



# The Threshing Floor

September 2014

Newsletter of the Guild for Psychological Studies

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**Guild Vision:** The Guild envisions a world in which the significance of each person's truth, authority, and inspired purpose finds fulfillment in life and community.

**Guild Mission:** Guild seminars offer a way of psychological and spiritual transformation that inspires individuals to live their purpose, expand consciousness, and discover and create meaning in their lives and community.

## Living in the Future ... a Psychological Response

For most readers of *The Threshing Floor*, “psychology” means the depth psychology pioneered by Freud and (especially) Jung. This psychology had its essential formation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Jung's formative years would have been characterized by a Europe that had largely been at peace since the defeat of Napoleon. Modern industrialized states had come into existence, led by Great Britain and the newly constituted Germany. Science had been progressing on every front from biology (evolution) to modern chemistry to the new social sciences and (experimental) psychology. Technology had brought the telegraph and telephone, the railroad and steamship. For many, the future looked to be one of constant improvement in the human condition.

However industrial technologies had also been deeply “disruptive” (to use a buzzword favored by today's Silicon Valley entrepreneurs). The ancient ties to the land and the social arrangements characteristic of predominately agricultural societies had been replaced for many by city life, the “alienation” of the individual from his or her labor (Marx), and social isolation even in the midst of unprecedented opportunities. To many intellectuals and artists, what would come to be called “modernity” was destroying what had been the human soul. They reacted to modernity by portraying its stark realities and in some cases devising alternative forms of community or lifestyle (not unlike what would happen in the 1960s and 1970s.)

Jung's own case is particularly interesting in that it embodies both visions—rationalism and the “Romantic” reaction. As Jung himself frequently acknowledged, he had two “selves.” One was the scientist who sought to establish a theory that would be adequate to the full range of phenomena of the psyche. Jung's other self was perhaps a sort of shaman or ancient “wise one” who was rooted in and dwelled among the numinous presence of the archetypes, those fixed stars of the inner sky. The message that Jung would offer was a way of healing and restoration for the modern individual.

Ultimately Jung insisted on maintaining both visions. He saw his psychology as empirical, investigating and describing the “psychological facts” portrayed in dreams, myth, and other images. At the same time he believed that the modern individual could, through therapy, become reconnected to the soul, and draw upon its resources, hidden in “the unconscious,” while still remaining “modern man.”

Today in the early 21st century we live in a very different historical situation. The industrial modernity that had disrupted the “archaic soul” would itself be wracked by war and the clash of ideologies in the 20th century and profoundly disrupted by new technologies of computing, media, and communications. Today, we no longer naively accept any overarching narrative of progress or decline, whether it comes from the Left or Right. The present is lit by jagged images: the towers burning in New York, endless wars in the Middle East, a return to clashes between police and protesters on our city streets. But the present is

also lit by the glow of a galaxy of screens—desktops, laptops, tablets, and phones, constantly insinuating themselves into our awareness.

Let's look at the economic shifts of the first decades of the new century. As the center of gravity of developed economies began to shift from relatively labor-intensive industry to automation, information and services, the implicit compact between worker and employer is breaking down. Today's emerging technologies require less and less human labor or even expertise to create value. Capitalism depends on the worker's ability to demand enough value in wages to afford to consume the products and services being created. When combined with a global "race to the bottom" technology such as artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and robotics increasingly marginalizes the human worker even as it enthralls the consumer. Even as the individual and his or her potential continues to be featured in advertising and promoted by liberal ideology, the actual status of the individual is becoming problematic.

Against this background, what happens to depth psychology and the task of the modern individual as envisioned by Jung? Today, in "medial modernity" the individual is being hollowed out (or perhaps turned inside out). What we cherish as private experience of an inner world looks to the ascendant algorithms to be a "profile," a set of numbers or categories, a demographic. The consumer is a commodity. But the technology does more than data mine the personal psyche. It also relentlessly encourages us to display our self as images moment to moment ("selfies"), or to share (or agree with) those abbreviated sentiments called tweets. Everything we do or express is watched over by cameras or scanners, analyzed as text or image, as we walk beneath the drone-crossed sky.

Given this shift in the logical status of the individual, a psychology that relies upon an individual having a fixed nature and boundaries seems increasingly irrelevant. Further, Jungian depth psychology and the task of "individuation" depend on the ego's relationship to "the unconscious." However, as we understand more about how the brain processes information, neuroscience broadly agrees with depth psychology that most (all?) cognition and decision-making is not initiated by the "ego." Just as we now know that memory is more a reconstruction than a recording of events, the "ego" is more like

the protagonist of a constantly rewritten story. There is certainly an *experience* of the "I," the subject, but there really isn't an *entity* that corresponds to it, in the brain or elsewhere.

