

From Inflation to the Ordinary

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Wolfgang Giegerich in his important and significant paper situates the precise moment in our history where modern psychotherapy makes its intervention. This historical moment might well be summarized as the moment when man experiences the abandonment and loss of his mythic-religious parents. Man finds himself in the world of T. S. Eliot's wasteland, a de-sacralized world bereft of metaphysical and religious meaning, naked and alone in the cold, cruel, dangerous world. Modern man is thus defined in a fundamental way by the loss of the myth of divine parents. Giegerich clearly implies that we must face up to this loss squarely, unflinchingly. We should not retreat; there is no going back. The only honest way left is the way forward: we must assume our historical place within the wasteland of a modern godless, secular, scientific, materialist culture.

Giegerich clearly views Jung as having recoiled from this historical necessity. His implication of a failure of courage on Jung's part is palpable. He all but accuses Jung of a retreat, of a regression, of a debilitating nostalgia for a former epoch in which we could wrap ourselves in the sumptuous garments of mythic, religious, and metaphysical meaning.

The battle cry one can hear between the lines of Giegerich's text is: "Have the courage to face the wasteland without the shield of historically obsolete mythologies." The only choice we have is to step forward and embrace our modern predicament of being naked in a material and spiritless world. Such a stance would entail a radical break from all preceding human history. Prior to the moment of modernity, man always had the safety and protection of mythological parents. As Giegerich asserts, "When man is born in a literal sense, he is not really born at all. He merely exchanges the biological womb of the mother for a second womb, the spiritual womb, the amniotic sac of the mind, images, meanings. Man is not born directly into the environment. He is born into his *being mind and soul*."

In previous epochs, man merely exchanged his literal, biological childhood for his mythic-religious childhood, still safely protected by metaphysical parents. One makes the transition from one's literal, real parents to the imaginary and

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symbolic parents of religious meaning. While this step forward from literal dependency to symbolic dependency is a genuine developmental advance, nevertheless this should not obscure the fact that in both developmental instances man remains in the dependent position of the child.

According to Giegerich, a truly modern psychotherapy would take the next (logical) step beyond this mythological solution to the problem of dependency. Giegerich is obviously very disappointed that Jung does not choose to take this next step. Instead, the therapeutic move Jung makes is to connect the patient's clinical material back to mythic paradigms of the kind we have outlined above. Within his transference relation to Jung and Jungian theory we can begin to discern the lineaments of Giegerich's own ego ideal, his own want-to-be, or, at least, the place where Giegerich's own ego ideal intersects with a certain cultural ideal for man in general. Giegerich desires to be *grown up*, where what it would mean to be grown up would be to transcend the need for parents of any kind, be they real, imaginary, or symbolic.

We might formulate this by saying Giegerich's desire is to be "father of himself"; that is, if we can still risk such an expression before Giegerich insists that we turn the dialectical screw one more notch and overcome any reference whatsoever to a parental figure in our formulation. Certainly he would push the dialectic so far as to insist on our having to find another name for the name of the father, in the formulation of what it is to be an adult. The famed Hegelian sublation would be logically necessary here. And here we glimpse the decidedly postmodern ego ideal of Giegerich: totally reflexive subjectivity.

All right. So far so good. What I propose to do now is to look at two instances that Giegerich treats in a clinical fashion. The first case will be that of the neurotic globetrotting woman and the second the analysis of Jung's self-analysis of two dreams. My purpose is to examine in more detail the precise nature of Giegerich's alternative therapeutic approach to that of Jung.

As you recall, Jung had encountered the woman in question on her third trip in a row around the world. When he looked at her he was amazed because she had the look of a "hunted and cornered animal. . . . She is nearly possessed." Jung proceeds to offer a psychological explanation of her condition: "Because she does not live the life that makes sense. Hers is a life utterly, grotesquely banal, utterly poor, meaningless, with no point in it at all. If she is killed today, nothing has happened, nothing has vanished—because she is nothing."

I am sure everyone recalls Jung's solution to her neurosis, the now infamous paradigm of the daughter of the moon; so let us move on to Giegerich's criticism of this clinical approach and, still more importantly, the sketching out of his alternative therapeutic move:

What Jung does not realize is that his proposed cure is just a repetition of that illness that he himself diagnosed correctly, and not a cure at all. By mimicking the Pueblo-Indian model, he only prescribes more of the same: "Daughter of the Moon"—this is absolutely out of reach for a modern woman; it is precisely an idea that could only be sought in an endless, futile search. Thus Jung conjures up the very transcendence the longing for which is

the cause of such seeking. Jung's suggestion feeds her neurotic craving, her "addiction." For what is she chasing after if not after some such mythical garment to dress herself in as in her "mummies." It is her very problem that while as a modern woman she cannot possibly say anything like what Jung suggested, she nevertheless thinks she ought to be able to; it is her problem that on principle there are no mythological garments that would fit her, but that she nevertheless is unconsciously convinced that it is indispensable to have one. This is the neurotic trap that turns her into the pointless seeker, the hunted, cornered animal that Jung saw in her eyes.

