

# ALCHEMICAL IMAGES, IMPLICIT COMMUNICATION, AND TRANSITIONAL STATES

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The symbols and images of alchemy, like Jung's view of the psyche, cannot be fully defined in conceptual or theoretical language. As Joseph Henderson said in a 1982 lecture, "You see, our psychological point of view is not just a rational, scientific procedure but one that evokes the nature of the unconscious and its corresponding imagery."<sup>1</sup> As I understand it, Jung's method relied less on abstraction, intellectually-derived concepts, or biological models and more on the symbolic function of the psyche and its capacity to represent itself. As Jung has shown, the psyche symbolizes itself to consciousness, for example in dreams, with an apparently self-regulating compensation or complementarity out of which a certain kind of objectivity can emerge. We refer to a dialogue between the ego and the Self or the

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process of individuation, in which we become more who we are as an individual while being less in the thrall of personal complexes. At the same time, a person can become more objective in the sense of seeing more clearly while simultaneously feeling more deeply connected with other human beings, with nature, and with the mystery of life. The qualities and forms of experience that constitute this psychological objectivity cannot be explained discursively, nor taught by intellectual means alone. How, then, can we know whether this profound form of knowing is purely personal and idiosyncratic, even delusional?

Early in his career, Jung used word association experiments to test his theory of “feeling-toned complexes.”<sup>2</sup> As far as I know, this was the very first experimental work demonstrating unconscious influences on verbal responses. Looking back, this work is still impressive for its careful design, the number of measures used to study the response (including reaction time and galvanic skin response), the careful analysis of the many factors influencing the results, and the use of statistics.

Later, Jung began a search for comparative material, from other cultures and times, to test the generality of his observations about the nature of the unconscious as revealed in the dreams of his patients and the process of their analytic work. Jung’s comparative method was not so very different from that of Charles Darwin, who compared morphological and functional similarities and differences among species and theorized that adaptation to the environment and competitive success of adaptations resulted in the extinction of some plants and animals and the survival of others (natural selection). Darwin’s theory of evolution, then, relied on observations and comparisons for support. It later received support from experimental biology and biochemistry, which have elucidated the biological mechanisms of natural selection, for example, the structure of DNA, mechanisms of genetic expression, and the tracing of evolutionary maternal lineages through mitochondrial DNA.

Jung’s search for comparative material eventually led him to the obscure images and text of the alchemists, and he hypothesized that the alchemists projected psyche onto the unknown in matter. His writings on this subject are difficult and complex, even for those who read him with interest. Jung had already been ostracized by the psychoanalytic community, and his fascination with alchemy was considered not only unscientific but also mystical and misguided. Jung’s work was ignored by 20<sup>th</sup>-century behavioral, rational, and

conceptual approaches to psychology in the academy, which for the most part was not interested in the unconscious *per se*. In the United States, psychiatric training was dominated by the superficially more scientific, authoritative, and developmentally-reductionistic approach of Freudian psychoanalysis, until that was displaced by psychopharmacology. Thus, it is a remarkable and unexpected development that a half-century after Jung’s death we witness the confluence of scientific psychology and Analytical Psychology: neuroimaging techniques, which give real time observations of the neuronal activity in human brain, are yielding results that are consistent with Jung’s views about the reality of the psyche, the nature of the unconscious, the Self, and the process of individuation.

This article will relate a series of alchemical illuminated paintings, which depict a process of transformation in depth, to recent work on the phenomenology and neurobiology of implicit communication and affective self-regulation. I see this as the beginning of an exploration into imaginatively and intellectually fertile new ground.

For sharing his deep connection to alchemical imagery, I am deeply grateful to San Francisco analyst Joseph L. Henderson.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Henderson analyzed with Jung and attended Jung’s English lectures in the 1930s, when Jung was at the beginning of his researches into alchemy. In 1937, while attending medical school in London, Dr. Henderson came across a beautiful alchemical treatise in the rare manuscript collection of the British Museum. The colors in its illuminated paintings—made from actual gold and silver, from stones such as lapis, and from plant extracts—spoke to dreams about color that he’d been having, and he became intrigued with them. As he got to know them better, he found that they spoke to him rather directly about the work of analysis.

Dr. Henderson and I collaborated on a book, *Transformation of the Psyche: The Symbolic Alchemy of the Splendor Solis*,<sup>4</sup> which was published in 2003, when Dr. Henderson was 100 years old. In *Transformation of the Psyche*, we address the symbolism in the paintings and relate it to analytic process, including dream images. We tried to remain true to the spirit of both alchemy and analysis by presenting the material in a way that invites the imagination of the reader rather than attempting definitive interpretations. Recently, we completed a three-and-a-half-year-long seminar with advanced candidates at the San Francisco Jung Institute, where we gave the participants one image each month,

without any written material, and asked them to contemplate it until the next meeting, responding to it in their own ways. It was a very vital experience, constantly fresh and full of discovery, evoking the nature of the unconscious and the creativity of the group.



Fig. 1: Paintings from the first series of illuminated paintings of the *Splendor Solis* (1582). 1a. (above) Plate I-4. Meeting of the King and Queen; 1b. (opposite page) Plate I-6. The Philosophical Tree.

