Three

Ellen

At the time of my work with Lisa, I had a pretty "classical" and limited notion of persona -- probably the least appreciated of Jung's five constitutive archetypes[1]: those modes of psychic functioning that comprise the full psyche (ego, persona, shadow, animus or anima, and self). Often persona is disparaged as the "false self" or "mask" we hide behind in order to remain acceptable in our social environment. Jung often wrote of the successful businessman, banker, or professor who identifies with his office (persona) and loses all connection with his inner life (especially anima and self). This may encourage the careless reader of Jung's works to conclude that the less persona we have the better it is for our psychic health. The contrast between Mara and Lisa, however, points up the fallacy in this position.

Persona is our place in the social world, whence we derive the support and admiration of our fellows. We require it in order to "fit in" and feel OK about ourselves. Without it we can have no effect upon our environment; we find ourselves isolated and shunned. The contrast between Lisa, who had no persona, and Mara, whose persona was rather well-developed, demonstrates that the absence of social support leaves us wide open to the flaw at the center of our being, our "narcissistic wound." Persona is, indeed, our first defense against feeling a dissolution or fragmentation in our sense of having a coherent self.

Persona is more than a "mask"[2] we don when we entertain company. It is a whole worldview. Specifically, it is the assemblage of the world that we take over in a mostly unconscious manner from our society and culture. Jung's comments on the seductive power of the "spirit of the age," which we oppose only at the cost of swimming against the stream, imply that the worldview of a particular society may change with the times. For example, the Christian middle ages was dominated by the image of an exacting God who was interested only in the spiritual life of the soul. The material conditions of life became, in that worldview, the testing ground for each individual. By resisting the sensory world, one's soul merited freedom and bliss in the afterlife. Rediscovery of the beauties of the physical world through the Renaissance and the subsequent development of experimental science have long-since transformed the worldview of "collective consciousness." The modern world has thus been dominated by a powerful overvaluation of technology and pragmatic materialism, to the point that spirit, divinity, and afterlife have become problematic notions. In the shorter

run, we see that attitudes can change drastically from one decade to the next. For example, the out-pouring of enthusiasm for individual freedoms and challenges to authority that dominated the late sixties and early seventies has been replaced by a back-lash of regulation and litigation. Whatever position we individuals take on the present state of our society, we cannot escape the simplistic terms through which we collectively filter our world: liberal/conservative, right to life/right to choose, ecology/progress, etc.

When a student's term-paper or a man-on-the-street interview is filled with phrases unconsciously adopted from televised beer commercials and political campaigns, we can see how the metaphors by which we organize our experience are not truly our own but shared with the public at large. All of this works to keep us unconscious of our individuality. This pervasive *persona field* subtly compels us to fit our unique personal experience into collective social categories or else to conclude that we are misfits. Those who find themselves able to conform with little effort can ride the wave of public opinion as on a surf board. Those who cannot are "wiped out."

Ellen saw herself as a "wipe out." She complained of a number of phobias that drastically limited the scope of her life. She had worked through the two mildest of them (supermarkets and expressways) with the help of behavior modification but was making no progress with the others (cities, elevators, and airplanes). She was unhappy with her behavior therapist because she felt he did not a see her as a whole person but only a bundle of behaviors. She hoped a Jungian analyst would take her whole being into account. I replied that I had no other way of working and would even prefer not to address the phobias directly but to try to see the whole picture.

She was about thirty years old, single, and a painter by training and inclination, although she had not touched a brush in years. Her sense of being weird and a misfit began in middle childhood when she had the experience of being carried up off the earth in a ball of light while her body continued painting a chalk line on the school playground. Initially she saw this as a sign of her election by God and believed that she was destined to sail through life with supernatural guidance.

