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Infinetizing Psychoanalysis

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Since its formal inception in the 1880s psychoanalysis has been in flight from the infinite. The immediate focus on psychopathology, initially through a study of conversion hysteria and childhood trauma, forced psychoanalysis into a narrow groove in which the entirety of the human process was compressed into a kind of hydraulics of finite processes. Put more starkly, one can say that the unfolding of the psychoanalytic perspective was itself an abjection or radical denial of the elusive pulsations of a self-giving infinite momentum that underlies all of the finite hydraulic forces of the wounded psyche. While this abjection is clear in the writings of Breuer and Freud, it is also clear, but in a less obvious way, in the writings of Jung, who might seem to be a champion of the infinite in his conception of the phylogenetic heritage of the archetypes as manifest in and through the collective or objective unconscious. But, in the end, Jung remained bound to a Freudian-style ego psychology that privileged the centrality of an autonomous (read as “Kantian”) ego even in the face of the Self archetype.

One noted exception to this abjection of the infinite can be found in the research and writing of Freud’s one-time protégée Wilhelm Reich, whose explorations of the infinite playing-forth of orgone energy advanced into a realm in which the infinite could become the central theme of psychoanalytic probings of the background and foreground of the psyche. Of course, there are vexing problems surrounding Reich’s attempts to articulate the ultimate nature of orgone, for example, around the issue of the ways in

which something non-electromagnetic can yet have effects that can be measured electromagnetically and thermally. Yet the fact remains that Reich was almost alone among the members of Freud's inner circle in pushing forward into the modalities of the infinite as it weaves itself into, through, and around the human process.

While a new infinitizing psychoanalysis cannot limit itself to Reich's varied formulations, it can lift up and transform some of his key concepts and locate them in a much larger and more carefully crafted perspective. Of primary importance is his concept of characterological armoring, which is manifest both in the musculature and in the emotions. Interestingly, what started out as a concept in psychopathology in the 1930s late became a much broader idea that pointed toward the infinite forces of orgone. The pathological version of the idea of armoring must, however, be generalized way beyond Reich's formulations and shown to be the key concept that can explain the very existence and logic behind the creation of psychoanalysis.

In the narrower orbit of Reich's writings, the concept of armoring denotes the process whereby the psyche rigidifies itself as a protection against strong affective fields, what Jung would call complexes, that threaten to inundate the psyche with unwanted sexual energies. By definition, the armored individual has frozen his or her sexuality in the oral or anal phase of development and lives with the constant presence of castration anxiety. Hence any sexual energy pushing outward from the libido toward the bodily surface is seen as a threat to the psychic economy that lives in fear that this very energy will generate the strong counter-response of either phallic or clitoral castration. The rigidity of the armoring serves to protect the psyche against the seeming infinite power of sexual and orgonotic energy. More specifically, armoring becomes manifest in rigid

bodily postures and muscle groups. For example, the area around the eyes can become rigid and limit the expressiveness of the face. Or the throat area can become armored and the individual almost chokes on his or her sexual energies. The most important, and emotionally crippling armoring segment, is that of the pelvic floor in which the entire genital area is locked in a rigid muscle contraction that makes it impossible for libido or orgonotic energy to unfold in a full healthy genital manner.

For Reich, the only remedy for this painful and almost universal situation is for the individual to systematically dissolve each zone of armoring so that the internal infinite energies can move without hindrance toward the surface of the body and from there into the bodily space of another person. Thus one has either emotional and muscular armoring or full genital potency. In this sense, the armoring represents the constriction into finitude of the infinite energies of the psyche. To be armored is to be self-encapsulated against the natural and healthy infinite of the genital psyche. Politically, this armoring, with its attendant castration anxiety, is manifest in the fascist State in which the authoritarian power of the castrating father gets projected onto the Fuhrer principle in which the sexually conflicted State takes on the role of the threat of castration for the sexually frustrated citizen. The State will castrate any wayward son or daughter who threatens to dissolve his or her armoring and move toward a non-dependent role in the political system.