### THE HARLEY *SPLENDOR SOLIS*<sup>5</sup>

The illuminated manuscript belonging to the British Library was probably painted in Southern Germany in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, but it has been speculated that the images in the *Splendor Solis* were well known and perhaps copied by students of alchemy during the early Renaissance.<sup>6</sup> Certain features, such as a knight with a scimitar, suggest to me that they could have an Arabic origin or influence.

In the *Splendor Solis*, an alchemical process of transformation is shown in three different series of images. In the first series, we see familiar alchemical symbols, such as the meeting of the Queen and King (Fig. 1a) and the Philosophical Tree (Fig. 1b), but in a much more





Fig. 2: Paintings from the second series of illuminated paintings of the *Splendor Solis* (1582). 2a. (above): Plate II-1. Under the sign of Saturn, the infant Mercurius in the alchemical vessel feeds the *prima materia* to a young dragon, while using a bellows to feed the fire in the heart of the dragon; 2b. (opposite page): Plate II-2. Under the sign of Jupiter, the outer world is in an order based on a hierarchy of roles, while within the alchemical, we find three birds in the colors of the alchemical transformation of black to white to red. Their imaginal nature is indicated by the way they interpenetrate one another, something not possible in the physical world.

expressive and sophisticated form than most of the alchemical images that have survived to this day. On the *trompe l'oeil* pedestal at the base of each painting, we see depictions of animals, Greek and Roman myths, legends, and Old Testament episodes.

The second series of paintings also depicts a process of transformation, but one that has more objective qualities. Each painting is of an astrological type, which shows a planet ruler in the sky above and related scenes in the world below. These paintings are unique,



however, in that in the center of the painting is a large vessel containing symbolic images. One way to approach the vessel is to see it as an inner experience in compensation or response to the outer situation. The figures in the vessel could then be viewed as symbolic representations of psycho-physiological states of being, perhaps unconscious or at least not expressible in words. Such states are of particular interest to us as analysts because we attend to changes in the field or the emotional state of our patients and ourselves, and especially to the nature of transitions from one state to another.

The *Splendor Solis* has a final series of four paintings, which represents the whole process, and for me, these images convey the heart and soul of transformation in depth. I will discuss all four images in the last part of this article.

#### IMPLICIT COMMUNICATION BY ALCHEMICAL IMAGERY

We cannot really know how the painter of the *Splendor Solis* related to its images, what was conscious and intentional and what was not. However, I am going to suggest to you that at least some aspects of the paintings can be read by us across time and cultures because they rely on universal and basic aspects of implicit communication, as well as explicit references to mythological and biblical stories.

Recent findings in the neurobiology of affective regulation support and enrich my appreciation of Jung's experientially-derived view of the psyche, including archetypes, complexes, and the importance of implicit communication in the transference and counter-transference, as well as the healing nature of expressive modalities within the analytic container.

I have been heartened to see that over the past two decades and especially in the past several years, psychoanalysts influenced by developmental psychology and neurobiology have formulated views about the nature of the unconscious and the process of analysis that are converging with those of analytical psychology. Allan Schore, a Los Angeles psychoanalyst, has been particularly active in studying and integrating the neurological literature in relation to attachment and trauma. His ideas have been stimulated in part by studies using imaging techniques, which allow the observation of brain activity in real time. Schore is making a strong and carefully documented

argument for a radical revision of psychoanalytic theory and technique. He has even suggested that the analytic couch might need to be set aside in favor of working face to face!

Schore writes, "Instead of a repository of archaic untamed passions and destructive wishes, the unconscious is now seen as a cohesive, active mental structure that continuously appraises life's experiences and responds according to its scheme of interpretation."<sup>7</sup>

We might be inclined to say that it is not either/or but that the unconscious contains both. Schore continues, "And in contrast to a static, deeply buried storehouse of ancient memories silenced in 'infantile amnesia,' contemporary intersubjective psychoanalysts now refer to a 'relational unconscious,' whereby one unconscious mind communicates with another unconscious mind."<sup>8</sup>

We might compare Schore's viewpoint to Jung's "Psychology of the Transference," first published in 1946, in which he explored the unconscious-to-unconscious relationship between the analyst and the patient, referring to the alchemical images of the *Rosarium philosophorum*. Here we see the image of the King and Queen of the *Rosarium*, who join their left hands suggesting their unconscious union in the work (Fig. 3).

#### PHILOSOPHORVM



Fig. 3. The King and Queen from the *Rosarium*, as reproduced in Jung's "Psychology of the Transference."<sup>9</sup>

As Jung wrote,

The left is inauspicious and awkward; also it is the side of the heart, from which comes not only love but all the evil thoughts connected with it, the moral contradictions in human nature that are expressed most clearly in our affective life. The contact of left hands could therefore be taken as an indication of the *affective nature of the relationship* (italics added).<sup>10</sup>

### THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF AFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT AND SELF-REGULATION

In addition to unconscious-to-unconscious or implicit communication, both Jung and Schore refer to improved self-regulation as an important parameter of analytic work.

