

## Whitehead, LSD, and Transpersonal Psychology

### I. Introduction

This paper expands on one I wrote more than twenty years ago that attempted to use certain concepts from Whitehead's work to explain some of the phenomena of LSD experiences, especially mystical experience. It benefits from the much broader literature that has developed since then, plus my own exposure to Holotropic Breathwork™, a technique developed by Stanislov and Christina Grof<sup>1</sup> that can yield experiences identical to those of LSD, without using substances.

As Western philosophy has become almost completely academic, even where process thought is concerned, it has eschewed a fundamental involvement with process, namely, the pursuit of sacred practices that open us to the experiential world "that is hard to define and difficult to speak of" (AI, p. 367)<sup>2</sup>. One illustration of our changed attitude toward sacred practice is that ancients from Pindar to Marcus Aurelius participated in the Mysteries at Eleusis, where they took a psychedelic to facilitate spiritual exploration.<sup>3</sup> Today they could be expelled from school for "drugs," and their writings regarded as tainted. Only very recently has Western academia begun to accommodate even spiritual practices that don't involve substances, although it is still far easier to get course credit for watching movies than for meditating or trance dancing.

In psychology, the spiritual concerns of William James were largely displaced from the academic world by Titchenerian structuralism and Watsonian behaviorism.<sup>4</sup> Pragmatism preserved some of James's influence in philosophy, and James clearly influenced Whitehead. But the positivist and analytic movement that ran parallel to structuralism and behaviorism in psychology hammered both pragmatism and process philosophy. Some of James's concerns also survived in religious studies, in an interesting parallel to Whitehead's survival in process theology. James's emphasis on the subconscious and his concern with pluralism survived only outside the mainline of academic psychology, in the various manifestations of psychology and psychotherapy that came to be called humanistic psychology.<sup>5</sup> The psychology James envisioned even exists robustly throughout contemporary culture in parapsychology, the self-help movement, counterculture psychotherapies, and pastoral counseling.<sup>6</sup>

Humanistic psychology spawned "transpersonal psychology," a name coined by Stanislov Grof and adopted by Maslow and his circle in preference to their own coinage of transhumanistic psychology.<sup>7</sup> Transpersonal psychology, which expresses the uniquely American psychology that James first made explicit, is discussed later in this paper.

### II. Significance of the Discovery of LSD

The discovery of LSD in 1943 by the Swiss chemist Albert Hoffman made profound philosophical and religious experiences available to modern Western culture in a very new way.

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<sup>1</sup> Grof, S., *The Adventure of Self-Discovery* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp.170ff, 207ff.

<sup>2</sup> AI indicates Whitehead, A.N. *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1933)

<sup>3</sup> Hoffman, A. "The Message of the Eleusinian Mysteries for Today's World," *Entheogens and the Future of Religion* (San Francisco: Council on Spiritual Practices, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, E., *William James on Consciousness Beyond the Margin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> The central themes of humanistic psychology reiterate James's: spiritualism, trance, personality and abnormal psychology, eastern psychology, exceptional mental states, mysticism, anaesthetic (psychedelic) revelation.

<sup>6</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

<sup>7</sup> Grof, S., "The History and Evolution of Transpersonal Psychology," *The Transpersonal Vision* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, audio tapes, 1998), tape 1.

Although such experiences have been available since long before recorded history,<sup>8</sup> two important obstacles have kept modern Western science from focussing on them. The first *was* that such experiences had not been experimentally and systematically reproducible. The second and more formidable obstacle *is* the materialist bias of modern science.

