

In Search of the Embodied Self

Gustl Marlock and Halko Weiss

Editor's Note: The following article was first appeared as a chapter in Michael Heller (Ed.) *The Flesh of the Soul: The Body We Work With* published by Peter Lang AG International Academic Publishers in Bern, and is used with permission. Following are the introductory comments of the authors. *This article is based on a conference lecture by Gustl Marlock and Halko Weiss delivered in the format of a dialogue. Since the spirit of dialogue and openness to divergent ideas was maintained throughout, readers may notice inconsistencies at some points. We did not want to smooth them over in this printed version as our slightly differing approaches interweave with each other. In what follows we do not indicate which one of us is speaking which sentences since the ideas stand on their own. The authors are friends from compatible schools of body-inclusive psychotherapy—Hakomi Integrative Psychology (Weiss) and Unitive Psychology (Marlock)—who have exchanged ideas and supported each other for many years since their respective approaches share significant common ground: An emphasis on character analysis, states of consciousness, the therapeutic relationship, the mind-body interface, as well as the inclusion of Eastern thought and transpersonal dimensions. The methods differ in that Hakomi has a more holistic approach based in systems theory, while Unitive Psychology maintains a more deeply scholarly connection to traditional depth psychology.*

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ABSTRACT: Argues that having a theory of the self that can be applied clinically will enhance and improve body-psychotherapy. Notes that this is a necessary move since most schools of body-centered psychotherapy have not explicitly dealt with the theories of the self they have theoretically inherited from their roots in humanistic and depth psychology (with the exception of such theorists as Jack Lee Rosenberg, Kekuni Minton, Al Pesse, Maarten Alberse, George Downing and Marianne Bentzen.) Offers a brief look at the history of the notion of self in depth psychology. Sketches a structural and systemic understanding of the self and its place in the body-mind based mainly on the work of Richard Schwartz. Clarifies why a concept of self must include the bodily dimension and why body-centered psychotherapists are uniquely qualified to flesh out the theoretical constructs. Names practical matters related to working clinically with self-concepts, including the connection to transpersonal dimensions. Outlines a vision that psychotherapy in the future must be firmly planted in a positive valuation of human potential, and not caught in a hypnotic gaze at human pathology.

Terms and History

If you look at the title of our presentation, "In Search of the Embodied Self," you may notice three things: First, it refers to one of the main books on Self Psychology, which is a contemporary branch of psychoanalysis, titled *In Search of the Self*. This book contains a number of articles by Heinz Kohut, the founder of psychoanalytic Self Psychology, who is a principal source for understanding the self theory.

Secondly, we are suggesting the emphasis on the self as embodied has several epistemological and practical advantages including doing justice to the existential nature of the human self as incarnated, "in carne." It is simply the only way we can conceive of ourselves.

Lastly, the word "search" implies the self is not a self-evident given, an easily defined, quantified object among other objects. It leads us into the realm of subjectivity, inner experience, states of being and relatedness. Subjectivity implies a felt-sense, an affective coloring, and specific modes of perception and expression. The language of self expression is usually less objective, and more

narrative and poetic. The medium by which we come to know the subjectivity of another is dialogical. That is why terms like "hermeneutic understanding" and "empathy" have long been used to describe intersubjective knowing in psychodynamic literature.

Let's briefly look at the concept of self through historical perspective. In Freud and most of his first followers it did not really play a role. In his early period Freud, generally used the term "self" as synonymous with ego, or the German "Ich." When Freud made the statement, often quoted by body-centered psychotherapists, that "the self is first of all a bodily self," he was not considering a true concept of the self. He was simply saying that the roots of the drives and instincts which he thought drove the personality were based in biology, and therefore in the body. This is also true for Wilhelm Reich whose work is based largely on Freudian drive theory, although Reich's concept of a "core" to the personality hints at a conception of self.

The first name to mention when it comes to developing a fuller concept of the self is D. W. Winnicott, in whose work it plays a key role. Winnicott's theory derived from

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observations of mother-child relationships as well as the symbolic reenactment of uncompleted developmental processes within therapy itself. He emphasized that a child's sense of a healthy, differentiated self develops through a relational process that shifts between poles of contact and separation.

