SPACE, TIME, AND SPIRIT: THE ANALOGICAL IMAGINATION AND THE EVOLUTION OF TRANSPERSONAL THEORY
PART TWO: CONTEMPORARY TRANSPERSONAL MODELS

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ABSTRACT: The author calls for a more mindful engagement with the analogical imagination, the creative promptings of which have guided the evolution of transpersonal theory from its inception to the present. Having traced, in Part One, the role of spatial and temporal image schemata in the models of such transpersonal precursors as Fechner, James, Myers, and Jung, this second part considers the further evolution of transpersonal theory into the paradigmatic models of Wilber (from Wilber I to IV) and Grof. Special attention is given to the tendency to spatialize, and therefore obscure, the more complex aspects of psyche and its relation to Spirit or the transpersonal. This tendency, when not rendered conscious, can lead to a kind of hardening of the categories and to a clash of tacit metaphysical assumptions and character dispositions hidden behind the variously defended “positions.”

I have called for a more mindful engagement with the analogical imagination, the creative promptings of which have guided the evolution of transpersonal theory from its inception to the present. I began, in Part One, with some reflections on the metaphorical or analogical ground of all theories, and went on to trace the role of spatial and temporal image schemata in the models of such transpersonal precursors as G.T. Fechner, Frederick Myers, William James, and C.G. Jung. In this Part Two, I consider the further evolution of transpersonal theory into the paradigmatic models of Wilber (from Wilber I to IV) and Grof, along with some implications of the trajectory as a whole.

GROF

Stanislav Grof (1931- ) stands firmly in the depth psychological tradition of Freud and Jung. He is, as well, the only major contemporary transpersonal theorist to emerge out of a clinical setting. In keeping with Freud’s “topographical” descriptions of the unconscious, Grof has proposed his own “cartography” of the psyche (or “map of inner space” [Grof, 1992, p. 20]), which describes a terrain of much vaster expanse than Freud was willing to recognize. While the notion of cartography suggests a more or less horizontal spread, where various “realms” or “domains” are seen as coexisting in an otherwise neutral space, Grof’s model also includes a simultaneous orientation downward along the vertical axis. Below the “sensory barrier,” which

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functions as the threshold, the first realm is the “biographical-recollective,” corresponding to the Freudian “subconscious” and to Jung’s “personal unconscious.” This realm, and indeed “the entire human psyche” (p. 25), is organized around “systems of condensed experience,” or COEX systems for short. A COEX system “is a dynamic constellation of memories (and associated fantasy material) from different periods of an individual’s life, with the common denominator of a strong emotional charge of the same quality, intense physical sensations of the same kind, or the fact that they share some other important elements” (Grof, 1985, p. 97). While the word “constellation” suggests the potentially infinite set of possible arrangements associated with star patterns, COEX systems are typically pictured as consisting of “layers” (on the analogy of an archeological deposit), reaching down eventually to the very origins of the individual’s existence. As is the case in all analytically inspired models of the psyche, the intuition of spatial depth here serves to symbolize an understanding of the manner in which the past, or psychic potentials in general, are preserved and continue to function as constitutive elements within the current organization of the personality.

Despite their many possible core themes or “common denominators,” Grof found that most COEX systems appear “to be anchored into a very particular aspect of the birth experience” (Grof, 1992, p. 25). To accommodate his data, Grof was compelled to recognize an even deeper realm than the biographical, one to which the roads from most COEX systems seemed to lead—namely, the perinatal. While clearly drawing from the actual phenomenology of biological birth, it is essential from the start to recognize the meta-natal character of the perinatal, for it is primarily to the archetypal or “deep” structure of birth that perinatal theory is addressed. “In spite of its close connection to childbirth,” as Grof says, “the perinatal process transcends biology and has important psychological, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions” (Grof, 1988, p. 9). It is with the deep structure of these dimensions in mind that Grof proposed a model of four “Basic Perinatal Matrices” (BPM). The word “matrix” here is particularly apposite since, along with its literal meaning of “mother” and “womb,” it suggests as well the function of a mold (as in printing or in engineering) or a set (as in mathematics), both of which connote the “meta” qualities of potentiality and universality.