Before the discovery of LSD, intense philosophical and religious experiences were not readily or predictably demonstrable under the rubric of conventional scientific protocols. The discovery of LSD and subsequently other psychedelic substances overcame this obstacle to the investigation of such experience, especially mystical,<sup>9</sup> by making it possible to elicit these states under "laboratory conditions." Not only did LSD itself afford this possibility, but its use also provoked further scientific discovery, including research of a large class of both natural and synthetic compounds now generally called "psychedelic." The most prominent natural compounds are those contained in the psilocybin mushroom, the peyote cactus (mescaline), and the tryptamine-rich substances found in a wide variety of Central and South American plants, as well as among the neurotransmitters of the human brain. Besides the natural compounds that have been discovered, synthetic procedures have yielded numerous other psychedelic compounds.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, the opportunity afforded by the discovery of LSD and other psychedelics remains blocked by a second obstacle. The powerful materialist and objectivist bias of modern science, which reduces human experience generally to an epiphenomenon of biochemistry, has long denigrated indigenous spiritual practices as mere superstitions. Ironically, modern Western religion has diminished its own spiritual capacity by becoming a co-conspirator. The conspiracy bespeaks prejudice overall against experiences that threaten the dominant materialist hegemony in modern Western culture. The sense of threat was reinforced by the social ferment of the 1960's decade, when Western youth used psychedelics in non-traditional and socially challenging ways. But LSD challenges the materialist bias of modern science by providing an experience that reveals materialism as hypothesis rather than fact. This immediately exposes the fallacy of misplaced concreteness that Whitehead pointed out as a deficiency of Western science. The mistake of misplaced concreteness, which has become florid in the way technological materialism dominates our culture, traces to ignorance of Process.

### III. Whiteheadian Interpretation of the LSD Experience and Holotropic Psychology

#### *The LSD Experience*

My interest in a Whiteheadian interpretation of the LSD experience<sup>11</sup> developed because Whitehead's concepts allowed me to make sense of an extended series of intense and powerful experiences that shook the roots of my existence. I will speak to some of my specific experience after a general characterization of the LSD experience.

Within about 20 minutes after taking an effective quantity of LSD-25, most people begin to experience a slight alteration of visual sensations, followed by a general sensory-aesthetic

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<sup>8</sup> From the Presocratics forward, we have accounts based on profound religious experiences. The Eleusinian Mysteries provide an excellent example of ancient mystical practice. Recent anthropological understanding allows us to go much further back. Study of contemporary indigenous peoples has interpreted the sign of the opened hand on cave wall paintings to mean, "At this place I entered the other world." (Furst, P., Seminar on Psychotropic Entheobotany, Uxmal, Mexico, January 1998.)

<sup>9</sup> This paper substantially adopts the terminology of James, W., *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures XVI and XVII, and Stace, W. T., *The Teachings of the Mystics* (New York: New American Library, 1960), Chapter 1. Ultimately, however, it focuses not on a single personal experience or set of them, but on their integration in a Process.

<sup>10</sup> Excellent accounts of the chemistry of psychedelic compounds are found in Shulgin, A. & Shulgin, A., *Pihkal* (Berkeley, CA: Transform Press, 1991), and *Tihkal* (Berkeley, CA: Transform Press, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Gibson, L., *The LSD Experience: A Whiteheadian Interpretation*, *Process Studies*, V7, N2, (Summer 1977).

enhancement. Beyond this, experience diverges, depending on factors that fall more or less into two categories, set and setting. Setting refers to social and environmental circumstances. Set refers to both idiosyncratic and archetypal aspects of a person's psyche.

The only common characteristic amidst the divergent experience is that one's feelings become more and more intense. The feelings can range anywhere from extreme bliss to extreme terror, and can switch instantly from one to the other. One may watch in horror to see the World collapse in Armageddon, or one may become blissfully entranced in the flame of a single candle. The apparently solid material world may dissolve before one's eyes into a fluid, melting stream. Mentation may become as fluid as sensation, and both become mutually permeable. One's sense of time and capacity for judgement may disappear. Hours may pass in a minute, or a minute may persist for hours. The intense feelings that occur in these states can overwhelm people and make them very vulnerable. People who are not adequately protected and supported may become intensely anxious and dangerously paranoid. With proper support, however, people can overcome even presentments of a profound paradoxical bind that makes them feel threatened with insanity. When people are able to face such a dilemma, great insight can flash.

After a few hours, if one's experience has proceeded in safety, the intensity begins to diminish. A sense of aesthetic appreciation may linger. Insights may persist and present themselves to the mind for further elaboration. A sense of calmness and relaxation may ensue. On the other hand, a person who has not had a safe setting for the experience, or who has had difficulty coming to grips with psychic material revealed in the course of the experience, may feel nervousness, agitation, and other discomforts. For most, the experience will gradually wind down over a period of eight to twelve hours.

For most, the experience will ultimately blend into the stream of ordinary life and only linger as a memory of something unusual or strange. Some will be intrigued and pursue it again, and some may even follow it as a spiritual quest. For a small number of people, ongoing disquietude can persist.