What is crucial in this process, according to Winnicott, is that the mother provides an empathic holding environment which relates to the needs and expressions of the child, and in so doing creates a matrix where the true self can develop. If this matrix is insufficient and the child has to orient itself around the needs and expectations of the environment, as opposed to its own, we find the origin of what Winnicott calls the "false self." This was the basis for Alice Miller's theory on narcissism which she developed in her book *The Drama of the Gifted Child*. We should also mention Bill Cornell's article "If Reich Met Winnicott", where he strongly argues that integrating Winnicott's work could strengthen the relationship aspects of body-psychotherapy.

Although Winnicott's terminology focuses to a large extent on the polarity of true and false self, his work contained a number of seeds which flourished later in analytic Self Psychology. Kohut does not mention Winnicott as a source. Nor does he mention another source either, a thread of thinking that was developing at about the same time as Kohut's theory, and which made extensive use of the term "self"--Humanistic Psychology.

We don't really know who inspired whom, or who did not reveal his sources. Maybe it was the "Zeitgeist". "Be yourself" was certainly an influential slogan of the sixties. You could find it on walls, in rock-music, in the way fashion was conceptualized, etc. We think it's important to mention that in the early period of Humanistic Psychology the self was *en vogue*, for example in the work of Carl Rogers, but even more so in the work of Abraham Maslow. Maslow promoted a radical shift in perspective away from psychopathology toward positive examples of creative, successful, and integrated human beings. As you may remember, the term "self-actualization" was created based on the observation of people with high degrees of maturation, individuality, and self-direction in their lives. Interestingly, humanistic authors like Suttich even proposed the term "Self Psychology" for Humanistic Psychology.

For those who want to do a little more research, it is worthwhile to mention that Maslow's ideas were based on late 18th century thinking that culminated in the broad movement of romantic philosophy, literature, and art. This movement arose in reaction to the elevated emphasis on disengaged reason, thought to be the basis of so-called objective and instrumental thinking in the mechanistically viewed world it came from. The Romantic Movement, in contrast, emphasized emotions, intuition, and fantasy. It

was based on understandings of our "inner nature" as an essential source of orientation, as an inner voice which we have to listen to, and for which we have to find ways of expression. This concept of "inner nature" as a source is at the basis of most modern concepts of individuation and self-realization.

When "inner nature" was understood as part of the larger connection to cosmic nature, when nature was still related to some idea of basic goodness or God, the concept of "inner nature" was able to provide a foundation for various spiritualized theories of individuation, like Jungian psychology as well as some contemporary forms of spirituality. When the spiritual aspects become dissociated, we find the more secularized ideas of self-realization of which our present culture is full. They quite often become materialistic and egotistic, because they obviously lack a transcendent aspect, as the renewed popularity of spiritual movements critically suggests.

Anyway, if we look at Maslow's book again, we see it makes extensive use of the concept of "inner nature", basically understood as a positive, striving towards growth, expression, and self-realization. Reading it, you would also realize that some of us obviously only read half of the book, namely all the parts that emphasize growth, expansion, peak experience, and human potential. The parts where he talks about the necessity of impulse control, endurance, possible suffering, etc., were often quite obviously neglected.

Here we find one of the possible reasons for the partial historic defeat of the humanistic movement, that is, in the overly hedonistic interpretation of the concept of self-actualization. Another reason might be in the change of social and economic conditions that, back then, allowed for more idealistic, inspired movements, while today, a much more materialistic and survival-oriented culture influences our view of reality. Given these developments, the humanistically inspired concepts of self and self-realization became more or less weakened.

In a parallel movement we can note a flourishing of theories on narcissism, like that of Otto Kernberg that emphasizes its pathological aspects, its illusionary character fixated on grandiosity, and omnipotence. The humanistic branch of psychotherapy did not adopt these theories in a conscious way. They might have helped to rationalize away the depressive forms of adaptation the once radical, inspired, and optimistic humanistic movement has gone through in the last two decades. But those theories on narcissism did not help at all with the repair of ideals which collapsed at the same time.

To talk about repairing the breakdown of ideals which has destructive consequences on the human psyche is already a way of thinking that is close to the vocabulary of so-called analytic Self Psychology. We believe that developing a

critical dialogue with Self Psychology concepts could enrich body-psychotherapy because there is already a congruence and similarity between these two approaches. We body-oriented psychotherapists could find a more elaborate vocabulary in relation to that mysterious something we sometimes call a "self." This dialogue might also help clarify therapeutic strategies for how to work with the growing phenomena of narcissistic personality styles (or, if you prefer, disorders) that are replacing classical forms of psychoneurosis in post-modern times.

