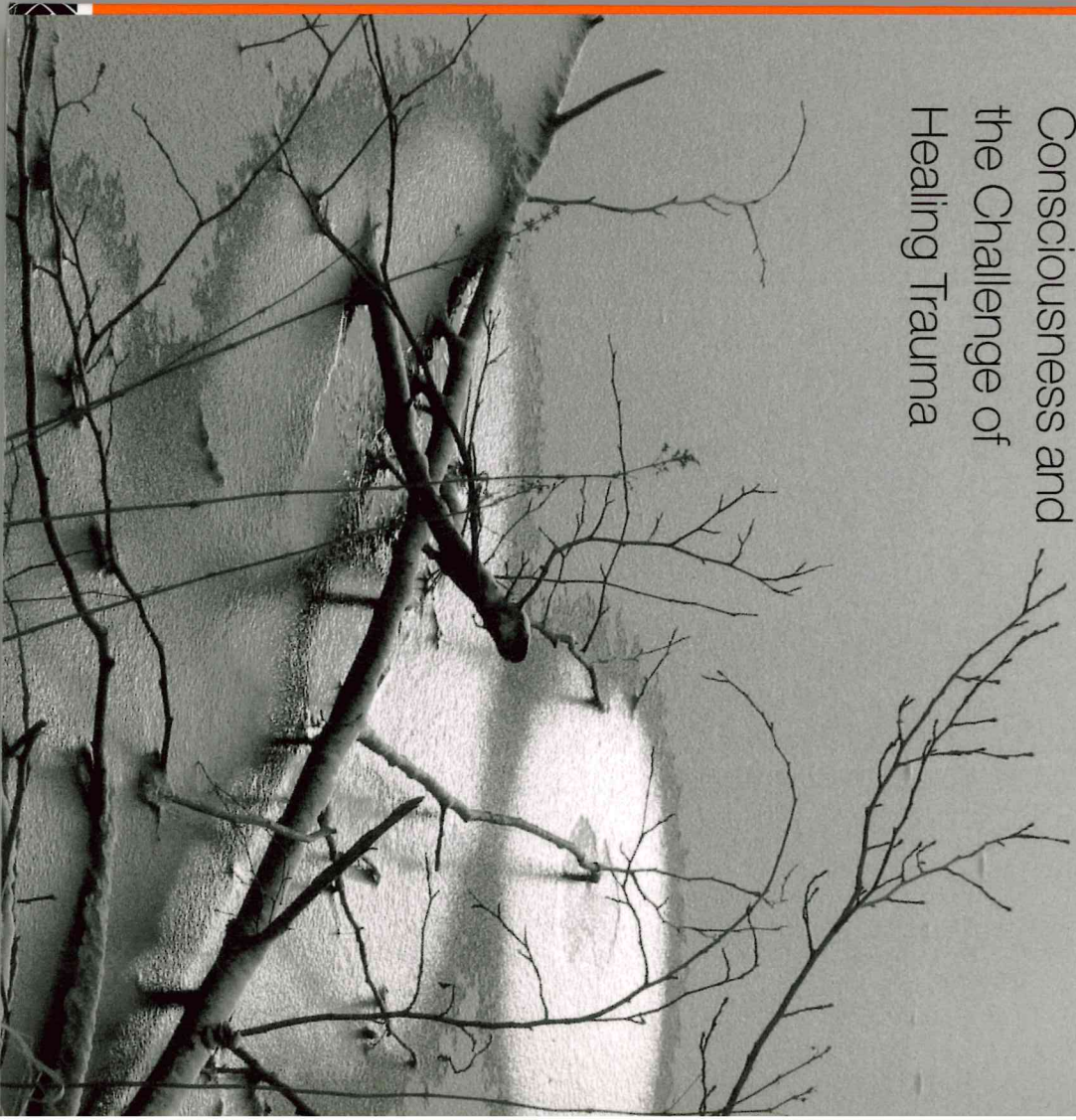


Jerome S. Bernstein

Living in the

Borderland

The Evolution of
Consciousness and
the Challenge of
Healing Trauma



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the challenge of healing trauma

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We see and hear what we are open to noticing.

Jerome S. Bernstein

For Golly -
With appreciation and
gratitude for your work
and steadfast ability
and spirit.
From a fellow journeyer
Jerome Bernstein
Phoenix, AZ, June 2010

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editors. Her support for and dedication to the work sometimes seemed to exceed my own, and her capacity to cajole, badger, and threaten consequences to move me and the work along was something I came to rely on. More than a first-rate copy editor, she understood and believed in the work and pushed and pulled me through several substantive swamps along the way. One could not have had a better ally.

Thanks to Ronald Brown and Johnson Dennison for permission to use photographs of various aspects of their work as a Navajo medicine man.

My sons, Eric and Matthew, have always been inspiration for life's vigor, challenges, and wonderment. As we have grown older together and the gap between being parent and child has narrowed, enabling more of a feeling of being men with mutual respect for one another, they have grown into my support and at times the kind of intellectual challenge that has pushed me to goals and limits beyond those which I might set for myself. Their light shines ever-brighter on the blessings of being a father. I am so appreciative of all of that.

Many thanks to you all.

Introduction

Whereas in the early scientific era, knowledge had rested on observation and deduction, modern scientific knowledge is based on experimentation and measurement.¹

Since science is all-inclusive knowledge, it cannot admit the validity of extrascientific healing – hence, the contempt of “official” medicine for all kinds of primitive and popular medicine, the latter containing remnants of primitive and early scientific medicine.²

A psychotherapist whom I supervise opened our supervisory session with the following: “So what’s with the animals out there? Everyone in my practice is coming in and talking about animals. What’s going on?” I replied that I think that what’s going on is that the western psyche is being reconnected to nature, and that nature themes in general, and animal themes in particular, reflect what I have called “Borderland consciousness,” a phenomenon that is emergent in the culture and becoming increasingly prevalent in clinical settings. I referred her to my article, “On the Borderland,” on the IONS³ website. That article follows here as the Prologue (Chapter 1) and Living in the Borderland (Chapter 2) of this book. I also pointed out that Borderland awareness is beginning to affect her, since she heard those references to animals as valid clinical data worth reflecting on, rather than passing them off as metaphor for something else on a more abstract level. And hers was not the only reference by a clinician to increasingly prevalent animal themes in their practice. I have heard similar statements from many colleagues.

I won’t take space here to describe “Borderland consciousness,” since this whole book addresses that topic. One point that does require discussion here, however, is what I refer to as “transrational reality.” By transrational reality I mean objective nonpersonal, nonrational phenomena occurring in the natural universe, information and experience that does not readily fit into standard cause and effect logical structure. These are the kinds of experience that typically are labeled and dismissed as superstition, irrational and in the

extreme, abnormal or crazy. A major theme of this book is that there is an increasing number of people who have transrational *experiences* that are *real* – not real seeming, not “as if” experiences, but real.⁴ One problem that these individuals experience in our very left-brain, ratio-centrally, cognitively⁵ biased culture, is that there is no construct, no frame for receiving and integrating such experience. That bias – culturally and psychologically – does not allow for the *possibility* of transrational reality. Thus people who claim to have such experience often are ostracized, dismissed out of hand, or worse, branded as pathological or crazy.

There are thousands of people in our culture – people I refer to as “Borderland personalities” – whose transrational experience is nothing short of sacred.⁶ There are many who would not be able to function in our society without their deep personal connection to that domain. And most of them feel forced to conceal that dimension of their experience, even from their loved ones, out of fear of being ostracized and branded as abnormal.

There are still others who suffer psychological wounding and who pursue psychotherapy in an attempt to heal and to find ways of coping and living in a wounded and wounding world. A number of these people have a Borderland connection that sustains them. Even so, they fear revealing this dimension even in their therapy, lest it be labeled, profaned, and spoiled. Still others are confused by their own Borderland experience and wonder themselves whether what they experience and cherish is not an extension of pathology and somehow must be given up in the name of something they do not understand. And worse, some are wounded by the therapy itself if the therapist, because of his rational bias and lack of receptivity to transrational experience (and perhaps his own discomfort with the very notion of the transrational), labels as pathology what for the patient is experienced as authentic and deeply meaningful. Many testimonials in this regard follow in this book.

Moreover, the western ego construct *is* the organ of rationality. The exclusion of transrational reality from consideration leaves it unchecked by any power outside itself and prone to profound and dangerous inflation. Indeed, I suggest in Part I of this book that such inflation threatens the very survival of our species. The western ego construct buttresses its stance of omnipotence and omniscience with a claim to superior and absolute knowledge through its scientific construct. The phrase “its scientific construct” is used advisedly. For science *is* a construct of the mind, and not, as some would assert, an independent system determining objective knowledge and truth. For all of its correctness and the benefits that flow from it – modern medicine for one – science remains, nonetheless *a* construct of the mind, in the context of other constructs, which, if received, could add to the general well-being of all of life. Alan Lightman, in a review of *Einstein’s Miraculous Year: Five Papers that Changed the Face of Physics*, observes, “Modern textbooks on science give no sense that scientific ideas come out of the minds of human beings. Instead, science is portrayed as a set of current laws and results

inscribed like the Ten Commandments by some immediate but disembodied authority.”⁷

In this amazing scientific and technological age, it is easy to forget that *all* science takes its roots in clinical observation. Chemistry was once alchemy, and before that, experimental ethnobotany; physics takes its roots in the hunter-gatherers who studied their prey, their motion in flight, and adjusted the trajectory and angle of their spears through intuitive observation by trial and error. And these “scientists” developed scientific systems in the age and context in which they lived, which were sufficiently reliable to warrant being taught to others in the community.

George Lakoff, Professor of Linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley, in his book co-authored with psychologist Rafael Núñez, *Where Mathematics Comes From*, says:

There are excellent reasons why so many people, including professional mathematicians, think that mathematics *does* have an independent, objective external existence . . . The reason [we think scientific truths to be completely objective] is that they are metaphorically based on our experience of external objects and experiences: Containers, continuous paths of motion.⁸

Lakoff proposes that the ability to mathematize results from our experiences in the world *and our ability to make metaphor*, i.e. that the source of this ability is the mind. It is in linking these metaphors that humans were able to develop the ability to formulate abstract mathematics. As regards the seemingly objective transcendence of mathematics and the mathematical underpinnings of modern science, he suggests that in the evolution of civilization and of science there was a need to break free of old mythic beliefs. Thus new metaphors were developed, ultimately leading to mathematics as we know it today. However, it would appear that the baby was thrown out with the bath water, and that other metaphors of reality and science have been shut out of modern scientific consideration.⁹

What all of this is about, is a plea for openness regarding other metaphors of science and reality. This is a central theme of this book. Along with openness, one needs to be prepared to listen differently and to think differently. Language, too, must be open if we are to make space for other formulations than those with which we are familiar and most comfortable. How we formulate questions very much determines the type of response we are likely to get and hence places constraints on experience.

In this regard, the reader will note that in several places in this book I have refrained from clarifying language and experiences that are ambiguous, even confusing. This constraint is deliberate and employed in the name of being true to the other’s experience, and to compel the reader to search for the metaphor being alluded to in the atypical experience/thought being reported.