One could say that “matrix” draws upon the spatial intuition, whereas “perinatal”—evoking the process of birth(ing)—draws more upon the temporal. But the situation is actually more complex. The “amniotic universe” of BPM I, characterized by its lack of boundaries and original participation between the fetus and the maternal organism, corresponds to a kind of “pre-space” (and time). Though the womb is the archetypal container (and thus a kind of proto-space), this is true only from the “outside,” that is, from the post-natal point of view. It is only with BPM II and the onset of labor, with its mounting pressure and contractions, that the spatial and temporal dimensions really begin to emerge as phenomenological actualities: pressure marks, through discomfort, the difference between inside and out, while the rhythm of contractions sets a new tempo in tense counterpoint to the steadier beats of the mother’s heart. The process is intensified during BPM III, where there is the first experience of “passage” through the birth canal (providing the first experiences of both displacement and of duration), culminating in BPM IV with the first breath and the cutting of the umbilical cord. The first breath not only signals the
successful biological differentiation of the child from the mother, but represents as well the initial experience of a lived integration of the intuitions of space and time. With each breath we (re)create the distinction between in and out, as we modulate the flow of moments into a variegated series of alternating nows and thens.6

The experience of birth not only functions as the occasion for the emergence of space and time as phenomenological actualities, but serves also as the root metaphor or prime analogy for the nature of the psyche and its relation to spirit. “Experiential sequences of death and rebirth,” writes Grof,

typically open the gate to a transbiographical domain in the human psyche that can best be referred to as transpersonal. The perinatal level of the unconscious clearly represents an interface between the biographical and the transpersonal realms, or between the individual and the collective unconscious. . . . The common denominator of the rich and ramified group of transpersonal phenomena is the subject’s feeling that his or her consciousness has expanded beyond the usual ego boundaries and has transcended the limitations of space and time. (Grof, 1988, pp. 37–38)

Note that the words “expanded” and “boundaries” which qualify the transcendence in question, though referring to both space and time, are nevertheless drawn from the experience of spatial situatedness or positionality. Thus one can conceive of a horizontal extension of the self-sense toward identification with contemporary others, whether individuals or groups (this extension can also proceed inwards to identification with parts or aspects of self normally considered other); or the extension can be vertical, whether temporally inflected (identification with past lives, with phylogenetic predecessors), or ontologically so (identification with “higher” or “lower” realms or beings).

The intuitions and categories of space and time are transcended altogether in what Grof considers to be “the most enigmatic and paradoxical of transpersonal experiences”—namely, that of the “Supracosmic and Metacosmic Void.” This Void

is beyond space and time, beyond form of any kind, and beyond polarities, such as light and darkness, good and evil, stability and motion, and ecstasy or agony. While nothing concrete exists in this state, nothing that is part of existence seems to be missing there either. This emptiness is thus, in a sense, pregnant with all of existence, since it contains everything in potential form. (p. 147)

Although experience of the Void is said to transcend the categories of space and time, Grof is compelled to use such spatial descriptors as “beyond” and “contains” to characterize its nature. The phrase “pregnant with all of existence,” moreover, re-invo kes the root metaphor of Grof’s model, recalling in particular the pre-spatial and pre-temporal qualities of BPM I. Since “nothing that is part of existence seems to be missing there,” space and time must be present as well, as paradoxical as this may sound. It is thus more a case, in experiences of this kind, of the potentially trans-spatial and trans-temporal qualities of post-natal consciousness,7 qualities which many spiritual traditions value as especially realized and felicitous.
Such considerations lead us finally to the work of Ken Wilber (1949– ) who, more than any other figure in the transpersonal movement, has devoted his work to mapping the most realized forms of consciousness and clarifying the relation between the notions of the pre and the trans. Wilber is neither a clinician (like Jung and Grof), a professional scientist (like Fechner), an experimentalist (like Fechner and James), or a professional philosopher (again like Fechner and James). Like Myers before him, however (though Myers had a classical education, while Wilber had training in bio-chemistry and bio-physics), Wilber is a prodigious autodidact whose thought ranges freely both “across” and “beyond” (trans-) the disciplinary spectrum. Although the transpersonal movement, as we have seen, has a considerable pedigree, stretching at least as far back as the origins of scientific psychology with Fechner, it is Wilber who really opened up, as he continues to inform, the field of transpersonal theory.

