

# TRANSPERSONAL SELF AS A CLINICAL CATEGORY: REFLECTIONS ON CULTURE, GENDER, AND PHENOMENOLOGY

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*ABSTRACT:* The article presents a critical analysis of transpersonal psychology in regard to the absence of a transpersonal clinical theory. It examines connections of transpersonal psychology with modernism and postmodernism, and affirms phenomenology as a paradigmatic force and the epistemological tool necessary for the development of the foundational clinical category of the transpersonal self. The latter is juxtaposed with the concept of the states of consciousness in its practical applicability for clinical work. Cultural constructionism and feminist theory are suggested among the perspectives that should inform the development of the transpersonal self as a clinical category. Self is viewed as an internally interrelated system, capable of transformation after ego-transcendence and/or spiritual experience, as shown by phenomenological studies of the Prayer of the Heart. The article calls for the integration of those spiritual traditions positing the ontological validity of personhood, such as Sufism and Tantra, with transpersonal clinical theory.

*- In the ever-grateful memory of Barbro Giorgi — a teacher, a friend.*

In full accordance with the postmodern zeitgeist, the self is lost in transpersonal psychology. However, as the postmodern deconstruction of the self is in itself an attempt to understand subjectivity (Alles Bello, 2006), so the juxtaposition of the concept of the states of consciousness vs. the concept of the self is an attempt to focus transpersonal clinical theory on the human subject. Whether the self or the states of consciousness will constitute the foundational clinical category in transpersonal psychology seems to be a critical question. The transpersonal “larger self”<sup>1</sup>, with its expanded horizons, is not concretized in living praxis, and does not accommodate the interrelatedness of its psychological and spiritual levels, ego-transcendent states, and its mysteriously sustained, overall psychic unity. Whence, the foundational clinical category remains undefined in transpersonal contexts, and the question, “Who is the subject of therapy?” remains unanswered. Are we (transpersonal psychologists) afraid, like Rilke (as in Simms, 1996) to examine the self, because being too person-centered will damage our work? It is the ego-bound self that suffers from globalization, diminishment, fragmentation, change of time-space relations and other societal hazards (Adams, 2007). It is into this context that the spiritual experience occurs, and not otherwise. With that in mind, we can draw on feminism and cultural studies as disciplines that have profoundly

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studied the living, practicing self and have influenced clinical approaches to personhood.

Over the last decade, explorations of the self in transpersonal contexts (Edge, 2001; Greyson, 2000; Haimenl & Valentine, 2001; Miller, 2007a; Parnell, 1996; Sundararajan, 2000), as well as explorations of gender, ethnicity, and culture (Becvar, 2005; Erlichman, 2003; Ferrer, Albareda, & Romero, 2004; Funderburk, 2003; Lesko, 2003; Puhakka, 2001; Ryan, 1998; Sell, 2001; Sky Hiltunen, 2001; Tolbert, 2003; Torchinov, 1996; Wright, 1995), have appeared in transpersonal psychological literature. They are not united by any kind of overarching understanding, but rather present the initial mapping of the field, i.e., separately standing empirical observations. Today, transpersonal psychology's clinical theory remains the only kind of psychological theory hardly touched by the conceptualization of culture and gender, as if the universalistic nature of our lofty vocation places us beyond the scope of ego-related relativities such as gender or ethnicity. However, the philosophical underpinnings to the construction of the self are that of relativism, not that of universalism (as in Schweder, 1991). The absence of a transpersonal theory of the diversity-related self affects transpersonal clinical theory or, better to say, results in the absence of such a theory. To specify, under clinical theory we include the understanding of who is the subject of the clinical work, followed by the realistically working map of the psyche, the concepts of normalcy and pathology, the understanding of what it means to heal or help, and the evaluation of the effectiveness of this work.

Clinical theories, including psychoanalytic, cognitive-behavioral, affective, systemic, constructivist, humanistic-existential, as well as developmental theories of assimilation and learning, grew out of an understanding of who is the subject of therapy, conceptualized within their respective philosophical frameworks. Therefore, the objectives of clinical work are always defined by the underlying theory of a person. This conceptualization has not yet taken place within transpersonal psychology, where the healing practice, the descriptive mapping of spiritual experience, and the ontological assumptions remain disconnected from the knowledge of a person, and from the ontology of personhood. John Herons *Feeling and Personhood* (1992) seems to be an important, and the only, exception here.

In its connection with the thought of Maslow (1962, 1969, 1972), Jung (1966), and Assagioli (1965, 1976), transpersonal clinical practice maintained centeredness on the self with distinct psychoanalytic connotations. That self (as in Chinen, 1986) was contextual. The difficulties in integrating this notion of the self with the accumulated knowledge of spiritual experience led to the fact that clinical practice in transpersonal psychology always retains its analytic, psychoanalytic, and at times humanistic-existential connotations (as in Perry, 1972; Chinen, 1986, 1987, 1996a, 1996b; Scotton, Chinen, & Battista, 1996; and Washburn, 1998, 2003). The burgeoning descriptive psychology of transpersonal states (as in Vich & Rhyne, 1967; Sutich, 1969) expanded this self through simple summation, that is, by adding spiritually related experience to the clinical maps.

While analysis of mental pathology became systematically linked to the states of consciousness model beginning with Wilber's (1977) *Spectrum of Consciousness*, the clinical applicability of this model received a fair critique (Grof, 1996). From the perspective of a practicing clinician, Russell (1986) argued that it is necessary to *integrate* psychology with the key insights of spiritual systems. Vaughan (1979) defined the context, the content, and the process of transpersonal therapy. Nonetheless, the subject of therapy, and consequently the issues of will, choice, intention, and freedom pertaining to human subjectivity, especially spiritually informed subjectivity, remained unexamined.

