

PLAY IN HUMAN RELIGIOUS, PSYCHOLOGICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE FOR  
HOMEOSTASIS

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KwangYu Lee

Drew University

Madison, New Jersey

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## **ABSTRACT**

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KwangYu Lee

Drew Theological School

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This thesis aims to insist the importance of play in human life that can be viewed as a mixture of what we call reality and what we call fantasy. On this basis, I will investigate the characteristics and functions of play from three different perspectives: philosophical, psychological and religious. Put simply, play provides a new non-reality existing between reality and fantasy where we can step back from our daily life and enter an imaginative life (philosophical) for homeostasis. Play develops our adaptive ability to the changing world and functions as the wellspring of creativity (psychological). Play is itself a transcendental experience (religious). To substantiate the practicality of the play-theory, next I will apply it to three cases, shamanism (religion), self-psychology of Heinz Kohut (psychology), and ecstatic naturalism of Robert S. Corrington (philosophy). As a result, it is revealed that there are some correlations between human religious, psychological and philosophical life and play for homeostasis.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Life is like the dream of a butterfly.” It is a Korean and Chinese adage that comes from a story of the ancient Chinese philosopher Zhuang Zhou. One day he went out to take a walk in the afternoon. After arriving at one of his favorite spots under a tree, he sat there and began pondering over the meaning of life. It was so warm and pleasant that he couldn’t shake off sleepiness and fell asleep. In a dream, he found himself flying up above the field. When discovering him with a pair of butterfly wings on his back, he realized that he became a butterfly. Flying here and there in the air, he enjoyed such freedom and joy as much as he could. All of a sudden, however, he woke up and acknowledged that in the dream he totally forgot who he was, Zhuang Zhou dreaming of a butterfly or the butterfly dreaming of Zhuang Zhou. He truly believed that he was the butterfly and that the butterfly was him. Such an extraordinary experience led him to a conclusion that life (or everything in life) is like the dream of a butterfly.

Although there are a variety of interpretations of this story, my own reading of it since high school remains intact: life is a mixture of reality and fantasy. In reality, survival is always the first priority, whereas in fantasy we transcend the limits of time, space, and causality. However, we cannot live forever in fantasy even if we consciously long for it. In this sense, it can be argued that human life unfolds in the paradoxical cycle between reality and fantasy. In Zhuang Zhou’s terms, we all want to live as a butterfly

symbolizing ‘transcendence’; yet, our fantasy only lasts for a while or one night at maximum. Is this a clear reason why people normally consider life as tough and miserable even if they incessantly desire to live happily and joyfully? If so, in this light can we suppose that human religious, psychological, philosophical life began with the tension between reality and fantasy? It is speculative that we can find some elements made of the mixture of reality and fantasy in religion, psychology and philosophy.

Zhuang Zhou also says “Only those who take leisurely what the people of the world are busy about can be busy about what the people of the world take leisurely.”<sup>1</sup> In my terms, only those who can work leisurely can play seriously. From the capitalistic standpoint that calculates everything in the world as currency value, it is impossible to equalize work with play. In common sense, work is the means for survival; play is what we can do when we have extra time as an entertainment or a pastime. However, in this thesis I will argue that life can be likened to play in certain spheres; put a step further, when we make the identification between life and play we can experience a mixture of them as a sort of religious experience, namely, Rudolf Otto’s *mysterium tremendum* the purpose of which is physical and psychological homeostasis. Out of the experience, we can attain and sustain physical and psychological homeostasis. By the same token, in *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*, Stuart Brown likens play to sleep. “Like sleep, play seems to dynamically stabilize body and social development in kids as well as sustain these qualities in adults.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lim Yutang, *The Importance of Living* (New York: The John Day Company, Inc., 1940), i.

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Brown and Christopher Vaughan, *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Open the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* (New York: Avery, 2010), 42.

For doing so, first, I will approach the issue of play from three different perspectives, philosophical, scientific (psychological), and religious. The philosophical perspectives will lead us to a conclusion that play provides us with a new reality made of a combination of reality and fantasy where, on a full-scale basis, we can experience freedom and autonomy that help us transcend our daily life for a given period of time. The scientific (psychological) perspectives will help us realize the importance of play in improving our adaptive ability to the vicissitudes of life and in experiencing catharsis to the full. The religious perspectives will lead us to realize that what we psychologically experience while playing is closely related to the so-called religious experience Rudolf Otto calls *mysterium tremendum* in which we feel the death of our past life and the birth of our new life.

Next, in order to validate the play-theory, I will apply it to looking into shamanism (religion), self-psychology of Heinz Kohut (psychology), and ecstatic naturalism of Robert S. Corrington (philosophy). After unfolding the basic structures of each, I will attempt to discover play-elements hidden in each. In the discourse of shamanism, we will witness a shamanistic play-function that stabilizes anxieties in reality in a communal way that a shaman can perform the shamanic healing ritual at the core of which there is the shaman's ecstatic experience by which s/he can overcome the dichotomy between reality and fantasy. The outcome of it is the stabilization of the psyche of the shaman and his/her community members. In the discourse of self-psychology, we will discover how Kohut played with his self-psychology first to maintain his sense of self-esteem and second to overcome the influence of the Freudian

psychology. For doing so, it is important to trace back to his personal issues such as a first generation German-Jewish American in the US who struggled to build up a new American identity by covering his past identity formulated through the lack of empathic responses from his parents in childhood and adolescence. Lastly, in the discourse of ecstatic naturalism, we will see that Corrington created and is still developing his philosophy ecstatic naturalism to alleviate his own mental hardship that is the severe mood swings generated by manic-depression. On the ground that there is some correlation between his philosophy of nature and his personal life of bipolar disorder, it is likely that his philosophy is his own way of healing himself by playing in his philosophical world (the semiotic world of nature). With this brief description of the thesis, let's begin with our playful journey toward both play in life and life in play.



## CHAPTER 2

### PLAY; LIFE; MYSTERIUM TREMENDUM

#### Play from philosophical perspectives

When the term play is introduced to philosophical circles as a philosophical topic, the first instant response one would get might be a sense of antipathy. For it is generally assumed that play is “recreational activity or the spontaneous activity of children” characterized by “absence of serious or harmful intent.” It is not likely to be a proper topic for those who love wisdom. To emphasize the value of play as a topic to be investigated philosophically, I want to raise a counteracting question: how did humans come to love wisdom? Why do we need a philosophical way of thinking in life? In his *The Importance of Living*, the Chinese philosopher Lin Yutang provides an interesting answer to this question.

Perhaps after all philosophy began with the sense of boredom. Anyway it is characteristic of humans to have a sad, vague and wistful longing for an ideal. Living in a real world, man has yet the capacity and tendency to dream of another world. Probably the difference between man and the monkeys is that the monkeys are merely bored, while man has boredom plus imagination. All of us have the desire to get out of an old rut, and all of us wish to be something else, and all of us dream. The private dream of being a corporal, the corporal dreams of being a captain, and the captain dreams of being a major or colonel.<sup>3</sup>

This philosophical hypothesis suggests that philosophy is by nature based on our detached attitude from reality as it is. For we can become philosophical only when we

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<sup>3</sup> Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living*, 73.

realize that what we want to grasp in the world is no other than a mirage in the long run. In this sense, it is necessary to accept that philosophy is characteristic of play as an entertainment or a pastime for we cannot play without staying away from our reality. Then, a new question arises: what advantage does play have for human life? In order to answer this, I introduce an original research on child play.

In his *Children and Play in the Holocaust*, George Eisen makes a convincing attempt to validate the importance of play in human life, especially that of play for children who lived in ghettos during the Second World War. In a ghetto, children grew up prematurely in spite of the harshness of life condition; yet, their psychological growth regressed almost to the degree of being like an infant. To help understand the background of why the children needed play, I want to quote a description of the horrible circumstances the children were forced to cope with from Eisen.

In every ghetto, the steadily increasing number of children without parental supervision, and orphans without any support, provides us with a clear testimony of this tragic development. The most traumatic and damaging psychological experience for a child is a feeling of losing the close ties with parents and family. Lost completely in an alien and forlorn environment, many children lived and died on the streets. "These are children who were orphaned when both parents died either in wanderings or in the typhus epidemic," wrote Chaim Kaplan in Warsaw. "Every morning you will see their little bodies frozen to death in the ghetto streets. It has become a customary sight." In January 1942 a welfare report summarized the state of refugees in the Warsaw ghetto: "Hunger, sickness, and want are their constant companions, and death is the only visitor in their homes."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> George Eisen, *Children and Play in the Holocaust: Games among the Shadows* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 20.

Interestingly enough, what adults did for the children in such horrible surroundings was to build playgrounds where children could play for a certain amount of time per day. Eisen calmly assessed the practical value of them, saying that “play had very little potential to mold or alter life. In fact, the protective walls erected against reality were, as will be shown, fragile creations that could provide only a few moments of genuine joy and a fleeting respite from a depressing surrounding.”<sup>5</sup> However, the more material related to playgrounds in ghetto and children’s life he discovers, the more carefully and persistently he delves into why play was so important to the life of children in ghettos. At first sight, it seems that he considers the function of play for children in ghettos is a sort of defensive mechanism to the coming of death. However, when he discovers the words of a little girl who lived and probably was killed in the Warsaw ghetto, he finally comes to find an answer.

When I am in play, I forget my hunger. I forget that outside are such evil Germans even existing. Early in the morning I rush to the child care center and I wish that the day would never end, because when it is getting dark, we all have to return home. In my room it is so full with dark shadows and black fear.<sup>6</sup>

Conclusively Eisen defines play as “a mental mechanism that facilitated their ability to cope with the psychological and physical environment.”<sup>7</sup> Play was not simply a way of killing time in ghettos. Neither was play merely a mental function designed to increase the ability to survival; instead, it is an attempt to transcend the reality and create a new reality in imagination. In the case of children in ghetto, such a tendency becomes self-

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 122.

evident for they played even right before death. For them, play was a clear-cut manifestation of their desire for transcendence. Having said this, I believe that now we built up a strong foundation for a philosophical investigation on play.

One of the founders of play theories, Johan Huizinga defines play as having “a non-materialistic quality in the nature of the thing itself,”<sup>8</sup> which is closely tied to “the supra-logical nature of the human situation.”<sup>9</sup> By this, he means that play functions to put a temporary end to the deterministic life. To be more specific, play exists beyond the world of both rationality and irrationality for it “lies outside the antithesis of wisdom and folly, and equally outside those of truth and falsehood, good and evil. Although it is a non-material activity it has no moral function. The valuations of vice and virtue do not apply here.”<sup>10</sup> To buttress this theory, he provides three characteristics of play: (1) Play is a voluntary activity; play necessitates freedom. (2) Play is neither reality nor fantasy; it is a mixture of reality and reality for when we play we know that it is not real but interestingly we are more careful with that than with reality. (3) Play is based on seclusion and limitedness; it can be actualized only when its locality and duration are initiated thoroughly by player(s). Additionally, he insists that there are several psychological requirements for play such as ingenuity, spontaneity, earnest, and seriousness. On this basis, we can appreciate his succinct definition of play.

Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It

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<sup>8</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1944), 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.<sup>11</sup>

In his *Man, Play, and Games*, by taking Huizinga's theory of play as a firm basement, Roger Caillois delineates a more systematic list of play characteristics: (1) Play is freedom (not obligatory). (2) Play is separate from reality; when we play we automatically stay away from our ordinary life and enter a new reality of play. (3) Play is based on uncertainty; we don't know where it goes and what we do is to watch how the player's initiative unfolds or to play. (4) Play is governed by rules; the rules of play consist of an evident beginning and end and what to do and what not to do. In this respect, play is different from the ambiguity of life. (5) Play is based on make-believe; in play we see ourselves living in a different time and space and causality, what is usually called fantasy but a more realistic fantasy than our daily life.