By his own reckoning, Wilber’s thought has undergone an evolution through at least four distinct phases. “Wilber I” was more or less aligned with Jung’s depth-psychological perspective, though already with some significant modifications and additions at the level of theory (with the very helpful distinction, for instance, between the body ego and the mental ego). The root metaphor during this phase was that of the “spectrum” of consciousness already proposed by both Myers and Jung, though now elaborated by Wilber in such a way as to facilitate the theoretical integration of previously independent or even antagonistic schools of psychology along with the core insights—collectively designated as the “perennial philosophy”—of the world’s spiritual traditions. The “bands” of a spectrum suggest a horizontal spread, but the word is gradually supplanted by the vertically oriented “levels,” which in any case is consistent with the more fundamental depth orientation of the model. The development or evolution of consciousness has two principal acts: an exodus from, and return to, the primordial Ground or Source (which, in this phase, Wilber refers to mostly as Mind or Unity Consciousness). The exodus is equivalent to the creation of boundaries (the root metaphor here is spatial, though the boundaries in question involve the emergence of time as well) which, through successive contractions, come to define and de-limit the separate-self sense (ultimately as the persona). The return, therefore, is tantamount to the dissolution of these boundaries, culminating paradoxically in the “Always Already” of the Eternal Now (or of what Gebser refers to as the “ever-present Origin”).

Although characterized as a return, the subject of development is nevertheless transformed in the end, which yields the image of the spiral (rather than the simple circle). The change that signals the emergence of Wilber II, however, is the recognition that the whole of development or evolution (and not just the second half) constitutes a “return.” There is an exodus, or prior (self-) differentiation of/from Source, which Wilber (following Aurobindo) now calls involution. Whereas, in Wilber I, overall development was conceived as a movement, in time, from Mind or Spirit to the ego/persona and back to Spirit, it is now a question of a pre-temporal, involutionary “movement” from Spirit to Matter (or in individual developmental terms, the unconscious as “primary matrix”), followed by the inverse, evolutionary movement in time from the unconscious matrix to Spirit. This return evolutionary
movement preserves something of the earlier spiral model by positing two “arcs”—the “outward” arc of ego development, and the “inward” arc of ego transcendence.

In either case, the general form of development is characterized in triadic terms—which, as we have seen (in Part One), suggests the intuition of time—though at this point in his thinking Wilber is not consistent as to the terms. When he first introduces the idea of a general form of development (Wilber, 1980, p. 29), each stage of growth is described as involving a differentiation of consciousness from the level with which it was identified, which in turn allows consciousness to transcend and operate upon that level (the example given is that of the mental ego which “can delay the body’s immediate discharges and postpone its instinctual gratifications using verbal insertions”). Later on in the same book (see pp. 79-80), however, the terms of the triad are rather (a) the emergence of the new structure or level, (b) identification with that level, and (c) eventual dis-identification with the structure. Though he will retain all of these distinctions in his later models, Wilber will also sometimes use the terms (a) identification, (b) differentiation, and (c) integration (see, for instance, A Brief History of Everything, in Wilber, 2000, Volume Seven, p. 183). This latter formulation is the most consistent with the triadic or triphasic nature of development as we find it articulated in the psychodynamic models of Jung and Grof. At the same time, however, the dynamic and genuinely temporal character of development suggested by the pulse-like quality of the triadic scheme tends to be overshadowed by the notion that each new stage of consciousness both transcends and includes (a spatial image schemata) those that come before it.

With these refinements and clarifications in place, we can turn to the most distinctive element of the second phase of Wilber’s thinking, an element that assumed a central position thereafter—namely, the pre/trans distinction and the corresponding notion of the pre/trans fallacy. In essence, as Wilber first articulated the notion:

Since development moves from prepersonal to personal to transpersonal, and since both prepersonal and transpersonal are, in their own ways, nonpersonal, then prepersonal and transpersonal tend to appear similar, even identical, to the untutored eye. . . . and there is the heart of the [pre/trans fallacy]. (Wilber, 1983, p. 205)

The fallacy can take two forms, depending upon whether the transpersonal is mistaken for the prepersonal (“ptf-1,” typified by Freud, for whom Spirit or the transpersonal is mere “illusion”), or the prepersonal for the transpersonal (“ptf-2,” typified by Jung and all “retro-romantics,” as Wilber will later characterize them). Referring to the latter, Wilber notes that

Such theories, in effect, posit a type of U-turn right in the middle of development—a simple and predictable result of ptf-2 collapse. But this U-turn also seems bolstered by a related misunderstanding. Instead of seeing that involution goes from C to B to A, and evolution goes from A to B to C, it views A-to-B as involution (or the movement of “greatest” alienation—called “alienation from Self” in Jungian theory) and B-to-C as the “sole” movement of evolution. It consequently overlooks or denies that A-to-B is the first part of evolution, and that, as far as involution or alienation goes, it is A, not B, that stands furthest from
Self (or Spirit). Thus the ego-mind ... mistakenly appears as the high point of alienation, instead of the high point of self-conscious recognition of already alienation and the halfway point of return to Self, or the overcoming of already alienation. (p. 212)