Rowan's (1993) summary of the specific approaches in transpersonal clinical practice demonstrated rich and original experiential clinical perspectives. Some of them, such as the holotropic work (Grof, 1992, 2000), or Ali's diamond approach (Almaas, 1986, 1988, 1995, 1996), include essential theoretical developments. However, as Cortright pointed out in 1997, the majority of methods remain as techniques only, and a set of even skillfully and thoughtfully arranged techniques could not substitute for clinical theory. Cortright (1997, 2007), Washburn (2003), and Sovatsky (1998, 2004) are among the few transpersonal theorists who are defining the subject of therapy, that is, the human being having a spiritual experience within the continuum of human consciousness. However, with regard to the self in the transpersonal theories spanning from Maslow to Ferrer (Daniels, 2005), they fail to agree in their conceptualization of the transpersonal self and their developmental psychologies.

After the phenomenological investigations of the constitution of the self with spiritual/ ego-transcendent experience by Ron Valle (in Anderson, Braud, & Valle, 1996; Valle & Moss, 1998), and the comparisons made by Amedeo Giorgi between the Husserlian transcendental self and transpersonal self (Aanstoos, 1996), only a few transpersonal researchers picked up the phenomenological approach to the self (Louchakova, 2004a, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, b, c; Miller, 2007a, 2007b). On the contrary, the empiricist approaches, capturing the discrete states of consciousness, prevail over the phenomenological approach in transpersonal psychology. As many studies have demonstrated, the phenomenological, and not the empiricist approach, is the proper means to the study of consciousness, and especially of the living self. Phenomenology investigates the consciousness-self as the lived experience of Husserlian intentional *Erlebnisse* (as in Howard, 1967). In other words, it brackets the representational level of experience, suspending arbitrary judgments and interpretations, and separates the perceptual imprints of the "external" world from the implicitly present structures of consciousness (shown in Gründberg, 2005). Thus, it can study consciousness *per se*, creating the proper ground for an understanding of the constitution of the self. It uses a specific process recommended by Husserl, i.e., bracketing and *epoche* (Balaban, 2002), procedures that are absent in empiricist research. Conversely, the empiricist approach, instead of enquiring into the constructions of the lived experience of the self, simply describes the naïve, arbitrarily happening experience.<sup>2</sup> The empiricist approach can not render a good knowledge of consciousness, since it is not free from a) theory-laden and

value-biased interpretations (and therefore always bound by the ideology of the researcher more than other approaches), and b) does not differentiate between consciousness as such and the impact of the objects of consciousness. Neither can it render information about the construction of a person, as it stays on the level of reflective experience, unable to reach the primary, pre-reflective depths (as in Valle & Moss, 1998), which define the person (Tymieniecka, 1975).

Empiricist studies can successfully tap into the segments of experience interesting to the researcher, without embracing the whole consciousness of the person. While this zooming into a particular horizon of the study is a valid and necessary process in psychological research conducted within the phenomenological attitude (Giorgi, 1985), when conducted within a natural or naïve attitude, it leads to the omitting of significant aspects of experience and the unexamined misconception of the person. Such will be the case of research and therapy based on the implicit (assumed by default) notion of the states of consciousness as the ground of the practice of living (as in Wilber, 2000; Wilber, Engler, & Brown, 1986). It seems to the authors of this article that these theories are more suitable for understanding the structure of human knowledge, specifically scientific knowledge, rather than tools for understanding, and especially making, the *praxis* of human living.

The perspective of consciousness as a collection of states, when uncritically transplanted from the realms of limited linear logic to the realms of actual human practice, especially spirituality-related practice, creates strange results even in the well-intended and welcome attempts to assess the dynamics in the spiritually practicing self. Differentiating between psychopathology and spiritual emergence within the fixed, unchangeable self of general personality theory, where spiritual conditions are but “states”, inevitably leads to assessing the symptoms only, not the whole person in her developmental contexts (as in Johnson & Friedman, in press). However, it is in this wholeness, i.e. capacity to integrate experience (as in Louchakova, 2007a), and the developmental context (as in Washburn, 1998), that defines the relations between the two conditions

Assessment approaches, based on the self as the implicit “states”-idea, leads to the “larger self” becoming the “larger and larger” or “smaller and smaller” self (as in e.g., Friedman & Pappas, 2006), ultimately composed along the lines of the Hegelian “idiotic infinity” (the term that Hegel used for the unlimited accumulation of ideas of the same order). Useful for the limited examination of the constitution of identity on the very secondary reflective level, this approach does not take into account the qualitative and systemic changes, the dynamics of the transmuting emotions, as well as the restructuring, which happen in the self after the ego-transcendent experience (as in Louchakova, 2007a). It belongs to the realms of linear, non-dialectical concepts (and are there such concepts at all, unless we temporarily make them up?), being antithetical both to the dialectical development of the self-idea, and to the reality of the living, spiritually practicing and transcending self. A self constituted of states of consciousness, where ego-transcendence is a state added by simple summation

to other psychological “states,” is purely a model, a hypothetical, non-existent in the phenomenological reality of self, and isolated from social and other contexts. Apart from rare exceptions such as the “spiritual bypass” concept (Welwood, 1983), the ego-transcendent states of this kind of self are not available to influences from within the ego. Hence, in spite of the good intentions of the researchers or practitioners, who are trying to ground themselves in relations to the actual person, the spiritual experience<sup>3</sup> is rendered context-free; its transcendentality becomes absolute.

An alternate tendency sees the spiritual experience as a developmental event (Grof & Grof, 1989; Grof, 2000), leading to internal transformations and a restructuring of the self, and as an alchemical, constitutional, or even a characterological change (Cortright, 2007; Louchakova, 2005a; 2007a, b, c; Sovatsky, 2004; Wall, Peters, McDonald, & Warner, 2007; Washburn, 2003).

