to literalize—to “nail down” our sense of

truth, justice and the American way—in order to empower us to look more deeply and reflexively at the world around us, to see through the myth of scientific knowledge and to welcome back the transformational powers of the imagination:

First there is a psychological moment, a moment of reflection, wonder, puzzlement, initiated by the soul which intervenes and countervails what we are in the midst of doing, hearing, reading, watching. With slow suspicion or sudden insight we move through the apparent to the less apparent. We use metaphors of light—a little flicker, a slow dawning, a lightening flash—as things become obvious and transparent, there seems to grow within it a new darkness, a new question or doubt, requiring a new act of insight penetrating again toward the less apparent. The movement becomes an infinite regress, which does not stop at coherent or elegant answers. The process of psychologizing [seeing through] cannot be brought to a halt at any of the resting places of science or philosophy...it is satisfied only by its own movement of seeing through...it is a process of deepening; moving from data of impersonal events to their personification...it is a process of subjectivizing...[whereby] the phenomenon before us is given a narrative. (1975, p. 140)

This process of “seeing through” or de-literalizing is relevant to the discourse of community in a number of ways, but I want to explore briefly just two of them. First off, in the shift towards the soulful perspective, the baseline, typical activities of the community get re-envisioned, “seen through” and reworked in favor of—as Morgan put it: “ways of being instead of ways of doing”—the emotional, the vulnerable, the slow deep movements of soul. Acts of the imagination come to the fore over against the conventional modes of conceptualizing, thinking, and speaking (e.g. using concepts and words). Thus, the emphasis shifts to experiences like writing poetry, being in nature, body movement focused on the delicacy of somatic sensation (e.g. yoga),

silence, spontaneous play, tuning (e.g. singing without words), painting, journaling, pantomime, sculpting with clay, and so on. Now, of course, as exemplified by the creativity workshop discussed in chapter 3, participants in the community already do all of these things, but they are often viewed as “after-thoughts” to the main event: intentional discourse or dialogue.

In the act of “seeing through”, all the normative activities that we consider transformative, even within the reflexive and flexible container of the community, become suspect: all forms of imaginative discourse and interplay-with-the-world are seen as opportunities for discovery, no mode of engagement supersedes any other, nothing is to be taken more or less seriously. For example, when the community engages in dream interpretation, or tarot reading, or experiences a medium or astrologer, there is a tendency to consider these activities with a certain sense of frivolity, of dismissiveness, as if they are secondary in importance to the “meaningful” act of conversation. Yet, Hillman ask us to see through this bounded and limited view and recognize that what matters is that we explore, discover and deepen our experience of meaning, within each of us as individuals, and among us as a group.

This widening of our interpretive lens to include the marginalized, edgy, messy and unscientific spheres of engagement has two benefits: it recalibrates the balance between intellectual pursuits and soulful pursuits (which is already an act of cultural activism in suburban New York, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not), and it opens the participant up to

experience unforeseen and unimagined means of connection and belonging—to each other, to nature, to the cosmos. It may sound like a slight, simple or sly shift of focus, but it is ultimately a radical disruption of the normative. Indeed, I will suggest here that only by engaging in continuous, imaginative re-invention of the modes of communing—the work of soul—can Old Growth be sure to avoid falling into the deadening trap of the “lifestyle enclave”, where a troupe of like-minded weekenders engage in partying and socializing, often falling victim to addictive behaviors—drinking, overeating and passively numbing out in front of the TV.

The second benefit of this tool of “seeing through” is that it offers an alternative way of imagining the very definition of community itself. Indeed, I have consciously avoided any attempt to define the meaning of “community” in this project for two specific reasons: first, all efforts by the participants to define what is meant by community have ended in failure and been divisive in the extreme; and second, any attempt on my part, as part of this participatory research paradigm, to expound a definition of community, for myself, for the reader, or for the community, no matter how enlivening my intent, is likely to have the opposite effect: I may kill it off.

Now at first glance, it may seem like a symptom of pathology within Old Growth that each time the subject of “defining the community” rears its ugly head, people tend to run in two diametrically opposed directions. Some run away due to the lack of “acceptable” definition—“I don’t want to play unless I know what we are doing here”—and an equal number seem to run in

the other direction—“don’t tie us down with your specific need to define this thing...it’s more freeing to just make it up as we go along”. Reconciliation of these extremes seems untenable, and for the most part, the subject is just kept off the table. Nevertheless, the question always hangs over the communal space like a thundercloud threatening to break.

Perhaps, with the help of Hillman’s mechanism for “seeing through” we can re-frame what appears as dysfunction and see it instead as simply the meandering, quantum particularity of soul: by leaving the butterfly of community un-tethered to any specific tree of knowledge, it is free to flit about, to irritate us with its elusive frolic, and at the same time, to keep us awake, self-conscious and reflexive about what we are up to—it keeps us bouyant. Hillman would remind us that it is crucial for the community to “see through” any image it may have of itself even as a container for healing, growth, transformation or collective individuation; these are useful as *perspectives of interpretation*, but they are not literally true. What really matters, from the vantage point of soul, is that the participants continually seek to deepen the meaning in each instance of being together, not declaring it as this or that “thing” to which we hold tight—as if we could grab a butterfly and keep it alive. Meaning itself must be a process of constant discovery and re-discovery that shows up as a continuous willingness to welcome the new. Perhaps it is no surprise then, that Jung wrote the following after many years of trying to “pin down” the work of psychology, the unconscious, and his own imagination: “Life is crazy and meaningful at once. And when we do not laugh

over the one aspect and speculate about the other, life is exceedingly drab, and everything is reduced to the littlest scale. There is then little sense and little nonsense either. When you come to think about it, nothing has any meaning, for when there was nobody to think, there was nobody to interpret what happened.” (in Miller, 1989, p. 122)

Recently, a participant in the community remarked to me that for her, the composition of the group had not changed much in recent months and was becoming, as she put it, “inbred and boring”. This, ironically, came up at a retreat where two new entrants had found their way “accidentally” into the fold: a mother had brought her six-week old baby, and a participant had brought a new friend, who had never met anyone in the community. For me, meeting these two multi-dimensional beings—situated at each end of the human spectrum—had been transformational; everything about the retreat was different than I had expected, not only, but partly due to their arrival: I rejoiced in the enveloping presence of a new-born in our midst, and reveled in the unique story of this newly minted “member” from out of the blue. So to this unprompted complaint I simply replied, “I believe that the story of this community is always unfolding, never complete, and with the introduction of just these two beings—in the blank slate of a new born or the chiseled relief of a new adult—the story only gets bigger”. I’m not sure that she appreciated this reply, but it did seem to provide her with food for thought; she drifted away, mollified.

Summary

I chose to invite the theoretical voices of process-thinking, liberation psychology and soul into the hermeneutic fold in this chapter, because I was particularly interested in exploring this idea of community as a form of cultural activism, as an expanded social narrative with influence beyond the personal. I wanted to consider the possibility that the tale of Old Growth is an unfinished novel—a spiraling confluence of fiction and non-fiction—that harbors broad social, cultural and political implications. And, with the support of Hillman’s radical revisioning of all of our western modes of being, doing, and thinking—all of our psychologies—I wanted to nurture an expansive, empowering stance on, as archetypal psychologist David Miller puts it: “the meaning of meaning.” (1989, p. 120)

It seems we have come full circle, in a process not unlike Ricoeur’s dynamic process of distanciation and appropriation, pushing Old Growth out to the farthest edges of the cultural and social universe, yet holding on tight to personal moments of intimacy—the moments of soul—as we weave a postmodern narrative of human becoming, that is remade, re-worked, and re-imagined each day. In the final analysis, *community itself is a perspective*; a constantly evolving form of human-world interaction. It dies and is born anew in each moment of gathering.

Reflections on Play, Hermeneutics, and Utopia

Introductory Remarks: Reflections on Method and Structure

By now it has probably become evident to the reader that I have employed a specific structural approach to this research report: beginning with a focus on the participants in the participatory hermeneutics in chapter three—their stories, quotes, personal reflections, and aesthetic imaginings—I have purposely moved outward in concentric circles, initially keeping a fairly narrow focus on individual healing and individuation, then expanding to broader linkages between the individual and the community—collective trauma, dialogue and witnessing, structure and principles of group process, leadership, sustainability—and finally gazing broadly into the cultural, historical, political and economic spheres of influence in which the community lives and breathes. The intention behind this structure has been to employ the “means of understanding” as delineated by Ricoeur and Gadamer, in a circular, dialectical methodological approach that captures the essence of a reciprocal mode of being: starting from the “I”, and moving outward in concentric circles to “you”, to “us”, to “them” and back again, ending with “all”.

My intention has been for the narrative exposition of this research to become a mirror reflection of the community process itself—to be enveloped within it, becoming just one more participant in the unfolding story. As Ricoeur has pointed out, a narrative text takes on a life of its own, its reach extends beyond the sphere of writer and into the life-world of reader, becoming a tool

of interpretation, play, imagination—of soul, if you like—for the receiver as much as the giver. Ultimately, this research is only meaningful and useful if it becomes one more hermeneutic tool—an additional participant with its own unique lens of interpretation—for the community to engage, ponder, dance with and meditate on, for it is only in the place of meeting—text to text, so to speak—where we receive the gift of illumination.

In this final section of interpretive reflections, I want to attempt a sort of double backwards somersault with the narrative, to interweave, in dialogical fashion, some final thoughts on method and praxis, with regard to the agency of community-in-action, and, in parallel, with respect to the endeavor of participatory hermeneutics itself. First, I want to return home to one more close-in aspect of community life, one that is perhaps the most common activity in which we engage but which is typically ignored or devalued in “serious” theoretical circles, the act of play, and consider the possibility, with the assistance of Gadamer’s hermeneutics and another newly emergent extension of depth psychology, imaginal psychology, that *play is a powerful tool for individual and group transformation*. Second, I want to leap back out onto the broader boulevards of interpretive reflection and consider in parallel, the activities of intentional community endeavors like Old Growth and participatory hermeneutic research praxis, for it seems to me, as postmodern, innovative endeavors of cultural exploration, they both signal a transformative shift in the landscape of human interaction and inquiry—a movement that would make the trickster Hermes proud—away from the closed-loop stasis of

the hermeneutic circle towards a more fluid, reflexive and flexible “hermeneutic spiral”.

Gadamer, Imaginal Psychology and Play as Praxis

We can all remember those lazy, hazy days of childhood when the worlds of the imagination and the real flowed into each other, distinctions blurred, time halted. Yet, as the linear days marched forward, the deep reality of these experiences receded, replaced by fantasy TV images, homework, and chores. They became trivialized, seen as fanciful, child-ish flights of the imagination. And soon enough, much too soon, we stood on the threshold of adulthood, glanced backwards longingly, and waved good-bye to “child’s play”. But something profound had been lost. It seems that our souls always feel the reductive pinch when the rich gnosis of play gets demeaned as frivolous, child-like, less.

One of the over-arching myths of our Western rationalist culture is that “work” is serious business, whereas “play” is mere distraction, fun, meaningless, “downtime”. Perhaps, the opposite is true. The Greeks, who had at least three different words for play, understood that play was something much more than just a childhood activity. Their veneration of youth, as seen in the Olympics, was inexorably bound to their belief that the play of the Gods, ever young, was soul-work, joyous and ecstatic, with “real” consequences. Johan Huizinga (1950), in his landmark study of the cultural ethos of play, asks us to look deeper at this universal phenomenon:

Here, then, we have the first main characteristic of play: that is it free, is in fact freedom. A second characteristic is that play is not “ordinary” or “real” life. It is rather a stepping out of “real” life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own. Nevertheless, the consciousness of play being “only a pretense” does not by any means prevent it from proceeding with the utmost seriousness, with an absorption, a devotion that passes into rapture. (in Highwater, 1994, p. 245)

Jamake Highwater (1994), in his book, *Language of Vision:*

Meditations on Myth and Metaphor, reminds us that play is one of those ubiquitous acts that connects us directly back to the animal world, where, at least for mammals, play is universal. Even the most ferocious creatures engage in play, especially in youth but even as adults. (p.244) Our need to rise above the lowly world of creatures, coupled with the ever-present utilitarian ethos that permeates our modern culture, has led to the denigration of playtime as mere distraction, wasteful, without purpose or plan. Nevertheless, even as “serious” adults, we are constantly on the lookout for opportunities to play, and on the community front, in fact, play is usually the first priority. As Jan (one of the participants from the group dialogue) described recently, the balance between work and play is crucial if a community event is likely to succeed: “I come to the community as much to play and relax as to learn and grow. We always need to make room for just plain fun. It may sound strange, but it is in the playful, crazy moments not the deep thinking and talking when I most feel at home. That’s where I get restored.”

Likewise, in Gadamer's reflections (1975) on the hermeneutic significance of artwork and the imagination, he considers humans-at-play to be the most deeply "natural" of all forms of understanding: play is the method by which we "relax", lose our sense of self-conscious awareness—the externalizing, objectifying mode of ego—and rather than determining "meaning", become submerged in it:

Play has a special relationship to what is considered serious...play itself contains its own, even sacred, seriousness. Yet, in playing, all those purposive relations that determine active and caring existence have not simply disappeared, but are curiously suspended...Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play...Here, the primacy of play over the consciousness of the player is fundamentally acknowledged...The structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence. (p.104-105)

I remember, as if it were yesterday, a daylong celebration of play at a community retreat, where the participants decided to go to an outdoor "paintball" club and try their luck at guerilla warfare. It was a great day of fun and frivolity, a chance for the participants, and myself, to don war paint, to apply fake tattoos, to form "gangs of marauders" and to gleefully team up and attack each other like street kids playing cops and robbers. It was also a profound excursion into unpredictable and never before witnessed modes of behavior and exchange, from the surprisingly aggressive and competitive antics of what were "normally" level-headed and compliant participants—most of them, but not all, women—to the hilarious transformation of combatants into tearful clowns whose prideful boasting failed to keep them "alive"—most of these, but not all, men. It was a paradoxical experience—clearly innocent,

meaningless; soulful and meaningful, all at once—in which the participant’s hidden demons and lingering childhood fantasies were allowed, even encouraged, to spring, temporarily, to life.

Afterwards, everyone was exhausted, exhilarated, and changed: we seemed to know each other on a deeper, more profoundly poignant level of intimacy. In the act of bringing our inner warriors to life, in re-making a wooded area over into a battlefield, in forming factions and strategies, and coalitions, using every nook and cranny of the natural setting to create boundaries, hide-outs and “lines of sight”, we constructed an imaginary world. For a time, as Gadamer describes, the play seemed to absorb the players, the community disappeared and in its place rose a landscape of alter egos and shadow figures, where the line between the “character” (actor) and the character (real person) became a blur. In those moments, the agency of transformation—of healing, growth, and individuation—was clearly at work, joining with the players at play.