### *Consciousness as Relation*

My previous paper<sup>12</sup> focused on the felt character and central intensity of the LSD experience, and it debated whether LSD experience was commensurate with mystical experience. Here, I will briefly review my analysis of feeling and intensity, then revisit the debate about mysticism, considering among other things Stace's notion of mystical consciousness.<sup>13</sup>

My initial interest in a Whiteheadian interpretation of the LSD experience developed because Whitehead's concepts allowed me to make sense of an extended series of intense and powerful personal experiences. Subsequently I have found Whiteheadian interpretation useful because the main effects of psychedelics, unlike those of other pharmacological substances, are not idiosyncratic to the substances themselves. Rather, the effects reflect the social and environmental setting in which the substances are used, as well as the constitution of an individual's psyche. The most important characteristic of LSD, and the singular characteristic shared by all psychedelics, is that it is "an unspecific amplifier of mental processes."<sup>14</sup> "Mental processes" refers here not just to cognition, but to psychic functioning as well. Very much to the point is the term "psychedelic," which derives from the Greek *psyche*-spirit, life, soul, mind,

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Stace, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Grof, S., *Realms of the Human Unconscious* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1975), p. 6.

reason, understanding, and *delos*-visible, manifest, set forth. Thus, "psychedelic" means "making the soul manifest."

In the decade of the 1960's, another term, "consciousness-expanding," was used alternatively to "psychedelic." In my earlier paper, I argued against the term "consciousness-expanding" because it connotes consciousness as a substance, in the Cartesian sense. I argued instead for "psychedelic" because it reflects Whitehead's characterization of consciousness as a function, a process.

In my earlier paper, I contended:

that LSD works to promote mental functioning, and that what is in turn promoted in the functioning of consciousness is not expansion, but rather depth—in the sense of intensity.

In order to support my contention, let me begin by summarizing Whitehead's explanation of consciousness as a function, deriving from prior modes of experience. His explanation rests on the basic tenet that, "Rather than experience depending on consciousness, consciousness presupposes experience" (PR 83)<sup>15</sup>.

Instinct is a primitive component of experience. For example, often before one is conscious of the feeling of hunger, one has a hungry feeling, and eats. After instinctual procedure there is intelligence. "The intellectual operations consist in the coordination of notions derived from the primary facts of instinctive experience into a logically coherent system" (AI 59f). Intellectual feelings involve a focus of attention that makes certain aspects of experience more important than it makes others.

"This concentration of attention also introduces the criticism of physical purposes, which is the intellectual judgment of truth or falsehood. But intellectual feelings are not to be understood unless it be remembered that they already find at work 'physical purposes' more primitive than themselves" (PR 416).

We have physical and mental activity, but we do not yet have consciousness. Whitehead's notion is contrary to the common assumption that mental phenomena and consciousness are one and the same. For Whitehead, pure mental feelings and pure physical feelings are exactly parallel in that their origination does not involve consciousness. When consciousness does arrive, however, it does so "peculiarly in connection with the mental functions, and has primarily to do with their product" (AI 271).

The origin of consciousness is in the feeling of contrast. The contrast is between the physical and the mental aspects of experience, between concrete fact and the abstract element that we conceptualize out of experience. In other words, consciousness awakens in the comparison of an immediate feeling with the conceptual prehension of that feeling, which treats only certain aspects of the feeling.

This interpretation of consciousness provides a way to explain how it is that consciousness seems sometimes to widen and other times to narrow during the LSD experience. Increased mental activity can, on the one hand, provide a wider than ordinary range of experience for consciousness to work on. On the other hand, the

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<sup>15</sup> PR indicates *Process and Reality*, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929)

increase in mental activity may be so drastic that consciousness is practically overwhelmed and unable to integrate all the quantity of experience that is provided.<sup>16</sup>

In a psychedelic experience, the sense that consciousness "expands" results from increasing intensity of feeling fed by the developing contrast between the physical and mental aspects of experience.

Notably, Whitehead sees the very process of contrast as giving rise to consciousness in the first place. Consciousness, therefore, is not a Cartesian substance, but a relation. Given this understanding of consciousness, another common term, "state of consciousness," needs re-examination, which I will undertake in another paper.

