

# Healing Our Split: *Participation Mystique* and C. G. Jung

*We see and hear what we are open to noticing.* – Jerome S. Bernstein

Western consciousness is by no means the only kind of consciousness there is; it is historically conditioned and geographically limited, and representative of only one part of mankind. The widening of consciousness ought not to proceed at the expense of the other kinds of consciousness... - C.G. Jung<sup>i</sup>

*Participation mystique is the idea that a strong, merged, almost strangulating psychic bond exists between primitive peoples and various objects in nature.* – Vine Deloria, Jr. <sup>ii</sup>

The focus of this paper is on the concept of *participation mystique* as it has been appropriated by Carl Jung and its impact on and pervasiveness in Jungian thought and writing up to the present time and going forward. <sup>1</sup>

Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, a French philosopher and “armchair anthropologist,”<sup>iii</sup> first wrote of *participation mystique* – a term he coined – around 1910. He defined it in these terms, “In the collective representations of primitive mentality objects can be...something other than themselves...they give forth and they receive mystic powers, virtues, qualities, influences *which make themselves felt* outside, without ceasing to remain where they are.”<sup>iv</sup> Note Lévy-Bruhl’s emphasis on the dynamic energy coming from and being received by the objects themselves.

Ecologist and philosopher, David Abram, observes that, “To the sensing body, *no* thing presents itself as utterly passive or inert. *Only by affirming the animateness of perceived things*

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<sup>1</sup> In his various writings on the ‘primitive,’ Carl Jung conflates all ‘primitives,’ putting them into one psycho-cultural basket. However, as an abundant body of research shows, different indigenous/native cultures have very different psycho/cultural viewpoints and practices. In this paper I will be speaking of *participation mystique* only in the context of American Indian cultures, and more specifically the Navajo and Hopi cultures since these are the ones I am most familiar with having had a 40+ year relationship in varying contexts. My orientation to the writing of this paper, as best as I can achieve it, is from their cosmological standpoint and through the lens of these native cultures and the psyche which gave rise to them as well as from my own more familiar lens as a Euro-American with a predominantly Western ego.

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*do we allow our words to emerge directly from the depths of our ongoing reciprocity with the world.”<sup>v</sup>* It is this “reciprocity” of which Abram speaks that we can see, feel, and experience in the dynamic relationship between subject and ‘object’ in the above quote from Lévy-Bruhl. I have put the word “object” in quotes because the English language does not offer us a word with which to describe [perceived-to-be] inanimate objects as en-souled so as to be recognized as a “participant” in this reciprocal relationship.<sup>2</sup>

Abram explains this paradox:

Our most immediate experience of things...is necessarily an experience of reciprocal encounter – of tension, communication, and commingling. From within the depths of this encounter, we know the thing or phenomenon only as our interlocutor – as a dynamic presence that confronts us and draws us into relation. We conceptually immobilize or objectify the phenomenon only by mentally absenting ourselves from this relation, by forgetting or repressing our sensuous involvement. To define another being as an inert or passive object is to deny its ability to actively engage us and to provoke our sense; *we thus block our perceptual reciprocity with that being*. By linguistically defining the surrounding world as a determinate set of objects, we cut our conscious, speaking selves off from the spontaneous life of our sensing bodies.<sup>vi</sup>

In his later writings post-1932, Jung intuited, but did not fully comprehend, this dynamic of reciprocity at the core of *participation mystique*, when he wrote:

[Consciousness]...overlooks the fact that although it has apparently got rid of the unconscious it has become the victim of its own verbal concepts...One can be – and is – just as dependent on words as on the unconscious. Man’s advance toward the Logos was a great achievement, but he must pay for it with a loss of instinct and loss of reality to the degree that he remains in primitive dependence on mere words....[T]echnology...is based on a specifically rationalistic differentiation of consciousness which tends to repress all irrational psychic factors.<sup>vii</sup>

It is noteworthy in this context to register that none of the players – Lévy-Bruhl, Jung, Jungian scholars, etc. dispute whether there is a *participation mystique* phenomenon. Rather, the discussion centers on the nature of that phenomenon.

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<sup>2</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr. describes this relationship elegantly: “Western Science, following Roger Bacon, believed man could force nature to reveal its secrets; the Sioux simply petitioned nature for friendship.” *C.G. Jung and the Sioux Traditions: Dreams, Visions, Nature, and the Primitive*. Frontispiece.

Carl Jung's first statements about the concept of *participation mystique* were made in 1912 in *Symbols of Transformation*.<sup>viii</sup> He developed the concept of *participation mystique* beyond Lévy-Bruhl's notion,<sup>ix</sup> and it became a defining optic through which he viewed 'primitive' peoples, most especially the American Indian.<sup>3</sup> This point is crucial since Jung's thinking and theoretical formulations were greatly influenced by his understanding and misunderstanding of what he referred to as "primitive mentality" and the "primordial unconscious state." His view of *participation mystique* played a major role in shaping his notions about the collective unconscious and his archetypal theory. It will help to have some of Jung's pre-1932 statements on the subject of *participation mystique* [All italics and underlinings added for emphasis]:

