

On Discursivity and Neurosis: Conditions of Possibility for (West) Discourse with Others

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The alliance of discursivity with neurosis on the one hand, and an exploration of new conditions of discourse on the other, conditions now self consciously denoted as 'West', gives notice of a certain disillusionment I feel with my culturally received, monotheistic valorization of the power of 'word-ing' (rendered as discourse, reasoning, dialoguing, conversation, etc.), and my sense that the problem is not discourse per se, but the way my understanding of it is, or has been, too stuck within its own cultural self enclosure, within the compound of its own cultural grammar, one might say. In taking up these issues within the context of a conference convened to consider "Fragmentation and the Desire for Order/Unity", I wish to declare that, for me, the issue of the theme is not in the way "Fragmentation and Order/Unity" play off each other relationally, or symbiotically (which they probably do) but how so inevitably and incidentally in the West that play-off has a neurotic tail-chasing character that is inspired precisely by Desire. My remarks, therefore, about the possibilities of new conditions of discourse for the West, turn most profoundly on a problematizing of Desire itself.

The deep neurosis in our communicative practices may issue, I suspect, from a form of constant craving, the satiation of which we are culturally pre-disposed to believe is pre-eminently possible only through an act of language, even language translated into action as policy, or social change. In Hebrew, the word "word" (*dabhar*) means *event*, and in the Greek gospels we are told that we live by "word" as much as by "bread"; which goes to show that in the Hebrew-Christian tradition anyway, word-ing is somehow linked to an interest in power (agency) and to appetite. Our orientation to language and its various modalities is inevitably meaning-driven, deeply purposive, or logocentric, as Derrida would put it, so that any investigation of sickness in our discursive practices may necessarily have to begin with the matter of our primary expectations, linguistically mediated.

That it is possible like this to have a discourse about discourse is a relatively recent phenomenon in the West. The turn to language in social science is traceable to Wittgenstein, and also to the Vienna Circle of the 1930's which precipitated the Frankfurt School of neo-Marxist critical social theory. But in the contemporary period it is to Michel Foucault that the largest debt is likely owed for illustrating how social practices are made topical and sustained through forms of discursive community that in turn must be sustained for the social practices to go on.¹ And then to Jacques Derrida we are indebted for so strongly resurrecting the pre-Socratic notion (also well understood by Kant and Marx) that presence always implies absence; that in present practices there lingers the suppressed "trace" of what makes them

possible.² So the Greek valorization of dialogue through the symposium **requires** a silent slave class to do the dirty work of life-support, and it requires the silence be safeguarded.

This new discourse about discourse eliminates forever the possibility that our talk and action can go on naively, innocent of the political realities that sustain them. The orthodox canon of English literature has to acknowledge its patriarchy; talk of the "humanities" requires admitting to the global empire of capitalism which inspired the confidence to speak for the entire species; Enlightenment principles of Truth and Reason underwriting the contemporary hard and social sciences are being forced to respond to the cries of those refusing to be subsumed under scientific accounts.

In what follows I wish to explore conditions that may mark the limits and possibilities of discourse within the contemporary situation of the West. Inevitably, I speak as a white Western male, but one formed through a personal biography of displacement from non-Western domains. I was born in China during the Maoist revolution, then ejected with my family as a foreigner. I grew up in Central Africa (Northern Rhodesia/Zambia), but after political independence it was clear that my skin colour, and all reflected through it, had little place within the new social agenda. So now I speak as a white male academic, profoundly sensitive to the ways my training in the codes, contents and protocols of the good liberal Western tradition bears only tainted currency in many other realms of our shared planetary home. I search for ways of speaking and acting that may make possible for the West forms of encounter with others that are more friendly, less violent, more self-reflexive, and not condescending. In undertaking this task, I repudiate any postmodern claims about the end of grand narratives, or even the end of narrativity.³ The challenge is to reinterpret the grand narratives from within the space of our post-colonial understanding of the modern world system; to move away from triumphal declarations about Truth into an acquaintance with the way human beings find their deepest companionship in the action of telling stories to each other, of giving accounts of their experience, that is, precisely in the practice of narrative out of which good theory comes. Before proceeding, I might note that my dis-illusionment about the possibilities of what can be rendered through discourse began with reading Tibetan Buddhist teacher, Chogyam Trungpa.⁴ In *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, Trungpa undertakes a meditation on the works of Nagarjuna, the 2nd-3rd century A.D. founder of Madhyamika (Middle Way) Buddhism. The word "neurotic" is used to describe the action of ego, which manifests itself as the Three

Lords of Materialism (the Lord of Form, the Lord of Speech, and the Lord of Mind). Trungpa explains:

The Lords use discursive thought as their first line of defense, as their pawns in their effort to deceive us. The more we generate thoughts, the busier we are mentally and the more convinced we are of our existence. So the Lords are constantly trying to activate these thoughts, trying to create a constant overlapping of thoughts so that nothing can be seen beyond them.⁵