On this basis, Caillois invents a criterion for play morphology that is composed of four elements: competition (*agôn*), chance (*alea*), simulation (*mimicry*), and vertigo (*lilix*). In play, competition (*agôn*) should be based on equality. The major purpose of play focused on competition is to attain a sense of grandiosity and superiority. Football, billiard, or chess, etc. belong to this category. Chance (*alea*) comes out of the realization that life is completely indifferent to human life. No matter how hard we play (or live), it often takes place that the result of a game (or life) does not coincide with our efforts. The

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 13.

so-called Providence of God may have been gendered out of human play in confrontation with the vicissitudes of life. Roulette or a lottery, etc. belong to this. Simulation (*mimicry*) is possible only by the temporary acceptance of players of an illusion (play). From this perspective, “play can consist not only of deploying actions or submitting to one’s fate in an imaginary milieu, but of becoming an illusory character oneself, and of so behaving.”<sup>12</sup> To play, it is required to put aside our reality-self and to put on a new play-self; play is a sort of identification. Theatricals, religious services, etc. belong to this. Lastly, vertigo (*lilix*) is what play satisfies the human desire “to temporarily destroy his bodily equilibrium, escape the tyranny of his ordinary perception, and provoke the abdication of conscience.”<sup>13</sup> It can be called the ecstatic experience of a sort. Spasm, seizure, shock, etc. belong here.

So far we have investigated the nature, characteristics, and morphology of play. Play is by nature non-materialistic, beyond both the rational and the irrational for when we play we enter into a new reality, what is constructed by what we experience in the ordinary life but at the same time helps us to move out of it. For doing so, we are required to follow a certain series of rules designed only for play that is characteristic of competition, chance, simulation, and vertigo. With all these in mind, let’s turn to psychological discourses on play. Yet, for those who cannot see any connection between philosophy and psychology in terms of play discourses, I consult the work of Herbert Marcuse who effectively interweaves both on the topic of civilization and its oppression of the human freedom in play.

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<sup>12</sup> Roger Caillois, trans. Meyer Barash, *Man, Play and Games* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

Marcuse strongly bases his *Eros and Civilization* on Freud's psycho-social critique of civilization. One substantially important difference between them is that, while Freud applies his psychological theory of the dynamically inherent tensions among the human psychical structure constituted of id, ego, and superego to civilization so as to analyze how civilization is built up, Marcuse applies such a theory reversely to human existence in civilization so as to investigate how civilization solidifies the oppressive economic relation in the human psyche with superego (conscience) at top and id (Eros) at bottom. As we know, the focal issue of the pleasure principle is id (Eros) originally viewed as the biologically pure life-force. What is to be noted at this point is that Marcuse speculates that Eros at the outset was not fixed at certain bodily parts, primarily the genital organs as Freud insists; instead it flowed through all over the body. Hence, his fundamental argument is that the establishment of civilization begun by confining the holistic pleasure of the human body to several spots. In doing so, civilization stimulates superego (conscience) to become predominant in the human psychical structure. This was the basement on which civilization kept growing up along with the victory of the reality principle over the pleasure principle. Here, Marcuse interprets sublimation as a partial actualization of the pleasure principle because sublimation is what ego chooses to make peace with both superego and id simply for an instant. However, the effectiveness of it cannot be guaranteed fully. When industrialization comes into being, such a tension becomes intensified to a great degree. Relying on Marxism, Marcuse constantly argues that industrialization degenerated humans into nothing better than a cog of a machine. What they do for living becomes what they must do as a part of the industrialization: the depreciation of the value of human existence. When rationalization becomes an aid to this

process, the reality principle more oppressively forces humans to behave like a bureaucrat, a socialized format of industrialization: the absence of freedom. As a result, play becomes work; immediate satisfaction delayed satisfaction; pleasure restraint of pleasure; receptiveness productiveness; absence of repression security.

Unfortunately, Marcuse does not suggest any socially practical solution to the structural matter of oppression hidden in civilization except for his daydream-like hypothesis that the oppression will be overcome when industrialization leads civilization at its peak where it can supply all humans equally with what they need for living although our common sense determinedly denies it. Then, is it not possible to resolve the tension between human freedom and civilization? For Marcuse, it is fantasy, the only potential revelation of the pleasure principle in reality on a full scale. Fantasy is the only thought-activity that remains intact and constantly connected to the pleasure principle under the influence of the reality principle. When we are in fantasy, we can feel pleasure all over the body at maximum for our reason comes to lose control over our body. At this juncture, can Marcuse's concept of fantasy be linked to the play theory? When we take a look at how, drawing on Jung, he defines fantasy, it becomes translucent.

According to Jung, Phantasy is "undistinguishably" united with all other mental functions; it appears "now as primeval, now as the ultimate and most audacious synthesis of all capabilities." Phantasy is above all the "creative activity [sublimation] out of which flow the answers to all answerable questions"; it is "the mother of all possibilities, in which all mental opposites as well as the conflict between internal and external world are united." Phantasy has always built the bridge between the irreconcilable demands of object and subject, extroversion and introversion. The simultaneously retrospective and expectant character of imagination is thus clearly stated: it looks not only back to an aboriginal



golden past, but also forward to all still unrealized but realizable possibilities.<sup>14</sup>

Given that Marcuse understands the term freedom as “freedom from the established reality”<sup>15</sup> or ““indifference to reality” and interests in “show (dis-play, *Schein*)””<sup>16</sup> or “a “true enlargement of humanity,””<sup>17</sup> we can realize that fantasy is his psychological way of being resistant to the oppressive civilization. In short, fantasy is what releases id from the prison of superego. In this respect, his psychologically charged proletarian revolution against civilization can be identified with what we have dealt so far under the heading of play. With this convincing transitional argument, let’s turn to our next discussion. That is, play from psychological (scientific) perspectives.

### **Play from scientific (psychological) perspectives**

In his *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*, Stuart Brown, the founder of the National Institute for Play, defines play as profoundly a biological activity that can be observed in almost all kinds of animals. On the foundation that play functions for animals’ adaptation to circumstances in the evolutionary sense, he puts emphasis on the importance of play by likening it to oxygen, what is always around us but we don’t usually recognize until it is missing. However, when it comes to human

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<sup>14</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 134.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

play, he adds something to the adaptive capacities of animals: creativity and innovation that are likely to maximize our ability for adaptation.

In order to support his conviction of play, Brown provides a vast amount of experimental evidence in the book. For a better understanding of play from the animal play theoretical angle, I will introduce several of them. After spending lots of time analyzing the play behaviors of the Alaskan grizzlies, a couple of animal behavioral scientists found that “the bears that played the most were the ones who survived best.”<sup>18</sup> It can sound nonsensical when it is considered with the evolutionary theory the principal issue of which is all the time the ‘survival of the fittest.’ For from our economical perspective spending time on play takes away the amount of time that should be spent looking for prey and preserving the species. However, two neuroscientists Sergio Pellis and Andrew Iwaniuk reported, as a proper answer to this suspicion, that “there is a strong positive link between brain size and playfulness for mammals in general.”<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, an animal play scholar John Byers discovered that “the amount of play is correlated to the development of the brain’s frontal cortex, which is the important brain region responsible for much of what we call cognition: discriminating relevant from irrelevant information, monitoring and organizing our own thoughts and feelings, and planning for the future.”<sup>20</sup> On this discovery, Byers speculated: “... during play, the brain is making sense of itself through simulation and testing. Play activity is actually helping sculpt the brain. In play,

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<sup>18</sup> Stuart Brown and Christopher Vaughan, *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* (New York: Avery, 2010), 31.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

most of the time we are able to try out things without threatening our physical or emotional well-being. We are safe precisely because we are just playing.”<sup>21</sup>

By taking a step further, Brown compares play to human imagination, especially daydream in which we all incessantly play with ourselves through inventing an unending series of life-scenarios at every single moment in our daily life. To be more specific, the so-called life blueprints of what kind of house to buy, whom to marry, how much money to make, where to live at old age, etc. are none other than our simulation process to prepare for the uncertainties of life. It goes without saying that at bottom there is our desire for adaptation to circumstances indifferent to our dreamy expectations. If you need a more concrete example of this, I refer you to a book titled *the Art of War* by Sun-tzu. Originally it was written for military strategies; yet, a number of people read it as a book of life strategies, and which adumbrates that there must be a correlation between life and war. Since a war causes a lot of unexpected dangerous situations, a military strategist is required to be ready anytime for all possible emergent conditions. Likewise, if it is our biological destiny to unendingly adapt to the harsh life conditions, it is needless to say that we are all obligated by nature to cope with the vicissitudes of life. Hence, it can be argued that our imagination (play) is our way of playfully making life strategies in the evolutionary sense. With this in mind, Brown’s clear-cut delineation of play makes better sense now.

Play can be seen as a key component of evolution itself. The part of evolution that gets the most attention is natural selection, which is often called the “survival of the fittest.” But there is another part of the process that is equally important: the generation of diversity. First nature generates

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

many different versions of organisms, mostly through gene mutation and gene recombination, and the best are “selected” by nature to reproduce and pass on their genes. The creation of these oddities, which Darwin called “sports,” is a kind of play. They are nonessential creations outside of everyday norms. Their creation adds flexibility to the biological system. Biologists have shown that when this genetic flexibility is large, evolution proceeds more quickly. If this variation is absent, evolution will cease. Nothing changes.<sup>22</sup>

At the heart of play, there is flexibility. With regard to flexibility for adaptation to the irregularities of nature, play subsumes creativity and innovation in itself. Can it be argued, then, that creativity and innovation in human life are biologically imbedded in our organism? The answer is dependent on how to define these two elements. But, when they are considered as a state of mind, in conjunction with Huizinga’s philosophical definition of play as “an activity connected with no material interest”<sup>23</sup> and “a free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious”, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly,”<sup>24</sup> it is reasonable that creativity and innovation are based on play as “an absorbing, apparently purposeless activity that provides enjoyment and a suspension of self-consciousness and sense of time.”<sup>25</sup> In addition, Genesis 2 provides a biblical root of human creativity. When God created the man, God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner. So out of the ground, God formed every animal of the field and every of the air and brought them to the man ...”<sup>26</sup> What is intriguing here is that God wanted to see what the man would call all the creatures. Whatever he called each of them, it became its

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

<sup>23</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Stuart Brown and Christopher Vaughan, *Play*, 60.

<sup>26</sup> Gen. 2:18 (New Revised Standard Version).

name. God wanted to see the man playing, naming them with the use of his imaginative power, namely, creativity. One thing to be kept in mind is that this creative cooperation between the man and God took place before the Fall event, what obligated the man incessantly to adapt to nature (reality) out of the Garden (non-reality). In this respect, is it too far-fetched to interpret the dichotomy between reality and the Garden in the Bible in the same vein of that between reality and play (fantasy)? When paying attention to the fact that Einstein got an inspiration of the theory of relativity while he was “imagining himself riding on a street car traveling at the speed of light,”<sup>27</sup> the correlation between play and creativity seems more convincing. On this basis, I can sympathize with Brown’s spiritual understanding of play, what will be handled in the following section.

Authentic play comes from deep down inside us. It’s not formed or motivated solely by others. Real play interacts with and involves the outside world, but it fundamentally expresses the needs and desires of the player. It emerges from the imaginative force within. That’s part of the adaptive power of play: with a pinch of pleasure, it integrates our deep physiological, emotional, and cognitive capacities. And quite without knowing it, we grow. We harmonize the influences within us. Where we may have felt pulled in one direction by the heart and another direction by the head, play can allow us to find a balanced course or a third way. All evidence indicates that the greatest rewards of play come when it arises naturally from within.<sup>28</sup>

Here what I can clearly get a glimpse of as to play is that, in harmony with what I argued in the philosophical discourses on play section, play is in nature transcendental and transformative. It functions as a third way to help overcome the ontological dichotomy of reality and fantasy in Huizinga’s sense. It provides us with pure freedom that lies at the

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<sup>27</sup> Stuart Brown and Christopher Vaughan, *Play*, 93.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

core of the pleasure principle in Marcuse's sense. When all is said and done, it is the time to take a turn to my substantial argument that play is the holy as *mysterium tremendum*.

### **Play as *Mysterium Tremendum***

Up to this point we have investigated the philosophical and scientific (psychological) discourses on play. We began with an attempt to sketch the nature, characteristics, morphology of play from several philosophical standpoints. According to Huizinga, play is non-materialistic; it exists beyond the boundary between reality and non-reality. In fact, play is based on and contrived out of what we experience in reality; yet, as soon as we are captivated by play, consciously or unconsciously we seem to enter a new arena that is outside or perhaps beyond the reality of time, space, and causality. However, the length of time we can stay in the playground is limited; when a play is over we naturally come back to our daily life. Thus, it can be insisted that in play reality and non-reality are ambiguously interwoven with each other. Put differently, immersed in play, we have an opportunity to harmonize reality and fantasy simultaneously. Here is the wellspring of creativity and innovation, what connects non-reality to reality and vice versa.