Like body-inclusive approaches to psychotherapy generally, Self Psychology has a much more positive outlook on human beings and their intrinsic motivations than the more classical theories. This definitely includes Kernberg with his Kleinian lenses along with his repetitive warning about the Thanatos-inspired destructive forces of the human unconscious.

Self Psychology starts with a positive understanding of human motivations. In the tradition of body-psychotherapy we call them needs. In the vocabulary of Self Psychology needs are described as motivational systems. For example, we have the need for bonding, physical regulation, mirroring (being seen and empathically understood), alter ego experience; the need for idealization, and merging with an idealized other (or object). With aversive behavior, we have the need for so-called antagonistic ally experiences (somebody we can oppose in a benign way). And, eventually, our needs emerge for sexual, sensual experience and gratification, the need to be effective, and the need for vitalizing resonance (somebody who resonates with our joy or happiness).

A lot of what is found in the motivational theories of Self Psychology is congruent with the basic needs described by body psychology theorists such as Alexander Lowen and David Boadella. Basic needs constitute the core elements of neurotic character structure, if they are not adequately met.

Put simply, in order to develop a strong sense of self according to Self Psychology, these needs require a certain amount of successful resonance or fulfillment. People need to take in or introject what is termed self-object experiences. And that need continues beyond childhood. If there is a successful interplay or enough phase-adequate resonance to those needs, then we are supposed to (are we?) develop a coherent self or, in neo-Reichian language, a core to our personality. This is the center of our initiatives, the place where we organize experience, and the reservoir that contains the individual nuclei of our ambitions, ideals, and talents. These nuclei motivate the self and allow it to move forward with its own sense of direction, and also to create a sense of purpose and meaning in life. The presence of the self in child development, as Winnicott would say, depends on "good

enough" self-object experiences. It manifests as a sense of strong and cohesive experience, self worth, and vitality.

If the self is temporarily or chronically undermined, instead of cohesion and vitality we will find forms of emptiness, lack of self worth, and especially fragmentation. The experience of fragmentation can range from irritation to panic, and above a certain level, to psychosis.

More recently, with the development of new ideas about the self, the phenomena of cohesion and fragmentation have been described from a different angle; a more systemic point of view we turn now to examine.

Hijacking, Parts, and the Self

It is a characteristic of some clients that they cannot hold or contain boundaries, or integrate their changing experiences. The function of cohesion for the whole is not operative. Daniel Goleman calls this process "emotional highjacking," which is meant to describe a state of being where parts of the limbic brain are highly activated, the frontal lobes are silent and mainly bypassed in the information processing circuits. Emotions take over, they "hijack" the person into a very limited reality. Alan Schore, Joseph Ledoux, Bessel von der Kolk, and many others have contributed to the biological understanding of how this happens on the neurophysiological levels.

In this article we would like to build on Richards Schwartz's psychological model of what happens in a person that is dominated by limiting experiences. His theory (which is similar to some others, like, Assagioli, Pessio, Gunther Schmidt, etc.) says that we are really made up of fairly distinct parts. Our psyche is not monolithic. Each of these parts have their own emotions, thoughts, memories, beliefs, and a BODY. These "parts" may be understood as "being-states" that a person lives with and moves through in varying situations.

An imaginary example: A man comes home from work, where he has been in his "business persona." He drives his car and gets upset about the traffic, where he turns into his "caged maniac persona." He comes home where his wife accuses him of some misdeeds, at which point he turns to his "depressed guilty persona." This moves him to seek refuge in front of the TV, where he turns into his "couch potato persona" for three hours before he goes to bed, meets his wife again, connects, and -- to end his day on a positive note -- winds up in his "passionate lover persona."

The core of this theory is that after being sucked into them through the triggers of outside stimuli, we become identified with these states of being we are in. When we are in a given state, our interpretation of reality in the moment, along with its associated emotional coloring,

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normally feels "real," valid, and the only possible way to be. This process is automatic.

