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Mandalas, Nixies, Goddesses, and Succubi
A Transpersonal Anthropologist Looks at the Anima

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Men past their midlives may become involved in a dialogue with their own unconscious. This dialogue often takes the form of female and female-related imagery and feelings that represent hidden mental processes in the self. C. G. Jung called the producer of these images and feelings the anima (or the animus in women), the harbinger of the contrasexual aspects of our being. We often come to know the anima by becoming aware of the qualities we project upon our contrasexual Other. The author, a transpersonal anthropologist, explores his own forty years of encounters with his anima, beginning with spontaneous and ecstatic "mandala experiences," and proceeding through decades of meditation and study in the traditions of Tibetan Tantric Buddhism, the Western mysteries, and Navajo religion. He argues that engagement with the anima is a hermeneutic process, and that traditional societies often have an intact, mystical cycle of meaning within which such experiences make sense. Euroamerican contemplatives, however, are frequently in the position of having to create their own cycle of meaning, because their enculturation does not inform their personal anima experiences. The role of culture in mediating anima/us related interpretations is discussed, and a model is presented that may help guide practitioners to a better understanding of how their psyches work, relative to both their conscious-unconscious and their personal and cultural conditioning. The author concludes with an argument in favor of a closer integration of transpersonal psychology and transpersonal anthropology.

Not all the contents of the anima and animus are projected...Many of them appear spontaneously in dreams and so on, and many more can be made conscious through active imagination. In this way we find that thoughts, feelings, and affects are alive in us which we would never have believed possible. Naturally, possibilities of this sort seem utterly fantastic to anyone who has not experienced them himself, for a normal person "knows what he thinks." Such a childish attitude on the part of the "normal person" is simply the rule, so that no one without experience in this field can be expected to understand the real nature of anima and animus.

—Jung, Aion (1951/1959, p. 19)

It all began nearly forty years ago when I awoke early one morning staring at the world through a mandala. I don't mean mandala in a metaphoric sense, but quite literally. I came out of sleep and into waking awareness in a state of bliss and looking at my room filtered through the most exquisitely complex and colorful mandala. It was a living thing and pulsed in synchrony with the rhythm of bliss energies I felt coursing through my body. The experience lasted for only a few minutes and then subsided. The mandala image faded as the bliss energies faded. It is hard to describe the complexity of the image, for no matter how proficient an artist I might have been, there is no way I could ever have rendered the image accurately on paper. It was made up of hundreds of thousands of fine, radiant colored lines, like a multicolored, pulsing doily or circular lacework made of pure energy hanging in front of my eyes. The ambient light in my bedroom was dim, but I
could discern the normal objects in the room through the gauzelike filter of the mandala.

This experience scared me. In fact I became furious with a friend with whom I had had coffee the night before, thinking that she had spiked my drink with some kind of drug. That was before I myself had explored psychoactive substances, and I was very naive about such things. Of course my friend had not inflicted any drugs on me, nor was she the kind of person who would have done such a thing. As it turned out, this was the first of many such mandala experiences that I was to have over the years, and I quite naturally became very curious about their phenomenology. The experiences in those early days were always spontaneous, and I had no notion that I could willfully produce them. They were essentially hypnopompic images and they all shared a common structure:

1. The Visual Aspect. An intense visual experience consisting of an intricate pattern of bright colored, infinitesimal lines—the total configuration corresponding to a classical mandala (i.e., a pattern that manifests a definite center, is symmetrical about that center, and is circular while at the same time "quaternary"; see Argüelles and Argüelles, 1972). The pattern is so intense that it may be perceived for a few minutes or longer after awakening, with the eyes open or closed, even in a lighted environment.

2. The Affective Aspect. An intense and active state of euphoria not associated with the ingestion of drugs. This affective state corresponds in intensity and decay rate with the visual aspect and is a similar state to that experienced in deep meditation or trance.

Over the years I have spoken with a few people who have had similar experiences of mandalas in their waking consciousness—usually during meditation sessions—and many more people who recall mandala motifs arising in their dreams. The direct experience of spontaneous, eidetic mandala imagery while people are awake, however, appears to be a fairly rare event. I am still not clear as to whether or not the mandala experience occurs in all persons during their dream life, or merely in a significant few. But that it is experienced by some people in all societies is quite likely, for the mandala motif in company with other images expressing the wholeness of the self is—as Jung (1951/1959) noted in Aion—a virtual cultural universal. The appearance of the mandala motif in religious and nonreligious symbolism is very widespread among the world's societies. It is present in the iconography of Buddhist sects, Australian aborigines, and various Plains Indian groups, as well as Western Christianity, to mention but a few examples.

Jung and the Mandala

Jung was, of course, fascinated by the mandala. But I was unaware of Jung or of his interest during those early years of spontaneous transpersonal episodes and later drug-induced explorations.1 My first encounter with Jung and his interest in mandala symbolism was profound and significant. A decade after my own first mandala experience, I was browsing in a bookstore and found a copy of Jung's Mandala Symbolism (1959/1972). As I leafed through the plates, I was struck by the remarkable similarity between four of those images and my own mandala experiences. So I bought the book, and only later did I discover in an editorial footnote that the four plates I had identified were the very four, and the only four, that Jung himself painted from his own dream recall.2 This remarkable correspondence naturally led me to study closely all of Jung's writings pertaining to the mandala.

In a number of places, Jung (e.g., 1964) points to the scientific significance of the mandala motif in dreams and religious symbolism around the world. Jung described the phenomenon as follows:

The Sanskrit word mandala means "circle" in the ordinary sense of the word. In the sphere of religious practices and in psychology it denotes circular images, which are drawn, painted, modeled, or danced. Plastic structures of this kind are to be found, for instance, in Tibetan Buddhism, and as dance figures these circular patterns occur also in Dervish monasteries. As psychological phenomena they appear spontaneously in dreams, in certain states of conflict, and in cases of schizophrenia. Very frequently they contain a quaternity or a multiple of four, in the form of a cross, a star, a square, an octagon, etc. In alchemy we encounter this motif in the form of quadratura circuli. (1959/1972, p. 3)

Jung firmly believed in the existence of the universal or "collective" unconscious, as well as in the fundamental tendency of humans to reason by constructing binary oppositions, or antinomies.
Jung felt the mandala to be the key to human symbolism because it is a primal archetype. As such it often represents both the self and the unification or nexus of all possible opposites (Jung 1951/1959, p. 31). Among other contexts, the mandala is encountered by the conscious ego in that of dreaming. But one thing that impressed me from the beginning is that, although Jung did encounter mandala motifs in his dreams and in his automatic painting exercises, he apparently did not encounter eidetic mandala imagery in the waking state in either hypnagogic/hypnopompic states or contemplative visions. This difference in our respective experiences of the mandala turns out to be crucial, for so far as I can tell, Jung never fully appreciated the mandala as a type of anima imagery, or as a doorway to the anima. His interpretation of mandala images was limited to an expression of the wholeness of the self archetype.

**Mandala As Anima**

Let me continue with my own mandala saga and I will return to this point in a moment. In working with these spontaneous mandala experiences, I learned that I could gain some measure of control over the experience by the exercise of concentration upon the center of the image. The more intense and unbroken my concentration became, the longer I could hold the image and the ecstatic affect that accompanied it. In effect, what I was learning to do was to prolong the hypnopompic state by stabilizing what is normally an evanescent warp of consciousness between the dream world and the waking world into a more enduring state of consciousness. Initially hit upon this technique unaided, but I later discovered that it is used to good effect in Tibetan dream yoga for the alteration of the hypnagogic/hypnopompic warps in order to retain awareness during the dream phases. In this fashion, I was able to stabilize the imagery and affect for up to thirty minutes or more at a time.