This approach reflects the dialectical relations between the levels of the self, and accounts for both the changes within the particular domains of the ego, such as the process of assimilation - pre-reflective and reflective changes in the various spheres of the self - and for the changes of the overall system such as character transformation.

However, even in this latter approach, the realms of the psyche within the ego remain a secondary concern of transpersonal theory, which in this matter uncritically relies on insights from other disciplines. For example, personality theory is accepted without modification, and psychopathology and diagnosis are only mildly examined, disregarding the possibility that the spiritual experience is a source of healing, and as such can cause profound systemic changes in the person. Two outcomes result from this: on the one hand, a reliance on the reflective level accounts, with the primary processes constituting the character (in a Husserlian, phenomenological, epoche-related, pre-reflective sense) unavailable for analysis; and on the other hand, an immunity to considerations of ethnicity and gender.

How so, one may object, if the latest years has witnessed transpersonal publications on gender (Sky Hiltunen, 2001; Schavrien, 2005; Sell, 2001; & Wade, 2000) and diversity (Hastings, et al., 2001)? Acknowledging this positive fact, we distinguish between the descriptive mappings of transpersonal experiences in the various spheres of human activity, and the development of an integral theory of the transpersonally oriented person. Diversity permeates our worlds (Benson, 2001) at the very foundation of the self. As the Bhagavad Gita states (*Srimad Bhagavad Gita Bhasya of Sri Samkaracarya*, 1983, pp. 403–404), “The living embodied person is the field for the emergence of self-knowledge and self-liberation.”

#### TRANSPERSONAL SELF AND CULTURE

The cultural construction argument (Cushman, 1995; Gergen, 2002) significantly eroded the invincibility of spiritual universalism (as in Forman, 1990).

What it means to be a human being is not the same “wherever we go” (Schweder & Bourne, 1991). If culture and mind mutually constitute one another, informing cross-culturally diverse patterns in higher-level mental processes, such as cognition, emotion, motivation, moral reasoning, and psychopathology, and if human development at large is the function of these influences (Rogoff, 2003), why then should spiritual development be exempt from them? Internal and subjective psychospiritual processes, expressed through human practice, are establishing, reproducing, and transforming the cultural systems. Transpersonal psychology is certainly at ease with the fact that an engaged spirituality transforms the world (Rothberg, 2006; Burge, 2006); however, the assumption that the world can exercise an influence on the foundational structures of human consciousness (see argument in Rothberg, 1990) seems to escape the attention of a majority of transpersonalists. In between the universalist and the relativist extremes, the more balanced feminist perspectives suggest that the universal and relative constructs are simultaneous and complementary in the constitution of the mind (Butler, 1997). In that sense, some spiritual states may be specifically linked to the constructs of gender, as, for example, in the case of homosexual mystics (Kakkar, 1992; Kripal, 1998), lesbian healers in American Indian tribes (Allen, 1992), or hermaphroditic mediums in Indian spirituality (Nanda, 1997).

After the epistemological praxis-oriented revisioning of transpersonal psychological theory (Ferrer, 2002) exposed the contradictions in its philosophical premise, the vision of transpersonal psychology as a unified discipline becomes rather questionable. A survey of transpersonal psychology in Mexico, United Kingdom, and the United States showed that people interpret and use it in ways matching the mental climate of the country, their professional profiles, and personal backgrounds (Louchakova & Paul, unpublished data)<sup>4</sup> - once again lending support to the feminist thesis of the contextual and standpoint-oriented nature of psychology (Olesen, 1994). Observations of the work of the European transpersonal association and other transpersonal groups worldwide suggest that the number of eclectic, locally effective transpersonal practices is growing. In the United States, this is a combination of psychoanalytic and somatic therapy approaches, psychosynthesis, spiritual techniques, meditation, existential-humanistic and phenomenological methods, and at times, family systems work. In the United Kingdom transpersonal clinical emphasis is generally on Jungian theory, with more of a Buddhist “bent.” In Romania and Portugal, the focus is on dream work, and in Portugal, on so-called past-life therapy. France and Russia feature holotropic breath work, integrated in France largely within a Freudian and Lacanian paradigm, and in Russia with proliferating “psychotechnologies.” Wilber’s (1986) spectrum of consciousness and lately, integral therapy approaches (Wilber, 2000), Vaughan’s intuitive synthesis of developmental spirituality (Vaughan, 1979), and Grof’s perinatal matrixes theory (Grof, 1992) reign in this eclectic mix. However, the origins of these cultural differences remain unclear, as well as the question of how cultural construction can influence the transpersonal subject of therapy. The latter includes questions such as: what are the cultural power relations between

a therapist and a client, as well as those of agency, will, and action (which remain, as it were, omitted in the analysis).

#### RE-INTERPRETING SELF AS A TRANSPERSONAL CLINICAL CATEGORY

As British transpersonal psychology differentiated itself from the studies of consciousness, two theoretical groups emerged: one, led by Jonathan Shear and Anthony Freeman, founded the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. The other, led by Les Lancaster, David Fontana, and John Rowan, laid down the clinical foundations of British transpersonal psychology. For good or for worse, this differentiation did not happen in the US. However, some of this kind of differentiation may be useful in regards to the development of clinical theory (see Daniels, 2005).