With these all in mind, we can turn to how psychology understands and defines play and its functions. Basically, there are two ways of approaching the topic. Whereas the evolutionary perspectives emphasize the aspect of play to help improve the ability for adaptation in animals, the human creativity-oriented perspectives stress that of play to combine reality and imagination so as to actualize innovation in life. After due consideration of what I have dealt, it becomes evident that play is not what we can simply

do intellectually but what we need to experience with the use of the combination of body/mind. Interestingly enough, such a thought is identical to what William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* contends when it comes to how to experience religion. By looking into the backbone of his argument on religious experience, we can see play as a kind of religious experience defined as *mysterium tremendum* by Rudolf Otto.

The reason why James' understanding of religion is important here is that it is he that transforms religion as an intellectual topic to be rationally investigated into a sensible stuff to be certainly experienced. On top of this, he defines religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in religion to whatever they may consider the divine."<sup>29</sup> In order to more clearly understand this definition of religion, it is necessary to grasp what he means by the divine. For him, the divine means "a primal reality as the individual feels impelled to respond to solemnly and gravely, and neither by a curse nor a jest."<sup>30</sup> One intriguing point here is that without doubt he does not hypothesize any specific object for religion; the divine is only what we can experience through our solemn feeling of it.<sup>31</sup> Again, there is a need to know what he means by the 'solemn feeling' in religion. For him, religious feeling is "an

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<sup>29</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: The New American Library, 1958), 42.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>31</sup> In this sense, I argue that James' concept of religion is to a great degree similar to Friedrich Schleiermacher's. As well known, in his *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultural Despisers*, in opposition to the tendency of the intellectuals at his time to rationalize the concept of God, he argues that at the core of religion there is only the feeling of "absolute dependence" on One. However, what most people do not pay attention to is the fact that he does not carefully define what One is or means except for his assumption that if we attain the feeling we can have religion in whatever it is. Right here, one distinctive difference between Schleiermacher and James as to religion is that while the former is preoccupied with the role of religion that helps identify each of us with One within the 'feeling' the latter is greatly interested in how a new being comes into being through religious 'experiences.'

absolute addition to the Subject's range of life. It gives him a new sphere of power. When the outward battle is lost, and the outer world disowns him, it [religious feeling] redeems and vivifies an interior world which otherwise would be an empty waste."<sup>32</sup> Now it becomes clear that James considers religion not as an object we can sense but as a so-called spiritual arena where we can feel ourselves redeemed or restored. The important point is that the (spiritual) place is not outside our body; it is inside us. Does it seem that James' understanding of religion bears a striking likeness to play in the light of the play theory that play is neither realistic nor unrealistic and that play is a third way between the two opposites? If such logic sounds like a mistake of hasty generalization, it can be asked the other way: how does religious experience take place in James' religious play?

From the play standpoint, a proper answer will be given out of what kind of rules James presents for the formation of the religion play. It is the conversion that makes it possible for a religious player to find or make a vital-turning point of his or her existence somewhere inside him/herself. But, it is not given without a fee. Conversion demands 'self-surrender,' and which is intensified by the player's awareness of "the present incompleteness or wrongness"<sup>33</sup> in him/herself. In religious terms, such recognition is called 'sin.' On this basis, James specifies conversion as "a process of struggling away from sin."<sup>34</sup> On the ground that James does not surmise the being-there of any unchangeable object outside the religious player, it seems possible to contend that sin can be interpreted as the discontent of who and what s/he is rather than "an offense against religious or moral law" or "transgression of the law of God." That we are uncomfortable

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



with ourselves indicates that we are not comfortable with what we did or what we are doing at a moment. When we consider such a feeling as sin, it is important to notice that it does not come from outside; instead it comes from inside. In this light, sin can be interpreted as the specific projection of the discontent (anxiety) of the player of him/herself on a specific behavior or state of mind. In order to overcome such a feeling, what is necessary to be done is conversion that helps kill the past self and give birth to a new self. Thus, the authenticity of a religious experience is solely dependent on how differently the player makes a new life in reality in a way that is beneficial to both him/her and others.

The religious experience as a new center of personal energy, whatever it may be, is named by James “the Reality of the Unseen”<sup>35</sup> which is not a physical arena but “a sense of the friendly continuity of the ideal power within our life;”<sup>36</sup> that is, what brings about “an immense elation and freedom.”<sup>37</sup> With all these in mind, it is possible to argue that religious experience can function as a play that requires a great amount of seriousness, earnest, creativity, etc. and eventually gives rise to a new sense of life as long as the player solemnly follows and obey its own totality. In delving into the relation of play to religion, Huizinga provides an example of St. Francis about the correlation between religious experience and play.

St. Francis of Assisi reveres Poverty, his bride, with holy fervour and pious rapture. But if we ask in sober earnest whether St. Francis actually believed in a spiritual and celestial being whose name was Poverty, who really was the idea of poverty, we begin to waver. Put in cold blood like

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

that the question is too blunt; we are forcing the emotional content of the idea. St. Francis' attitude was one of belief and unbelief mixed. The Church hardly authorized him in an explicit belief of that sort. His conception of Poverty must have vacillated between poetic imagination and dogmatic conviction, although gravitating towards the latter. The most succinct way of putting his state of mind would be to say that St. Francis was playing with the figure of poverty. The saint's whole life is full of pure play-factors and play-figures, and these are not the least attractive part of him.<sup>38</sup>

According to the play theory, St. Francis of Assisi could enter “the Reality of the Unseen”<sup>39</sup> through playing with poverty. For him, poverty was an important means with which to experience repetitively living in between of reality and fantasy. However, what still seems lacking is the validity of making an equality of play and poverty. In conjunction with the correlation between play and life, it is necessary to ask if poverty can be equalized to life as it is. Probably not. Poverty needs to be understood as a way of life. Given that poverty is an attitude toward life, then, it is possible to ask: how could St. Francis Assisi identify his life and his life-play, namely poverty? William James might answer that it is his conversion experience that helped him decide how to play life. But, what is still missing is the point of what happened at the very moment of conversion physically and psychologically. Rudolf Otto’s description of the holy can be a good help in handling the question.

At the outset of *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto stresses the significance of investigating what really lies at the core of the so-called religious experience. Above all, he cannot be satisfied with Schleiermacher’s concept of the feeling of absolute

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<sup>38</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 139.

<sup>39</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, 217.

dependence as religion. For it is simply about an intensification of the sensory functions of the human body. What Otto is primarily interested in is not either feeling (Schleiermacher) or experience (James); instead it is a state of mind we take as religious. Here, one of the most well known definitions of the religious state of mind comes into existence: the holy *mysterium tremendum*. First of all, Otto defines the holy as the transcendent Reality that is not reality but nor non-reality; it is, like play, a third way of reality. Like James' conversion, it requires the annihilation of the self so as to gain access to the new Reality. That is, the holy presupposes putting a temporary end to our ordinary consciousness. When we are confronted with the holy, we are required to stand with the two contradictory natures of it: *mysterium* and *tremendum*. While the former indicates "the 'wholly other', that which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the 'canny', and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment,"<sup>40</sup> the latter means a mystical awe that causes "the feeling of one's own submergence, of being but 'dust and ashes' and nothingness"<sup>41</sup> and forms "the numinous raw material for the feeling of religious humility."<sup>42</sup> In this sense, paradoxically enough, when we are in the holy, it gives rise to two different movements of our psyche. On the one hand, *mysterium* symbolizes our centripetal psychical movement toward the holy. Since it is so fascinating that we cannot help but try to approach to it as closely as possible. On the other hand, *tremendum* is centrifugal. Since it is so dispelling that, for the sake of our preservation instinct, we try to stay away from it as far away as possible. The important point is that,

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<sup>40</sup> Rudolf Otto, trans. John W. Harvey, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 26.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

in such a paradoxical state of mind, “all the rich potentialities and possibilities of development inherent in the true primal numinous emotion”<sup>43</sup> will be supplied as the third way. It is necessary to note, however, that unfortunately Otto does not concretely touch upon the ‘something,’ the fountainhead of the third reality. Yet, when we listen to his remark on the relation between the holy and revelation (disclose), we can arrive at a new realization.

The ‘crude’ stage [reality] is transcended as the numen reveals “itself” (i.e. becomes manifest to mind and feeling) ever more strongly and fully. An essential factor in this is the process by which it is filled out of and charged with rational elements, whereby it passes at the same time into the region of the conceivable and comprehensible. Yet all the time all the elements of non-rational ‘inconceivability’ are retained on the side of the numinous and intensified as the revelation proceeds. ‘Revelation’ does not mean a *mere* passing over into the intelligible and comprehensible. Something may be profoundly and intimately known in feeling for the bliss it brings or the agitation it produces, and yet the understanding may find no concept for it. To *know* and to *understand conceptually* are two different things, are often even mutually exclusive and contrasted. The mysterious obscurity of the numen is by no means tantamount to unknowableness.<sup>44</sup>

The holy [religiosity] is not separated from the unholy [ordinary life]. Our process of conceptualizing the holy is possible only after we are enchanted by it; however, a conceptualization of it can never be an equal to what it is as thing-in-itself. Then, what is the very something that reveals itself to us when we are ready to become mesmerized in a state of mind of *mysterium tremendum*?

Now we know that the ‘something’ is not an object outside us, that it possibly exists somewhere inside us, that it reveals itself to us, that the only access to it is our

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 134-135.

solemnly sincere and serious experience of it, and that it is not mandatory to experience it; yet, if we come to experience it, we can attain a new life (a new identity) in spite of the fact that it is considerably difficult to materialize the experience in our daily life. However, what still remains mysterious is that we don't know what the 'something' is. What is the 'something' out of which we can feel and experience *mysterium tremendum*? To answer, I would like to go back to the beginning of this thesis, the dream of a butterfly with which I argued that life is a mixture of reality and fantasy. Life in reality is what we have to cope with throughout lifetime in the evolutionary sense of adaptation and preservation of species; by contrast, life in fantasy is what we want to experience in reality with the aid of freedom and creativity. Just as sleep restores our body/mind, fantasy (play) seems to recreate reality. In this sense, can it be possible that fantasy is inseparable from reality as life is inseparable from death? If so, is it life itself that we can experience and play with as the 'something' that brings about *mysterium tremendum*? In *The Importance of Living*, the Chinese philosopher Lin Yutang undoubtedly touches on the same issue.

I think that, from a biological standpoint, human life almost reads like a poem. It has its own rhythm and beat, its internal cycles of growth and decay. It begins with innocent childhood, followed by awkward adolescence trying awkwardly to adapt itself to mature society, with its young passions and follies, its ideals and ambitions; then it reaches a manhood of intense activities, its ideals and ambitions; then it reaches a manhood of intense activities, profiting from experience and learning more about society and human nature; at middle age, there is a slight easing of tension, a mellowing of character like the ripening of fruit or the mellowing of good wine, and the gradual acquiring of a more tolerant, more cynical and at the same time a kindlier view of life; then in the sunset of our life, the endocrine glands decrease their activity, and if we have a true philosophy of old age of peace and security and leisure and

contentment; finally, life flickers out and one goes into eternal sleep, never to wake up again.<sup>45</sup>

Yutang considers life as a play governed by the principle of tension and relaxation. In reality, too often we become tensional to deal with our daily survival. In fantasy, normally we try to become relax to put aside our daily life filled with tension. In this light, we can read life as a play ground under the influence of tensions between reality and fantasy. On a cosmic level, it can be described as the process from birth to death. On a microcosmic level, it can be portrayed as an unending cyclical movement from reality to fantasy and from fantasy to reality. Life is the ‘something’ to be played by the life-player. Whether or not we can feel and experience the holy in life as *mysterium tremendum* solely depends on how we enter the life-play or play-life arena. As the dream of a butterfly symbolizes, it is not easy to draw an apparent line between fantasy and reality. The point is that we are required to combine fantasy and reality into one. Life is like fantasy and fantasy is like life. In play we can experience them as one where play lives life and life plays itself; we can experience the identification as *mysterium tremendum*.

So far I have examined the relationship between fantasy and reality. For doing so, first I explored the philosophical discourses on play (the nature, characteristics, and morphology of play). Second, I looked into the scientific (psychological) discourses on it (adaptation and creativity). Third, I made an attempt to connect play to the holy experience as *mysterium tremendum*. Lastly, I tentatively argued that the ‘something’ to be felt and experienced as *mysterium tremendum* is nothing else but life itself. With these

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<sup>45</sup> Yutang, *The Importance of Living*, 30-31.

all in mind, from now I will apply the play theory articulated in this thesis to shamanism (religion), self-psychology of Heinz Kohut (psychology), and ecstatic naturalism of Robert S. Corrington (philosophy). By doing so, it will be disclosed that the elements of play are hidden in human life, religious, psychological, and philosophical much more evidently than we expect.