One witnesses here a primal critique of everything assumed to be good in a Word tradition such as that of the West. The very desire to generate thoughts and concepts discursively is not only linked to a phenomenology of deception, particularly to a deception about identity (existence); so also is the activism at work in this deception linked to an ever-deepening myopia. Here then are illuminated the seeds of hyper-production so characteristic of capitalist versions of literacy. Also clarified are the exaggerated vanities of Christian ideas about proclamation ("Here is the news..."), to say nothing of the oppressive officiousness of the activist mind. All these lead to a hardening self-enclosure, ripe for xenophobia and parochialism, the death of openness. So it is that there seems to be a widening despair in the West about what can be achieved through wording, through talking, through writing: an implosion of the democratic ideal, of consensus seeking, and even of the literary ideal as a form of social discipline.⁶ Of course, we are not talking here of the end of discursivity per se. After all, even a Buddha has to talk to critique talk. Instead, the aim must be two-fold: to show the limits of conventional West phenomenologies of discourse at the same time as refract them through understandings that may open them up and rejuvenate them through reformulation.

Herewith, then, an exploration of conditions of possibility for (West) discourse with others, considered through three clustered themes: 1) Post-colonial theorizing of the other, enantiomorphism and a recovery of the logic of the negative; 2) The homocentric fallacy and a shift from ideology to an ecology of consciousness; and 3) Meditation and the pedagogy of presence.

THEME ONE: Post-colonial Theorizing of the Other, Enantiomorphism and a Recovery of the Logic of the Negative

Enantiomorphism is a term derived from Greek describing how Truth cannot be expressed except

in relationships of opposites (> Gk *enantios*, opposite + *morphe*, form).⁷ Sometimes what is denoted is the tendency of things to actively turn into their opposite, as in the case of the word “socialism”, which, as Havel has shown⁸, in Eastern Europe turned from being a word of celebration to a swear-word in about fifty years. American democracy requires the practice of fascism to protect its interests in Brazil, Chile, Mexico. In teaching, it takes a meek child about two weeks to turn a meek teacher into a monster.⁹ Generally, the degree to which this dynamic holds true depends upon the degree to which polar identities fail to recognize or appreciate how such self-identifications stand in a dependent and continuous relationship with what they reject. This resonates with postmodern formulations that any identity requires an Other by which to define itself; that I understand who I am through whom I am not. As well, the play of opposites is articulated in Asian wisdom traditions where virtue involves maintaining a harmonious balance between the pulls and tugs of opposition, and that to fall in love with extremes is to undermine the grounds of genuinely creative existence.

Why this last understanding is so often given a pejorative twist in the West (Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean, notwithstanding), to mean quietism, non-action or even moral cowardice, is itself a matter worthy of consideration. Ashis Nandy has noted for example that in the context of British imperialism in India, the British interpreted the ease of their conquest as a revelation of a certain moral and intellectual deficiency of the Indian people. In fact, a more accurate interpretation would show that it was Hindu virtues of tolerance and openness that enabled the British to establish themselves.¹⁰ It is only the deep hubris of capitalism that can afford a view that its global successes are due to some inherent trait of strength and superiority.

Now certainly, enantiomorphism itself can be read as standing in a relation of opposition to all formulations oriented to final resolution. But such is the point: orientation to finality, closure and fixity always end up revealing a condition of lack, and usually the result is violent, because the requirements for ‘finalization’ are inevitably political, with arrangements of oppression required toward nay-saying. So enantiomorphism should not be taken as a fixable concept but rather as a descriptive device for the way in which things naturally unfold. Call it a reminder never to take any one thing, -idea or person with ultimate seriousness: even here, the word “never” requires a gloss, but that is a task for another time.

The beckoning, then, is for a language which can articulate the phenomenology of living ‘in the

middle’ of things, a language not determined to have the final say, but one that can show the way of the condition in which we always already find ourselves, namely in the condition of perpetual non-resolution, yet one in which we are mysteriously, even mystically sustained. There is a resolution already, always at work in our non-resolutions, but one that cannot be named from within any one lexicon or grammar, also without which the possibilities of human language cannot exist. Pierre Bourdieu has referred to this as “the consensus in dissensus”.¹¹ The great hermeneutical scholar, H.G. Gadamer, after a life devoted to inquiry into the grounds of human understanding, was prompted to ask: “Does what already sustains us require any grounding?”¹² It seems such a plaintive remark from someone in the sunset years of a distinguished career in Western metaphysics, but it points to an important insight, namely that the search for a theoretical “grounding” of human life belies the truth that human life is already sustained without such grounding. There is a homocentric fallacy at work in most Western attempts to explain its actions, another theme to be examined later.

The following illustration can be taken from the realm of pedagogy, one showing not only the way in which Western pedagogies so relentlessly construct the delusion of resolution, but also how, in that process, they simultaneously shut down the possibilities of enantiomorphic insight by hardening the borders of self-definition. The conditions of creative interpretation are thereby foreclosed.