Olga Louchakova remembers her excitement throughout her first encounter with Wilber's transpersonal spectrum of consciousness, and its liberating influence on her thinking as a scientist. Suddenly the flow of chaotic data of exceptional experiences acquired meaning and made sense. Years later, however, states of consciousness resolved into a spiritual cul-de-sac at the emptiness of pure consciousness, and the slow and tumultuous process of reconstruction brought into focus the dismantled human person. This reverse refocusing on the living human subject provides for ego-transcendence into cosmic selfhood (as in Ibn-Arabi, 12<sup>th</sup> century/1975; Sri Sankaracharya, 8<sup>th</sup> century/1978), without which the notion of individual separateness always lingers in the background. Al-Jili (Jili, 1983), the 12<sup>th</sup> century Sufi, conveys:

Each individual of the human species contains the others entirely, without any lack, his [her] own limitation being but accidental... For as far as the accidental conditions do not intervene, individuals are, then, like opposing mirrors, in which one fully reflects the other... (p. xxv)

The self is the psychic mirror of the world's Unity-Of-Everything-There-Is-Alive (Tymieniecka, 1998) while the states of consciousness are but a partiality of the intentional worlds (as in Benson, 2001) in the limitless depths of the self. This unity, in fact, is the "esoteric", unspoken, but true subject of transpersonal psychology – do we not think we study the wholeness of the developing and transforming mind inclusive of the realms beyond the ego (based on Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2007)? The inquiry that allows for the states, and their particularities, to obscure the totality of the subject matter, will remain the enquiry where, in a Kantian sense, our subject matter always will be veiled to us, as a "thing in itself" and never a "thing for us", i.e., unavailable in its essence to our understanding.

Psychology itself, as a social healing system, is fully impacted by its social contexts and itself constitutes culture (Cushman, 1995). The same is true regarding transpersonal psychology. Born on the cusp of modernity and post-modernism, it is never context free. While the apparent roots of transpersonal psychology are in the expanded awareness and spiritual openings of the sixties,

the altered states of consciousness in itself emerged as a part and parcel of economic and politically related social phenomena (Faber, 1981). There are many convincing arguments made by social critics such as E. Said (2000), historians of religion such as C. Ernst (1992) and O. Safi (2006), sociologists of religion (Fitzgerald, 2000; Kippenberg, 2002) and even existential philosophers (Sartre, 1991), who demonstrated that the seemingly politically neutral discourses of the sacred, and the claims to the experiences beyond the ego, contribute to the formation of the values and consequently, to the formation of the social power structures. Therefore, transpersonal psychology is itself an ideology in some aspects. This manifests, for example, in the ways people associated with transpersonal psychology construct their identity around it, or in the arguments of self-reification as the current one. As an ideology, transpersonal psychology counteracted secularization by offering plausible, scientifically inquiring, spiritual alternatives to the psychological reduction of a person. However, it did so uncritically, as if being possessed by this task. The prodigal child of modernism<sup>5</sup>, transpersonal psychology inherits its universalistic perspective (as shown in Ferrer, 2002). Post-modernism announces the loss of the self (as in Collier, 1977), and, in full compliance with its message, transpersonal psychology deconstructs the self into perceptual states. An uncritical stance presents these ideas as solely emerging from the analysis of the world's spiritual systems, while in fact their emergence is totally warranted by, and rooted in, the existing social and economic conditions in the west.

The transpersonal discoveries of the structures of consciousness within the world's spiritual systems emerged within the seemingly "objective" (i.e. science-bound) western mind, in the process of the western person's examination of the western, male-centered versions of the world's spirituality<sup>6</sup>. The cross-cultural investigations in transpersonal psychology remind us of the (by now, classic) Malinowski (1967) participant observation studies where the observers-participants of the complex cultural phenomenon remain un-reflected regarding their original cultural identity. This is the model of the researcher, "who could also write complex, dense theories about what is studied" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.7), claiming the "objective" scientific stance.<sup>7</sup> In anthropology, the interpretive component in these studies has to be acknowledged for the goodness of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994); not so in transpersonal investigations where the theorists' biases are, until now, taken for granted. This situation has rare exceptions (as in Asante, 1984), when the representatives of indigenous spiritual systems talk for themselves, thus decreasing the heterogeneous bias. To give further ground to this critique it is worth mentioning that, a) interdependent (East), independent (West) (Hsu, 1985), autonomous-relational (Turkey) (Kagitcibasi, 1996), and person as a community (Africa) (Ogbonnaya, 1994) self-construals experience the world and practice in it differently, b) the notion and the context of religion itself differs in different cultures (Fitzgerald, 2000; Schweder, 1991), and c) religious studies are bound by the ideology of the cultural system (Fitzgerald, 2000). These premises have yet to be integrated in transpersonal theory, in their specific relevance to its praxis.

The “empty” self (Cushman, 1995) teams up well with the western versions of Theravada Buddhism (Aronson, 2004; Carey, 2005; Rubin, 1996) creating the situation where the culturally constructed, consumerism-bound vacuity of the internal world becomes justified as a natural state of things, i.e. the condition of “no-self,” in the manner of existential self-deception. However, as Engler (1993) pointed out early on, the crux of the difficulty in this matter is addressed quite simply: “...but one has to be somebody before one can be nobody” (p. 120). Kornfield (1993), further addressing this difficulty, states, “If we are to end suffering and find freedom, we can’t keep these two levels of our lives separate” (p. 67). In the case of the contemporary western self, afflicted by the social changes of the 20th–21st centuries (Adams, 2007), the matter is not only in gaining a mature self, but also in repairing its damage (Louchakova, 2004d). The damaged self is internally empty, and it is this emptiness of the existential damage that gets mistaken for the spiritual emptiness of all things.