## CHAPTER 3

### PLAY IN SHAMANISM

#### **The shamanic cosmology as a play regulation**

Shamanism is one of the most primitive human religious phenomena. The *Tungus* term shaman literally means “one who is excited, moved, or raised”<sup>46</sup> or “a person of either sex who has mastered spirits and who can at will introduce them into his own body.”<sup>47</sup> In *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, after delineating a variety of roles a shaman performs: a magician, a medical man, a psychopomp, a priest, a mystic, a poet, and so on, Mircea Eliade defines a shaman as “the great master of ecstasy”<sup>48</sup> and shamanism as a “technique of ecstasy.”<sup>49</sup> The *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* defines ecstasy as “a condition of dissociation, characterized by the lack of voluntary movement, and frequently by automatism in act and thought, illustrated by hypnotic and mediumistic conditions.” To be more specific, it can be “a perception of a reality that lies in the depths of our own soul. In a trance state access to daily reality is minimized in favor of areas of consciousness that leads us to dreams, visions, and fantasies.”<sup>50</sup> That a shaman is the master of ecstasy means that s/he voluntarily goes into trance (or séance); shamanism is a technique of ecstasy indicates that shamanism is a religious experience at the heart of

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<sup>46</sup> I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 45.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Mircea Eliade, Willard R. Trask and Wendy Doniger, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 4.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Claudia Eüller-Ebeling, Christian Rättsch and Surendra Bahadur Shahi, *Shamanism and Tantra in the Himalayas*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 112.



which the ecstatic experience lies. One important point to be noted is that there is only one person who can put ecstasy into action; it is a shaman.

According to Mircea Eliade, the essential purpose of shamanism is to attain and sustain the psychological stability of the members of a community. Then, it is reasonable to ask: how can a shaman as the master of ecstasy perform such a job? In order to answer this, it is important to take a look at how people understand the world under the aegis of shamanism. From the play theory standpoint, the shamanic worldview can be interpreted as a set of fundamental regulations that makes the shamanistic play actualize in a mixture of play and life. By the same token, in *Shamanism and Tantra in the Himalaya*, Claudia Müller insists that if we want to experience shamanism we “must believe the unbelievable, imagine the unimaginable, think the unthinkable, and accept the unexpected. Only then can one slowly to understand.”<sup>51</sup> The belief in the cosmology of shamanism (a make-believe play) precedes its ecstatic religious experience.

In *Shamanism and the Origin of States*, Sarah Miledge likens the worldview of shamanism to animism that sees “everything is alive in some sense, with an independent spirit [anima]. Rock, trees, springs, rivers, mountains, and even diseases may thus have spirits, as well as buildings, birds, and hearths.”<sup>52</sup> For example, the ancient people who lived under the influence of shamanism understood the human body as a composite of a number of spirits. “Disease is attributed to the soul’s having strayed away or been stolen, and treatment is in principle reduced to finding it, capturing it, and obliging it to resume

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>52</sup> Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Shamanism and The Origin of States: Spirit, Power, and Gender in East Asia* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2008) 63.

its place in the patient's body."<sup>53</sup> It is a shaman who can heal the patient through his/her ecstatic experiences. Then, it is necessary to look into what characteristics the ecstatic experience has, and which is closely related to the shamanistic cosmology.

The ancient people, especially those who lived with shamanism, believed: In the beginning, humans lived in harmony with gods. There was no difference in quality between them. However, one day humans made an irretrievable mistake or sin (normally something equal to *hubris*) against gods like Adam and Eve did in Garden of Eden. It resulted in the existential dichotomy between humans and gods, like the *Fall* event in the Bible. From that moment on, humans were destined to live on earth, and when they died they were judged either to go up to the heaven again or to go down to the underworld where the dead human-spirits lived eternally. Of course, god(s) stayed in heaven. However, not so long after that happened, they believed that there was still a place where the connection between the three places was not broken. The place was called 'the Center of the World *Axis Mundi*,' 'the Tree of the World,' and so forth. A shaman was able to approach the sacrosanct place and be in communication with spirits with the use of his/her special ability called ecstasy, *séance*, or trance. However, when we hear a shaman Mohan Rai saying "Without the *phurba* [the world tree or the world axis] inside himself, the shaman has no consciousness,"<sup>54</sup> it becomes clear that the hallowed place is not a physical place but a psychologically imagined place. What is the Center of the World inside us or a shaman?

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<sup>53</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*, 215.

<sup>54</sup> Claudia Müller-Ebeling, Christian Rättsch, and Surendra Bahadur Shahi, *Shamanism and Tantra in the Himalayas*, 10.

In *Shamanism and the Psychology of C. G. Jung*, Robert E. Ryan makes an attempt to build up a bridge between shamanism and Jung's psychology on the premise that the trance of a shaman can be psychologically understood as a convergence experience between the conscious and the unconscious although it lasts for a moment. For Jung, while the conscious has control of the 'physical' reality, the unconscious has control of the 'psychological' reality. Put differently, if the conscious is tied to the scientific understanding of the world that aims to analyze the world and find out a chain of the principles of how it works, the unconscious is related to the symbolic understanding of the world that attempts to see the world filled with the mysterious and seek to perceive something in the world beyond the reach of the conscious. Here it is valuable to hear Jung's remarks on the unconscious.

We only understand that thinking which is a mere equation, and from which nothing comes out but what we have put in. That is the working of the intellect. But beyond that there is a thinking in primordial images – in symbols which are older than historical man; which have been ingrained in him from earliest times, and, eternally living, outlasting all generations, still make up the groundwork of the human psyche. It is only possible to live the fullest life when we are in harmony with these symbols; wisdom is a return to them. It is neither a question of belief nor of knowledge, but of the agreement of our thinking with the primordial images of the unconscious.<sup>55</sup>

Now suffice it to say that trance, which is a state of mind that is characteristic of being stayed out of one's ordinary consciousness, can be viewed as the experience of a reunification of consciousness and the unconscious in the Jungian psychology. In fact, Ryan names this psychical phenomenon an altered state of consciousness (ASC), namely,

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<sup>55</sup> C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, (Orlando: Harcourt Harvest, 1995), 112-13

“any psychological state in which emotions, perceptions, sense of self and sense of the reality around one are modified in some way so that one's CONSCIOUSNESS is experienced as distinct from a normal, waking state (from the *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*).” Interestingly enough, when we went through various perspectives on play, particularly scientific approaches, we noticed that in play our normal consciousness becomes altered like in ‘waking dreaming,’ what is half realistic and half illusory. If individuation in Jung’s terms includes the convergence between the conscious and the unconscious, it is possible to assume that the way of becoming a shaman also has some similar traits. Hence it is worthwhile to take a look at how a human becomes a shaman. That will be our next topic to be handled.

### **The shamanic initiation as a contest play**

Generally speaking, there are two ways for a shamanic candidate to become an authentic shaman; biological inheritance and individualistic decision on the basis of calling (normally, it is believed, by spirits). However, in both cases, the general procedure for the series of initiative rites s/he is required to accomplish is identical. The central themes of an initiation ceremony are: “dismemberment of the neophyte’s body and renewal of his organs; ritual death followed by resurrection”<sup>56</sup> or, in more simplistic terms, the three stages of separation, death, and resurrection in a U-turn shape. In *Shamanism*, Eliade renders a summary of what are mostly common in the initiative rites:

- (a) Period of seclusion in the bush (symbol of the beyond) and larval existence, like that of the dead; prohibitions imposed on the candidates by

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 38.

the fact that they are assimilated to the dead (a dead man cannot eat certain dishes, or cannot use his fingers, etc.); (b) Face and body daubed with ashes or certain calcareous substances, to obtain the pallid hue of ghosts; funerary masks; (c) Symbolic burial in the temple or fetish house; (d) Symbolic descent to the underworld; (e) Hypnotic sleep; drinks that make the candidate unconscious; (f) Difficult ordeals; beatings, feet held close to a fire, suspension in the air, amputations of fingers, and various other cruelties.<sup>57</sup>

During this period, the shamanic candidate learns how to contact and converse with spirits. When s/he finally resurrects from the symbolic death, it is believed that the spirits helps him/her become a “wounded healer” who knows when to die and resurrect whenever it is necessary in helping and healing others. In conjunction with Jung’s psychology, the initiation can be understood as an attempt to abolish the separation between the conscious and the unconscious of the shamanic candidate and make a reunification between them. In *Ecstatic Religion*, I. M. Lewis describes the initiative procedure as the birth of a professional player in the shamanic play.

The shaman is not the slave, but the master of anomaly and chaos. The transcendental mystery which lies at the heart of his vocation is the healer’s passion; his ultimate triumph over the chaotic experience of raw power which threatened to drag him under. Out of the agony of affliction and the dark night of the soul comes literally the ecstasy of spiritual victory. In rising to the challenge of the powers which rule his life and by valiantly overcoming them in this crucial initiatory rite (cf. La Fontaine, 1985) which re-imposes order on chaos and despair, man reasserts his mastery of the universe and affirms his control of destiny and fate.<sup>58</sup>

However, there is one indispensable element to understanding shamanism. It is the fact that whether a shamanic candidate can be a real shaman or not is thoroughly dependent on the agreement of a community. Although a candidate shows an

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>58</sup> I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, 169.

extraordinary ability for ecstasy, s/he cannot be a shaman unless an agreement is reached. In this sense, Lewis argues that the major difference between the modern society and the shamanic community is that while the former labels the candidate as the schizoid personality the latter tends to tolerate it and even to make some space where they express their shamanic potentialities as much as they want. At this point, from the play theory standpoint can it be argued that the shamanic initiation is a contest among shamanic candidates to be validated by a community? In reality they are labeled as abnormal; on the contrary, when the initiation is provided, they enter a new reality in which the shamanic cosmology takes precedence over all other matters. What they are required to do is not struggling with their daily life issues but improving their shamanic potentialities. The victory is not made by any candidate. Rather the victory must be decided by the whole community for only one winner. Even if it is well known that a shaman plays a communal leadership, the initiation reveals that “the community is not simply the recipients of shamanic services, but the shape of a shaman’s career.”<sup>59</sup>

To sum up, the shamanic initiation is a contest play held by the whole community in which shamanic candidates express their shamanic potentialities. Only the winner can be a religious leader of the entire community and a preserver of the tradition and customs of it. Let’s assume that now we have the winner shaman. What can we expect from him/her? Needless to say, the shaman takes care of our psychological homeostasis by performing ecstasy in the shamanic healing ritual.

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<sup>59</sup> Thomas S. Dubios, *An Introduction to Shamanism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 90.

### **The shamanic healing ritual as a psychodrama (psycho-play)**

As stated earlier, disease in the shamanic cosmology is considered as a break in the harmonious relationship between a human and the spiritual world. Microcosmically taken, it is believed to be a collapse of the harmony among spirits inside the human body; macrocosmically taken, it is believed to be that of the harmony between the heavenly world and the earthy world. In this respect, “the recovery of physical health is closely dependent on restoring the balance of spiritual forces, for it is often the case that the illness is due to a neglect or an omission in respect to the infernal powers, which also belong to the sphere of the sacred.”<sup>60</sup> There is only one person who can handle this matter: the shaman who is able to hover between the two worlds at will. As soon as the shaman recognizes what causes the disease, s/he sets about preparing a shamanic healing ritual.

Here it is important to take a closer look at difference between modern medical science and the shamanic healing ritual. While the former mainly focuses on a patient as the object to be healed, the latter does not consider the patient as an individualistic object but rather a communal one, that is, that the patient is interpreted as a manifestation of the disharmony occurring in the entire community. Thus, it is natural that the healing ritual is designed for the entire community; without exception, all the members are obligated to participate in it. There are several indispensably important preparations to be made for the ritual: musical instruments (a drum, a guitar, etc.), animal masks, animal skin clothes, intoxicating substances such as mushrooms, tobaccos, and so on. Since the core of shamanism is ecstasy (séance or trance), these materials are used to accelerate the potentiality of ecstasy in the shaman.

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<sup>60</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*, 216.