This characterization of the essential difference between Freud and Jung (and, more generally, between the Enlightenment and Romantic views of development) initially struck me as a revelation. As lucid and trenchant as the pre/trans distinction might be, however, the situation appears, on closer scrutiny, to be somewhat more complex than the above passage might lead one to believe. The "prepersonal" consciousness of the infant may be pictured as "further" from Spirit than the consciousness of the mature adult only by focusing on the ontological, to the exclusion of the existential, dimension of consciousness. From the existential point of view, the slumber of the infant can be envied (though not, of course, authentically desired) for its freedom from the kind of pain and felt alienation that inevitably awaits the full-fledged ego. One could also say that the essential difference is that between the passive alienation of the infant versus the active alienation of the adult. However hellish one might imagine the helplessness of infancy to be, all spiritual traditions agree that willful (active, existential) turning away from Spirit—which only the self-conscious, "personally" accountable individual can do—is much more significant karmically, is a much weightier "sin" than its "original" (passive, ontological) counterpart. A and B, therefore, are both equally and inversely alienated, depending upon the point of view adopted.

If it is a fallacy and its correspondingly skewed worldview that is responsible for the failure to see the first alienation—namely, that the slumber of infancy is "further" from Spirit than the dis-illusioned consciousness of an intransigent materialist and atheist—what is it that might blind one to the second alienation? Perhaps a kind of hypertrophy of the spatial intuition (what I mean by this will become apparent momentarily). Wilber is one with the Romantics and German idealists (despite his criticism of the Romantics, in particular) in embracing the notion of cultural evolution, which itself is seen as an organic expression of what Lovejoy described as the "temporalization of the Great Chain of Being." What is meant by this phrase is that the universe, which was once pictured (by Aristotle or Aquinas, for instance) as a static structure of hierarchically arrayed "levels" of being (from the pure potency of prime matter to the pure act of the self-subsistent divine), is now conceived as engaged in the process of its own becoming, as striving "upward" to awaken to itself as the Spirit it already potentially is. While this introduction of time and genuine development to an otherwise static universe is certainly to be welcomed, it would appear that the root metaphor of the Great Chain of Being is so securely anchored in the intuition of space that, unless one is particularly vigilant, the time dimension is easily re-spatialized. As a result, the goal or telos of development to an otherwise static universe is certainly to be welcomed, it would appear that the root metaphor of the Great Chain of Being is so securely anchored in the intuition of space that, unless one is particularly vigilant, the time dimension is easily re-spatialized. As a result, the goal or telos of development is literalized or reified in such a way that, instead of being an event—that is, an occasion that has its being (paradoxically) both "beyond" and "in" time—it is visualized as a "place" that must be reached, and the relative "distance" (or alienation) from which as something that can be measured along a line from A through B to C. What is required, therefore, is that we temporalize the Great Chain of Being without spatializing the Great River of Time. Wilber himself succeeds in
doing this whenever he speaks from his intuition of the “Always Already,” which he describes as “the most recurrent theme of all my work—and the motivation for most of it” (Wilber, 1999, Volume One, p. xi). In his autobiographical essay, *Odyssey*, for instance, he recognizes that

... men and women have fallen from heaven (or from unity with and as Godhead), but that is a fall not in history but in the timeless present from which all things issue. We fall from heaven in this moment and this moment and this, every time we embrace boundaries and live as a separate-self sense. (Wilber, 1999, Volume Two, p. 31)

Just as involution is not a fall in time, neither is evolution a movement (“up” or “forward”) in space. We cannot, of course, entirely do without such spatial qualifiers, especially in the context of developmental or evolutionary theory. The root metaphors here, though action verbs—*de*, “apart” + *volvere*, “to wrap”; and *e-*, “out” + *volvere*, “to roll”—clearly suggest the creation of space in the form of surface area. The very complexity of the psyche, however—and more emphatically so when, as is the case with transpersonal psychology, the relation to Spirit is a major concern—must be matched by a corresponding complexity at the level of theory. More particularly, the theory must be able to accommodate the twists and turns, the foldings, overlappings, and “weaving together” (*com-plexere*)—of the preformal with the post- or transformal, for instance (childhood spirituality, transpersonal elements of perinatal experiences)—that are not immediately evident in the more straight-forward metaphors of “unwrapping” and “unrolling” that otherwise inform the concepts of development and evolution.