These kinds of attribution errors are not exclusively specific to transpersonal psychology; sneaking in through the interdisciplinary cracks, they are the virtual plague of all cross-cultural studies of esotericism and spirituality (Louchakova, 2006c). In the case of our discipline, however, the confusion is aggravated because the self, as a category, is already absent, and the understanding of its internal structures are already confused. Whence, the process of ego-transcendence also remains unclear. Once, Arthur Hastings quoted an Institute of Transpersonal Psychology alumnus, an accomplished therapist, who said in regard to the transpersonal knowledge of ego-transcendence: “That’s what makes the mainstream psychologists shake their heads about us” (Hastings, personal communication, 1/22/2007).

Ego-transcendence is, probably, not just one kind of process, but a generic name for many mental processes sharing the intuitively captured common denominator of a canceled sense of individual or separate “I” (Louchakova, 2007b). Examples are: transcendence into social contexts (Sullivan, 1950/1971, pp. 198–226), the transcendence of individual consciousness into consciousness as such in Husserl (Giorgi, A., 1985; Giorgi, A., & Giorgi, B., 2003; Giorgi, B., 1998, 2005), ego-transcendence into the cosmic self (as in Louchakova, 2005a; 2005c), yogic ego-dissolution into the perceptual void (Patanjali, 1976), and so forth. While transpersonal psychology naturally studies mind beyond the ego (Grof, 1992; Wade 1996; Walsh & Vaughan, 1980), the very process of ego-transcendence is poorly defined as a dissolution of the sense of the individual “I” (whatever that means), and understood in the Jungian sense, i.e., as the emergence of realms related to the collective unconscious, or as the emergence of non-locality (as in Miller, 2007b). Within this mixture, there may be the conditions of dissociation (Miller, 2007b), as well as the culturally-constructed void self. Thus, the mind in these conditions may remain within the ego domain, even if a separate form of “I” is not perceived in the moment. To sort out this puzzle, it is necessary, in our opinion, a) to adopt the phenomenological approach to the study of ego-transcendence<sup>8</sup> in different contexts, and b) to establish the transpersonal category of the self as the field of ego-transcendence, where the construction of the ego-self and the modes of

reduction resulting in the transcendence of the ego and reconstitution of the self can be studied (as in Louchakova, 2007b).

While existentialism extensively studied the self *and* ego-transcendence (e.g. Sartre, 1991; Sleeth, 2007), transpersonal psychology, except for rare exceptions such as the culture-related examination of Buddhist practitioners (Carey, 2005), does not dialog with these findings, even though the two disciplines are tightly knit together (as in Moss, 1999). The issues regarding whether or not the essential mental substratum of ego-transcendence is, indeed, the transcendence of locality, and what processes are associated with the cancellation of the ego, are not clear. However, for transpersonal psychology this will be a critical clinical area.

At best, the self is known in transpersonal psychology as a system that organizes experience (Washburn, 2003; Wilber, 1986) around the spiritual center (Perry, 1985; Washburn, 2003), and opens the way into the “non-representational realms of being” (Cook-Greuter, 2000, pp. 93–94). Only a few researchers seriously post the question: what, in fact, constitutes this organizational faculty? The major players in the constitution of the self, i.e., culture and gender, which define the foundational processes of knowing (Schweder, 1991), do not receive much attention, and their relations to human fulfilment and developmental completion are not addressed. Therapeutic techniques, uncritically adopting the hidden universalistic perspective, are prone to strengthen the coping-in-isolation for a masterful, bounded, empty self (Cushman, 1995) at the expense of an engaged, warm, interrelational, and meaningful human life.

One of the authors, Louchakova, grounds the above conclusion in her own disillusioning experience of transplanting spiritual methods from culture to culture without consideration for the type of cultural self. After teaching spirituality in the Russian underground in the 1980s and 1990s (Kungurtsev & Louchakova, 1997), she used the same set of practices in her spiritual school in the United States. Used in Eastern Europe, her methodology increased tolerance, social engagement, and personal empowerment. After seven years of the study, a group of her American students, all non-dualists, advanced meditators, and successful professionals, had the task of incorporating several members from another spiritual group. The students responded with fear and anger; they were definitely protective of their space. This led to the examination of the personal changes emerging in the process of the training. As it came out, the spiritual methodology that Louchakova used had a tendency to strengthen the already existing type of cultural self. Consequently, it strengthened community engagement in the context of collectivist Russia, and strengthened individualistic tendencies in the US.

The absence of the transpersonal category of the self, which would be the subject in an examination of culture-related processes, prevents transpersonal psychotherapy from developing a congruent clinical theory. Genderless, disembodied states of consciousness cannot be subjects for therapy; only a living person can be that. The concept of a person as a composition of states

easily surrenders to the dualism implicit in the patriarchal view of a person. Rosen, the founder of topological phenomenology, says in regard to *Awakening Intuition* (Vaughan, 1979):

Reading between the lines of Vaughan's exposition, what came through to me was her apparent grounding in the patriarchal tradition that equates the material body (matter, mater, mother) with maya, with illusion, personal hang-ups, a dualistic state of impurity – i.e., with the imperfections of the finite. Spirit, on the other hand, is seen as transpersonal purity and perfect truth, the unitive awareness of the infinite which left the body behind.” (Rosen, 2006, p. 225)

The unexamined assumption of a mind-body dualism limits transpersonal psychology in addressing psychosomatic conflicts that frequently happen in spiritual awakening, and prevents the discipline from a dialogue with the other disciplines that study human consciousness. The welcome departures from dualistic thinking (as in Cortright, 2007) need to be grounded in the transpersonal theory of the human subject. Whether transpersonal psychology will work its understanding of the self off the semiotic self of pragmatists (Wiley, 1994), the self of depth-psychology (Bacal & Newmann, 1990; Kohut, 2001; Stein, 1998; Young-Eisendrath & Hall, 1991), the psychoanalytic self (López-Corvo, 1995), the postmodern self afflicted by social change (Adams, 2007), the endangered self of 20th century theology (Fenn & Capps, 1992), the self of a philosophical psychology (Jopling, 2000), the egological self of phenomenology (Howard, 1967), or the self as described or conceptualized within any other discipline - the mind-body dualism, pervasive to the western thinking, has to be bracketed in order for the spiritual experience to reveal its true relations to the person.