We now have some clues about where in the brain higher-order processing of self-regulation may occur. Our bodies and brains have a bilateral form, with representations of the left side of the body's skin and musculature connecting to the right side of the brain. Thus, the left hands of the King and Queen in our alchemical picture connect to the right side of their brains. Roger Sperry won the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1981 for showing that the two halves of the human cerebral cortex are not simple mirrors of each other: areas responsible for higher order processing in the right and left cortices are differentiated to perform specific tasks. The specialization of cortical functions continues to develop until at least puberty.

Allan Schore and others have focused on one particular region in the right hemisphere, the orbitofrontal cortex (Fig. 4), which they suggest is the brain region responsible for higher-order affect regulation. The orbitofrontal cortex—which, as its name implies, is at the front of the brain behind the orbit of the eyes—receives input from the limbic regions of the brain, meaning, literally, the parts of the brain that are on the edge, where things meet. The limbic system integrates input from the autonomic nervous system, the hypothalamus, and other areas involved in physical and emotional self-regulation, with information from the five senses. The orbitofrontal cortex is thought to support a more differentiated non-reactive response to one's affective circumstances, and it is a region

that remains plastic—in other words, can change and develop—throughout the lifespan. This is important, because neuroscientists believed until fairly recently that the adult brain could lose nerve cells but not make new ones. These findings strongly suggest that higher-order regulation of affect may be more malleable than scientific dogma would have led us to hope.

### IMPLICIT COMMUNICATION OF AFFECTIVE STATES

Let us now turn to one of the many ways that affect is communicated implicitly and may be experienced without conscious awareness by both the sender and receiver of the information.

Thirty years ago, when I was a student of ethology and neurobiology, I was very taken with Darwin's book, *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*,<sup>12</sup> in which he explored species-specific emotional responses and communications through facial expression in much the same way that he compared morphology within and across species. In Fig. 5, you see some dramatic photographs of basic facial expressions, which appeared in the very first edition of Darwin's book.

Using more sophisticated techniques, Paul Ekman and others have confirmed and extended Darwin's observations that certain basic

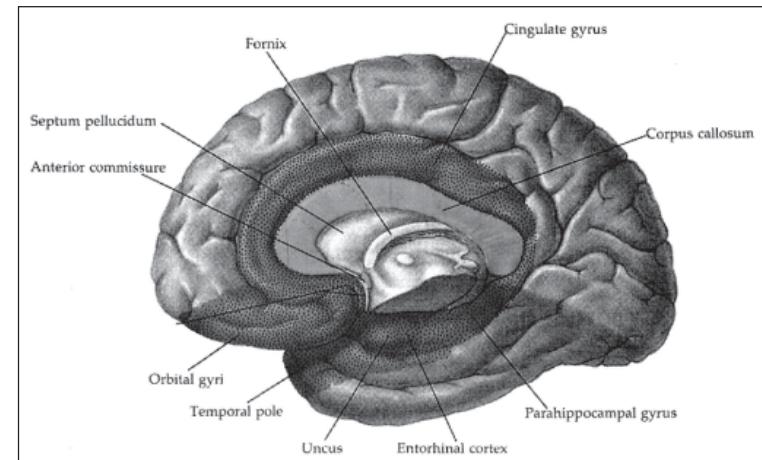


Fig. 4: A midsagittal view of the right side of the human brain, showing the cortical regions that process emotion and body state, which are indicated by stippling.<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 5: Photographs used by Charles Darwin to illustrate the facial expression and body language expressing disgust (background flattened for clarity). 5a. Disgust; 5b. Contempt.

emotions and their facial expression are recognizable across cultures (Fig. 5). Among Jungians, Lou Stewart and Joan Chodorow integrated this work into their studies of affect and expression.<sup>13</sup>

Our faces, if uncensored, reflect our emotional state, and in turn, we each have the potential to respond to and perhaps make meaning of the emotional states of others as communicated through facial expression. However, the development of this capacity is shaped by dispositional factors and by our experience in relationships, which are personally and culturally influenced.

Recent neurobiological research has shown that a very slight change in a human facial expression is detected and processed by an observer within a tenth of a second,<sup>15</sup> long before it reaches consciousness. Facial-communicated state changes are often mirrored within three- or four-tenths of a second.<sup>16</sup> These reactions may or may not later come into conscious awareness (Fig. 6).

The role of face-to-face contact between mothers and infants has been of interest to developmental psychologists for many years, and it is known that human infants early on see most clearly at the distance from the mother's breast to her face. Experimental developmental psychologists have shown that infants prefer to gaze at drawings of faces where the eyes, nose, and mouth are in the normal configuration in comparison to faces where the features are rearranged. They