The variety of experiences triggered by psychedelics, and their high degrees of intensity, contribute to the notion that one experiences distinct, different states of consciousness. William James's account of his intoxication with nitrous oxide speaks to this:

One conclusion was forced upon my mind at that time, and my impression of its truth has ever since remained unshaken. It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness.... How to regard them is the question, for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness.<sup>17</sup>

Psychedelic experience seems so different from ordinary experience not only because of its much greater degree of intensity, but also because physical feeling, typically beneath notice, comes dramatically into attention. Again, contrast is the operative process:

In his discussion of the "Higher Phases of Experience," Whitehead says, "An intense experience is an aesthetic fact" (PR 426). Furthermore, "All aesthetic experience is feeling arising out of the realization of contrast under identity" (PR 427).

Identity depends on the continuity of physical feeling; the contrast is provided by mentality. The simplest example of contrast under identity is the phenomenon of vibration that characterizes subatomic occasions (wave-particles). The most complex example is God's experience. In between we find human experience.

In normal human experience mentality promotes a selective inattention that drops physical feeling mostly below notice. We more often feel ourselves as individuals apart from the rest of the world, for instance, than as part of it. Those moments when we do feel ourselves in closer relation to the world tend to be more intense than normal experience. They often come with some shift of attention that heightens the activity of mind. I contend that it is this heightened activity that brings back into attention physical feeling, which normally drops below our notice. It is not, for example, that the red we see in the beautiful sunset is different from the color we have already seen several times before in the day. Rather, our attention to it is heightened, and we feel more our relation to this particular instance of it.

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<sup>16</sup> Gibson, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100, adapted.

<sup>17</sup> James, W. *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures XVI and XVII.

Our attention is heightened because there is an increase of mental feeling, and this in turn procures a greater depth of feeling in general by virtue of the fact that the contrast with physical feeling is increased. Not only does this greater depth of feeling attach to the particular object on which our attention is focused, but also the physical feeling that is always there becomes dramatized by the contrast. Thus, physical feeling wells up into our attention as a companion of our increased emotion toward the object. We feel both heightened attention to the object and a strengthened sense of relationship to the world and the object as part of the world.<sup>18</sup>

This phenomenon from ordinary experience develops substantially under the influence of LSD. This development explains the enhancement of perception that occurs in the experience, first in the greater vividness and intensity of colors and sounds, and second in the fusion of ideas into perception. Every event prehends the entire universe, with gradations of relevance. In our ordinary perception of events we take into account only those aspects with high grades of relevance, but as our attention deepens the lower grades come into notice. In attending to these lower grades we discover the endless patterns of relationships that bind that event to the rest of the universe. Not only do we make this discovery in regard to the occasions of the world, but also the same deepening takes place in ourselves. That is to say, the enhancement of physical feeling not only brings into attention our relationship with the external world; it also reveals the internal world of the "unconscious." If we interpret the unconscious in terms of Whitehead's doctrine of physical feeling, it is easy to understand why amplification of mental processes elicits strong feelings of relationship to the world around us as well as it reveals elements of the unconscious: Both are elements of our physical inheritance.<sup>19</sup>

### *Whiteheadian Interpretation of Holotropic Psychology*

As I have found Whitehead's philosophy invaluable to explicate psychedelic experience, I find it also provides an excellent metaphysical background for Stanislav Grof's technique of Holotropic Breathwork and the holotropic psychology that Grof has developed. Grof is a psychiatrist who did extensive research with LSD in his native Czechoslovakia and later the United States. When LSD became proscribed, he developed a non-drug psycho-spiritual technique called Holotropic Breathwork that yields many of the same sorts of experiences as psychedelics.<sup>20</sup>

Holotropic Breathwork is a simple technique. Participants are instructed to lie on a mat, guided through a brief relaxation exercise, and then asked to begin breathing more rapidly and deeply than normal. Evocative, but emotionally non-directive music is played to support the breathing process. Before the session, participants have been encouraged to let themselves go into any feelings, emotions, or bodily movements that come to the fore after they have begun their intensified breathing. For most people a process develops that runs its course over a couple of hours. Sometimes during a session a facilitator helps participants by providing resistance to push

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<sup>18</sup> "The main function of [intellectual feelings] is to heighten the intensity accompanying the valuations in the conceptual feeling involved, and in the more physical purposes which are more primitive than any intellectual feelings" (PR 416).