- "*Participation mystique* is a term derived from Lévy-Bruhl. It denotes a peculiar kind of psychological connection with objects, and consists in the fact that the subject cannot clearly distinguish himself from the object but is bound to it by a direct relationship which amounts to partial identity."<sup>x</sup>
- "Among civilized peoples it [*participation mystique*] usually occurs between persons, seldom between a person and a thing. In the first case it is a transference relationship . . . In the second case there is a similar influence on the part of the thing, or else an identification with a thing or the idea of a thing."<sup>xi</sup>
- Identity "is a characteristic of the primitive mentality and the real foundation of *participation mystique*, which is nothing but a relic of the original non-differentiation of subject and object, and hence of the primordial unconscious state. It is also a characteristic of the mental state of early infancy, and, finally, of the unconscious of the civilized adult."<sup>xii</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> His brief encounter (less than 24 hours) at Taos Pueblo in 1925 left him profoundly emotionally impacted. See *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* pp. 246-253 and my "Foreword" in Vine Deloria's *C.G. Jung and the Sioux Traditions* pp. vii-xvii.

- “The further we go back into history, the more we see personality disappearing beneath the wrappings of collectivity. And if we go right back to primitive psychology, we find absolutely no trace of the concept of an individual. Instead of individuality we find only collective relationship or what Lévy-Bruhl calls *participation mystique*”.<sup>xiii</sup>

Vine Deloria, Jr., in his landmark ‘answer to Jung,’ as expressed in his book, *C.G. Jung and the Sioux Traditions: Dreams, Visions, Nature and the Primitive*, excoriates Jung for some of these observations.<sup>xiv</sup>

Lévy-Bruhl’s use of the word “participation” in his analysis of the Native psyche is of particular note. It speaks to a dynamic and interactive process between subject and object. French phenomenological philosopher, Merleau-Ponty’s work validates this view and goes even further by suggesting that “participation” is a defining attribute of perception itself.<sup>xv</sup> Lévy-Bruhl emphasizes the dynamic power of the object itself to influence the individual(s) psyche, i.e. ‘power’ exists in and emanates from the ‘object’. Jung’s emphasis, on the other hand, is on the dynamic power of the individual mind [ego/psyche] to identify or dis-identify with the object, depending on the degree, developmentally, of consciousness/unconsciousness on the part of the individual.<sup>4</sup> With increasing consciousness comes diminished identification with the object and ultimately greater distance between the individual (as well as group or culture) and their engagement in *participation mystique* states with the world they are embedded in. For Jung, then, the dynamic power exists within the individual, not within the object itself. Note that in these quotes Jung does not use the word “psyche.” This is important as we shall soon see. He does use terms such as “primitive *mentality*,” “*identity*,” “*mental*

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that Jung was referring to the only kind of consciousness paradigm that he experienced at that time, i.e. Western consciousness.

state,” and “*primitive psychology*.” For the most part, pre-1932, he means (developmentally) “unconscious.” Also note that he uses the terms, “collectivity” and “*collective relationship*,” but does not use the term “collective unconscious.” In *Mysterium Coniunctionis* he wrote: “Everything that we today would call ‘mind’ and ‘insight’ was, in earlier centuries, projected into things...”<sup>xvi</sup>

It is important to remember that Jung was observing and trying to understand the ‘primitive mind’ through the lens of his ‘civilized’ mind. Projecting and fitting what he thought he was observing into categories understandable to him was unavoidable since he had no other frame of reference. Apparently it did not occur to him to try to go beyond “understanding” by putting himself into the psychic and spiritual frame of mind of these ‘primitives’ *nor did he have the experience to do so*. He observed and analyzed them, as well as their culture and spiritual practices, but did not share or participate in these aspects of their psychic life with them. Nor was he consciously aware that he was observing a highly complex cosmological *psychic system* that, from the perspective of the Native American, was less linear; reflecting a sense of a Great Round where time is more circular than linear. In such a system, there is no ‘beginning’ to the cosmological story as such; where ‘creation’ ‘happened’ (was told as Story) as opposed to being ordained by a “higher power” or resulted from *thought* as opposed to thinking; where Story and particularly story-telling itself is the sustaining power of life.<sup>5</sup> He also was likely unaware of the profound differences in language *structure* between verb-based oral traditional language where words, according to Tewa Professor Dr. Gregory Cajete, “that describe the world emerge

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<sup>5</sup> In the Native American cultures with which I am familiar, particularly the Hopi and the Navajo, ritual is the enactment (not re-enactment) in the Now of specific components of their respective cosmological stories. I believe this to be the case with most intact tribal cultures in the lower 48 States.

directly from actively perceived *experience*,<sup>xvii</sup> and more noun-based Western *Logos*<sup>6</sup> language which is more abstract and conceptual, i.e. more removed from the experience itself. And we now know that language, particularly language *structure*, has a profound adaptive and interactive relationship to and with culture and therein with the spiritual orientation of that culture.<sup>7</sup>

The above quotes and numerous of his other writings prior to 1932 reflect Jung's still formulating ideas<sup>8</sup> which were later to become his sophisticated theories regarding psyche, such as: the personal unconscious, the collective unconscious, his archetypal theories, and his theory of synchronicity - all of which were to become incorporated under his broad and deep theory of "psyche." However, prior to 1932, it would appear that his overall theory of human psychology, both of "primitives" as well as "civilized" peoples, reflected the following characteristics:

- A linear "mental state" in terms of space and time<sup>xviii xix xx</sup>
- Differences between 'primitives' and 'civilized peoples' were understood to be developmental along a linear space and time continuum, not due to dynamic differences in the nature and characteristics of psyche itself
- 'Primitive' mental states prevailed because 'primitives' were unconscious, not because they functioned on the basis of a psyche which was fundamentally different in character and structure from that of 'civilized' mental states that

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<sup>6</sup> "Reason... is the controlling principle in the universe" [Merriam- Webster.com; Britannica.com]. Reason: "the power of the mind to think in a logical way, to understand and have opinions, etc. Only human beings are capable of reason (= of thinking in a logical way, etc.) to lose your reason (= become mentally ill)." [oxfordadvancedlearnersdictionary.com]

<sup>7</sup> See George Lakoff's *Metaphors We Live By* (2003), for example.

<sup>8</sup> It helps to remember that this was less than 32 years after the publication of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which some consider the symbolic launching of depth psychology in the "modern era."

were more conscious. This implied that those ‘primitives’ who chose to become more conscious could become so ‘just like us.’<sup>9</sup>

- Jung was caught in and enamored of the idea of a single continuum of psychological development. It made sense within that linear Logos frame and seemed to cut a clear path towards a unified theory of human consciousness. Lévy-Bruhl’s theory of *participation mystique*, as Jung understood it and modified it, provided a missing link along that continuum between “primitive mentality” and “civilized peoples.”

Robert A. Segal, Ph.D., Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Aberdeen, in an article entitled, “Jung and Lévy-Bruhl,” questions whether Jung “grasped all that Lévy-Bruhl meant by ‘primitive’ thinking.”<sup>xxi</sup> His article is a penetrating comprehensive analysis of how Lévy-Bruhl and Jung perceived the phenomenon of *participation mystique*, particularly up to 1932 in Jung’s writings. It is unfortunate that Lévy-Bruhl’s characterization of *participation mystique* is contained in a book he titled, *How Natives Think*.<sup>xxii</sup> “Thinking” is a very specialized and particular function in Western culture and language, and most particularly in the Jungian theoretical framework. There are profound differences between the thinking process of Native Americans and those of us acculturated and educated through the filter of Western *Logos* thought structure. One example of such a difference is the fact that the Tewa language (spoken by some Pueblo Indian Tribes in New Mexico) has a single word with which they express

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<sup>9</sup>This condescending attitude excludes the possibility that ‘primitives’ had and have their own psychic reality that was due to a rich experience of a consciousness of a different kind. It is questionable whether any of them would “trade” the one form of consciousness for the other, were that possible. In the modern context, it is not unusual to hear Native Americans use the expression of “walking in two worlds,” i.e. that they have a rich psychic life through their Native roots and that they have learned to adapt and function in the Western cosmological frame of consciousness. In short, they experience and function in two consciousnesses, not one.

thinking and feeling.<sup>xxiii</sup> <sup>10</sup> Jungians, on the other hand, spend much of their training struggling to differentiate these two “distinct” functions. In my view it would have been less confusing to talk about perception and experience rather than “thinking,” i.e. “How Natives Perceive,” or “How Natives Experience What They Perceive,” or even “How Natives Think about What They Perceive.” The word “thinking” not only fixes the kind of thought process into which researchers such as Lévy-Bruhl, Jung and others fit what they observed in Natives, but it also sets up a subtle hierarchy with a superior psyche/mind/consciousness of the (Western) non-Native observing the ‘less developed, more unconscious psyche’ of Natives however unintended or unconscious on the part of the observer.<sup>11 12</sup>

Segal, quoting Lévy-Bruhl, presents an example of this misunderstanding on the part of “modern Westerners.” He writes,

Rather than thinking like moderns, just less rigorously, ‘primitives’ think wholly differently from moderns.” It is a difference of kind. Their thinking differs in two key ways: it is ‘mystical’, and it is ‘prelogical’. By ‘mystical’, Lévy-Bruhl means that ‘primitive’ peoples experience the world as identical with themselves rather than, like moderns, as distinct from themselves....The ‘primitive’ mind deems all things identical with one another yet somehow still distinct – a logical contradiction. A human is simultaneously a tree and still a human being.<sup>xxiv</sup>

While pointing out correctly that ‘primitives’ think differently, not less vigorously than moderns, Lévy-Bruhl still misses the point as far as Vine Deloria, Jr.<sup>13</sup> is concerned. Deloria emphasizes

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<sup>10</sup> I will not explore this language/thinking dynamic further here because of its depth and complexity, but you may find more on it in: “Medicine Wheel, Mandala, and Jung,” by Eduardo Duran, pp. 132-141, in *Spring Journal*, Vol. 87.

<sup>11</sup> See, Jeff King’s “A Critique of Western Psychology from an American Indian Psychology”, and also “Medicine Wheel, Mandala, and Jung,” by Eduardo Duran, both in *Spring Journal* Vol. 87.

<sup>12</sup> One might ask, ‘Less developed than what?’ since their consciousness and their psyche would be presumed to be adequate for life in their realm.