The game itself, perhaps child’s play on the one hand, represented a deeply profound method of interactive engagement on the other. Gadamer considers the ontological status of play to be intrinsically transformational, for the historically and culturally bounded meaning of “reality” gets broken apart by the transcendental mode of play—we “forget” who we are when immersed in play, and henceforth, something—someone—new is allowed to emerge:

Play itself is a transformation of such a kind that the identity of the player does not continue to exist for anybody...The players no longer exist, only what they are playing...In being presented in play, what *is*

emerges. It produces and brings to light what is otherwise constantly hidden and withdrawn...The being of all play is self-realization, sheer fulfillment...which has a *telos* within itself. (p. 112)

Once recognized, across the playing field of the forest or the imagination—the new entrant on the scene becomes a readily identifiable personage: in the mirror reflection of another we become multiplied, diversified, and grown. This expansion of self through personified fantasy characters and exploration of imaginary realms, has always been a crucial method for childhood development, (I can see myself, under the blanket with a pal, at around age five, him playing the tiger, me playing the bear...it is a fight to the finish as we struggle to claim dominance, yet in the tangle of combat, losing ourselves in the fantasy, we forget the rules of warfare and simply roll into a playful ball, forgetting where the tiger ends and the bear begins...) and yet its power to transform reality—to mold new, overlapping, multitudinous possibilities from the mundane reality of isolation and separation, is no less potent in the adult context.

Within this frame of interpretation, I suggest that play—as perhaps the most potent transformational tool in the toolbox of community—has unfortunately, been the last methodological child to be chosen for the team. In fact, in spite of Gadamer's theoretical musings about the ontological significance of play, depth psychology, with few exceptions like sand tray therapy (which has been employed for the most part with children) has kept play—and the playful—from finding a home in its therapeutic bag of tricks. Only with Hillman's revolutionary work to revise and re-envision the

procedures, principles and praxis of psychology—with the reinsertion of soul/psyche into the mix—has the field of imaginal psychology taken up the banner and proclaimed the transformational power of play.

Imaginal psychology is a relatively recent offshoot of depth psychology in which the work of Jung and Hillman and Henry Corbin has been expanded towards a deeper understanding of the power of the fundamental creation of the psyche: the image. What makes the imaginal approach distinctive is its shift toward acceptance of the imaginal other—as separate and real. Alive, embodied with a “knowing” and a “seeing” not generated by our ego consciousness, but rather autonomous, mysterious, even divine, the image demands that we re-frame our ego stance with regard to what is considered factual or knowable.

If we view the trajectory of depth psychology and then archetypal psychology as moves toward recovery of the individually and culturally dissociated, split off aspects of our selves through the serious investigation of the unconscious, then imaginal psychology asks us to take one further step: to collapse the artificial wall between conscious and unconscious phenomena and the inner/outer worlds of reality. In this context, the imaginal worlds of fantasy and dream-image are not just irruptive aspects of our unconscious self, but rather momentary, fleeting access points to an in-between reality, a place between subject and object, a third space filled with embodied spirit. But to take such a possibility seriously, as Freud and Jung began to do with their work studying dreams, we only have to cross a small threshold to find

ourselves coming full circle, back to childhood ways of knowing, and back to “play”.

With this in mind, I pose the question: can play be a praxis, a methodology for research and study into a lost form of knowing? To answer this question from a depth psychological perspective, it will be necessary to build a historical and conceptual foundation on which play as praxis might stand. To do this, I propose to find “play” a home in the long lineage of playful, imaginative, and quite serious methods employed by depth psychologists back to Freud.

In his desire to discover the etiology of the prevailing neurotic symptoms of his time, Freud invented research methods and undertook the study of phenomena that had heretofore been generally accepted as incidental, childish, accidental: dreams, fantasy, and fairy tales. In speculating that these events represented important irruptions of unconscious and repressed material, and that their symbolic meanings reflected infantile sexual wishes, Freud started the field of depth psychology down the long road of research into the abnormal, the liminal and marginal spaces of consciousness, which we still today typically dismiss as inconsequential or imaginary.

Jung continued to research the workings of the unconscious in search of causal antecedents for neurotic symptoms, but his empirical knife cut a broader and deeper swath through the unconscious. Grounded in his own inner experiences with dream figures and visions—many of which stayed with

him from childhood—Jung took a less reductive perspective on dream and fantasy imagery, positing that this material held direct and affective meaning of its own, that images represented archetypal, primordial patterns of human creativity and potential that emerged from the deep well of the collective unconscious. His approach to the dream image was expansive and mythical in nature; he sought to amplify the dream or fantasy image, to dialogue and engage with the imaginal figures and to interpret their meaning and message through the “feeling-tone” they evoked. His methods of dream amplification and active imagination remain analytical and interpretive, but take a big step towards the phenomenological acceptance of the image as real.

Towards the end of his life, he began to “see through” the artificial lens of objectivity and accept synchronistic outer events as manifestations of a nonspace-time limited objective psyche, and inner figures as alive, embodied, and real. In his method of building totems of stone and crafting paintings and drawings of mandalas from his dreams, he stepped into the world of play as praxis, investigating what always remained for him a *participation mystique* between the inner and outer realms of phenomenal imagery. Bertha Mook (2000), in her writing on the intersection of phenomenology, analytical psychology and play therapy, describes Jung as perhaps depth psychology’s earliest adopter of play as praxis:

In this highly significant period of his life, Jung recalled his turbulent childhood in which he was often plagued by anxiety dreams and frightening daytime visions. He also remembered his childhood passion for play and how it offered him a sanctuary in which he gained some sense of control and mastery. What is most amazing is that

Jung at this time in his adult life returned to his former sanctuary of play in an attempt to recover the creative life he experienced as a child...Recovering play and exploring his own images, dreams and fantasies resulted for Jung in powerful insights and discoveries that grounded his life work. (p.242)

Later, Post-Jungian child analysts would come to base their use of sandtray and other play-oriented therapeutic techniques on the transformational accounts of Jung's own healing journey. The fields of art, theater, and dance therapy can all point to the work of Jung and his understanding of the fantasy and image-making work of the psyche as "the mother of all possibilities" (Jung 1921/71, par. 52), as the foundation stones upon which creativity and healing have been linked.

The methods of James Hillman's archetypal psychology--personifying, psychologizing and pathologizing--further the collapse of the split between the imaginal and the phenomenal by recognizing that when we try to position the images of psyche as figments of the mind or even as phenomenal objects placed in the world for our benefit—as prophecy, or warning—and study, we are, in effect, continuing to take an anthropocentric stance toward the image, our bodies, and each other. The key shift in archetypal methods is towards a *relational attitude* with regard to psychic phenomena: seeing that we are in and of the world of image, that images are both inside and outside of us. We are in psyche; psyche is in us:

We misunderstand the mode of being of these images, the figures in our dreams or the person of our imaginings. We believe these figures are subjectively real when we mean *imaginally* real: the illusion that we made them up, own them, that they are part of us, phantasms. Or, we believe these figures are externally real when we mean *essentially*

real—the illusions of parapsychology and hallucinations. We confuse imaginal with subjective and internal, and we mistake essential for external and objective. (Hillman, 1981, p. 6)

It is especially in Hillman's method of personifying where we can feel the deeply resonant pull of the soul toward recovery of the mult-valent, polytheistic and animated worlds of play, which we take for granted in early childhood. Personifying allows us to bring the world back to life. By giving life back to animal images, for example, we can dialogue with the lions, tigers, and bears of both the real world and the world of dreams (no less real); we can touch, smell, taste, and most importantly, listen in to the world of the "other". In assigning "personhood" to things, images, affects, and behaviors, we even the playing field: our ego no longer holds all the cards. We can walk side-by-side with imaginal beings and step off the plateau of dissecting, measuring, evaluating, judging, whereby all life is snuffed out, including, and perhaps especially, ours.

For Hillman, personifying is not narcissistic child's play, however, and it is not personalizing—not creating characters as mirror images of "me". Instead, personifying is about re-connecting with the 'other' through feeling, opening up the path of the heart to see the pain and suffering and grief of the world, such that we once again come to feel the loss of the kingdom of beauty and life that our technological prowess and denial is suffocating and systematically destroying..."imagining things [as alive, as real] becomes crucial for moving from an abstract, objectified psychology to one that encourages animistic engagement with the world. Personifying allows the

multiplicity of psychic phenomena to be experienced as voices, faces, and names.” (Hillman, 1983, p. 62)

Surely, in the typical, conversational modality of community, the Old Growth participants have minimal propensity to muse on the personification of objects, manmade or otherwise (although it is not lost on the participants that personification is a key component of most advertising strategies, especially for cars!), yet that does not prevent them from falling below the horizon of rational critique in moments of reverie, repose, or poetic pondering. Here is an example in one participant’s *Prayer on the River*:

*Timeless rocks cradle the endless river,
Flowing with God’s energy and music,
My heart hears and opens to receive your gifts,
May my being stand like a rock,
May my spirit flow like the water,
Open to the splendor and simplicity of God.
(J. Marcus)*

Now, as we move in closer to the present along this linear trajectory of depth psychological theory and praxis, we quickly find ourselves closer to home, closing in on Gadamer’s playroom, but for a moment we need to linger in the recent echoes of that shift from archetypal psychology towards the newer and broader imaginal psychology, which grew out of Mary Watkin’s (1981/2000) work with imaginal dialogues and Robert Romanyshyn’s work on the symptoms of technology (1989) and the ways of the heart (2002). These two psychologists take up alongside Hillman by “seeing through”, in the manner of personifying and pathologizing, two distinct phenomena—dream images and dream-like technologies.

Taking the dream images out of the body/mind and, once and for all, placing them firmly *in the world*, Watkins emphasizes the independence, the autonomy, and the numinous reality of dream characters. She seeks to free the image from the confining box called ego/mind, thus re-establishing the imaginal realm as fundamental and relational to us, not created by us. Freed up to operate as agents of relatedness and community, living images release the soul from its intra-psychic prison in the neurological synapses of human consciousness, allowing the self, the soul, and the “other” to regain their natural multiplicity and relatedness to the world. The myth, the Western dream/fantasy of a unified ego, like the omnipresent Hal in “2001—A Space Odyssey”, a dis-embodied voice that encompasses and controls everything and relates to nothing, is dashed.

Romanyshyn then takes the further step of uncovering the dream in which we live our lives, recognizing that myth and dream are one and the same, and that the outer dream of the techno-cyber life is simply a manifestation of the hero’s complex gone awry. By bringing to consciousness the truth that our addiction to technology has resulted in a pestilence of pathological symptoms—addiction, depression, alienation, environmental degradation—he harkens back to Freud, and we witness the collective hysteria writ large. In these examples, we can see how imaginal psychology pushes us out of the dream in our heads, and into the dream of the world, thus collapsing the separation between inner or outer forms of consciousness.

But what of the methods employed here? As we might expect, the methods of Watkins and Romanyshyn take us right up to the edge of the known, socially acceptable, “accredited” forms of study, such that today we may leap off the precipice into a shaky, but perhaps transformational epistemological and ontological borderland space—a liminal landscape where play becomes praxis. Watkins and Romanyshyn’s epistemological stance with regard to the imaginal realm is dialogical; they refuse to place the psychologist outside or inside the “object” to be studied, but rather situate the agency of knowing as side-by-side; we know only through relationship and participation with the “other”.

Imaginal psychology’s means of understanding then is metaphorical and liberatory in essence, freeing up subject and object, image and affect, me and you, to dance in the light of knowing ourselves as mirror reflections of each other: We see in that moment when we are seen; we listen in that moment when we speak; we receive only in that moment when we give.

Through the tears of the heart, we begin to see that knowing is about loving and not about power, and that its practice requires a surrender of oneself to what one wishes to know, a surrender that places oneself in intimate proximity with the desired other, and not at a distance that allows dominance and control. In this way of knowing, we know as we let ourselves be known. Although this way of knowing and being is neither about the empiricism of facts nor the logic of reason, it is a legitimate way of knowing the world and being in it. It is a gnosis familiar to the artist and the lover, the mystic and the poet, childhood and madness. (Romanyshyn, 2002, p. 156.)

Likewise, in the approach that Gadamer employs to understand play as a participatory dialectic, a drama unfolds between a subjective “player” within a

field of imaginative action, and “the play” operates as an objective entity, “a closed world with a phenomenological structure of its own”. He also calls for the transformative act of knowing to emerge through the agency of witnessing, seeing and being seen: meaning—*reality itself*—expands as the player is “played” by the play, in the form of recognition.

The joy of recognition is rather the joy of knowing *more* than is already familiar. In recognition, what we know emerges, as if illuminated, from all the contingent and variable circumstances that condition it; it is grasped in its essence. It is known as something... This applies especially to the kind of recognition that take place in play. This kind of representation leaves behind it everything that is accidental and unessential...the particular being of the actor. He disappears entirely in the recognition of what he is representing. But what is represented...is raised, as it were, to its own validity and truth. (p. 114)

In this collapsed sunbeam of soul-light, any strict adherence to the confined rigors of method, as scientific, as literal, as direct reception of omnipotent knowledge, must be suspect; all forms of knowing become metaphorical, and all manner of conation, visceral, empathic, perhaps conceptual, but not limited to thinking. Grounded in the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, Romanyshyn strives to integrate the body and the psyche into meaningful patterns of human—world relatedness. Existential phenomenology, when seen as an epistemological stance from which Romanyshyn is seeking to “know” the world, hinges on acceptance of the unavoidable truth that all knowledge is contingent, ephemeral. The act of knowing, in this context, becomes a relative, relational notion, like trying to capture water droplets in the fog.

His philosophy (Merleau-Ponty) of ambiguity embraces a continual exploration of the interrelatedness between the known and the lived, or the revealed and the concealed, and as such endorses the poetic and the metaphorical character of human life. Phenomenology also offers a rigorous methodology, which aims to describe the meaning-structures of phenomena as they reveal themselves to consciousness. (Mook, B. in Brooke, ed. , p. 236)

Romanyshyn's delicate and meditative writing, harkening back to the poetic sensibility of Bachelard, sings out for tending to the meandering ways of the heart, to *reverie* as method. Bringing twilight eyes to daylight, Romanyshyn's focus on the imaginal requires that we allow ourselves and our laser-like vision to go-out-of-focus, that we slow to a somnambulistic crawl, and take recess from the over harsh, over bright work-a-day world. His epistemological tree house is a kid's hangout par excellence: the place of the daydream.

The metaphoric mind plays on the border and boundaries of the imaginal, which is neither about things nor thoughts, that world where baboons before dawn are monks in silent prayer, and ripe red roses are the light of the sun made visible as color, texture, and aroma. This imaginal domain is the true realm of the pathetic heart as Corbin asserts, the realm where the Angel of the occasion always dwells. (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.169)

To daydream? To dialogue with spirits and subtle beings and animals who slink through the landscape without a trace, to float with the angels? Is this not the method, the mildness, and the madness, of play?