<sup>19</sup> Gibson, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-101, adapted.

<sup>20</sup> See Grof, S. *Beyond the Brain: Birth, Death, and Transcendence in Psychotherapy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985). An overarching compendium of Holotropic (holos-whole, trepin-turning to) theory, with extensive reference to the history of depth psychology. Develops an architectonic that illuminates psychopathology in terms of perinatal (around birth) experience. Explores the nature of consciousness from a post-Cartesian perspective, based on over 4,000 clinical sessions of LSD psychotherapy, ranging from material gleaned working with psychiatric patients at the state Research Institute in Prague to terminal cancer patients at Johns Hopkins, plus material from tens of thousands of Holotropic Breathwork sessions gathered at workshops around the world. Most accessible from a background of clinical work or broad familiarity with psychological theory.

against in response to bodily feelings. After a session, drawing and group sharing facilitate integration of experiences a participant has had.

Holotropic Breathwork experiences range from mild aesthetic intensification through extreme emotions to spiritual encounters. The operative method of this approach seems common to many techniques indigenous peoples use for spiritual access. In many respects it is also similar to Pentecostal practice. Although there tend to be differences of intensity between Breathwork and psychedelic experience, identical experiences do obtain, in which participants reach the limit of human capacity, including union with the Divine or merging with the metacosmic and supracosmic Void.

The same analysis I offered for the LSD experience applies to Holotropic Breathwork: development of intensity under contrast. The absence of any substance use in Holotropic Breathwork emphasizes the fact that experience is the fundamental actuality. Physiology is of no more consequence regarding the fundamental details of experience than is the television set to the content of the programs it displays. As experience deepens, it becomes more apparent that prehension renders the whole of time, the extent of the universe, and the entire array of eternal possibilities internally available to the self-creative moment of the actual occasion. The concrescence of each actual occasion is the moment of mystical fullness.

#### IV. Perennial Philosophy and Transpersonal Psychology

Whitehead's doctrine of physical feeling as applied to the unconscious provides a basis for connecting one of the most important concerns of perennial philosophy<sup>21</sup> with one of the most important concerns of transpersonal psychology. Perennial philosophy concerns the relationship between the many and the one. Transpersonal psychology focuses on the relationship between the individual self and the transcendent self.

##### *Category of the Ultimate*

Whitehead treats the theme of the many and the one under the Category of the Ultimate. The Category of the Ultimate comprises three notions: creativity, many, one. Of them, he says:

'Creativity' is the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact. It is that ultimate principle by which the many, which are the universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion, which is the universe conjunctively (PR 31f).

The central character of the process of becoming and perishing, which yields the actual occasion, is creativity. In the actual occasion, the many become one. And in the very same process, the actual occasion completes itself by perishing and enriching the many. The one and the many are related in the becoming of the actual occasion. At the heart of the becoming of the actual occasion is subjective aim, the aim at becoming which is a hybrid feeling of God and the world. Subjective aim is the means by which God operates in the world, and so, subjective aim is teleological, and the subjective aim is at intensity (PR 41). Thus, as Jones observes, "Whitehead ties the ultimate teleological concerns of process...to the concept of intensity."<sup>22</sup>

This process of becoming and perishing on the human level is the process of death and rebirth. In transpersonal psychology, the process of death and rebirth concerns the death of the ego.

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<sup>21</sup> Aldous Huxley's shorthand term for the enduring school of metaphysical idealism in philosophy.

<sup>22</sup> Jones, J. *Intensity, an Essay in Whiteheadian Ontology* (Nashville and London: Vanderbilt University Press), p. 9.

Concern with ego prevents the individual self from discovering itself as also the transcendent self. In his metaphysics Whitehead describes the becoming of the actual occasion as the fundamental process of creation. Transpersonal psychology describes the comparable process as awakening of the self.

These two descriptions differ only in emphasis, the one on metaphysics and the other on psychology, and in where they pick up the beat. The actual occasion is usually presented first as becoming, then perishing; as nothing first, then something that has become, then perishes. The literature of transpersonal psychology usually begins by presenting the existent self, all bound in ego, as comprising the problem that we have to overcome in order to awaken. The description of the process of awakening, consequently, focuses first on how dying comes about. However, whether we describe the process as "becoming, perishing, becoming, perishing..." or "dying, being reborn, dying, being reborn..." it is finally just a matter of where we focus in on the process.