Stephen Wolinsky uses the term "trances" for these states. He makes the case that as ordinary people we do not really connect to the present moment, to "reality." We just shift from identification with one trance state to another. These trance states are actually regressions, since they shape our perception of a situation on the basis of prior experiences. We have an entire set of readily available, pre-formed trances, habits for dealing with similar situations to the ones in which they were fashioned. From his point of view, as from the point of view of many modalities of body-psychotherapy, we are habitual beings. A situation occurs. It is similar to a pre-learned situation. The appropriate trance is triggered, and a whole set of emotions, thoughts, beliefs, behavior elements, and bodily configurations appear that are ready to deal with that particular situation. The important point here is that we automatically move through these personal sets of being-states or trances that were learned earlier, and that we become identified with them.

According to Schwartz (Schwartz, 1995), these "parts" form a sensitive, inner ecology, based on set relationships between the parts. In his approach the roles and relationships of these parts determine the quality of a person's experience.

The question that naturally arises at this point is who is this ME then? What is truly my self as I move through a set of identifications with ever shifting states? Of course this is also a central spiritual question, and the answer we find will indeed approach the spiritual in some respects.

Schwartz introduces the term "Self" at this point. Since he was a renowned family therapist at first, he approached the term without the preconceptions of intra-psyche training, almost with a virgin-like *naïveté*, which was actually very helpful. His work is now designed to bring forward and establish an identification with a state of Self that is able to understand, regulate and support ALL the parts in a compassionate and all-partisan way. It is a higher level of consciousness with a bodily grounding that can truly integrate and harmonize a disparate set of parts, trances, or being-states. He claims that this Self-state includes and transcends the parts. It is of a higher, more encompassing order while at the same time at the core of our being.

Using the term "holon," Ken Wilber expounds at great length about this aspect of self-organizing systems. Both Schwartz and Wilber continually argue that access to these Self-states signifies a condition of health and maturation. You may notice that here the self becomes a Self with a capital "S." Contrary to Self Psychology, where all kinds of being-states are called self-states, even those which are incapacitating or pathological, Schwartz's Self is meant to specifically point to a distinctive state that is highly mature

and cohesive. It is a higher state of consciousness that has the capacity to modulate and integrate an entire system of parts. In this text we will keep writing the Self with a capital "S" whenever we are relating to Schwartz's interpretation of the self notion.

With Schwartz we are entering into a structural and systemic model of the body/psyche that postulates each individual's capacity for a cohesive Self-state. We understand the term "Self" as an abstraction of this cohesive and mature state, as it is understood to have the ability to constructively deal with, heal, and integrate all the parts/trances that a person is composed of--and initially identified with. If no Self-like function was able to accomplish this process, the body-mind-whole would lose integration, parts would polarize, entertain hostile relationships, and fragment. Differentiation would slip into dissociation, as Wilber describes such disintegrative processes of organized holons.

Here is a summary of four practical implications of the Schwartz model:

- 1) The Self will eventually be able to perform functions of integration and regulation that are temporarily provided by a therapist--or the mothering person on the developmental level. A therapist has to provide space for Self-regulation to occur. Allan Schore has given us a beginning biological understanding for some of what may have to happen in the brain to master this step of self-regulation. As we pointed out, some depth psychologists like Kohut have theorized about the developmental aspects of this process.
- 2) The emergence of a Self, or expressed phenomenologically, the occurrence of a cohesive, integrative Self-state, is a measure of maturation and health.
- 3) Maturation does not seem to be based on suppressive functions of the ego, or solely on the free flow of expression, but on integrative functions of the Self that clarify and value the contributions of each component of the body-mind.
- 4) The path towards Self leadership (Schwartz's term) is characterized by a process of identification of trances, disidentification from them, and eventually relating from the cohesive Self-state that reveals essential qualities of wisdom and compassion. In the course of working with dissociated, polarized, and sometimes deficient being-states (parts) and coaxing forward the cohesive Self-type state, the body is vitally important.

No Self Without a Body

It is important to comprehend the intermingling of the psyche and the body, and how the so-called (S)self-states that Self Psychology and Richard Schwartz talk about, are only completely understood if they are seen as embodied states. Likewise, analytic character theory would benefit from a conceptualization which integrates the concept of a Self.

For body-psychotherapists, of course, it is a commonplace insight that existence starts with embodiment or incarnation, and that our developmental processes happen in the flesh, "in carne." In the last decade it has become much clearer, even to those who do not ordinarily embrace the body as part of the mind, or the mind as part of the body, that the body is deeply involved in psycho-emotional processes, that it is part of the memory system, that it can block and release experiences and memories, that it contributes to and modulates being-states, and that it can trigger transformational processes, etc.