In this context, I can re-frame the morning, a few years ago near the place and time of the community's birth, when participants in a Tom and Flame workshop found themselves separated, in reverie, along a rocky, swirling river, taking time to reflect, journal, and ponder their relationships,

with each other, with the miracle of nature in which they were enveloped, and with the universe. Unwittingly, they called this “down-time”—a break from the work of play, and the play of work. Yet, out of those slow, meandering moments, in the evocative absence of presence—a mode of being that is unusual for the community: witnessing not each other but the world—, moments that were soothing, calming, fertile grounds for self-reflection, Tom Lutes wrote and later shared the following poem with the group. To my mind, it captures the pure essence of this imaginal, playful, silent yet fully resonant embrace of the daydream. Upon reading and re-reading, distancing and appropriating, as it were, this amazing text, I can see how the practice—*praxis*—of play—in words, in games, in reverie, and dreaming both while awake and asleep—bears the unmistakable mark, however subtle and unnoticeable in the moment, of transformation and healing:

The Shape of Character

*As dawn turns to morning
Clouds mold light into forms
Water whispers turn to contours
And we welcome a new shaping of our own.*

*Watching water sculpt character into rock
Listening to wind shape sound through chimes
We face into that which carves through us
And we hear the truth of our depths.*

*Just as sand dunes take the shape of their wind
So! We become the shape of our beholding
Character is built as inevitably as dawn
When we grow into that which carves us.*

*Always it's the presence that counts
The shape of our character*

*Becomes the quality of our attention,
We are that which we allow to shape us.
(Tom Lutes)*

Imaginal psychology reminds us that there is nothing valid in validity, no proving a proof. Science is child's play and all child's play is science. Play as praxis then, emerges at the frontier of a deep and potent, intellectually rigorous, and yes, logically unassailable lineage of depth psychological methodology. Play as praxis asks us to go all the way, to dive under that blanket and recover our nascent childlike view of the world in its entirety, to take leave of our senses and to utilize them one and all—taste, sight, sound, touch, smell—, to leave no stone unturned, *and* to tap dance on the Philosopher's Stone.

Ricoeur's Social Imaginary and the Hermeneutic Spiral

If we consider Old Growth as metaphor for an incipient shift in the cultural landscape of healing and transformation, as emblematic of an emergent postmodern individual and communal form of therapeutic container, then studies like this one—participatory, dialogical, reflexive—indicate a similar shift in the culture towards communitarian and liberatory frameworks for research and participatory study. Essentially, just as the closed loop, dyadic forms of therapy expand to encompass broader, more open-ended communal and participatory approaches to healing and individuation, I want to suggest, with a playful nod to the praxis described above, that the idea of hermeneutics as a circle, whether seen in terms of interpretation and

understanding (Gadamer), projection and transference (Heidegger, depth psychology), distanciation and appropriation (Ricoeur), needs to be “opened up” with a metaphor more appropriate for this communitarian worldview.

Postmodern modes of inquiry like participatory hermeneutics, if they are to remain true to their destiny, must remain playful, open-ended, expansive and inquisitive; they must never close the doors of inquiry in favor of “reaching an understanding” or “forming an identity”, for these always also signal the closing of the doors of possibility. Hence, if we are to successfully refocus our gaze, away from results, endings, and most importantly, *answers*, in order to peer forward into the frontiers of human understanding, we will need to start speaking, not of a hermeneutic circle, but of a “hermeneutic spiral”.

By now it is probably clear to the reader, as it is surely evident to the participants in Old Growth, whether they have “appropriated” this textual description of life in the community or not, that there is only one, however paradoxical, rule that must be followed in order to keep the community alive: we must never attempt to fully understand, know, or name what we are doing. It seems that once the community endeavor itself becomes categorized, labeled, or “known”, its potency as an agency of transformation quickly dissolves. Once it takes on the ontological status of an identifiable “thing”, which can be studied, interpreted, and dissected; or forms an “establishment”—becoming a ‘church’, a ‘temple’, even simply ‘a center’—the

dance between the subjective and inter-subjective spaces of individual and communal *interpenetration* is over.

In the clutches of the beast known as “the institution”, as Jung eloquently prophesied years ago, the individual no longer “belongs” but is consumed, eaten and swallowed whole. Likewise, the experience of community, once institutionalized, codified, and structured, becomes tasteless, uninviting and stagnant. As Hillman would remind us: it loses its soul. The challenge then, in manifesting communities of liberation and transformation, as with participatory hermeneutics’ attempt to foster multiple pathways to knowledge, is to keep the window open onto the playing field of exploration, expansion, and most-of-all invitation—to the uniqueness of the individual, to the “other”, and to mystery.

Ultimately, in depth psychological terms, the act of “understanding” itself can become a tool of colonization, a way for the ego, individual or collective, to co-opt, circumscribe and kill off the lifeblood of humans-in-action. Otherwise, why would we in the community vacillate so much, be so quixotic and temperamental around the endless process of coming together and falling apart? On some level of consciousness—a place in-between the dream of community as utopia, and the nightmare of community as a prison—we prefer to dance with the organic, moment-to-moment unfolding of community as an “idea” rather than take up hammer and nail or lay the bricks of a building. It seems we would rather wander in the wilderness of belonging

than settle, comfortably, in the living room in front of the TV. Of course, this is only partly true, and herein lays the paradox: we want both.

In Ricoeur's work in critical hermeneutics, we see a parallel theme arise as he explores the paradoxical nature of human imagination. In this view, much like Hillman's and those of imaginal psychologists, the means of understanding between human beings is facilitated through the creation of narrative, of recognizable "texts" that can be interpreted and understood through a cyclical process, as discussed earlier, of distanciation and appropriation. Yet, Ricoeur is also aware of the fact that the process of connection, of communication, and of participation between individuals requires an agency of mediation—what he calls the "social imaginary".

To say that you think as I do, that, like me, you experience pleasure and pain, is to be able to imagine what I would think and experience if I were in your place. This transfer through imagination of my "here" into "there" is the source of what we call "intropathy", empathy which can be in the form of hate as well as love... This criterion, in my opinion, presupposes that individuals as well as collective entities (groups, classes, and nations) are always already related to social reality in a mode other than that of immediate participation, following the figures of non-coincidence, which are, precisely, those of the social imaginary. (1991, p.180-182)

It is through this process of collective imagining that Ricoeur believes humans get trapped, in individual, social, and cultural doom loops—pathological attachments to a "false consciousness" as he calls it—of opposing perspectives on civilization and society, namely ideology versus utopia: "The truth of our condition is that the analogical tie that makes every man my brother is accessible to us only through a certain number of

imaginative practices, among them ideology and utopia.” (p. 181) Ricoeur sees ideology and utopia as polarized social responses to issues of power: the former perpetrated by and through a given figuration of authority, in order to reinforce and self-perpetuate a stance of domination and privilege, the latter representing a rising up from below, a reaction against any and all hegemonic claims of legitimacy and a push towards a fantastic, imagined future that subverts reality in favor of a “view from nowhere”.

What is interesting about Ricoeur’s reflections, with respect to the social imagination and the paradox of community discussed above, is that the “false consciousness” that he speaks about points to the problematic nature of both ideology and utopia when pushed into rigidly, prescribed forms: utopias become “fixations on perfectionist designs, dreams that subordinate reality”, while ideologies are likewise false claims of legitimation, reified, rigid notions of a social ideal, often promulgated in the name of utopia. In a sense, the agency of social imagining, when it lays claim, that is “appropriates”, any social or cultural narrative as utopian or ideological, it is literalizing one end or the other of the pole of possibility, thus rendering it dangerous, oppressive and useless as a means towards individuation, progress, or liberation.

In this way, we can begin to see the danger of all circular views of interpretation, for in the social imaginary of ideology and utopia, completing the circle negates the liberating power of ideals and utopian imaginings: when the loop becomes closed, when an “understanding” is reached, then the trouble begins. Of course, this circular dynamic is mirrored in the paradox of

community praxis set forth above. We are thus left with the question: how can intentional community be an agency of liberation, if both idealization (a pre-figuration of ideology—e.g. “Tom and Flame *should* run the community”) and utopian fantasies (flights of the imaginary that leave the ground of reality—e.g. “community should be always be fun: *I just want to play!*”) are set ups for oppression.

It seems to me that the key to reconciling the paradox of community—and of human understanding in general—lies in a subtle—*playful*—shift of perspective, away from the metaphorical application of the notion of “circle”—the transferential dyad, the dialogue circle, the hermeneutic circle—over towards the more open-ended figuration of the spiral. Of course, we might think of the mandala—an imaginal circle—as a candidate for replacement along the lines of this argument as well, but in deference to Jung, who considered the mandala image as a pointer towards wholeness, as an archetypal pull towards a never realized completion, we can leave this one out of the mix. (Of course, depending upon one’s entrance into these circles of interpretation, all of them *can* be considered “open”, but it seems to me that those of us who employ the circles of hermeneutics, dialogue, and therapy, are not always listening for the echo of Jung’s footsteps, instead tending towards *the illusion of expansion and multiplicity and possibility*, when, in fact, we are normatively tied to our cultural tether: we want to *know*, to arrive at a conclusion—to land somewhere safe.)

This widening of the interpretive lens over to a hermeneutic spiral, if kept in mind as all the narratives are written, as all the stories get told, could foreshadow a form of visual and intellectual reflexivity that is committed to maintaining a never-ending evolution of expansion and openness—keeping the butterfly alive. The community is thus always “under construction”, like a “web of inclusion” that moves ever outward in concentric, spiraling swirls of inquiry and participation, always welcoming the new. Like the complex, delicate unfolding of a spider’s web, the community can be rotated and viewed from a thousand different angles, but if it is captured, held, or claimed by the hand of knowledge, it dissolves into mere wisps of silk—becoming a cobweb collecting dust—with no rhyme or reason, shape or form.

In linguistic terms, remembering Gadamer’s summation that all understanding is born in the process of conversation, and that only in community dialogue can the “understood” be *conscientized*, changed, transmuted and rejuvenated, we can say that any form of declaration—“the community is...”—risks becoming an ideological frame of reference no matter how utopian it may seem. Whereas, a question—what is community?—retains an opening, leaves a space for the continuous experimentation and imaginings of human possibility and unfolding potential.

Finally, we must note that the exact same process occurs within an individual who has formed and become attached to an identity—and is unwilling to release it: this person gets trapped in artificial enclaves of belonging—systems, institutions, sects—because the walls around his or her

being have become impenetrable to soul. This person cannot see beyond the identifiable trees, let alone be at home in a forest, or wander through the infinite possibilities of wilderness, because he or she is too busy building a “home base”—acquiring the trappings of a lifestyle: a car, house, gadgets, family, community, church, school and state—all of which become figurations of colonization and oppression if they are bought to protect him/herself from the world.

In this regard, let me close (dangerous word!) this reflection by interjecting a spiral-like moment of linguistic play—in the form of a poem—to reinforce my points on the gifts of spirals over circles, wilderness over too much “belonging”:

Lost.

*Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.
(D. Waggoner, in Whyte, D., 1997, frontispiece)*

In tracing a spiral path through the wilderness of belonging, my intention has been to leave us at home in forest of the unknown, for it seems to me that we must always remember that the endeavor of intentional community, however potent its power to transform, to heal, or to unite,

remains for us a “powerful stranger”. However unaccustomed we urbanites are to leaving our doors unlocked and our windows open, we must allow the walls around the “village of Old Growth” to open in spiral-formation, always inviting new visitors—new questions—to climb over the walls, peek through the cracks, and wander in through the front door.

Chapter 4

Manifesto for Belonging

In the preceding chapter, I attempted to bring into the hermeneutics of this project multiple theoretical and academic voices, bringing to bear on the primary themes that emerged from the participatory research and dialogues a wide range of depth psychological, cultural, and philosophical perspectives. For the most part, my approach has been to stick as closely as possible to the thematic material raised in the conversations with community participants—along with an occasional lapse into areas that have specific resonance for me (but, of course, I too am a member of this community)—such that my choice of psychological theory was designed to broaden, deepen, and enrich the inquiry around particular topics: healing and restoration; raising consciousness; witnessing (seeing and being seen); the power of dialogue, ritual, and play; leadership, structure, principles and sustainability; issues of safety, comfort and belonging; spirituality and community practice; social and cultural activism and the dangers of “forgetting”; community as soul work; and finally, the impossibility of circumscribing, closing, defining, or ever really “knowing” the true face of community.

This process of hermeneutic reflection has hopefully taken us on a fruitful journey into the works of depth psychological and cultural masters; all of whom have thought deeply and written broadly on the topics enumerated

above. I have tried as much as possible to plumb the gifts of these thinkers while keeping in mind the three-fold goals of this project: to explore the relationship—the complex dialectic and interplay—between the individual and an intentional community; to further the goals of the community itself through dialogue with the individuals who are specifically committed to nurturing, sustaining and building it; to develop a theoretical understanding of the meaning and value of intentional community, as well as the issues involved in building it—opportunities, gifts, challenges and shadows—in a postmodern context.

At this juncture it feels safe to say that the work of depth psychology and critical hermeneutics, especially within a postmodern context, has offered up a plethora of gifts to the tiny, localized endeavor of Old Growth as it struggles to make a difference within the vast metropolitan sprawl of New York City. Nevertheless, the work of the community is alive and well as of this writing; its leadership council, born of this project, is moving forward and expanding, and the voices of Jung, Freud, Bion, Fromm, Hillman, Ascher, Lorenz, Watkins, Gadamer, and Ricoeur—just to name a few—will likely remain potent, adjunct “professors”—a depth psychological board of directors if you like—to the community for the foreseeable future.

Before closing, I want to take a short walk back through the interpretive reflections and summarize some of the key points. I started the chapter of theoretical hermeneutics with Jungian psychology, specifically because Jung’s is perhaps the most well-known and revered psychological voice within

the community; his work is still very much alive and reverberating in New Age and social spheres today. It was Jung who wrote definitively on the distinctions between individuality, individualism and individuation that have become the fundamental tenets for much of our understanding of personal growth and the self. I explored classical Jungian themes—individuation, the shadow, projection—in order to help the community better understand and reinforce the importance of reflexivity and introspection, to deepen the community’s surface understanding of the mechanisms of projection and transference, as well as placing the ideal of “raising consciousness” within a psychological framework that contains the unfathomable depths of the personal and collective unconscious.

I have gleaned, through the mysterious agency of the Transcendent Function, an intuitive sense of how community as a “chosen family” may offer the participants a unique healing and transformative opportunity. The social modalities of community, which naturally, and unconsciously, constellate symbolic re-enactments of family dynamics, may bring to conscious awareness long buried or repressed memories of early wounding, thus enabling a participant to re-visit and release emotional and psychic energy that may have been frozen in place since childhood. In addition, Jung’s theory of synchronicity, juxtaposed with the non-Western voices of African shamanism and tribal ritual, has served to underscore the restorative potency of dialogue, ritual, meaningful coincidence—in dream, image, symbol—and the entrance of “spirit”, that ineffable, numinous presence, which mysteriously

enters the communal space and changes everything—and everyone. Finally, Jung’s more recent students, like David Tacey and Christopher Hauke, have supported this exploration by bringing Jungian psychology into the postmodern era of de-construction, pluralism and relativism, pointing out the dangers of reifying Jungian concepts, and reminding us that the cooptation of Jungian theory is fraught with risks of hubris, narcissism and potential for inflation.

In deepening my exploration of the quixotic and at times conflicted themes of healing and restoration that emerged in the dialogues, theoretical work on social and collective trauma, by Klein, Homans, Caruth, Erickson, and others, has been invaluable. With their guidance, the community may be in a better position to understand its ambivalence and challenge in confronting the emotional stresses of modern life, not to mention the acts of terror that have come closer and closer to home. Through a deeper sense of how the complex emotionally dynamic and inter-subjective process of “witnessing” works, along with an understanding of how the social sphere of intentional community may be best suited for the resuscitation of communal memory, the participants may become skilled in employing practices focused on mourning, grief, and the expression of repressed affect.

These studies of collective healing and social suffering should serve Old Growth in fostering a container of safety, vulnerability and trust that enables the participants to work through the pain of individual, social, and symbolic loss. The goal, in any case, seems worthy: to restore and maintain

the overall health and wellbeing of the members in the face of an increasingly de-stabilized and fragmented social world. Perhaps, with the incorporation and expansion of conscious ritual and dialogical practices, Old Growth might come to serve as a model for a newly emergent form of group therapy.