Her mother reacted with scoffing incredulity, exclaiming, "Well you certainly didn't get that from *my* side of the family." She had not dared to tell her father, a dogmatic atheist, who insisted that she never refer to the sun rising or setting but rather to the earth turning. In reaction to her father's intransigent materialism, she had been haunted since childhood by a recurring horror image of the sun turning into the carcass of a chicken.

It seemed evident to me that the elevator and airplane phobias were directly related to the childhood levitation experience and her ambivalence about it; for it simultaneously suggested divine chosenness and God's mockery of her. Why would she be given experiences that set her apart from her parents and the world at large (*i.e*, the persona field) if they could not be used? Did they not prove her weirdness and unsuitability?

As strange and even "bizarre" as these images might seem to be, I had no sense of uneasiness with Ellen. Indeed, I knew whereof she spoke, having had mystical experiences of my own. I saw her problem as needing to reconcile her transcendent experiences founded in the self field with the demands of social adaptation.

Believing the place to begin was with the validity of her mystical experiences, I set out to demonstrate to her that there was a small but significant group of people in the world who were familiar with experiences such as hers. I lent her my copy of R. M. Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness,* originally published in 1901. Bucke had had an experience of levitating in a ball of light that was nearly identical to Ellen's. Not deterred by the misunderstanding of his fellows, he had searched out others, living and dead, who had spoken or written of similar experiences. He found about a hundred such people, analyzed their testimonies, and developed a dubious but none-the-less interesting theory of "the evolution of the human mind." I hoped Ellen would find in the book comfort that she was not alone, as well as the expectation that her experiences might yet be found to have a useful meaning.

She was delighted but cautious with Bucke's data and thesis. Still the feelings of weirdness were not put to rest. Cities, for example, were filled with what she saw as "the chrome and glass people" -- individuals who were professionally successful and sure of their view of the world. The gleaming skyscrapers and furniture of the cities bespoke a cold certainty that had no place for her poetic and emotion-filled perceptions. In my consulting room she spoke eloquently of the songs of the birds and the beauty of the flowers, realities that were essential to her world but regarding which she expected mockery from the chrome and glass people. She thought it was her duty to try to guess how the majority view the world and to try to imitate their feelings and behaviors in her own life. This, in fact, was why she had given up painting. She could not prevent her paintings from portraying her own bizarre views, so that it was terribly embarrassing to have canvasses lying about in various states of completion, each a testimony to her craziness.

She had not always been as fearful of her feelings as she had become in recent months, with the break up of her several-year-long relationship with Jim. Formerly, her feelings had been her only trustworthy compass. She had known with absolute certainty from the moment she met him that she and Jim would spend their lives together. She had based this conclusion on the profound feelings of connection she had with him. She even knew that he reciprocated her feelings with an identical intensity and certainty -- even though he had always refused to speak of them.

I knew exactly what she meant, for I had had the same experience in my relationship with Patricia, the woman whose specter overshadowed my work with Mara. Because the years had validated my certainty of the depth and truth in our connection, I could well believe the validity of Ellen's assertions. Furthermore, both Ellen's and my relationships had come to a sudden and unexplained end, without any satisfying explanation or closure. Jim had left her, moved to another city in search of work, and kept postponing the date when she would be allowed to join him. She knew the relationship was over. Her feelings, she concluded, had led her astray and could never be trusted again.

As I questioned her, I could see that she really had paid attention to her feelings; and I was inclined to trust them -- both as regards herself and her former partner. She had been acutely aware of the feelings that underlay her everyday interactions and that stemmed from the self field she and Jim had inhabited together. The difficulty was that she had drawn too many wishful conclusions from those feelings. Above all, she had made no accommodations to the realities of everyday life -- the fights and misunderstandings that had grown over their years together.

The fact that we connect deeply with and feel loyal toward one another does not at all guarantee that we can live together successfully. Indeed, Ellen told me she had had such supreme confidence in the solidity and permanence of her connection with Jim that she had expected everything would take care of itself -- the same assumption she had made of the ball of light experience many years before. She had not been worried about the ways she and Jim had neglected one another. Thus, although she had paid attention to her self-level feelings, she had leapt to indefensible conclusions. These latter were not feelings but unwarranted hopes. It was not her feelings that had been untrustworthy but the interpretations and constructions she had placed upon them.