As one example, psychoneuroimmunology has shown again and again how the mind can influence the immune system, and how the immune system can affect the mind. Among others, Candace Pert has gathered an immense amount of research that supports an understanding, even among traditional scientists, that the body co-regulates the whole human system in cooperation with the brain. We are able to demonstrate today that the body is not simply the executive branch of the brain carrying out orders. The brain does not end anywhere in the body. Instead, the body is the original locus of experience, deeply involved in organizing it. The body is also our extension into wider reality with its senses telling us what is true and what not. So if we want to connect to anything that is Self, if we want to feel the reality of it, it will show up in bodily experience. It will be co-held and perceived there. And, if the body is left out, Self experience lacks a sense of reality, power, and authenticity.

To talk about self-states, and to think of them as merely psychological, or intra-psyche, also supports a quality of mysteriousness and the ensuing search for its locus. If we add the bodily dimension to what is called being-states and/or the Self-state we will see contours of postures, breathing styles, and muscular tonus, configurations of flexibility or inhibition, and also, (somewhat mechanistically termed), energetic aspects, which are in fact qualities and degrees of vitality.

While Self Psychologists talk about certain being or self-states, body-centered psychotherapists know about the somatic manifestations of these states. For example: An empty self ("self" only in Self Psychology terms), with its inherent, subjectively experienced feelings of inner emptiness, lack of motivation, despair, depression, and lack of joy, correlates to bodily states that reveal a lack of inner

movement and stimuli, lack of tonus and inspiration--in the double meaning of this word--and a lack of emotions, which means a lack of movement towards the world and its objects.

If a bodily configuration demonstrates a collapsed structure, then we are most likely dealing with chronic deficits. If it reveals a repressed bodily structure, then we are usually dealing with the inhibition and repression of anger and rage, emotions which may be a key to change. You will find the equivalent for that in the Self Psychology notion of narcissistic rage and the way that school deals with it. They lend to narcissistic rage some understanding and the right to exist. We in body psychology would provide, in addition, the opportunity for somatic exploration and expression.

This is also the case in what is called an over-stimulated state with its quality of over-excitement, as well as for over-burdened states or unbalanced states. All these states are organized, perceived and expressed on a psychological/psychodynamic, as well as a somatic level. This is especially true for what is called fragmented states, which, if they are severe and chronic, will manifest in the person's incapacity to handle excitement and feel safe, and disclose to visual diagnosis a split, un-integrated structure in the body.

Now, we would like to call attention to another issue that we think explains why operating with a concept of an embodied Self would imply a slight shift in the body-psychotherapeutic perspective, and a more balanced approach to its practice.

No Body Without a Self

Character analysis, which originated with the work of Reich and has been developed by Lowen, Pierrakos and others, focuses on defensive structures in the body, psyche, and behavior. It's practice focuses to a large extent on a systematic--sometimes not so systematic--analysis and transformation of these defensive structures. Sometimes this practice can be very lopsided, focusing too strongly on breaking down defenses. This tendency started with Reich, with his slightly aggressive, militaristic attitude towards the armoring quality of character. If this becomes the main focus, we find an overemphasis in therapy on disidentification and also deconstruction, to borrow a word from the vocabulary of philosophy.

What is equally important is that character defenses are not only defenses against painful experiences. They are also a set of inhibitions of movements towards or away from the world and certain objects; movements that were earlier discouraged through mishandling or the absence of positive self-object experiences. Working therapeutically with these relational conditions can help to support and motivate

the natural and necessary gestures and movements towards the world and its objects. If these actions are successful, they strengthen the leadership position of the Self; it's sense of affective subjectivity, agency, and cohesion. These are the experiences which Daniel Stern, the researcher of infant development, understands as basic for the emergence and the development of the Self.

The bottom line is that many schools of body-psychotherapy, influenced by the concepts of classical psychoanalysis, emphasize the defensive aspects of character, and engage in a predominantly deconstructive practice. We want to assert here that the process of de-arming and deconstruction needs to be supplemented by a more relational and systemic approach that could support the therapeutic accessing of Self-type capacities. This is necessary to empower a person to relate to the external world and its objects, as well as to internal parts, in a more satisfying manner.

Leading from a cohesive Self-state enables a person to better deal with extreme states, like depression, dependency, rage, etc. Rather than suppressing them or acting them out, their capacities are re-appropriated for Self care. These are capacities of prefrontal-limbic integration which have to be learned, a process that involves changes in the neuronal linkage patterns of the brain, (Schorer, 1994).