Shared with the larger social frame beyond New York, this kind of intentional community endeavor might become a postmodern tool of social restoration.

Out of the quagmire of the difficult, paradoxical and confronting issues of leadership and sustainability, the voices of Bion, Fromm, Agazarian & Peters, Oakley, Peck, and others have brought much needed clarity and support for those community participants who have taken up the gauntlet of shared leadership. Clearly, issues of who should lead, who should teach, who should follow, and most importantly, how they will all work collaboratively together, is very much an ongoing debate within the circle of Old Growth. The key themes of self-responsibility, claiming one's power, partnering versus competing, building consensus versus dictating, maintaining "me-ness" in the face of "the all", how to avoid losing oneself in the numinous moments of "one-ness"—these are all challenges that each individual in Old Growth must approach within the psychological frame of his or her own individual level of maturity—as Tom and Flame aptly pointed out early on.

Developing the ability to work effectively with a wide spectrum of emotional readiness, skill, and talent for leadership, becomes the requisite starting point for true democracy in action, for as these psychologists have shown, it is only through the individual face-off with real and imagined

authority figures—within oneself, with peers in real-time, and with the psychic ghosts of parents, teachers, siblings, all kinds of dominating figures from the past—that the “rubber hits the road” in terms of the successful development of a collective container for belonging, restoration and growth. The issue of power is always a harbinger of heightened sensitivity and emotional resistance. How could it be otherwise, given that suburban and urban Americans all cohabitate within a social and political culture that espouses democratic principles but regularly fails to implement them in just about every organizational construct?

America is a young and immature experiment in shared leadership, and as such, the tools for running truly leader-ful community enterprises are just beginning to be forged. Most of the hard work being done in this domain is carried out on the backs of socially committed individuals who long for a day when the patriarchal, normative voice “from nowhere” is aptly circumscribed and muted, becoming just one more echo among the abundant and diverse sonorities of the human family.

Likewise, in a culture where entrepreneurial and capitalistic dogma is continually promulgated around themes of success, failure, and heroic—masculine—feats of achievement, the issue of sustainability—keeping the community alive and thriving—brings up a wide range of emotions and inner turmoil for the Old Growth participants. My hope has been that by exploring, describing and sharing the stories of a few comparable attempts at community-based healing and non-geographical community enterprises—

Landmark Education, Alcoholics Anonymous, Authentic Process Therapy, The Foundation for Community Encouragement—the worker bees in Old Growth may relax a bit, and take solace in the fact that their attempt to grow a community not specifically formulated around a program, dogma, leadership style, or set of principles, is in fact, a bold social experiment in postmodern gathering. It may feel perilously unformed, fluid and permeable, yet that may ultimately prove to be one of its most salient and enduring features, for as the gifts, new ideas and possibilities for praxis that emerge from this dissertation project begin to take root and generate creative energy—a process that has already begun—, they may be more easily accepted and integrated into the folds of an enterprise whose walls are not yet fully formed. We’ve still got the time and the flexibility to “get it right” (whatever that means).

Indeed, Old Growth is perhaps better understood as a powerful social experiment whose best interests may not be served by placing emphasis upon the culturally prescribed attributes of success or failure. The deeper truth, as Hillman and others reminded us, is that community is born and dies each time the group comes together. In fact, the theoretical perspective of “seeing through” has demonstrated what will undoubtedly be supremely useful in hedging, qualifying, and balancing any community conversation regarding what, in fact, constitutes the “community”: it is always open to interpretation.

In the sphere of spiritual development over against religious tradition and indoctrination—areas of particular importance to many in the

community—the work of process theologians and postmodern Jungians has been noteworthy in support of the community’s deepest yearnings for spirit (or God). If this area of exploration has had anything profound to offer the participants in this regard, it is the following: an alternative to the New Age spiritualism of individual transcendence that often smacks of narcissism and colonization of religious ceremony and practice in service of an aggrandizing ego. Instead, Ascher, Tacey, Ferrer, and others offer the community a theoretical ground on which to base their desire for a co-creative, dynamic and interactive dance with the numinous. In their view, seeking the “face of God” may always remain a journey shrouded in mystery, a trek into ineffable, ultimately unknowable terrain—as Jung points out—where the flag of enlightenment may be found planted closer to home, in our own hearts, instead of waving coldly at us from a far-off mountain of paternalism.

The spiritual path of relatedness, of love, of dialogical encounter with the numinous, does not necessarily have to play to the hierarchical, patriarchal tune of masculine entitlement. The work of acquiring wisdom, practicing forgiveness, experiencing grace, does not necessarily follow a scripted, linear, upward path of transcendence; in fact, with a grounding in post-Jungian, postmodern, practices of conscientization and cultural awakening, the challenge of active participation and partnering with self, other, and spirit may open the way for community to facilitate a grounded, humble, earth-bound quest for trans-traditional spiritual wisdom.

Likewise, the voices of Liberation Psychologists Lorenz, Watkins, Freire, and Martin-Baro, among many others, serve to remind us that the work of community is always conducted within a social and cultural frame of reference: every communal act is a political act. How then can we underestimate the deeper possibilities for change, transmutation and transformation—the ‘for the sake of what’—with which the community is engaged? By its very existence, the community represents a yearning, a deep human longing for new forms of relatedness and renewed means of connection. Perhaps Tom and Flame are correct in demanding that the community “step up” and take on a greater purpose than the inward focus of healing and individual growth; yet what also may be true, in the context of community as cultural work, is that this “greater purpose” may already be underway; it may only need to be brought to conscious awareness, and signified, placed—for internal purposes only—on the community marquee.

Who can ultimately know what transformative impact the reverberating, ripple effect of Old Growth might have on the local, regional, or even national landscape? Clearly, as I have discussed in detail, the local pond in which the community swims is a gilded pool of racial, economic, and social privilege—which can easily foment separation, alienation and elitism—yet my hope is that by listening to the thoughtful and self-reflective voice of liberation psychology, the community participants may be persuaded to hear more deeply into the whispers from the margin, to actively encourage the “other” to enter, speak and be heard, and to foster practices of intra-psychic self-

evaluation that place the myth of economic entitlement within a historical discourse that includes colonization, domination and trauma, no matter how difficult these cultural shadows are to face. The peril of “the forgotten” is that until it is “remembered”, it can never be forgiven. All of these acts of liberation and conscientization would go a long way towards realizing what is possible when a small group of conscious and committed individuals come together in the name of growth, change, spiritual development and social justice.

The possibilities are endless; the only barrier to multiplicity and cultural pluralism, as these writers have pointed out so eloquently, lies within, in our fear-based tendency towards “normative restoration” and other regressive modes that hold tight to the status quo. Yet, as the Hopi Indians have recently reminded us, using the egalitarian mouthpiece of the internet to share their prophecy: it is time to “jump in the river, push off from the sides, keep our heads above the water, open our eyes, and celebrate who we see: we are the ones we have been waiting for.” (Statement from the Hopi Nation, Oraibi, Arizona, 2002).

Leave it to the Native Americans to couch their deeply profound message of wisdom in a universal act of play—jumping in the river! Of course, the transformational power of play has always been understood by the indigenous elders. In this context, it has been essential to include a deep reflection on the less noticeable, yet common “practices” of the community in action: music-making (kiva singing, toning, even Karaoke!), journal and poetry

writing, walking in nature, story-telling, and, most ubiquitous and underestimated of all—the act of play. With the help of Hillman and Gadamer, and the story of the emergent field of imaginal psychology, my intent has been to redress our tendency to dismiss the impact of these ubiquitous acts of community.

There has often been a tendency within Old Growth—not altogether unfounded, given the sometimes heavy-handed seriousness of the New Age agenda—to denigrate and de-valorize the community's playful aspects. What makes matters worse, is that we also have a predilection to toss passive entertainments like watching sports (not participating), watching TV, excessive drinking and partying, into the mix called “play”. My goal in spending a substantial amount of space in this document on the topics of soul-making and play, in a variety of contexts, has been to address this subjugation of play, to restore the divine child in all of us to his (or her) rightful place in the community.

As Gadamer has eloquently summarized, play is not a passive or simple act of mimicry or personification or role-playing. It is a conscious decision taken on the part of a “player”, to temporarily assume an alternative identity: to become a warrior, an animal, a fearsome competitor, a member of the opposite sex, a tyrant, a hunter. Insofar as all of these “roles” require a conscious transmutation of the norm, they provide a unique opportunity for the “recognition” of how the normative itself is a role—and if play is entered with a high level of vigilance, commitment, and consciousness—as we all

approached it as children—then the player becomes “played”—transformed, mollified, and humbled.

Play is a high stakes game of relatedness, witnessing, and human intercourse. It is often a modality where the “normal” rules of discourse and behavior are suspended, where the freedom to conspire and rebel and co-create fresh new approaches to being and being-together are all invited and allowed. Play, as the community participants discovered on more than one occasion—in the “shaping community” workshop; in the paintball competition—is a deeply psychological, dream-like landscape, where community participants can learn, if they care to pay attention, all about themselves and their compatriots on the playing field—their fears, their dreams, their passions, their alter egos, shadows and unheralded talents.

Finally, the work of Ricoeur, Gadamer, Whyte, and others has been supportive in bringing me full circle—or should I say full spiral—to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in that ubiquitous desire in all of us who venture forth in search of intentional community: the desire to belong. By reminding us that all forms of community have woven into their foundational fabric “utopian imaginings” as well as the ideological trappings of politics and culture, we can be aware of our tendency to “mark our territory”, to cultivate cliques and form walled off social spaces, to build hierarchies and coalesce unconsciously into power factions, all in the name of human bonding.

It appears that what is necessary in order for an intentional community to become an instrument of empowerment, emancipation and maturation, as

opposed to a prison of alienation, separation and elitism, is for the participants to remain vigilant in the face of that ubiquitous and not so subtle psychological need to ward off insecurity and loneliness by forging and reifying attachments. As Ricoeur points out in his discussion of the polarized spectrum of ideology and utopia, the mediating principle in the quest for connection—the social imaginary—can be a flexible tool for heightened consciousness and reflexivity, but only if our need to form an “identity”, to assuage our ego’s need to label, name and categorize, is kept in check by a deeper willingness to continuously re-make and re-configure our sense of “self”.

We need to continually work to push at the hard edges of the psychic borders of diversity and difference, to develop and hone new sets of social skills that will serve to interweave more tightly the threads that bind us all together. We need to learn skills that will render us capable of working at the frontiers of pluralism; skills that enable us to use holistic and convergent rather than either/or thinking; skills that marry the masculine and feminine energies of the intellect and the intuitive, that loosen our cultural attachments to what is considered rational and irrational—bridging the chasm between heart and mind. Finally, we need to develop skills that enable us to linger more comfortably in the emerging borderlands of a multicultural, globally connected world, such that we learn to be at home in temporary lodging—moving nomadically (as proclaimed by Braidotti and other post-structuralists) across borders between this group, that group and no group at all.

A Manifesto for Building Intentional Community

In the context of this summary statement, in which all the supportive voices of depth psychology and cultural studies have joined to aid the participants in Old Growth in navigating the “wilderness of belonging”, I want to conclude this project by returning one final time to the themes brought forth by the community members themselves. At the request of many of the co-researchers in this project, I want to recapitulate, in the form of a “statement of principles” or a miniature manifesto of sorts, the main concerns, ideas, and suggestions that were shared in the dialogues.

The following statements are offered as “philosophical tenets” for use by the Old Growth community, based on the shared dreams, visions, and concerns of the co-researchers—and myself—involved in this project. The list proposed is tentative, just a starting point for further reflection and dialogue. Indeed, in keeping with my advocacy of a hermeneutic spiral, the tenth principle is offered up as a question, reminding the reader, myself, and the community, that even as we put forth a list of what will hopefully be useful and empowering propositions, there must not be any sense of finality or closure, rather the “end” must always bring us back to the beginning, leaving us to ask: what is missing? What have we left out? What have we ignored, repressed, or dismissed?

It should also be noted that the following principles may or may not be applicable to community constructs beyond the walls of Old Growth; it has not

been my intention to develop a universal set of core beliefs for use in divergent contextual or cultural settings. In keeping firmly planted on postmodern philosophical ground, we must keep in mind that these statements have been derived from within a particular, local, socio-economic, and culturally circumscribed situation. However, this caveat notwithstanding, these statements below may prove useful in other cultural, geographical, and socio-economic contexts, even though it has not been my expressed goal to cultivate or espouse any “essential” ways or means of building community.

1. A container for belonging. First and foremost, we agree that Old Growth—or whatever the New York based community ultimately decides to name itself (remembering that the name Old Growth has been provisional and represents a particular place and time in the evolution of the community)—should be built as a house of belonging—a place where trust, acceptance and love are the cornerstones of the edifice. The community believes in a fundamental commitment to creating spaces of safety, such that expressions of vulnerability, emotional catharsis, and all forms of affect, are accepted, encouraged, and considered signs of strength.

2. A place of restoration. The community is committed to fostering dialogical practices that encourage speaking from the heart, self-responsibility in facing and working through conflict, and openness to diverse points of view. The community recognizes and values the powerful agency of witnessing—seeing and being seen—and realizes that safety, honesty, and compassion are the requisite hallmarks of restorative discourse. The

community is not a “healing community” per se, but it is committed to creating safe and open spaces where participants are encouraged to share their personal stories, to “bear witness” and “call each other forth” with deep listening and respect, such that spontaneous and lasting healing may occur. The community is also committed to maintaining a high level of consciousness and vigilance around forming boundaries, becoming exclusive, and not allowing “comfort” to supplant the deeper intentionality of spiritual development, personal growth, and communitarian activism.

3. *A center for spiritual growth.* The community represents an opportunity for individuals to explore and follow their own individually directed spiritual paths within a context of relatedness, love, and dialogical practice. Within an atmosphere of tolerance and openness, the community is committed to healing and transforming the wounds of shame, guilt and alienation inflicted by traditional religion. The community is not bound to any liturgy, dogma or set of spiritual principles, nor does it espouse that a particular path be followed towards the experience of enlightenment or transcendence; rather, the community provides a container in which participants use each other as teachers, co-creating practices that nurture a participatory dance with spirit.

4. *An experiment in shared leadership.* The participants are committed to practicing a high-level of self-responsibility and accountability for the growth and sustainability of the community. They are interested in developing leadership practices that foster collaborative, shared, co-created structures,

rules and events, and consistently fostering greater awareness around the dangers, pitfalls, and opportunities presented whenever the issue is power.

5. *A landscape for soul-making.* There is a strong commitment on the part of the membership to foster and nurture the emotional, creative and aesthetic realms of human experience: the fieldwork of soul. The community recognizes the importance, and the transformational potential, of participatory engagement in dream work, bodywork and all forms of imaginative, right-brain modalities—movement, music, writing, poetry, art—as a counterweight to the cultural tendency towards intellectual and rational modes of discourse.

6. *A social and political force for change and renewal.* Although not specifically a political or social action group, the community participants are committed to pushing the edge of their own levels of political and cultural consciousness. They are interested in constantly exploring how their dialogical practices and their cultural and political discourse may impact the individuals and social spheres in which they operate.