I saw it as my job to support the validity of her feelings emanating from the self field and to gradually nurture confidence in the possibility of building bridges to the public world. Poetic, philosophical, and other analogies with her experience were by no means rare. Eventually she began to appreciate that there might be a hidden community of individuals who, to a greater or lesser extent, shared her experience and view of the world: a viable subculture in the persona field. The turning point in this work was marked by the following dream:

> She was about to be married to herself. She had designed a ritual in which she was to appear at the altar naked as a sign of her complete honesty and integrity. The congregation was assembled and the wedding about to begin when she realized her nakedness would not be understood the way she intended it. She had to find clothing to serve two functions. It had to meet the expectations of her congregation, and it had to express her own sense of who she was. She tried on several outfits, each covering progressively more of her body, until finally she settled on one that had a long skirt decorated with a Chinese scene.

Here, the theme of an incontrovertible inner truth -- getting married to herself -- has to be clothed for the sake of the public world. The oriental design reminded her of her dream of the previous week in which she was a Chinese woman walking along a narrow mountain ridge. China suggested her foreignness in her surroundings as well as her attention to "inner" realities: she thought of Buddhism and meditation, allusions to her at-home-ness in the self field. The narrow ridge seemed to refer to her new attempts to accommodate to the realities of both self and persona. She could live the deep realities of self only if she clothed them appropriately for the persona field.

Through this dream, Ellen learned for herself and taught me a radically new version of persona. The persona she was called upon to design in this dream was not a "false self," not a "mask," and not a corruption of her identity for the sake of the public world. Ellen's Chinese dress represented a conscious and authentic stance toward the persona field, the selection of an image of her deep self that she could live publicly. Her solution to the persona/self problem suggests an entirely new possibility.

Persona does not *have* to be at odds with self. In the general run of things it may be that conflicts involving persona are our first indications of adjustment difficulties. But for Mara, Lisa, and Ellen, these conflicts reflected different kinds of problem. Mara and Lisa suffered from a failure to find a center in their persons and in their lives. Mara was relieved of the much of the burden of her distress by a somewhat flamboyant persona. The task of her analysis was to revise her narcissistic defenses so that she no longer had to rely on a progressively irrelevant persona. As I look back on Mara's work from the perspective Ellen

has provided, it seems clear to me that her longing for grand magical powers and her unconscious aggression were attempts to invest narcissistic energy in her persona, to make it a bulwark against a severe wound in the integrity of her sense of self. The course of her life before analysis was actually serving to widen the rift between persona and self. Her bouts of depression might therefore be seen as protests staged by her neglected self, demands for a caring and empathic response. Her deep unconscious woundedness appealed to my own. And, although I did not yet understand my own need for empathy, the uneven treatment I received from my first two analysts had sensitized me to the value of empathy in the analyst so that I could stumble into doing the right thing for the wrong reasons.

Lisa, on the other hand, wholly lacked a persona-defense and was overwhelmed by the pain of her self-alienation. Persona and self, suffering from similar tendencies to dissolve, actually seemed to collapse into one another. Lisa could not distinguish her need for a mode of life in the persona field from the desperation resulting from her fragmented sense of self. Although I was also not able to distinguish these two forms of woundedness clearly in my own mind, I was painfully aware that her alienation from the social world was so acute that I had no choice but to address it immediately. If she could not connect with family, husband, or other associates, I hoped to connect her to myself. I thought that if she could connect with one human being, she would eventually be able to find her way to the more general social world. What surprised me was that this persona work appeared to have simultaneously begun the work of reknitting the wound in her self. Apparently the collapse of persona-lessness into self-disintegration had offered a hidden advantage, but I could not understand what this was before my work with Ellen.