<sup>13</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr. was a Sioux Indian, Western educated scholar, theologian, historian, activist, descendant of traditional native healers and author of *Custer Died for Your Sins; God is Red;* and *C.G. Jung and the Sioux Traditions: Dreams, Visions, Nature and the Primitive*, among other books. He read all of the works of Jung, including the entire *Collected Works*, prior to writing his manuscript, *C.G. Jung & the Sioux Traditions*.



that although the Native feels communion and relationship – even soul connection -- with the tree, he does not see himself literally as a tree as well as his five-fingered/four-legged, i.e. human self.<sup>xxv</sup> At the same time, Professor Segal quotes Lévy-Bruhl as describing the ‘primitive’ as *perceiving* or *experiencing* the world as *at one* with themselves.<sup>xxvi</sup> This is quite a different psychodynamic from seeing the world as *identical* with themselves. I think this is more accurate language (i.e. perceiving and experiencing rather than “identical with”) that more truly reflects their psychic make-up, and is not just language differences.

With regard to “prelogicality,” i.e. “the law of non-contradiction” that follows from that “mystical” identity which Lévy-Bruhl asserts is a characteristic of the Native mind and includes the notion that something cannot simultaneously be both itself and something else,<sup>xxvii</sup> many anthropologists say the concept of “prelogicality” itself is “illogical.”<sup>xxviii</sup> The term “logic” has specific connotation within Western epistemology and ontology. All of this follows and makes sense when viewing the Native through the lens of the Western psyche and all that it brings. It does not necessarily hold true when looked at through the opposite end of the telescope, i.e. starting from within the frame of the Native psyche and its cosmological, epistemological and ontological center. Just as a photon is both wave *and* particle, from within the frame of the Native psyche, in addressing two or more interconnected entities, there is no “law of contradiction” to ‘violate,’ i.e. no such “law” exists.<sup>xxix</sup>

Segal says that Jung “misses the difference [between] the mystical and prelogical aspects of ‘primitive’ thinking and conflates prelogical with mystical...” and therefore misunderstands Lévy-Bruhl’s more penetrating aspect of the ‘primitive’ mind. I agree with his position. Segal goes on to say:

For both Jung and Lévy-Bruhl, moderns are modern to the extent that they have rejected 'primitive' thinking. But where Lévy-Bruhl uncompromisingly celebrates the liberation of moderns from 'primitive' thinking, Jung, while likewise celebrating that liberation, simultaneously laments the severance of moderns from their 'primitive' roots....The external world is really natural rather than supernatural, impersonal rather than personal. Science properly replaces myth and religion as the explanation of the world. There is no turning back.<sup>xxx</sup>

And, I would agree, there is no turning back. But what about going forward?

Rather than being "supernatural" the world – life -- is indeed *transrational*. It is the confusion between the "supernatural" which trumps the rational and 'makes no sense,' and what I call the '*transrational*,' which goes beyond the rational but poses no contradiction to the rational. It is this confusion that confounds and dissociates the Western psyche and its organ of consciousness, the Western ego construct, at the peril of our species. *Participation mystique*, as it is being re-framed here in this paper, is an essential path to a non-dissociated psyche and the next step in our species' (co)-evolution.<sup>14</sup>

Rather than being "supernatural" (or "transpersonal") the world – life -- is *transrational*<sup>15</sup> as well as rational. This distinction is essential because of the confusion between the "supernatural" which trumps the rational (reason) and 'makes no sense,' and what I call the '*transrational*,' which transcends the binary *Logos* concept of rationality but

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<sup>14</sup> My definition of *participation mystique* is: "A *transrational* liminal state of being resulting from communication and communion between the Western psyche (based in its psychic principle of Dominion) and the Native psyche (based in its psychic principle of Essential Reciprocity). The product of this communication/communion is a new and emergent *Borderland* consciousness." (See Figure 1 below)

<sup>15</sup> A word I coined in 2000, though further research has revealed that Ken Wilber used the word in his 1995 book, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*.

poses no contradiction to the rational. It is a different experience and because it does not trump the rational, neither makes sense nor doesn't make sense.<sup>16</sup> It is what it is.

From within this framework, science and its offspring, technology, take their rightful place in the evolution of consciousness. Segal asserts that science properly replaces myth – I prefer the word 'story' – as "the explanation of the world."<sup>17</sup> It is this confusion around the "logical" and the "prelogical"<sup>18</sup> that confounds and which in Jung's thought is the cause of dissociation in the Western psyche and specifically its organ of consciousness, the Western ego construct.<sup>xxx</sup> The problem was in labeling *participation mystique* as "prelogical" in order to make it fit into the Western *Logos* frame. The need was and remains to recognize that *participation mystique* was and is a *different manifestation* of the reality of the psyche. Jung was emphatic concerning his position:

The fact that [empirical science] ...must push forward into regions where belief and doubt argue the question of truth does not prove that it has any intention of intervening or presuming to decide what the truth is. Its "truth" consists solely in establishing the facts and in explaining them without prejudice within the framework of empirical psychology. Under no circumstances is it entitled to say whether the facts are valid or not, or to try to ascertain their moral or religious value. I must emphasize this so emphatically because my method is constantly suspected of being theology or metaphysics in disguise. The difficulty for my critics seems to be that they are unable to accept the concept of psychic reality. A psychic process is something that really exists, and a psychic content is as real as a plant or an animal...<sup>xxxii</sup> The psychic is a phenomenal world in itself, which can be reduced neither to the brain nor to metaphysics.<sup>xxxiii</sup> ...A

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<sup>16</sup> There is no external ruler by which it is measured.

