

ACT THREE

THE 'ZONE'

Many times during the process of writing I enter what I call the 'Zone'. It is a state of hyper-awareness I think many of us experience in which we can absorb massive amounts of data. While in this zone, with my conscious mind paying attention to the world outside, my subconscious mind gets busy doing whatever it does with this data: storing it in strange places, perhaps relating it to something obscure, or hiding it away for just the right time to use against me. Then I start to write. It is through the process of writing, both creative and academic, that my conscious and subconscious selves seem to synchronize, and through this intersection of energies I begin making all sorts of connections. Creative writing facilitates this process by helping to build the synapses within and between disciplines that at first blush would seem to be completed unrelated. For me, some of my ideas are an epiphany, perhaps not original, but an epiphany all the same. These kinds of epiphanies are possibly the most creative leaps humankind can make; leaps that would not be possible without making conscious and subconscious connections between broad ranges of seemingly unrelated data.

As I mentioned in my introduction, I have come to believe that interstitial spaces such as the space between disciplines are critical to the creative process. Another of the more significant of these is that nebulous space that exists between our conscious and 'sub' conscious minds.

Wellspring

As I was walking in the land between here and there I spotted a sparkling river of light — I was amazed at its size. As far as I could tell, it had no beginning and no end. "What exactly is this river?" I thought to myself, "And what is it doing in the middle of nowhere?" As I approached the river I had an overwhelming urge to jump in. As I prepared to do just that, a strange, yet kindly young man with old man eyes tapped me on the shoulder and suggested otherwise. "That river is much too big and bright for you son, it will swallow you whole. Why don't you take a sip of it instead?" And so, that's exactly what I did.

I often return to this river. Sometimes I just sit on its banks and wonder. Every now and then I cup my hands together and take a sip. On the rare occasion, my friend paddles up to shore in his canoe and takes me for a ride. As we float down the river, I caress the gentle waves with my fingers and we get lost in creative conversation. Each time the journey is an exhilarating, inspiring adventure. And each time I step out of the canoe, I walk upon the world with brighter eyes.

The River – The Energy – The Core of Self

In the early twentieth century, Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud identified and named the *Id*. According to Freud, from the *Id* comes *libido*. Psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung stayed with the term coined by Freud and expanded the definition of the *libido* from “instinctual energy, basically sexual in nature ...to the energy of the processes of life” (Progoff, 1953, p. 59).

For me, the ‘energy of the processes of life’ is pregnant with meaning. To Henri-Louis Bergson, a major French philosopher in the early twentieth century, it is the vital force that nourishes the evolving universe. As summarized by I. Edman (1977), Bergson coined the term *élan vital* to describe this “...creative surge of life...” (p. xii). Carl Jung identified quite closely with Bergson’s *élan vital* and turned the focus of his life’s work to the study of the unconscious and the movements of this vital energy “...manifested specifically in the psyche of man” (Progoff, p. 59).

It is extremely difficult to disentangle interpretations of this energy from the source, or space, from which it emerges. This space I believe is actually key to the creative process. For now, I will refer to this as the interstitial space within our ‘sub’ conscious minds.

There appear to be several hypotheses as to what this creative energy is. As mentioned previously, for Freud and many present-day psychologists, it is simply a libidinal, drive-based energy that is basically sexual in nature. Lacanians complicated this definition somewhat by introducing the concept of the *real* from out of which springs a raw, sexually implicit *jouissance*. Because of the libidinal connotations, and to tickle my own core of self, I like to refer to *jouissance* as our ‘creative juice’.

In this '*jouissance*' paradigm, creative juice flows from a reality, which from a *symbolic* perspective, we cannot see – a perspective in which we have created language and symbols in order to function and live together. For example, we see a chair when we look at a chair – and we all agree it is a chair. However, when we were born, everything appeared as a fuzzy haze until we learned to focus, differentiate, and then label. A chair is a symbol that represents a certain, very complex collection of energy – it is also a symbol we agree on, and thereby enable us to 'relate' to each other. All of us perceive this chair to be solid, although in reality it is just a bunch of energy in empty space – a useful perception that prevents us from trying to walk through empty 'solid' objects.