Ellen, in great contrast to the others, had many of the elements of a secure sense of self. She felt this potential strength as a severe disadvantage, however, inasmuch as it was so out of harmony with the spirit of the age. Indeed, her frequent humiliations in the public world had seriously undermined her natural trust in her deep feelings. This being a situation I could identify with completely, I did not find myself unsettled by Ellen the way I had been by Mara and Lisa. Before I had entered analysis, I had defended myself against an inadequate persona by relying heavily on my deeper, even mystical, certainties. Even today I am easily wounded by misunderstandings originating in the persona field and retreat reflexively to the "inner world" where I am more secure. Jung taught me to see this as the plight of the "introvert." I easily identify with Jung's pain at being misunderstood, although I am suspicious of an unanalyzed narcissism in his claims of superior wisdom -- accurate though they may have been. For example: "I have offended many people, for as soon as I saw that they did not understand me, that was the end of the matter as far as I was concerned" (1961: p. 356).

A modicum of Jung's cockiness can go a long way toward establishing a secure footing in the self field for those, like Ellen and myself, who have an innate trust in our deep feelings but experience great difficulty in adapting to society. This is why I believed I knew Ellen so well. She needed to find a persona capable of mediating between her reliable inner realities and what she experienced as rigid and arbitrary public expectations. Her dream of the Chinese dress was her first ray of hope that such an adaptation was possible. Indeed, it suggested a more satisfactory solution than the one Jung had found. For, instead of turning away in anger from those unable to understand, Ellen's dream suggested that the misunderstood truths only required a new suit of clothes -- not to disguise them but to

transmit them more effectively. Ellen's dream taught me that persona might be not so much an obstacle as an opportunity, not so much a device to hide my self as to communicate it.

It seems that I appreciated Ellen's dream far more than she did. For me it meant the analysis was beginning to succeed, that there was a self to be transmitted (she was to be married to herself) and that there was a means (the Chinese dress) to accomplish it. An integration of great magnitude was underway. She was solidifying at the level of self and ready to adapt to the persona field. She seemed a bit dubious of my enthusiasm. She failed to "get it" in a conscious sense, because she had not yet *lived* it. But she must have felt it in her bones, because she immediately began to treat *me* in a new way. She became more assertive and sure of herself -- a situation that did not always leave me unscathed.

For example, she began to express her anger for my having failed to address her phobias directly. She reminded me she had been in analysis for three years and that her phobias were just as strong as ever. She did not wish to deny that she had made some important changes, but she felt the work was beside the point, in that we had not yet touched the main problem. Immediately I felt abashed, misunderstood, and guilty on all counts. I was hurt and angry over her belittling our work, *my* work. I felt I had failed her, and I still had not a clue about how to address the symptoms apart from some fuzzy kind of desensitization process. I had to say something, so -- rather defensively, I suppose -- I began by reiterating the terms of our original contract.

My job was to address her wholeness in order to provide the psychological foundations that would render her phobias no longer necessary. We had been doing that. Perhaps it was now time to put it to the test and see, by confronting the phobias, whether we had weakened them at all. As far as I could see, they were there to protect her from the two things that scared her the most. The first was her dubious election by God in the experience of being taken up in a ball of light. Elevators and airplanes reminded her of this experience. The other was the world of chrome and glass people, those who confidently *belonged* in the persona field and had no use for Ellen. Cities, airplanes, and supermarkets were where these people congregated. Expressways were the roads they used to get from one gathering to the next.