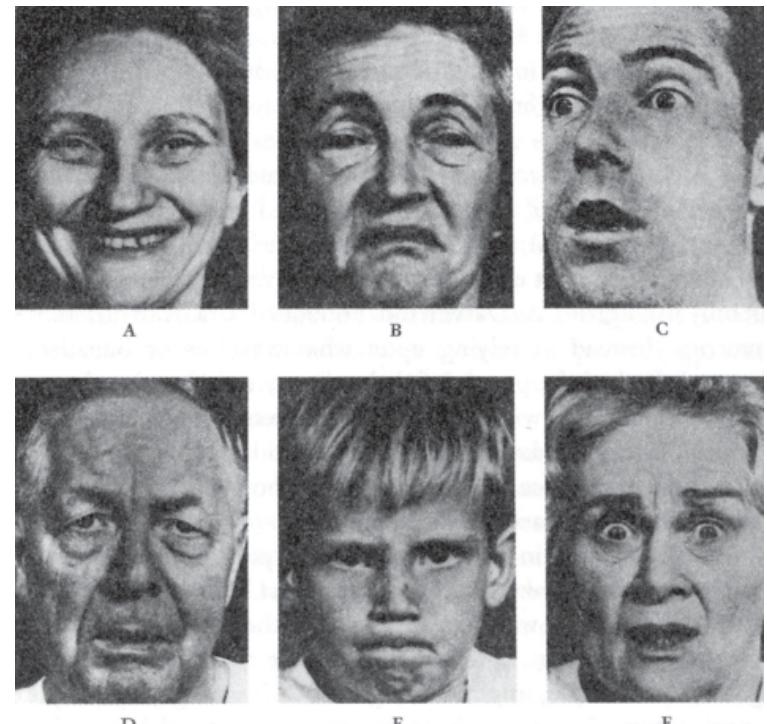


Fig. 6: These photographs were shown to people from different cultures, who were asked to identify the emotion conveyed by the facial expressions. Agreement was found cross-culturally. A. Happiness. B. Disgust. C. Surprise. D. Sadness. E. Anger. F. Fear. (From Eckman's Introduction to the revised edition of Darwin's Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals.<sup>14</sup>

prefer eye-to-eye alignment, and both mothers and infants can be observed tilting their heads to achieve this arrangement (Fig. 7). Of course, things don't always go smoothly, and once a pattern is set in motion it may be self-perpetuating. When I worked with mothers and infants with attachment disorders, I saw infants who struggled to make eye contact with depressed mothers, as well as infants who looked away from their mother's face, apparently overstimulated or distressed by the contact.

This early patterning of psyche-soma is a fundamental problem that we address in analytic work, and we cannot underestimate the possibilities of maladaptive self-regulatory schemata, which

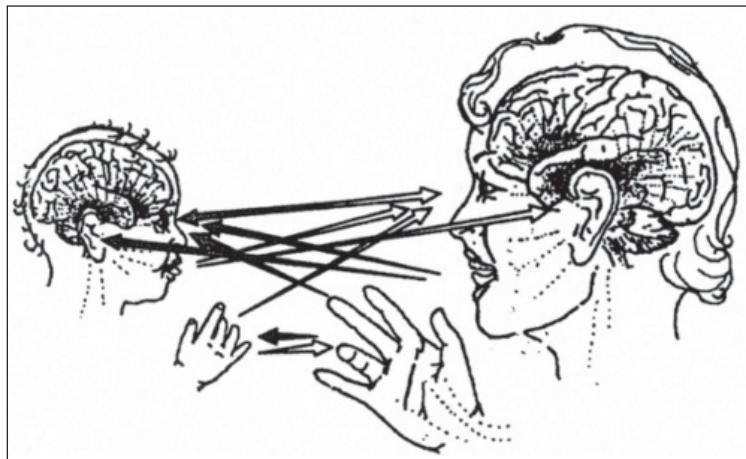


Fig. 7: Face-to-Face Communication is mediated by (1) eye-to-eye orientation, (2) vocalizations, (3) hand gestures, and (4) movements of the arms/head.<sup>17</sup>

unconsciously cause a person to recreate known but overwhelming or depriving states of being. Clinical work suggests to me that the psyche-soma may become set to create a situation or field which matches a pathological set point, around which self-regulation struggles to function.

Affective communications through facial expression can move us into a new state or field. It is a two-way process, at the very least. While the expression of basic emotions is universal, human facial expressions of more complex states can be quite difficult to read, and they may stimulate anxiety or curiosity in the viewer. Moreover, while negative states can be read easily, the interpretation of positive affects is more accurate if voice tone is added to the equation.

#### IMPLICIT COMMUNICATION, SYMBOL, AND PARADOX REPRESENTATING A PROCESS OF EMBODIED TRANSFORMATION

The very first painting of the 22 in the *Splendor Solis* (Fig. 8a) shows the coat of arms of alchemy in the foreground and two men conversing in the background. Let us look more closely at the strange coat of arms, in which there are two suns. The upper sun (Fig. 8b) appears—what?



Fig. 8a: The first illuminated painting of the *Splendor Solis*.



Figs. 8b. (left) & 8c. (right): Details showing the upper and lower suns on the coat-of-arms respectively.

Steady? Serene? Thoughtful? Wise? Slightly sad? This sun sits above three crescent moons, associated in Western alchemy with feminine, lunar consciousness. The lower sun (Fig. 8c) seems to be falling off the banner into three-dimensional space, askew, so that we cannot easily make the eye-to-eye contact that we so innately prefer. What is even more disturbing is that where the eyes and mouth should be, we see three more faces, hence a further fragmentation. Each of these faces has a slightly different expression, as suggested by the gazes and mouths. How are you affected internally when you see these images? When you take into account the two men conversing, does that change your internal response?