Indeed, the experience of post-modernity is that "mind" is becoming *distributed* or networked, rather than being confined to the brains of individuals. What is happening when your phone keeps your day organized, a bevy of websites suggest where to find what you want, and navigation apps tell you how to get there? What is happening is that just as our brain carries on all sorts of cognitions without "conscious" (ego) awareness, cognition and decisions are increasingly being made by computer algorithms interconnected by a vast network. Jung quoted the alchemist as saying "the greater part of the soul is outside the body." Increasingly the structure of cognition is to be found outside the human individual and indeed, the human species as a whole.

As individuals we still seek (and need) a sense of purpose, meaning, and relationship to the world around us. Many Jungians are content to carry on with the task of helping individuals pursue self-understanding and connect to the resources of "the unconscious." To some extent this places depth psychology within the larger "New Age" or "human potential" movements. Today's actual life of the soul in culture (including technology) can be either ignored or condemned, with the suggestion that we as individuals (or more grandiosely the world itself) might be somehow rescued or restored to the archaic wholeness. We can be advised to face our shadow to address ideological or ethnic conflicts. Restore our relationship to the Earth and begin to reverse global warming. Rediscover the simple pleasures of a lower tech. world.

These well-meaning suggestions founder themselves on the reality that the soul cannot "unthink" what it has once thought or constituted itself as. The soul, Giegerich tells us, always thinks, and always starts its thinking anew from the historical situation in which it finds itself. When we look at what we would restore, we need to realize that the soul, like Elvis, has already "left the building."

What can we say about the new form of consciousness that is emerging in our actual

existence in the world today? "It's hard to predict anything, especially the future"--Yogi Berra may or may not have said that. Some of the best science fiction writers (people like William Gibson or Cory Doctorow) would agree that their craft is not about the future, but about catching up to what is already present, but not yet fully known in its implications.

Fortunately, there is another aspect of Jung's legacy that can show us how to proceed. Jung saw himself as a scientist and a shaman, but he was also a quite good phenomenologist. A phenomenologist is someone who takes an attitude and cultivates a skill of observation that allows what is happening (the phenomenon) to express itself in its own terms. (Jung, affirmed by Giegerich, reminds us that a dream, myth, or cultural phenomenon has "everything it needs" within its unfolding.)

As we attend to the phenomena, we can I believe find some meaning and comfort in the fact that while the future may not be about us, that doesn't mean that "human" qualities are not needed. On a practical level, whatever new form of consciousness may be emerging is, like all such things, naked and largely unprotected. If civilization is destroyed by widespread wars, or the environment becomes incapable of sustaining it, whatever has been achieved logically will be lost empirically.

At present, despite its growing power and scope, the cognition of the network is limited in its ability to operate on itself and evolve, to recognize larger contexts, to understand the role of history, or to generate a compelling story or account of itself. These are all human capabilities and qualities. At some point these human qualities may become sublated (negated yet retained and refined) in a form of consciousness that we can scarcely imagine. If this process is successful, it will be in part because we as human beings reflected and chose wisely, helping the soul know what it is creating.

*You are invited to continue this conversation, by sending a comment to [The Threshing Floor](#), or send me email at [hrh@well.com](mailto:hrh@well.com). I am also continuing to ask for you to express any interest in a Bay Area discussion group that can pursue these or related topics this Fall/Winter or perhaps the coming Spring.*

*Harry Henderson*

## You Reading This, Be Ready

Starting here, what do you want to remember?  
How sunlight creeps along a shining floor?  
What scent of old wood hovers, what softened  
sound from outside fills the air?

Will you ever bring a better gift for the world  
than the breathing respect that you carry  
wherever you go right now? Are you waiting  
for time to show you some better thoughts?

When you turn around, starting here, lift this  
new glimpse that you found; carry into evening  
all that you want from this day. This interval you  
spent  
reading or hearing this, keep it for life -

What can anyone give you greater than now,  
starting here, right in this room, when you turn  
around?

~ William Stafford ~

## September Birthdays

Judith Peterson	Sep 2
Charlotte Brown	Sep 5
John Hopkins	Sep 5
Damilia Loupy	Sep 11
Eliane Wilson	Sep 11
Nancy Travers	Sep 12
Jon Orvik	Sep 13
Elli Norris	Sep 15
Barbara Lyon	Sep 20
Wilene Chang	Sep 22
Patricia Wilson	Sep 26
John Soderberg	Sep 28
Howard Lewis	Sep 29
Robin Taylor	Sep 29

## Faith Mason 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday Request

Please make your contributions to Four Springs Phoenix fund for my 65th birthday. The kitchen still needs: blender, large toaster, food processor. Tim did a great job of supplying pots and pans etc. and many participants brought various utensils and spices. The June seminar brought life to the new lodge which was enjoyed by all. Thanks!

### Donations

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### Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this newsletter (by contributors other than staff and directors) are the writers' and not necessarily an official position of the Guild.

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