In his daring probes into the infinitizing power of sexuality and orgone energy Reich went beyond the Freud of the 1920s who was unable to find a way past the pathological conflicts between the death drive and a more limited conception of eros. Freud remained enveloped in his hydraulics of finite forces of struggle, denial, and

resistance; namely, the eternal conflict between the buffeted ego and its ego-ideal, the Id with its unrelenting demands, and the unconscious super-ego that introjected the parental and social abjections of the Id. While the concept of the Id, and the slightly different concept of the libido, seem to point to the infinite, they are in fact expressions of what Hegel would call the “bad infinite,” that is, a false infinite that is little more than the return of the repressed and thus has no teleological potency or forward momentum.

But what if there is some deeper logic going on here? What if Reich’s concepts of armoring, castration anxiety, orgonotic pulsations, and the authoritarian personality of both the nuclear family and the fascist State, actually point toward a much deeper abjection within the movement of psychoanalysis itself? Or more radically, what if the very existence of psychoanalysis is itself a symptom of the flight from the infinite? Could it be the case that psychoanalysis emerged as it did to deflect and deny the potencies of the infinite that threaten the ego in a much deeper way than psychoanalytic resistance could allow to become known?

I wish to make what might be seen as a revolutionary claim; namely, that the psychoanalytic movement, for all of its brilliance, courage, and descriptive power, has actually been the single most sophisticated attempt in the Western traditions, and now in the East and South Asian worlds, of masking, demonizing, and encapsulating the infinite potencies of the psyche and the nature within which it is embedded. No one can question the reach and scope of psychoanalytic categories and the triumph of the psychopathological reading of the human process. But the depth-logic of this triumph points to something darker and more devastating to the trajectory of the human self through time. Psychoanalysis is responsible for nothing less than the eclipse of the

infinite, an infinite with many modalities and many faces, but which remains the infinite even in its variations.

The alternative to the armored, self-limiting, and self-protective psychoanalysis is an infinitizing psychoanalysis that is also at the same time a psychosemiotics. These two concepts belong together. Infinitizing psychoanalysis is a movement of infinitizing rather than a topological or taxonomic system that would structure both the conscious and unconscious. Even when one argues that the unconscious is a language or like a language, this conceptual maneuver remains tied to a kind of self-enveloping system that can be governed by a hydraulics or economy of energies. More specifically, French post-Freudianism, from Lacan to Kristeva, is trapped in glottocentrism—the notion that the ultimate forms of signification in the world are linguistic. Further, in giving the privileged status to language, the irony is that language becomes utterly divorced from nature, history, and the objective foundations of the human process. In the end the tyranny of linguistics is but one more gambit in the game of attempting to outflank the infinite.

Psychosemiotics deals with all forms of signification the linguistic being but a species within the genus of a natural semiotics that deals with all forms of sign use within the innumerable worlds that surround and enter into the human process. Infinitizing psychoanalysis is the momentum, the hovering and transforming power of the psyche's movement into the infinite that surrounds it and that it also is. The "matter" or material of infinite psychoanalysis is explored, articulated, and celebrated by psychosemiotics which has as its field of analysis every kind of sign transaction in the domains of nature.

from the inorganic to the human and, perhaps, beyond. Thus infinitizing psychoanalysis is the *way* and psychosemiotics is the *what*.

Let us start in the reverse order and deal with the *what*, with the full plenitude of signs and sign meanings as they play themselves out in the infinite orders of nature. It helps to start with some definitions. Anything whatsoever is a sign insofar as it points to something beyond itself in some respect. Further, anything so pointing beyond itself emerges from antecedent signs that have no absolute beginning nor will the resultant signs have an absolute end, except when all of the orders of the world cease to prevail. Thus a given sign is part of an infinite sign series that stretches into the dimly lit past and will unfold and ramify in indefinite ways into the equally dim future. No sign can prevail without ramifications, without sending out lines of new relevance into the future. But equally important, no sign can ever be exhausted in its meaning or historical journeys or be fully probed by the human self. A given sign points to a moving infinite in all directions. It has an indefinite and elusive past as well as a fecund and robust presence. Its future is also a moving infinite in which there can be found no closed contour or bound structure.