In many ways, the shift to Wilber III represents an acknowledgement of this complexity, the key innovation here being the recognition of “relatively independent developmental lines.” These lines include, but are not limited to: morals, affects, self-identity, psychosexuality, cognition, socio-emotional capacity, care, openness, joy, worldviews, logico-mathematical competence, gender identity, empathy, and the list goes on (see *Integral Psychology*, in Wilber, 2000, Volume Four). Countering those who criticized his model for being too linear, Wilber came explicitly to grant that “a person can be at a relatively high level of development in some lines, a medium level in others, and a low level in still others...there is absolutely nothing ‘linear’ about overall development” (*The Eye of Spirit*, in Wilber, 2000, Volume Seven, p. 548). Note, however, that we are still dealing with the vertical positioning of “lines” (“high,” “medium,” and “low”) which, though allowing for the inclusion of an indefinite number of elements or dimensions, is also supremely adapted to the hyper-spatialized Cartesian grid (see Wilber’s proposal for the integral “psychograph” in *Integral Psychology*, in Wilber, 1999, Volume Four, p. 462). Despite an obvious gain in clarity, the notion of relatively independent developmental lines, when spatialized in this way, can obscure the complex character and ultimately unplottable relations between such conceptual abstractions as “cognition,” “morality,” etc..

Wilber would appear to be cognizant of the limitations of the line metaphor to the extent that he began, in this latest phase of his model, using “stream” instead. While
he treats the two terms as functionally synonymous, however, they are actually profoundly different in connotation. The same could be said for the metaphor of “waves” which Wilber sometimes uses instead of “levels.” These water based metaphors are obviously better able to accommodate some of the complexities of consciousness and its evolution or development than their more rigidly spatialized counterparts. A stream can, it is true, be represented as a line on a map, but only by abstracting (or subtracting) from what constitutes the stream as stream: most importantly, the quality of flow, but also the fact that streams are co-defined by the eco-system (weather patterns, plant life, etc.) in which they are embedded. A wave, similarly, though it can be plotted on a graph, is not only dependent upon a flowing medium but has, as we saw with Fechner and James in Part One, a characteristic “indetermination of the margin” that makes it continuous, below a certain threshold, with all other waves.

Despite the occasional allusion to waves and streams, however, the two guiding metaphors of Wilber’s mature, “integral” model—which he sums up with the phrase, “all quadrant, all level”—are thoroughly spatial in character. As for the levels, Wilber has taken to referring to them in relation to the “Great Nest,” rather than the “Great Chain of Being,” which suggests the image of concentric circles instead of the more linearly arrayed, and externally related, “links” of a chain. The quadrants are constituted by the crossing of two axes whose respective termini are defined by the terms individual/collective, on the vertical plane, and interior/external, on the horizontal plane. Combining the quadrants with the concentric circles of the “Great Nest” yields a “Kosmic Mandala” which Wilber hopes will serve as the starting point for a truly integral, and not merely transpersonal, theory (by which he means a theory that takes all four quadrants into account).

Wilber’s “all quadrant, all level” approach is full of promise for those seeking an integral alternative to the disciplinary fragmentation of modern intellectual culture. At the same time, however, just as Jung’s predilection for the spatially intuited image of the quaternity sometimes blinded him to the virtues of the trinity as a temporally inflected symbol of the Self, so can Wilber’s Kosmic Mandala, despite its unparalleled integrative capacity in other respects, obscure certain subtleties and complexities to which any truly integral approach must give heed. It is not clear, to begin with, that the quadrant model can be coherently combined with that of the concentric circles of levels or waves. As Wilber indicates in Integral Psychology (see figures 8 and 12; in Wilber, 1999, Volume Four, pp. 508 and 610, respectively), the whole Upper Right quadrant is more or less equivalent to “Body” (or “organism”). This means, however, that there is only one major level or wave in this quadrant. Or at most we could say there are two, since the jump from organic molecules to cells constitutes a shift from Matter to Life, whereas all the other levels, although involving higher degrees of organizational complexity (as in the shift from single to multi-cellular life forms, for instance), are still expressions of the organism. More significantly, if the Left Hand quadrants, as the “within” of things, together correspond to “Mind,” while the Right Hand quadrants correspond to “Matter” (see figure 13, p. 614), then what we have is a kind of psychophysical parallelism, a la Fechner, rather than the Great Nest of concentric circles where Mind is said to envelop Matter.
Perhaps Wilber is merely encountering the challenge that has always met those who attempt the squaring of the circle. Contrary to popular opinion, the exercise is far from futile. Combining the cross of the quadrants with the circle yields the figure of the mandala that so fascinated Jung. Especially when such fascination is involved, however, one must beware of lapsing back into “single vision,” as Blake describes it, which sometimes happened even to Jung, as we have seen (in Part One), master of the symbolic or analogical imagination though he was. Such also appears to be the case, for instance, with Wilber’s unconditional statements concerning the relation of the biosphere to the noosphere. Wilber remarks that:

many holistic theorists create their “holistic” sequences using simple span, and end up with this: the noosphere is part of the larger whole called the biosphere, which is itself part of the larger whole called the cosmos (or the entire physiosphere). . . . Absolutely not true [my emphasis]. Absolutely the other way around. As we have seen [in the earlier analogy of the relation of atoms to molecules], if the noosphere [like atoms] were really part of the biosphere [like molecules], then if we destroyed the noosphere the biosphere would disappear, and that is clearly not the case. . . . What these holists mean to say, correctly, is that the noosphere depends on the biosphere, which depends on the physiosphere—and that is true precisely because the physiosphere is a lower component of the biosphere, which is a lower component of the noosphere, and not the other way around. (Wilber, 2000, Volume Six, pp. 96–97)  

There are profound metaphysical issues at stake here, and I have no doubt that what Wilber says here is valid, but also, as he might put it, partial. I say this because of the use to which he puts the schema of containment in his articulation of the relative priority of the terms in question. We have seen repeatedly that it is next to impossible to characterize the nature of the psyche, of mind, consciousness, or spirit, without appealing to qualifiers derived from our intuition of space. Wilber is doing just that when he says that the biosphere is “in” the noosphere. Now we know that “in” here cannot be taken literally in the sense of metric space (Wilber’s “span”), but rather implies a relation of (onto-) logical priority (Wilber’s “depth”) where the container (in this case, the noosphere or mind principle) is deemed superior in some way to the contained (in this case the biosphere and physiosphere, or more generally the matter principle). Where one stands—or better, how one dances—metaphysically relative to this issue will depend, among other things, upon how rigidly or lightly one holds to the spatial qualifiers invoked to settle (or set in motion) the elements at hand.

We should be suspicious, therefore, when Wilber says “Absolutely not true. Absolutely the other way around.” After all, Wilber is willing to grant that the noosphere “depends” upon the biosphere, where he clearly does not intend the literal sense of “hang down from” (de-, + pendere). In fact, in the context of the perennialist metaphysics to which he often appeals, it would be Life that de-pends on or from Mind, which comes first in the emanational or involutionary sequence. With Sri Aurobindo (see Aurobindo 1951), for instance, Mind is a “lower” involute of Supermind (and is even “below” the Overmind) which, however, is involved in, or implicate to (as Bohm would say), both Life and Matter. In this sense, therefore,
Mind is “in” Life as much as the reverse. In the context of Aurobindo’s (or Plotinus’s or Wilber’s) metaphysics, and contrary to Wilber’s assertion above, were Mind to disappear, so would Life and Matter, precisely because, as he says, both are “in” Mind (as involutes of Mind), though not “absolutely” so.14

Wilber himself, I’m sure, would agree with me here, since he himself cautions that “we can use metaphors of ‘levels’ or ‘ladders’ or ‘strata’ [or “links” or “spheres” or “in” or “depends”] only if we exercise a little imagination in understanding the complexity that is actually involved” (Wilber, 2000, Volume Six, p. 27), which he does particularly well whenever he speaks to, or from, the “Always Already” that, as we have seen, motivates most of his work. And so he speaks when he asks:

Can we not see Spirit as the Life of Evolution and the Love of Kosmos itself . . . ? Does not the refluxing movement of God and the effluxing movement of the Goddess embrace the entire Circle of Ascent and Descent? Can we not . . . see that Spirit always manifests in all four quadrants equally? Is not Spirit here and now in all its radiant glory, eternally present as every I and every We and every It? (p. 549).

To this I can only say, Yea and Amen!