To insist on a rational response to transrational experience, i.e. "It is or it isn't . . ." aborts the possibility of recognizing a different metaphor of reality. When, for example, my patient Hannah reports "feeling" the sadness of the cows, I consciously avoid the question of what she "really" did experience. That word "really" puts the discourse into a left-brain cause and effect linear metaphor and denies the validity of the truth she was struggling to claim. Truth is what it is – whether it makes sense to us or not. *Our* discomfort with what is alluded to in the moment does not justify denying the other's reality. Whatever Hannah's experience, it was not *her* metaphor. We may not be able to put into words what her metaphor was, but we can share that she experienced something beyond what such questions imply.¹⁰ So in some passages of the book, the reader is thrown back on himself to struggle with what is alluded to and what is conjured up in the reader, both on a mental and on a body level.

I began this introduction with reference to what my supervisee said was taking place in her practice regarding Borderland, i.e. transrational, experience. But these experiences are far from limited to the clinical context alone. Their prevalence becomes more apparent the more one reminds oneself that there are other dimensions of experience to be encountered. *We notice what we are open to noticing.*

The reader will note that, from time to time, I mention a film. Whereas the arts, poetry, drama, the troubadour, and various forms of literature have been the primary carriers of archetypal awareness over the centuries, beginning in the 20th century, film has become a primary mode of incarnating and communicating collective consciousness and evolution. Film is a major vehicle and harbinger of society's psychic evolution. Film oftentimes provides our first peek at mythological and archetypal themes and changes happening in our midst; thus, it often presents a graphic confrontation with emerging positive and negative social consciousness as well as new psychic realities. There has been a spate of films in the past several years that portray Borderland personalities and transrational reality. Some of these are: *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*,¹¹ the *Star Wars* trilogy, *The Sixth Sense*, *The Green Mile*, *Instinct*, *The Matrix* trilogy, the Lord of the Rings trilogy, and *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill*, among others. The prevalence of the Borderland theme in modern film is evidence of an emergent psychic reality that is pressing for incarnation from within the collective unconscious.

Last, this book has been written with a broad readership in mind. It is structured in three parts, any one of which may be read independently of the others. However, it is strongly recommended that the Prologue and Chapter 2 be read first. Part I presents a theoretical formulation for the emergence of Borderland reality and Borderland personality in western culture. Part II is primarily clinical in focus and explores how Borderland dynamics are manifest in the psychotherapeutic setting, as well as their related psychotherapeutic implications. Part III continues the clinical explorations of

Part II, but incorporates the Navajo medical model as a paradigm for bridging the mind-body duality in western medicine. It explores a clinical model that might result from a joining of Navajo and allopathic approaches to medicine and healing. It demonstrates, through multiple case presentations, how modern medicine could benefit from transrational data in the diagnosis and treatment of serious illness.

The reader is strongly encouraged to check for content endnotes (as opposed to citations without content). The explications in these content endnotes amplify the book's content in important ways.

Most of all, I would hope that the reader will be touched as I have been in sharing some of the extraordinary experiences of the Borderland personalities who have generously opened their hearts and souls and their suffering out of a need for others to witness their unique connection to the sacred.

Jerome S. Bernstein
December 2003

Notes

- 1 Ellenberger, 1970: 47.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 The Institute of Noetic Sciences.
- 4 Of course, there are people who hallucinate, or are delusional, who also would say that they have experiences that we would consider abnormal or not real. The struggle to differentiate between the two was dramatically highlighted in the film, *A Beautiful Mind*. This book discusses the difference between these two dimensions of experience, one real and the other pathological, and how to make those differentiations, particularly in a clinical or therapeutic context.
- 5 A term coined by the modern authority on shamanism, Michael Harner.
- 6 Rudolf Otto says of the holy and the sacred: "There must be felt a something 'numinous' [something outside of itself], to which the mind turns spontaneously . . . these feelings can only arise in the mind as accompanying emotions when the category of 'the numinous' is called into play . . . The numinous is . . . felt as objective and outside the self" (Otto, 1923: 10–11).
- 7 He also distinguishes between what he calls "rational religion," and the "ineffable" (pp. 1–7). And, with the rational comes the *choice* of believing or not in the sacred. In an experience of the ineffable, there is no choice.
- 8 In my usage of the word "sacred" throughout this book, I am referring to the numinous – that which compels a feeling experience of awe and that is outside the self. In the modern context for western culture, that dimension is the western ego's reconnection with nature. It is in this context that the western ego is reconnecting with the "ineffable."
- 9 Lightman, 1999: 88.
- 10 Lakoff and Nuñez, 2003: 349.
- 11 Lakoff, 2003: 337–363.
- 12 E.g. she didn't "really" feel those cows – it had to be . . .
- 13 This film, up until the *Star Wars* trilogy and subsequently *Titanic*, held the record for box office attendance, testimony to the compelling nature of the Borderland theme in the American psyche.

Chapter I

Prologue

The year 1971 was one of personal endings and personal beginnings. I ended a career in the federal Office of Economic Opportunity, and started a new consulting firm with a friend and business partner. We did social science consulting of the kind that was prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s and that had mushroomed with the War on Poverty.

That year was also a landmark year for American Indian tribes. Richard Nixon initiated what became the Indian Self-Determination Act. For the first time in the history of US tribal relations, American Indians would be given the right to decide for themselves what was in their best interest, to take over the administration of selected programs from the federal government, and, like other Americans, to make their own mistakes and to live with and learn from them.

In the fall of 1971, within weeks of approval of this Act, the newly elected chairman of the Navajo Nation called my business partner and said that he wanted to begin the process of restoring his tribe's culture, language, and dignity through the development of a tribal Division of Education. His plan was that, henceforth, Navajo children would be trained by Navajos in their own language by bilingual teachers who would teach Navajo culture and religion with pride. No such tribal-wide program had ever existed, and the chairman was well aware that starting this project on the Navajo Reservation (comprising one-third of all tribal Indians in the United States, with a land-base about the size of West Virginia) would set a precedent and establish a model for all Indian tribes and for the federal government as well. We determined that I would go for a week's consultation.

I did know something about the administration of school programs, but I had never been on an Indian reservation and had never met a tribal Indian. The assignment was daunting, but something deep within me said that there was a purpose in this calling.

When I arrived in Window Rock, Arizona, the capital of the Navajo Nation, the town was cold and lonely, desolate even. The desolation was accentuated by the ever-present wind, which seemed to remind me of a silent, persistent history that demanded to be heard. I met with the Division of

Education staff and the staff of the newly established Navajo Community College to hear their ideas about priorities, resources, problems, and concerns. These meetings required traveling virtually the whole of the 26,000-square mile reservation.

Early in my stay at Navajo I learned that time for Navajos is more circular than it is linear, more of a *kaïros* than a *kronos*. It was not unusual when asking a Navajo the time to hear the response, "Skin time or White Man's time?" So the last day of my week, I was not too surprised when I arrived for a morning meeting to find it was to take place in the afternoon. After the meeting I raced back to Window Rock in hopes of catching the Division of Education staff before they left at 5 pm. I was an hour and a half late. I assumed no one would be there when I returned, but I hoped the offices would not be locked; I had papers to pick up before leaving for Albuquerque to return to D.C.

When I entered the office, I was surprised to see three men sitting on small wooden straight-back chairs in a tiny room that served as an office for the three people who shared the one government-surplus desk. I knew one of the men, Ralph, fairly well. I had spent a good deal of time with him during my week at Navajo. "We've been waiting for you," he said. "We've been listening to you listen, and we think you can hear us. We have decided. We want you to come back." Indeed, I had been listening intently. It was my primary "activity" that first week at Navajo. But I was unaware that they had been listening to me listen. This was a new idea for me. "I would like to come back and work with you," I said. Thus began a five-year professional relationship with the Navajo Tribe. It was also the moment I began to learn the deeper meanings of *listening*. Over the next years I made many trips to Navajo, sometimes spending weeks at a time.

In 1972 I met Carl Gorman, a Navajo native, who was an artist and teacher of art and Navajo history, culture, and religion, and was a Navajo code talker during World War II. Carl was the founding director of the newly established Office of Native Healing Sciences. In that position he worked cooperatively with the Navajo Medicine Man Association, a recently formed consortium. At that time, Carl's office and the Association had surveyed the Navajo medicine men in practice and concluded that the *youngest* medicine man was somewhere between age 68 and 72, and that there were few, if any, younger Navajos in apprenticeship. It was obvious that, if something were not done quickly, Navajo religion and healing would die out completely within 15 to 20 years. Carl worked with the Medicine Man Association to recruit apprentices to work with individual medicine men to learn their specific healing ceremonies.

Through these contacts, I was exposed to Navajo religion and healing over the next several years. This had a profound effect on me. I began to have healing dreams that involved Navajo and sometimes Hopi healers/medicine men. At the time I had been in Jungian analysis for more than two years, and

I explored these dreams in my analysis. Over time, I realized that these dreams were leading me onto a new path: I was to become a Jungian analyst myself. In 1974 I was accepted into training at the C. G. Jung Institute in New York, from which I graduated in 1980.

One hot summer day in 1975 I was standing alone at the edge of a mesa at Old Oraibi on the Hopi Indian Reservation in Arizona. As I looked out at the vast expanse of desert below me, I imagined I could smell the ancient ocean that once covered the beauty that lay before me. To the west was the majesty of the still snow-capped San Francisco Peaks above Flagstaff. In the exquisite quiet of the moment I felt a presence. I looked up and saw two golden eagles flying toward me. They swooped down to within a few feet of my head, and, wings almost touching, flew together in a circle around me, as if they were doing a dance. They circled me three or four times, then flew off together to the west, disappearing into the brilliant horizon. I felt that their presence honored me, and that I had been brought there, to that place in that moment, to honor them. And in that moment I felt the mystery that was unfolding my life to me. I mused: "What is a fat little Jewish boy from southwest Washington D.C. doing at this ancient holy place at the edge of the world, immersed in Hopi and Navajo religion and healing?" And then I realized that one's personal mystery is not rational at all. I could not have conjured the events that had brought me to the edge of that mesa, yet I knew I could not be anywhere else. It was here that my path and the mystery of my self had taken me. As improbable as it seemed, it was indeed my path. It took another 20 years for me to transcend strong family, personal, and professional ties in the East and move to New Mexico. But when I did, I knew I was coming home.

Living in the Borderland – The pathological and the sacred: Hannah

The noblest ministry of nature is to stand as the apparition of God. It is the organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Over these last few years I've come to recognize that the very practice of psychotherapy in its traditional form can be dangerous to one's health, that a devotion to maintaining certain preconceived assumptions may actually prevent healing, for both therapist and client.¹

The year was 1992 when I finally moved to New Mexico, establishing my analytic practice in Santa Fe. One year later a woman in her early 40s contacted me and asked for a consultation.

Hannah had already undergone at least 12 years of therapy with both male and female therapists. She had a history of sexual abuse. At the age of nine she was molested by a man at a sleep-away camp she attended. She also suspected sexual abuse by at least two family members, although her recall of specific events was vague and shadowy. Since the age of 20, she had suffered from recurring nightmares with graphic images of a murderer coming after her. She had made suicide attempts as a teenager. Her five siblings suffered severe and chronic depression as well, and all had been sexually abused at some point in their lives. During our initial session she indicated that she again felt suicidal; the only thing stopping her was her care for her dog, who was dependent on her. Her depression and despair were constant.