Augustana University College is a fine liberal arts institution which traces its identity to Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. Like any well-intended academy, the college is dedicated to inspiring its young with the noblest ideals of Western culture, and in this case the hero is the Augustinian monk from Wittenburg. It is understandable, therefore, that the most striking icon on the open campus commons should be a statue of Luther. But here one might ask, what representation of Luther would constitute the most pedagogically responsible one? Or, in the context of the present discussion, how might Luther be depicted to show the character of Lutheran Protestantism in its most whole-some sense? How should the students at the college be taught to “read” Luther in a way that might avoid a plunge into one-sidedness?

Inevitably perhaps, the college elders elected the high road, choosing to depict Luther at his young, virile best. Eyes clear, skin smooth and taut; the sheer force of the bronze truly gives pause. But... one must ask, what of the older Luther, the scrofulous one, the man drinking four gallons of beer a day whose (later) writings show

all the signs of paranoid alcoholic psychosis?¹³ And what of the down-side of the Protestant Reformation as a whole, as it can now be read in retrospect from the point of view of our present experience of it: its propensity for schism and divisiveness; its ability, in the name of purification, to produce not just intolerance for ambiguity, but also an exaggerated imaginal literalism through the death of symbol. Of course too, one must give account of the deep pessimism about human nature that Luther inherited from Augustine, subsequently willed to the future, a pessimism with its own self-fulfilling character, whereby if I feel doomed my only comfort is in making others feel the same? What about all this?

Enantiomorphically, it is necessary to affirm that the young Luther and the later share an immutable continuity, and that the truth of Luther, including the deep Lutheran legacy in the history of the West, must be found in acknowledging both sides of his character. Pedagogically speaking, to hold up only the young idealist as a hero to the neglect of acknowledging his imbalances and exaggerations ensures an induction of the young into a cultural interpretation full of repression, producing a stance toward life that must be inevitably paranoid and defensive, determined to keep the devil at bay. The Luther curriculum then degenerates into debates over which interpretation of his character is 'correct', instead of trying to creatively discern how all aspects articulate one unity. When God and the Devil are set up as two identically different players within a cultural architecture of dualism, it becomes virtually impossible to learn how God can so easily turn out to be the Devil, and the Devil may be God in disguise. Any attempt to create 'pure' identity, whether in the name of religion or ideology inevitably falters from the discovery that purity, as the possibility of life-without-difference, is a vain hope.¹⁴

In terms of contemporary global reconfigurations of influence and order, one of the most difficult challenges facing the West is the realization that the West itself is not a pure identity, to be held up as a clean example of development, progress and civility. The debts, both economic and cultural, to Others, especially to peoples of the former colonies, are too large.¹⁵ Too, the demographic shifts whereby the people of India, Pakistan, the Middle East etc. have taken their places on the home soil of their former colonizers only shows how the colonial past has to be 'faced' in real terms.

Actually, from an enantiomorphic point of view, that facing is a responsibility of all players. For one thing, the myth of pre-contactism presumes to insinuate that before the arrival of Western colonizers, life was unproblematic for

non-Western peoples, but the most cursory examination of pre-contact conditions in any colonized country simply does not bear this out. In the case of China, for example, before the arrival of Protestant missionaries the lot of women was to be held as virtual prisoner within a mythical construct whereby men were the mediators of heaven (yang) while women were to be chained to an earth-boundedness (yin).¹⁶

The new massive interfusion of cultures, then, one of the long-term legacies of the modern colonial period, brings with it the inevitability of tradition-boundedness being challenged to reassess itself. However, whether this is understood positively or negatively, that is whether it is a loss or gain to have one's stable structures of belief 'relativized' by encounters with Others, is not simply a hermeneutic option that can be decided completely, purely, by those in charge. There is always more at work through interfusion than can be disentangled by means of the languages and lexicons of pre-contact conditions. Contact, or 'facing' the Other, always means examining the ways I am now inexorably different than I was before contact, and things can never be the same again. In the case of Islamic tradition, for example, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Naim has shown how the traditional Muslim concept of sharia, or the pure, exclusive tradition of Islamic law, is being reworked through new interpretations of the Koran to provide a language for Muslim practice that is more tolerant and open.¹⁷

In summary then, post-colonial realities point to ways in which linguistically mediated Western assumptions about identity contain an aporia, or perplexity, which can only be addressed by acknowledging how identity means nothing without a set of relations, and that historically it can now be seen how Western identity in particular got constructed through long-standing dependencies with silenced Others, others now claiming their debts. In terms of the new possibilities of discourse, there must be a facing of the exaggerations implicit in one-sided interpretations, and an owning-up to the consequences of operating out of a fiction of purity; a thinking through of how purity may not mean one thing (pejorative monotheism), but a full plenitude of the Many (unispheric polytheism), articulated as a coming to terms with a logic of the negative implicit in all speech and action, whereby there is a silent partner in all conversation. It implies the end of unity in any secured sense, but maybe also a sense of relief to be gained from shedding those defensive weights that a belief in pure identity requires to sustain itself. At the same time a new invigoration becomes possible from acknowledging how that which once had been held at bay contains at least

part of the answer for a shared future. This may lead in turn to an understanding of unity that is not dependent on the usual Western assumption of identity as difference. I do not need to keep you in your place in order to be me if I understand the concept "me" itself to be a fiction. This will be explored later under theme three.