At some point in this development, the intricate, lacy mandalas began to morph. At first they only became geometrically dynamic—much like the ever-changing image in a child's kaleidoscope—but with the difference that the geometric imagery appeared to emerge from the center of the mandala and flow outwards to the edges of the visual field. Later, this process of emergence began to take on a three-dimensional quality and became one of rushing down a long, geometrically intricate tunnel. If my concentration was sufficiently intense, the tunnel experience would open out into other kinds of visions, either of bright lights, or of some scenario like a lucid dream. I was not asleep, however, and was very much awake and aware. By the later 1970s, or about a decade and a half after the first mandala experience, I had learned a lot about formal meditation. During one weekend retreat, while I was meditating upon my breath, the mandala experience again arose. I experienced myself flying down the usual tunnel with ever-increasing bliss, and into a light that became brighter and brighter until brilliant white light pervaded my entire consciousness and the bliss had increased to the point of almost unendurable ecstasy. When I slowly returned to the awareness of my tingling and twitching body and my surroundings, I found I was lying on the floor, curled up in the fetal position, ten feet from the chair I had been sitting in when the experience had begun. I retained no memory of how I had gotten there.

As it turned out, this was the first time that the mandala experience had morphed into a birthing experience, an initiation as it were. It became an exploration that was to unfold for some years afterwards, especially during meditation retreats. These experiences brought me back into contact with my birth and with the trauma associated with that event. For some years, I could not do breathwork without triggering birthing experiences, sometimes associated with mandala imagery.

On top of this, during the latter 1970s and early 1980s I was intensively doing the Tibetan Tantric Buddhist foundation practices (ngon-dro), one of which is called the "mandala practice" or dkyil-khor (Beyer, 1973, pp. 437ff; MacDonald, Cove, Laughlin & McManus, 1988). This repetitive practice involves constructing a mandala-like form out of rice atop a round, mirror-like surface and then wiping the surface clean. The practitioner concentrates on the operation of assembling and disassembling the rice-form while repeating a chant that describes the construction of the mandala-like mystical cosmos surrounding the mythical Mount Sumeru. This operation is repeated, often for hours at a time, at least a hundred thousand times during
the basic introductory work prior to advanced Tantric practice. It is not surprising that this practice deepened and elaborated my spontaneous experiences of mandalas, and mandala-associated birthing experiences (a type of anima experience), and underscored the significance of the mandala as a “calling” as it were from the anima—the mandala taking on the characteristics of “the womb of form” (Namgyal Rimpoché, 1981). At such times, our consciousness produces an experiential surround with ourselves in the middle, which may be considered an aspect of the Great Mother archetype.

Parenthetically, it is precisely this kind of experience that is used to support empirically the view of death and birth as depicted in the Tibetan Book of the Dead (or Bardo Thodol, Tib: bar-do’i-thos-grol; see Fremantle & Chogyam Trungpa, 1975). The Tibetan term bardo refers to the space or gap between things, between events. A bardo is a point of transition between one state and another. With respect to the stream of consciousness, bardo is equivalent to our biogenetic structural concept of “warp” between “phases” or states of consciousness. With respect to death, the bardo refers to the warp between the end of this life and the beginning of the next life—in other words, rebirth. And some of the phenomenology arising during the bardo is said to involve whizzing down tunnels into light and other lucid phenomena.

The mandala experience as I have described it is a type of anima experience, or may morph into anima-related imagery. In terms of psychodynamics at least, mandala motifs may constitute anima expressions which vary in their function and their interpretation according to their distinct geometry and dynamics. I would suggest at least three types of spontaneous mandala experiences, as well as their functions:

1. Static, two-dimensional mandalas. In their two-dimensional form without much morphing, mandalas may emphasize union or relations among antinomous structures. They may constitute a “calling” from the self to greater union, or a warning that the ego is off center in some significant way.

2. Dynamic, two-dimensional mandalas. In their more dynamic, kaleidoscopic, but two-dimensional form, mandalas may express the antinomies that arise and pass away within the ongoing stream of consciousness. The warning here from the self may be to attend to the stream of consciousness and position the awareness in the middle between the demands and productions of binary structures—for example, between ego and shadow aspects.

3. Dynamic, three-dimensional mandalas. In their dynamic and three-dimensional “tunnel-like” form, mandalas may represent the recurring transformation and “re-birth” which is required for the ego to become sufficiently flexible to incorporate both shadow and anima materials into its increasingly dynamic organization. This recurring process may express the alternating coniunctio and negrido phases of psychic growth that Jung emphasized (Schwartz-Salant, 1998, Ch. 7).

Jung on the Anima

Jung’s discovery of the anima (Latin for “breath,” “soul,” “shade”) in males and the animus in females is one of the main distinguishing features of his view of psychodynamics. The anima/us is a:

...natural archetype that satisfactorily sums up all the statements of the unconscious, of the primitive mind, of the history of language and religion. It is a “factor” in the proper sense of the word. Man cannot make [the anima/us]; on the contrary, it is always the a priori element in his moods, reactions, impulses, and whatever else is spontaneous in psychic life. It is something that lives of itself, that makes us live; it is a life behind consciousness that cannot be completely integrated with it, but from which, on the contrary, consciousness arises. For, in the last analysis, psychic life is for the greater part an unconscious life that surrounds consciousness on all sides—a notion that is sufficiently obvious when one considers how much unconscious preparation is needed, for instance, to register a sense-impresion. (Jung, 1940/1968a, p. 27)

The anima/us performs the bridge or mediator function between the ego and the collective unconscious (Jung, 1930-1934/1997, p. 127; Steinberg 1993, p. 183)—that vast field of archetypal structures that we inherit by virtue of having human brains (Jung, 1940/1968a, pp. 27-28; see also Laughlin, 1996a). Jung noted that there are as many archetypes as there are species-wide, typical perceptions (1940/1968a, p. 48). Archetypes of the collective unconscious are in a certain sense
indistinguishable from the instincts (1951/1959, p. 179), and it is from the archetypal structures that the more developed, differentiated and mature structures of experience grow (Steinberg, 1993, pp. 182-185). The archetypes are living tissue, and whether or not they grow, they are alive and will at every opportunity “do their thing,” usually outside the bounds of our ego consciousness.

The anima/us is also one of the most controversial of Jung's notions. This is due primarily to (1) the difficulty of operationalizing the term in the kind of crisp, inclusive-exclusive form that science requires, and (2) the cultural stereotypes evident in Jung’s definition of male and female attributes. Jung never intended the concepts to be other than phenomenological ones, covering as they so usefully do the very fuzzy natural categories of our experiences of the collective unconscious:

The empirical reality summed up under the concept of the anima forms an extremely dramatic content of the unconscious. It is possible to describe this content in rational, scientific language, but in this way one entirely fails to express its living character. Therefore, in describing the living processes of the psyche, I deliberately and consciously give preference to a dramatic, mythological way of thinking and speaking, because this is not only more expressive but also more exact than an abstract scientific terminology, which is wont to toy with the notion that its theoretic formulations may one fine day be resolved into algebraic equations. (Jung, 1951/1959, p. 13)

The anima/us cannot be pinned down to a crisp theoretical formulation, for to attempt to do so, as many “Jungian” systematists are wont to do, is to rob the term of its essentially phenomenological power. Indeed, natural categories of transpersonal experiences are by their very nature fuzzy (see Laughlin, 1993 on this issue). As Jung (1961/1965) notes in his autobiography, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, the notion of anima/us arose as a consequence of his experience of his parents, the experiences of his patients, and especially in his own internal process of individuation. Considering this rich symbolic material, Jung suspected at first that the anima/us is in relation to the unconscious as the persona is in relation to the external world of objects (Jung, 1928/1966, p. 304). But being open to his own experiences, he later came to see that the same-sex shadow performs that filtering process with the unconscious, and that the anima/us involves the direct apprehension of the unconscious by the ego—a relationship that may nonetheless be distorted by shadow responses to contrasexual content. Indeed, it was Jung’s view that it is through incorporating the shadow, or the personal unconscious, that one comes into a more direct and effective interaction with the anima/us. For this reason, he argued that the anima/us should be encountered within the context of actual human relationships in order for the contrasexual elements of the psyche to be integrated into consciousness (Jung, 1951/1959, p. 22). As we shall see, while this is the most common course of integration of anima/us materials, especially for individuals undergoing analysis, the enactment of the syzygies in actual relationships is neither necessary nor sufficient for individuation. Were this not true, then Eastern paths like Tantric Buddhism would be ineffectual.