In *Shamanism*, Eliade provides a summary of the shamanic ritual procedure: “(1) evocation of helping spirits [accompanied by a shaman’s and the audience’s responsive singing and dancing]; (2) discovery of the cause of the illness, usually an evil spirit that has stolen the patient’s soul/or entered his body; (3) expulsion of the evil spirits by threats, noise, etc.; and finally (4) the shaman’s ascent to the sky.”<sup>61</sup> He poignantly intuits that the shamanic healing ritual is in accordance with the shamanic initiation in terms of its U-turn shaped procedure of separation, death, and resurrection. Separation is symbolized by the shaman’s entry into ecstasy; death by the shaman’s spiritual battle against the evil spirit(s); rebirth by the shaman’s ascent to the sky. Just as disease is considered both microcosmically and macrocosmically, the healing ritual has two different functions. The first is to stabilize the spiritual condition of the patient at a microcosmic level. The second is to re-harmonize the relationship between the heavenly and earthly world at a macrocosmic level. Hence, it can be argued that the shamanic healing ritual is designed for the spiritual equilibrium for the patient, the community, and the universe.

By taking a step further, Lewis insists that the shamanic healing ritual (ecstasy) functions to enshrine and express the moral consciousness of the community. If the behaviors and utterances of a shaman in ecstasy are officially validated by the entire community members, they are experienced as the sacred. The shaman, “the half-healed madman,”<sup>62</sup> becomes an actualization of the Center of the World before the audience. Although they are not allowed to approach the sacrosanct place, while encouraging and validating the abnormal psychic phenomenon of a shaman the audience witness the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>62</sup> I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, 165.



embodiment of *Axis Mundi*. On this basis, Lewis names the shamanic healing ritual as “danced psychodramas.”

[They are]... ‘work-outs’ in which some measure of psychic compensation for the injuries and vicissitudes of daily life is obtained. Possession in this context is indeed a release, an escape from harsh reality into a world of symbolism which, precisely because it is not inappropriately detached from mundane life, is full of compensatory potentialities and has great emotive appeal (cf, Siikala, 1978; Peters and Price-Williams, 1980).<sup>63</sup>

Provided that psychodrama aims at allowing “the client to express troublesome emotions and face deep conflicts in the relatively protected environment of the therapeutic stage (from the *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*)” in the presence of a therapist, the shamanic healing ritual can be perceived as a sort of psychodrama in which, intriguingly enough, the client (the patient or the audience) and a therapist (a shaman) can cooperate by taking place of each other’s role. Insofar as a shaman dances and sings to fall into ecstasy, the audience takes the therapist role; yet, as soon as the shaman plays in ecstasy, the roles are reversed in that the shaman (as a therapist) begins to lead the audience into the journey of ecstasy and the audience (as the client) witnesses it as if they were to become a shaman. After careful consideration of all these, it becomes evident that shamanism is “the spiritual armory of a community beset by chronic environmental uncertainty, or rapid and inexplicable social change.”<sup>64</sup> By the same token, Dubios insightfully refers to shamanism as “experience of social affiliation – bonding, feelings of unity or communal identity – results in increased production of these peptides, which in

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 182.

turn leads to an enhanced feeling of happiness and trust.”<sup>65</sup> With all these in mind, now let’s take a comprehensive look at shamanism from the play theory standpoint.

### **Play in shamanism**

When the play-theory is applied to observing shamanism, there are three clear-cut play elements in shamanism. First of all, the shamanic cosmology needs be regarded as a basic framework for the shamanic play. It does not make any sense from the modern scientific angle that the world is a complex of spirits. But, in order to experience ecstasy, the essence of shamanism, it is mandatory for all shamanic players to accept the shamanic cosmology as truth. Through the unanimous agreement within a community can ecstasy be interpreted as the only way to reconnect the ontological dichotomy between the heavenly and earthly world. Here we can see that the shamanic play per se is a mixture of reality and fantasy and has its own totality. In a word, shamanism can be categorized as a make-believe play.

Second, the shamanic initiation can be viewed as a contest among shamanic candidates where candidates try their best to be validated to become a real shaman and the whole community functions as the judge. Within the boundary of ‘freedom’ given by the audience, candidates show off their top capabilities mainly related to ecstatic experiences so as to gain as much credence and recognition as possible. The fundamental purpose of the initiation is to choose out the most effective shaman for the entire community. To win the victory, there are a variety of shamanic ritual elements candidates must master: how to contact their helping spirits, how to diagnose a patient, how to

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas S. Dubios, *An Introduction to Shamanism*, 146.

effectively actualize ecstasy, and so on. What is more, they are required to have an apprenticeship under the instruction of a professional shaman for a certain period of time. When attention is given to the harshness of the final round of the play in which a candidate must die and resurrect symbolically, we can assume that how seriously they sacrifice themselves for the shamanic initiation contest.

Third, the shamanic healing ritual is threefold; personal, communal, and cosmic. Insofar as it aims at healing a patient, it is personal. However, as long as it preconditions the participation of an entire community, it is communal. Furthermore, insofar as it purposes to re-stabilize the primordial cosmic equilibrium between humanity and gods, it is cosmic. At the heart of the healing ritual there is ecstasy through which a shaman enters a new reality where the primordial world before the *Fall* event took place remains intact. As indicated earlier, such a dramatic element can be possible only by the agreement of the audience who discerns what a shaman does as truth. In this process, all the community members experience being identified with a shaman; the journey of a shaman becomes the same experience they have at the moment. Hence the ecstatic experience of a shaman impacts on the mentality of all the members.

When taking all these into account, Mircea's conclusive remark on shamanism sounds convincing:

It is difficult for us, modern men as we are, to imagine the repercussions of such a *spectacle* [shamanism] in a "primitive" community. The shamanic "miracles" [ecstasy] not only confirm and reinforce the patterns of the traditional religion, they also stimulate and feed the imagination, demolish the barriers between dream and present reality, open windows upon worlds inhabited by the gods, the dead, and the spirits.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*, 511.

In opposition to Mircea's assumption, nevertheless, it seems not difficult to understand shamanism when we take it as life in play or play in life. When we consider a shamanic community that lives with the shamanic play from the play theory standpoint, it can be compared equally to St. Francis of Assisi who played with poverty throughout his lifetime. What seems really difficult to do is how to draw a line between reality and fantasy in the shamanic play.

## CHAPTER 4

### PLAY IN SELF-PSYCHOLOGY OF HEINZ KOHUT

#### **The self: the fundamental structure of the human psyche**

It is difficult to clearly define what psychology is. Although the *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* defines it as ‘the science of mind,’ ‘the science of mental life,’ ‘the science of behavior,’ etc, it is still not easy to make clear where to draw a boundary line among them, where one is intertwined with others and so forth. Yet, given that psychology came to our attention after humans established civilization to a degree that we were no longer worried about how to survive physically, it is worthwhile to recognize that psychology is in general on how the human mind, not the human body, adapts to the uncertainties of life. The founder of the modern psychology, Freud created a basic principle of psychology. It is Oedipus complex that delineates the workings of the human mind in a triangular relationship among a father, a mother, and a child (particularly male child with little regard to female). For the child, his mother is a substitute for the womb psychologically equal to Garden of Eden where he spent about 10 months on preparing to come into being in the world. However, as soon as he is born he slowly comes to a realization that he cannot use his mother as he did when he lived in her womb because there is a life-long rival, his father, against him. Here, ambivalence, one of the key terminologies in Freudian psychology, takes place; he wants to kill his father so as to possess and use his mother completely but at the same time he felt the necessity of obeying his father owing to the fact that he needs his father so as to survive. On this basis Freud developed the three

psychical functions: id (pleasure principle; what he did in his mother's womb), superego (the authority of his father to take his mother), and ego (the ambivalent workings of the child's mind). At the bottom of this psychology there is an assumption that human life from the beginning is tragically determined under the influence of Oedipus complex. For everyone is destined to hesitate between the desire to kill his father and the hunger to identify with his father. In his late times, Freud developed his psychotherapeutic hermeneutic into a psycho-philosophical viewpoint. In his *Civilization and Its Discontent*, he argued that the essential motive of civilization is the killing of a father by a band of brothers; such a theoretical argument is clearly based on his belief in Oedipus complex.

However, as time went by, there appeared the psychologist Heinz Kohut who historicized the achievement of Freud by saying that Oedipus complex is a historical product of the 19<sup>th</sup> century mainly caused by parents' 'overstimulation' of their children. On top of this, he insisted that what matters most in psychology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not neurosis but rather lack of self-esteem or self-confidence mostly generated by parents' 'under-stimulation.' While neurosis is closely related to an excessive erotic relationship among family members, lack of self-esteem is reliant on lack of interaction among them. Hence, attention needs be given not to the degree of tension ego can stand with between the unending psychological battle between id and superego but to the degree of stability of the self as a basic structure of the human psyche that helps the self attain and sustain self-esteem and self-confidence in spite of a variety of life experiences that threatens to break the stability and cohesiveness of the self structure. Kohut thus states:

Self psychology does not work with a framework of biological drives [libido] and a mental apparatus [id, ego, and superego]. It posits a primary

self which, in a matrix of empathic selfobjects that is held to be as much a prerequisite of psychological existence as oxygen is for biological life, experiences *selfobject* greatness (assertiveness; ambitions), on the one hand, and *selfobject* perfection (idealization of one's goals; enthusiasm for one's ideals), on the other.<sup>67</sup>

To appropriately understand Kohut's self-psychology, it is necessary to know its basic technical terms, that is, a set of fundamental rules for the psychological play: the self, the nuclear self, and a matrix of selfobjects.

In order to comprehend what Kohut means by the term self, it is worthwhile to keep in mind that his understanding of narcissism is essentially different from that of Freud. For Freud, (primary) narcissism refers to "an initial libidinal investment of psychic energy in the pre-differentiated ego."<sup>68</sup> A neonate does not have the ability to differentiate the objective reality from the subjective reality; it feels everything in the world as part of itself. From the Freudian perspective, the development of the human psychical structure is based on the ability of an infant to distinguish itself from all the other; later it gives birth to the triangular functions of the psyche. In this respect, secondary narcissism can be interpreted as a sort of regressive behavior or defensive mechanism. For it is "a condition in which libido is withdrawn from external objects and turned anew onto the ego, or cathected to objects internalized within the ego."<sup>69</sup> Thus, the Freudian psychology defines narcissism as something to be overcome so as to achieve object relations.

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<sup>67</sup> Heinz Kohut, *Self Psychology and the Humanities: Reflections on a New Psychoanalytic Approach* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 74.

<sup>68</sup> Andrew P. Morrison, ed., *Essential Papers on Narcissism* (New York: New York University, 1986), 13.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

By contrast, Kohut argues that narcissism is the most fundamental characteristic of the human psyche. For the inability of a neonate to differentiate itself from the outer world cannot be completely transformed into object relations. Though the inability is viewed by Freudian psychology as a negative element in the human psyche, it can be newly interpreted as a positive element because in primary narcissism an infant experiences full-scaled grandiosity. Here narcissism is the wellspring of self-esteem. If self-esteem is ‘the degree to which one values oneself (from the *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*),’ it is speculative that there must be a foundational structure in the human psyche that functions as a criterion with which to value one’s way of thinking and behaving. For Kohut, it is the self, which is defined as below:

I consider the self as a potentially observable content of the mind. If we choose this approach we will recognize the simultaneous existence of different and even contradictory selves in the same person, of selves with various degrees of stability and or various degrees of importance. There are conscious, preconscious, and unconscious selves; there are selves in the ego, the id, and the superego...<sup>70</sup>

Interestingly enough, Kohut does not put aside the Freudian three functions of the human psyche; instead he subsumes them into his definition of the self. Kohut perceives the self as an organic structure that needs to develop prior to the ego, the id, and the superego. Different from the function of the ego to regulate the tensions between the id and superego, the self functions to maintain the so-called psychological homeostasis. In this respect, Kohut also describes the self as “a precondition for mental health in the

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<sup>70</sup> Heinz Kohut, *Self Psychology and the Humanities*, 10.



narcissistic sector of the personality.”<sup>71</sup> In *The Restoration of the Self*, he stresses the importance of the establishment of the self in the human mind by saying that just as human’s survival relies on his/her success in creating new adaptive behaviors against the harsh natural environment so human’s psychological survival hinges upon either the establishment of the self or not in the mind. Therefore Kohut’s self-psychology contends that a satisfactory life is based on the appropriate establishment of the self prior to loving and working. Then, how is the self created in the mind? Kohut’s answer attracts our attention to the nuclear self, which lies at the core of the self as a fundamental structure.