**THEME TWO:
The Homocentric Fallacy
and a Shift from Ideology
to an Ecology of Consciousness**

It is we humans who take all these phenomena of Nature as having some definite design in relationship to human destiny and welfare, but this homocentric interpretation of the world always ends in tragedy, if not in an utter confusion of thought.

So says the great Zen teacher, D.T. Suzuki.¹⁸ The roots of such homocentrism in the West are not difficult to trace. That Man (*sic*) is the crown of the created order, destined to rule over it as a duty, if not pleasure, is the central myth of *Genesis*, and it is the myth that made possible the vast confidence of science in both exploring and unlocking the secrets of the natural order without fear.¹⁹ In the social realm, Marx's scientific materialism, applied to the engineering of social space, is only the most obvious of serious attempts to live as if human will and intention are the final arbiter of the destiny of human affairs, a view most notably contraindicated by Chernobyl. A more subtle form of the same disposition can be found in the "social construction of reality"²⁰ myth which dominates Western social science. It provides a language for being able to claim that we are who we think we are, without extra-human contingencies, and that the self-enclosure of our cognitive constructs represents a triumph of some sort, something worthy of cultural applause, even though phenomenologically, in terms of how we live, it may be a form of imaginal and egological imprisonment of the darkest kind.²¹

The critique of homocentrism can be taken up in two ways. In the most elementary sense, human vulnerability is easily named by pointing to all the ways our securities so easily fall victim to natural forces over which we do not have, nor likely ever will have, any real control. The fallout from Mt. Pinatubo's eruption in the Philippines has exceeded, in terms of negative influence on the ozone layer, all human pollution since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. An earthquake can easily wipe out in a few minutes a human population

the size of Hiroshima. In a family, the different personalities of offspring, quite apparent from birth, are simply not reducible to any learning theory.

As a teacher of teachers in a university faculty of education, I am often appalled at how virtually none of the languages and constructs of teacher education give even a nod to this deep lacuna within human experience. On the contrary, every space is required to be filled with either action or explanation, almost as a denial of death, a determined evasion of the inevitable news that no matter how complete one's plans, things could very easily fall apart. Homocentrism is haunted by a heavy, ghostly demand for complete human responsibility in everything that happens, and it is a demand that can never be satisfactorily fulfilled precisely because it is impossible to have a plan that could anticipate every contingency.

Homocentric pedagogy is a serious, joyless business, and distinctly anti-pedagogical in the sense that there is no place for that-which-cannot-be-named, no awe or reverence for all those forces that surround us every moment and which at any moment might betray our false confidence. An attunement to such things leads inevitably to forms of relating to the world which have largely been banished by science and secularism, but without which there can be no wisdom or understanding. Homocentric pedagogy is inevitably a pedagogy of despair.

A second line of critique against the homocentric fallacy involves acknowledging the way the natural world has its own subjectivity. As Thomas Berry says²², the world is not just an object to my subjectivity; rather it has its own set of response abilities to human conduct. The species death of birds, fish, reptiles and so on as a consequence of human pollution is a response to what human beings do, not just a vacant termination. Thus we can look to the natural world as a kind of interlocutor with the capacity to pass judgement on human affairs. The injunctions of Jesus, "Consider the lilies of the field...; Behold the fowls of the air..."²³ point to an insight well understood in Asian Way traditions, especially Taoism, that there are important lessons to be learned from deep meditation on the natural world, particularly with respect to the balance of relations among emergence, nurture and decay.

Most social theory in the West, especially since the turn of the century, has been generated in urban, highly industrialized environments, places where the only trees and plants available to human observation are products of hyper-cultivation, and the only visible animals are profoundly domesticated, dependent on pleasing human overlords as a means of manipulatively pro-

curing the necessities of life. Such a site for the generation of theory and policy must inevitably ensure social outcomes that are driven by the ambiances, rhythms and tones of their situational origin, characterised most clearly by prediction, control, and rationalization, to say nothing of an embeddedness within a sonic environment echoing primarily the noises of machines. Canadian musicologist and composer, R. Murray Schafer, says one of the first prerequisites for learning to hear the world in new ways is to undergo "ear cleaning".²⁴