If our work had had any effect on the phobias, we would expect to find it in a reduction in the alienation she felt from the persona world and a lowering of anxiety as she rose off the ground in an elevator. I suggested that she try to see how far she could go before the anxiety became intolerable. We might expect that there would be *some* anxiety, possibly even a good deal of it. But there might also be a lot less that she expects. I asked her to give an elevator a try, not recklessly, but monitoring the level of her anxiety at every step. She should ask herself if she thinks she can bear the anxiety she is feeling right now. If so, she should ask herself if she could bear a bit more for a moment or two. If she could handle standing in the open elevator, maybe she could try the second floor. She could always step off the elevator and walk down the stairs if the anxiety became too great. When she came to her session next week, we could discuss the anxiety she felt and what changes it might have undergone.

I was not sure this was "sound analytic technique." It sounded like a page out of Milton Erickson. I was setting it up as a "given" that there would be changes in her level of anxiety -- probably changes for the better. We "knew" she would fail to get to the top. We just did not know how high she could get. But height was beside the point. Her task was not reach

any particular goal, but only to observe her anxiety at each stage. Monitoring her anxiety was to be a distraction from her fear of failure. It might allow her to succeed in spite of herself -- a subtle form of "hypnosis," as Erickson understood it. As long as our interest was directed to the anxiety we knew she had not lost, there was no possibility -- despite its outcome -- that the task could be seen as a failure.

Although I felt myself a bit of a fraud at the time, in hindsight I would say this was *potentially* a good analytic move; for it was opening up a discussion that might result in a much more differentiated appreciation of her anxiety. What made her fear *phobic* was that the anxiety it carried was a big, fuzzy, overwhelming ball of terror. If she could look at it clearly enough to mark its contours, we could begin to "analyze" her anxiety feelings -- taming them as we named them. In my ignorance, I missed the opportunity to see it this way at the time.

Ellen designed the experiment herself. She began visiting the city center's tallest buildings to see how high she could ride the elevators. The sixth floor was about the limit at first. But then she got a friend to go with her, and found she could get to the top. But she felt she had to get there on her own, and there had to be something to do, someplace to go, when she got to the top. So she rented a room as close to the top of the tallest hotel she could find. Step by step, she found the anxiety was tolerable and actually diminished with time. Finally she tackled the airplane phobia.

She changed the hour of her session so that she could meet with me every week after attending a "fear of flying" course at Logan Airport. Intimidated week after week by other participants in the course boasting of their self-confidence, she feared she was out of place even in this group of airplane phobics. But when "graduation day" arrived and everyone was to fly in an airliner some eighty miles to Bradley Airport in Connecticut and then home again to Boston, she was one of the few to undergo the rite of passage. The "confident" ones had failed to appear.

It was a double triumph for her. She had dared to let herself be taken aloft in a mechanical contraption that reminded her of the ball of light of many years before and survived; and she had learned that other peoples' bravado might be less well founded than her own shaky persona. After solidifying her accomplishment with a couple of additional flights to visit friends and relatives in other parts of the country, she planned a new life for herself as a painter in a large city where she had a small community of artist friends. We terminated the analysis shortly before she boarded a plane for a one-way journey to her new home.

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1. I distinguish between two groups of archetypes: "constitutive" (or "functional") and "mythological." The five archetypes that "constitute" the psyche or that describe the psyche's five modes of "functioning" are ego, persona, shadow, anima/animus, and self. There are always five and only five of these. Everything that transpires in the psyche can be attributed to the relations between them. They have no definite image, but may be filled in differently by each individual. Their relations with one another are "dynamic" in the sense this word is used of Freud's three constitutive archetypes: ego, superego, and id.

The "mythological" archetypes, on the other hand, have quite a definite shape, from one individual to the next. They recapitulate the mythic forms and narratives of the human race. The mythic image of Hermes, for instance, is always a sly character, a traveler, a shape-shifter. But he might sometimes play the role of shadow, sometimes of anima -- indeed, of any of the functional archetypes.

2. *Persona*, in Latin, meant the mask worn by an actor on stage. Cf. *Dramatis personae*. According to its roots it means to "sound through," *per sonare*, i.e., the voice through the opening in the mask at the place of the mouth.