Unfortunately, most people never come to understand that many of the attributes they project upon their contrasexual opposites derive from qualities of their own psyches that their enculturation has caused to be alienated from their consciousness. In blind ignorance of their own psychodynamics, most people fail to perceive the many and varied ways in which they project themselves upon other people (Jung, 1951/1959, p. 19; 1930-1934/1997, pp. 4-5). Nonetheless, experience teaches those with the eyes to see that we frequently become ensnared by our own projected psychic materials:

The Anima determines man’s relationship to women, and in the encounter with a woman, man experiences and recognizes the essence of his own soul. Wherever he projects his soul upon a woman, a kind of magic identity is established. This expresses itself in the guise of overwhelming emotions, especially with the intense feeling of “falling-in-love.” Thereby the Anima becomes fate-shaping. When one’s own soul is projected, one feels unable to separate oneself any longer from the object of projection. When one believes he has found, at long last, one’s complement, one does not want to lose this “other half.” Thus the Anima drives the young man towards the realization of his yearnings. (Brunner, 1963/1986, pp. xxi-xxii)

We unconsciously yearn for unity with our self, but because we are outer-oriented, we project the
contrasexual aspects of our selves upon the Other and then feel compelled to interact with the Other in a manner Jung called participation mystique (1930-1934/1997, pp. 6-7; after Lucien LevyBruhl, 1923/1966), or the kind of magico-mystical involvement in which we can become trapped when possessed by unconscious materials. Such possession states are frequently highly charged with psychic energy (i.e., libido; see Jung, 1912/1956, Part 2, ch. 2) and the object of our obsession numinous, bordering on the sacred. Because the state of participation mystique is a special kind of hyperintentionality (samadhi or “absorption-state” in Buddhist psychology; see Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1990, p. 118), the experience is of at least a partial dissolution of ego boundaries and a sense of more or less union with the Other.

**Culture and the Anima**

It is quite possible for any of us to learn how our own psyches work. To accomplish this, however, requires that one develop a contemplative turn of mind. Armed with contemplative skills (Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili, 1990, ch. 11), it is possible to understand the mechanisms of consciousness by studying one's own mental acts—even as they are operating upon objects and events in the world. And sooner or later this process of internal study brings us into contact with our anima/us. As I mentioned above, Jung suggested the term anima/us to cover the experiences we all have of the contrasexual archetypes, the material appropriate to the opposite sex that we inherit as humans and suppress during our development.

For me, as for other males, this relationship with the unconscious is often mediated by feminine imagery, as well as by reflection upon my relationships with real women. That is, aspects of my unconscious self are frequently represented by female motifs in dreams, fantasies, episodes of active imagination, spontaneous visions (Skt: nimitta) during meditation, and in projections upon actual females with whom I am in relationship (Meier, 1995, p. 103). Those Eros qualities that in the course of my own enculturation were considered female—qualities like nurturance, emotion, sensitivity to nuances of relationship, mood, softness, intuition and spiritual awareness—were for a long time suppressed in my quest for a male identity. But because that quest had drawn my ego way off center from the self, the self began to call the ego back into its fold with imagery that hooked my attention and awareness—the first and foremost call being the mandala experience. My path of individuation, as is perhaps the case with everyone, has been idiosyncratic—a reflection of my own distinct life-course (Ulanov & Ulanov, 1994, p. 19). In addition, my path has also reflected both cultural and genetic elements—my life-long enculturation and the array of archetypal structures I inherited as a human with a very typical human nervous system.

Much has been made of Jung's presumed ignorance of the fact that his experiences as a contemplative and as a healer were culturally loaded. But this view is largely the result of a superficial reading of Jung. In fact he was perfectly aware that the anima/us experiences of people from other cultures would be different and conditioned by their upbringing. Moreover, as the archetypes themselves are never experienced directly, and are really structures, not contents, an infinite variety of images and themes may be mediated by the anima/us, depending upon personal and cultural factors (see Ulanov & Ulanov, 1994, pp. 16-18 for a good discussion of this issue). Keep in mind that Jung was as avid a reader of the ethnography of his day as was his teacher, Freud, before him. Indeed, his appreciation of cross-cultural variation was at the root of his suspicion that Eastern yogic and spiritual practices were inappropriate for Euroamericans.

As for myself, because my masculine ego-ideal, as well as the field of underdeveloped archetypes comprising my unconscious, were heavily impacted by my upbringing, it is clear that just what constellation of archetypes comprises the anima for me will vary from that of other males in my society, and is demonstrably influenced heavily by culture. Culture clearly influences the extent to which a male identifies with the variety of functions of the psyche—with emotion, with intuition, and with other attributes of self. Thus the path of self-discovery for each of us is as much an encounter with our cultural background and personal development as it is with the deeper and instinctual collective unconscious. As is sometimes said in the Western mysteries, each knight must enter the forest at the place darkest to him (or her).
**Nixies, Goddesses, and Succubi**

Since the beginning of time man, with his wholesome animal instinct, has been engaged in combat with his soul and its demonism. If the soul were uniformly dark it would be a simple matter. Unfortunately this is not so, for the anima can appear also as an angel of light, a psychopomp who points the way to the highest meaning...

—Jung (1940/1968a, p. 29)

When we do enter that forest, we enter the domain of the Wild Mother (i.e., the chthonic unconscious, the thoroughly chaotic and undifferentiated domain of Eros). We encounter both mythical beasts and domesticated animals, demons of every sort and description, and eventually the positive and negative aspects of the contrasexual anima/us. As we emerge from each encounter, we are impressed with the living reality of the archetypes—entities in the depths of the psyche that seem not only to be alive and enduring, but also marked by something approaching consciousness.

Jung’s writings appear at times to be ambiguous with respect to whether or not the archetypes are actually conscious, and in particular, how conscious the anima/us may be. He speaks at times as though the anima only attains consciousness by interaction and integration with the ego (e.g., Jung, 1951/1959, pp. 24-25), and at other times he speaks of the anima as the ego’s psychopomp in its exploration of the unconscious, and as having a personality of its own (e.g., Jung, 1930-1934/1997, pp. 1215-1216). However, this ambiguity is only apparently so. A closer reading of Jung, accompanied by the requisite direct experience, may lead to a better understanding of the subtle distinction between being conscious of something in the normal ego sense, and the active, living presence and intention of non-ego mediated archetypes. The archetypes do compete for trophic resources, for after all they are living cells within the central nervous system (see Laughlin, 1996a). Being organizations of millions of cells, the archetypes will “do their thing,” so to speak, in a very active way. But just because structures in the unconscious are living systems, compete for trophic resources, and may eventually become entrained to conscious network, this does not mean that the archetypes themselves are conscious. Rather, as Jung (1930-1934/1997) suggests: “It is as if you cut off a little finger and it continued to live quite independently; it would then be a little finger personality, it would be a he or a she, it would give itself a name and talk out of its own mind” (p. 1216).

The struggle of “I-ness” among the complexes is achieved through the competition of organized societies of cells for entrainment to conscious network—in this respect I come down heavily on Jung’s side rather than James Hillman’s more metaphysical views (Hillman, 1989, p. 31; Collins, 1994, p. 13). As far as I can tell, the archetypes are not conscious in the commonsense way we all mean by the term—a term defined primarily by the qualities of awareness and intentionality that we experience in ourselves every day. But when the archetypes engage consciousness by way of imagery, they do become involved to some extent in consciousness, and in a certain sense “become conscious.” As Jung (1928/1966) repeatedly emphasized, however, the archetypes are autonomous, and cannot be known directly, but only by way of their sensory productions. So causation from consciousness back to the archetypes (so to speak) is constrained by the fact of the unconscious nature of archetypal processing (p. 97). The unconscious, and especially the collective unconscious, is largely free from the intentionality of consciousness. Yet, at the same time, the process of assimilation of archetypal materials by the ego does exercise a certain limiting effect upon subsequent transformations produced by the archetypes, and the role of the ego in generating distinctions and discriminations among archetypal elements arising in consciousness is fundamental to the effect of the archetypes on our experience.
The most common medium for encountering the anima/us is in our most intimate contrasexual relationships, beginning of course with our cross-sex parent (Ulanov & Ulanov, 1994; Schwartz-Salant, 1998). There is fascinating evidence from pre- and perinatal psychology that we are born as social beings, cognizing and participating in social events, and knowing our mothers. Not only is the world of physical objects archetypally “already there” to neonatal perception at, or before birth, so too is the world of socially significant objects and interactions. These are objects that include speech sounds or vocal vibrations, interactive gestures, emotional expressions and faces, and especially the face, gestures, feelings, smell, physical touch, breasts and speech of the mother (Field, 1985; Murray & Trevarthen, 1985; Butterworth & Grover, 1988). In other words, we are born with certain nascent proclivities to project socially relevant meaning upon significant others.