Hannah was an artist. She said of her painting: "I don't know how to bear the part of me that comes out." She painted animals almost exclusively. Sometimes she included human figures, but they were shadowy, usually considerably smaller than the animal figures. Her paintings were dark, the animals always in stages of stress, deprivation, mutilation, and torture. Hannah said that although these paintings did express suffering and pain, at the same time

also stated: "I can't distinguish between my pain and the pain of other people. And it doesn't help when I do understand it."

Given Hannah's history, I began our work with a traditional approach. I explored her family experiences and pursued in depth the issues of substance abuse, sexual abuse, and parental neglect. I employed the whole repertoire of techniques involved in a good psychoanalytic-psychotherapeutic approach, as we call it. This was helpful to some extent. But always during our sessions, I had the feeling that something was missing; something was not happening – some part of her was absent.

When Hannah brought her paintings into the sessions, things livened up considerably. I wasn't sure if this was because her painting offered her a way of dealing with her depression, isolation, and despair, or if it was more than that. Yet, noticeably, we both sensed relief.

One day, a year or so into the work, she arrived at my office very distressed. Driving home from our previous session, she had found herself behind a truck carrying two cows. Her feeling was that the cows were being taken to slaughter. I pursued the standard approach of suggesting that she was projecting onto the cows, i.e. how she saw her life circumstance in the plight of these cows. She went along with me for a time. But then she protested in frustration: "But it's the *cows!*" I pointed out to her that her response was an identification with animals she experienced as abused. She acknowledged the truth of my interpretations. She began to talk about all the animals in the world that exist only as domesticated beings, and their sadness. And again she burst out: "But it's the *cows!*" After that last protest – by now at the end of the session – I became aware in *myself* of Hannah's distress and her identification with the plight of these cows. And I also became aware of a different feeling in the room. The feeling was attached to Hannah, yet it was separate from her. It seemed of a different dimension. It was a new experience for me.

Some weeks later, Hannah recounted how she had gone for a long walk in the country and was followed by some stray dogs. As she described the experience, the room filled with pain and remorse. I asked her what she was feeling. Again we had a go-round like the one with the cows. And again she acknowledged her projection onto the dogs. But this time, out of character for her, she became angry – so angry that she took her shoe in her hand and hit the floor with it. "You just don't get it!" she shouted, and slammed the floor again with her shoe. "It's the *dogs!*" It was as if she were saying the dogs were projecting something onto *her*. The urgency of her tone and her uncharacteristic anger jolted me into the realization that my standard interpretations were not enough and somehow off the mark. Something other was happening in the room.

The next week Hannah came to our session with a dream suggesting the threat of sexual violation by me. The dream jarred me, and I knew I had better *hear* her. I began to listen to her more closely and tried diligently to shut off my mind and training. I tried to listen as I sensed the medicine man listens

Over the next months Hannah struggled to wrench out of her unconscious the words to talk to me. Clearly she was extremely intelligent, yet at times it seemed she was groping for a vocabulary that was beyond her reach – a vocabulary that perhaps didn't yet exist. Gradually, however, she did begin to communicate her feelings to me. And as she did, I was startled to realize that the things she was telling me I had heard once before.

During my analytical training I had also been learning from native elders and healers, particularly from my Navajo friend, Carl Gorman, from a Hopi elder whom I called Grandpa, and from a Hopi medicine man, Homer. These men were teaching me a new way of looking at life. I realized that here were people whose involvement with nature was completely different from the utilitarian, often adversarial if sometimes sentimental, attitude toward nature that had characterized the western mind for thousands of years. For the Navajo, religion and healing are the same. The psychic connection with nature is the source of – and at the same time is inseparable from – spiritual and physical health. Illness is a “disconnection” with one's psychic roots.

As I listened to Hannah struggle to articulate her emotions, I did “get it.” It was indeed the cows. I realized that what Hannah was telling me was precisely the same message the native elders and healers were teaching me – and what my own unconscious was telling me through my dreams: Everything animate and inanimate has within it a spirit dimension and communicates *in that dimension* to those who can listen.

Darwin taught us that extinction occurs when a species becomes overspecialized and can no longer adapt to changing conditions. In my view, the most dramatic evidence of the western, overspecialized ego bringing our species to the edge of extinction is the game of Russian roulette we played with the former Soviet Union during the Cold War. This lasted for about 50 years from the post-World War II period until the early 1990s. As a consequence of this apocalyptic teetering on the brink of self-annihilation, the western ego became overspecialized and one sided. As a result, I believe we can see a massive compensatory shift to redress this imbalance, to reconnect with our split-off roots. This shift is not just – or even primarily – political and social. I believe it to be an evolutionary psychic shift. Navajo religion and healing – as do other paradigms – most poignantly represent a conscious conception of the world that is not separated from nature in all its forms, animate and inanimate. For non-Native people this is still a largely unconscious phenomenon. It is only recently liminally emergent in westerners such as Hannah, who experience this shift most intensely.

The psychic space where the hyper-developed and overly rational western ego is in the process of reconnecting with its split-off roots in nature is what I call the Borderland. Phrases such as “a reconnection to nature” can conjure up the idealized image of Native Americans as portrayed in the movies, or “New Age” ideas and movements, or vague allusions to ancient mysteries and the occult, many of which are perceived as “flaky” by the culture at large.

But it is my contention that these ideas are manifestations of the “Borderland” consciousness, indications of a “reconnection with nature” that is taking place in western culture. I am talking here of a profound, psychic process in which the very psychological nature and structure of the western ego is evolving through dramatic changes. It is becoming something more, and different from, what we have known in the past.

Hannah is a “Borderland personality.” She *lives* in the Borderland. She embodies and reflects an evolving psyche that is not only new unto itself but one that in profound ways is strange and alien to her, as do many others. Such people are the frontline recipients of *new psychic forms* that are entering and impacting the western psyche. They experience the tension resulting from split-off psychic material reconnecting with an ego that resists and is threatened by it.

Borderland people *personally* experience, and must live out, the split from nature on which the western ego, as we know it, has been built. They feel (not feel *about*) the extinction of species; they feel (not feel about) the plight of animals that are no longer permitted to live by their own instincts, and which survive only in domesticated states to be used as pets or food. Such people are highly intuitive. Many, if not most, are psychic to some degree, whether they know it or not. They are deeply feeling, sometimes to such a degree that they find themselves in profound feeling states that seem irrational to them. Virtually all of them are highly sensitive on a bodily level. They experience the rape of the land in their bodies, they psychically, and sometimes physically, gasp at the poisoning of the atmosphere. Often they suffer from “environmental illness.” This psychic identity with the animate and inanimate objects of nature is a phenomenon that anthropologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl recognized among native cultures, and which he called *participation mystique*.² It is a psychic identification from which, up until recently, westerners have been totally alienated. My experience working with Hannah brought into focus phenomena I had observed both inside and outside my practice over the past 20 years – phenomena that until now had made no sense.

The Borderland is a phenomenon of the collective unconscious. It is an evolutionary dynamic that is moving the western psyche to reconnect our overspecialized ego to its natural psychic roots. It is my view that we are all in the grip of this unfolding. Indeed, it is possible that our very survival as species *Homo sapiens* may depend on this shift that is taking place. The people I have dubbed Borderland personalities experience and *incarnate* these new psychic forms into their lives – and directly and indirectly into ours as members of the western cultural collective. In the case of Hannah, I felt I was observing the impact of this evolutionary process on a specific individual.

A difference between Borderland personalities and non-Borderland personalities is that the former might be thought of as being three or more standard deviations out from the psychic norm. The rest of us, being closer to the western rational norm at the center of the bell curve, still function in our

preferred ignorance of Borderland phenomena. I say “preferred” ignorance because such phenomena do not readily fit our rational construct of the universe or of ourselves. Much of what might fall into the nonrational realm is perceived as irrational, that is, “counter-rational,” and plays into a phobic abhorrence characteristic of the western ego. More often than not, Borderland phenomena, if experienced at all, are simply dismissed out of hand or labeled crazy.

In recent years, physicists have been developing “field theory,” wherein interactions between bodies are seen as the result of changes in space surrounding the bodies, as distinct from a concept of space as a vacuum in which forces external to the space determine the behavior of bodies. The study of weather patterns (for example, El Niño, La Niña) now reveals that storms and other meteorological phenomena are known to constantly impact areas of the planet thousands of miles distant on a constant basis whether we perceive them or not. A popular conception of this phenomenon is the beating of a butterfly’s wings that is said to impact a “field,” however immeasurably, thousands of miles away.

Ironically, this new direction in science, through the ideas of David Bohm and others, seems to be approaching a kind of “Borderland realm” for the rational western mind. It is in the field of quantum physics that an interface between nonrational and rational phenomena of the *physical realm* is studied and accepted to an increasing degree. Quantum physics posits that form – and form alone – is itself matter.³

This world of quantum physics appears to be a strange “Borderland” world indeed. For the scientific mind confronted with such nonrational phenomena, the saving grace appears to be quantification, wherein the application of feeling-neutral mathematics is the ultimate accepted language. In this context, quantification provides a rational connection between the quasi-rational and the nonrational, and thus avoids a disquieting reaction on the part of the mind that studies them. However, when it comes to human *behavior* and *psychology* (fields of study that inevitably confront our feelings and emotions), the Borderland realm is not explored by most investigators. It is shunned because it thrusts the nonrational dimension under the nose of our obsessively rational ego. On a feeling and emotional level this is disquieting, often triggering a phobic reaction in those who are confronted with this dilemma.

Most of us in the psychological professions are trained in the mold of the medical model of healing, that is, a rational model where all phenomena are made to fit logical/rational theories of psychological health (of cells, organs, personalities, behavior). Those phenomena that do not fit our theories are ipso facto labeled “pathological.” The term as used is not only descriptive of a psychodynamic process, it is also a judgment. That which is pathological is “bad” and therefore must be “cured” (fixed, gotten rid of, cut out.) What I learned from my work with Hannah – and subsequently with other patients – is

that the Borderland phenomena they experience are *real*, however disquieting that notion may seem. Problems result from the fact that most often Borderland personalities themselves do not register their own experiences as real. They have been conditioned, like the rest of us with a western ego, to identify with the negative bias against the nonrational realm of phenomenology. Thus they see their own Borderland experiences as “crazy” – as pathological. And because they do, they become more neurotic than would otherwise be the case.

Many Borderland people I have encountered have experienced early childhood trauma, often sexual trauma. Like Hannah, they carry deep wounds and neuroses that *do* fit standard rational psychological theories of mental health and *do* fit the medical model of healing. Great personal suffering often occurs when nonpathological Borderland experiences become fused with personal traumatic experiences and the neurotic layers of personality structure. This in turn amplifies and reinforces a person’s neurosis. Hence the experiences are then labeled as pathological either by the individuals themselves or by the healing practitioner, by the family, or by others around them. This fusion of the personal with the nonpersonal makes it difficult to sort out which is which, and precisely this was my problem in the first year or so of my work with Hannah.

Prior to our work together, Hannah could not distinguish between her own feelings and those of the earth and the animals. When I first encouraged her to talk about the animals, she was reticent. She feared, understandably, that I would label her “crazy.” And for a while, until I “got it,” my insistence on relating her feelings exclusively to her personal history confused and exacerbated the situation.