A real cure would have to move into the opposite direction. It would have to make her fully aware that unconsciously she obviously thinks she ought to be the Daughter of the Moon or some such thing and that this is why she is desperately traveling, constantly seeking; in other words, that she—as does Jung here—tries to solve her problem on the semantic level while trying to keep the syntactic level intact. A real therapeutic move would have to make her aware that her problem is a syntactic or logical one and to confront her with the exaltedness, inflatedness of these unconscious demands and expectations, which—much like Kitsch—are the result of a semantics that is not covered by the scope, form, and sophistication of the syntax. *Why should she not be able, like everybody else, to find satisfaction, contentedness, in ordinary life? Perhaps by cultivating her garden, doing her daily duties, enjoying some good books and exhibitions, giving her neighbors a hand—perhaps also, and above all, by devoting herself to some useful task that would allow her to discover and employ her specific potential for being productive. Everybody surely can find some area where, some way how, to be productive.* Why must she make such a fuss, unwittingly give herself airs as if she were perhaps a secret Queen in search of her missing crown insignia and the recognition due but denied to her? Why can't she be her ordinary self and find the way into the simplicity of life and of being human? Why can't she understand that there is nothing to be sought, nothing that would be somewhere else, be it in the future or in transcendence? (my emphasis)

Clearly Giegerich is upset. Why does this woman have to make waves? Why does she have to be such a troublemaker? It doesn't help that he sees in this woman the same hidden and disguised narcissism and grandiosity that he sees in Jung himself. Does anyone else detect here in Giegerich's reaction the affect that we routinely term countertransference? Does anyone else hear as well the nuanced tone of certain helplessness in the face of such behavior bordering on countertransference demand? Almost a pleading with the woman to understand things and stop creating problems? Let's leave this to one side for the moment. Instead, let us pursue the analysis of Giegerich's alternative therapeutic move.

First, he would analyze the unconscious demands and expectations causing her ego inflation and grandiosity. These demands are rooted in a mythic religious

past, which has not been left behind. Therefore such a therapeutic move would require making conscious the past which is still present and then the working through which would move this past into the truly past.

Second, he would not feed her addiction to the mirage of metaphysical meaning. Instead of attempting to provide the woman with the quasi-religious consolation of a version of the old myth of divine genealogy, Giegerich advocates for a solution that I find, in some respects, to be very close to the Freudian view of the unconscious. In theoretical terms, he advocates for the historicization of the subject's (psychological) history. In so far as the unconscious is the past that is still present, the historicization of this past is not simply a recollection but a rewriting of the past. Such historicization of history accomplishes a change of status of the past into past that is truly past and no longer still (interfering with the) present. This work of historicization in analysis would thus overcome the myth of divine parents in the precise manner in which Hegel speaks of the overcoming of the (historical) causality of fate.

Third, he would not succumb to the cultural and historical nostalgia of trying to redeem her suffering by linking her up to a mythic model which is historically and therefore experientially "out of reach." Giegerich essentially argues that such a solution to neurosis is no longer possible due to the cultural and social changes which have occurred and which have utterly changed our historical reality forever; there is no going back against the movement of history.

Finally, and perhaps most critically for my purposes, Giegerich would instead link the woman's neurosis up to the paradigm of the ordinary where she could be "useful" and "productive." I will defer any political economic analysis of the values of usefulness and production, though to be sure this could and should be done. But I will say that to fall back to a call to produce and perform in the brazen form of the reality principle as it is embodied in Late Capitalism is as much a part of the problem as it is its solution. Instead, allow me to cite Lacan at some length to be juxtaposed against what I shall call Giegerich's praise of the everyday and the ordinary. Lacan (1977) was vigilant from very early on that the modern (epistemological) myth of objectivity was ever more implicated in the forms of twentieth-century psychopathology:

The third paradox of the relation of language to speech is that of the subject who loses his meaning in the objectifications of discourse. . . .