A very dramatic experience demonstrated for me the congruence between the metaphysical notion of becoming and perishing and the psychological notion of death and rebirth. It happened while I was in graduate school, late in the decade of the 1960's. I was sitting at my desk in my little tree house apartment in Montclair, writing a paper for John Cobb's course on Whitehead. The paper was a precursor of this one, an attempt to illustrate psychedelic insights with Whiteheadian concepts.

Trying to write about "perpetual perishing," I found myself groping to bring my thoughts together. I stood up and started to pace, turning things over and over in my mind. Suddenly, time stopped. Outside my window, cars still drove along the road, and rest of the external world went on. For me experientially, however, the felt process of time had come to a halt. I had no sense of things happening and changing. Psychedelics had given me experiences of timelessness, but the liveliness of things happening and changing never vanished from my feeling, and the experiences felt blissful. This sudden experience of time's stopping was extra distressing, because I had not taken any substances, so I could not pass my experience off as simply a drug-induced bad moment, which would pass the way bad experiences had before. This was a feeling of no exit, of alienation, of loss of contact with the life and vitality of the world.<sup>23</sup>

I began to panic. I felt insane and realized I could remain that way permanently, cut off from the world and alone, starkly mad. What was I going to do? Then I began to think, "perpetual perishing, perpetual perishing." It occurred to me that I would remain in this moment until it perished. What becomes of a moment when it perishes? From its own point of view it dies. Whether it will have a successor, it cannot know. There is no guarantee. I realized that the only way out of the moment I was trapped in was to let myself perish, die. I did not have to do anything to kill myself, I just had to let myself die. But it was not metaphorical death I was contemplating. It was the end, actually perishing, with no guarantee that another moment of myself would follow.

I became very scared. I did not want to die. I pulled back, searched frantically. But I could not avoid it. My choice was between death or enduring insanity. Finally, I screwed up my courage, let go, and plunged into nothingness. Immediately, I was reborn into great warmth of self-recognition amidst a living, moving world.

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<sup>23</sup> From my present vantage point, I understand this experience not only in Whiteheadian terms, but also in terms of Grof's description of perinatal experience. Perinatal analysis suggests that I was re-experiencing trauma from the stage in the birth process where labor's contractions had begun in earnest, but the cervix had not yet opened.



This was ego death. In that moment I discovered the absolute correspondence between psychological death and rebirth and the process of becoming and perishing. In that moment, perpetual perishing changed for me from a rich, metaphorical concept into a powerfully felt lived experience.

With psychedelic stimulus, I had other intense experiences during this period. Whitehead's metaphysic was the only scheme I found that made some systematic sense of my experiences. I picked up bits and pieces from writers here and there who described psychedelic experiences, but they generally lacked system. Plato served in a number of ways, but although he originates many ideas that Whitehead speaks to, he does not speak as pointedly as Whitehead to the process by which the actual occasion of experience becomes.

I picked up ideas also from Western religion and from Eastern philosophy and religion. The religious ideas, however, suffered from lack of systematization. Also, the important ideas I got from Western religion spoke to its deepest spiritual roots, but unfortunately, day-to-day Western religion has significantly distanced itself from spirituality. Eastern philosophy offered some useful systematic ideas, and the spirituality of Eastern religion was not depleted for me by familiarity with its day-to-day forms. Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to study either Eastern philosophy or religion in my graduate program.

Fortunately, I had not by that time done graduate studies in psychology, or I would have undoubtedly been certified bona fide psychotic by my instructors. It was only after I later undertook graduate study in psychology and found it as deficient in theory as I had found philosophy in practice that I finally discovered Grof's holotropic psychology, which complemented Whitehead.

#### *"Pure" Mysticism*

When I began thinking about mysticism and my psychedelic experiences, I had conceived a spectrum. Like Plato's Divided Line, it had levels, but notions like perpetual perishing broadened it, as well as did other bits and pieces from Whitehead's Categorical scheme. Nonetheless, the basic character of the spectrum I conceived was a linear succession of levels extending from ordinary day-to-day experience, through intensified aesthetic and intellectual experience, ultimately to mystical experience transcendent of sensory-intellectual consciousness, as Stace describes it:

The mystical consciousness is destitute of any sensations at all. Nor does it contain any concepts or thoughts. It is not a sensory-intellectual consciousness at all. Accordingly, it cannot be described or analyzed in terms of any of the elements of the sensory-intellectual consciousness, with which it is wholly incommensurable....