However, Hannah and I were able to sort out her pathology arising from her upbringing on the one hand and her nonpathological experiences arising from Borderland phenomena on the other. I was able to witness and authenticate her Borderland experiences as *objective nonpersonal, nonrational phenomena* occurring in the natural universe for which she was not responsible. And as she came to understand this, she felt more sane and whole, and became dramatically healthier and more functional. This has also been the case with increasing numbers of patients who come into my office.

I have referred to the Borderland phenomenon as “sacred.” Much of it is. By sacred I mean that which is transpersonal, beyond rational experience, and which carries a feeling of numinosity. These phenomena are a mystery connected to the source of life itself – that is, to the godhead. Indeed, the word “*godhead*” is a misnomer in that there is little of the rational mind that is connected with this dimension of the sacred. Here I am not talking about a personified *godhead*, a god after whom we are supposedly fashioned, but of a dimension that preexisted any concept of personified deity. I am talking about that dimension of the sacred that resides – consciously for tribal cultures – in nature herself.

Navajo religion speaks to the source, the mystery from which life in all its forms emerges, by calling on the “Holy People.” However, the Holy People are not so much personified *creators* as they are the purveyors of what *is* and what emerges from the Great Mystery. The various forms of the Holy People – Talking God, Calling God, First Man, First Woman, Changing Woman, Big Fly, Coyote, Wind, etc. – serve as mythological and symbolic messengers in a cosmology of all that is seen and unseen. They convey the knowledge of the way all things once were, and, in terms of basic order, the way that all things are *intended* to be. At the same time, each object, each symbol, each event has its own intrinsic spiritual form and purpose. We might take “wind” as one example as described in James K. McNeley’s *Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy*:

It was seen that in the creation of the world on Earth’s surface, the Holy People, existing as inner forms of natural phenomena of the cardinal directions, were given the means of communicating with others by means of Winds. These Winds could be sent as their “messengers,” their “means of knowing things” and of providing guidance to Earth Surface People. The Wind within and about the developing individual consists in part, of such Messenger Winds conceived of as Little Winds or Wind’s Child which exist within the Wind that is everywhere there is life. It is these Little Winds sent by the Holy Ones that are thought to provide the means of good Navajo thought and behavior.⁴

This dimension of the sacred, as it is expressed here in the Navajo religion, was of *necessity* sacrificed to the development of what we have come to know as western culture. It is to this dimension of the sacred that I believe evolution is now bringing us – to a reconnection in spite of our conscious intent. And it is a reconnection that is in process, a process that points forward, not backward, a process that is changing us profoundly. The nature of that change is the mystery that lies ahead.

I do not mean to idealize nature or the dynamic I have called the Borderland personality. The process of evolution accepts, modifies, or rejects the forms through which an organism has passed – it does not revert to them. Hence my term “a reconnection to nature” should not be confused with the idealized “back-to-nature” philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau or of the later 19th-century writers and artists who followed him. Neither do I wish to idealize the suffering that Hannah and so many others experience; this would be cruel and completely miss the point. Environmental illness and dissociative states cannot be idealized.

Yet in many ways I do see Borderland personalities as heroic. In their struggles to survive and bring these sacred phenomena into our world – albeit in most cases unconsciously – they do work that benefits us all. Hannah does this through her painting, others write books; some do it in their consulting

rooms, not only in the healing professions, but also even in the corporate world. Many, if not most, incarnate this sacred dimension in silent and unseen ways.

When I have the opportunity of working with Borderland personalities, I am moved not only by their struggle to do their personal work, but to do our work for us as well, that is, for those of us who are much less connected to and in touch with the Borderland. I see the deeper thrust of this new phase in our psychic evolution as *a pulling back from the brink of self-extinction*. It is in this sense that Borderland people are the unrecognized heroes and heroines of our collective evolution toward growth, consciousness, and individuation. Theirs is a large and sacred work. To the extent this is true, we all will stand or fall with the outcome.

When I attend the plaza dances at Hopi or at the Indian pueblos, particularly the Corn Dance at San Felipe Pueblo on their feast day, I am profoundly moved that this small band of people, which western civilization nearly exterminated, is doing sacred work for all of us, Indian and non-Indian alike. As I watch the barefoot dancers – men, women, and children – dance from sunrise to sunset, hour after hour after hour in the hot, shadeless plaza, I am moved by their gift to us. When I see one of the center men hold erect a huge ten- to 15-foot wooden pole and circumambulate the line of dancers, waving the pole back and forth, emulating a corn plant sprinkling its pollen in blessing over dancers and observers, I am thankful to him. I realize that these dancers and the headman with the pole are also emulating the earth rotating on its axis, maintaining the balance in nature necessary for the continuance of life in a sacred honoring and thanking of Mother Earth for her gifts to all of us. They are doing the work that we, as western civilized beings, no longer know how to do. And somewhere, deep down in my soul, perhaps in my Borderland place, I know that if they do not do our work for us as well as for their own, perhaps the earth in some sense *would* cease rotating on its axis. And then there would be no one to sing the sacred songs.

I have presented the case of Hannah as a model for the ideas to follow. However, this case is only one of many Borderland personality types I have encountered in my clinical work. A number of them will be discussed in Part II of the book. I have chosen Hannah’s case to open up discussion of this new dimension of consciousness, as well as a number of clinical considerations that ensue from it, in order to simplify the presentation for the reader. Throughout the book I use the case of Hannah for discussion purposes as representative of many cases. My theory is not based on a single case, but on the many cases discussed throughout the book.

The remaining chapters of Part I address the theoretical model that has emerged as I have struggled to explain the appearance of Borderland consciousness. The theoretical model presented in the following chapters is very much informed by my 30 years of clinical work: psychanalytic theory most

particularly the psychology of Carl Jung; recent research in the neuropsychiatry of psychological development, as well as research in complexity theory and a number of other related areas of research reflected in the text. My work with Navajo medicine men, both as student and as patient, and the teachings of Hopi elders and a Hopi medicine man have been of immense importance in formulating this model. Individuals unknown to me other than through their correspondence have stepped forward and identified themselves as Borderland personalities (some of whose material appears in Part II with their permission). I am aware that theoretical models other than the one that follows might explain the phenomena that I describe as "Borderland." The theoretical model that I present, obviously, is the one that makes most sense to me.

Notes

- 1 Scott, 2000: 45.
- 2 Levy-Bruhl, 1966.
- 3 Peat, 1990.
- 4 McNeley, 1981: 36.

Chapter 3

Genesis: Birth of the western ego¹

He [uncivilized man] does not dream of regarding himself as the lord of creation. His zoological classification does not culminate in *Homo sapiens* but in the elephant. Next comes the lion, then the python or crocodile, then man. It never occurs to him that he might be able to rule nature.²

[T]he essential biblical idea is that God is also beyond nature.³

You must forgive me, dear friend. I'm a lover of learning, and trees and open country won't teach me anything, whereas men in the town do.⁴

Throughout this book, I will be using the terms "psyche" and "ego." Psyche represents the *totality* of conscious and unconscious psychological life. This all-inclusive organ has many components: The unconscious, typological orientation (intuition, sensation, feeling, thinking, extroversion/introversion); constructs for apprehending subjective states and implicit memory; the sense of collective consciousness, and the motivations of unconscious cultural values and impulses. Dominant within the psyche, among what one might call these "background" psychic constructs, is the ego – the center of subjective being, the "I" of one's self. This ego is the *conscious* part of our psychic make-up, the mental tool we use to adapt to our personal experiences and perception of reality, and to our identity with the cultural and social groups through which we build our civilization.^{5,6} Notwithstanding its one-sided dedication to consciousness and conscious process, it, the ego, is influenced by unconscious elements.

Psyche, and consequently ego, are inherently constructs of culture; hence the western *psyche* is the totality of those elements that throughout history have created a "western" psychic consciousness and unconsciousness. The western *ego* is the conscious personalization of European/American cultural constructs and the personal and collective experiences that are the motivations of behavior. At the same time, the western ego is influenced by unconscious elements.

There are men too gentle to live among wolves
 Who devour them with eager appetite and search
 For other men to prey upon and suck their childhood dry.
 There are men too gentle for an accountant's world
 Who dream instead of Easter eggs and fragrant grass
 And search for beauty in the mystery of the sky.
 There are men too gentle to live among wolves
 Who toss them like a lost and wounded dove.
 Such gentle men are lonely in a merchant's world,
 Unless they have a gentle one to love.¹⁵

Notes

- 1 Carl G. Jung and after his death M.-L. von Franz, 1964: 95.
- 2 Quincey, 2002: 11.
- 3 Although Jung is speaking implicitly of the western ego when he uses the term "ego," he never explicitly states so.
- 4 Jung, 1961: 261.
- 5 Jungian analyst, Marie-Louise von Franz, seemed to be reaching for a related notion in her discussion of "reciprocal individuation." In Edinger, 1999, 24–25.
- 6 My contention that Jung did not foresee this psychodynamic role of the collective unconscious was reinforced in a personal conversation in 1989 with Jung's son, Franz Jung.
- 7 Jung, 1960: 540.
- 8 A term coined by the modern authority on shamanism, Michael Harner.
- 9 That is, combined 1911 when he wrote his essay, "Two Kinds of Thinking," and 1961 when he died. The overspecialization of the western ego became dramatically identifiable around the time of Jung's death and has increased exponentially in its threat to species survival since then.
- 10 Jung, 1964: 95.
- 11 Griffin, 1999: 97.
- 12 The personal content of these dreams are manifest as reported above. In the case of the man in his 60s, I am familiar with the personal import of his dream since we have a relationship. I have had no contact with Susan Griffin, and her dream as reported stands for both the personal message about her life and health and the broader more collective message that it reflects. It is clear from her book that she took the import of her dream on both the personal and collective levels.
- 13 This echoes Jung's assertion that, "It is the single individual who will undergo a reconnection with the lost symbolic contents of nature and carry it through."
- 14 A brief glance back to the 16th-century Inquisition of the Catholic Church and the lives of Galileo Galilei and Nicolas Copernicus displays the profound confusion of western civilization regarding what was perceived as pathological and what was perceived as sacred. That confusion has evolved as western civilization has evolved. Although today we are more sophisticated, and the "punishments" less severe than in the 16th century, this confusion remains with us still.
- 15 Kavanagh, 1991.

Chapter 10

Portals to the Borderland

A purely personalistic psychology . . . does not capture the true mystery of that *coming into being* of the personal spirit in the face of trauma . . . This is because it leaves out the transpersonal element or it interprets the transpersonal element as infantile omnipotence and neglects the primacy of the numinosum in human experiences.¹

In terms of personal psychology, it would appear that there are three portals² to the Borderland:

- 1 evolution
- 2 personality structure (i.e. the type of psyche we are born with)
- 3 trauma.

Evolution portal

In the preceding chapters I made the case for a compensatory evolutionary shift wherein the western psyche is in the process of being reconnected to nature from which it began its psychic split over 3,000 years ago. In essence, the western ego is being pushed into that reconnection with nature by an evolutionary process in the name of species preservation – if not the preservation of all of life as we know it.