While advancements of phenomenology (Bermudez, Marcel, & Eilen, 1998; De Preester & Knockaert, 2005; Rosen, 2006; Todres, 2007) are bridging the gap between thought and the body, the monumental task of reformulating the dualistic assumptions in transpersonal psychology remains untackled because of the heterogeneity of the field and its origins in different areas of knowledge. When the notion of body-energy is brought into the analysis of spiritual development (as in Louchakova & Warner, 2003; Washburn, 2003), it is confronted with the millennia-old dualistic bias embedded in language and culture informing the written and oral traditions in transpersonal psychology. Dualism is in our memes (informational cultural unit in ethology, analogous to genes in biology), and along with it, the body remains as the seat of egotism, while spiritual states retain their disembodied status. While latest works bring more of the systematic analysis and paradigmatic reframing of the “embodiment” towards a more consistent and internally congruent perspective (as in Anderson, 2008; Ferrer, 2006), the concept of the subtle centers of consciousness, i.e. chakras (Sanskrit), lataif (Arabic), tan-tiens (Chinese) and the like, remains a controversial subject. Except for a few publications (Costello, 2006; Anderson, 1996; Louchakova & Warner, 2003; Louchakova, 2007b, c), both the spiritual experience and the unconscious remain disembodied in transpersonal thought.

When the spiritual consciousness transcends the bodily aspects of corporeity (materiality) and the body-schema, this understanding becomes incorporated in the integral consciousness (as in Cortright, 2007; Wall et al., 2007), where the body acts as the gates into this consciousness. The relationship between spiritual meanings, psychological meanings, and corporeity, however, may be much more complex than just a simple “transcendence” of the latter (Louchakova, 2007a, b, c). The subtle materiality of the body, subtle energies (Louchakova & Warner, 2003) which mediate the spiritual states (Ouspensky, 1949), and distant mental influences (Braud, 2003) create to the foundations of transpersonal psychology in ways physics creates the foundation of engineering (Tart, 1997).

With the mind-body split invisibly present in transpersonal theory, the archetypal transpersonal messianic Hero (as in Perry, 1972) is bound to journey towards transcendence of the body, opting for the expansion of the quasi-disembodied, deceptively free of egoic meaning-making, but in fact totally ego-constituted, empty self. As shown by the feminist authors (Keller, 1986; Starhawk, 1988), the mind-body split, in fact, constitutes this kind of a self. While the onset of the separation of mind and body is associated with the vilification of women and the beginnings of a patriarchal society, the individuation of the “hero” in this situation is but a compensatory movement responding to the “angst” of the divided self (Keller, 1986). Consequently, the model of the transpersonal hero moving towards the ideal of enlightenment, inherently patriarchal in western cultural discourse, collapses against a “reality check” in the lives of transpersonal psychologists themselves. The “left behind” body strikes back.

In September 2006, during the conference “100 years of Transpersonal Psychology” of the American Association of Transpersonal Psychology and the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Louchakova (2006d, September) facilitated a celebratory panel of women, who have made important contributions to transpersonal psychology. When invited to speak about what was central to their lives, five out of eight panelists addressed the sufferings of their bodies. The emphasis was not on states of consciousness, evolution, or transcendence. In the lives of many panelists, the body suffered some kind of affliction. They spoke of cancers, traumas, surgeries, stresses, autoimmune disorders, and so forth. What was going on? It is a known fact that in the culture at large, the female body continually takes upon itself the shadow of the patriarchal power structures (Cushman, 1995). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this manifested in neurasthenia. In the 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the tyranny of the perfected body image resulted in psychosomatic disorders, bulimia and eating disorders, breast cancer, and so on. Is it possible that the cultural shadow, such as the mind-body split, cultural complexes (Singer & Kimbles, 2004), and patriarchal gender/power issues, remains hidden in the western journey to enlightenment? Can it be that women-leaders “live out” this “transpersonal shadow” in their bodies? The foundational category of the self, that is, the understanding of, to whom the process is happening, is methodologically central to the answers to this and similar questions.

To formulate its central clinical category of “self,” transpersonal psychology needs to embrace the post-postmodern paradigm shift. Phenomenology frequently is named as a post-postmodern paradigm (Backhaus, 2001, 2004; Rosen, 2006). The phenomenological perspective, however, challenges some assumptions implicit in transpersonal psychology. These include the assumption that spiritual experience evidences advanced stages of consciousness, and the certainty of its emergence as a superstructure to the “non-spiritual” configuration of the self. Phenomenological investigations not only show that spiritual experience restructures the self (Louchakova, 2005a, 2007a, b, c), but also suggest that the reorganization of the self in spiritual awakening can be restorative to self rather than signify the advancement of one’s consciousness development (Louchakova, 2005c; 2007a).

If transpersonal psychologists are to engage with the cultural and religious studies, the feminist studies and theology are the other important partners for dialog. Beginning with Simon de Beauvoir, feminist theorists sought recognition of the other, not as a female object but as an equal, feeling, thinking, acting, choosing and emoting conscious subject. Irigaray and Whitford (1991) and Kristeva (1982) showed that gender and sexuality are de facto social and linguistic constructs, which rest on hidden assumptions of power and authority. Chodorow (1999) and Benjamin (1998) demonstrated that gender and authority always and inevitably impact the clinical setting. Grosz (1994) articulated the structure of the self’s subjectivity and embodiment, and the function of the self as a locator. Keller (1986), mentioned above, examined how the historically formed mind-body split obfuscates the self, makes it subject to “existential angst”, and underlies the compensatory movement of individuation. These and later developments in the feminist theology concerning the self (Hollywood, 2002) and the embodiment of spiritual experience (Lanzetta, 2005) can be very useful to transpersonal psychology in re-positioning its discourse.