Another aspect, then, of interlocution in earth-human relations, and the critique of homocentrism that such interlocution entails, concerns an attention to the necessary geography of all human thought and action.²⁵ Our ideas and actions are inspired just as much by physical landscape and "geophysical memory"²⁶ as by Platonic notions of pure thought. William Thompson, for example, suggests that fairytales such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* are best understood as reflecting human memory traces of prehistoric geophysical activity. The dwarfs are a subliminal reminder that underneath the sunlit surface of human affairs there is the constant subterranean agitation and tumultuous work of geophysical forces that could erupt at any time. In a different turn, David Campbell²⁷, explores how the identity, "United States", is a construction that privileges the spatial over the temporal because Europeans who encountered the New World went out of their way to deny its historicity. In American experience, history developed into an "eternal present", a condition emerging from the experience of rupture from, and discontinuity with, the Old World. The Puritans turned "geography into eschatology", a move that justified the genocide of native American Indians and the enslavement of the Afro-American as embodiments of the Anti-Christ. The imaginative geography of the United States then, is "iconic" and "ideational", with politics privileging the "symbolic". Underdeveloped in the American psyche is what could be called a narrative phenomenological sensibility which pays attention to the complexity of human experience in its lived conditions of place, story, and family etc. Solutions to human problems always begin with abstract theorizing rather than with an attention to life as it is lived in its specificity.

These examples from Thompson and Campbell point to the obvious, but under a homocentric dispensation, suppressed truth that there is always more going on in the world than human beings could ever dream of; that indeed even our dreams are shaped and moulded by the ways our experience is conditioned by relations to particular temporal and spatial situatedness on the planet, both

socio-political and otherwise. Thompson suggests that such dependencies invite a reorientation of thinking about thinking away from orthodox conventions which regard the purpose of thinking to be the securing of metaphysical, social, political or scientific truths, truths which always end up being found out as "ideologies", or hyper-extended imputations of the specific being the general. Such renderings, when turned into institutional forms, must of necessity close an eye to their own dependencies in order to remain stable. What is required, says Thompson, is an understanding of consciousness itself as "ecological", always in a state of reverberation and transformation as a consequence of its broader connections. This understanding not only reveals the conditionedness of our imaginal life, but also our potential for re-imagining, should it be possible to cultivate new ways of paying attention. Paying attention in new ways can best be named as the practice of meditation, the last theme to be taken up in this paper.

THEME THREE: Meditation and the Pedagogy of Presence

*The contemplative life must provide an area, a space of liberty, of silence, in which possibilities are allowed to surface and new choices — beyond routine choice — become manifest. It should create a new experience of time ... not a blank to be filled or an untouched space to be conquered and violated, but a space which can enjoy its own potentialities and hopes ... open to others — compassionate time, rooted in the sense of common illusion and in criticism of it.*²⁸

Facing the General Assembly of the Council of Europe in Vienna, Vaclav Havel recently issued a lament for the dismal prospects of a new Europe emerging from the ashes of the Cold War.²⁹ Currently, too many Western states are trying to "outwit history by reducing the idea of Europe to a noble backdrop against which they can continue their petty concerns". Attempts at unification around principles of democracy and pluralistic politics seem doomed largely because of an erroneous belief that the task ahead is a purely technical, instrumental and administrative one, involving nothing but "endless" discussion and debate. What is neglected, he suggests, is a new kind of common moral obligation between peoples and states that can incarnate the full potential for creative change that the present moment holds. Speaking self-reflexively, Havel suggests that such potentiality has little chance, however, "without

ever attempting to change anything in ourselves, or in the habitual motives and stereotypes of our behavior”.

The question of how we come to change our social, political and personal habits is of course critical to any proposal for collective reform. It is an issue of special relevance in the contemporary period when the technology for manipulating both public and private consciousness is so well developed. People everywhere suffer the irony of being offered a ubiquitous promise for individual expression while that very promise itself is manufactured by others through a dense and largely hidden network of sophisticated marketing and media technologies tied to corporate capital interests. Even public education, once venerated as the primal hope for shaping public will, now shows itself too often as a hollowed out site of “culture wars”,³⁰ incapable of anything but the most banal and washed out renditions of human reality, an induction into “know-nothingism”, as Gayatri Spivak recently described the American university educational system.³¹ Religious groups and other traditional sources of inspired morals too easily reveal their complicity in regressive politics, or a commitment to narrow sectarian interests which are entirely inappropriate for a time when the positive fruits of the new cultural interfusion require, more than anything else, a spirit of openness, generosity and care.

The widespread cultural confusion in the West, now very close to the surface, and signified most obviously in the postmodern move to show the inability of language to contain a call to action which could be held in common — such confusion may be a prelude to a new enlightenment. Again as Trungpa says, “Confusion is part of the path”³², but for the next stage to be realized, there has to be a cleansing of the old rationalities, all those rationalities linked in the West to a conception of the Same named, say, as capital interest, an interest in turn linked to the reduction of most forms of cultural capital, from ‘higher’ education to the use of ‘manipulatives’ in kindergarten, to the language of power. There needs to be an attention to what David Loy calls “the repressed shadow of rationality”³³, which is meditation, or meditative consciousness, an attunement to the world which is not dependent on the ravenous pressures of the market or on all those other forms of interference which get in the way of the genuinely new.