7. *A celebration of “otherness”.* The community is committed to maintaining an atmosphere of openness, invitation, and celebration of diversity. They recognize the limitations and “gaps” in the demographic, social fabric of the group—lack of representation by certain socio-economic and racial groups—and although they are not specifically involved in “recruitment”, they are committed to dialogue and raising individual and group consciousness around issues of exclusivity, tolerance of diverse voices, and acceptance.

8. *A living, breathing organic entity.* At its deepest core, the philosophical cornerstone of the community is a belief in the organic, co-creative nature of the social system that is Old Growth. Much like the “life principles” described by Margaret Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers in *A Simpler Way* (1996), their book on social systems and complexity theory, the community recognizes the following principles of organizational systems at work in the context of community: 1. Everything in life is in a constant process of discovery and creating; 2. Community will use “messes to get to well-ordered solutions”; 3. The community is intent on finding what works, not what’s “right”; 4. Community systems, by their very nature, continue to create possibilities and new “windows of opportunity”—nothing is a closed-loop; 5. The community system is attracted to order and stability, but never stops seeking greater complexity and creative form; 6. The community will consistently evolve through cyclical stages of identity formation, release, and re-formation; 7. The community continually participates, affects, and is affected by the evolution of its neighbors: all social systems are born of interdependence. (p. 13-14)

9. *A playground for transformation.* The community recognizes that the “work” of community must be balanced by consistently seeking opportunities to co-create active modes of play. At their deepest, childlike core, “fun and games” are the birthright and perhaps the foundational need of all beings in coming together. The community that plays together is

enlivened, transformed, and committed to action; it is in a constant state of re-birth and renewal.

10. *What's next?* The future is unplanned, unknown, and anticipated with optimism, passion, and a commitment to keeping alive the questions: what is an intentional community? Why do we care? What do we desire? What do we dream together? What is possible?

Impact of the Study in the Participants (co-researchers)

At this juncture in the project, after many months of dialogue, reading and interpreting texts, participating in workshops, retreats, and all manner of community celebrations, the work of this dissertation seems to have become comfortably woven into the day-to-day life of the community. Those co-researchers who have been actively engaged with me in the project have—to this point—been enthusiastic in their commitment to the project and forthcoming with feedback. In many ways, I believe that they have been somewhat surprised by the depth of meaning, potency, and potential impact that what they view as a small but important—to them—group endeavor, might have on the larger world. There is a sense in which they were only partially aware that some of the philosophies and practices that Old Growth is engaged in are “postmodern”, progressive, and potentially political in their ramifications.

After sharing the chapters of this document with co-researchers and also providing the text of the above “manifesto” to additional community

members, I have received innumerable comments regarding the contents of this dissertation. For the most part, the response has been strongly positive and enthusiastic, with most readers feeling comfortable that the essential gifts, characteristics, and qualities of the community have been described adequately and appropriately. For example, Tom (of Tom and Flame Lutes) fed back the following overall assessment: “You have done an admirable job of blending, representing and honoring all the different points of views and realities. It is very difficult to attempt to do justice to everyone and get the big picture at the same time...as I read parts of the paper, they have left me really appreciating you in that way.”

Likewise, key co-researcher and collaborator, Judy Fox, had the following to say about her overall impressions: “I love what I have been reading about our community in these pages; the themes, principles, experiences and possibilities are thrilling to read!” In addition, a number of co-researchers, Pat, Jan, Julie, and others, have spoken to me directly about their positive regard for the paper, and their hopes that the document—once circulated in some form—will re-invigorate and enliven the dialogue within the community about who we are, what we are up to, and most importantly, “what’s next”.

All of the kudos notwithstanding, a number of the readers have also voiced questions and concerns, perhaps not so much about this document, per se, but about the community that it describes and the direction in which it may be heading. Generally, the concerns can be summarized under three

headings: concerns about the so-called “goals” of the community; concerns about the distinction between workshops and community life, and; concerns about the future direction—whether inward or outward—of the community’s aspirations.

In the first case, a number of people have remarked to me that the community often discusses and deliberates about having “goals”—or setting an agenda of sorts—for future activities and commitments, yet there seems to be a lethargy or general ennui about claiming, owning and stepping up to follow through with all the great ideas. Many of these comments have come to me wrapped within the broader commentary about the insecure, fear-based and unsettled economic and political period we seem to be living through under the Bush administration, with threats of terror and the controversial occupation of Iraq.

Community participants, in some cases, seem overwhelmed by the world situation, to the point where their energy for community activities, let alone “activism” seems to have atrophied. This feedback comprises a far too unscientific and incomplete survey for me to declare a general symptom of malaise among the community, but it merits note that a significant number of community participants have expressed concern that the “energy for setting goals and making commitments seems to have dissipated in the past year”.

On the other hand a significant number of social and life events—weddings, birthdays, births, etc.—have continued to bring the community together in celebration and social gathering, where discussions of “next steps”

and the tone of “we need to keep things moving” has been increasing. There is a sustained conversation among the leadership group about creating a weeklong community retreat in Sedona, Arizona in March of 2004, which, according to early signals, is receiving an enthusiastic response from the membership. Reflecting back on the chapters in which the sustainability of the community was discussed in detail, it seems that the inevitable vacillation between inspired enthusiasm and fear of commitment is alive and well, as the community continues to experience growing pains—just as Tom and Flame predicted.

Secondly, the issue of workshops versus community activities—and whether there should be a clearer distinction between them—came back to me as a point of inquiry for a number of co-researchers. A number of the readers of this text seemed to feel that I failed to adequately demarcate the line between workshops—which are led by Tom and Flame, are open to the general public, and are specifically focused on personal growth and healing practices—and community retreats, weekends, evenings, celebrations and such, that are held by invitation only (to community participants and their invited friends—as a form of “recruitment”). In fact, the social aspects of these community events is where the powerful mechanisms of game-playing and dialogical interaction, rituals and the arts are often the center-piece of the agenda, as opposed to the facilitated and focused “work” approach to community workshops with Tom and Flame.

I tend to agree, in retrospect, with this feedback. These readers are pointing to a potential flaw in my approach to the material gleaned from the dialogues and interviews. I have tried to paint a broad-brush picture of an intentional community that operates in a transitional space between its programmatic foundations and its ongoing expansion to encompass the full panoply of community life. For example, as one participant pointed out, the workshops are always and only for adults, whereas many of the retreats and community events include entire families and the newborns of young couples. Even the participants' animals become part of the scene at a community event, which is patently untrue of the "workshop scene". And so, it seems that as the particular time and space in which this text was written passes, the synthesis between workshop and community event out of which the community was forged is fragmenting, as the Tom and Flame workshops grow increasingly separate from the on-going NY community.

However, these workshops do remain a mainstay activity for many of the community participants, who view Tom and Flame as the spiritual teachers and 'leaders' of the community. Perhaps most importantly, these workshops also remain a powerful tool for welcoming new entrants into the fold of the community. It seems likely that the evolution of workshops and community events will continue on parallel tracks for the foreseeable future. Perhaps a key stage of growth and synthesis will occur when Tom and Flame and the "sustaining council" come together and enter a broader discussion/dialogue regarding how the two community formats (for regardless

of the participant's opinions, both of these venues overlap for many old-timers and new participants) might work effectively in tandem to support the expansion and deepening of the work of personal and community transformation.

In the third case, an additional concern of participants—and in particular Tom and Flame—has proven stubborn and tenacious throughout this project, with no discernable light at the end of the tunnel. At issue here is the question of whether the community will continue to be primarily an inwardly focused collective of individuals who 'use' the community container mostly for their own personal growth, spiritual grounding and consciousness raising, or whether the community needs to expand its horizons and glance outward, to seek places and opportunities where the collective energy of the group could make a specific contribution to the broader society.

At issue here, for many of the participants, is the fact that in this document I discussed at length the societal implications—and possibilities—of the postmodern community in a social and cultural context. Many of the participants were uncomfortable with this approach to the material. They expressed some misgiving that they "might not be ready" to "tackle the world" and that they are "perfectly comfortable" just keeping the agenda focused on individuation and growth through relationship. As Larry stated it simply: "For me, the key to community is simply sharing, with all that implies, such as giving permission to speak and allowance to listen. Perhaps something

magical happens simply out of that and what the community provides is nothing more than a platform for that to occur. Need there be more?"

On the other hand, Tom recently wrote a reiteration of his view of the dangers of collective myopia, which he had professed from the outset:

My other concern, as we have discussed, is that the community process will devolve into only feeling good together. That there will not be any outreach to the large community, nor will there be much deep internal exploration. In short, will all the rough spots and stretch points just smooth out into a normalized complacency? Of course being normal and having fun are great and necessary, but they are not the driving force, which originally bonded people and brought them together. (unpublished feedback, 2003)

And so, even in the wake of this project, the community seems left with this dilemma—a mixed bag of motives where individuals vacillate between sharing a broad desire to impact the world and retreating into a closer-to-home focus on personal work and expanding consciousness.

Perhaps the dialogue between these so-called factions, both internal and external (in the sense that I think we all regularly move back and forth between self-centered and altruistic positions depending upon our current internal state of affairs), is nothing if not a healthy, if sometimes contentious spark of the very energy that keeps the “self” coming back again and again to be in the company of “other”. At the end of the day, individual identity and group identity are in a constant dance between distance and intimacy, and social activism can be defined on micro and macro levels with equally fortuitous or disastrous results. Far too often, it seems to me, the externalized work of social activists gets carried out with the high stakes

charge of projective energy—often in the form of anger and resentment against an innocuous “them”. This voluminous energy, expelled in the name of community betterment, often creates bigger messes than those it intends to “fix”, and might be better siphoned off unceremoniously through the powerful mirroring tool of a small community circle. In any case, what matters is that the collective entity called ‘community’ keep the dialogue, the questions, the energy of *the agenda of transformation* alive and thriving, either within the circumscribed boundaries of the community circle or in the wider expanse of the culture. Just by keeping the conversation alive—as Gadamer reminds us—this small troupe does make a difference, and just maybe, in spawning a dissertation and a broader conversation in the world, they may make a huge contribution in spite of themselves and their supposed “inward” focus. Who knows?

Contribution to Depth Psychology

In choosing to conduct a research project focused on the themes of the meaning, value, and potential impact of intentional community, my foremost goal has been to serve the specific community of which I am a member. However, in choosing to interpret and analyze the data through a variety of depth psychological and cultural lens, I have also had the opportunity to respond directly to a recent call by many in the field: to take the work of depth psychology out of the clinician’s office and into the world. In this context,

there are a number of areas where this project may provide a contribution to depth psychological theory and practice.

First and foremost, in response to calls by Peter Homans, Andrew Samuels, and other psychologists from both a psychoanalytic and Jungian orientation, this project has taken me into a research area that has been sorely neglected: the intermediary space of the small, social group. With the exception of studies in group therapy, and broader research into the larger social group comprising victims of collective trauma—e.g. victims of the Holocaust and other war trauma—research that looks closely, within a depth psychological framework, at the cultural, social and psychological dynamics of small groups, is still relatively rare.

It is my hope that by juxtaposing the perspectives of Jung, post-Jungians, post-Freudians, liberation psychologists, imaginal psychologists and others against particular areas of interest to the participants of the Old Growth community, that the case for the application and relevance of depth psychological theory to small group situations, has been reinforced and validated. My fondest hope is that this work might generate a deeper enthusiasm for psychologists to finally follow the road laid out by Freud over a century ago: to expand the intra-psychic realms of the personal unconscious to include the influence of “civilization and its discontents”. Or even better, for post-Jungians to finally fully assimilate what Jung was pointing to when he wrote about the collapse of the inner and outer realms of consciousness, of the “objective psyche” and the archetype of the “Self”: that the work of

individuation, if undertaken within an analytic frame, must always bear in mind the permeability of inner and outer realms of psyche, and the interpenetrability of individual, cultural and social worlds.

It has been my contention from the outset of this project that with the inevitable demise of dyadic therapy—or at the very least its diminishment in the West as the chosen modality to treat psychological suffering—which is increasingly becoming less financially feasible and impractical for the majority of Americans due to their over-worked lifestyles, the ready availability of prescription anti-depressants, and the constraints placed on talk therapy by HMO's, there is a need for depth psychologists to expand their repertoire to include client configurations greater than one. This project has hopefully made a contribution in this regard, by demonstrating how, on a small group scale, the theory and praxis of depth psychology—including, but not limited to, dialogue, dream work, shadow work, imaginal and creative use of the arts as tools for excavation into the unconscious—may represent a powerful compensatory opportunity for individual healing and restoration in a community setting. In effect, the turn of the millennium, and the turn outward of psychotherapeutic modalities, could bring depth psychology practitioners a whole new source of income: facilitating community.

Likewise, this project has enabled me to further the arguments put forth by postmodern depth psychologists who work in the emergent fields of ecological, transpersonal and liberation psychology, as they attempt to broaden the contextual frameworks in which psychotherapy is conducted. In

particular, this project has hopefully reinforced the theory that cultural, historical, and social influences leave an indelible mark—perhaps equally as deep as mother and father—on the psyche of the individual. By working from the inside out, within a small and intimate collective, I have been fortunate to put the theories of liberation psychology—empowerment through dialogue; transformation through tending to the hidden, marginalized voice; deepening self-knowledge by raising consciousness of cultural and social influences—to practical use in a real-world setting.

In addition, although I have not specifically made claim to community organizations having archetypal resonance—categorizing the community as an archetype—along the lines of Jung and Hillman’s primary theses, I do believe that the work in this project around the constellation of “family dynamics”, has raised the possibility that Jung’s pantheon of archetypes needs to be updated to include the family—and perhaps the “community”. It seems that just as there is an archetypal pattern at work in the developmental triad of mother-father-child, the family itself, in whatever configuration manifests, can be re-constituted in symbolic form—much like the transference container of therapy—within a consciously attuned community group. However, the importance of this possibility does not rest on its becoming reified as a universal pattern of human behavior. What is relevant I believe for depth psychology, is that early childhood wounding and trauma due to family or socially inflicted physical or psychic abuse (school yard,

neighbor, uncle), might be healed, using depth psychological techniques, within the container of an intentional community.

This project has also afforded me an opportunity to take some of the key theoretical underpinnings of archetypal psychology, imaginal psychology and psychoanalysis, and apply them in a real-time, real world context. The contribution to depth psychology in this regard, I believe, has been that Old Growth provided a unique laboratory in which to practice and deepen an exploration of the implications and ramifications of what have been mostly theoretical speculations around leadership theory, group process, soul work, and play as praxis. As an example, this project has provided the framework for Agazarian and Peters' developmental model of group process to be mapped against a real-life social group, as opposed to the more typical, and somewhat artificially proscribed, collective of group therapy.

Likewise, I have been able to explore, in a real-world context, the theories of social suffering and witnessing put forth by Homans, Caruth, Butler, and others, and hopefully made a tiny step in the direction of addressing the loss of cultural containers for grieving, mourning and responding to collective trauma. In effect, this project, and the work represented by the Old Growth community itself, is a response—albeit only a tiny drop of hope in a sea of suffering—to Judith Butler's call, which I quoted earlier, for the emergence of collective institutions for grieving and the re-assembly of community in the world.