#### THE LIVING SELF IN SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS

In contrast to the Buddhist notion of no-self, traditions such as Indian Tantra, Vedanta, Sufism, and Christian mysticism posit the ontological value of selfhood. These traditions, not surprisingly, are less touched upon in transpersonal analysis where self is not only absent in clinical setting, but also unpopular in its spiritual connotations. A devotional attitude in these traditions also may present a problem for the non-duality-oriented transpersonal rationalist (Louchakova, 2004b).

Self and no-self based traditions differ in regard to the experience of the ultimate reality in the human condition. While a majority of mystics agree on the ontological indivisibility and non-duality of the ultimate reality, there is a distinction of how the latter is *lived*. Self-based traditions imply that the attainment of the ultimate reality during one’s embodied existence requires a transformation of the understanding of the self, leading to non-dual perception. In contrast to this, Dzogchen or Mahamudra (“no-self” based

traditions), suggest that canceling the production of meaning and an emphasis on the changes in perception towards non-duality warrants the attainment of the ultimate reality. Another distinction between the two approaches is the motivational setting of the practice: open-ended/inspired in Tibetan Buddhism, and devotional in Hesychasm (Christian mysticism). Yet another distinction is that in Hesychasm, the ultimate reality is reached by transcending awareness of the body in the Spiritual Heart center. By contrast, Buddhist Tantra (“no-self” based tradition) does not associate the attainment of the ultimate reality with any kind of focusing, but involves the maintaining of an evenly spread awareness embracing equally all rising phenomena (Dunn, Hartigan, & Mikulas, 1999; Lutz, Dunne, & Davidson, 2007; – as cited in Louchakova & Kozhevnikov, 2007). Due to these and other distinctions, there are arguments in the oral tradition (Carol Whitfield, personal communication, May 1994; Swami Dayananda Saraswati, personal communication, November 1996) suggesting that “s(S)elf” and “no-self” centered paths reach different fruitions.

Self-based traditions pay attention to the organization of the living self, including its internal hierarchical ordering (Louchakova, 2005a) and the inner interrelatedness of its constituents (Louchakova, 2007a), as opposed to “no-self” traditions, which see the internal reality as egalitarian and homogenous (Louchakova, 2007c). As the second-person phenomenological analysis of the accounts of volunteers interested in self-knowledge shows, the living self entails both the egological (including the self-referencing cognitions) and non-egological (without I-centered thinking) conditions (Louchakova, 2005a, 2006a, b, 2007b). Attribution of an ontological primacy to one of those two conditions may be at the root of spiritual systems with “s(S)elf” or “no-self” based philosophies. An understanding of the respective roles of each of those conditions requires further phenomenological studies regarding the constitution of the self.

Differentiation of experience of the self into the egological and non-egological conditions, made by the current author (Louchakova, 2006b; 2007b), is a good example of how phenomenological investigations of the self in transpersonal psychology, done in the spirit of fidelity to the actual experience of the self, can contribute to the broader philosophies and clinical theories. Egology, i.e. the studies of the psychic unity of the self, run back to neo-Kantians, classic phenomenology, and existentialism (as in Howard, 1967); however, these studies were always conducted within the self-referencing frame of mind in the introspective, first-person based self-investigations. The differentiation between the egological and non-egological configurations of the self renders insights into human development and transformation, unavailable otherwise. While both self-referencing and no-self-referencing states of mind are within the structure of the lived experience, it is only the egological (self-referencing) condition that contains the constitutional shifts reflecting major changes in development and health (as in Louchakova, 2007b). Traditions focused on examinations of the egological condition, such as Kundalini Tantra, maintain that the gradual evolution of the bodily forms of awareness, and the dynamics of the psychological and spirituality-related cognitions associated with it, i.e., the body-based map of the intentional consciousness (Louchakova, 2004c),

serve as a code for the spiritual development through the life-span (Harrigan, 2005; Louchakova & Warner, 2003; Louchakova, 2003; 2004d). The chakras, in this system, serve as the centers of internal organization, that is, the clusters of perception/meaning, arranged in developmental order. Meanings (both within and beyond the individual identity), associated with chakras and centers of embodied consciousness, serve as the gateways into spiritual experiences (Louchakova & Warner, 2003). Non-egological condition, i.e. the state of mind with no distinct self-referencing cognitions, is characterized by a completely different structure of the self, which may not substantiate any developmental changes in the self (Louchakova, 2008). Whether egological condition coincides with the ego-based, and non-egological - with the non-ego based states of mind, has to be researched. However, it is clear that these conditions are not developmentally sequential, but are the equal participants in the day-to-day workings of the mind.

Self-based traditions ground their understanding of human development in the direct intuition of the interior structures of the self. Hesychasm, for example, deems the *self as always relational*, and the spiritual ascent as an essentially dialogical process within the relational constitution of the self (Louchakova, 2005a). Sufism tells us that only the self devoid of power structures, like an unbroken mirror, can behold Union (Metin Bobaroglu, personal communication, September 13, 2001). Overcoming the internal power hierarchies, the self becomes fit for non-duality, where the process of transformation consists in the ego being “consumed” by its internal counterpart, the Self<sup>9</sup> (Louchakova, 2005a).