As I have argued elsewhere (Laughlin, 1990), the psychological attributes projected upon the feminine are nonarbitrary, and are grounded in our pre- and perinatal experiences of both the woman as the world, and the mother or female caregiver as a powerful mediator between the perinatal child and the world. Because of this heavy archetypal loading, followed by early experiential identification of the feminine with Eros, the Logos faculties of the higher cortical functions that generally develop later than the experiential-emotional faculties become invested in the masculine. Of course the extent of opposition between feminine and masculine attributes in the adult will depend upon the personality, enculturation and age of the individual. Nonetheless, there exists a recognizable cross-cultural and nonarbitrary regularity to gender projections.

The whole of the self is never projected upon the Other, nor can we rely solely upon tracking our projections onto Others in the outer world to learn the full breadth and depth of our anima/us manifestations (Jung, 1951/1959, p. 19; cf. Schwartz-Salant, 1998, Ch. 10). This is because living people often draw projections they resemble in some manner relative to our anima/us imagery. But no one person can resemble all of our anima/us. In my case, my anima will generate one set of attributions upon a small, dark, compact and moody woman who becomes for me a chthonic nixie—a woman vaguely resembling my mother in her youth. She is a creature of the oceanic depths, inarticulate and seductive in her ways, emotionally chaotic and often destructive; and if my gaze were to become trapped by her, I would be led into a tumultuous and chaotic roller coaster ride which would inevitably end in torment and self-denigration—a siren of monumental proportions in my phenomenology, indeed.

But also my anima will project another set of attributions upon a taller, fairer, more slender and more intelligent woman—a female Other of radiance and loving countenance who may act as both nurturing lover, fellow spiritual companion, and psychopomp. The anima qualities that I “recognize” in the Other will be somewhat different, depending upon the archetypal category to which the woman penetrates. And of course, no living person can live up to these projections entirely, if at all—be they positive or negative. If one holds tenaciously to these projections and attempts to ignore or explain away the anomalous qualities of the real person, then the relationship, so long as it lasts, is doomed to acted-out psychopathology and/or oblivion.

When it comes to relationships with the opposite sex, we are caught upon the horns of the proverbial dilemma—and the dilemma is wired into our neurophysiology. On the one hand we are designed to track and model reality in a veridical way. This is important in the interests of adaptation. Psychotic hunters would not last long in the jungle. On the other hand, we are propelled by an inner urge to organic unity—to organize the bits and pieces of our psyche into a coherent whole. When we become engaged in tracking our anima/us, we find out that the same person in the real world—our significant Other—is the object of the drive both for verity and for an anima/us projection device (or APD). The same person becomes both a real object in the world, and a mirror of our own unconscious processes.

As I have mentioned already, much is made in the literature about real relationships being the principal locus for the anima/us work (e.g., Schwartz-Salant, 1998). While this is probably true for most people who work within a Jungian frame, full engagement with the anima/us does not require a real person, nor is a real relationship sufficient for completing the work. In order to optimize our encounters with our anima/us, we must learn to track our dream, fantasy and other imagery directly—we must
learn to quiet the mind and contemplate spontaneous visions, and explore themes and scenarios in active imagination. In so doing we may come to explore our anima materials freed from projection upon people, and in their natural settings—that is, within the internal field of our own “theater of mind.” In this way we accumulate the data necessary to discern patterns in the imagery, and thus begin to make cognitive distinctions based upon the recurrent form of the imagery, the recurrent context of presentation, and typical emotional and intuitive loading.

__Coniunctio__

For example, one of the earliest and most profound experiences of psychic energy I have ever had was during a weekend “loving-kindness” retreat in 1979. Part of the work we were assigned was to imagine a rose in the heart region while repeating the famous mantra, Om Mani Padme Hum, associated with the Tibetan deity, Chenrezig (Skt: Avalokitesvara). Numerous visual images spontaneously arose during the retreat, including: a red sun emitting radiant rays of rose light; two rose planes, one above me and one below me, formed by conjoined bubbles; a bush sprouting innumerable red roses; blue tubes spewing rose energy; and a long lake between mountain peaks with a golden mountain at the end of the lake. All of these may be interpreted as Eros-related symbolism; that is, symbols expressing the intensification of Eros energies in my body.

At a certain point while I was in a state of deep absorption and blissful peace, the image of a beautiful blond female figure dressed in a red shift appeared walking away from me in my left visual field. At first I intended to ignore her as I routinely did with all other distractions from the object of my meditation, but then I intuited that “she” was an archetypal expression of my anima. So I sent her a blast of loving feeling visualized as a laser beam of rose light emanating from my heart. As the laser beam of light connected with the image, both the image of the woman and my bodily self-awareness instantly exploded into a rapidly expanding sphere of rose energy. Within a split second, my consciousness was in a state of intense absorption upon boundless space filled with pulsing, shimmering rose particles and ecstatic bliss. There then followed the eruption of a soundless scream and another energy explosion from the depths of my being that culminated in the awareness of the visual image of a tunnel or birth canal. When corporeal awareness gradually returned, I spent a couple of hours in complete tranquillity, either contemplating the essential attributes of mind, or in absorption upon this or that symbol as it arose before the mind’s eye.

A number of elements of this experience are significant to our discussion of pure anima visions:

1. **Perfection of the image.** Contemplatives come to understand that images freed from the imposition of external perception tend to perfect themselves. From my point of view, the female form was utterly perfect. I felt that no living human being could ever be that beautiful. Or, in the case of a negative anima image, nothing in the world could be so utterly repulsive or terrible. In both Eastern and Western meditation training, an external object like a bowl of water or a flower or the painting of a deity or guru is frequently used to activate an image that is then internalized in the “mind’s eye” and meditated upon as an eidetic image. Those who do this work notice that the internalized eidetic image or “visualization” tends to perfect itself. It will lose any flaws present in the external stimulus, and will perfect the ideal geometry of relations in the form. The deity may become translucent and even radiant as though backlit. In this manner one may learn that no object in the real world could ever completely match the perfection of the inner archetypal imagery. As a matter of fact there actually exist Tantric texts in the East describing the physical qualities to be looked for in finding the ideal lama consort. It is clear that these instructions are for the purpose of finding a lover who simulates the perfect dakini on the inner plane as closely as possible. And with such an experience, one may learn that one’s notions of gods and goddesses derive from the projections onto our sensorium, and from our sensorium onto the world, of the perfect productions of our unconscious.

2. **Intense affective charge.** Pure anima images may be entrained to intense libidinous energies. Indeed, the affective charge may become so intense as to constitute a warp driving the consciousness into an altered state—perhaps a hyperintentional state of absorption. This pairing of the anima image and intense affect may confirm and animate our interpretation of the feminine principle. In the East, this energetic principle is associated with images of the dakinis,
young naked females dancing in the flames of transformation. The image of the blond woman in the red shift was my very Western vision of the dakini—perhaps a Western version of Dorje Pagmo (Skt: Vajravarahi), a young female figure, approximately 16 years old, who is paired (yab-yum) with the male deity Korlo Demchog (Skt: Chakrasamvara)—forming a typical syzygistic image in the Tibetan Tantric system. After the peak experience, I was able to meditate with great concentration and energy for a considerable number of hours.

3. Coniunctio. With the amount of love that had been generated doing the “loving-kindness” penetration work, there transpired the explosive dissolution of both ego consciousness and alienation from the Other, thus producing, for a few moments at least, a coniunctio oppositorum (Jung, 1951/1959, p. 31; 1940/1968a, pp. 175-177), the mystical resolution of the tension of syzygistic duality. Loving or positive, blissful psychic energy is the universal solvent which, when it fills the crucible containing the opposites, dissolves the boundaries and creates union. I suspect that the closest most people come to this experience is during orgasm, a relatively brief state which is mediated by the simultaneous discharge of both the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. The meditative coniunctio experience is probably energized in a similar fashion, but without the involvement of the sexual organs. I should note that the coniunctio experience was many times as intense as any orgasm I have ever experienced, thus adding to the sense of the sacredness and numinosity of the joining.24

Girls, Girls, and Not a Drop to Drink!