So, this painting represents the beginning of the work, or some place in the middle perhaps, when a shield, a second, harder skin, perhaps a *persona* identification begins to dis-integrate. The painting brings us into that emotional field through its implicit contents, including facial expression, as well as by its more explicit contents. In this period of analysis, the patient and the analyst may experience surprising eruptions of affect and confusion. However, the two men conversing provide a compensatory sense that it is possible to discuss and relate at the same time that one is falling apart.



Fig. 9: Detail from the Plate I-4 of the *Splendor Solis*, showing the encounter between the King and Queen.

Now let us go on to another image (Fig. 9), a detail from the fourth painting in the first series (shown in Fig. 1a), where, like the image of the *Rosarium* King and Queen (Fig. 3), we see a meeting of these two symbolic figures. I like to imagine that they have been sitting on their thrones, facing the world, and that they are just now finding themselves outside the royal court, in nature, and facing each other. What do their expressions and gestures tell us? The queen holds up her left palm and points with her forefinger, while the king exposes his right palm. Do the expressions on the sun and moon echo their facial expressions, or perhaps complement them? Can we look at this without some apprehension and curiosity as to what is going to happen in this highly charged meeting of the opposites? Might we see this painting as using

implicit communication to tell us about the nature of affect and inner experience, or, to put it another way, to induce a state change in the viewer that we can recognize as something we have experienced when containing rather than acting out a conflict? Might we ask, albeit simplistically, whether this image portrays Jung's two kinds of consciousness? Or perhaps the left and right sides of the brain-body—the analytical left side of the brain associated with speech and the right side of the brain associated with emotion and self-regulation?

In this way, we can use neurobiology to add new dimensions to our imagination, rather than to bracket it. To emphasize this point: I am not suggesting a reductionistic approach. The *reality of the psyche* is paramount for Jungians, and this is receiving affirmation from unexpected quarters, namely from one of the foremost academic experimental psychologists in the United States. For example, Roger Shepard, Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, and his colleague, Piet Hut of the Institute of Advanced Study, Princeton University, have suggested:

Instead of speaking of conscious experience as arising in a brain, we prefer to speak of a brain as arising in conscious experience. From an epistemological standpoint, starting from direct experiences strikes us as more justified. As a first option, we reconsider the “hard problem” of the relation between conscious experience and the physical world by thus turning that problem upside down. We also consider a second option: turning the hard problem sideways. Rather than starting with the third-person approach used in physics, or the first-person approach of starting with individual conscious experience, we consider starting from an I-and-you basis, centered around the second-person.<sup>18</sup>

#### THE LIMINALITY OF TRANSFORMATIVE STATES: THE FINAL SERIES OF FOUR PAINTINGS IN THE *SPLENDOR SOLIS*

I now want to consider the final four paintings of the *Splendor Solis*.<sup>19</sup> I believe that they speak to the process of suffering and transformation that I experience in my consulting room and in life. We might think of them as implicit communications, which are listened to by the right side of the brain and through one's entire being, not through words or narrative. Recall that

the communication begins even before a conscious process has time to occur. We might ask ourselves whether each of these paintings represents an affect-rich liminal or transitional space.



Fig. 10: Plate III-1 of the Harley *Splendor Solis* (1582). The Dark Sun.

In the first image (Plate III-1, Fig. 10), we see the sun with a human face. We also see a landscape without people but with the personified sun at the horizon and visible below the horizon through earth and water. Its golden rays fill the sky and also seem to travel through the earth to appear in the landscape in the foreground. The sun is black above the horizon, and brilliant golden rays appear to emerge from the blackness. What might this mean? Has a dark sun, or *sol niger*, eclipsed the golden sun? Is the sun rising or setting? What does the human face of the sun convey to you?

We can see signs of death in the blackened stumps of trees but also new growth in the form of delicate plants highlighted with gold. Rivers undulate toward the horizon, where larger trees and a city lit by the sun can be seen. The golden frame holding this scene is filled with flowers and animals, including snails, caterpillars, butterflies, birds, and a frog—reminding us that this process takes place within the diversity and vigor of the life force.

The darkened trees in the foreground suggest that the landscape had recently become desiccated, perhaps by too much heat and too little water. This might suggest feelings of being depressed, dried up, flat, or empty. We are also reminded of the destructive potential of too much analysis, particularly in its reductionistic or overly intellectualized forms. In "Psychology of the Transference," Jung related the phenomenon of soul loss to the loss of libido, as well as a turning-inward that may precede a new conscious attitude.<sup>20</sup> Or, we might ask whether this scene is the aftermath of too much water, a flood, the depletion that follows an immersion into the unconscious. Or has there been a fire? Is this the aftermath of consuming passions? Such is the ambiguity of this image that it thwarts any desire to be correct, to have answers. Our imagination is stirred, our curiosity stimulated—and perhaps the need for mirroring the ineffable in that way feels deeply moving.

The light of the sun has disappeared into the earth, into matter, and a kind of consciousness or intelligence is at work underground, in the watery depths of the unconscious. Or we might say that the light of consciousness has turned its energies away from the activities of life to illuminate what is buried in the unconscious ground of existence.