The incommensurability of the mystical with the sensory-intellectual consciousness is also the ultimate reason why we have to exclude visions and voices, telepathy, precognition, and clairvoyance from the category of the mystical.<sup>24</sup>

At this early time, quintessential mystical experience seemed clean and flashing, like the sudden Satori of the Rinzai School of Zen Buddhism or Plato's leaping spark of ultimate understanding.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Stace, W., *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Plato, *Letter VII*, 341d

My mystical experiences were born of conceptual agony, the clash of contradictions in myself that threatened to drive me insane before they became transmuted at the last minute into intense contrast.

### *Kundalini*

I maintained my concept of mystical experience as clean and flashing, even though many phenomena of my psychedelic experiences did not readily fit the scheme. I will recount, for example, an episode that occurred about two years before the experience of perpetual perishing described above.

I had been invited to an academic dinner party as an exemplary psychedelic mystic. I prepared for my role by taking LSD early in the afternoon. By the time the dinner party started, I was in some turmoil because my phone had been ringing all afternoon, and I had not wanted to answer what I presumed to be a call from my father. (This was before answering machines and RJ11 telephone jacks.) When I got to the party, I was relieved to learn that it had simply been the host calling to say the party would start a little later. I began having fun at the party by drawing the woman on my left into conversation that touched her deeply and brought her to tears. Then I turned to the woman my right and began another deepening conversation. Her escort, a hip, liberal Southern Baptist minister, who was on sabbatical from the administration of a very prestigious East Coast University, became alarmed.

He interceded by suggesting I was gratuitously stirring up deep problems in the women and that I was not looking at any problems in myself. I protested that I was very willing to speak to my own problems. I told him of how bothered by the ringing telephone I had felt in the afternoon. In a very open state, I was easily led. He pointed out that I had been afraid to answer the telephone because I was myself in the midst of a psychedelic experience, yet at the same time I touted the experience to others as valuable. He got me to see that I was entertaining two different "selves." Then, in a master stroke he held up two fingers and said, "But the two," and then holding up one finger, "are one." My feeling of contradiction between two selves had become extremely intense. Then it burst. My inquisitor's face became a series of faces dissolving finally into my father's face. A surge of energy sprung up from the base of my spine and exploded into petal-layered white intensity at the crown of my head. In the course of the surge, chimes rang in my ears and fireworks filled my vision.

I was, in the parlance of the time, blown away. My mind was stunned, my body depleted. I had a sense of profound insight, but in addition I thought I might be dying of a heart attack. I felt my heart burst into a great void. I experienced a sense of insight and oneness with the universe that I had always thought of as mystical, but I did not know what to make of the melange of sounds and visions. Only years later did I finally come to understand this as a classic Kundalini experience: The snake of energy comes to life at the base of the spine. It surges up the spine, opening each of the chakras in turn, and each chakra displays its characteristic color and sound. Finally, it opens the crown chakra, in what Hindu literature describes as "the thousand petaled lotus blossom."

I recovered and eventually got home, but this experience began a year or so of increasingly intense and multifarious experiences that I finally could not sustain. I fled California and crashed into a depression that took me six months to crawl out of. Fortunately, it was the sixties. Everything managed to fit in. I came back on firmer ground and was able to cultivate experiences that were clean and flashing, eschewing the florid vision world that burgeoned in psychedelic culture at large.

## V. Cartography of Depth Psychology

Twenty years of reflection and learning since my original paper have taught me that my original notion of physical feeling, while conceptually correct, was far too clean and abstract. My reckoning about the mystical had denigrated most of the causes of physical feeling that provide bases for the panoply of the world's deities. I thought of the deities merely as visions, only an intermediate realm through which one might pass on the way to the mystical. I thought that I had fortunately or skillfully avoided most of these distractions.

I now realize that the universe is filled with multitudes of gods and goddesses, diverse spirits, and hells and heavens of endless variety. All are woven in the great fabric of the past on which physical feeling draws. I now understand that when mental activity is amplified by any of the great array of humankind's sacred practices, or spiritual technologies<sup>26</sup>, a vast cartography is uncovered. Some of the paths charted by this cartography can be described in a more or less linear way, as systematic progressions through a successive hierarchy of states. The vast majority of routes, however, seem to be circuitous and haphazard in the places they come across. One very simple example is that individual people meet different power animals on a first shamanic journey, even though they make the journey in a group. More complicated examples are the variety of dream contents people experience, or the vast array of visions that religious people have experienced.