Finally, within the participatory and hermeneutic framework of this dissertation, it has been my desire to explore what aspects of depth psychological theory may have particular healing and transformative gifts to offer in the context of an intentional community—and I have discovered that there are many: dialogue, ritual, the arts, body work, play, etc. It would seem that the evolution of depth psychological theory and praxis is ripe for the application of its techniques and tools to become more widespread in community circles. More and more people are responding to the fragmentation and isolation of Western culture by seeking out like-minded—and, I hope, increasingly diverse—small groups in which to re-capture a diminished sense of connection, belonging, and well-being. If this project has demonstrated anything in the context of depth psychology, it is how much potential there remains for depth psychological practitioners to take their wares “to the field”.

Chapter 5

Recommendations for Further Study

This dissertation project has been a deeply rewarding experience, in that I have had the luxury of researching, in collaboration with good friends and community partners, a topic in which I have great personal interest: the transformative power of community. By choosing a qualitative approach to the research, the process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting data has been particularly relevant and meaningful, for it has been carried out within a framework of shared-learning, dialogue, and collaboration. With the guidance of Elizabeth Herda and other pioneers in postmodern research paradigms, I have been able to construct a project in which the act of learning has been carried out, not in the sterile laboratory of false objectivity, but in a rich and alive, inter-subjective space of generosity, and reciprocity; my co-researchers, surely as much as the voices of the “experts” in depth psychology, have been my greatest teachers.

The gift of participatory research is that it enables the attainment of knowledge to be a communitarian act, as opposed to siphoning off “the goods” from research “subjects”, who then relinquish their “data” to the supposedly well-intentioned, social scientist. Instead, those individuals from the community who have volunteered their time and energy to this project will remain the true “owners” of the study, and, it is my hope, that the community

in which we participate together will become the ultimate benefactor of any knowledge acquired.

This project was not undertaken with the intention of proving a particular hypothesis or answering any one definitive question regarding the meaning of intentional community. Instead, I have attempted to explore and uncover a range of material that might be used to deepen our understanding and support the nurturance and building of intentional community containers at this particular place and time: New York City and environs, circa 2003. Just as the work of an intentional community is ongoing, the work of this dissertation is hardly complete: in fact, I would venture to say that its success might be measured more by the number of questions it raises than the number it answers. Hence, it is my fervent hope that this project will represent only a starting point, a singular data point along an endlessly expanding spiral of inquiry, such that the work of exploration, psychological excavation and expansion of our frames of interpretation around the configuration of the self, and the self-in-community, has only just begun.

Recommendations for Further Study

As noted above, this project does not represent any form of closure or final theory around the depth psychology of community or the self-in-community. Quite the opposite, in fact, it has engendered a plethora of possible areas for further exploration and study. The following list represents a summary of those research possibilities that I believe would be worthwhile

additions to the growing body of “knowledge” regarding the transformational, political, and cultural potency of intentional community enterprise.

Exploration of relational dynamics

Within the Old Growth community there are clearly a number of social and relationship dynamics that I was unable to explore deeply. These include the meaning and impact of community on male-female partnerships and friendships; the impact of community process on marriage and “lovers”—both in and outside of the community (e.g. there are situations in Old Growth where a wife is in the community and the husband is not); the impact of children and family dynamics (e.g. where family members are together in Old Growth) on community situations. It might also be interesting to explore the inter-relational dynamics of the male and female voices (including the archetypal energies of anima-animus within a Jungian frame) in terms of power and leadership issues.

Inter-penetration of non-Western and Western cultural products

With the globalization of Western culture, the ease of foreign travel, and the ubiquitous rise of the internet, there has been a marked increase in the cross-pollination of multi-cultural “products” of community practice. For example, Buddhism and Eastern religious and philosophical practices, Native American and other indigenous, non-Western ritual and initiatory practices—shamanic ceremony, use of plant medicines, etc.—have become fairly

common activities in affluent Western community groups. It would be interesting to explore the meaning, value and the positive/negative ramifications of this phenomenon of the cross-pollination of cultural praxis, symbol, and imagery. Does it represent an agenda—conscious or unconscious—of global homogenization, a resurgence of the colonizing tendencies of the hegemonic West? Or does it signal a greater expansion of multiplicity and diversity, a rise of a new reciprocity and respect for the transformative, ecologically re-balancing, and healing powers of non-Western cultural traditions? Perhaps both?

Minorities in leadership

Many of the intentional community endeavors that I explored as part of this project have women and minorities in leadership roles. Questions that might be investigated in other community settings could be: What might be the meaning and potential cultural and societal impact of this phenomenon? Are there particular and unique gifts that gay people, women, and people of color bring to community in leadership roles? How is the “normative” leadership voice of the Caucasian, Judeo-Christian, heterosexual male impacted by the ascension of the “other” to positions of power in community contexts?

The meaning and character of community in a range of sizes and geographical settings

This project focused on one, relatively small community group—about forty people total—within the circumscribed, affluent neighborhoods of New York City and suburbs. It would be interesting to study other groups and explore how they change—and how the relationship of the “self” and the community evolves—as the community becomes much larger, more institutionalized, or spreads out geographically. What happens to the “self” within the context of a much larger intentional community? Is there an optimal size and scope for the developmental work of self within the community context? When do the social theories of institutions and bureaucracy start to apply to intentional communities? How do changes in geography, setting, and socio-economic status of the participants alter the complexion and character of intentional community?

The evolution of shared leadership practices

Old Growth, as described in detail in chapter 4, is a fledgling experiment in shared leadership. It would be interesting to explore, across a wider range of community groups—geographically-based, religious or cultural communities, etc.—how the principles of collaborative, consensus-based leadership are evolving and being implemented in a variety of settings and community contexts. The following questions might be researched: is shared leadership a growing phenomenon in the West? What would a “true

democracy” look like and how might intentional community work forward the evolution of society in this direction? Might shared leadership practices represent an evolutionary “next step” in the individuation of the individual and/or society in general? Does shared leadership reflect the imminent demise of patriarchy and the hegemonic discourse of the masculine? Is it a specifically feminine reaction to patriarchy or a heterogeneous evolution within the collective? How do men “really feel” about the idea of sharing leadership? Is it possible for a community to sustain a working capacity within the definitions of Agazarian and Peters’ stage six “work group”?

Definitions of community

In this project, I have deliberately avoided any attempt to strictly ‘define’ what is meant by intentional community. Perhaps this represents a limitation of the research methodology, which focused on pursuing the areas of interest and meaning to the community itself. Old Growth participants were particularly reluctant to define and thus—in their minds—deaden, their experiment in collectivity. However, it would surely be worthwhile to conduct further research that explores a wider range of postmodern community experiments in order to discern common themes, definitions, and descriptions for the phenomenon and its potential impact on the culture and society as a whole. This kind of research might include a deeper exploration of the distinctions between “lifestyle enclaves”—social groups, clubs, cliques,

neighborhood groups—and intentional communities—a theme around which I have only touched the surface with research into one example.

Community as a form of social activism

In the section on liberation psychology, as well as in the dialogues with the group leaders and Tom and Flame, the theme of community as a force for social action was discussed from a variety of perspectives. However, in the case of Old Growth, there was little consensus—other than the theoretical premise that all communitarian gatherings are a form of social activism—among the co-researchers as to what constitutes and circumscribes social and political activism within the purview of community. In an additional study with Old Growth or any other intentional community, it would be interesting to explore the following questions: How does a community influence the political environment in which it operates? What is the appropriate balance between inward and outwardly directed energies of an intentional community? How does intentional community—especially if it engages in new forms of leadership and structure—play a role in the evolution of social worlds? Where can we see the impact of community playing out on the larger social and cultural landscape? When does a community get too large, such that it loses its subversive power—operating under the radar screen of institutional and media recognition—to influence the cultural contexts in which it operates?

The evolution of group therapy

In this project, I have made the assertion that Old Growth, and perhaps intentional community endeavors in general, represents an emergent form of cultural therapy, perhaps a “next stage” in the evolution of group therapy. It would be interesting to explore this theory from a different perspective: to look at current examples of group therapy and discern how they have evolved inside and outside depth psychological traditions, answering questions such as: do long term therapy groups evolve into a form of intentional community? If so, how and in what manner? When does a therapy group become a community and when does a community become group therapy? What is the difference between a support group and group therapy? How does the definition and use of the term “healing” evolve and change depending upon the social construct—community, support group, group therapy—in which it is used? Does the evolution of depth psychology indicate, as I have suggested, that the future growth in the field will be focused on the confluence of individual, group and community healing modalities? How does the loss of institutional settings for group therapy—and the financial support for it—impact the evolution of healing and support groups? Are community groups emerging in response to this loss? If so, how and in what form?

References

- Agazarian, Y. & Peters, R. (1981). *The visible and invisible group*. London: Routledge and Kegan.
- Asher, C. (1993). *The communitarian self as (God) ultimate reality*. in Spring. (54) p. 71-98.
- Bache, C. (2000). *Dark night, early dawn: steps to a deep ecology of mind*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Bauman, Z. (1991). *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Belenky, M. & Bond, L. & Weinstock, J. (1997). *A tradition that has no name: nurturing the development of people, families, and communities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bellah, R., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. (1985). *Habits of the heart: individualism and commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bion, W. (1961). *Experiences in Groups*. Taylor & Francis Group Publishers: London, U.K.
- Bohm, D. (1996). *On Dialogue*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Braidotti, R. (1994). *Nomadic subjects: embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Brooke, R. Ed. (2000). *Pathways into the Jungian world: phenomenology and analytical psychology*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1997). *The psychic life of power: theories in subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Caruth, C. Ed. (1995). *Trauma: explorations in memory*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Collingwood, H. (2003). *The sink or swim economy*. New York: New York Times Publications.
- Cushman, P. (1995). *Constructing the self, constructing America: a cultural history of psychotherapy*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing.

- Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Edinger, E. (1972). *Ego and archetype: individuation and the religious function of the psyche*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.
- Esteban Munoz, J. (1999). *Disidentifications: queers of color and the performance of politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Esteva, G. & Prakash, M. (1998). *Grassroots postmodernism: remaking the soil of cultures*. London: Zed Publishers.
- Felman, S. & Laub, D. (1992). *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*. London: Routledge.
- Ferrer, J. (2002). *Revisioning transpersonal theory: a participatory vision of human spirituality*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Forsey, H. Ed. (1993). *Circles of strength: community alternatives to alienation*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Fromm, E. (1955). *The Sane society*. Henry Holt & Company, New York: NY
- _____(1994). *On being human*. Continuum: New York: NY.
- Gadamer, H. (1994). *Truth and method*. New York: Continuum Publishing.
- _____(1976). *Philosophical hermeneutics*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- Gergen, K. (1991). *The saturated self: dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Griffin, D. Ed. (1989). *Archetypal process: self and divine in Whitehead, Jung, and Hillman*. Evanston: University of Illinois Press.
- Gozdz, K. Ed. (1995). *Community building: renewing spirit and learning in business*. San Francisco: New Leaders Press.
- Hanh, T. (1994). *A joyful path: community transformation and peace*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

- Hauke, C. (2000). *Jung and the postmodern: an interpretation of realities*. London: Routledge.
- Heidegger, M. (1971), *On the way to language*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.
- Herda, E. (1999). *Research conversations and narrative: a critical hermeneutic orientation in participatory inquiry*. Westport: Praeger.
- Highwater, J. (1994). *The language of vision: meditations on myth and metaphor*. New York: Grove Press.
- Hillman, J. (1975). *Revisioning psychology*. New York: Harper & Row.
- _____(1981). *The thought of the heart and the soul of the world*. Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications.
- _____(1983). *Archetypal psychology: a brief account*. Woodstock, CT: Spring publications.
- Hillman, J. & Ventura, M. (1992). *We've had hundred years of psychotherapy- and the world's getting worse*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.
- Hollander, N. (1997). *Love in a time of hate: liberation psychology in Latin America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Homans, P. Ed. (2000). *Symbolic loss: the ambiguity of mourning and memory at century's end*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Jung, C. (1921/1971). *Psychological Types*. In R.F.C. Hull (Trans.), The collected works of C.G. Jung. (Vol. 6). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- _____(1953/1966). *Two essays on analytical psychology*. In R.F. C. Hull (Trans.) The collected works of C.G. Jung. (Vol. 7). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- _____(1916/60). *The structure and dynamics of the psyche*. In R.F. C. Hull (Trans.) The collected works of C.G. Jung_(Vol. 8). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- _____(1959) *Aion: researches into the phenomenology of the self*. In R.F. C. Hull (Trans.) The collected works of C.G. Jung_(Vol. 9). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Kidner, D. (2001). *Nature and psyche: radical environmentalism and the politics of subjectivity*. New York: State University of NY Press.
- Liedhoff, J. (1975). *The continuum concept: in search of happiness lost*. Reading, MA: Perseus Books.
- Lifton, R. (1993). *The protean self: human resilience in an age of fragmentation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lorenz, H. (1997). *Living at the edge of chaos: complex systems in culture and psyche*. Einsiedeln: Daimon Verlag.
- Lorenz, H. & Watkins, M. (2001). *Individuation, seeing-through, and liberation: depth psychology and colonialism*. Pacifica Graduate Institute: unpublished paper.
- _____ (2002). *What is a depth psychological approach to cultural work? What is a cultural approach to depth psychological work?* Pacifica Graduate Institute: unpublished paper.
- _____ (2002). *Thinking about collective trauma, symbolic loss, and the praxis of restoration in the Americas*. Pacifica Graduate Institute: unpublished paper.
- Maalouf, A. (1998). *Les identités meurtrières (on identity)*. London: Harvill Press.
- Martin-Baro, I. (1994) *Writings for a liberation psychology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- McLaughlin, C. & Davidson, G. (1985). *Builders of the dawn: community lifestyles in a changing world*. Summertown, TN: Book Publishing Company.
- Miller, D. (1989). *The stone which is not a stone: Jung and the postmodern meaning of meaning*. In Spring. Volume unknown.
- Murphy, M. (1992). *The future of the body: explorations into the further evolution of human nature*. Los Angeles: Jeremy Tarcher.
- Oakley, C. (1999). *What is a group: a new look at theory and practice*. London: Rebus Press.
- Oliver, K. (2001). *Witnessing: beyond recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Peck, M. (1987). *The different drum: community making and peace*. Simon & Schuster: New York, NY.
- Perry, J. (1985). *Individuality: a spiritual task and societal hazard*. In ReVISION. Vol. 8(1), sum-fall. pp. 53-58. US: Heldref Publications.
- Picucci, M. (1998). *The journey toward complete recovery: reclaiming your emotional, spiritual & sexual wholeness*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Ricoeur, P. (1991). *From text to action: essays in hermeneutics II*. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press.
- _____(1981). *Hermeneutics and the human sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Romanyshyn, R. (1989). *Technology as symptom and dream*. London: Routledge.
- _____(2002). *Ways of the heart: essays toward an imaginal psychology*. Pittsburgh: Trivium Publications.
- Roseman, M. & Laderman, C. (1996). *The performance of healing*. New York: Routledge.
- Roszak, T. (Ed.)(1995). *Ecopsychology: restoring the earth healing the mind*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Sampson, E. (1993). *Celebrating the other: a dialogic account of human nature*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Samuels, A. (2001). *Politics on the couch: citizenship and the internal life*. *Press Release*. London: Profile Books.
- Scott, J. (1990). *Domination and the arts of resistance: hidden transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Shapiro, E. (1995). *Restoring habitats, communities, and souls*. In *Ecopsychology: restoring the earth healing the mind*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

- Shor, I. & Freire, P. (1989). *A pedagogy for liberation: dialogues on transforming education*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Slattery, D. & Corbett, L. Eds. (2000). *Depth psychology: meditations in the field*. Einsiedeln: Daimon Verlag and Carpinteria, CA: Pacifica Graduate Institute.
- Some, M. (1998). *The healing wisdom of Africa: finding life purpose through nature, ritual, and community*. New York: Jeremy Tarcher.
- Some, S. (1997). *The spirit of intimacy: ancient African teachings in the ways of relationships*. New York: Quill, William Morrow.
- Stark, M. (2002). *The state of the U.S. consumer 2002*. New York: Saatchi & Saatchi.
- Talamo, P., Borgogno, F. & Merciai, S. Eds. (1998). *Bion's legacy to groups*. London: Karnac Books.
- Tacey, D. (2001). *Jung and the New Age*. East Sussex: Brunner-Routledge.
- Thompson, J. (1981). *Critical hermeneutics: a study in the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Turner, V. (1966). *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Villoldo, A. (2000). *Shaman, healer, sage: how to heal yourself and others with the energy medicine of the Americas*. New York: Harmony Books.
- Watkins, M. (1992). *From individualism to the interdependent self: changing the paradigm of the self in psychotherapy*. In *Psychological perspectives: a journal of global consciousness integrating psyche, soul and nature*. V. 27. Fall/Winter.
- _____. (2000). *Invisible guests: the development of imaginal dialogues*. Woodstock: Spring Publications.
- Wheatley, M. & Kellner Rogers, M. (1996). *A simpler way*. San Francisco: Berret-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Whyte, D. (1997). *The house of belonging*. Langley, WA: Many Rivers Press.