### **The nuclear self: the essential gear for the self-psychological play**

In *the Analysis of the Self*, Kohut explains that the nuclear self is “the nucleus of a self which in general maintains its [the self’s] cohesiveness, or which, after a temporary fragmentation, could at least re-form itself speedily.”<sup>72</sup> If the human mind is what is biologically given *a priori*, it is speculative that the self belongs to something *a posteriori* on which the mind is built up. It leads to a question of how the self is formulated. Can it be structured by our conscious efforts such as imaginative power? Kohut clearly answers that “the nuclear self, in particular, is not formed via conscious encouragement and praise and via conscious discouragement and rebuke, but by the deeply anchored responsiveness of the self-objects.”<sup>73</sup> Given that the first selfobject for an infant is its first caregiver(s) and that anything can function as a selfobject as far as it provides the same

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<sup>71</sup> Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 108.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>73</sup> Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (Madison: International University Press, Inc., 1988), 100.

responsiveness from the first caregiver(s), it becomes clear that the self is a sort of psychological structure that cannot be created by itself and that it should be created by psychological responses (empathy) from outside. To make this clear, we need to go back to the primary narcissism again.

As stated earlier, an infant in primary narcissism lives in the complete psychological equilibrium owing to the lack of its ability to differentiate itself from the outer world. The infant's psychological equilibrium is synonymous with grandiosity and omnipotence. However, living outside of its mother's womb does not provide the equilibrium as in the womb. Accordingly, the infant inevitably meets moments when the psychological equilibrium is broken to varying degrees. The instinct for survival naturally demands the mind to maintain psychological homeostasis by building up a psychological adaptive structure, that is, the nuclear self as the foundation of the self. The process results in the two different but interactive nuclear structures to a considerable degree: the *grandiose exhibitionistic* self and the *idealized parental imago*. The *grandiose exhibitionistic* self is structured out of the desire of the infant to maintain its grandiosity and omnipotence extant in primary narcissism. The *idealized parental imago* is structured out of the realization of the infant that it cannot survive outside of its mother womb without relying on or idealizing its caregiver(s). Kohut speculates that under 'optimal' developmental conditions, the *grandiose exhibitionistic* self can develop into "the instinctual fuel for our ego-syntonic ambitions and purposes"<sup>74</sup> while the *idealized*

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<sup>74</sup> Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self*, 28.

*parental imago*, “an important component of our psychic organization by holding up to us the leading leadership of its ideals.”<sup>75</sup>

In the process of the establishment of the nuclear self, what is the most psychologically important raw material is a mother or caregiver’s phase-appropriately empathic responses. That empathy (vicarious introspection) is “the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person”<sup>76</sup> indicates that from its caregiver an infant needs mirroring experience in which the exhibitionistic desire of the infant is freely expressed and appropriately warmly accepted. However, the mirroring experience cannot satisfy the infant’s desire in full since, as Kohut argues, we are all narcissistic enough to be preoccupied with what we need rather than what others need. In order to resolve such a psychological problem, the infant performs what Kohut calls ‘transmuting internalization’ that makes it possible for “the structure necessary for tolerance of delayed [emphatic] responses”<sup>77</sup> to be built. By receiving appropriate empathic responses from its caregiver(s), the infant builds the nuclear self at the center of its mind not in a geographical sense but in a dynamical sense. Here, it needs to be noted that Kohut presupposes the existence of ‘optimal frustration’ of the infant’s narcissistic desire at a non-traumatic degree. That is, the establishment of the (nuclear) self is based on a collapse of primary narcissism to some degree. Interestingly Kohut does not define what he means by ‘optimal frustration’; since the degree of frustration to facilitate the formulation of the self is different from one another. Therefore, it is evident that there is

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>76</sup> Heinz Kohut, edited by Arnold Goldberg, *How Does Analysis Cure?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 82.

<sup>77</sup> Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self*, 116.

no absolute definition about the ideal type of the self as well as the nuclear self. Everyone has its own unique nuclear self structure in which the traits of the grandiose exhibitionistic self and the idealized parental imago are also different from one another. When taking into consideration the diversity of talents and skills each individual has, it sounds more reasonable. With all these in mind, Kohut's summary of the nuclear self sounds much more persuasive.

... a core self – the nuclear self – ... is the basis for our sense of being an independent center of initiative and perception, integrated with our most central ambitions and ideals and with our experience that our body and mind form a unit in space and a continuum in time. This cohesive and enduring psychic configuration, in connection with a correlated set of talents and skills that it attracts to itself or that develops in response to the demands of the ambitions and ideals of the nuclear self, forms the central sector of the personality.<sup>78</sup>

### **A matrix of selfobjects: a matrix of psychological oxygen**

In investigating the process in which the nuclear self is established in the human mind, it was emphasized that the psychological raw material necessary for us to construct the nuclear self is empathic responses from our caregiver(s). Kohut defines the selfobject as an object experienced as part of the self. In *Grace for the Injured Self*, Terry D. Cooper and Robert L. Randall provide a succinct and poignant definition of selfobjects.

Selfobjects ... are individuals, groups, things, ideas, or anything that a self takes as part of its self, as an extension of its self (hence the term "selfobject"), which the self implicitly expects, and often explicitly demands, to act in mirroring, idealizing, or alter ego ways. For Kohut, the life-giving milieu of selfobject's

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<sup>78</sup> Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self*, 178.

response to the individual's or group's self needs constitutes the very foundation of all psychological life.<sup>79</sup>

On top of this, Kohut argues that just as the physical survival of human life is for the most part dependent on what kind of environment we are born into, so the psychological survival of human life also relies on the same matter. In fact, he delineates the psychological environment as a matrix of selfobjects, which he understands as psychologically essential nutrition. To clarify the importance of selfobject, Kohut likens it to oxygen as follows:

The child that is to survive psychologically is born into an empathic-responsive human milieu (of self-object) just as he is born into an atmosphere that contains an optimal amount of oxygen if he is to survive physically. And his nascent self “expects” – to use an inappropriately anthropomorphic but appropriately evocative terms – an empathic environment to be in tune with his psychological need-wishes with the same unquestioning certitudes as the respiratory apparatus of the newborn infant may be said to “expect” oxygen to be contained in the surrounding atmosphere.<sup>80</sup>

Psychologically speaking, from the beginning to the end in life we are destined to live in a matrix of selfobjects. Although our nuclear self can be established only out of the fragmentation of our primary narcissism to a certain degree, it is empathic responses we can get from our selfobjects that actually cause the nuclear self to be formulated in our psyche. In this respect, Kohut stresses the importance of dependence in human life from one another. For in a matrix of selfobjects we cannot survive without any selfobject as part of ourselves that is utilized as psychological material for our self-esteem and self-

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<sup>79</sup> Heinz Kohut, *Grace for the Injured Self*, 92.

<sup>80</sup> Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self*, 85.

confidence. We need selfobjects that affirm us to be a worthwhile being. Furthermore, as far as mature (cohesive) self is concerned, human life can be viewed as interdependent among all of us. For in proportion as we need others as our selfobjects, they need us in the same way. However, it is assumable that such a matrix is nothing but an imaginative creation for Kohut to construct his own system of self-psychology. We can imagine how the self is formulated and how it functions for our self-esteem; we cannot prove it as if we solved a mathematical question for it is not based on any self-sufficient principle. However, when we hear why Kohut came to believe in the importance of a matrix of selfobjects for our psychological life, we cannot simply confine it to an imaginative creation.

An interesting study, relevant to our topic, about an experiment in nature, so to speak, was written by Anna Freud and Sophie Dann about twenty years ago (1951). They reported on a group of six children who had survived the concentration camp. In the course of their three years in the camp they were taken care of by ever-changing successive sets of mothers. The children survived, but the young women who were delivered into the concentration camp were all exterminated, to be replaced by a new group of young women who, until their death, took care of the children in their turn. Now, these children were surely disturbed, no doubt – but they were not schizophrenic. These children had a reasonably cohesive self; they had had a reasonable sense of being accepted in this world. The only conclusion one can draw is that the young women, as the end of their life was approaching, fastened on the next generation with a kind of empathy, with a kind of affection, with a kind of responsiveness that gave these children a sense of the continuity and reality of their self that allowed them to become viable individuals.<sup>81</sup>

What becomes clear by this account is the possibility that a matrix of selfobjects can exist much more realistically than we expect. The fragile self of the children survived

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<sup>81</sup> Heinz Kohut, *Self Psychology and the Humanities*, 167.

psychologically well because they continued to inhale the fresh psychological air in spite of the fact that they lived in one of the most horrible places in history. Insofar as the matrix of selfobjects helped them re-experience the emphatic responses they received from their first caregiver(s) it does not matter what the selfobject is. Even right before the chain of death, their self remained cohesively and coherently by sustaining psychological homeostasis. Thus, a matrix of selfobjects is the psychological place where the nuclear self can intake and digest the psychological food of empathic responses and transform it into cohesiveness and continuity of the self. Put it differently, the matrix is indispensable to the psychological survival of the nuclear self.

### **Play in self-psychology**

In *Heinz Kohut: The Making of a Psychoanalyst*, Charles B. Strozier makes an attempt to find out how Kohut could develop his own system of self-psychology with a historical approach that mainly focuses on the personal lives of Kohut. In order to understand Kohut's personal motivation for his psychology, there are three important elements to be taken weightily.

First, in childhood Kohut had difficulties in his relation with his parents. Out of the intimacy-lacking marriage between his father and mother, Kohut was able to receive the appropriate emphatic responses from neither father nor mother. His father's treatment of Kohut is well summarized into one word: indifference. His mother's way of nurturing him is well explicated in the case study of Mr. Z in which Kohut analyzed a young man and his relation with his mother from his childhood; later, it was revealed that Mr. Z is

Kohut himself. Kohut's mother treated child Kohut as a machine to be checked for its proper operation rather than a child to be loved unconditionally. Such a tendency is represented by an anecdote. Usually when she changed his son's diaper, she was much more interested in the condition of his son's stool than his son. It is difficult to see such responses from his mother to Kohut as an empathic response. When taking into consideration these facts, it is interesting to hear the argument of Kohut that the structure of the self in human life is a much more important matter than the dynamics of the psychological triadic functions of id, ego, and superego. Given the fact that he was not able to receive emphatic responses unilaterally from his parents, it can be drawn that his major issue in psychology was how to gain and sustain self-esteem and self-confidence but not how to overcome Oedipus complex. In fact, according to Strozier, his mother seems to have been stronger than his father financially and socially.

Second, born as a Jewish-German, he lived as a Jewish-German-American in the US. It is interesting that he implicitly or explicitly tried to conceal his Jewish identity. He attempted to build up a new social identity of being the psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut. By extension, to him the US could be something like a matrix of selfobjects in his psychological development. Although he had hard times in his home country owing to his identity as a Jew during the Second World War, as soon as he arrived at the US he started making a new identity that should have accepted first by himself and then by others in the US. In this light, it is presumable that the development of Kohut's self-psychology can be viewed in accordance with that of the new identity as psychologist Heinz Kohut in the US. In this light, it is presumable that the development of Kohut's self-psychology can be



viewed in accordance with that of his new identity in the US as psychologist Heinz Kohut. In a word, just as he developed a new identity in the US he developed a new psychology in the US.

The last is his emphasis on stability (psychological homeostasis) in the self rather than on sublimation in the psyche. He repetitively said that he did not discover Oedipus complex as the fundamental cause of the psychological problems of patients he consulted throughout his analytic life. Harkening back to what he experienced at home in childhood, it is possible to assume that he did not struggle with Oedipus complex owing to the psychological absence of father. He did not have any need to be jealous of his father. Rather, the most urgent issue to him was how to cope with the reality lacking the emphatic responses from his parents; that is, he grappled with how to sustain cohesiveness and continuity in the self. Luckily, his relations with private teachers and a few intimate friends and his immersion in books in many different fields provided him with a psychological field where he was able to assure himself continually; speculatively speaking, he interpreted his life-experiences psychologically as a theory of selfobjects in self-psychology. His experience of strengthening self-confidence and self-esteem with selfobjects once again seemed to come to the fore when he had hard times to confront the majority of Freudian psychologists who cold-heartedly rejected his theory of self-psychology.