One last point about the importance of the body in relation to the concept of Self: A central element in the understanding of narcissistic personality structure is the notion that more archaic defense mechanisms are at work than in so-called psychoneurotic disorders. The most significant and most discussed defense mechanism is the process of splitting. Kohutians and neo-Kohutians talk of vertical and horizontal splitting. Vertical means to split off parts of outer reality while horizontal refers to splitting off painful experiences within the inner world.

The *locus operandi* here is the body. In less severe forms the body still informs the psyche, often in a diffuse way, of unpleasant, depressing, painful aspects of the person's reality. These aspects are in contrast to the image the person is identified with. In more severe cases splitting results in desensitization with numb states manifested in the body, states that in themselves fuel depressive symptoms. If splitting is more severe or chronic we might find acute or chronic processes of so-called psychosomatic illnesses.

Focusing on the body and amplifying awareness of bodily signals are of crucial importance in this context. It is a process of helping the person to re-anchor in his/her body, painful and heavy as that might be. After a period of working through, it can hopefully result in a more integrated, cohesive, and pulsating experience of one's bodily self. It might even move toward the recovery of a

light, easy, sometimes playful, generally fluid state of presence. It is this that lies at the core of what Maslow once called the "peak experience." We, as well as some transpersonal traditions, and interestingly enough, the Self Psychologists, have called it bliss. In fact, Self Psychology is the only branch of psychoanalysis which doesn't denunciate the experience of bliss as regressive or pathological.

Self-States in Body-Psychotherapy

Although we are searching for a practical way to include a notion of Self in body-psychotherapy, we feel that is unnecessary and unwarranted to make the Self a theoretical construct. It seems that after reviewing the history of the term, we can avoid long discussions on what it really is, by approaching the issue phenomenologically: What do we see happen? How does the phenomenon manifest? Put scientifically: What can we all observe and agree upon if we perform the required injunctions? To make speaking about it easier, we would still call it a Self, or a mature self-state, or some such designation, but we would leave it without objective, final definition.

Now, enlisting Ken Wilber in our deliberations, we can consider the Self phenomenon/Self-state as a state that is capable of profound integration, that encompasses not only body, emotion, and mind, not only all the parts/trances, but also bridges what Wilber calls the right hand and the left hand dimensions, the objective and the subjective, the exterior and the interior worlds. Outward signs can be observed, but the ultimate quality of the Self-state can only be experienced from the inside. Therefore we will describe some observable characteristics, some from the outside, some from the inside, but we will not attempt to define the term completely. Self is a deeply complex and subjective experience, essentially a "higher" state of body-mind consciousness. It is, in terms of Wilber, of a higher logical order than everyday language, and therefore cannot be expressed properly at the language level of ordinary consciousness. It eventually borders upon the spiritual.

So, what is it that we see happening in psychotherapeutic sessions with clients who have advanced to a level of Self leadership, and with therapists who are open enough to allow Self-states to emerge? Typically, we would see a client move slowly, sometimes suddenly, from one state where s/he may have been in some kind of pain, into a very calm and centered state. The bodily experience is often described as moving from heavy/grounded to light, sometimes warm, relaxed, full, gently but fully energized, etc. The more mental aspects often include calmness, clarity, centeredness, and compassion with everything appearing good/right just as it is. Emotions range from total calm to joy.

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In practice, we believe that there are Self-states, close-to-Self-states, and being-states that are all functional to varying degrees. Essential Self-states appear after appropriate work, but cannot be cajoled or "made" to happen. They are ultimately spontaneous.

This is very important to understand because of the glamour attached to supposedly "higher" states, and because clients as well as therapists may consciously or unconsciously want to think of themselves in places where they are truly NOT. This tends to result in make-believe, self-delusion, and fake states that do not serve healing at all. The problem is that the notion of Self easily lends itself to any and all manifestations of narcissism.

Practically, the use of cohesive Self-states for clients would be to 1) understand and mirror the experience of the parts/trances compassionately, 2) find ways to meet their appropriate needs, and 3) to coach and modulate their automatic occurrence.