This experience proved to be a profound one for my development, but was by no means a solitary event. In fact many hundreds of images have emerged out of the mist in dreams and visions that have provided information about the breadth, depth, and various attributes of the anima. Often these images reflected the ego-shadow ambiguities relative to the feminine. There was one phase during which, in meditation retreats, many of my meditative visions and dreams were replete with more than the usual sexual imagery. For example, sometimes the entire visual field would be taken up by a landscape of rocks and boulders, with hundreds of naked and lascivious male and female figures draped over rocks as far as the eye could see, involved in every conceivable posture of sexual abandon. Such visions were accompanied by intense sexual arousal that would at times persist for hours.

It was during this period that I learned of the unitary source of psychic energy. I hit upon this fact quite by accident, for becoming bored with all the lascivious imagery and sexual arousal, I tried willing those energies to rise up the central channel, rather than out via the genitals. And it worked! Playing with this experience, I discovered that there exists something like a psychological “tap” by which one can willfully shunt psychic energy outward as sexual arousal, or upward into the heart as pure loving-kindness (Skt: metta; see Laughlin, 1985), and further upward into the “third eye” region of the head, thus leading to intense clarity and penetrating awareness (see Laughlin, 1994a on kundalini and Tibetan dumo [or tummo] practice). There is an experience in which one may flip back and forth between outward and upward shunting, and during this flipping back and forth, the imagery changes in appropriate accord. If for example one is focused upon a radiant female deity as the object of meditation, the psychic energy directed from the heart may lead to ecstatic union, whereas if the energy is directed outwards through the genitals, the imagery may shift to coitus. A central point to make here is, so far as my phenomenology can tell, as goes the structure of psychic energy (or libido), so goes the imagery. The image and the affect appear to be two aspects of the same underlying structure.

With respect to the shadow, and its impact upon experiencing the anima and its productions, one must keep in mind that we are dealing with the interplay between two levels in the development of the brain. One of these is the conditioned “personal” unconscious and the other is the deeper, more primordial and relatively unconditioned “collective” unconscious. The latter, in my view, is the nascent, genetically inherited organization25 of the human nervous system, while the former are the more developed, antinomous adaptations that have emerged during enculturation and ego-identity formation of the individual. In my case, there has existed a strong attraction toward, complemented by a fear of and aversion to, the female Other. This ambiguity was laid down in my infancy, and was acted out in the world for years by a neurotic
alternating attraction and aversion to the same woman.

In the experience of pure anima imagery, the duality expressed itself at times as female figures that would morph from sexually attractive forms into repulsive, fearsome forms, and vice versa. For example, during one retreat I had a vision in which I was sitting behind a picket fence looking out at a vast and dismal landscape. In the distance a female figure appeared—a manikin really—with a naked lithe body which shone as though she were covered in chrome. As she came nearer, she smiled seductively and reached out and opened a gate in the fence. As she passed through the gate she morphed into a dark, frightening figure with leathern wings and demonic countenance, and then took flight and passed over my head.

The affect during this episode was revealing and typical of many of my encounters with anima figures. The affect was ambivalent—of sexual attraction or interest on the one hand and anxiety on the other, the ego/persona associating itself with the positive attraction to the feminine, while the shadow was in fear of engulfment and possession by the Terrible Mother. To the shadow, woman takes on the aspect of the animus-figures expresses itself in the text and in pictures as dancing in flames while in sexual union—that is, in the so-called yab-yum posture. One of the techniques used in this practice is to imagine oneself alternately as the male deity embracing the female, then as the female deity embracing the male. Naturally it was with the yum, I would take on a certain submissive relationship to the yab, and would imagine quite successfully being entered by “his” phallus. Meanwhile, during this retreat I was wearing the long flowing red robes of the Tibetan monk, and I would daily take long walks out on the moor where all I ever saw were herds of sheep in the distance and the occasional shepherd. There came a point in these meditations when the female image penetrated deeply into my unconscious and I began to act out the part, and on several occasions found myself dancing lightly across the moor singing tunes like “I’m a girl! I’m a girl!” at the top of my

Of course in meditation work, the unconscious may well gain the upper hand, at least for a while, for the deepening tranquillity that develops in mature contemplation, as it were, pulls the energy rug out from under the repressions. Arising anima figures may be greeted by ambiguous feelings and conflicting attitudes, depending of course on the distinct pattern of enculturation and personal development of the individual psyche—that is, depending upon the ego-shadow configuration and its limbic and cognitive-perceptual associations.

Anima possession can no doubt be dangerous to the stability of an individual’s daily adaptation. But possession does have its lighter side. The funniest encounter with anima possession I ever experienced occurred during a lengthy retreat in Scotland. During that retreat I was working on the symbolism of the Tibetan Tantric deity Demchog (in Tibetan Buddhist terms, the yab). Demchog’s consort is Dorje Pagmo (the yum), the young naked female figure mentioned above. The two are depicted in the text and in pictures as dancing in flames while in sexual union—that is, in the so-called yab-yum posture. One of the techniques used in this practice is to imagine oneself alternately as the male deity embracing the female, then as the female deity embracing the male. Naturally it was far easier for me to identify with Demchog than with Dorje Pagmo, so I spent a lot of time working on being a young, vivacious, red-skinned female. While identifying with the yum, I would take on a certain submissive relationship to the yab, and would imagine quite successfully being entered by “his” phallus. Meanwhile, during this retreat I was wearing the long flowing red robes of the Tibetan monk, and I would daily take long walks out on the moor where all I ever saw were herds of sheep in the distance and the occasional shepherd. There came a point in these meditations when the female image penetrated deeply into my unconscious and I began to act out the part, and on several occasions found myself dancing lightly across the moor singing tunes like “I’m a girl! I’m a girl!” at the top of my
lungs. Part of my observing mind was fascinated by these transformations, while another part drew amusing associations with Julie Andrews in the movie, *The Sound of Music*.

**Simplification of the Anima Images**

Other less entertaining, but no less informative things were learned during this retreat, among them being the discovery of the inexorable simplification of the core symbolism involved in Tantric meditations. Those who have done this kind of work will know that eventually the deities “come alive” in the sensorium, and instead of one struggling to hold an eidetic image, the meditation becomes one of watching the eidetic figures “do their thing” in the mind’s eye. Much of the behavior of these yab-yum images was dancing. But how the yah and yum interacted with each other within the dance began to reflect the state of my consciousness at that moment relative to watcher and unconscious. Not only that, but within a few days, the Demchog-Dorje Pagmo humanoid figures had transformed into two simple *bindus*, or bubbles, colored respectively blue and red. The dance between the red and blue bindu-ized yab-yums became the dance between my male and female self, and when the state of consciousness was one of opposition between the male and female elements of my consciousness, the bindus would remain distinct and relate to each other by differential size and complementary activity. But when my consciousness was experiencing ecstatic union, the two bindus would become part of a larger symbol, with the blue male bindu in a red field and the red female bindu in a blue field, and the two fields swirling around and around, intertwining with each other. Thus it was that I learned firsthand the phenomenological origins of the Taoist *yin-yang* symbol.

I also learned that:

1. **Bindus may become permanent fixtures.** Once the deities had morphed into bindus, they became a permanent fixture in my consciousness. To this day, over fifteen years later, if I close my eyes and concentrate, the two bindus are there in the mind’s eye. Moreover, when I am intensely watching the male and female aspects of consciousness, the bindu representation will frequently resolve into the yab and yum bindus with a smaller, more intense and golden colored *bindu* standing between the red and blue spheres.

2. **Bindus may represent the anima.** The interaction of the bindus represents to some extent the general state of consciousness at the moment, even during more ordinary states, and in particular the interaction between the watcher, the shadow and the female anima. The vastness of the self often crops up as a red mist surrounding the dynamic yab and yum bindus, the red sphere representing the anima-bridge between the ego identified with Logos and the vastness of the unconscious.

3. **Simplification increases symbolic universality.** As symbols become naturally simplified, they also become more universal. Symbols like Demchog and Dorje Palmo, as with Jesus or with the Navajo’s beloved Changing Woman, are heavily loaded with cultural attributes. But as they simplify before the mind’s eye, they take on increasingly universal forms—forms like flowing water, colored mist, spheres, lightning bolts, rocks, and so on. This includes the naked human form as well.