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have seen that transpersonal theory, in modeling the nature of consciousness or the psyche and its relation to spirit, draws extensively, though for the most part unconsciously, from our embodied experience as beings in space and time. In most cases, it is the spatial intuition—in association with such metaphors as depth, height, position, orientation, threshold, boundary, level, inside and outside, etc.—which serves to structure the model. These metaphors allow for the articulation of the relation between such concepts as conscious and unconscious, body ego and mental ego, the prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal. The modeling, moreover, is not value neutral. This is especially evident with respect to the vertical axis—where “higher” is often equivalent to “better” (as somehow “closer” to spirit, or to whatever is considered most actualized). It is evident, too, though perhaps not so immediately, with the in/out distinction which, in determining what is part and what whole, at the same time establishes an order of rank, since the part is subject to the whole. Though not completely arbitrary, the value judgments carried by such metaphors are not intrinsic to the “space” that is being modeled, but instead are expressions of various metaphysical assumptions and character dispositions which, to the extent that they are made explicit, often appeal to the same metaphors to establish or buttress their “positions.”

As for the intuition of time, we have seen that James and Grof in particular are able to preserve, and even highlight, the non-spatialized sense of time as duration. While Fechner, Jung, and Wilber recognize the triadic rhythm of development, their models each tend, in their own way, to subordinate this rhythm to their respective visions of wholeness or inclusiveness, and in this way make it easier, however
unwittingly, to spatialize the river of time. I say “visions” advisedly, since the spatial intuition is intimately associated with seeing, whereas the (non-spatialized) intuition of time is more closely related to hearing. Still, it is possible to retain some of the qualities of the primordial time sense—I have mentioned rhythm, but there is also frequency and resonance, for instance, all of which terms involve a kind of non-locality—by appealing to such visual images as waves and fields. It should be noted as well that it is particularly the “single vision” of what Gebser (1985) describes as “perspectival consciousness,” dominant throughout the modern period, which insists on the grid-like intelligibility of a local world. Fortunately, there is still and always the full seeing (and hearing) analogical or mythopoetic imagination, whose symbols and correspondences defy the rules of perspectival thinking. It is no easy task, however, to keep both eyes open in a world still overrun by cyclopes.

It is neither possible nor always desirable to create a theoretical discourse that is totally free of spatial qualifiers. We can, however, seek to cultivate the kind of vision-logic, or complex ana-logic which, as I hope the preceding pages have demonstrated, is essential to the project of transpersonal theory, and to meta-theoretical endeavors generally. If we are to avoid the defensive posturing and mutual misunderstanding associated with the tendency, however subtle and skillfully enacted, to reify and cling to our concepts and theories, we must strive to make them diaphanous to the ever-present Origin that would shine through them all. Without such diaphaneity, it will remain impossible to resist lapsing into intellectual complacency when faced with apparent understanding—a word for a thing, or perhaps no-thing but imagining or intuiting what, in being pointed to, is equally concealed.

NOTES

1 Michael Washburn has proposed his own “dynamic-dialectical” model (Washburn, 1988, 1995) as an explicit alternative to Wilber’s “structural-hierarchical” model. Though it constitutes an original contribution to the field of transpersonal theory, it is also in substantial alignment with the Jungian version of depth psychology. In the interests of economy, therefore, I will not comment on his model in this paper.

2 While Grof seems to accept, as early as Beyond the Brain (1985), Wilber’s “height” psychological arrangement of subtle and causal levels, he never abandons the fundamental depth orientation of his overall model and practice. While it is true, therefore, that Grof sometimes reaches upwards, one might say, to the metaphysical heights more typically associated with Wilber, he nevertheless remains rooted in the depth tradition of Freud and Jung.

3 Freud had already used the metaphors of condensation and displacement in his theory of dream formation. Each of these terms uses a different form of movement through space, more obviously in the case of displacement, to account for the difficulty of recognizing the true contents of dream elements (and of unconscious contents generally).

4 I have developed the notion of the metanatal in Kelly, 2000a.

5 The root of “duration” is durare = to last, harden, from the base deus- = to move forward, related to deu- = to cease: whence the words “tire” and “duress.”

6 Quite appropriately, therefore, the Grofs have developed the practice of “holotropic breathwork” to facilitate access to the unconscious and the psyche’s natural healing potential (for a discussion of the theory and practice of holotropic breathwork, see especially Grof’s Adventure of Self-Discovery (Grof, 1988).

7 which, from the metanatal perspective, therefore suggest BPM IV rather than BPM I.

8 The title of Wilber’s more popularly conceived follow-up to Spectrum is No Boundary.

9 For Jung, as we have seen (in Part One), the triadic structure is symbolic of the Self as ongoing dialectic between the ego and the unconscious. Though Grof’s model has four Basic Perinatal Matrices, these can, as Tarnas and I have both pointed out, be assimilated to the three phases of the Hegelian dialectic (see Tarnas, 1991, p.429, and Kelly, 2000a).
10 Or, by extension, Nature as “the original, as yet unconscious, poetry of the spirit,” as Schelling put it (Schelling, 1800/1997, p. 12).