This "reconnection" is not a regression. Rather it is a reconnection to nature as a *dimension of existence*, as a *life form*, as a *reality principle*, different from that to which we have accustomed ourselves, integrating with it. The major impact of this reconnection on the western ego is psychological and spiritual. It is compelling an awareness of nonrational reality and experience on which this ego progressively turned its back millennia ago. In the post-Enlightenment world, we have behaved as if those dimensions of reality simply ceased to exist. But they have remained what they were and what they are, and we are being pushed to reconnect with those dimensions of reality – like it or not.³

Evolution is predominantly a biological term. The “collective unconscious” is the concept formulated by Jung to describe the dynamic through which unconscious contents heretofore unknown and unrealized emerge into human awareness – a kind of psychic evolution. The western ego itself is one such psychic evolutionary construct. While the impetus for evolutionary change is unknown and essentially unknowable, we can infer deductively and inductively the *probable* telos – or final cause, of a given evolutionary process.⁴ This is no less true in the case of psychic evolution as it is of biological evolution. Most biologists/scientists would argue that there is no telos, there is simply the structure and order that we see, the source of that order and organization is beyond our capacity to know and therefore is not addressed in the *data*. But too often the telos is very much experienced by many biologists in their *subjective feeling reaction* to the numinosity of the beauty of the order we do find in life. The data, in this context, are their awe – and ours as well. And, as was suggested in the introduction, science, and the mathematics that supports scientific endeavor, is not the only universal language. Neither is it a language of objectivity “purified” of subjective, i.e. human, influence.⁵ Subjective feeling reaction – “knowing” – is a universal language too. The latter conveys an *experience* of truth, however well or poorly we may be able to express it verbally. The Borderland, as I have described it in Part I, is the by-product of that evolutionary process, the “space,” the nexus, the threshold whereby the western ego is being thrust into reconnection with transrational dimensions of reality.

It is important here to distinguish between the imaginal world, the source of which is internal to the individual, and the Borderland. Borderland experiences are not imaginal – although these two realms often inform, stimulate, and feed each other. They are not experiences secondary to fantasy. They are direct experiences of transrational reality. In one sense, this is not a new phenomenon in terms of psychic experience. There have been isolated *individials* for whom these experiences have been known and commonplace. And, historically, we know about some of them. Some individuals once burned as witches, might today be seen as Borderland personalities. Others have been the wise people who, over the centuries, were consulted about the health and welfare of the people and their animals. Yet others have been dowzers. And, of course, some – many – have been branded as “looney” and shunned from the community.

What is new is that reconnection with these nonrational dimensions of reality is taking place rapidly on a collective level within western culture and is beginning to affect many individuals at all levels of society. And if indeed this phenomenon is happening as a function of evolutionary process, then it portends to affect tens of thousands of individuals and the culture as a whole – I would say, in the short span of the current century.⁶

In the case of children who experience Borderland phenomena as a natural part of their childhood, these experiences should not be

particularly stressful since they naturally have one foot in the archetypal realm as their young egos gradually develop.⁷ It *can* become stressful for children if they develop in a family and/or cultural context that is hostile to what they experience as “natural.” Where this evolutionary dynamic typically has stressful impact is in the case of individuals who begin their lives where the magical level of consciousness is suppressed in their early developmental years – before age 7 – or whose initial conscious experience of Borderland phenomena comes either later in childhood (after age 7) or as adults in their 20s or 30s for whom this dimension has newly opened. There appears to be a correlation between the age of initial conscious experience of Borderland phenomena and the potential for disturbing psychic and emotional impact on the ego: The older the individual the greater potential for deleterious impact. Some individuals become highly inflated and pursue grandiose goals. In this instance, some go over the edge in pursuit of self-destructive, unrealizable ventures and relationships. In other instances, this grandiosity leads to highly creative processes and successful artistic careers of one sort or another. I have seen individuals in clinical practice who came into therapy because the Borderland dimension had opened up to them, either frightening them or because they were intrigued to explore the mystery of this dimension in themselves in greater breadth and depth.

Personality structure portal

Jung’s concept of the Self holds that each individual comes into this world at birth with an innate character structure/personality type. Included in that character structure are a number of personality traits, such as introversion/extroversion, artistic traits, native intelligence, and, through the Self, the degree and nature of connection to the transpersonal dimension. Some individuals fit the Borderland personality type, that is, they have a more *natural* connection to the transpersonal dimension than do others. Another way of saying this is that their psyches have not fully adapted to the absolute psychic split from nature that is apparent in the mainstream of western culture. Sometimes a genetic or personality link to parents or grandparents appears to be evident with regard to these traits.⁸ Sometimes not. When there is a link, there has tended to be less stress connected with being a Borderland personality.

Historically there have been isolated *categories* of individuals such as artists and highly intuitive people who are naturally more prone to experiencing Borderland phenomena than others. The very nature of their personality structure has “several toes,” if not a whole foot, in the nonrational realm of psychic experience. Most of us have heard or read about creative individuals whose inspiration, if not the work itself, *came to* the individual from some transpersonal source through the artist’s unconscious. We talk

of creative "gifts," as if they come from a source outside the personal ego. In the case of many artistic personality types, these individuals have developed with an *ongoing relationship* to the transrational realm. That does not mean that many of them have not had a difficult time – in some cases an extremely difficult time – bridging the rational world of everyday life with their subjective experience of the transrational dimension. But, they grew up being *used to* living with their transrational experience and, often, of being out of step with the rational world in which they live. Developmentally speaking, the transrational dimension of experience has never been alien to them.

Subjectively, the experience of the artistic personality is significantly different from that of many Borderland personalities whose connection to the transrational (magical) dimension of experience ended developmentally, for the most part, between ages 6 and 7.⁹ For these Borderland individuals, being thrust into reconnection with transrational reality later in life can be quite unsettling. In addition to the emotional discomfort of not knowing what is happening to them, many may come to wonder if something is not "wrong" with them. Often this unspoken self-doubt is reflected back to them by loved ones, friends, and co-workers, who increasingly find them to be "weird." Many have difficulty adjusting to the demands of outer life. And many who seek therapy have their worst fears ratified by being told that something is "wrong." A diagnosis of pathology (often "Borderline personality disorder") gives rise to even greater anxiety and can become part of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The second chapter of this book, which discusses the case of Hannah, was published independently in *The Salt Journal*¹⁰ and in the *IONS Noetic Sciences Review* in 2000.¹¹ As a result of those articles I received a number of communications from individuals who read the piece and who identified themselves as "Borderland personalities." A number coined the term, "Borderlander." Several said that the article was the first time their life experience had been put into words. Several offered descriptions of their "Borderland" experience. As a result of these communications, I developed an informal questionnaire (see Appendix), which I sent to 20 individuals, mostly via email. Some of the responses I received are contained in this and the next chapter with permission of the individuals.

One respondent reported:

I was sort of born with an inclination toward the Borderland and had semi-Borderland experiences throughout my youth . . . I trusted my Borderland experiences from the beginning . . . I shared them with peers, former professors from college, fellow evangelical Christians, anyone who would listen, because I felt my experiences to be important. I received two main types of reactions. Either blank stares, or (more often) stern, defensive opposition.

A 46-year-old woman identified herself in a letter as a "Borderland person." She said of herself:

My sensitivities to all things animate and inanimate were with me from my earliest memories. I would touch my bedroom door and it would "tell" me about the forest it came from. Though we had no pets, dogs and cats would show up at our front door – I had invited them to come over. The dog next door was my best friend, literally.

Everything I came in contact with had something to tell me. It was not a problem until I realized that no one else heard what I heard or felt what I felt. I kept waiting, hoping, to find other people like me. There is nothing worse for a child than to be different. I was different from everyone, my own family included. Interestingly my older brother and sister made up a story that I had been dropped on the door step by an Indian. I was only about three years old when they told me this story, but I remember being so happy to hear that I did have a "real" family and that maybe they would come back for me. I used to watch out the front door, looking for an Indian.

As a small child (2 to 5 years old) I was very tuned in to both the animate and inanimate world. I remember my mother trying to explain death to me. She said that when an animal dies, it stops eating, breathing, and becomes like a rock. I told her, well then it is still alive, because for me rocks were very alive.

This woman intentionally shut down the Borderland dimension of her life at about age 8. It was too lonely and frightening for her to live in that realm with no validation or support. Although "I had lost conscious memory of most of my Borderland existence, I had been a spiritual seeker for several years and practiced meditation." Through some synchronous connections at age 32, she consciously chose to reconnect to the Borderland.

Psychic Personalities

It is easy to confuse "psychic" individuals with Borderland personalities. A few of the individuals who have contacted me and who have identified themselves as Borderland personalities, when asked, stated that these two dimensions were one and the same. Certainly for some individuals, there is indeed an overlapping of psychic and Borderland personality characteristics. However, to my mind it is important to distinguish between the two.

Psychic personalities typically pick up bits and pieces of information, i.e. psychic data, not unlike the far distant radio stations one can sometimes pick up late at night that are not detectable during daytime hours. The source of this information is other than the life experience of the psychic individual. That information can be about people, things, or events, and, as anyone who has had a relationship with a psychic individual knows, can be shockingly

accurate. Some psychic individuals can hone in, focus, on specific subjects or issues. And sometimes, because of that focusing ability, they are consultants to police departments, the FBI, and various agencies of the intelligence community.

Psychics sometimes have difficulty discerning what is psychic information – information coming to them from a source outside themselves – from their own intuition. They often have difficulty discerning whether the information they pick up has to do with some aspect of their own lives, or whether it is about someone else's life. I have more than once had a client innocently bring in a dream that, in graphic detail, was about some current aspect or sensitive issue of my life. Indeed, sometimes these psychic intrusions can be quite disconcerting. Unless one is used to such events, one can find oneself suddenly enraged being psychically violated, as if one has discovered a Peeping Tom looking through the window. In my experience, not only do the individuals with the psychic dream or "intuition" present this information in innocence, but they often suffer emotional consequences from the fear they have left the other person feeling violated. They sometimes know that the material is not theirs but often they have no idea to whom it is connected. That is part of the reason they bring the material into therapy – to try to make some sense of it and to see what relevance it may have for their own process. It takes a great deal of sensitivity on the part of the therapist to be able to identify and discern psychic material when the client doesn't realize that they have picked up personal or sensitive material about the therapist. Sometimes it is necessary to set boundaries around what will and will not be pursued in therapy: The therapist's personal relationship with his or her spouse, for example. The client will also need help in learning how to manage material that he does withhold in the name of respecting boundaries. And, above all else, it takes a great deal of self-control on the part of the therapist to not *react* on a personal level when such a violation does take place. Such a reaction can be quite wounding to the client, even traumatizing, and in extreme cases, can result in the client hiding this dimension of his/her life so as to not incur the wrath of the therapist, thus compromising the whole of the therapeutic work.

Some psychic individuals are tormented by information they pick up when the content is emotionally upsetting. They have no idea to whom or to what it is connected, why they have the information, or what to do with it. And, of course, there are times when such psychic information can be enormously comforting and helpful, even life saving.

Borderland personalities, contrariwise, may or may not have their own psychic experiences. However, whether or not they do, they all have an *ongoing relationship* with transrational reality. Their connection with that dimension is not random, and is usually based in a *feeling dialogue* which, depending on the content of that dialogue, can either be comforting or – as we saw in the case of Hannah and the cows – discomforting or worse.