<sup>17</sup> "Myth" is a word that has become contaminated in meaning. It is sometimes referred to as a "traditional story" and at other times as "a set of often idealized or glamorized ideas and stories," or simply "something that is fictitious or nonexistent" (example definitions from online Bing dictionary). In other words, it has lost much of its archetypal potency in the scientific age. I prefer the word 'story' in this context and even in this context I don't mean it in the sense of a benign identification. 'Story,' for oral traditional cultures carries the impetus of archetypal and phenomenological authenticity. This dimension of "story" appears to be what modern medicine is reaching for in the development in recent years of the discipline of "narrative medicine." [Charon 2001]

<sup>18</sup> Specifically the distinction between "natural," "supernatural," and "*transrational*."

materialistic view of the world ill accords with the reality and autonomy of the psyche.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

In other words, in celebrating the development of modern culture, science, technology, and most importantly depth psychology, Jung was correct in lamenting the severance of moderns from their 'primitive' roots. *Participation mystique*, as it is being framed here, is an essential path to an un-dissociated psyche and the next step in our species' (co)-evolution.<sup>19</sup> From this standpoint, story (myth) would retain its rightful position as the un-dissociated, un-split off part of the explanation of the world. This is the part that Jung was lamenting in the severance of moderns from their 'primitive' roots.<sup>20</sup>

I see the Garden of Eden story in Genesis as the story of the birth and evolution of the Western psyche. Out of the latter evolved its unique form of reflective consciousness, alphabetic technology, culture as we know it today and the genius of science and technology, among other distinctive characteristics. In my symbolic and archetypal reading of that story, the expulsion from the Garden and the ensuing cleavage from at-oneness with Nature was the evolutionary means by which the latter occurred. I have written elsewhere that the teleology of this psychic split was precisely the development of Western culture as we know it today in its fundamentals.<sup>xxxv</sup> But as Darwin has pointed out, organs and species that become over-specialized become extinct.<sup>21</sup> It is my contention that that is exactly the point that we have arrived at today – being threatened with species suicide as a result of over-specialization of our

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<sup>19</sup> Discussed in a presentation given by me in St. Petersburg, Russia on August 31, 2012, published in the French journal *Cahiers Jungiens de Psychanalyse*, and not yet published in English. Also, see Chapter 7, "A Co-Evolutionary Partner," in *Living in the Borderland*.

<sup>20</sup> See FN 1 above.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. the extinct Dodo bird, Stellar's sea cow, and Haast's eagle.

inflated organ of consciousness. Global climate change, weapons of mass destruction, rape and pillaging of the earth as if it didn't matter, and inadvertently – but consciously – creating new strains of virulent microorganisms that resist treatment, etc. are the result of that creative genius. In short, our organ of consciousness has a lethal archetypal deficit of a capacity for humility. Without the mediating influence of Nature to balance such hubris, we risk species suicide. Jung's early (pre-1932) view of time and consciousness (i.e. psyche) as developmentally linear left him no choice but to conclude that moderns' "immediate communication with nature is gone *for ever*."<sup>xxxvi</sup>

In his essay, *Archaic Man*, published in 1932, Jung wrestled with the questions of whether what he witnessed in 'primitives' was something in their psyche or "chance occurrences" or projections "of unconscious psychic contents through *participation mystique*. For archaic man this distinction does not exist, because psychic happenings are projected so completely that they cannot be distinguished from objective, physical events."<sup>xxxvii</sup> This was his conclusion *and* he was never satisfied with it. It was a *logical* conclusion following from his linear concept of the evolution of consciousness, but I believe he never felt satisfied with this conclusion. He intuited/knew and experienced<sup>22</sup> otherwise. Five paragraphs later in the same essay he poses a critical question:

The question is nothing less than this: Does the psychic in general -- the soul or spirit or the unconscious – originate in *us*, or is the psyche, in the early stages of conscious evolution, actually outside us in the form of arbitrary powers with intentions of their own, and does it gradually take its place within us in the course of psychic development? Were the split-off "souls" – or dissociated psychic contents, as we would call them – ever parts of the psyches of individuals, *or were they from the beginning*

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<sup>22</sup> Most notably in his encounter with Ochwiay Biano.

*psychic entities existing in themselves* according to the primitive view as ghosts, ancestral spirits, and the like? Were they only by degrees embodied in man in the course of development, so that they gradually constituted in him that world which we now call the psyche?<sup>xxxviii</sup>

[While] this whole idea strikes us as *dangerously paradoxical*...at bottom, it is not altogether inconceivable.... [However,] I must leave this question unanswered.<sup>xxxix</sup>

So, in 1932, Jung considered this question dangerous. And Jung says that he must leave the question unanswered. Why? One possible reason is that at the time it challenged his then current theoretical formulation of psyche.