11 Though Wilber claims that the third phase of his thought began in earnest with the essays included in Transformations of Consciousness (1986), I have not been able to find any extended discussion of the notion of relatively independent developmental lines prior to The Eye of Spirit (1997). Unless I am mistaken, therefore, this fundamental innovation (or at least, the stable adaptation, as Wilber might put it, of his model to this innovation) is really part of the same shift to the model identified as Wilber IV.

12 In The Eye of Spirit, Wilber notes that, although the various lines are arrayed “alongside each other like columns in a building,” it would appear as well that some are “necessary but not sufficient” for others (“ethical development cannot race ahead of interpersonal development, which cannot race ahead of cognitive development, which itself rests on certain physiological maturational schedules”). In other words, the lines, though relatively independent (“columns in a building”), are also in some instances overlapping or mutually implicative (Wilber expresses this thought by saying that “some of the columns cannot be taller than others”) (in Wilber, 2000, Volume Seven, p. 638).

13 For a discussion of this issue in the context of the Morinian paradigm of complexity, see Kelly, 1999 and Kelly, 2000a.

14 For a graphic representation of the manner in which Mind can be seen as included within Life, and Spirit within Mind, see the figure of the various “sheaths,” in A Brief History of Everything, which Wilber describes as “the perennial philosophy’s version of the pyramid of development” (in Wilber, 2000, Volume Seven, p. 84). Or again, see figure 10 in Integral Psychology, which describes the Great Nest from the perspective of “degrees of interior depth” (in Wilber, 1999, Volume Four, pp. 534 and 535).

15 Rhythm is non-local in the sense that “keeping the beat” not only involves attention to each beat as it sounds, but also (to use Husserl’s terms) retention of the beats already past, and protention of beats not yet sounded. Resonance involves the correlation of frequencies between two vibrating bodies not in immediate contact.

REFERENCES


The Author

Sean M. Kelly received his Ph.D. (1988) in Religious Studies from the University of Ottawa and has taught in the Departments of Religious Studies at the University of Windsor, the University of Ottawa, and Carleton University. Sean is the Director of the Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness Program at the California Institute of Integral Studies. He has published articles on Jung, Hegel, transpersonal theory, and the new science and is the author of Individuation and the Absolute: Hegel, Jung, and the Path toward Wholeness (1993). Sean is also co-editor, with Donald Rothberg, of Ken Wilber in Dialogue: Conversations with Leading Transpersonal Thinkers (1998) and co-translator, with Roger Lapointe, of French thinker Edgar Morin’s book, Homeland Earth: A manifesto for the New Millennium (1999). Along with his academic work, Sean has trained intensively in the Chinese internal arts (T’ai Chi, Pa Kua, and Hsing-I) and has been teaching T’ai Chi since 1990.
The second part describes the principles and process of the non-pharmacological technique developed by the author and his wife Christina for self-exploration and for psychotherapy. Grof explores in detail the components of this technique. He describes its method, its effective mechanisms, as well as its goals and potential. He is one of the founders and chief theoreticians of transpersonal psychology and the founding president of the International Transpersonal Association (ITA). In 2007, he was granted the prestigious Vision 97 award from the Vaclav and Dagmar Havel Foundation in Prague. Space, time, and life. Translated from the Russian. Bibliography: p. Includes index. Two Illustrations of the Model: Nomogenesis and Neotenic. Internal Biological Time as a Measure of Changeability. Evolution of the Texts of Cultur. What is the relationship between thermodynamic time, a time headed toward equilibrium, and the time in which evolution toward increasing complexity is occurring? Was Bergson right? Is time the very medium of innovation, or is it nothing at all? 5.2. TRANSPERSONAL THEORY argues that the essential characteristic and indispensable condition of genius is the ability to attain, maintain and transmit a state of transpersonal or cosmic consciousness, creative ecstasy and illumination, enlightenment, satori and, above all, the highest productive creative inspiration. Behind the visible variety of transpersonal experience and the cultural and historical diversity of its descriptions, lies a single eternal, trans-temporal, trans-confessional and transcultural state, a single highest goal, one higher, achieved in different ways, the result. At the same time, this state of creative enlightenment is a natural, intimate, accessible, and easily accessible state.