It is not the place here to lay out a program for the practice of meditation, with all the permutations and possibilities articulated by its many traditions in the world.³⁴ Let the aim be simple: to evoke its primary purpose and show its value in the present discussion. Etymologically, meditation

has to do with gaining the true measure of one's situation (>L. *med-*, measure) which is achieved through a stopping of all those daily rituals and habits which inevitably act to sustain status quo conventionalities. Most traditions of meditation emphasize the importance of understanding breathing, and this is not just another piece of exotica, but an acknowledgement of how the simple practice of breathing reflects the character of our connection to the outer world. The lungs are the door through which the outside world is taken into the inner world and transformed into a response via the cardiovascular system. Stress responses to environmental pressures are most often connected to breathing difficulties. Wisdom traditions understand this very well. In Hebrew, the word for “breath” is *ruach*, which is also the word for “spirit”. Spiritual difficulties are breathing difficulties and vice versa; problems in our understanding of the necessary conditions for good relations between Self and Other.

Meditative stopping makes possible a new kind of stillness in which can be heard or recognized, maybe for the first time, all of those voices, intuitions, dreams and aspirations (another term connected to breathing) which have been suppressed under the dispensations of the dominant order. Meditation disrupts the grammar of received consciousness to make consciousness available to its wider purview, which is the ability to think freely, in a way not dependent upon concepts determined by essentialist thinking to be the necessary tools of thought. It invites an orientation to language and thinking which is no longer dependent on this or that (postmodern relationalism) but acts out of a forgetfulness of language as self-consciously appropriated ego-identity, working instead in a condition of “non-abiding” (>Skt. *sunyata*). To become forgetful in this way is not self-induced amnesia or escapism, but rather an emergence into recognition of the deep interdependency of any identity and a full owning-up to the way in which I always already am that of which I speak, even when I speak of the world and others as object. This is the famous *tuam saf asi* of Hinduism, “that thou art”.³⁵ The subject/object dualism that underwrites virtually all of Western metaphysics, relegating conversation to a form of power negotiation arising from arguments over concepts, such dualism is shown meditatively to be a fiction, because, as David Loy says, “To forget oneself is to wake up and find oneself in or, more precisely, as a situation — not confronted by it but one with it”.³⁶ And so, as Martin Buber once put it, “all real living is meeting”.³⁷

Approaching the world meditatively or contemplatively is a living form of saturated ethics whereby the discipline of meditation produces what can

be called a “condition of unthinkability”. When I begin to understand that everything is interpenetrated by everything else it becomes, in a very literal sense, quite unthinkable that for the sake of my own fictional identity I should deliberately perpetrate violence against another. To kill my brother is to engage in my own destruction; to wound the earth through willful negligence is to destroy the means of my own survival. If, as Gandhi once said, I am wealthy, it is because I am a thief.³⁸ Putting the matter positively, Thomas Berry says that when I heal myself, I heal the world,³⁹ and it is this inspiration (another breathing term) that is the true point of meditation, namely healing — healing oneself of all those cultural diseases that are mediated precisely through forms and constructs that one’s cultural grammar predisposes one to live out as natural. For Western civilization, said Max Scheler, “the entire development has been a one-sided and overactive process of expansion outward”,⁴⁰ with a coincidental evacuation of the inner life. The evacuation itself contains a double bind: full of haunted memory and desperate to fill its lack, but frustrated at every turn, because what is craved is a something, something like everything else already in possession; an evacuation still full of the grammar of consumption whereby every void must be filled, every space made replete as a sign of Divine presence. Meditative consciousness, therefore, in its true shamanic character, must precisely be none of this, a process instead of “de-reflection”, as David Loy describes it, whereby “the legacy of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment project in social and scientific terms, that which liberates us from absolutism, dogmatism, and superstition — must dovetail into the enlightenment that frees me from me”.⁴¹ Ego-identity in its most dogmatic forms is the full binary of pejorative monotheism; the concept “God” being the logical extension of Me/Us, so that a process of de-reflection which frees me from me can at the same time make possible a true resacralization of the world, or, to put it better, dereflection can inaugurate a human discovery of the world as already sacred, already whole. As Derrida has said, “the death of God will ensure our salvation because the death of God alone can reawaken the divine”.⁴²

If the times are dismal, if at every turn there is cause for doubt about the possibility of basic human decency being translatable into sustainable social policy or good politics, it may be important to remember how the link between pessimism and utopian fantasy may itself be sustained by a neurotic symbiosis entrapped in particular interpretations of time and space. Marx knew the pessimism well: “The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the liv-

ing”, he said in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*,⁴³ where he grappled with the issue of how, at the precise moment in a revolution when people are at last free to choose a new future, they always inevitably end up framing it in languages and customs borrowed from the past, thereby ensuring a quick return to old problems, rearranged. The contemplative life, more than anything else, turns away from backward or forward visions to a disciplined practice of living in the present, such that the true character of morality is well understood for its ordinariness and simplicity, not its grandiosity, and wherein the really revolutionary challenges of life, including genuine pleasures, are never ‘over there’ or ‘back then’ but always everywhere mediated in the here and now. Wendell Berry has warned of “the futility of global thinking”,⁴⁴ whereby, particularly in a (Western) culture framed by Fall and Redemption mythology, the temptation is always to look for a saviour, in the form of the one big solution, one program that can solve all problems. Such is the nature of fundamentalism, and it can come in the guise of science and technology, or the cult of information, just as much as in the swaddling clothes of conservative religion.