It is my view that Jung's own experience with "primitives" was mostly through projection and his own *participation mystique* experiences and that a huge portion of his entire work was based on this *participation mystique* that he himself was not fully conscious of. I submit that Jung intuited something deeply and that although he never did 'answer' that question, the question itself and what he did intuit and feel, impacted his theoretical formulations from 1932 forward.<sup>23</sup> It is noteworthy that none of Jung's at times extensive encounters with 'primitives' in Africa, India and elsewhere had the kind of emotional impact on him that his one encounter with Ochwiay Bianco, Mountain Lake, had on him in 1925. Something in that encounter put Jung in touch with<sup>24</sup> the part of psyche that was not expelled from the Garden of Eden. A dimension of psyche that was not linear, that operated on a 'logic'

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<sup>23</sup> David Tacey, Ph.D., Professor of Religion, Spirituality and Depth Psychology at Latrobe University, Australia, the question of whether psyche originated in the mind of man or "outside us" and formulates it this way:

"We live in the midst of psyche, and the psyche is not inside us. Jung is saying that it works the other way around to normal perception: the notion that the psyche as a small, circumscribed entity of human subjectivity is an illusion of our making. We swim inside a psychic sea, and one aspect of that world psyche...is the realm of the spirit. The psyche is more than psychological; it is also cosmological, archetypal, spiritual and theological. If we want to make it merely psychological, i.e. inside the human, this is our problem, but tells us nothing about the nature of reality itself, only how we (mis)define it."  
(Personal correspondence)

<sup>24</sup> And 'it' in touch with him.

based in *transrational* experience and knowing and one that had never been severed from its roots in Nature. From within this dimension of psyche, all of life – all objects – exerted reciprocity (spirit connection) with all of life and all encounters in life. This dynamic relationship is what Lévy-Bruhl called *participation mystique* when he described the relationship between ‘primitive mentality’ and objects ‘giving forth’ and receiving mystical powers; making themselves felt outside without ceasing to remain where they are.

Lévy-Bruhl attributes these characteristics to “collective representations” that are instilled “into all their perceptions.”<sup>xi</sup> He does not offer a source for those collective representations. He says, “Primitive man, therefore, lives and acts in an environment of beings and objects, all of which, in addition to the [observable] properties that we recognize them to possess, are endued with mystic attributes.”<sup>xii</sup> The operative word here is “endued.” He appears to call them “mystical” because they do not fit his Western logical formulation. He has no other way of knowing that this characteristic is ‘endued’ than his own interpretation/projection based on his own logic based in its post-expulsion-from-the-Garden-of-Eden consciousness. Within that psychic framework, i.e. dominion, there can be no other conclusion.

But there was a psychic framework in the Garden before the expulsion. If not, there would be no need for an expulsion and all that ensued from it. So there were two psychic frameworks, two kinds of consciousnesses, one pre and one post expulsion from the Garden, each having its own unique characteristics. ‘In the beginning’, the impetus was for severance so that the incipient Western consciousness and all that it was to give birth to could be born. We

should note that biologically the very first dynamic that occurs in the wake of fertilization and conception is separation and division.

I am positing that what Lévy-Bruhl and Jung encountered in the behavior of ‘primitives’ and in how natives think, were manifestations of that pre-expulsion psyche from which natives were never severed. This is what Lévy-Bruhl was reaching for but had no logical frame through which to comprehend what he was discovering and also what Jung encountered intuitively and was profoundly impacted by in his meeting with Ochwiay Biano at Taos Pueblo in 1925.

In Jung’s case, though he could not name it as such;<sup>25</sup> this manifestation of *participation mystique* – one might even say his own *participation mystique* experience -- influenced the development of his theories of the Self, the collective unconscious, his archetypal theory, synchronicity, and so forth for the rest of his years. That dimension of psychic reality that he encountered at Taos Pueblo never left him and he intuited that that pre-expulsion psyche ultimately would be indispensable to the survival of our species. He and Ochwiay Biano had entered into mutual participation mystique for which neither had words comprehensible to the other. Between them, words were not needed in the moment. It was only when each attempted to understand the “logic” of the psychic world of the other that their connection in the moment was disrupted. In this liminal realm it is essential to be open to discovering meaning rather than to make meaning, the latter being a hallmark of logos-thinking and the logical process.

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<sup>25</sup> He tried with his concept of the “psychoid archetype”.



Certainly for Jung his *participation mystique* bond with Ochwiay Biano carried him for the next 36 years of his life leading up to his death, as we shall see below, after that meeting in 1925. But it was gone “for ever,”<sup>xlii</sup> he thought.<sup>26</sup> If only we could connect with it.

Jung not only lamented the severance of moderns from their ‘primitive’ roots, as Segal suggests, I think he was profoundly wounded by his inability to grasp, to consciously reconnect in a more meaningful way that he could understand, with this pre-expulsion psyche. I think in some sense he felt that he had failed a sacred mission – providing a way to counter the hubris of the Western ego construct. At the time, he was consumed by the looming specter of nuclear holocaust. The hydrogen bomb had been tested and Jung was horrified at the prospects that accompanied that “successful” test.<sup>27</sup> <sup>xliii</sup>

More than anything, Jung was fascinated with life. For all of his talk about spirit and his erudition on hundreds of topics, to me he seemed most dazzled with the wondrousness of life itself. For him this was the sacred. It is also noteworthy that he often equated psyche, life, and nature as if they were one and the same.<sup>xliv</sup>

Nine months before his death, in June 1961, he wrote the following to Miguel Serrano:

We are sorely in need of a Truth or a self-understanding similar to that...which I have found still living with the Taos Pueblos...