**Anima and the Cycle of Meaning**

*Thus the anima and life itself are meaningless in so far as they offer no interpretation. Yet they have a nature that can be interpreted, for in all chaos there is a cosmos, in all disorder a secret order, in all caprice a fixed law, for everything that works is grounded on its opposite. It takes man’s discriminating understanding, which breaks everything down into antinomial judgements, to recognize this.*

—Jung (1940/1968a, p. 66)

**Coming to terms with one’s anima is a hermeneutic process (Jung, 1940/1968a, pp. 32-41). Meanings do not adhere in the contents of the unconscious, but are attributed by conscious reflection to contents. Yet there is an ordered—one might even say lawful—regularity to these contents. It is the task of the engaged ego to apply meaning that as closely as possible approximates the hidden order expressed by the anima—and to do so in a dynamic, growing and nonideological manner. For, as I have said, the anima is not the unconscious itself, but only the expression of processes forever hidden from our sight. As a northward-flying wedge of geese is the harbinger of spring, so too is anima imagery the harbinger of
processes in the self. The sight of a flight of geese is only a harbinger to the mind that associates this phenomenon with a much-welcomed change of seasons. In other words, the phenomenon is interpreted as a sign, and as it happens is naturally associated with seasonal changes.

Just so, we learn to interpret our own anima imagery in a way that both accurately reflects the underlying processes of the psyche, and builds a shared repository of meaningful imagery by means of which the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind-brain may communicate with each other. It is as though there is room for only one library of symbols within memory, a repertoire of images that both the conscious and unconscious parts of the psyche may use to communicate. The problem is that the grammar of the communication differs drastically between the two, and it is the task of the conscious mind to learn to read the unfamiliar rules of the unconscious, for the unconscious cannot and will not adapt to the grammar of the higher cortical functions of the brain. In time, there develops a corpus of shared meanings by which the unconscious may express its deepest processes, and which consciousness may use to penetrate and engage unconscious processes. For example, if I close my eyes and focus my attention upon the spontaneous dance of the bindus, I will be better able to interpret what is going on in my psyche. In that way I am privileging the communication from the unconscious. But alternatively I can use visualization techniques to trigger desired activities normally outside the direct control of consciousness. For example, suppose that I am feeling stressed. If I focus my attention upon a radiant cool blue, pea-sized bindu in my “third eye” region and then suddenly drop the sphere into my navel region, my body will almost instantaneously become calm. In this way I am privileging the executive function of the conscious ego over the unconscious.

The Traditional Cycle of Meaning

For my conscious ego and for my unconscious, the meaning of the bindu and other anima related images (nixies, goddesses, succubi) has developed out of their nascent, relatively undifferentiated forms into a virtual dictionary of symbols, based upon a lifetime of experiences associated with them in memory. Had I been born and raised in a traditional society with an intact mystical worldview, and had I undergone many of these experiences, I likely would have interpreted them within the local cosmological context—a cultural process we have called the cycle of meaning.

The cosmology, which people mainly carry around in their heads, is imagined and expressed by way of their culture’s stock of symbolic material in such a way that people are able to participate intimately in their version of a symbolically pregnant mythic reality. As Alfonso Ortiz (1972, p. 135) noted, the associations, principles and assumptions upon which a traditional cosmology are founded are rarely, if ever, created anew by individuals. Rather, most people accept and participate in accordance with the worldview they inherit from their culture. This participation results in real life experiences that are in turn interpreted in terms of the cosmology, thus completing a negative feedback loop which instantiates the cosmology in individual experiences and which also confirms the truth of the people’s system of knowledge.

Let me suggest a good example of an intact traditional cycle of meaning from the culture of the Navajo people of the American Southwest—a people amongst whom I have lived and researched for years. While it is true that many Navajo people today do not entirely subscribe to the traditional worldview, and may in fact know little about their traditional roots, traditional Navajo cosmology exhibits many of the features common to such cosmologies worldwide (see Laughlin & Throop, 2001). Moreover, the cosmology is thoroughly syzygistic both in religious iconography and in its appreciation of the antinomous, yet unitary nature of reality. Much of Navajo philosophy is organized around the postulate that all perceivable things in the world have invisible aspects that may be imagined as “Holy People”—for example, the Mountain People, the Star People, the River People, the Rain People, the Corn People, and so forth. Most of the humanoid Holy People have a male and a female representation; that is, Blue Corn Boy, Blue Corn Girl, and so forth. For more philosophically inclined Navajo thinkers, these Holy People are thought of as anthropomorphized symbols for the normally hidden and vital element within all things, which traditional Navajo philosophy equates with “Wind” (nilch'i; see McNeley, 1981). As real people, we also have such a hidden dimension called “the Wind within
one" (nilch'i hwii'isitiinii). All these Winds are really part of the one all pervasive and all encompassing Holy Wind. Winds are never understood to be distinct entities, since energy is thought to be flowing in and out of even the most apparently enduring objects. It is the coming and going of wind that accounts for the tapestry of reciprocal causation typical of this particular understanding of the cosmos. The choice of "wind" as the central metaphor is an explicit recognition—common to many cultures on the planet—that there are forces that normally cannot be observed, save by inference from their effects.

At the root of the sacredness of Navajo cosmology, and of the Holy People who represent the essence of reality, are the many myths recounted through the generations. It is very much the function of myth in societies like that of the Navajo to reveal and explicate the hidden dimensions of the world. The hidden energies that are the essence of reality are given a face—a countenance that may be contemplated, that is "pleasing to the mind," that may be enacted in ritual (e.g., in the elaborate and ingenious Navajo system of hitaal, or healing ceremonies), and that may be imagined in daily life as the efficient cause of significant phenomena and events. For those members who are well versed in their society's mythopoetic system, the core myths and their various symbolic extrusions are often understood to be all-of-a-piece. They form a single, ramified "cognitive map" (Wallace, 1966) within the context of which events in their everyday lives make sense and are easily related to both other events in the contemporary world, and archetypal events that unfold in the context of mythological narratives.

As I said, Navajo cosmology is essentially syzygistic. The main tension and complementarity characteristic of the world is attributed to the interplay of the male and female principles. Complementarity is emphasized, each pole requiring the other in order to maintain viability. There are even myths that tell the story of what happens when the male and female principles get out of synch (see e.g., Matthews 1897/1994, pp. 71-74). Even the famous Navajo ceremonial are divided into complementary sets, the Blessingway ceremonies—given female attribution and concerned with harmony—and the Enemyway ceremonies (given male attribution and concerned with protection; see Griffin-Pierce, 1992, pp. 40-41). Within each of these sets, there are male and female elements—like the male bindu in the female field and the female bindu in the male field in the yin-yang symbol. Hence anyone reared under the influence of these stories and ceremonies would come to interpret relationships as characterized by both polarized tension and unity of complements. Moreover, both men and women are conditioned to think of themselves as embodying male and female principles, and being essentially whole and spiritually empowered by the one, all pervasive Holy Wind. The most important concept in Navajo philosophy is hozho, which is usually translated as "beauty" or "blessing," but which also connotes harmony, health, unity, good, and so forth (Farella, 1984). Men who have knowledge about, and participate in the traditional ways will explicitly interpret their state of hozho in terms of the male and female principles being in harmony within their being. Their anima (they would not speak in these terms of course) would be related to the female Holy People and especially to Changing Woman, the Navajo's most revered goddess and beloved Earth Mother (Schwarz, 1997).