After reading my article on the Borderland and discussing this aspect of her life with her oldest son, one mother said that he offered some "additional insights into my gifts. The most obvious and yet profound is that I always was able to differentiate my thoughts and feelings from those of the objects and animals around me. I could be overwhelmed by the thought forms but I always knew that they didn't originate with me."

Another person wrote:

I believe that I was born with the ability to enter liminal psychological space . . . I also believe it came as a gift to show me that this is not the only world. When I have been receptive to my Borderland experiences, I have been less attached to what is going on in the world. I feel now that I have a perspective that allows me to process events differently. I also attribute my art to my encounters with Borderland entities.

I did not discover my Borderland connection in therapy. Rather I came to love myself and my Borderland ways . . . I would choose to be the way I am all over again and I continue to do so today.

And, of course, there are many Borderland personalities who do not realize this dimension of their lives – at least not fully. Although they register Borderland phenomena they do not know how to relate to some of them because of prejudice in the dominant culture against transrational experience. This can be quite damaging to the individual. This will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

In my experience it is much more common for Borderland personalities to have psychic experiences than for psychic personalities to live in the Borderland. Clinically, if one is used to working with individuals considered to be Borderland personalities, it is not difficult to differentiate one personality type from the other.

Children's personalities

Another type of personality structure that functions as a portal to the Borderland is that of the young child. Unless they are shamed or cognitively yanked out of it, most children under the ages of 6 or 7 experience the Borderland as a "natural" mode of experience. If we return to Figure 7.1, we can see in Part 1 a schematic description of the psychic structure of an infant child whose ego sense of subjective identity, rests totally as a *psychic potential*, yet to emerge from total containment within the self of the individual and its mother.¹² At an *ego level*, the child lives more than not in the unconscious realm with no self-identity, no sense of an *I*. Psychologically speaking, she/he swims in a kind of archetypal soup. By "archetypal soup," I hope to create a *feeling* metaphor for something that in fact is unknowable to us as adults because we are too separated from it by our highly developed

cognitive structures. We can only fantasize what that realm must be like subjectively (when literally there is no subject "self") for the infant and for the very young child. My fantasy is one of swimming through myriad body sensations, one flowing/stopping over into the other and back again, having *all* experience mediated on a body level (including, particularly, the eyes and skin), and being constantly flooded with archetypal "material" (a meaningless phrase in this context – but we only have words here), with no sense of control or input over what comes and goes and what impacts the child.

If we move on to Figure 7.1, Part 2, we see a schematic description of the psychic structure of a child somewhere between ages 4 and 6 or 7. Here we see an ego structure, a subjective sense of *I* that has begun to emerge from total containment in the unconscious archetypal soup. Children in this age range are still at the mercy of the archetypal ebb and flow (we are no longer using the word "soup") through their psyches, most particularly at night.¹³ This latter psychodynamic fact is reflected in the cross-hatched section of Figure 7.1, Part 2, where more of the child's ego lives in the unconscious realm – the Self – than it does in the mundane world of day-to-day organized life. And, for those of us who are parents, most of us know the night terrors that our children have experienced with "bad dreams," "monster dreams," that seem to come up from below to terrify them. This is the archetypal realm flowing into, out of, and through our little ones. For the most part, we are helpless to control these comings and goings because they are autonomous within the psyche of the child. By the time the child is 3 or 4, we can begin to talk about these terrors because they now have shape and form, i.e. "monsters," in the language of our children. But inexorably they will come back to terrify our children until an ego structure has developed that functions more outside the unconscious realm than in it.¹⁴ With language comes the capacity to symbolize. So what had been an archetypal soup is now (at age 3–4) transformed into symbolic forms – monsters, dragons, princesses, fairies – some positive and some negative. Because of their archetypal nature, even the positive symbols carry overwhelming numinosity for their little egos.

There is a positive side to this dual life in the archetypal and mundane worlds: The child *naturally* experiences the magical level of consciousness, and, along with it, the Borderland realm. Indeed, the latter is a natural state of being for most children between 4 and 6 or 7 – depending on the degree of *cognization imposed on the child by its parents and other caretakers*.¹⁵ Some parents do not permit their child to live inside and to live out their magical worlds – worlds that are quite real to him or her. Indeed, American culture in particular is often hostile to this dimension of a child's reality. That hostility is expressed in dramatic and subtle ways. Although the psychological result of spoiling – and even in extreme cases killing off – the magical dimension of consciousness for many of our children is unconscious, this drive in our culture is inexorable and, even traumatizing in and of itself.

As has been observed, some children before age 7 lose their Borderland

sensitivities and connections, others don't. The culture at large and specifically TV are so contaminating and destructive of the child's natural internal imaginal realm, that unless these little psyches are consciously protected from these forces that surround them in everyday life, there is a constant erosion of their *natural* healthy relationship to the Borderland dimension.¹⁶

For a very long time Disney productions so sanitized fairytales and myths in their films, that they came close to portraying life without a dark side, or, at best, one so weak that it had no real potency.¹⁷ At the same time, children in their connection to the archetypal realm *know* there is a dark side to life because they experience it in their fantasies (the ghost/monster under the bed) and in their night terrors and dreams. And indeed, this is the true significance of fairytales: To stimulate an inner psychic struggle on the part of the child that will compel him or her to learn to manage the tension between those opposites, i.e. the light and dark sides of life, *and to prepare him to face the outer world and its formidable challenges into which he will emerge full time with decreasing parental protection*. This is why the fairytales are often so dark and grim(m).

One of the main attractions at Disney World is MGM Studios, visited by over one million children every year, a large proportion under age 7. This "attraction" proudly presents the technology behind the magical effects in films and other entertainment arenas. The subtle, but quite effective, message behind these "entertainments" is that there is no real magic, there is no real magical realm, and that the things to be ogled are the worldly wonders of technology. On an even more subtle level the message to the child is that you should not be in the imaginal world in your mind, you should *know* that cognition, not imagination, produces the *simulation* of magic. Subtly, the awe of the magical realm that children *know* because it is *natural* in the psychic realm in which they live, is debunked as fake. In its place is offered the "awe" of technological prowess. Typically for children, this technological prowess "impresses," but it does not *awe* because it is devoid of "magic." So much for some of our future artists, architects, musicians, writers, etc. – the impact can be that profound!

With the damaging/killing of awe comes the damaging/killing of spirit in our little ones. It is their connection to spirit (*not* religion per se, but *spirit*), their relationship to the transpersonal realm that protects and guides them, *and is essential for the formulation of functional defenses* to events that otherwise can be quite traumatic in their lives. Because they *are* little people, the conflict between the dark and light forces that they experience intrapsychically in their pre-school years calls forth their connection with positive transpersonal forces of the spirit dimension far more powerful than their little egos. Their egos cannot be given the full burden of constructing (rational) ego defenses of sufficient power to withstand such archetypal onslaughts. They need to *feel* their little egos backed up by spiritual powers greater than their own egos *and their own understanding*. This is why, all too often, when parents use rational explanations alone to help a child cope with night terrors

("it's *only* a dream;" "there's nothing there;" "it went away"), either they don't work, or worse, the child is subtly coerced into agreeing that what she/he is experiencing is not real when it feels profoundly otherwise. Oftentimes, the presence or absence of this connection with the spirit dimension makes the difference between whether or not a child emerges into the mundane world with a legacy of an ability to symbolize, imaginal richness or creativity, or even emotional trauma. When I speak of children's connection to the spirit realm, I am aware that I am attempting to describe something that is their own *unique* relationship to that dimension, i.e. something that is different from our adult concept of "spirit" and for which I do not have adequate language. (One difference between their relationship to the spirit dimension and ours that I do know is that theirs is not split off from nature.)¹⁸ This connection to the magical realm, then, is all important in determining whether children experience trauma in the manner Donald Kalsched so well describes and documents in his book, *The Inner World of Trauma*. Or whether "the gods" and "good fairies" will protect them as they traverse that awesomely scary land between the pre-egoic self and the post-magical ego world where the outer world must be engaged without those *natural* protections.

Many TV programs, video tapes, and DVDs now feature "Behind the Making of . . ." commentaries on, for example, *Star Wars* or *Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* – films with a lot of fantastic imagery and depictions of what could be called Borderland reality. These add-ons to the actual movie focus on the technology involved in making the various films. So the message is that holding our collective breath in the suspense of wondering whether Luke Skywalker can permit himself to follow The Force in combating Darth Vader (the Dark Side) is not really warranted. The various airplanes and the battles were just miniature wooden and plastic figures manipulated for effect. The imaginal and Borderland linking world of the right brain is subtly overpowered by left-brain smarts and the science of digital technology.

I once took my 4-year-old son to a puppet show put on by the brilliant and magical Jim Henson. When we emerged from the theater into the lobby, I was astonished to see none other than Jim Henson displaying how the puppets and the mechanics of the set "worked" to this crowd of children, many of whom were 7 or under. We did not stay for the demonstration.¹⁹

Least the reader think that I am hostile to technology per se, I am not. Indeed, I find wonder in much of technology. "Neutral" technology is not the culprit. The damage to children results from the way in which technology and rationality are used to co-opt and/or supplant the *natural*/internal relationship of children to their imaginal and Borderland realms.

I specifically mention the ages 6 to 7 because it is somewhere in that period, in the more or less healthy psychological development of the child, that there is a bit more of that child's ego that is outside of containment in the self than there is in it. (See Figure 7.1, Part 2a.) This is a process that continues in the life of the individual to about age 7 as illustrated in Part 2 and Part 3 – see

Part 2a. The essential point here is that when that theoretical threshold is reached by ages 6 to 7, the child's *ongoing connection* with the archetypal realm *naturally* ceases to dominate. The monster dreams stop, more or less, and the child's connection with the imaginal realm takes a back seat to cognitive development. Of course, all of this is reinforced by the facts of rapid socialization and of formal education with their near exclusive emphasis on cognitive development to the exclusion of the imaginal, magical, archetypal and other "right-brain" dimensions of psychic existence.

Trauma portal

In his eloquently penetrating work, *The Inner World of Trauma*, Jungian psychoanalyst Donald Kalsched, discusses "trauma" in children as "any experience that causes the child unbearable psychic pain or anxiety."²⁰ He goes on to say that "unbearable experiences" are those that "overwhelm the usual defensive measures" and that the distinguishing feature of such trauma is what Heinz Kohut calls a "disintegration anxiety," an unnameable dread associated with the threatened dissolution of a coherent self.²¹ Kalsched describes the alternative inner world opened by the archetypal defenses that rescue the personality when trauma strikes. The result is what he calls a "self-care system" peopled by the "mythopoetic" or "daimonic" denizens of the collective psyche. The alternative world he describes bears a marked similarity to what I am delineating as the Borderland, although Kalsched focuses on the *inner* world and not on the connection to nature, which so frequently characterizes the "Borderland personality."

I do not intend here to discuss in depth the nature of trauma or its treatment. Rather my focus will be on the role of trauma – of those "unbearable experiences" – in opening a portal to the Borderland world and the complications and implications that ensue. As we saw in the previous section, trauma can be especially unbearable to the psyche of the child. But it is not a necessary precondition for entrance into the Borderland. The child's natural sense of magic is all the preconditioning necessary. But the implications of trauma for opening consciousness of the Borderland is not limited to the psyches of children.