With all these in mind, it is easy to understand why he defines the purpose of life as “narcissistic homeostasis in the vicissitudes of the self; the joy of existence,”<sup>82</sup> or, to

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<sup>82</sup> Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self*, 285.

be more precise, “to enjoy the experience of his [or her] effectively functioning and creative self.”<sup>83</sup> Given that the five life-fruits of the cohesive self are (1) creativity; (2) the ability to be emphatic; (3) the capacity to recognize one’s impermanence; (4) a sense of humor; and (5) wisdom from matured narcissism, it is evident that the most important thing to a healthy life depends on the degree of cohesiveness of the self. For Kohut, our psychological life is not deterministic as Freud insisted; instead, it is imagined as full of self-objects with which our self can grow and mature continually. Can it be possible to say that his self-psychology is his own biography? Interestingly enough, in *How Does Analysis Cure?*, Kohut seems to reflect on what he did in his life by saying that “the most productive and creative lives are lived by those who, despite high degrees of traumatization in childhood, are able to acquire new structures by finding new routes toward inner completeness [cohesiveness and continuity in the self].”<sup>84</sup>

I contend that Heinz Kohut played with his self-psychology in which a matrix of selfobjects is like a life playground for him. When entering the Freudian psychological play, he was not able to find a solution to his life symbolized by the term ‘fragmented self.’ It is not Oedipus complex that made difficult for him to grow up psychologically; instead it is the fragile structure of his psyche that prevented him from moving forward in a cohesive way. To overcome it, it was important for him to adjust Freudian psychology to the degree that he could heal himself or joyfully confront the reality given to him. In doing so, he must have needed something (selfobjects) with which he could assure himself that he is worthwhile. As far as it is helpful, everything could be his advocate,

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>84</sup> Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 144.

namely, a selfobject. As time goes on, a selfobject can be connected to another and so on; it becomes a matrix of selfobjects. In a word, human life by substance unfolds in a matrix of selfobjects.

From the play-theory standpoint, such imaginative acts can be viewed as a kind of make-believe play constituted of simulation (the infinite repetition of the selfobject experience), vertigo (the interaction of the selfobject experience with the unconscious), and chance (cohesiveness and continuity of the self is the result of a combination of the *grandiose-exhibitionistic* self and the *idealized parental imago* self and one's talents and skills). As stated before, anything in the world can be taken as a selfobject insofar as it can provide appropriate emphatic responses an infant received from its parents. On the ground that "when the adult experiences the self-sustaining effects of a maturely chosen selfobject, the selfobject experiences of all the preceding stages of his life reverberate unconsciously,"<sup>85</sup> it is not impossible to view selfobject experience as a make-believe play.

In the sense that a matrix of selfobjects can function as a soothing or healing mechanism for the self, it can be viewed as a religious play for homeostasis. In the sense that we can develop the degree of cohesiveness and continuity of the self with the use of our skills or talents in spite of the fragile condition of the self made by inappropriate emphatic responses from parents, self-psychology seems chancy in terms of how to attain and sustain cohesiveness of the self. Next, where can we find the competition element? Can it be that self-psychological is itself a competitor to Freudian psychology? Out of

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<sup>85</sup> Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 49-50.

the fact that he based his self-psychology on Freud's notion of primary narcissism but later overcame it, it is self-evident. When all is said and done, it is feasible to argue that in some sense Kohut played with his self-psychology and that self-psychology is his life play.

## CHAPTER 5

### PLAY IN ECSTATIC NATURALISM OF ROBERT S. CORRINGTON

#### **The ontological disparity between *nature naturing* and *nature natured*: the ecstatic naturalism playground**

In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga insists that philosophy is originated in a sort of leisure in which people joyfully try to prove what they think right in opposition to what others do. In this sense, I agree with his point that “All knowledge – and this naturally includes philosophy – is polemical by nature, and polemics cannot be divorced from agnostics.”<sup>105</sup> What primarily matters is not about seeking for the so-called truth of whatever it is but about how to demonstrate their thoughts as reasonable and compelling. In a similar vein, Robert S. Corrington, the philosopher who created an American naturalistic philosophy ecstatic naturalism, also says that the purpose of philosophy is “to generate and propagate perspectives that have a deeply personal stamp.”<sup>106</sup> However, he doesn’t want to stop there simply taking philosophy as a leisure activity. He hopes that “a rich philosophy framework transcends its antecedent psychological conditions,”<sup>107</sup> and which clearly reveals that philosophy can be a method to make a private philosophical concern universal. On this basis, in what follows, I will delve into ecstatic naturalism so as to find the boundary area between the personal and the universal.

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<sup>105</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 156.

<sup>106</sup> Robert S. Corrington, *Riding the Windhorse: Manic-Depressive Disorder and the Quest for Wholeness* (New York: Hamilton Books, 2003), 19.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

Put starkly, ecstatic naturalism is one of American naturalistic philosophies that basically place emphasis on nature *per se* rather than human. In ecstatic naturalism, the term nature does not merely mean the physical world we are living in; instead, it means some kind of womb filled with potencies out of which all possible natural phenomena become existent in nature and in which innumerable meanings appear and disappear unendingly under the influence of a sort of nature's semiotic evolution. Hence, Corrington defines nature as something that "itself is an interpretive process through and through – not because it is an alleged series of minds or monads of protoconsciousness but because it prevails as innumerable orders of interaction and evolutionary ramification."<sup>108</sup> An effective imagery for understanding Corrington's nature can be Gaia, the great mother of all in Greek mythology. But it must be noticed that Corrington's nature is a much bigger concept than Gaia because it includes the visible and invisible traits of nature in itself. That being said, the philosophy aims to free all human discourses on nature from anthropocentrism.

How is it possible that we can overcome our anthropocentrically charged way of interpretation? It is possible on the make-believe that we are nothing more than a sign in nature in terms of nature's semiotics, that is, a view that all the natural phenomena need to be considered as a system of meanings. From the nature's standpoint, we are not different from sand dunes. How so? Provided that everything in the world comes from nature and goes back to nature, that each life is not eternal, and that the actualization of each life is nothing but the expression of its being as a sign in nature, it is necessary to

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<sup>108</sup> Robert S. Corrington, *The Community of Interpreters: On the Hermeneutics of Nature and the Bible in the American Philosophical Tradition* (Macon: Mercer, 1995), 98.

accept that human life is equal to a tree; moreover, in terms of the life span, the tree is more meaningful than we are. It can be argued that the door to ecstatic naturalism is to discard the misconception that we are superior to all other things in nature. We are no more than an infinitesimal part of nature.

The major topic of ecstatic naturalism is nature *per se* as a cosmic composite of innumerable things visible and invisible. With the principle of the philosophy that all things in nature are considered as a sign system in mind, it could be argued that ecstatic naturalism purposes to investigate how nature creates the cosmic composite of signs out of itself. For doing so, Corrington centers his discourses on an ontological disparity between *nature naturing* and *nature natured* that presents the two different aspects of nature. While *nature naturing* is the origin of nature, that is, “the self-transforming potencies within nature which continually renew the orders of the world,”<sup>109</sup> *nature natured* is the manifestations of nature, that is, “the innumerable orders of the world.”<sup>110</sup> *Nature naturing* is characteristic of restlessness in creating *nature natured* out of itself; psychologically taken, it is like a manic state represented by “a variety of symptoms including inappropriate elation, extreme motor activity, impulsiveness and excessively rapid thought and speech.”<sup>111</sup> By contrast, *nature natured* is characteristic of melancholy classified by “a pronounced depression with feelings of foreboding, sleeplessness and

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<sup>109</sup> Robert S. Corrington, *Nature and Spirit: An Essay in Ecstatic Naturalism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), x.

<sup>110</sup> Robert S. Corrington, *Ecstatic Naturalism: Signs of the World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>111</sup> *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, s.v. "mania," accessed April 13, 2012, <http://www.credoreference.com/entry/penguinpsyc/mania>

loss of appetite.”<sup>112</sup> In ecstatic naturalism, creation imports the ontological transition of *nature naturing* into *nature natured*. There is no creation *ex nihilo*; creation is only by, through, and within nature *per se*. If such a creation discourse is taken semiotically, it denotes the birth of the semiotic universe. Here it is interesting to note that ecstatic naturalism identifies metaphysics (the study of the fundamental nature of reality) with phenomenology (the study of the formal structure of objects) because, on the basis that all beings in nature is a sign system, it can be possible that the origin of existence is closely tied to its manifestations in terms of semiotics. The origin is known by its presentations; the presentations are based on their origin.

Now it is useful to take a look at the general outline of ecstatic naturalism that can be summarized into six points: (1) Ecstatic naturalism is a systemic and general account of the traits of nature; (2) Ecstatic naturalism presupposes the supremacy of nature in any theoretical interpretations of it; we cannot delineate nature in full for nature is always what is beyond the reach of all kinds of human discourses; (3) Ecstatic naturalism is founded on the belief that, in nature, there is an ontological split that can never be filled in, and which gives rise to the two different matrixes of nature: *nature naturing* as the origin of nature and *nature natured* as the manifestations of *nature naturing*; (4) Ecstatic naturalism places the human process as a sign system in the tension between ecstasy (*nature naturing*) and melancholy (*nature natured*); and (5) Ecstatic naturalism aims to investigate interactions or correlations between semiotics, i.e., phenomenology, and metaphysics of nature: as stated above, phenomenology, the study of being can be

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<sup>112</sup> The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology, s.v. "melancholia," accessed April 13, 2012, <http://www.credoreference.com/entry/penguinpsyc/melancholia>



equalized with semiotics, the study of meaning, when the issue of being is viewed as a way of expressing itself as a sign system. Metaphysics, the study of origin, can be viewed as related to semiotics in that a meaning cannot be created out of nothing. Put differently, a meaning should be based on other meaning(s). With all these in mind, it can be asked: how can we understand our life or the life of a sign? That is our next topic.

### **The ontological wound of a sign system: the *ecstatic naturalism* play rule**

In ecstatic naturalism everything in nature is considered as a sign system. In *nature naturing* there are only potencies that are far beyond the reach of our knowledge. However, as soon as the transition of potencies into *nature natured* is made, a sign system is given birth to, and which means that the sign system is put under the influence of temporality, self-reflection, and intersubjectivity. By temporality, it is meant that a sign system is under the control of time, space, and causality. Corrington adds to it the Darwinian perspective that the destiny of a sign system is to survive and preserve its own species by intensifying the meaning of its existence in spite of the law of survival of the fittest and the law of entropy. By self-reflection, it is meant that all sign systems in nature have their self-reflection that leads to a realization that they exist between *nature naturing* and *nature natured*. By intersubjectivity, it is meant that a sign system is connected to other sign systems although it is not connected to all the others. On the one hand, it is connected to others; on the other hand, it is not connected to others. However, in terms of the fact that a connection among sign systems help intensify the existent-meaning of each, the survival of a sign already presupposes its being connected to others

in a certain way. On this basis, let's take a look at how Corrington delineates the life of a sign system in his semiotic world of nature.

Meanings [the life of a sign] have the quality of being omnivorous, that is, of seeking greater and greater instantiation in the world. The only check for this is competing sign and hunger reinforces the idea that signs are self-othering, that is, that they desire to gather other semiotic matter into themselves and convert it into usable semiotic energy.<sup>113</sup>

With this quote, it becomes evident that Corrington sees the semiosis of nature as living in the wild where survival is first and foremost priority. Thus, is there in ecstatic naturalism something like the evolutionary theory to explain the cause of the existence of our life?

To answer the question, it is necessary to go back to *nature naturing*, which is described by Corrington such as the unconscious of nature that seemingly aimlessly creates dream stories out of itself, the unruly ground that exists beyond the criterion of good and evil, the churning sea that is “absolutely indifferent to whatever may occur on or below its surface.”<sup>114</sup> As I said, *nature naturing* perennially creates innumerable signs out of itself, and which can be compared with a hyper-manic state of mind in which a sign system can illusorily see itself connected with all the other. A sign is the result of an ejaculation from *nature naturing*. In fact, we don't know what is ejaculated. But Corrington constantly argues that *nature natured* is the result of the irruption of potencies of *nature naturing*. It is commonsensical to ask: what happens during the irruption? Or what makes possible the transition from *nature naturing* to *nature natured*?

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<sup>113</sup> Robert S. Corrington, *A Semiotic Theory of Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 191.

<sup>114</sup> Robert S. Corrington, *Nature's Religion* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Inc., 1997), 102.