But a way out is offered to the subject for the resolution of that impasse when his discourse is delusional. Communication can be validly established for him in the common task of science and in the posts that it commands in our universal civilization; this communication will be effective within the enormous objectification constituted by that science, and it will enable him to forget his subjectivity. He will make an effective contribution to the common task in his daily work and will be able to furnish his leisure time with all the pleasures of a profuse culture which, from detective novels to historical memoirs, from educational lectures to the

orthopaedics of group relations, will give him the wherewithal to forget his own existence and his death, at the same time to misconstrue (*méconnaître*) the particular meaning of his life in false communication. (p. 70)

Perhaps the woman in question could employ her specific potential in becoming a scientist. Perhaps even a social scientist. Or, dare I say it, an *experimental* psychologist? Then she could cheerfully write in the monological form of the natural scientific experiment and in the process manage to forget her own being towards death. After all, she'll simply be reporting the facts in the inimitable spirit of Dragnet's Joe Friday. She will be, like all the good scientists, in the phrase of the illustrious Sir Francis Bacon, the "secretary of nature" merely taking dictation for those amazing things speaking for themselves.

Forgive me if I find no salvation in the ordinary productivity and usefulness which our scientific and materialistic culture provides. To the contrary, in this proposed solution I find the noble project of the dealienation of the subject remains unfinished.

While Giegerich finds answers for our modern woman in enjoying some good books and art exhibitions, and in her puttering in her garden—no doubt raised nearly to the level of an art in the inimitable tradition of no less a beacon of our (desiccated) culture than Martha Stewart—I find myself agreeing with Lacan in finding the forgetting, indeed the repression, of the meaning of our being in the various guises of false objectification the illness *par excellence* of our time. The compensatory praise for the quotidian will not make of it the heart of the solution to our postmodern alienation. In fact, it unwittingly colludes and collaborates with it. That Giegerich wants a therapeutic approach that deals with our historical reality is to be commended. His heroic bravery in wanting to face reality however bleak and however much of a "wasteland" it may be is to be recognized and praised. But flying to the antithesis of the inflation of the divine child in the compensatory embrace of the ordinariness of everyday life is still missing the elusive synthesis in question. There is, after all, still a meaning of repressed subjectivity in the vicissitudes of desire to be rescued from the false objectifications of our modern cultural consciousness; even if, it is true, it is not the Meaning of Life in the (old) mythical or religious sense, it is nevertheless the meanings of a life which the particulars of an individual life history provide.¹

Let us move to the example of Jung himself. Giegerich cites two late dreams of Jung's and the latter's own self-analysis of them. Jung's interpretations of these two dreams are remarkable. In a sudden lightning flash of intuition Jung entertains the stunning reversal in which the ego is the projection of the Other, and not the other way around: "UFOs are projections of ours. Now it turns that we are their projections. I am projected by the magic lantern as C. G. Jung. But who manipulates the apparatus?" Who indeed. Who throws up C. G. Jung on the screen as but an image, a mirage? Is not the "magic lantern" but a metaphor as was Freud's "psychical apparatus" for the dream machine that is called the unconscious? Is this not Jung's attempt yet once again to conceptualize the

remarkable psychical engine of the unconscious which continually foments images upon the screen of consciousness with a logic and a 'syntax' all its own?

Jung's interpretation of the second dream contains the same reversal as the previous one, the only essential difference being that this time the "magic lantern" is personified as a "yogin": "I started in profound fright, and awoke with the thought: 'Aha, so he is the one who is meditating me. He has a dream, and I am it.' I knew that when he awakened, I would no longer be."

Giegerich is disappointed with Jung's interpretations, reproaching him for taking the dreams "literally," on the "object level," for "hypostatizing" them, for taking them "naively, literally, metaphysically." In contrast, he offers what he calls a "psychological interpretation" in which he reads in these dreams the (Hegelian) "idea of the soul's self-relation" or, at another point, conceiving of the self "as thinking self-relation." But I pose the following question here: Can the psychical phenomena and psychical operations in question here be reduced to the vicissitudes of self-consciousness? To the "conscious relation to self"? Is not Jung's reversal here yet another attempt to rediscover the unconscious yet again? Or, more broadly, can Giegerich's effort to eliminate the metaphysical concept of the unconscious in favor of a Hegelian theory of self-consciousness cover the full domain of phenomena in question without loss or remainder? Or is Jung's patently ludicrous idea of us as projections of UFO's an attempt to formulate psychical operations which go on without the benefit of consciousness and with another logic from that of consciousness?