In this scene we can also see signs of life and hope in the young plants, with green and golden foliage growing from the roots of a dead tree.

This image symbolizes the fundamental inseparability of death and rebirth, a theme often emphasized by Dr. Henderson. The very landscape, as well as the human expression on the face of the sun, suggest a simultaneous death and renewal in nature.

We might also think of this image as representing a state of being in which healing has begun to take place at a very basic (plant) level. This brings to mind the so-called "vegetative" or autonomic nervous system, where our psychosomatic responses can occur completely unconsciously. The absence of humans and other animals suggests that instinctual and intellectual activities have not been fully revitalized in terms of action and will. We might add that, indeed, this should not be rushed.

Mary Jo Spencer, a San Francisco analyst,<sup>21</sup> has noted that there is something very compelling about the actual image of the dark sun looking out over a natural landscape without any human presence. She has suggested that this conveys a feeling that is more like a presence behind the human condition, or even behind the elements. It is perhaps a sense of that presence that informs the capacity of a person in analysis to refrain from unconsciously pursuing familiar activities and from willful problem-solving.

You might be surprised by what follows (Fig. 11), unless you reflect on your own experiences where a dark and nearly unbearable time seems to release energy for humor and play. Perhaps you will also recall how meaningful it is when a patient reaches a point where she or he is able to be genuinely playful. The text which corresponds to this image says, "Wherefore is this Art compared to the play of children, who when they play, turn undermost that which before was uppermost."<sup>22</sup>

Here we see the only image of an interior in the *Splendor Solis*, and it brings to mind what goes on in our consulting rooms symbolically, as well as words such as *potential space*, *transitional space*, and *reverie*. Sunlight filters through beautiful window panes, which are square with circular facets. All the elements are here, Earth, Air, Fire, and Water, and all are contained and in harmony with the needs of humans.

The room is warmed by a tile stove and by the presence of a maternal figure (Fig. 12). She holds an infant who may be self-comforting by sucking his hand while looking out at the older children, who are



Fig. 11: Plate III-2 of the Harley *Splendor Solis* (1582) Children Playing.

mobile and playing. A toddler touches the woman's skirt and elicits eye contact, in what Margaret Mahler called "refueling" before returning to play.

Other children engage in parallel and interactive play, exploring with delight the effect of their own body movements on windmills (turned by the resistance of the air, which is invisible) and imaginatively using the materials at hand.

The perspective of the picture leads the eye toward a doorway (Fig. 13). Above the doorway rest two vessels containing a yellow liquid. For the alchemists, yellow, or *citrinatis*, represented a transitional stage. Why are there *two* vessels? We might think of the number two as denoting something that is just coming into



Fig. 12: Detail from Plate III-2 of the Harley *Splendor Solis*. A maternal figure sits in front of a tile stove, holding an infant while gazing at a toddler who tugs at her skirt.



Fig. 13: Detail from Plate III-2 of the Harley *Splendor Solis*. Doorway opening into a deeper interior space.

consciousness, or we might think of the two people necessary for a relationship, and of unconscious-to-unconscious communication, since in the second series the alchemical vessels contained the symbols of the interior and perhaps unconscious process. The doorway opens to a dark space, where a girl is carrying something, perhaps a basin, with both hands. What might this mean? What is the link between the room and the dark space, separated by the doorway? Does her

presence, perhaps carrying water, imply that there is work going on in the darkness, in the unconscious which is accessed in this secure setting full of affectively positive human connections and imaginative play? Could it be an intimation of what is to come, the next *enantiadromia*? Or for those of you who know the *I Ching*, an old *yang* turning into a young *yin*?

The next painting shows a well-known alchemical symbol, women washing (Fig. 14). The women work with nature and with the elements: there is no implication that they have special abilities. The process is represented as the ordinary work of women receiving no special recognition or rewards.

A river runs through a verdant countryside. Neither its source nor its direction is visible. Could this represent the mysterious source and destination of the Self?

As in the previous two images, we see all the elements: earth, air, fire, and water.

Washing clothes and putting them out in the sun to dry is concretely and symbolically a combination of the *solutio* and the *solificatio*, processes of purification. The laying of the cloth on the ground refers to the processes of distillation and sublimation. Water on the earth evaporates into the air during the heat of the day, and then in the coolness of the night, it condenses back onto the surface of the earth as dew. An alchemical text advised, "Gather Dew in the Month of May, with a clean white Linnen Cloth spread upon the Grass."<sup>23</sup> In her commentary on *Aurora Consurgens*, Marie-Louise von Franz referred to alchemical texts which advised that dew must be gathered before sunrise, before "the sun robs it [the earth] of its dew in order to nourish itself, and then the earth is 'a widow and without husband.'"<sup>24</sup> She concluded that, "... the east or dawn was correlated not only with the *rubedo* (blood and life) but also with the feminine, white, 'dewy' substance fertilized by the spirit."<sup>25</sup> However, dew was also associated with the mercurial fiery-water, or spirit, and so can be seen to correspond to the masculine spiritual substance which fertilizes the earth.<sup>26</sup>

The alchemy is no longer in the laboratory. It is found in the humble, daily, repetitive work of life, such as the work we do as analysts. We might note in this context that many spiritual disciplines also use a method of mindful repetition, as in the Zen precept, "Chop wood, carry water."