“The purpose of meditation”, said Trungpa, “is not to get higher, but to be present”. It involves “the continual act of making friends”,⁴⁵ with oneself and with the world. In the first instance, from my privileged place as a teacher of young children, I can testify to the devastation caused by a Western educational system constructed on an Aristotelian assumption that knowledge compounded leads eventually to God. Not only does this end up as a fast track to ambition, careerism and other forms of cultural “high”, so also does it lead to an abandonment of others in the name of seeking or desiring transcendence, transcendence usually masquerading as theory. It is in the lives of children that the lived implications of broader social values are to be seen most clearly, and today the most obvious social diseases of the young can be traced to their abandonment to theory, be it social, political or pedagogical. As Ashis Nandy has suggested, in technical industrial cultures, the real child is supplanted by the idea of childhood.⁴⁶ The particular needs of particular children are never addressed because they have no currency on prevailing registers of research or policy.⁴⁷ One does not have to look far for the absence of presence, or rather both absence and presence badly understood. The most serious need in any educational reform today may be for adults to simply be “present” to children, although what is meant here is not cloying, earnest concern, but a deep attunement to the valence between genuine intimacy and detachment. My favorite icon of the Buddha shows him literally crawling with children,

and there is unadulterated joy on everyone's faces. It must be asked here how a life based on detachment seems to afford such an opportunity for children. In Buddhism, the practice of Presence implies the practice of Absence, leading in turn to Wisdom (Skt. *prajna*), and it is this last which is the real home to which children are most naturally drawn and where they find their deepest companionship and happiness. There is a Christian parallel to this insight in the Gospel of Mark: "...and the children came to him..."⁴⁸ The attractiveness of Wisdom for children is a subject worthy of further research.

To conclude: this consideration of the relationship between discursivity and neurosis began for me with a worry that, in the West, in the context of massively increased powers of linguistic production of various modalities (print, different media capabilities etc.), language is losing its ability to convey anything except artificial constructions. Or, in the midst of an incredible inflation the word through the new technologies of linguistic production, the ability of *yea* to mean *yea* or *nay*, *nay* has become almost impossible. For the West, I believe this condition is largely a consequence of science, whereby, in the Cartesian version anyway, which has roots deep in our various monotheistic sensibilities, language itself becomes an object of science, an object for personal manipulation by an Ego separated off into a shell of pure identity from which to make statements about a now-separated-off world. The long range effect seems to be to render human experience of communication as profoundly hallucinatory because that to which any speech (for example) refers, loses its ability to reference a common world. A recovery of a sense of a common world may be the first prerequisite for a more relevant understanding of humanity for the West, although as Goethe once remarked, "you can only understand what you love." So at least we know where the true challenge lies.

NOTES

1. See especially, M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, edited by Colin Gordon (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1980).
2. A good introduction to Derrida is Jonathon Culler's "Derrida" in John Sturrock, editor, *Structuralism and Since* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979).
3. The strongest claim about the end of grand narratives comes from J.F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1986).
4. See particularly *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* (Boston: Shambhala Press, 1986) and

Meditation and the Myth of Freedom (Boston: Shambhala Press, 1988).

5. P. 10
6. For a discussion of how the rise of the ideal of public literacy was linked to a concern for public discipline, see Carmen Luke, *Printing, Protestantism and Pedagogy* (New York: SUNY Press, 1988). The point made here I discuss more fully in "Modernism, Hyperliteracy and the Colonization of the Word," *Alternatives*, 17 (1992) pp. 247-260.
7. I am indebted to William I. Thompson's discussion of this in "The cultural implications of the new Biology". See William I. Thompson, editor, *GALA: A Way of Knowing* (New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1988) pp. 27-29.
8. Vaclav Havel, "Words on Words." *The New York Review of Books*, January 18, 1990.
9. For a discussion of the child-as-monster in the cultural struggle between puer and senex, see David Jardine, "Student-Teacher, Interpretation, and the Monstrous Child." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (in press).
10. See Ashis Nandy, "The Uncolonized Mind: A Post Colonial View of India and the West" in *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) pp. 70-93.
11. Pierre Bourdieu, "Systems of Education and Systems of Thought." In M.F.D. Young, editor, *Knowledge and Control* (London: Collier and Macmillan, 1967) p. 191.
12. H.G. Gadamer, "Forward to the second German edition of Truth and Method." In Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman and Thomas McCarthy, editors, *After Philosophy: End or Transformation* (London: MIT Press, 1987) p. 349.
13. For a discussion of Luther's excesses, see Hartmann Grisar, *Martin Luther: His Life and Work*. (New York: AMS Press, 1930).
14. In the religious context. Rudy Weibe's novel *Peace shall destroy many* (Toronto, ON: Maclellan and Stewart, 1974) is a telling example of how a community committed to pacifism has its own forms of violence, which arise precisely from attempts to suppress it.
15. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Vintage Press, 1978) is the work that more than any other illuminated the condition of interdependence between oriental and occidental worlds. For other contexts, such as the experience of Latin America and India. see respectively. Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, (New York NY: Basic Books, 1977). and Ashis Nandy, *Tradition, Tyranny and Utopia: Essays in the Politics of Awareness* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).
16. In a book with a generally very anti-Western tone, Kiang Kang-Hu grudgingly acknowledges the contribution of Western missionaries to the emancipation of women in China. See "Women and Education in China" in *On Chinese Studies* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1934) pp. 191-204.