He [Ochwiay Biano] correctly assumes that their day, their light, their consciousness, and their meaning will die when destroyed by the narrow-mindedness of American rationalism, and the same will happen to the whole world when subjected to such

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<sup>26</sup> The theme of my book, *Living in the Borderland: The Evolution of Consciousness and the Challenge of Healing Trauma* is that that reconnection with Nature that Jung desperately longed for is indeed taking place and producing a new form of consciousness which I call “Borderland consciousness.”

<sup>27</sup> “Nowadays, particularly, the world hangs by a thin thread, and that thread is the psyche of man. We are the great danger. The psyche is the great danger. What if something goes wrong with the psyche? And though it is demonstrated in our day what the power of the psyche is, how important it is to know something about it. But we know nothing.” [Film - *Matter of Heart* 2004]

treatment. That is the reason why I tried to find the best truth and the clearest light I could attain to, and since I have reached my highest point I can't transcend any more, I am guarding my light and my treasure, convinced that nobody would gain and I myself would be badly, even hopelessly injured if I should lose it... If God had foreseen his world, it would be a mere senseless machine and man's existence a useless freak.

My intellect can envisage the latter possibility, but the whole of my being says "No" to it.<sup>xlv 28</sup>

Since Jung wrote this letter, "narrow-minded American rationalism" has permeated most of the cultures and economies of the world. American economic supremacy serves as a machine that kills spirit in the name of economic progress and treats the earth as matter with no spirit. That which is valued is that which is "profitable" and those who determine the latter and reap the "benefits" become smaller and smaller in number. As Christian de Quincey so eloquently states it:

"What is needed now...is to find a way to restore a sense of the sacred to science and to the world – to embody mind and to "enmind" matter. Getting there will involve a radical approach to studying consciousness, where the researcher (scientist or philosopher) may be profoundly changed in the process of exploring his or her own consciousness."<sup>xlvi</sup>

I think Jung felt this calling and while seeing himself as having contributed much in this regard, he 'knew' that there was something more that was essential to the endeavor. He felt it and it guided him. But it never became a conscious participatory reciprocal relationship for him between himself and that Native psyche. He desperately wanted to dialogue with it as he did with Ochwiay Bianco.

But he did leave us the tools with which to do just that. His theoretical frame did provide the blocks with which to build a bridge between the Western psyche and the Native

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<sup>28</sup> It is important to remember that this meeting with Ochwiay Bianco about whom Jung writes with such reverence and authority was, as far as we know, the *only* encounter Jung had in his life with a Native American – and it took place for a few hours in a single 24 hour period on December 31, 1924/January 1, 1925.

psyche with the possibility of connecting with and participating in, the exploration of new forms of consciousness, as a co-evolutionary partner.<sup>29</sup> Lévy-Bruhl, although he did not fully understand the depth of his own insights, did discover a living dimension of psyche different from the Western psyche as we know it, and this is especially true after his later revisions of his idea.<sup>xlvii xlviii</sup>

There is a way forward. As I see it, *participation mystique* still endures amongst us, most particularly in those Native tribes whose cultures with extant languages and religious/healing practices that have survived the genocide perpetuated by Western culture. Unlike the Western psyche, the primary characteristic of the Native psyche is that it has not been severed from Nature. Psychically, it still lives in that “oneness” with Nature. Lévy-Bruhl named that psychic dimension “*participation mystique*”. His discovery in turn gave Carl Jung a frame with which to explore that dimension of psyche. The fact that each man understood only part of crucial aspects of the dynamic of *participation mystique* does not change the value of the discovery. Indeed, in a number of ways the survival of our species hangs on being able to build a bridge for dialogue between these two psychic realms. Our challenge is to pick up where Jung was forced to leave off.

In my view that reconnection with nature that Jung saw as being so urgently needed and “gone forever” is still possible today. It calls for dialogue between the Western and Native psychic realms out of which can emerge new forms of consciousness and new ways of relating