Again, language, that most privileged of post-modern realities, is but one form of signification in the world. It is a late evolutionary product and is far less important to the depth structure of signification than most realize. One of the reasons for the failure of Freud's dream theory is that it is too tied to linguistic structures of signification and thereby ignores the other and more primary forms by and through which the unconscious interacts with the attending consciousness. Images, emotional fields, narrative structures, semiotic series, and portents are all emergent from the unconscious during sleep, and the

linguistic puns and word plays isolated by Freud for special treatment are the least relevant forms of sign transaction within the mobile dream field.

Thus the *what* of psychosemiotics is constituted by any and all forms of signification, actual and possible, within the innumerable orders of the world. Any given sign belongs to more than one infinite series and has potential and actual ramifications that prevail without limit. The human self swims in the vast sea of signification and adds its own infinitizing forms of signification to a mobile infinite. More specifically: what are the forms of infinitude taken by signs in nature? What are some of the regnant modes in which the infinite realm of sign use obtains?

One can isolate out four modes of infinite signification. They are: 1) the actual infinite, 2) the processive infinite, 3) the open infinite, and 4) the sustaining infinite. Each mode is infinite in its own way and each interacts with the others. Brevity of time only allows for some initial delineations of these four modalities of the infinite, but some sense can be gained of their phenomenological contours—indeed, an infinitizing phenomenology becomes the link between the *what* of psychosemiotics and the *how* of infinitizing psychoanalysis.

The first modality, that of the *actual infinite* is constituted by the actual plenitude of currently available signs as these signs also link up into infinitely complex sign series. One can say that the actual infinite is the infinite in its most dramatic form of embodiment, that is, as the concrete incarnation of meaning. It is impossible to count the components of the actual infinite for the clear reason that nature contains no pure simples that could be the exemplars for counting. No sign is a single simple sign *an sich*, but is always a sign with innumerable tendings, leadings, and prospects. Hence it makes no

sense to ask for the number of signs in the world. There simply is no such number, one of the implications of infinitude.

In sharp distinction to the sheer plenitude of the actual infinite is the seeming emptiness of the *processive infinite*. Here we see an infinite that does not obtain as actual signs and/or sign series. The processive infinite is more akin to a clearing within which the powers of the actual infinite can become manifest in nature. The processive infinite can be said to “surround” each sign series and to provide it with a sphere within which to unfold. Put differently, the processive infinite is a clearing-away of impediments to the ramified realm of signs. Metaphorically we could say that the actual infinite represents the earth while the processive infinite represents the water that enables the earth to stand out from the oceanic background. But the word “processive” does not denote any pre-established process or blueprint that the actual infinite somehow falls into.

The *open infinite* is directly tied to the principle of individuation, as rendered from Leibniz down to Jung. This principle asserts that in some sense each and every sign is unique in at least some respect and that it is impossible for any two signs to be identical in all respects, especially since no sign is self-encapsulated as a finite body of traits. It is impossible to find anything like a closed contour for any sign. The open infinite, like the more encompassing processive infinite, works to clear-away encrustations that would bind a sign to only a set list of internal traits. Nature simply cannot be sheer plenitude any more than it can be sheer emptiness. Any given plenitude is what it is, at least in part, by the mobile field of emptiness that surrounds it. The major difference between the processive and the open infinite is that the former is the enabling condition for vast sign

series while the latter is the enabling condition for particular signs, remembering of course, that there are no literal particulars or simples.

The *sustaining infinite* is the most reticent to show its face to an infinitizing phenomenology. It is neither a sign nor an enabling condition for signification. One could call it sheer Be-ness rather than *a* being or *an* emptiness. It is the Be-ness that is the *providing* for all modes of emptiness, all modes of plenitude, but is reducible to neither. Metaphorically it might best be seen as the air that makes it possible for life, death, growth, open spaces, and confined spaces to prevail at all. Hence the actual infinite is the earthy and incarnational plenitude that forms the “stuff” of the world, while the processive and open infinities are like the clearing-away power of water that provides the lighting-up space for all modes of signification to shine-forth. The sustaining infinite provides the sky under which plenitude and emptiness play out their eternal dance. The sky holds and supports the radiance and the darkenings that move within the play of earth and water.

But what has happened to fire in this metaphorical re-grounding of the much starker categorial scheme? To answer that question we must move from the domain of semiotics toward the power of infinitizing that represents the depth-transformation possible for a radical psychoanalysis.