I suggested that Jung had expanded the Freudian definition of libidinal energy quite significantly. Ira Progoff (1953) says that Jung:

...works with a larger and more flexible concept of energy. He treats it under two aspects: one is energy expressed on the cosmic level of life, energy as a whole; the other is energy manifested specifically in the psyche of man. On the wider plane, under its cosmic aspect, it corresponds somewhat to Henri Bergson's "élan vital," and in this sense, as Jung remarks, psychic energy becomes "a broader concept of vital energy which includes so-called psychic energy as a specific part. (p. 59)

The concept of a creative life force is not new. Jung's broader concept of this creative energy has many parallels. For instance, according to Dorcas and Yung (2003) in traditional Chinese culture *Qi* is the term used to "...indicate a type of energy or dynamic force that sustains and nourishes life" (p. 198). They also say that in "traditional Chinese writings the mind or consciousness comprises two main elements, *shi shen* and *yuan shen*" (p. 199). *Yuan shen* "is seen as the mutable dynamic force inherent to *Qi* that is responsible for the natural rhythmic movements of all living things. In other words, it is the source of life from whence even the vital energy mentioned previously (*qi*) draws its power" (p. 200).

Yuan shen is who we are and the ‘knowing’ we are born with, and *shi shen* is who we become, or the higher self we could become, and the ‘knowing’ we learn.

Another definition of this energy comes from the Hindu Philosophy in the form of *Prana*. As stated in the Free Dictionary by Farlex, *Prana* is “vital energy as articulated in the spiritual and healing systems of India.” It is a life-sustaining energy or life force that is centered in the human brain that governs inspiration and the conscious intellect.

For the Iroquois it is an inherent ‘spiritual’ energy named Orenda. The German name it the Odic Force. George Lucas called it ‘the Force’. Christians call it the ‘Holy Spirit’. It is not specifically named in Buddhism, but with Karma it is implied as a consequence of intention (actions with good ‘moral’ intention will lead to good future results).

Humans have known of the existence of this energy for thousands and thousands of years – and perhaps one day a real scientist will measure it in a lab and announce to the world the discovery of something that we all intuitively knew was always already there.

The closest we can get to this creative energy, I believe, is a sort of holding space within our own minds. For Psychoanalyst and former Lacanian Julia Kristeva, this formational and transformational space resides in the deepest layers of the unconscious. She labelled this space the *imaginary father* (in those days psychiatrists were still focussed on the father as key to self-identification – if it helps, you can replace this with *imaginary other*). Kristeva (Moi, 1986) defines this *imaginary other* as the place of transference, or a place of love, like a cocoon or chrysalis, where self-building, and self-transformation occurs (p. 238). In the process of ego development this *imaginary* space or fragile boundary is thrown up by the child to protect itself from the void created from separation from the mother. It is in this imaginary space of love that the self begins the process of construction. It is also the place to which psychoanalysts take their clients to discover, renew and/or rebuild self. It is also, I believe, the space some of us return to through other ‘creative’ means.

Elliot's (2008) concept of a holding, transitional sort of space is very similar to the safe place of transference or *imaginary other* defined by Julia Kristeva. In her paper, Elliot defines this space as "both in the room between the therapist and the patient, and in the patient's mind, either cultivated internally through meditation or externally through art and creative process" (p. 27). Like Elliot, I believe this space can be cultivated and/or ignited through the creative process.

The Persona

Another issue or concept that complicates an attempt to define the 'energy of the processes of life' is the close relationship it sometimes has to some form of a persona. Many would likely consider this 'guide' to be a self-defined higher power. For devout Christians, for example, this would likely be God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit, but for others it may be the 'Universe', and for some, it may simply be a higher form of self.

Jung speaks quite often of the process of individuation and the need to centre one's self more closely with our higher selves. Creating an awareness of or contact with this higher self is for Jung the primary objective of humanity.

I have already provided a subjective interpretation of the 'energy of the processes of life' in my opening parable. In this parable, the land between here and there is the 'sub' conscious realm. The river within the 'sub' conscious realm represents the creative force. The banks of the river are where many of us go, perhaps when we sit or work in our gardens, read exciting novels, or try to get closer to nature; something as simple as camping, or better yet, by canoeing down the Churchill river in northern Saskatchewan. Those of us who take a sip of the river are the inspiring poets and artists among us, the deeply spiritual, and likely those intuitive, transformative leaders we run into or hear about every now and again.

The canoe, I believe, is a 'chrysalis of transformation'. It is the closest we can get to the river without losing ourselves in its depths. It is much like the space of Kristeva's *imaginary*

other. This is a place of safety from which we can maximize the level of creative energy available to us. I believe this is the most cathartic, transformational, and perhaps mystical form of ‘the energy of the processes of life’.

The opening parable also includes a representation of the persona that for some seems to provide a bridge to the source of this creative energy. Depending on one’s worldview, the young man in the parable could be my higher self, my ‘sub’ conscious self, a representation of Kristeva’s *imaginary other*, a Jungian archetype, God, my inner child, or perhaps something entirely imaginary.