One woman who contacted me after reading the "Hannah" chapter in the *IONS Noetic Sciences Review* and who was traumatized in first grade by a too early and too deep confrontation of her Borderland/magical existence by the left brain cogni-centric approach to life, wrote the following:

There was not one event that I can point to with certainty and say, that was it. What happened was that from the time I was three until I was around eight years old a series of events and processes took place that forced my abandoning of my special world [the Borderland].

First grade was a huge turning point . . . I had a first grade teacher who

was an amateur naturalist. We spent a great deal of time learning about the animal world. I should have been very happy. Unfortunately for me, most of the animals that came into class were stuffed and mounted. It bothered me a great deal. What really disturbed me to the point of trauma was the "sleeping" jar. My teacher encouraged the children to bring into class unusual insect specimens, preferably alive. She would then put them in the "sleeping" jar, which I believe had an ether soaked rag in the bottom of it. After they went "to sleep," she would take them out of the jar and mount them on a large cork board.

No one else in the class had any problem with this almost daily scenario. I found it to be torture. I could hear the bugs dying. Some were very quiet about it; most made gasping and moaning sounds as the air in the jar was replaced with unbreathable fumes. The butterflies screamed. It was a high pitched staccato sound. I could not stand it, and it was very obvious that no one else in the room heard it. I asked to be excused, went into the bathroom, turned on the water, to drown out the screams, put my hands over my ears. I did not hear the teacher knocking on the door. When she opened the door and saw me standing with my hands over my ears, crouched down in the corner she must have thought I was mentally ill. The teacher called my parents. They were upset with me, told me that there was nothing wrong with the "sleeping jar" and I had to get over it. Soon after this I began getting sick quite often. I had severe upper respiratory infections. At seven years old I developed pneumonia.

While I was home sick I had an out of body experience. I went to what I call my real home. It was the place I lived before I came into this body. There I was greeted by my real parents. They were very happy to see me. I was beyond joyous to see them. They explained to me that I had been getting sick because I was thinking about leaving this body. They assured me that was ok, but if I did leave now there were some things that I had come into the body to do that wouldn't get done, so I would be needing to come back soon to complete those things. I remember them showing me what I can only describe as a book with moving pictures of what was to be parts of my life. I cannot remember anything in particular of what I saw. Just the feeling of wanting to complete my tasks now, and not wait for another lifetime. I do remember asking them if I could keep coming to visit them. They told me no, that if I decided to stay in my body I could not come to visit them again for a very long time. That was the beginning of my loss of contact with the Borderland. [She did not permit herself to reconnect to the Borderland realm again until her adult years.]²²

This kind of cultural and pedagogical assault on a sensitive psyche is often overlooked as a source of early trauma in children. The fact that this woman's trauma was experienced in the classroom is instructive. The left-brain bias of

education in this country may be a more significant source of trauma in young children than we might imagine. I do not suggest that development of left-brain skills is the problem here – certainly that dimension of education is beneficial and essential. It is the left-brain *bias*, the insensitivity to, and de-legitimation of right-brain sensitivities of many children that can be damaging or even traumatizing, as in the above example.²³

If the rapid evolutionary reconnection of the western ego with nature is taking place as I have described above, then this sharp delineation between the magical realm of consciousness before ages 6 to 7, which is shut down after this age in favor of cognitive (left-brain) development, will become less absolute. In its place there will be more of an integration collectively of the two, which can then be carried forward developmentally in individuals.²⁴ The individuals I have identified, and who identify themselves as being Borderland personalities²⁵ have access to both the cognitive and magical realms. But the extent and the manner in which they have integrated both remains an individual matter. Contrary to the projection of many, not all Borderland personalities live in a kind of mental ether. A number are quite grounded in both left-brain and right-brain functioning. One respondent quoted in this book is the former head of a state bar association.

One woman who stated that she experienced "extreme physical and verbal abuse" her entire childhood into her teenage years, wrote the following:

What I am thinking is that therapy has really helped me cope with the real world much better in terms of the conflict and day-to-day stresses of living. HOWEVER, I can still inhabit the other world as well. It is sort of like being able to love two (or more) people at the same time . . . you just love them differently and you conduct yourself appropriately so that neither is hurt or damaged in any way. I don't think that I am schizoid when I say that I live in two worlds and that they don't collide. The Borderland world has made me better in the "real world" than I probably would have ever been if I had not had the experiences I had.

[Emphasis in original.]

Kalsched describes how trauma fragments the drive towards cohesiveness in the impacted child and "fixes" (i.e. sets in place) these split parts of the psyche developmentally. He cites Ferenczi, who observed that "one part of the ego *regresses* to the infantile period, and another part *progresses*, i.e. grows up too fast and becomes precociously adapted to the outer world, often [but not always] as what D. W. Winnicott calls the 'false self.'"²⁶ Kalsched then suggests, "the *progressed part* of the personality then caretakes the *regressed part*." He points out how both regressed and progressed aspects seem to be involved in the dissociation or "out of body" experience that preserves life for the incarnate person suffering unbearable experience (trauma). He says, "If we think of the 'personal spirit' as that part of the 'great spirit' that 'wants' to

incarnate in *this* body as the *soul of a unique particular person*, then trauma constitutes those times when the soul can no longer remain in the body and must 'return' to the spirit realm for sanctuary – such as the woman who wrote about her out of body experience (see above). It then returns, but your Borderland personalities never forget their 'true home.' Trauma often gives people life-sustaining access to this area."²⁷

In this context, Kalsched begins his approach to this archetypal domain through the dynamics of trauma, i.e. the approach is through the pathology of traumatic assault on the child. My approach and emphasis begins with the Borderland (archetypal) domain and acknowledges traumatic wounding as the portal that *may* have provided initial access to the Borderland. The emphasis makes a difference. Neither is right or wrong – both are descriptive of real intrapsychic process. *The issue is the experience and perception of the individual*. How well that experience appears to work for the individual – how syntonic it is with their life needs and experience – determines authenticity more than how the individual got there, i.e. trauma. For some of the Borderland individuals I have cited here, although they acknowledge the trauma portal as their initial access to the Borderland, they are adamant in their insistence that their Borderland existence not be seen as an extension of, or attached to, their traumatic experience – i.e. pathologized. Many have said that when therapists and friends insist on this connection, they experience that insistence as re-traumatizing. Typically, in reaction, they will then shut down and hide their Borderland existence. *They do not want it pathologized*. When it is pathologized, it feels like a profanation of something sacred.

In a number of ways this description *partially* sums up the dynamic of the genesis of a Borderland personality on the part of *some* individuals as a result of trauma. The regressed part of the psyche fixes at a level of development *prior to* that threshold point, the theoretical threshold between Parts 2 and 3 in Figure 7.1 (see also Part 2a) and the more developed parts caretake the latter. But here, is the Borderland the *progressed* or *regressed* part of the psyche in this context?²⁸

Some individuals, adults as well as children, have had a sustained ego-syntonic (ego-comfortable) connection to the Borderland prior to the onset of the trauma. In some of these cases, the reverse seemed to be the case, i.e. the Borderland connection within the person's psyche seemed to caretake and sustain the traumatized parts of the psyche. One woman reported:

I believe that I was born with the ability to enter liminal space. I also believe that the death of my beloved grandmother and the subsequent beatings by my father [trauma] brought that ability to the fore. I believe that it came as a gift to show me that this is not the only world.

In other words, this woman's Borderland connections sustained and nurtured her through her traumatic experiences.

A typical clinical interpretation of this circumstance would deny the reality of the "other world" this woman was able to enter. It would suggest that this woman's psyche "split" into a regressed state – the Borderland – in order to not feel the pain of her trauma. Clinically, the goal would be to help her feel the feelings (grief) associated with these traumas so that she wouldn't need the "other world". Clinical psychology is suspicious of that other world and can only see it as an artifact of experience in "this" world. But this respondent said that she "was born with the ability to enter liminal space," i.e. that that was a *natural* part of her *healthy* orientation to life. In a sense, she had an ability to go from one (psychic) room to another by choice, prior to the later trauma that she describes in her life. So did her psyche "split" – an *unconscious* defense mechanism – after her grandmother's death and the onset of her father's beatings, or did she simply use the *conscious* tools at her disposal – the reality of the Borderland – to protect herself from harm?

One of the questions contained in the questionnaire (see Appendix) I sent to individuals who contacted me was the following: "Looking back . . . what would you have changed in terms of your actions?" Significantly, this woman's response was, "Nothing." Another question in the questionnaire was: "If you could have realized significantly better intimacy with others in the first half of your life, would you choose to do so if it meant sacrificing some of the Borderland connection/experience that you had? Would you choose to do so now if that choice were available to you?" Her answer: "No, I would choose to be the way I am all over again and I continue to do so today."

The crucial point here is that this woman's experience of her Borderland personality was positive and life saving. It supported "the other side" of her personality, including the traumatic phases of her life (after her grandmother died). She said, in response to item #14 in the questionnaire: "I did not discover my Borderland connection in [10 years of] therapy. Rather I came to love myself and my 'Borderland ways.'" She reported that with one minor, short-lived exception, her experiences with two therapists were very positive. She noted in particular that these two therapists were positively receptive to her "Borderland ways." She credits one in particular with helping her to identify some heretofore unrecognized trauma in her life. There is little doubt that had her "Borderland ways" been received with skepticism or clinically labeled (pathologized) – a possible traumatic experience in itself – her life circumstance would likely have been qualitatively different as a woman, a wife and as a mother.

A woman in her mid-60s wrote:

My parents . . . told me I was a witch and crazy and contributed to making my existence a hell. There was also much emotional and physical abuse, and a big part of my childhood was spent being a hypochondriac and wanting to end my life.

I have had . . . five successful careers, and the various directions which

my adventurous, risk-taking nature has led me. With the trauma I endured in my earlier years and periodically throughout my life, by all accounts, I should have ended up in an institution. Yet, with what can only be Grace, and with much gratitude, I recognize that I have been given an amazing gift and the privilege of an incredible growth experience; as well as the ability to participate and experience fully in what has turned out to be an eventful, creative and wonderfully enlightening journey.

It seems that the Borderland is both a dimension that can be opened by the experience of trauma and one which can preexist experiences of trauma. In either case it can be a powerful support for both the regressed and "progressed" part of the personality," in Kalsched's terms, and assist it in sustaining the individual through the experience of trauma.

In some cases, the Borderland connection provides the *primary* sustenance for an ego in the throes of trauma. This distinction is critical. If the Borderland as a dimension of psychic experience is viewed only as a by-product of trauma then it is likely to be viewed, clinically, as being exclusively a *symptom* of trauma, i.e. aberrant. And this one dimensional view of Borderland experience can itself be experienced as the greater trauma for some individuals. One person who was forced to view satanic rituals as a child stated:

The trauma began when I was a toddler, possibly at birth . . . I know these experiences [which included being forced to witness the torture of animals] contributed to my learning compassion and empathy. To this day, I often suffer deeply emotionally if it occurs to me that I have hurt someone or if I witness someone else's pain. I thought for years that this was merely "codependence," which I know is part of it, but it is also about a greater level of empathy and compassion . . . I know that these experiences in my early life planted seeds which in the last few years have developed into the Borderland experiences. Again, I used to think that my reactions to animals in the present was all about my processing the pain I witnessed and felt many years ago, and that is part of it, but there is also the Borderland, which for me manifests as a mystical empathy.