Infinitizing psychoanalysis has as its subject matter the four modes of the infinite. In essence, it rides on the back of signification and feels the pull of sign series as they radiate out into infinity. It is a movement, a way of being that emerges from the true depth of the human process and represents the *how* of the self's journey from its armoring into the infinite that it was, is, and will be. Yet finitizing psychoanalysis stands in the

way of the infinite and armors the self against its own longing to return to the infinite from whence it has come—its true lost object. By contrast, infinitizing psychoanalysis works through recollection to coax the self back to its ungrounded ground, its true origin in the ocean of the infinite. This form of recollection is different in kind from the recollection that devotes itself to breaking through resistance and denial to gain access to pre-Oedipal and Oedipal traumas. Infinitizing psychoanalysis uses the lesser form of personal recollection as a means to quicken the processes of ontological recollection—a recollection that moves past and through finite structures and affect systems toward something that dissolves their power.

We have gained some clarity into the matter that concerns infinitizing psychoanalysis. Metaphorically we have seen how earth, water, and air interact to sustain the worlds of signification that surround and also enter into the human process in both its conscious and unconscious dimensions. Infinitizing phenomenology, unlike transcendental or hermeneutic forms of phenomenology, enters into the pulsations of each mode of the infinite and allows itself to be continually stretched beyond any of its antecedent formulations. As a radicalized form of phenomenology it no longer concerns itself with essences nor does it privilege either Husserl's transcendental ego or Heidegger's *Dasein*. Infinitizing phenomenology, as a method, harks back to Hegel, but totally rejects his particular formation of *Geist* and its imperial Christian overtones. Rather, infinitizing phenomenology is a gift of the four modalities of the infinite as they gather themselves into and as forms of signification that are humanly available. The infinite uses phenomenology as a disclosive force that articulates those aspects of it that can be known.

It is in looking at the *way* of infinitizing psychoanalysis that the armoring of finitizing psychoanalysis becomes most obvious. And the transition from finitizing to infinitizing focuses on some of the most cherished notions within psychoanalysis. As noted, the very existence of psychoanalysis was made possible because its founders, serving as spokespersons for all of us, fled from the seemingly dangerous and frightening powers of the infinite. The founding claim that psychoanalysis was and must be the study of psychopathology crippled from the start the transforming role of the infinite, now presented to us through its manifestation in and as infinitizing phenomenology, in relocating the human process within the depth-dimension of nature. The flight from nature, as the locus of any and all modalities of the infinite, was further exacerbated by the glottocentrism that wrenched human languages out of their ground within pansemiosis and thus magnified the role of language beyond all reason.

Let us look at the most obvious, and in some respects most curious, place. From its inception finitizing psychoanalysis has argued that the ego, the center of the field of consciousness, is the reality-seeking function that must be strengthened against the imperial powers of the super-ego and the Id. Or, in Jungian terms, the ego must be strong enough to withstand the psychic inflation that can come when merely personal complexes get infused with archetypal contents and invade the conscious part of the psyche with what looks like an infinite force, akin to a tsunami that batters a coast line and shatters its fragile defenses. In its early years psychoanalysis was in fact an ego psychology serving to protect this vulnerable structure from the twin unconscious forces that tore into its boundaries—the castrating judgment of the social and familial on the one hand and the surging and archaic blind force of the sexual/aggressive on the other hand.

How was the ego saved by finitizing psychoanalysis? By finitizing and ironically castrating the super-ego and the Id. The super-ego was destructured and reduced to its causal antecedents and rendered less and less potent for the post-Oedipal psyche. More dramatically, the Id was reduced to only a few of its dimensions, and these were in turn cathected in less dangerous directions via sublimation. But most importantly, the ego was turned into an armored island that became increasingly distant from the forces surrounding it. But is that the end of the story?

Suppose we take a further step and say that the ego, a reality that seems so obvious in its centrality and simplicity, is a product of armoring. Further, that finitizing psychoanalysis created a finite, bound, and captive ego system in order to provide a bulwark against forms of signification that cannot be so captured, tamed, and rendered harmless. Is ego psychology nothing more than a prophylaxis against the infinite powers of nature? Could it be that finitizing psychoanalysis derived its fierce momentum and its occasional dogmatism from its hidden recoil away from the potencies of infinite nature?