17. Reported by Henry Louis Gates in "Blood and Irony: How race and religion will shape the future." *Economist*, 11 September, 1993, p. 37.
18. D.T. Suzuki, *Living by Zen*, (London: Century Hutchinson Limited, 1990) p. 150.
19. For a discussion concerning the relation of the Biblical creation myth to the rise of science, see D. Homans, *Science and the Modern World View* (New York, NY: Colliers, 1967).
20. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The social construction of reality* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1967).
21. For a further discussion of the origins of the cognitive self-enclosure of Western consciousness, see David Jardine, *Speaking with a Boneless Tongue* (Bragg Creek, AB: Makyo Press, 1992). Also, William Barrett, *The Illusion of Technique* (New York, NY: Anchor Doubleday, 1972).
22. See various papers of Berry's on this theme in *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1988).
23. Luke 12:27; Matthew 6:26
24. R. Murray Schafer, *Ear: Cleaning* (Don Mills, ON: BMI Press, 1967). On the relationship of sound structure to social structure, see Steven Feld, "Sound Structure as Social Structure," *Ethnomusicology*, 28:3, (1984) pp. 383-409.
25. The relation of geography to modes or styles of cognition is being fruitfully researched by Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1993).
26. This is a term I coin after reading William Thomson, *Imaginary Landscapes: Making Worlds of Myth and Science* (New York, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1990.)
27. David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992). For the point which follows, I am indebted to the brilliant exposition of Campbell by Sankaran Krishna in "The Importance of Being Ironic: A Postcolonial View on Critical Interantional Relations Theory," *Alternatives*, 18 (1993), pp. 385-417.
28. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, edited by Naomi Burton, Patrick Hart and James Laughlin (New York, NY: New Directions, 1975) p. 117.
29. Vaclav Havel, "How Europe Could Fail." *The New York Review of Books*, XI:19, 18 November, 1993, p. 3.
30. Ira Shor, *Culture Wars: School and Society in the Conservative Restoration* (Boston, MA: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).
31. Gayatri C. Spivak, "Postmarked Calcutta, India," in *The Postcolonial Critic*, ed., Sarah Haraym (New York, NY: routledge, 1990) p. 93. "(America has) the most opulent university system in the world, where clearly the humanities have as an ideology know-nothingism, so that they cannot be critical in this society."
32. *Meditation and the Myth of Freedom*, p. 73.
33. David Loy, "India's Postmodern Net". *Philosophy East and West*, 43:3, July 1993, p. 485.
34. For those wishing to further investigate the meditative tradition, see especially Chogyam Trungpa, *Meditation and the Myth of Freedom*, and Thich Naht Hahn's *The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual on Meditation*, trans, Mobi Ho (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987). Han's *The Sun My Heart: From Mindfulness to Insight Contemplation* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1988) contains a very sophisticated, brilliant analysis of the resonances between the insights of contemplative practice and the findings of the new physics regarding, for example, the unity of time and space. There are notable similarities between the meditative practice of stopping and the Western phenomenological strategy of "bracketing" to reveal the essences of experiences. The major difference is that in Buddhism, essence is an illusion.
35. For an accessible discussion of this, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1967).
36. Loy, p. 497.
37. Martin Buber, *The Eclipse of God*, trans. Maurice S. Friedman (New York, NY: Harper Torchbook, 1975) p. 35. The above quote is a paraphrase of Buber by Loy, p. 497.
38. Personal communication from N. Radhakrishnan, Director of the Gandhi Centre, New Delhi, October 12th, 1993.
39. "Technology and the Healing of the Earth," in *Dream of the Earth*, p. 142.
40. Max Scheler, "Man in the Age of Compensation" (1929). Quoted by Ernst Benz in *Buddhism in the Western World*, edited by Heinrich Dumoulin, (London: Collier, 1976), p. 321.
41. Loy, p. 503.
42. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 184.
43. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1981), p. 15.
44. Wendell Berry, "The Futility of Global Thinking," *Harper's Magazine*, September, 1989, pp. 16-22.
45. *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, pp. 74 and 97 respectively.
46. See Ashis Nandy, "Reconstructing Childhood" in *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 56-76.
47. For a journalistic account of the seriousness of this issue, see the special theme issue of *Mother Jones Journal*, May/June 1991: "America's Dirty Little Secret: We Hate Kids."
48. Mark 10:13-16.

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