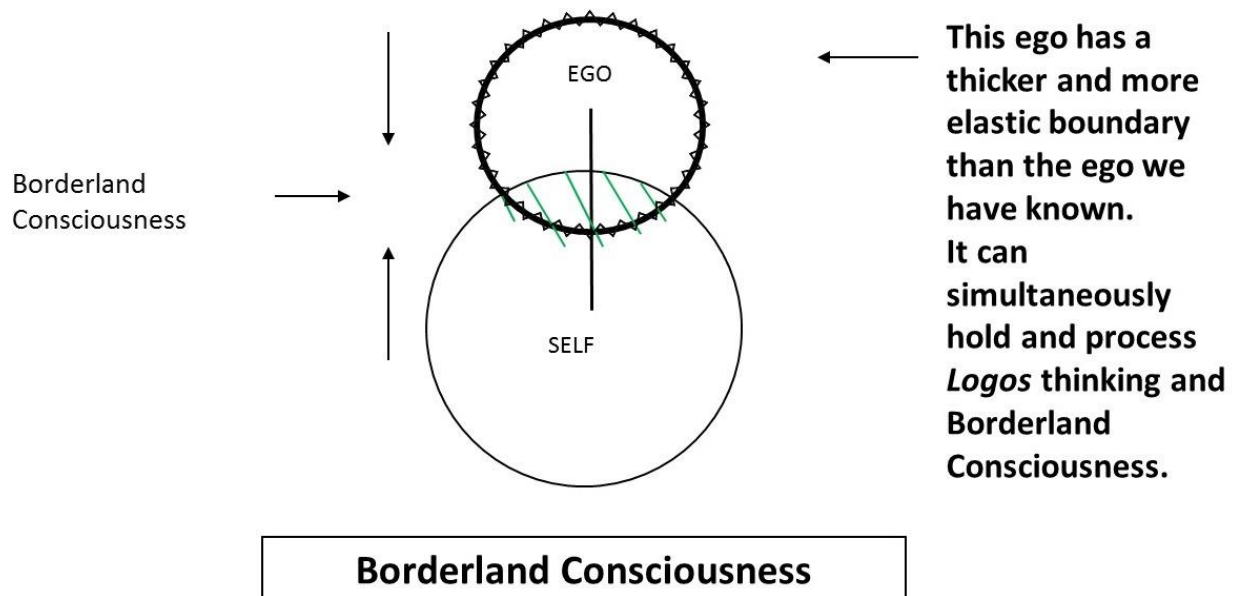
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<sup>29</sup> This concept is most developed in Part I of my book, *Living in the Borderland: The Evolution of Consciousness and the Challenge of Healing Trauma* (Routledge: 2005); *C.G. Jung and the Sioux Traditions: Dreams, Visions, Nature, and the Primitive* (Spring Journal Books: 2011) by Vine Deloria, Jr.; and the movie “Avatar,” James Cameron, Director, 2009. Jerome S. Bernstein “On the Edge: Borderland Consciousness and Avatar: An Emergent Myth of Our Time. Quadrant: XXXXI: 1, Winter 2011.

to that consciousness. We need a consciousness that can perceive and relate to *the whole of* psychic reality. Nature has its own set of rules,<sup>xlix</sup> and we need to come to understand and respect those rules better than we do. What is urgent is to bring the psychodynamic of *reciprocity* into engagement with the psychodynamic of *dominion* and therein bring balance to our over-inflated self-annihilating Western ego. (See Figure 1.)

## FIGURE 1

### Emergent Ego-Self Relationship Resulting from the Ego's Reconnection with Nature: Borderland Consciousness



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Perhaps the first step in that dialogue is to change the questions that we ask. When we label as “irrational” or even as “transpersonal,” *experiences* that do not fit our pre-existing logical constructs, we shut down the possibility of dialogue. Perhaps we could ask, “What if....?” as a new way of exploring psyche. It opens wide the door to noticing.

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<sup>i</sup> Jung *Collected Works* 13, par. 84

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- ii Deloria p. 37 [Vine Deloria was an American Indian Sioux scholar, historian, theologian, author and activist whose forebears were medicine people. He was and remains a hero to most American Indians.]
- iii Segal 2007, p. 635
- iv Lévy-Bruhl 1966, p. 61 [underlining mine]
- v Abram 1996, p. 56
- vi *ibid*
- vii Jung CW 11, par. 442-443
- viii Jung CW 5, par. 203
- ix Segal, p. 636
- x Jung CW 6, par. 781
- xi *ibid*
- xii Par. 741
- xiii Par. 12
- xiv Deloria, pp. 36-7, 42, 48 & 54
- xv Abram, p. 57
- xvi Jung 1953, CW 14, par. 696
- xvii Cajete, p. 27 [Italics mine]
- xviii Jung 1964, pp. 23, 98
- xix Jung 1953, CW 9i, par. 499
- xx Neumann 1954, pp. 331-335
- xxi Segal, 635
- xxii Lévy-Bruhl 1975
- xxiii Swentzell 2010
- xxiv Segal, pp. 635-637
- xxv Deloria, pp. 130-131
- xxvi Segal, 636
- xxvii 637
- xxviii 638
- xxix Cater & Bernstein 2012, 7-13
- xxx Segal, 649
- xxxi Jung 1961, CW 18, par. 581 & 585
- xxxii CW 14: par. 651
- xxxiii par. 667
- xxxiv par. 673
- xxxv From presentations given in St. Petersburg on August 31, 2012 and in Montreal 2010 to the International Association for Analytical Psychology. Also see chapter 8 of *Living in the Borderland*.
- xxxvi Jung CW 18, par. 585
- xxxvii CW 10 par. 135
- xxxviii CW 10: par. 140.
- xxxix CW: 10 par. 141, 147 [Italics mine]
- xl Segal p. 637
- xli Segal p. 637
- xlii Jung CW: 18, par. 585
- xliii Jung 1976, CW 10, par. 574-7
- xliv Jung 1975, pp. 540
- xlv Jung 1975, p. 596-97
- xlvi Quincey 2002
- xlvii Lévy-Bruhl 1975, pp. 100-01
- xlviii Lloyd 1990