In answering these questions in the affirmative, it is incumbent upon me to show more clearly the ways in which the constructions of finitizing psychoanalysis represent a turn away from the light of the infinite in its four modalities. How, more specifically, does ego psychology, allied to a privileged psychopathology, pull an armored shell around the psyche so that it becomes the denatured locus for internal dynamics that seem to merely circle around themselves in mute repetitive anxiety? And is anxiety neurosis, especially the pervasive stasis anxiety probed by Reich, the departing gift of an infinite that has been darkened by a triumphant finitude?

What exactly is the ego from a finite and from an infinite perspective? The answer comes from psychosemiotics and its careful delineation of the four modes of the infinite, an infinite that is both semiotic and pre-semiotic but in different respects. Let us look at each modality in turn. The *actual infinite* is obviously indefinitely greater in scope than the ego. The ego is one of the places where the actual infinite can appear, but its appearances there are of profoundly limited scope. Yet from a finite perspective, the ego is the originating source for meaning and the structures of signification. Insofar as the finite ego steps out of its rudimentary grasp of the so-called “reality principle” it regresses into the infantile “omnipotence of thought” that is manifest in everything from guilt to real or alleged parapsychological phenomena. The finitized ego is the grand wizard of its own kingdom of meaning, projecting its complexes outward with unconscious force and in blissful ignorance. All sign systems within the actual infinite are grist for its mill and bend themselves to its borrowed and rather pitiful solar power. Hence, for a finitizing psychoanalysis, the actual infinite is dramatically reduced to a caricature of itself. It limps along as either a blind projection of signs or as a fluctuating and unstable reality principle in search of genuine signification.

But if the ego is relocated within the more capacious perspective of infinitizing psychoanalysis it becomes a partner of the actual infinite rather than its unwitting betrayer. The ego and its complexes are no longer understood to have armored boundaries. Rather, the play of the actual infinite pervades the ego and transforms it from an anxiety ridden captive of finitude into a mobile location for the play, not of denatured signifiers, but of pragmatically rooted naturalistic signs and sign systems. The ego moves from being one of the lost foundlings of an abjected infinite to an erotic co-

participant in the weaving and unweaving of armoring structures. But it is very important to note that this transfiguring of the ego has nothing in common with the state of psychic inflation or with post-modern narcissism and its deluded belief in self-grounding empty signifiers. The infinitized ego is the clearing within which the actual infinite enhances its depth and scope by entwining itself with the human process. Signs and their objects, both immediate and dynamic, enter into the place that was once the finitized ego.

The *processive infinite* is directly abjected by the finitized ego. It represents a threat to its omnipotence and manic plenitude. There is no sense in which the finite ego can allow for a clearing around its own sign systems. For to do so would be to acknowledge that there are forces within nature that are not instantly translatable into internal semiosis. In fact, within the armored boundaries of the finite ego there are no mechanism that would enable the self to catch an empty form of the infinite that flickers on the outer edges of signs and their systems. Finite forms of phenomenology do not have the elasticity to see the processive infinite in operation.

An infinitized ego becomes deeply responsive to the strange co-givenness of the processive infinite and enters more fully into its forms of emptiness. A balance is struck between the plenitude of nature's actual infinite and nature's processive form of infinitizing. There is no longer any reason to abject emptiness, nor is there any reason to eulogize it and thereby deny the fullness of the actual infinite.

The same logic applies in a more restricted compass to the dynamics of the *open infinite*. When the open infinite becomes relevant to the self-in-process each sign becomes enveloped by that which is not a sign or sign system. The individuated form of emptiness of this form of the infinite allows each sign to vibrate within an enabling and

open field that makes deeper signification possible. The finite ego, in contrast, cannot stand to see its signs held in momentary suspension by the open infinite. Any resistance or reticence from the non-ego realm is unconsciously, and perhaps consciously, held to be a slap in the face of the self-grounding finitized ego.