The therapist would systematically support those functions according to the techniques that his or her method brings to the process. In order to evoke a cohesive Self-state Richard Schwartz suggests an indirect process. He does not enlist his clients in a training process that would teach them how to get to a Self-state directly. Instead, he starts by identifying some important being-state the client has named that in Schwartz's terms would not be a Self-state, but a "part." His client would then explore and "embody" the part, meaning that he or she would look for the body of that part, or a place in their body that holds it somehow.

Typically, he would then ask the client something like: "What would You (your-Self) say to this part?" This question is meant to engage a possible Self - part interaction, which might not be possible for quite some time. Normally, until the Self really shows up and is trusted in the later stages of therapy, it is another part trying to interact with the first part. A common interaction would go like this:

Client: (after exploration of a part and experiencing it bodily): "When I am in this place, I feel so terribly sad and lonely."

Therapist: "Feels really abandoned, hmm?"

Client: "Yes."

Therapist: "What do You, your-Self, say to this part?"

Client: (after some thinking) "You can't go on like that!"

Here another part, not the Self, usurps the interaction. It is a part that does not reveal essential Self characteristics such as curiosity, compassion, acceptance and wisdom, but tries to suppress the sad and lonely part. So Schwartz would then identify this new part as another player in the inner

ecology, and keep on interacting with these two parts, again and again seeing additional parts appear in interactions rather than the Self, until all the involved parts are identified. Schwartz has a fairly complex method that cannot be explained here, but what typically happens is that after enough parts are identified (which leads to dis-identification from these parts), the client spontaneously (with appropriate coaching) ends up in a Self-state that actually knows how to appropriately deal with and help the parts.

This is very much like the peeling process described in some Eastern spiritual traditions, but also in Western therapies, like Gestalt Therapy. Layers of parts are peeled off until a core, the Self, is left to stand and to take over leadership.

Self-states, when they begin to appear, have the following characteristics:

- 1) The person is highly integrated or has a high integrating potential. S/he can hold boundaries and maintain cohesiveness.
- 2) A person in a Self-state can compassionately relate to, support, and help the parts that compose the body/psyche. The client will be able to listen to the pain, to experiences and memories of the parts/trances, and will know how to soothe and relieve them.
- 3) A person in a Self-state will understand the resources in all the parts/trances, bring them forward, harmonize them with each other, and use them constructively and creatively. S/he can help the parts interact with the world and it's objects.
- 4) The person is not identified with the experiences or the beliefs of the parts, though S/he relates to them compassionately.
- 5) There is self-authenticating certainty about the profoundness of the state, with the body providing a sense of deep anchoring and truth to the experience.
- 6) The person feels nourished and complete. There is a powerful body/mind experience that creates a sense of "presence." This in turn can affect other people in the environment. These other people, like a therapist, are sometimes "triggered" into a Self-state as well. This means that resonance phenomena tend to create shared experiences of Self.

The Transpersonal Dimension

You may have glimpsed by now our position that the conception of Self presented here transcends the old authoritarian view of human nature, which says that it has to be repressed and domesticated by means of a strong ego or super ego. This essential, embodied Self transcends as well those solipsistic concepts of body-psychotherapy that focus on discharge and emptying out. Instead, it circles around the question of which developmental matrices support growth and maturation. It highlights that a human being is motivated toward, and capable of maturation, unfolding, and ultimately--conscious presence. If we do not misconceive the transcendent aspects of the Self as New-Agey and mysterious, we can embrace the fluid, non-static, non-defined qualities of our experience and our Self.

We may also understand that what existentialistic philosophers called "das Sein," or beingness, shines through our Self. We can acknowledge the transpersonal view that the Self is rooted in Being. Self is the core of who we are, as well as what we can be. When its integrating capacities have created a sense of maturity and wisdom for us, when there is less sense of urgency and pain, our focus moves spontaneously away from the former inner turmoil. Instead, we reorient around humanitarian, transpersonal or spiritual questions: What is the place, the role, of this newly unified "I" within the larger whole of which I am a part?

Many eminent minds from Arthur Koestler to Erich Jantsch, from Ken Wilber to the celebrated theorists of Complex Adaptive Systems at the Santa Fe Institute (Stuart Kauffman, for instance) have explicated this universal process which moves integrated wholes toward becoming part of larger wholes; this eternal movement of the universe to create, evolve, and transform itself. If we participate consciously in this movement, our awareness starts to shape our motivations and presence. The concept of an Embodied Self can help us as therapists and clients to be conscious of what is the essence of transformation and health, and to choose our steps wisely.

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