At the time I wrote my previous paper, I suggested that interpreting the unconscious in terms of Whitehead's doctrine of physical feeling afforded a means to reconcile the Freudian individual unconscious and the Jungian collective unconscious. I reasoned that the inheritance ingredient in the human event comprises both idiosyncratic elements immediately relevant to the thread of personal identity and universal elements that have lower grades of relevance.<sup>27</sup> I no longer think that the contents of the collective unconscious are less relevant in individual inheritance. I now see that the vast cartography we must use to chart human experience encompasses both the Freudian and the Jungian unconscious with no inherent subordination of the one to the other. I see that the cartography encompasses great realms of other experience as well, and the realms are diverse rather than inherently ranked. I have also discovered how charting Grof's perinatal<sup>28</sup> domain along with the Freudian and the Jungian unconscious yields a useful tripartite organization for the cartography of depth psychology.

### *James: Antecedent Themes*

The work of William James provides some important antecedent themes for both Whitehead and Grof. Both share with James an understanding that active exploration of the subconscious is linked to religious awakening.<sup>29</sup> Although Whitehead's discussion of psychology is minimal in his works, he captures the essence of this understanding when he remarks, "Religion is what the individual does with his solitariness" (RM 47). This phrase and Whitehead's subsequent discussion of it repeat James's definition of religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of

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<sup>26</sup> Among the array of spiritual technologies revealed historically, anthropologically are intense singing, dancing, chanting, various alterations of breathing, posture, and behavior, prayer, sensory deprivation, flagellation, bloodletting, immersion baptism, partaking psychoactive plant and animal substances from a vast array of sources, virtual reality environments, experiential psychology techniques, and vision quests.

<sup>27</sup> Gibson, *op. cit.*

<sup>28</sup> See Grof, S., *Beyond the Brain* for a complete presentation of perinatal psychology. Perinatal experience extends from conception to birth. In this period of experience, the archetypal *many* become *one* individual that subsequently develops a past comprising its "unconscious." Grof's description of the process bears a striking analogy with the process of creativity Whitehead describes in the Category of the Ultimate, wherein "The many become one, and are increased by one." (PR 32)

<sup>29</sup> Taylor, E. *op. cit.*, p.76, speaks to James's insight.

individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to the divine."<sup>30</sup>

Pluralism is another important theme Whitehead and Grof share with James. Whitehead says repeatedly that actual entities in their plurality all own an equal claim in the nature of the universe as existing for themselves. He also repeatedly reminds us that there is no basis in the vast sweep of human experience to claim finality for any particular instance of that experience.

### *Peace*

My early idea that mystical consciousness consisted in the peak experience of transcending sensory-intellectual consciousness has given way to understanding it as an ongoing process, rather than a delimited experience or set of experiences. In his concluding chapter in *Adventures of Ideas* Whitehead characterizes mystical consciousness as Peace. He speaks to its derivation from the utmost depth of experience. He emphasizes plurality in many ways, and the ultimate development of the contrasts inherent in it into the Harmony of Harmonies. But Whitehead is not all sweetness and light. He also cautions against numerous bastard offshoots of the mystical experience such as dogma, fanaticism, and the desire for fame, which fall into James's category of *theopathy*.<sup>31</sup>

It is not the moment of mystical experience that marks the end of the path. Not only do more peaks stretch endlessly ahead, but also "Decay, Transition, Loss, Displacement belong to the essence of the Creative Advance" (AI pp. 368-9). For Whitehead, need we be reminded, it is the Process that is critical. It is Process that is Reality.

Leonard Gibson  
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### Abbreviations for references to Whitehead's works:

AI--Whitehead, A. N. (1933). *Adventures of Ideas*. New York: The Macmillan Company.  
PR--Whitehead, A. N. (1929). *Process and Reality*. New York: The Macmillan Company.  
RM-- Whitehead, A. N. (1926). *Religion in the Making*. New York: The Macmillan Company.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>31</sup> James, W. *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures XIV and XV.