: Methodology

Appendices

Appendix A: Introduction to the methodology

As an on-going member of the spiritual, yet secular Old Growth community group, I am currently engaged in the phenomenological experience that I investigated in this dissertation research. In general, the Old Growth community of New York, in which I am a leader, comprises a non-exclusive, diverse group of approximately 30-50 individuals, who meet and gather together on a regular basis—evenings, weekends, and weeklong retreats. The community is not specifically land-based, although most of the on-going members reside in the suburban and metropolitan areas around New York City. The purpose of the community, which is still in its infancy, having been founded approximately seven years ago out of a series of personal growth workshops, is to explore the use of conscious community circles, ritual, and dialogue as tools for the transformation, healing and personal growth of the individuals who participate. We are called together, as declared in the purpose statement created by the participants: “to provide a container in which individuals can be safe, intimate, and supported in becoming more fully human”.

The primary goal of this dissertation research has been to investigate, using a participatory research methodology as well as a depth psychological interpretive lens, the qualitative phenomenon of an intentional community experience, and its potential influence and impact on the larger community.

Within this framework, the methodological approach to the dissertation comprised of interweaving two hermeneutic paths towards deeper understanding, which are presented in two sections: 1. An exploration of the participants' experience of community, following a participatory research protocol; 2. A series of interpretive reflections using the participatory material in dialogue with various depth psychological and theoretical texts. The next few paragraphs provide a general overview of the research process and goals, followed by a detailed review of the steps and theoretical grounding of the methodological approach to the dissertation.

1. *Participatory Hermeneutics*. As an on-going member of this community, it has been my intention to create a participatory framework that enabled myself as researcher and the community as participants to explore together the themes and questions posed in the problem statement. This process for collecting and working with data from the participants involved three specific interactive modalities: 1. Group dialogue/interviews; 2. one-on-one interviews/conversations; 3. creative, artistic exploration (non-verbal) of the themes/meaning of community. The detailed steps that were employed to collect data in all three of these interventions are outlined below.

It has not been my intention to use the community in order to "test a hypothesis" or to quantify or analyze any particular aspect of the community experience, rather I was interested in creating a dialogical process, with the goal of deepening our shared understanding of the nature, purpose and goals of the community and of the self-in-community. If this project is to be considered

successful, the participants will have benefited as much as the researcher, in that we have co-created a narrative that uncovers, deepens and expands our understanding of what it means to be a self-in-community in the suburbs of New York City circa 2003.

2. Interpretive Reflections. In addition, the material that emerges from dialogue and collaborative research with the community participants was also used to explore, understand and interpret the phenomenon of an intentional community hermeneutically, employing a range of depth psychological perspectives—e.g. Jungian, psychoanalytic, and cultural. This analysis included examining individual and collective symptoms, issues of marginalization and hidden agendas, and the meaning and impact of symbolic, ritualistic, and/or unconscious behaviors and material. With reference to the Jungian perspective described in the introduction, the research data also provided an opportunity to explore both the conscious and the unconscious qualities of this phenomenon; e.g. individuation, synchronicity and the soul work of community enterprise; the shadow side of community; and the restorative, dialectic, and compensatory intra-psychic and inter-psychic work of ritual, dialogue, symbolic action and imagery.

Appendix B: Methodological Approach to Data Collection

Within this participatory, hermeneutic framework, it seemed most appropriate to follow a step-by-step approach to the research that combined the themes of seeking understanding (as opposed to “knowledge”), participation and interpretation, such as those outlined by Ellen Herda (1999), in her book, *Research Conversations and Narrative: A Critical Hermeneutic Orientation in Participatory Inquiry*. What is of particular interest in Herda’s work is her focus on the inter-subjective, co-creative and dialectical relationship between the researcher and his/her subjects. She defines a methodology that is committed to doing more than merely examining a community under a microscope, thereby objectifying the living organism as a “thing”. She is interested in using research and study in a participatory manner, such that the aims and goals of the enterprise can be forwarded, supported and further bolstered by the work:

Our society has for several decades celebrated individualism, but now many people are beginning to critique the price they paid for individualism and to think about different kinds of relationships—ones birthed in community...The research model posited in the present text relies on community for it to work, and, at the same time, strengthens existing communities or helps to build new communities. In the end it is our responsibility to think differently, to learn and to act differently. A field-based research in a hermeneutic tradition can help bring forth community motifs that engender conversation, reflection and new bases for action. (Herda, p. 130-131)

Herda’s work represents a relatively new approach to social science research. Following the work of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, she is concerned with developing research frameworks that move beyond the rationalist and positivist paradigm of neutral and value-free data collection and

analysis carried out by a “subject” who is investigating “objects”. Heidegger laid groundwork for a critical approach to this mechanistic and Cartesian epistemology by pointing out that our very beingness as humans is deeply laden with interpretation: the very act of being conscious requires an interaction between a being and its “beingness” (Dasein), which according to Heidegger is always accomplished through projection--an interpretive act (Heidegger, 1971). There is no such thing as “neutral” or value-free data, for as subjects we always bring with us a historical, cultural, and contextual lens to whatever “facts” we examine.

Following Heidegger’s theme, the hermeneutic perspective on truth and knowledge set forth by Gadamer calls for us to abandon the quest for scientific knowledge in the realm of the social sciences and instead to seek truth and understanding by exploring human reality through social interaction, for social actions, not individual actions, are the starting point of all intelligibility in human existence. For Gadamer (1994), the foundation stone of all social action and interaction is language. Much more than just a technical tool for representing the objective world, as posited by the positivistic linguistic philosophers like Chomsky and Wittgenstein, language for Gadamer is an ontological event: it is how people engage with themselves and their world and come to “know” their own existence.

[Language] is a living process in which a community of life is lived out. In linguistic communication, a world is disclosed that sets its theme before those communicating like a disputed object between them...thus the world is common ground, trodden by none and recognized by all, uniting all who speak with one another. All forms of human community of life are

forms of linguistic community: even more, they constitute language, but it acquires its reality only in the process of communicating. That is why it is not a mere means of communication. (Gadamer in Herda 1999, pg. 28)

For Gadamer, language is expressed in conversation and dialogue; it is always social, cultural, historical and contextual, and meaning is continually created through a mutual interchange involving active listening and speaking, which in turn provoke interpretation.

In this context, Ricoeur (1991) then takes the further step of pointing out that the interpretive act in a research setting—the work of hermeneutics—always involves a process of distancing and appropriation of a narrative “text”. A text for Ricoeur is a social science fiction created whenever a dialogue or conversation or speech is fixed in space/time by writing. It must be treated as an entity of understanding that represents, not the actual conversation, but a new creative product that is subject to its own contextual conditions and interpretations. Ricoeur points out that when one fixes a discourse in writing, a new thing is created, in a new time and place, separate from the conversation that engendered it. Hence, the hermeneutic approach to analysis of data collected through dialogue and conversation must consider each “text” as a new “event” in which to deepen the thinking and understanding of a communication experience between humans.

The process of “distancing” or distancing from the text, allows the reader/writer to create a space of recognition that the text entity is a separate mode of reality—a written as opposed to dialogical experience—which must be apprehended within its own temporal context (e.g. it could be read and

interpreted months or years after the fact, rendering a wholly different response than one engendered soon after or simultaneous with its creation). Following this shift of consciousness comes the recognition that the text may hold new and heretofore unrealized meanings and possibilities for expansion and understanding that must be “appropriated” through an act of interpretation—another participatory event (and likely conversational/dialogical). This process of distancing and appropriation then sets the context in which field-based research in a hermeneutic tradition takes place: “In field-based hermeneutic research, the object is to create collaboratively a text that allows us to carry out the integrative act of reading, interpreting, and critiquing our understandings. This act is a grounding for our actions. The medium for this collaborative act is language.” (Herda, pg. 87)

With the philosophical foundation outlined briefly above, it became possible to develop a method of inquiry for this dissertation that was both participatory and hermeneutic. Using protocols and guidelines set forth by Herda and other examples of hermeneutic research methods, (e.g. in Packer and Addison, 1989) I developed a research framework that fostered the engagement of the members of the community in collaborative, creative, and interpretive acts designed to further an understanding of the questions posed by this project, all the while supporting and forwarding the agenda of the community itself.

Methodological steps: section 1—participatory hermeneutics

The following is an overview of the steps that I followed as I entered the participatory research phase of this project. These guidelines were chosen after considering the timing of the project vis a vis community events, the availability of participants, and the co-creative intent of the research protocol; they represent a synthesis of best practices as outlined in examples from Herda's work with her graduate students

1. Design hermeneutic framework of inquiry.

According to Herda, the entry point for research is the most crucial piece of the hermeneutic puzzle, as it is essential that the researcher understand the distinction between the role of a researcher in a positivistic or phenomenological study and one that is participative and hermeneutic in nature. In this context, I entered the research, not with a particular hypothesis or goal in mind, but rather with the attitude of uncovering, discovering and exploring the nature of intentional community from the inside out.

In hermeneutic research, one does not "bracket" or ignore the prejudices, biases, and judgments that are a natural part of the researcher's repertoire of seeing, speaking and acting. Instead, as researcher, I had to be prepared to uncover and explore my own prejudices, wrestle with them, understand them, and be willing to let go of them as the inquiry unfolded. Likewise, in the role of "primary researcher" in this participative mode, it was my responsibility to create a space of trust and safety such that the participants felt free to expose and explore their hidden assumptions and deepest longings with regard to the subject matter. In this way, the project represented an opportunity for reflective

and emancipative learning that benefits both researcher and participants and, ultimately, will hopefully further the growth and development of the community itself.

2. Develop research categories.

The purpose for choosing to identify initial categories was to help frame the conversations and focus the development of questions that engendered reflection and responses from the participants that were aligned with the purpose and intent of the investigation. Since hermeneutic inquiry is essentially a process of narrative creation and interpretation, it was important to construct some structure—with permeable boundaries—around the characters, setting and plot of the stories that emerged. I understood that the categories might shift and change as the work progressed; these thematic guidelines were initiated as original starting points that were ultimately reframed, with three discarded altogether, as the collaborative interview and conversation processes unfolded. Initially, I established seven basic categories of inquiry around the nature of the intentional community experience. They were: 1. The local, cultural and historical frame; 2. The nature of the participants—their histories, characters, wounds and gifts; 3. The purpose and aim of the community; 4. The practices that define the community experience; 5. Understandings and meanings of self-in-community; 6. The social and cultural perspective. 7. Shadow issues and marginalization. (See the end of this method section for sample framing questions that were used)

3. Select participants.

I chose thirteen individuals to participate in this project, as a subset of the community members. The choice of participants was based on the following criteria: 1. Their interest in the subject matter of the inquiry; 2. Their willingness to “co-create” the project through conversation and dialogue; 3. Their availability and interest in reading and working through the narrative text in partnership with the researcher; 4. Their commitment to the growth and learning of the community overall—as a result of this project.

4. Collect data.

Unlike traditional phenomenological research protocols, I understood the participative and hermeneutic method to encourage and allow a great deal of flexibility in terms of how, where, and what data were collected. The reason for this was that the goal of the process of collecting data was to collaboratively explore themes and questions in a “natural” format and setting, such that the result which becomes a “text” be as true a representation of the thoughts, wishes, and beliefs of the participants—as well as the researcher—as possible. Hence, the key to collecting data was to conduct conversations with the participants in a variety of modes and settings over a five month period. I also initiated a series of initial one-on-one conversations with a few members of the participant group and additional members of the community—although these were not taped or transcribed—as an opportunity to test out a variety of questions and approaches to the subject matter.

The following outline details the order and number of the specific interactions that took place between the chosen participants and myself in a “research mode” (e.g. taping conversations):

- a. *Initial interviews*: held informal discussions with three-four of the participants (not taped) to share ideas regarding the themes and categories chosen, and to explore possible lines of questioning in the formal interviews/dialogue sessions.
- b. *Interview with community founders*: conducted—and taped—one two-hour conversation with Tom and Flame Lutes, regarding the philosophical cornerstones, the formation and initial birth of the Old Growth community—in order to set the stage for the interactions with the rest of the participants/co-researchers.
- c. *Group dialogue*: conducted three two-hour sessions of dialogue with eight members of the chosen participant group in attendance. These sessions were taped and transcribed—the narrative text was shared, interpreted and discussed as described below.
- d. *One-on-one interviews*: conducted four one-on-one interviews with three new co-researchers and one who had already participated in the group dialogue sessions. These interviews took place after the group dialogue and used an open-ended dialogical format, in which the participants were encouraged to converse openly about their thoughts, concerns and dreams with regard to the community. In addition, I took the opportunity to explore many of the same themes

with them that had emerged in the sessions with Tom and Flame and the group. These sessions each lasted at least one hour in length, were taped and transcribed, and the narrative text was again shared, interpreted and discussed with the participants.

- e. One full-day creative, artistic session:* a group of 14 participants from the community, comprising all or most of the study group and others who showed an interest, as well as myself—in both a research and participative mode—engaged in a day-long workshop called “Shaping a Community”. This workshop was created and facilitated by two “animators”, Xavier Roux and Kathleen Calabrese, who are professional workshop leaders/artists and not members of the community. This session was photographed and sections of the day were video and audio taped, with all artistic materials preserved/recorded, distributed and shared among the participants.
- f. Follow-up conversations:* I conducted a series of follow-up sessions with each of the participants in the group dialogue and each of the one-on-one interviewees, in order to provide an opportunity for the individuals and the whole group to “work through” the process of interpretation and appropriation of the narrative texts that we created together.