Allow me to pose a hypothesis. Jung, far from hypostatizing and dissociating his modern scientific consciousness in the metaphors of the "magic lantern" and the "yogin," is actually on the verge of a breakthrough to a nonreified notion of the ego as fundamentally of the order of the imaginary. There are no scientific abstractions of the ego here: as a bundle of functions like perception-consciousness, or of "conflict-free spheres," or as something to be "strengthened," and so on. Rather, do we not see Jung in his work with his two dreams coming precisely to the point, which Lacan (1977) describes, in the following passage?

Does the subject not become engaged in an ever-growing dispossession of that being of his, concerning which—by dint of sincere portraits which leave its idea no less incoherent, of rectifications which do not succeed in freeing its essence, of stays and defenses that do not prevent his statue from tottering, of narcissistic embraces that become like a puff of air in animating it—he ends up recognizing that his being has never been anything more than his construct in the imaginary and that this construct ends up by disappointing all his certainties? (pp. 41–42)

Are we not witnessing Jung at the precise juncture in his own self-analysis where he is coming to the conscious recognition that the "me" he has known as C. G. Jung is but "his construct in the imaginary"? That Jung has been "engaged in an ever-growing dispossession of that being of his"? And finally, allow me to add that it is a common experience of patients in analysis taken to their limits that the

death of the ego is first experienced in the confused manner as the threat of death to their being as a psychophysical totality, that is, as the threat of a literal death.

The good news is of course that the death of the ego is not the death of the human being. It is the dissolution of an image in the flames of interpretation. However, the death of the ego, prior to the moment of emancipation from its alienating effects upon the subject, is often accompanied with a transitory depersonalization. Shorn of the mirages of the ego, as Jung said, "I knew that when he awakened, I would no longer be."

Therefore Giegerich is no doubt right that Jung (and it might be added, Freud as well) could not envision life after the death of the ego: "This death of the Bollingen person would be the final birth of man, the emergence from the waters. But again this thought came to Jung only as an unconscious one, in the form of a dream and as a possibility of, and projection into, the future, a post-mortal potentiality (that Jung could not even envision as solution, redemption, but only as the literal death of himself as human being)."

Yes, the vision of life after death of the ego would have to await Lacan and Giegerich. Neither Freud nor Jung ever stopped confounding the death of the ego with the death of the human being. This breakthrough conception of the ego had not yet been isolated and clearly differentiated from the other agencies of symbolization comprising the psyche.

On the other side of death is the "emergence from the waters." No doubt these are the waters symbolizing the unconscious. It remains to measure the travail from the emergence of Giegerich's truly modern man armed with his Hegelian dialectic of self-consciousness and shorn of all metaphysical nostalgia to Lacan's freeing of the radical heterogeneity of desire from the refracting and distorting lens of the ego. I will content myself with only a single reference to the future direction that Lacan's work took after his early period referenced in this paper in which he fashioned his alternative theoretical conception of the ego to that of American ego psychology. In a paper entitled the *Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire* Lacan (2002, pp. 281-312) addresses, amongst other things, the contribution and the limits of the Hegelian dialectic for the psychoanalytic theorization of the subject. For beyond the critique of American ego psychology lies an even more profound critique of Hegelian Reason and its attempt to reduce the phenomena of the unconscious to the dialectics of the self relation. In that paper Lacan attempts to show that the dialectic of self-consciousness in the Hegelian sense does not in truth capture the movements of unconscious desire. The latter constantly disturbs even the ultimate sublations of Reason by its continuing emergence. In short, the autonomy of the operations of Reason are themselves subverted, relativizing not only the ego but transcendental self-consciousness as well. In clinical terms, there is always a difference between desire and spoken demand, a remainder, a lost object, which escapes the net of the relation to self. Surely then, Giegerich's authentically modern man must contend with the return of the elided signifiers of desire which always insert themselves into the breaks of rational discourse, as he marches down the road toward the shibboleth of absolute knowledge.

Notes

1) Giegerich, with a somewhat surprising tentativeness, reveals a view of the etiology of neurosis that comports amazingly well with Freudian theory as rectified by Lacan above:

“I doubt that neurosis is indeed an attempt to solve a universal problem of the epoch and thus an addressing of the true problem of the age. I tend to think that in neurosis a battle is fought that has long been decided by history. The problem of neurosis would then not merely be that its attempt happens to be unsuccessful, but that the attempt is a priori not all that important as Jung wants to believe.

In other words, neurosis is the outcome of the historical turning points and the anamnesis is the method by which the historicization of that history accomplishes not only a reproduction but a *rewriting* of that past, emancipating the subject from the former determinism of their history.

References

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