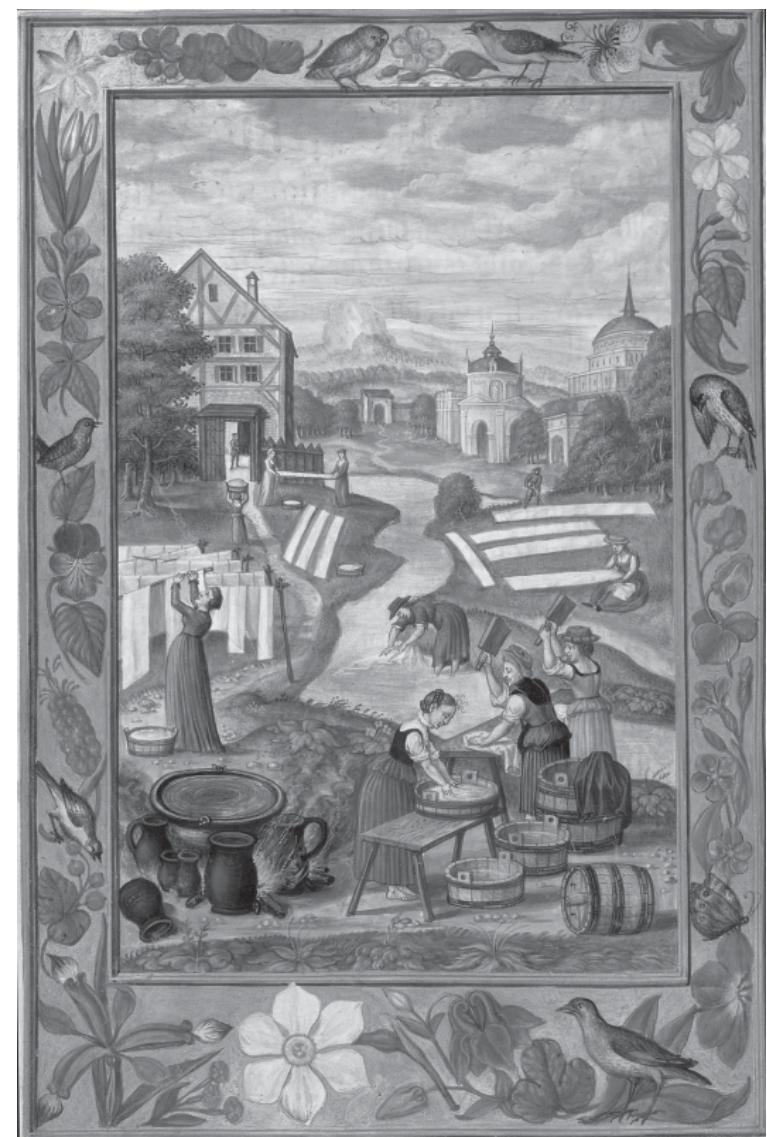


Fig. 14: Plate III-3 of the Harley *Splendor Solis*. Women Washing.

The final plate in the series, and in the *Splendor Solis*, is of the sun above a gray landscape (Fig. 15). As in the first plate of this final series, the foreground contains blackened tree stumps and delicate foliage. The new growth appears to be a different kind of plant. Patricia Damery, a San Francisco analyst whom I consulted about plant identification, suggested that the newly growing plants might be ones that are better adapted to the bright sunlight of higher altitudes, again pointing to life on a new basis.

A path or stream meanders from the foreground toward a large walled city, with many-spired buildings. A large gated bridge traverses a river, which separates the viewer from the city. In the foreground, to the left, a humble house is nestled among trees. Might this suggest a life closer to nature, with access to collective life but not immersion within it?

The sun's rays do not seem to light the city, to which it is so near, and its lower rays cannot be seen beneath the horizon, as in the first picture in this series (Plate III-1, Fig. 10). The city is in shadow, against the dictates of common sense, since the sun is high in the sky. What is happening here? Even high in the mountains, we see glimmers at sunrise and sunset. Could it be that the sun is not lighting up the world? Once again, this inner, paradoxical landscape can affect us deeply.

How do you read the expression on the human face of the sun? It reminds me of Wolter's description of images of the Greek god Asklepios, as quoted by Kerényi:

The eyes seem to look upwards and into the distance without definite aim. This ... gives us an impression of a great inner emotion, one might almost say of suffering. This god does not stand before us in Olympian calm: he is assailed as it were by the sufferings of men, which it is his vocation to assuage.<sup>27</sup>

Applied to the process of analysis, the final plate could suggest that the initial loss of soul has lifted—but not into an inflation. The individual is not identified with the archetypal image of the sun in its splendor. Paradoxically, this particular image of the sun, as a symbol of conscious awareness, tells us that becoming more conscious does not promise a state of elation or ecstasy, but rather, a fuller awareness of the human condition. It also reminds me of something Jung wrote in "Two Essays on Analytical Psychology":



Fig. 15: Plate III-4, the final plate of the Harley *Splendor Solis*.