Charlie's Transpersonal Cycle of Meaning

But many of us in modern Euroamerican society do not have such an intact syzygistic cosmological tradition into which we have been nurtured and enculturated, and to which we can have recourse when interpreting our inner imaginings. Thus part of the spiritual path for many of us requires that we discover some sensible context within which to lodge and integrate these meanings. This quest for an integrated context of meaning is required by the holistic operator of the brain (d'Aquili & Newberg 1999), or what Jung called the archetype of wholeness, which he held was indistinguishable from the image of the divine (Jung, 1951/1959, p. 40; 1940/1968a, p. 388). Jung found his own context by way of a careful reconstruction of latter day alchemy (1944/1968b; 1956-1966/1970). I, on the other hand, like so many these days, have borrowed extensively from Eastern mystical teachings and have combined them with various aspects of modern science, including knowledge about how the human brain works. Still others have found the required context in charismatic Christianity, Sufism, or in shamanism, wicca and other so-called "new world religions."
The result is that I, like many who spend years tracking their inner psyche, have developed a quite personal, and essentially transpersonal cycle of meaning. Recall the mandala experience with which I opened this paper. The first time I encountered this experience, the only context of interpretation I had in my head was that a friend had dosed me with a psychotrope. In other words, I had no appropriate cycle of meaning within which a transpersonal experience made any sense. But later on—much later on—my life course had led me through various avenues and adventures, and I ended up thinking about things out of an essentially transpersonal worldview in which not only mandala experiences, but ecstatic union with ladies in red shifts and dancing hindus make perfect sense. The major difference between both the paths found by myself and Jung on the one hand, and those of people raised in traditional cosmological cycles of meaning on the other, is that the former paths are relatively dynamic and plastic, while most traditional systems tend to be extremely conservative of meaning. In fact, adepts in traditional systems tend to place strict controls on the types of experiences that are allowed to occur and the range of interpretations available for those experiences. For instance, professional Moroccan oneiromancers always interpret the more important dreams of their clients in terms of the symbolism and teaching of the Koran, whereas a proper Jungian approach to dream interpretation is appropriately individual and dynamic (see e.g., Jung, 1930-1934/1997; see also Maidenbaum, 1998).

**Conclusion**

These reflections upon the anima have been all too brief. But I think a few salient points have been brought out with respect to our engagement with the anima. Let me close by briefly outlining the more important points, and then discussing the relevance of the anima to transpersonal studies:

1. **Anima and gender.** Although we most commonly encounter our anima in the image or person of the female—especially in the intimate relationship with our significant Other—not all anima imagery is explicitly female. Nor need it be, either when it spontaneously arises or when we use imagery to penetrate and potentiate unconscious processes. Images like mandalas, animals, geographical features like simulacra, tunnels and streams may all represent or penetrate the anima. A symbol as simple as a bindu may suffice. Thus it is clear that to know whether or not a symbol represents the anima is an interpretive act, easy enough to accomplish with projections upon actual females, but a much more creative operation with tunnels and bindus. We need always to keep in mind that Jung never intended the concept to be crisply defined by any particular form. The anima is a function of the psyche. Whatever imagery occurs to express those unconscious and archetypal aspects of the nonmale self that we have suppressed in our development as males may be reasonably supposed to be activities of the anima. In any event, this forms a good working hypothesis from which to begin discriminating anima and nonanima imagery.

2. **Anima as structure and as content.** There is a natural ambiguity involved in thinking of the anima as an innate function of the nervous system which, until active in producing imagery in the sensorium, remains essentially contentless. This is similar to saying that until the hand does its thing, there is no grasping. Anima may refer to the underlying structure of communication between the conscious and unconscious mental faculties, and it may refer to the dream and fantasy imagery that expresses activities in the unconscious. This distinction is far from trivial when we place the issue in cross-cultural perspective, for while there is such a phenomenon as a relatively pure archetypal experience, most anima imagery is culturally loaded. I seriously doubt that a black native of Zimbabwe, or a Micronesian from the Marshall Islands would encounter a radiant white blond in a shift during a meditation retreat. More than likely, their positive anima ideal would resemble their own culture's goddesses. But to say that the content of anima imagery is culturally influenced is not to deny the universal, archetypal basis of the structures within the nervous system that mediate it.

3. **Anima and affect.** While it is natural to focus upon dream imagery and meditation symbols, it is often the affect associated with these phenomena that alert us to anima eruptions. This is especially true with shadow-anima interactions. My impression for years has been that the symbolism in a vision or dream may...
actually be produced by the affect, rather than the affect tagging along after the imagery. Often the imagery would seem to provide a scenario that makes sense of the feelings we have at the moment. Conflicting emotions may well produce a scenario of conflicting relations among images. Thus not only archetypal images may be influenced by culture, but also the emotion associated with the imagery, for emotion as it is commonly understood in our culture is mediated by cognitive as well as affective structures (Laughlin & Throop, 1999).

4. Anima and interpretation. The main point I wish to stress here is that working with the anima, in any cultural setting, is an interpretive process. The anima must be involved in some form of cycle of meaning that integrates knowledge—often social ways of knowing—with the individual's direct experiences. Most traditional cultures will provide an interpretive context within which anima imagery and affect will make sense.

It is very unlikely that such systems will interpret anima-like experiences as psychodynamic. Rather, they will tend to be interpreted in terms of visitation by spirits, goddesses or demons, depending upon whether they are affectively positive or negative. Anima possession may be viewed as soul-loss, or possession by some spirit for the purpose of healing or killing (Boddy, 1994; Bourguignon, 1976; Prince, 1968). If they are considered bothersome, sometimes anima states may be seen as being due to witchcraft or sorcery. The positive aspect of anima manifestation may involve interpretations of “divine intervention” when manifestations include intuitive inspiration—the word “inspiration” being used advisedly here, for it originally meant the divine breathing wisdom into one. Intuition in many cultures is considered intervention from the external domain of the spirit, rather than as an internal and largely unconscious function of the psyche.

It is very important from the anthropological point of view to understand that a “Jungian” hermeneutic is just as culturally loaded as any other. It is the purpose to which the interpretation is put that matters. From the standpoint of individuation, the Jungian approach will probably carry one to higher states of maturity than will traditional cycles of meaning. The latter are normally more concerned with the social integration of meaning than with aiding the individual to optimize his or her own individuation.

Transpersonal anthropology takes as a fundamental tenet that the extraordinary experiences encountered by people everywhere are to be considered relevant and appropriate to science—thus reinforcing the arguments made by William James in support of a *radical empiricism* (James 1912/1976; see also Laughlin and McManus 1995). As I have made plain by coming down hard upon the essentially hermeneutic aspect of the process of individuation, the range of experiences that may be considered anima-related will vary from culture to culture. I am emphasizing the cross-cultural aspect to anima experiences, not because ethnography is the stock-in-trade of the professional anthropologist, but because of the apparent ignorance of cross-cultural factors often found in the Jungian literature today. During the years that I worked with meditators of all ideological stripes and cultural backgrounds, I was impressed by the extent to which people can uncritically accept the interpretations most amenable to their worldview. To my reading at least, the failure to take into consideration the relativity of interpretation is not only antithetical to what Jung taught, but is also a blind spot in the development of transpersonal studies.

A better integration of transpersonal psychology and transpersonal anthropology would help the development of transpersonal studies. Transpersonal psychologists are frequently unacquainted with over a century of ethnographic interest in transpersonal experience, and over a quarter century of organized transpersonal anthropology (see Campbell & Staniford, 1978; Laughlin, 1988, 1994b; Laughlin, McManus & Shearer, 1983). Meanwhile, transpersonal anthropologists often ignore clinical and experimental research into the causes and varieties of transpersonal experience. Moreover, the interpretive element that is involved in all experience is often given less consideration than it requires in the transpersonal psychological literature. Just as debilitating, the psychophysiological processes that underlie extraordinary experiences are, as a rule, given short shrift by anthropologists—due primarily to the implacable mind-body dualism that infests that discipline. It is true to say that transpersonal anthropology is far more robust than is
neuroanthropology, and very few of the handful of neuroanthropologists have any interest whatever in relating brain science to transpersonal studies.

The study of the anima/us function of the human psyche might provide an auspicious focus for the integration of transpersonal psychology and transpersonal anthropology. This is for several reasons: first, anima/us experiences are almost by definition transpersonal, regardless of their cultural setting. Because of the bridging function of the anima/us, the ego, of whatever configuration, is brought into direct communion with the unknown, the mysterious and the numinous. Second, anima/us imagery would appear to be a cultural universal, usually related to the aspect of culture we in the West recognize as religion. As such, there must be a genetic and psychophysical basis for such universal psychological properties which produce some of the core elements of traditional worldviews. And third, anima/us related experiences would seem to arise in many folks as spontaneous and ineluctable callings from the spiritual domain—though how people interpret such encounters will vary with their cultural background. Thus anima/us imagery may provide valuable clues to the etiology and psychological significance of shamanistic and other spiritual conversion experiences. In short, the transpersonal study of the anima/us function and anima/us related experiences would seem to be pregnant with possibilities for research, whether that research be based upon contemplative, clinical, experimental, ethnographic, or psychophysiological approaches.