As a further clarification of step “e” above, it was my intention to expand the inquiry to include the collection of symbolic, imaginal “data”, through the creation of sculpture and/or drawing. These activities provided participants an

opportunity to set aside the conceptual and intellectual framework of dialogue, to enter a deeper, emotionally rich imaginal space, where the depth psychological and symbolic meanings of community experience were encouraged to emerge. By incorporating these imaginal ways of knowing into the participative research protocol, beyond just dialogue and conversation, I hoped to create spaces for the voices of hidden emotions, marginalized thoughts, even unconscious dreams, to emerge into the circle. As the overall intention of this work has been to explore what under girds our yearning for community at this time and in this place—urban American circa 2003—the collection of “data” in the form of image, symbol and artistic renderings, supported the deepening of the individual and community’s understanding and awareness of its hidden meanings and values, goals and aims.

The “texts” of image and symbol also provided rich material with which to engage the community in further dialogue from a depth psychological perspective, exploring and uncovering what remains hidden, unexpressed, unacknowledged, or perhaps not-yet-known to the individuals or the community as a whole. The depth psychological lens, along with data in the form of symbolic narrative, as opposed to exclusively discursive texts, afforded me access to an important, often overlooked class of psychological material: that which is repressed, hidden, and unconsciously projected onto the community and the larger world, as well as the deepest and most profound desires and utopian dreams of the participants (some of which they were not even aware of).

5. Create “texts”.

Each of the conversations described above was taped and transcribed. These were then given in “story” format to the participants to read and reflect on. The image and symbol based material was also explored and interpreted by the individuals and the community through follow up conversations and through dialogue with the facilitators, who also were encouraged to engage in reflection upon the community artworks and community processes that they witnessed during the day-long workshop. In addition, much as Ricoeur’s work sets the context for narrative texts to be treated as separate and distinct data from the point of view of the research and researchers, the artistic works themselves and their subsequent interpretations by myself and the co-researchers were treated as a separate and distinct form of community narrative, in order that the affective and aesthetic qualities of the artworks be honored and their resonance and potency as symbols kept intact.

6. Review and interpret text with participants.

In follow-up sessions with the individuals and with the group, we worked through the process of “appropriation” of the texts together. This entailed reading and discussing and bringing to the project new and unfolding ideas and themes that may not have emerged in the initial dialogues. Each participant was given the opportunity to review his or her own transcripts—and was provided a summary version in addition to the entire text format—and asked to provide on-going dialogical interpretation of the results of the discourse.

This iterative process naturally has no “given” conclusion, although for purposes of the final dissertation product, I worked with the results from one

formal and a series of informal follow up sessions with the participants. Even as this project winds down, it is likely that the community may choose to continue to work with the texts and art projects, sharing them with the wider community group over a sustained period. This, in effect, may be one of the “outcomes” of the participatory nature of the project that benefits and strengthens the community building process.

7. Develop significant themes/new categories

I conducted this step after reviewing the transcripts and dialoguing with the participants about the thematic qualities of the conversations. The final list of categories was narrowed down to four major areas of focus: 1. Personal and cultural context; 2. Meaning, values and purpose; 3. Community practices; 4. Leadership and sustainability. Although the conversations with co-researchers covered, in each case, a wider array of topical subjects and areas of interest regarding the community itself and “intentional community” in general, at some point it became clear that these four themes were the focal areas of greatest interest to the participants. However, the original framework of seven categories and the questions outlined below (at the end of this chapter) were used to guide the initial taped conversations.

8. Summarize results and share with participants.

Unlike traditional research endeavors in which the research data gets extracted from a group of “subjects”, then interpreted at a distance by a supposedly objective “expert”, becoming the sole possession of the researcher, the co-creative nature of this research project necessitated that I share my draft

chapters of the participative material with a subset of interested parties from within the community. This final act of reciprocity enabled the participants to comment on the form and content of their part of the hermeneutics. In the creation of knowledge from a dialogical perspective, this shared-ownership of the result is crucial if the liberatory and empowering aims of a participatory research protocol are to be realized; ultimately, in this methodological stance, the community should embrace the research results as their own.

Methodological steps: section 2—Interpretive reflections

9. Researcher hermeneutics and written summary.

In this section of the dissertation, I had the opportunity to reflect back on the entire process of dialogical and imaginal data collection, the core research questions, and collaboration that led to the participatory research results/summary in Step number 8. Within this broad-based context, it was then possible to re-engage the material and original questions within a hermeneutic circle that re-visited and incorporated earlier depth psychological themes that had emerged from the literature review, and to generate and explore additional theoretical and psychological avenues that had grown out of the dialectical process of the collaborative research. This section of interpretive and hermeneutic reflections is presented in chapters four, five, and six through a series of sub-chapters that focused on particular aspects of the dialogical material, culminating in concluding remarks that circle back to the participatory material directly with an eye to synthesizing both aspects of the hermeneutics,

participatory and interpretive. The following provides a brief overview of the topical subject areas that were chosen and the general questions that framed my interpretations:

- Jungian Psychology: What aspects of the participatory research can be linked back to the Jungian perspective—how do the Jungian theories of individuation, the shadow, the transcendent function, and synchronicity in particular, support and reinforce the development, healing, transformational and restorative qualities of the community experience described by the co-researchers?
- Psychoanalytic theories of social trauma: What aspects of the recent work in psychoanalytic theory around methods for healing social trauma might be relevant and applicable to the situation and context described by participants in Old Growth?
- Psychoanalytic theories of group process: Are there ways in which the theories of group process, as well as leadership and organizational theory from a psychoanalytic and depth perspective, may be useful in supporting the challenges and complexities of structure, organization and leadership faced by the participants in Old Growth? How might theories of group process and culture development help the participants to understand and work more meaningfully—and hopefully more successfully—with issues of enrollment, participation, responsibility, and sustainability?

- Postmodern approaches to spirituality: How might the theories that link process theology, postmodernism, and postJungian psychology enrich and deepen the community's understanding of itself as a spiritual undertaking? How might psychological and social theory around postmodern religious practices support and reinforce the praxis and processes engaged in Old Growth?
- Liberation psychology: How might the participants in Old Growth come to understand their community work as social and political in nature? How might theories that link cultural contexts with depth psychological theory be useful in deepening the community's understanding of its gifts and shadows, opportunities to impact the greater culture and society, and the issues and challenges it faces within the socio-economic, historical, and political sphere of post-colonial, patriarchal capitalism?
- Archetypal and imaginal psychologies: How might the community re-frame and deepen its understanding of the interplay between participants, nature, and soul? How might they use these depth psychological theories to bolster their imaginative practices and deepen their soul work in community settings? How might the perspectives of the imaginal, the soul, and the aesthetic, help to inspire and re-balance the modes of participation beyond simply discourse and dialogue?

- Theories of community praxis: How might the work of critical hermeneutics and depth psychology support the community in deepening its understanding of the transformational power and importance of practices that are often dismissed or marginalized: play, poetry, reverie, etc?
- Hermeneutics and theories of social narrative: How might the work of Ricoeur, Sampson, Gadamer, Hillman, and others support the community in deepening an understanding of itself as an important social experiment in relatedness, democracy and postmodern modalities of belonging? How might this “text” be used by the community to develop a statement of praxis and principle for the nurturing of postmodern community containers? How might the theory of Ricoeur’s “social imaginary” support the community in understanding the importance of permeability, openness, and avoiding attachments?
- How might I summarize my personal reflections and understanding of the experience of this research project, its impact on myself as a practicing member of the community and its impact on the co-researchers who gave of their time, intellect, energy and love for the project?
- How have my personal biases, opinions and judgments been reinforced, changed, or discarded through the process of participative action and hermeneutic interpretation?

Appendix C: Limitations and Ethical Assurances

Limitations to the method

There is no practical approach to participatory or qualitative research that does not carry inherent risks, obstacles to understanding and practical limitations. As such, the methods outlined above have been implemented with the intention of providing a collaborative framework that will enable and engender a deepening understanding around the meaning, impact and purpose of the intentional community under investigation. However, given that the co-researchers and the primary researcher are all members of the same community, and they generally know each other quite well, there is an immediate risk that some collective consciousness, and hence unconsciousness, may pervade the project—that the insular and intertwined nature of the group may foster collusion or a subtle form of “group think”.

As such, it was important for myself, as primary researcher, to remain vigilant and conscious of any tendency on the part of participants to avoid particular subjects, or more likely, to consider some subject matter “already known” within the circle and therefore unnecessary to repeat. This collusive tendency may have prevented valuable insights and unacknowledged vulnerabilities—of the individuals, and the group itself—from being presented in a format where they could be interpreted and worked through. By the very fact that these participants and myself are well-acquainted, it is probably impossible to ascertain what level of communal memory has been held back, lost under the tacit “assumption of being known”, or repressed in an effort not to create conflict.

However, unlike quantitative or other qualitative methods in which the desire for objectivity and distinctly recognizable “knowledge” is sought, this method has been chosen within a different research context. It has been essential for the co-researchers to maintain an awareness of any tendency to repress, block or otherwise “leave out” important information regarding their experiences and feelings about the community, yet, in essence the goal of this method has been to deepen and widen the understandings of all concerned, not to provide “data” for the sole use of an expert. It has been my responsibility, as co-researcher and primary interpreter, to remind the participants that their vigilance and consciousness with regard to being fully open, expressive, and forth coming—not assuming that people in the community already “know” anything—will benefit not only the outcome of this project, but the future endeavors of the community itself.

In essence, this research protocol is clearly circumscribed within the localized sphere of the community in which it is designed to support—in interpreting and summarizing the conversations, I have not attempted to mitigate prejudice, bias or subjective material; in fact, it is just this kind of content that deeply enriched and broadened our “horizons of understanding”—recognizing that the goal of this project was not to “prove” any particular hypothesis or to claim rigor and validity to any scientific knowledge: the goal has been to foster a deeper sense of meaning, purpose and value in the agency of community in the world.

In addition, it must be recognized that the group selected for participation in this project represents only a small subset of the community-at-large. There are between thirty and forty active members of Old Growth and it is growing on a daily basis. Hence, the limitation inherent in working with a microcosm of the whole must necessarily presuppose that the views of the co-research group may or may not always coincide with the overall perspective of the community. I have mitigated this concern as best as possible by choosing a cross-section of the community membership to participate, including as diverse a population as possible: leaders, active participants, part-timers, men and women. The trade-off inherent in choosing a small group required that I forgo having more diversity, such that minorities, in terms of race, sexuality, and age, are not particularly well represented. On the other hand—as was discussed in detail during the research—the diversity of the community in general is quite limited; hence the choice of participants is generally a representative sample of the whole.

Finally, the small size of the group enabled the research team—myself and the participants—to work very closely and deeply over a period of months. Hence, the result of the project is not to be viewed as a representation of community work in any sphere beyond the scope of the Old Growth group and its ground in the suburbs of New York City: it is “our” product. It is not meant to represent or tell the story of community in America or to espouse “knowledge” about intentional community in the Western world. If it is useful as a meaningful piece of research it will be for two reasons: 1. It becomes a tool for use by the Old Growth membership to engender further dialogue and exploration about the

structure, growth, meaning and purpose of the community going forward; 2. It becomes *a support tool* for others who hold a desire to create and nurture containers of belonging, growth and healing through the praxis of intentional community. The very nature of this participatory and qualitative method of research necessitates that we be as humble and localized in our agenda as possible, recognizing that the work of community is never “complete” nor is it automatically transferable from one people or place to another. This dissertation is but one chapter in the ongoing story of intentional community endeavors in urban America.

Ethical Assurances

Given the nature of this research protocol, in which I conducted a series of informal and conversational interactions with the co-researchers, there has been a risk of personal information, personal vulnerabilities, personal stories, and personal prejudices being shared, taped and subsequently inserted in the final product of this dissertation. The participants have all been made aware of the qualitative, personal, and subjective nature of this collaborative approach to the research. They have all signed a release form and discussed directly with me the use of their name and their personal stories within the framework of this project. It has also been made clear to all of the co-researchers that should any of this material be published further beyond the dissertation product, they would have access to the content, and rights to first refusal in terms of the use of their name, their story, and their personal commentary.

In addition, given that the participants in Old Growth are involved with the community for a multitude of purposes, including healing and spiritual development, which are personal in nature, there has been a small risk that this project might bring up difficult and emotionally challenging material for the participants. In this case, I have arranged for them to contact me directly with any questions, concerns, or symptoms that emerge as a result of this project and their involvement herein. I have enlisted the support of two qualified and licensed psychotherapists, Judy Fox (who is a member of the community and involved in this project) and Kathleen Calabrese, Ph.D. (who co-led the creativity workshop), to be available should anyone require special attention in this regard.

Appendix D: Initial Categories and Foundational Questions

In closing, the following questions, arranged by category, provided an initial frame for the conversations, and were used in both the individual interviews and group sessions. It is important to bear in mind, however, that all of the questions outlined below were but starting points for dialogue—the essence of this research protocol was found in the collaborative nature of the content that emerged. As such, many, even all of the questions below were re-worked, re-worded, or even discarded altogether as the conversations progressed and the participants came to clarity around what was deeply meaningful and important for them—within the broader framework of the exploration of their experience of ‘self’ within an intentional community.

1. The local, cultural and historical frame.

- What other community experiences can be considered typical for the local area in which the Old Growth community has been founded?
- How does the Old Growth community represent something different or unique from these other community offerings?
- What is missing from geographical, historical and religious communities in your area that would lead to your involvement with Old Growth?
- What is the cultural landscape that you experience that fosters your desire for this kind of community experience?

2. The nature of the participants—their histories, characters, wounds and gifts.

- What brought you to participate in this community? Why?
- How does your personal background impact your interest in intentional community?
- What does “community” mean to you personally? Why is it important?
- How does it benefit you directly or indirectly?
- Who is invited to be a part of this community? Who is excluded? Why?

3. The purpose and aim of the community

- What is the goal of the Old Growth community?
- Why is this important to you?
- What is unique about this community versus others that you belong to?
- What is your role in achieving the aims of the community?
- What is the nature of “leadership” for the community?
- How do you describe the roles and nature of leaders vs. members of the community?

4. The practices that define an intentional community

- What are the experiences that define the community for you?
- How do you create the community process/experience?

- What specific activities make the community gatherings meaningful for you?
- Can you describe rituals, ceremonies, or other repetitive activities that foster/reinforce the community experience?
- How would you describe your role in the practices of community?

5. The definition of self-in-community

- How does the community experience impact your sense of “self”?
- What is different or unique about the “self” that you experience yourself to be in community versus other contexts?
- How has being a part of the community changed who you see yourself to be?
- How do you define the borders between yourself as an individual and your self-in-community?

6. Shadow issues and marginalization

- Are there aspects of the community experience that might be considered oppressive or unconsciously harmful?
- What might cause the community to fail?
- What concerns/issues do you feel are repressed, hidden from view?
- Is there withheld or secretive information within the community?
- What is the shadow-side of the community experience?
- How does the community deal with issues of inclusion/exclusion?

- Who is not invited to participate? Why?
- Who is sought after and encouraged to participate? Why?

7. The cultural perspective

- Why do believe people desire and long for new experiences and forms of community at this time?
- What impact do you see your intentional community having on the larger culture?
- What is unique about the approach and processes that the Old Growth community has employed to birth, build and sustain itself?
- How do you understand the different purposes and meanings of one-one-on-one therapeutic work, group therapy, support groups, and intentional community?