The unconscious processes that compensate the conscious ego contain all those elements that are necessary for the self-regulation of the psyche as a whole. On the personal level, these are the not consciously recognized personal motives which appear in dreams, or the meanings of daily situations which we have overlooked, or conclusions we have failed to draw, or affects we have not permitted, or criticism we have spared ourselves. But the more we become conscious of ourselves through self-knowledge, and act accordingly, the more the layer [I would say influence rather than layer] of the personal unconscious will be diminished. In this way there arises a consciousness which is no longer imprisoned in the petty, oversensitive, personal world of the ego, but participates freely in the wider world of objective interests. ... At this stage it is fundamentally a question of collective problems, which have activated the collective unconscious because they require collective rather than personal compensation.<sup>28</sup>

In the final series of four, all the royal symbols are absent—no kings, no queens, no princes—no symbols of power or prestige.

These images were painted during the Renaissance in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when kingship was still very much alive and the domination of countries by “divine right” of the sovereign was still very much in place (as shown in Figure 2b, Plate II-2 of the *Splendor Solis*). Alchemy was often regarded as heretical by Christianity (since its Christianized versions espoused the Arian heresy) and dangerous to the principle of the vested power of church and state. Alchemy kept bringing in the Earth and the Feminine Principle of embodied and related soul and spirit, expressing values that were not acceptable to cultural attitudes based on power relationships and an inflated view of the values of reason and *logos*. Alchemical images transcend these opposites and suggest the ineffable in their emerging from related, rather than one-sided, development.

This final painting of the *Splendor Solis*, or the *Splendor of the Sun*, leaves us with a final paradox. It contains no splendor and no symbolism in the sense in which we usually use the term symbol. Rather, we see a world of quietly evocative imagery. It is as though the reality of the individual and the imagery come together, and ordinary life now exists in liminal states and is imbued with depth and meaning.

## NOTES

1. Joseph L. Henderson, *Shadow and Self* (Wilmette, Illinois: Chiron Publications, 1990), 63.
2. An entire volume of Jung’s *Collected Works*, over 600 pages in length, is devoted to *Experimental Researches* (Volume 2).
3. For a superbly sensitive clinical integration of this new material from neurobiology, see Margaret Wilkinson, *Coming into Mind: The Mind-Brain Relationship: a Jungian Clinical Perspective*, Foreword by Allan Shore (Hove: Routledge, 2006).
4. Joseph L. Henderson and Dyane N. Sherwood, *Transformation of the Psyche: The Symbolic Alchemy of the Splendor Solis* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).
5. The *Splendor Solis* (1582) belonging to the British Library, MS 3469, is the source of the beautiful illuminated paintings shown throughout this article by permission of the British Library.
6. Adam McLean, “Introduction,” in J. Godwin, *Splendor Solis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1991), 9.
7. Alan Schore, *Affect Regulation & the Repair of the Self* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2003), xvi.
8. Schore, xvi.
9. C. G. Jung, *Collected Works*, Vol. 16.
10. C. G. Jung, *Collected Works*, Vol. 16 § 410.
11. From J. L. Martin, *Neuroanatomy: Text and Atlas* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1989).
12. The most recent edition: Charles Darwin, *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*, Introduction, Afterword and Commentaries by Paul Ekman (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
13. Joan Chodorow, “Play, Imagination, and the Emotions,” *North-South Conference of Jungian Analysts*, March 1–4, 2001, np. (from a work-in-progress for the Carolyn and Ernest Fay Series in Analytical Psychology).
14. Eckman in Darwin (1998).
15. S. R. Lehky, “Fine Discrimination of faces can be performed rapidly,” *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 12, 2000, 848-855.

16. U. Dimberg, M. Thunberg, and K. Elmehed, "Unconscious facial reactions to emotional facial expressions," *Psychological Science* 11, 2000, 86-89.
17. From K. J. Aitken & C. Trevarthen, "Self/other organization in human psychological development," *Developmental and Psychopathology*, 9, 653-677, 1997.
18. Piet Hut & Roger Shepard, 1996, "Turning 'The Hard Problem' Upside Down & Sideways," *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 3(4), 313.
19. Extended and modified from Henderson and Sherwood, 2003.
20. C. G. Jung, *Collected Works* 16 § 373.
21. Comments made at a videotaped lecture by Dr. Henderson for the *Archives for Research in Archetypal Symbolism* (ARAS) in San Francisco on the *Splendor Solis*, San Francisco, 1987.
22. Henderson and Sherwood. Appendix: English Translation of the Harley text of the *Splendor Solis*, 180.
23. Quoted in John Read, *Prelude to Chemistry* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1936), 157.
24. Marie-Louise von Franz, ed., *Aurora Consurgens* (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1966), 206.
25. von Franz, ed., *Aurora Consurgens*.
26. See Alexander Roob, *Alchemy & Mysticism* (New York and London: Taschen, 1997), 47.
27. Wolter, as quoted in K. Kerényi, *Asklepios: Archetypal Image of the Physician's Existence*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Bollingen Series LXV.3 and London: 1959.) (Originally published in German as *Der Göttliche Arzt*, 1947), 22-3.
28. C. G. Jung, *Collected Works*, Vol. 7 § 275.