When asked if she would be willing to sacrifice some of the Borderland connection/experience that she had in the name of less life struggle she replied:

The answer is an unqualified no. Painful as these Borderland experiences are, they feel very important, they feel sacred, they feel like something I even long for. They were and are so very much more than simply an antidote to despair.

As was the case with Hannah, painful though her experiences were vis-à-vis

"the cows," the greater pain – and she would say, "trauma," – came from having her *experience* denied and labeled as a symptom, as something less than real. For her, and for other Borderland personalities with whom I have had contact, the denial of her subjective reality – particularly in the face of her feeling of not having had her experience *even considered* as being real – left her feeling crazy and pathologized by the therapy itself. Every single Borderland individual with whom I have dealt, either in my clinical practice, or via correspondence, has expressed the same subjective experience.

However, this does bring us to a conundrum: Some individuals suffering from trauma do carry defenses to their traumatic experience that do impinge on the quality of their lives and that, in a clinical model, could rightfully be viewed as "pathological." Trauma theory would hold that these individuals live on the "other side of the window" from life's reality, in a "transitional zone," as Kalsched would put it, seeking a safe haven from perceived threats from the outer world and from "traumatic anxiety." In his model, Kalsched states that:

Repeated exposure to traumatic anxiety *forecloses transitional space*, kills the symbolic activity of creative imagination, and replaces it with what Winnicott calls "fantasying." Fantasying is a dissociated state, which is neither imagination nor living in external reality, but a kind of melancholic self-soothing compromise which goes on forever – a defensive use of the imagination in the service of anxiety avoidance . . .

Psychotherapists must be very careful . . . to distinguish between genuine imagination and fantasy, which is the self-soothing activity of the daemon. This self-soothing really amounts to a self-hypnotic spell – an unconscious undertow into non-differentiation to escape conscious feeling. Here a retreat into "oneness" replaces the hard work of separation necessary for "wholeness." This is not regression, as we like to think of it in the service of the ego, but "malignant regression" – regression which suspends a part [of the patient] in an auto-hypnotic twilight state in order . . . to assure the survival of [the patient] as a human person.²⁹

[Emphasis in original.]

In some cases, I think the above description of fantasy as regression would be quite accurate. Here the individual would be using "fantasying" as a defense against anxiety associated with trauma. Some individuals who described their experiences as "Borderland experiences" might be viewed as confusing my description of Borderland dynamics with what Kalsched (and Winnicott) describe as fantasying.

However, Borderland experience does not represent either "fantasying" or "genuine imagination." It is not an *intrapsychic* relationship between ego and self. It is *experience*. It is a *vis-à-vis relationship* between the individual and

the transrational dimension of reality. Historically, this relationship has been attributed as “magical,” i.e. *not real*. But for the Borderland personality it is experience of transrational *reality*. Hannah didn’t fantasize or imagine or project the pain of the cows. She *felt* it. Young children feel these things too – as did the woman above who in first grade experienced insects dying in the sleeping jar.

The very question of what did they “really” feel,³⁰ *in and of itself*, has the effect of drawing one into a bifurcated left-brain realm hostile to the right-brain realm that can/does experience transrational reality. One has to “re-ask” the question out of a linked right/left brain context. Yet our very *logos*-dependent language does not provide the words that permit a question that reflects at least the *possibility* of an experience of transrational reality. As Borderland consciousness evolves in the context of the western psyche, presumably new language constructs will come with it. Daniel Siegel, addressing the neurobiological substrates of this point says: “*The left hemisphere’s drive to understand cause-effect relationships is a primary motivation of the narrative process. Coherent narratives, however, require participation of both the interpreting left hemisphere and the mentalizing right hemisphere. Coherent narratives are created through interhemispheric integration.*”³¹ [Emphasis in original. Underlining added.]

One can see how easily Borderland experience could be confused with “fantasizing.” This can be all the more disconcerting when both dynamics are present in the same individual. This confusion can take place on the part of the individual in therapy and on the part of the therapist as well. Therapists who are unfamiliar with Borderland phenomena and its prevalence in particular personality types are particularly prone in this regard. This will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter. One can also readily see how patients are wounded, even traumatized, by their therapy when their experience of “wholeness” and the “sacred” – which often includes the Borderland dimension – is branded, directly or indirectly, as “malignant regression.” The challenge for clinicians, particularly those working in the trauma field, is to learn to differentiate between an “unhealthy response to trauma,” a “healthy response to trauma,” and a Borderland connection, which is neither.

The problem is further confounded by the fact that these boundaries – between (nonpathological) Borderland experience and (pathological) “fantasizing” or malignant regression – are seldom clear cut. At the same time, a therapy which pathologizes nonpathological experience of the patient in itself can be traumatizing. As clinicians, it is indeed a fine line that we must walk with such individuals. And if the prevalence of Borderland personality types is in the process of increasing exponentially, then these problems will become increasingly prevalent in our clinical practices.

Notes

1 Kalsched, 1996: 142.

2 The three portals are not totally bounded, i.e. they sometimes overlap and interact psychodynamically.

3 Jung, in one context refers to nature as “simply that which is, and always was, given” (Jung, 1972: 210, fn.121).

4 Jung referred to this source as the “psychoid dimension” (Jung, 1972: 176f).

5 George Lakoff, Professor of Linguistics, University of California at Berkeley, in a 2003 Santa Fe Institute lecture asserted: “The only mathematical ideas we can have are ideas the brain allows . . . Like other abstract ideas, mathematical ideas arise via conceptual metaphor – a mechanism for adapting the brain’s sensory-motor system to constitute abstract thought . . . the conceptual metaphors built into mathematical ideas, and the cognitive theory of mathematical ideas” (Lakoff, 2003).

6 In personal communication with David Abram, author of *The Spell of the Sensuous*, he informed me that scores, if not hundreds of individuals who have read his book, and who fit the description of the Borderland personality, have identified themselves to him. My experience has been similar to his – being contacted by individuals who are desperate to have their experience of reality witnessed and validated by people whom they think can and will hear them. Without this validation, they feel branded by the culture as “looney.”

7 The fact that *all* children before age 7 *naturally* experience life in its totality, i.e. without a split between nature and the mundane world, speaks to an inherent psychic yearning for a return/reconnection to what was naturally wondrous in the early years of life as the ego emerged out of immersion in the self. (See Figure 7.1, Parts 1 and 2 in Chapter 7.)

8 We all know examples of this apparent genetic link where one of several children is psychic “just like father or grandmother or Aunt Sadie” while their siblings are not.

9 See Part 2a in Figure 7.1.

10 Unfortunately, the Salt Institute ceased to exist as of the fall of 2001.

11 Bernstein, 2000.

12 Part 2 (Figure 7.1) is the “place before” time and story. It is personal and impersonal. Because it is “before” it is unknowable by the ego. For the Navajo, unlike westerners, it is “knowable” and experiential both through their cosmology story *and* its enactment through the healing ceremony. It is the possibility of connecting with the “place before,” i.e. Part 1, that heals. The Navajo, because of their psychic structure that is never not connected to the transpersonal and conceptualizes the infinity of time through their emergence myth, can *do* through experience (e.g. the healing ceremony) what we, with our western ego can do only through inference.

13 I say night, because, psychodynamically speaking, this is when the ego sleeps and the unconscious is most active. The ego is the organ which mediates between the conscious and unconscious realms. This fact is supported both in contemporary brain and dream research.

14 Between then and when a sufficiently strong ego structure has developed to contain these “errors,” the child is comforted and made to feel safe through healthy-enough attachment to its parents and/or other caretakers.

15 I wish to thank Peter Talley of Ignacio, Colorado, for stimulating me to deepen my thinking in this regard.

16 The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) reports the following data collected by “Real Vision”: The average number of hours per week that American 1-year-old children watch television is six hours. The number of hours of TV-watching

time recommended by the AAP for children in this age group is 0. Seventy per cent of *day care centers* use TV during a typical day. The *average* time per week that the American child ages 2–7 spends watching TV is 19 hours and 40 minutes. (Data were not available specifically on the 1–6 age group. Eighty-one per cent of television viewing time of children between the ages of 2–7 is alone and unsupervised.) (Data obtained from the AAP on July 15, 2002.)

One could argue that programs such as “Sesame Street” are constructive for children. I have my doubts about the concrete aspects of programs like “Sesame Street” for the under 5-year-old viewers, i.e. teaching the letters of the alphabet, reading numbers, and the like. These children will get plenty of such training once they enter formal education. The imaginal aspects – storytelling, the play between the various puppet characters – certainly is stimulating and fun. Weighing the value of even these components against the conditioning of children to get their fun passively “out of the tube” is questionable, particularly in the pre-school years.

17 I think Disney has moved a bit more towards center in its movies in the past few years.

18 This fact is amply attested to by their personal dreams and night terrors and the symbolic structure of myths and fairy tales, as for example “talking trees” in *The Wizard of Oz*.

19 I must claim one blow for the imaginal integrity of children. In the mid-1980s, I was interviewed by ZDF, the German equivalent of American public television. The interview focused on the “meaning” – essentially the archetypal interpretation – of one of the *Star Wars* films. To my surprise when I arrived at the studio for a viewing of the film the interviewer first wanted me to watch, “The Making of Star Wars.” I refused. The astonished interviewer, however, agreed to make my refusal and the reasons for my refusal part of the hour-long interview for the program which was to air “The Making of Star Wars” portion. I spoke directly to the viewing parents of children in Germany and advised them to not permit their children to view “The Making of Star Wars,” or for that matter, “the making of” anything else lest their children’s rich *and essential* connection to the magical (and Borderland) realm of consciousness and their own inner imaginal space be significantly intruded on.

20 Kalsched, 1996: 1.

21 Kalsched, 1996: 34

22 In fact, I have heard a number of similar stories from other individuals. A stunningly similar testimony by another person states: “The most startling experience came one day when I was standing in a supermarket among the produce. I began to hear cries of the vegetables from when they were sprayed . . . I stood there stunned.” Schmall, 1997: 5–6.

23 For a neurobiological exploration of the potential impact of left-brain bias in education and its deleterious impact on children, see the work of Daniel Siegel (Siegel, 1999: 330–337).

24 This integration would carry forward the archetypal ebb and flow eluded to above but would not, in the majority of cases, carry forward an ego still floating in an archetypal “soup.”

25 Distinct from “psychic personalities.” See above.

26 Winnicott, D. W. “Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self,” as cited in Kalsched, *Ibid.*: 3.

27 Personal correspondence with the author in 2003. All emphasis is that of Dr. Kalsched.

28 In his book Kalsched speaks about how when the personal spirit falls through the

“basic fault” opened by trauma, it falls into an archetypal world already there to catch it. See Balint, 1969. The Borderland realm can be viewed as a kind of archetypal realm in this regard.

29 Kalsched, 1996: 35.

30 See the Introduction to Part I regarding what Hannah (and other Borderlanders) “really” feel.

31 Siegel, 1999: 331.