Comparing the understanding of egological and non-egological forms of self in spiritual traditions allows one to proceed with more discretion in transpersonal theory building. One may argue, however, that spiritual systems such as Hesychasm, Tantra, or Sufism are less popular than Buddhism among western psychologists for the following reasons: Hesychasm is nearly “outlawed” in Western Christianity itself (Louchakova, 2008) ; Tantra, domestically in India, is considered by some to be a cult (Louchakova & Warner, 2003; Handa, 2004); and Sufism is considered by many feminists as a climax of the patriarchal tradition.

The latter will be a good example for the need of cultural considerations in the cross-cultural transfer of the traditions. Sufism and transpersonal psychology share a belief that the ego is a societal hazard (as in Perry, 1985); however, they take different positions with regard to this assumption. While transpersonal psychology has turned away from the ego-centered processes, Sufism has specifically focused on neutralizing the ego’s destructive tendencies in favor of the needs of collectively developing community. Totally embedded in the multifold cultural and historical contexts of Islam (as in Said, 2002), Sufism has contributed to the development of cultural coping mechanisms and resilience to trauma in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia. This protean embeddedness in contexts makes it difficult to separate the transformative essence of Sufism from its cultural make-up. In the course of history, Sufism has behaved like a growing palm tree: its outer layers turning rigid and dead, to be shed - as happened, for example, with the conservative and corrupted forms of Sufism of the Ottoman empire - while its living core is

always in a process of cultural adaptation, such as the spontaneous dhikr<sup>10</sup> communities of the custodians of the sacred earth sites in Kyrgyzstan (Aitpaeva, 2007).

The logic of spiritual development in self-positing traditions is different from the transpersonal understanding of human development with its levels of “larger and larger” self-identification (as in Friedman & Pappas, 2006). Rather, these traditions present the process of the decrease (of ego) and the increase (of Self) within the intentional relational field (Louchakova, 2005a). The living self is transformed rather than increased (as in Cortright, 2007; Wall et al., 2007). The study of self-related practices, such as the Hesychastic Prayer of the Heart, shows the self as an integral system with implicit, highly sophisticated psychosomatics, involved in a process of dynamic progressive self-organization (Louchakova, 2005a, 2007b, c). Non-dual aspect of the self, i.e. Self as non-locality (Miller, 2007b), remains always connected with the aspect of separateness via the topological flip-flops of meaning (as in Louchakova 2005a; Rosen, 2006).

#### CONCLUSION

Informing transpersonal inquiry with a developing awareness of the cultural contexts, and with knowledge of spiritual traditions that have studied the living relational self, will lead to practical, clinically applicable models that serve as a foundation for transpersonal clinical theory. Phenomenological analysis of these relations cuts through the simplistic reintegration of the body and mind, and brings in a Unicity of Being (Yiangou, 2007), or the indivisible continuum of life (as in Tymieniecka, 1998) as a therapeutic premise. This premise leads to the possibility of the socio-communal transpersonal therapy (Backhaus, 2004), which recognizes the inseparable unity of the spiritual experience of the individual, her individuation, and the larger circles of her life in society.

Spiritual experience is always a “full person” event (Washburn, 2003; Louchakova, 2006a; 2007b). Spiritual experience involves all modalities of awareness, such as perception, affect, cognition, hyletics (sense of corporeality), space-time perception, etc., even in cases when conscious awareness during this experience remains limited or dissociated from the body (as in Miller, 2007b). It is arguably the most wholesome experience available in the human condition (Louchakova, 2006a). The development of phenomenological perspectives of the self in regard to its spiritual experience can connect transpersonal theory with the phenomenological body, and transpersonal clinical theory with the neuroscientific brain (as in Thompson, 2006) and with the clinical theory of psychosomatic disorders (Louchakova, 2007b; Louchakova & Warner, 2003; Fogel, 2008). Hopefully, this will make the transpersonal dialog with the rest of psychology far more effective. To that end, as well as for the benefit of the therapeutic client, we have offered this analysis.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The term “larger self” migrated into transpersonal psychology from ordinary language, and became an occasionally used common-place. In spite of its evident connection with the various theories in psychology which interpret the self in its contexts beyond the ego (Arthur Hastings, personal communication, October 18, 2007), the meaning of the term was never defined.

<sup>2</sup>For the readers not intimately familiar with phenomenology: this is a major distinction that defines classic phenomenology as an approach to understanding a person and consciousness, and a major element in the psychological phenomenological research method.

<sup>3</sup>For the purpose of this argument, spirituality, mysticism, numinosity etc. related experiences are presented under the common sense term “spiritual experience.”

<sup>4</sup>This research project, titled “Transpersonal Psychology Worldwide – Self-Reflection Project” , was conducted in 2004–2005 as the on-line survey. The study was made possible by the internal grant from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology.

<sup>5</sup>Universalistic assumptions and secularization are the critical features of modernism.

<sup>6</sup>The male-centeredness of transpersonal psychology manifests not in the demographics of its theorists, but in the structure of its major theories, implicitly reflecting the mind-body split.

<sup>7</sup>For instance, in Turkey, Olga Louchakova heard complaints from the local Sufis that they are studied by American scholars as “natives,” with no credit for the knowledge they generously share.

<sup>8</sup>Acknowledging the contributions of the prior studies of beyond the ego experience, which undoubtedly broke new grounds in psychology, we emphasize that the subject of the study in this case is specifically ego-transcendence, as an act and a fact of consciousness-self, distinct from the studies of the maps of discrete states beyond the ego.

<sup>9</sup>Self- based spiritual ontologies relate to the ultimate reality as Self, and we use capitalized Self as synonym for ultimate reality, while the self with the small “s” relates to the living person.

<sup>10</sup>Dhikr (Arabic) is the central spiritual practice of Sufism.

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