The ultimate threat to the self-justification of the finite ego comes from the quiet and deeply abjected power of the *sustaining infinite*, which can also be called *Be-ness* or *Providingness*. The issue has to do with the nature of grounds and grounding. The finitized ego has armored itself against the very idea that there are grounds or forms of grounding that lie outside of its self-constitution. It grounds itself over and over again by pushing the light of the infinite into darkness. It is an illusory form of self-grounding that is actually a recoil away from the invitation of the infinite to enter into its various modalities and become a participant in infinite semiosis. The anxiety that pervades the finitized ego comes from the tragic sense of incompleteness as it cycles around its own acts over and over again finding neither satisfaction nor rest. The finite ego can't help but be anxious since anxiety is the foremost mark of the retreating infinite. The quest for endless self-grounding, the perfect exemplar of the bad infinite, is the tragic delusion of the armored ego.

However, for the infinitizing ego, already open to the other modalities of the infinite, *Be-ness* emerges as the non-grounded giving of ground for its perpetual unfolding. It comes to realize that the finite ego it is leaving behind was the counter-thrust left behind by a primal ignorance that failed to recollect the infinite from which it came and which awaits it. In this sense armoring is the structural form of the ignorance that made finite constriction possible.

Once again the psychoanalytic imperative manifests itself with its stark yet binding claim that ignorance, not disobedience, is the primal sin. The infinitizing ego, now seen as the Gnostic ego, remembers its lost object while transfiguring its infinitude in the open future. The finite ego, falsely erected as the point of origin and revered goal by finite psychoanalysis, emerges into its infinite dimensions through an infinitizing psychoanalysis that is sure of its role in the self-presentation of the infinite. A few final words are in order concerning the actual *way* of the new psychoanalysis.

Metaphors are important as means to enhance the richness and exhibitiv power of a more austere presented categorial framework. It is absurd to think that metaphors can somehow replace what Hegel called the “strenuousness of the concept,” but their assistance at key junctures can advance query into the pervasive traits of nature. Let me suggest several metaphors at the end of our deliberations on the transition from finite to infinitizing psychoanalysis. They are meant to honor the ways in which psychoanalysis enters into what we could call the infinitizing of the infinite itself.

The metaphor of “play” has certainly been overused from Gadamer to post-structuralism, yet in a more precise and circumspect fashion it functions to show how the modes of the infinite play into and through the psychoanalytic quest for more and more consciousness of that which is outside of the momentary scope of awareness. But there is a profound difference between an anxious play that is trapped in the return of the repressed and a play that is a joining of the momenta of the infinite and the self-transfiguring ego on its way toward its own infinitude. In this sense, the phenomenon of play stands as the contrast reality to that of armoring. No piece of armor, always finite

and self-encapsulated, can bend or transform itself into a more open configuration—if it bends it breaks.

The psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers gives us another metaphor that is quite apt for infinitizing psychoanalysis; namely, that of “hovering” (*schweben*). To hover is to fly in, around, over, and under signs, portents, objects, and energies. It is a momentum that can only take place in the open spaces of the infinite. From the perspective of the now translucent ego such hovering enables it to become aware of those forces and meanings that live on the other side of the current horizon of the self. To hover is to feel the winds of the actual, processive, and open infinities. More clearly, it is to feel the ever quiet and ever gentle sustaining presence of *Be-ness* that provides the ultimate unground for all that has or makes grounds.

Finally there is the metaphor of fire, that missing element that was only hinted at earlier. For it is in the consuming yet equally empowering and warming effects of fire that the self can recast and ultimately burn away its finitude and its armoring. If all forms of pathology can be seen to be forms of armoring, then the melting of armor is at the same time the overcoming of pathology—but this is another story for another time. The fire that is the *way* and *how* of the new psychoanalysis, transforms the matter that it takes over from psychosemiotics, namely the dimensions of earth, water, and sky. It quickens and re-moulds them by opening them to the fuller expression of the infinite they manifest. Infinitizing psychoanalysis moves through the modalities of a naturalistically grounded play, an attentive and wonder filled hovering, and a fire that reflects the even stronger light of the infinite. Perhaps we can say that the finitized psychoanalysis of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries prepared the way for its own sublation, not

sublimation, into the ecstatic and infinitizing psychoanalysis of this century. This means at the same time that the armored self can let go of its finitization and become the Gnostic self of infinite nature.