Notes

An earlier version of this paper was presented before the C. G. Jung Society in Ottawa, Ontario, on May 11, 2001. It is dedicated in loving memory to my friend and fellow ICRL member, Mike Witunski.

1. I should note that I began exploring psychotropic drugs, including marijuana, peyote, mescaline and LSD-25 during the later 1960s. None of the spontaneous mandala experiences were associated with ingesting drugs.

2. The editor’s footnote in question is note 1 in Jung’s Mandala Symbolism (1959/1972, p. 71) and in the second edition of Jung’s The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (1940/1968a, p. 355). The four plates are numbers 6, 28, 29 and 36.

3. Archetype is defined by Jung (1959/1972) as “a particular, frequently occurring, formal aspect of instinct.” The term of course predates Jung, and may be traced to the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers and mystics; see Meier (1995, p. 96).

4. The stream of consciousness is punctuated by rapid transformations of internal structure (in biogenetic structural theory we call these “warp”s; see Laughlin, McManus & d’Aquili, 1990, pp. 140-145) that establish the initial configuration of the much more enduring “phases” or states of consciousness.

5. In my own exploration of Tibetan dream yoga, I was forced to attempt to sleep sitting upright in order not to lose consciousness during the hypnagogic warp. I built a wooden box that was padded on the sides and on the bottom with thick styrofoam in which I slept every night for three months. I was thus able to maintain consciousness through an altered hypnagogic state and into a night of lucid dreaming with virtually total recall.

6. In other words, anapanasiti meditation.

7. These birth-related experiences are originally what involved me in the study of pre- and perinatal psychology, and eventually led me to various writings on pre- and perinatal anthropology (see, e.g., Laughlin, 1991).

8. As with any meditation, many experiences may arise during the course of this work. One of the main insights that will inevitably arise is that the mirror practice is a symbolic replica of the sensorium, and that the rice grains are dots, the mandala the totality of forms that arise in the sensorium via the organization of dots, and the wiping clean of the mirror is the flux of sensorial events, including the dots making up the events. Full realization of the essential impermanence of sensorial events is considered in some Buddhist traditions to be a principal watershed in the psychological development of a being.

9. See Laughlin, McManus and d’Aquili (1990, n. 5).


11. Jung wrote that the archetypes are “ever-repeated typical experiences” that are somehow impressed upon the materiality of the body—that they had been “stamped on the human brain for aeons” (1928/1966, p. 69). And not in human beings alone are archetypes to be found, but very likely in animals as well (1928/1966, p. 69).

12. See for example the feminist critique of Jung’s presumed sexist bias in Karaban (1992).

13. “Syzygy” is from the Greek and Latin roots meaning “yoked” or “paired.” It refers to the structures responsible for the fact that each of us has within us both male and female aspects. It also refers to the male and female complementarity in many of the cosmologies of traditional peoples.
14. The term "enculturation" derives from cultural anthropology and means "the process by which an individual acquires the mental representations (beliefs, knowledge, and so forth) and patterns of behavior required to function as a member of a culture" (Barfield, 1997, p. 149).


16. I was raised in Arkansas and Texas, and all of my kin, including my mother, who were in any way spiritually active were females.

17. This structure vs. content distinction is not unique to Jung. Far from it. It is to be found in the metaphysics of Aristotle and Kant, to name a couple of thinkers. The great sociological theorist, Emile Durkheim, likewise reasoned that inherent "categories of understanding" organize culturally variant contents into universal patterns of cognition; see Throop and Laughlin (1997, p. 149).

18. See Tiberia (1977) for empirical research on this issue. Tiberia demonstrated that the qualities projected upon fantasized females vary with the type of masculine ego-ideal, and the attributes of the psyche with which the subject identifies. Also, Colman (1996) looks at early developmental factors that may impact the later experience of the anima/us, and Beebe (1984) examines the relationship between the father's anima and that of his son.

19. "Conscious network" is our term for the network of neurophysiological structures mediating consciousness in each moment of consciousness; see Laughlin, McManus, and d'Aquili (1990, pp. 94-95).

20. A "nix" is a water demon or sprite—a "nixie" being the female version; for instance, the mermaid.


22. See Laughlin, McManus, and d'Aquili (1990, pp. 198-211) on the Tibetan Buddhist system of symbolic penetration.

23. The dakinis are Tantric goddesses who are protectors and servants of the Buddha Dharma. Some dakinis actually dwell among humans on earth.

24. I might also note that the peak experience here was not equivalent to the experience of nirvana, which although also an absorption state is not an absorption into sensory material. This experience was equivalent to ecstatic union with the godhead, not to "stream entry" in the Buddhist sense.

25. That is, neurognosis; see Laughlin, McManus, and d'Aquili (1990, p. 49) and Laughlin (1996b).

26. A succubus is a female spirit said to have sex with men while they sleep. It may also disturb the tranquility of meditating monks.

27. See Steinberg (1993, pp. 162-163) on submission as a feminine attribute.

28. This "coming alive" aspect of visualization practice is a type of "universal symbol" about which we wrote in Laughlin, McManus, and Webber (1985) and Laughlin, McManus, and d'Aquili (1990, pp. 201-202). These are archetypal symbols that arise in the sensorium unbidden. Yet they are lawfully entailed by the type of visualization practice in which one has been engaged. Often the changes in the universal symbol offer clues to the teacher as to how advanced the adept has become in the practice.

29. Skt: bindu (Tib: tig le or thig.le) meaning "drop" or "dot." This term connotes the essence of the male and female energies, and combined refers to the essence of the Buddha mind.

30. The scientific study of this process in relation to healing is called psychoneuroimmunology; see Ader (1980).

31. The "cycle of meaning" is a central concept in biogenetic structural theory. For further reading on the topic, see Laughlin (1997), Laughlin, McManus, and d'Aquili (1990, pp. 214-233), and Laughlin and Throop (2001).

32. Lucien Levy-Bruhl (1923/1966) called this intimate engagement with a people's mythopoetic system "mystical participation." (See my earlier section, "Jung on the anima.")

33. Using systems theory, a "negative feedback loop" is an information channel that tends to reinforce the previous state of the system—in other words, it is conservative feedback. A "positive feedback loop" is an information channel that tends to cause the system to change or readjust.

34. Many modern Navajos who interact within the context of Anglo society will no doubt also experience Anglo anima imagery. I am speaking here of more traditional people who live out their lives on the Navajo reservation.

35. Of course there must be some flexibility in traditional systems, for otherwise they would not keep up with changes in society and the environment, but changes tend to be slow and take generations. This is the process anthropologists call "revitalization" (Wallace, 1966).

36. A "simulacrum" is a geographical feature, like a rock or a mountain, that resembles (to the human mind) some anthropomorphic form, like a vagina, horns, breasts, face, and so on; see Paul Devereux (1992, p. 152; 1996, pp. 194-207).

37. In biogenetic structural terms, the anima/us is the homeomorphic structure by which processes outside the structure of the sensorium become imagined in the sensorium. Because all innervation within the nervous system is reciprocal—that is, nerves run back and forth...
between any two loci—images may be caused by unconscious processes (expression), or may excite unconscious processes (penetration); see Laughlin, McManus and d’Aquili (1990, p. 193).

38. James Hillman’s rejection of this crucial distinction between structure and content has the effect, intended or otherwise, of totally culturally relativizing the concept of the anima/us. Hillman (1985, p. 13) and others (e.g., Griffin, 1989, p. 40) have rejected Jung’s distinction between the archetypes as unknowable structures in themselves and archetypal images and ideas as knowable transformations (or “contents”) of those structures. They do so on the dubious grounds that, if the “archetypes in themselves” are in principle unknowable, then how can we know anything about them? But this is a serious error that further confuses the underlying ontological difficulties with the notion of archetype. Moreover, it is a view that is overrationalized, ethnocentric, and phenomenologically naive. There really exists no universal structure in Hillman’s account whose transformations allow comparisons and deductions pertaining to its hidden nature.

References