To explain this, first Corrington employs Otto Rank's birth trauma. For Rank, the truthful cause of anxieties in human mental life is not Oedipus complex; but rather it is the trauma of birth that refers to the most extreme painful experience we all went through when we were delivered into this world. To be, we all must have gone through the threshold of death when we tried to move out of our mother's womb. For Rank, such a horrible experience seems to have taken place when we were separated from mother. In this sense, it can be argued that to be is to lose our own mother to a certain degree or to lose our original state of being. Corrington explicitly applies this theory to the transitional moment from *nature naturing* to *nature natured*. However, it is necessary to ask: how is a psychological theory useful in dealing with the semiosis of nature? Here, Corrington calls for Julia Kristeva who, in her semiotic psychology, develops Plato's *chora* that originally has the mythical definition to be 'enclosed space or womb.' For Kristeva, *chora* is the presemiotic realm that is "the birthing ground of all signification and meaning."<sup>115</sup> On top of this, Corrington makes a connection between her *chora* and his *nature naturing* as follows:

... the *chora* is the active dimension of the unconscious of nature because it is fundamentally ejective of its own rhythms and powers. The unconscious 'surrounds' the *chora*, providing it with an infinite reservoir of energy and semiosis. Extending the categorical structure, we can say that all potencies, as preformal and presemiotic, are unconscious. The *chora* is the 'place' where the potencies move more specifically toward expression within and as the orders of the world.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Robert S. Corrington, *Ecstatic Naturalism*, 27.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

A sign comes into being by being pushed out of the *chora*. Here the trauma of birth is equalized with the occurrence of the loss of the material maternal, and which causes the ontological melancholy in each sign system that engenders an unending want to go back to its pristine state of being in the womb of *nature naturing*. Hence, it is arguable that the existence of a sign system is always in the tensions between melancholy and ecstasy. For just as *nature natured* longs for going back to its origin of *nature naturing*, so melancholy yearns for going back to its origin of ecstasy. The life of a sign system seems miserable from the beginning. However, play has its own totality. If there is a beginning, there must be an end. Does Corrington also make that in his philosophical play?

### **The victory in ecstatic naturalism play: stillness**

In ecstatic naturalism, Corrington implicitly describes the life of a sign system as a sort of pilgrimage. There is, however, no one-time victory of salvation in this semiotic pilgrimage, like the returning Kingdom of Heaven in Christianity. Corrington makes a rule for a sign system to win in the semiotic play of nature that each sign system must progress until it passes by the ontological dichotomy between *nature naturing* and *nature natured*. The victory means moving out of the semiotic cycle of nature that takes place in the interaction between the two natures. Interestingly, moving out is characterized by the Buddhistic term stillness meaning ‘pure consciousness.’ Corrington defines stillness as “where all meanings coneresce in the ultimate mystery that is not circumscribable.”<sup>117</sup> Taking into account that ecstatic naturalism insists the evolutionary development in the

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 198.

intensification of the meaning of a sign system, it is distinctive that the destination of a sign system is quite equal to being or staying in potencies of *nature naturing* in the same way that the ecstatic state of potencies cause the life of a sign system to enter the state of ecstasy, that is, “the movement of self-othering, of standing outside of the point of origin”<sup>118</sup> or “the momentum of self-transcendence in which an antecedent state [of a sign system] welcomes an internal transfiguration in which its plentitude is enhanced.”<sup>119</sup> In a word, the destination (victory) of a sign system in ecstatic naturalism is to go back to its origin in the ecstatic state of potencies. How can we do this?

Put simply, we as a sign system cannot do that alone. For to be born means to be marked with the ontological disparity. The trauma of birth and the loss of the material maternal are latent in the existence of a sign system throughout its lifespan. It suggests that all sign systems must struggle with the mood swings of nature between ecstasy (*nature naturing*) and melancholy (*nature natured*). It is the destiny of *nature natured* that perennially longs for its origin. Salvation must come from the origin, that is, from inside of nature but not from outside. Here we can meet ecstatic naturalism version of spirit(s). Spirit(s) are a very unique species of nature which can move freely between *nature naturing* and *nature natured*, and sustain the tensions between them. They function as “the ultimate guide for all communal interpretation and conceptual elaboration [survival] of the meaning of the life and work of”<sup>120</sup> all sign systems in nature. With the power of spirits “to provide us with a continual process of opening onto the

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>119</sup> Robert S. Corrington, *Nature's Self: Our Journey from Origin to Spirit* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Inc., 1996), 63.

<sup>120</sup> Robert S. Corrington, *The Community of Interpreters*, 79.

undelimited realm where the temporal does not cease to be (a confusion of the apocalyptic mind), but tastes of a time beyond the ravages of entropy and decay,<sup>121</sup> we can gradually progress toward our origin. To be more specific, when a sign system is aided by spirits in its own semiotic individuation, it can enter into the ecstatic state of potencies of *nature naturing* for a moment during which its semiotic energies is recharged and restored enough to continue its own life in the semiotic battlefield. The final victory will be given when it arrives at a point of stillness that is located somewhere beyond the perennial semiotic cycle of nature. What needs to be remembered is that until the victory we are destined to move along with the mood swings of nature between ecstasy and melancholy. Corrington calls such a semiotic spiritual journey of a sign *selving* in which a sign continually develops itself until it finally becomes reunited with its origin of *nature naturing*.

### **Play in ecstatic naturalism**

Corrington likens the semiotic life of a sign system to part of nature's play with itself. In *A Semiotic Theory of Theology and Philosophy*, he utilizes, one of the most important play teachers in North America, Uta Hagen's six questions to be answered by actors/actresses before they perform their role: "(1) who am I (i.e., as a character?), (2) what are the circumstances (from example, time, place, and surrounding)?, (3) what are my relationships?, (4) what do I want?, (5) what is my obstacle?, and (6) what do I do to

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<sup>121</sup> Robert S. Corrington, *Nature's Self*, 146.

get what I want? (Hagen 1991:134)<sup>122</sup> If Corrington understands the life of a sign as playing a given role in nature's play, it is also possible that I can find the answers of ecstatic naturalism to the above questions. My answers go: (1) I am a sign system; (2) I am thrown into *nature natures* by *nature naturing*'s irruption out of itself, and in this process I have the ontological wound made by the birth trauma and the loss of my mother; (3) To be, I am required to fight with others; if I win, I can intensify my existence as a sign system degree by degree; but if I lose, it puts an end to my existence; (4) I want to go back to my origin; (5) There are several obstacles like the ontological wound I cannot heal by myself, the law of survival of the fittest and the law of entropy; (6) To go back to where I came from, I need to follow the mood swings of nature between ecstasy and melancholy that are already embedded in me from the outset of my semiotic life; with the help of spirit(s), hopefully I can gradually move forward. With this guideline in mind, now it is time to investigate into play elements in ecstatic naturalism.

To take a look at ecstatic naturalism from the play-theory standpoint, it is important to know that Corrington struggles with manic-depression, which is a mood disorder characterized by severe mood swings between mania and depression. Thus, it is necessary to keep in mind the fact that a manic-depressive cannot easily experience the balance between mania and depression without the aid of medicine. When the manic and depressive episodes are translated semiotically, it seems that manic episodes indicate the traits of *nature naturing* while depressive episodes the characteristics of *nature natures*. It seems that there are some correlations between ecstatic naturalism and manic depression. Put a step further, ecstatic naturalism for Corrington is his own way of

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<sup>122</sup> Robert S. Corrington, *A Semiotic Theory of Theology and Philosophy*, 100.

healing himself. In harmony with the mood swings of nature between ecstasy and melancholy, Corrington attempts to intuit the interactive area between *nature naturing* and *nature natured* with the hope that if he approaches the center of the arena and know what is going on he can accelerate his own semiotic individuation the destination of which will be a point of stillness symbolizing an perfect escape from manic depression. To validate my analysis, I want to quote the statement of why Corrington writes or creates his own philosophy in *Riding the Windhorse*.

... the writing projection is filled with a deep stillness that comes from the lack within the self. The hope is that the completion of a rounded and whole work will fill in the lack and still its desperate rhythm. This hope is part of the sheer cunning of nature that spurs the genius on, full well “knowing” that there will be no stillness at the end of the journey. On one level, the genius knows the rules of the game that he or she has been forced to play, while on another level there is a wonderful kind of amnesia that makes it possible to hope again hope that this time the rules will change.<sup>123</sup>

Corrington speculates that the major cause of manic-depression was a combination of his ‘Evil’ mother, who, in a manic state, tried to kill infant Corrington several times after she sank into a postpartum psychology and his hereditary traits. Along with this, it is worthwhile to note that throughout his life Corrington has grappled with his ‘Evil’ mother imageries that are still vividly alive in his psyche. More important, although explicitly he wants to stay away from his mother as far as he can, he still deeply desires to make peace with her. From the angle of ecstatic naturalism, it is possible to imagine that his personal struggles are projected on his philosophy. One difference is that

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<sup>123</sup> Robert S. Corrington, *Riding the Windhorse*, 123.



while the former is microcosmic (an individualistic play) the latter is macrocosmic (the semiotic play of nature).

Corrington knows that the reconciliation cannot be given for nothing. It takes time and efforts. How so? Just as he constantly attempts to accept his life marked with the mother-child dichotomy and to try to heal it, so his philosophy perennially investigates the ontological cleft and figures out what is going on there. Hence, it can be argued that Corrington seriously plays with ecstatic naturalism. In reality, he cannot solve his existential hardships caused by manic depression himself. He has to stand with it as long as he is alive. In play, however, he becomes the creator of the semiosis of nature although he defines himself as none other than a sign system in *nature natured*. Here, with the help of his violent but simultaneously gracious Mother Nature, he can move toward accomplishing the reconciliation between *nature naturing* and *nature natured* in which he can attain the stillness of his being.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

So far we have discussed the traits and functions of play and how it benefits human life with the three examples: shamanism (religion), self-psychology (psychology), ecstatic naturalism (philosophy). My major argument went: play is important in keeping homeostasis in human life that is originally made of the mixture of what we call reality and what we consider fantasy. Play (almost equal to fantasy) is not an entertainment and a pastime; instead it has its own important functions to help improve our adaptive ability (homeostasis) to the vicissitudes of life by allowing us to stay away from and moreover transcend our daily life. In the new reality of play though it lasts for an agreed amount of time, we can attain pure freedom and experience being autonomous as a creator of the play. In this sense, play is closely related to what we attain in religious experiences: the annulations of the past self Rudolf Otto symbolizes with the term *mysterium tremendum*. However, there is one important requirement so as to experience life as play that causes the *mysterium tremendum* experience, that is, the attitude toward living play much more seriously than living our daily life. In what follows, I will recapitulate what I have handled up to this point and at the end I will re-emphasize the importance of play in our life.

## **Play**

In order to argue that play is important to our life much more than we normally assume, I provided three different approaches, philosophical, scientific (psychological), and religious. When I wove all of them into one play theory, it became evident that play provides us with a new reality, which unfortunately cannot last as long as we want. In play, we can attain freedom and autonomy and become creative at a pure degree. In play, we can live a play-life with its own totality composed of a world with a beginning and an end, the life and death of each player, and the life-purpose of the play-life.

The major characteristics of play are delineated by four factors: competition, simulation, chance, and vertigo. By competition, it is meant that play requires each player to accomplish the cutthroat life-battle. It is not to say that a player should kill the other player; instead it is to say that the newly imagined play-life is much more serious than reality. In this sense, it is argued that in play we work out ourselves in preparation for the real fierce life-and-death battle in life. By simulation, it is meant that play puts us into a new reality where the play-life is controlled and administrated by the unanimously agreed set of regulations. To play, we are required to keep the rules of the play-life. Turning to the child play in which, by imitating their parents' way of life, children learn how to adapt to the human society, it becomes evident that play helps us to prepare life-events beyond our anticipation. By chance, it is meant that no matter how meticulously we prepare for play victory or defeat is beyond our control. Needless to say, the power of luck is considered seriously. By vertigo, it is meant that play provides us with a cathartic moment, namely, the reunification of the dichotomy between body and mind. Such a

moment can also be explained with the religious approaches to play; concretely *mysterium tremendum*. Play is attractive but at the same time it causes awesomeness. As Rudolf Otto argues in *The Idea of the Holy* and William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, such a psychological state ignited by *mysterium tremendum* requires the annulation of the past self and brings about a new self. Out of this experience can we enter our daily life with the newly established psychological homeostasis. With this play theory, I looked into the three case subjects: religion (shamanism), psychology (self-psychology), and philosophy (ecstatic naturalism)

### **Life-Play in shamanism**

As far as shamanism is concerned, it is important to note that shamanism is the most primitive form of the human religious life we have discovered so far. It is a communal religious activity in which a shaman representative of his/her whole community makes an attempt to stabilize the anxieties existent in the psyche of the community members. Shamanism is based on a mythological understanding of the world, which goes: In the beginning there was only one world where gods and humans were no difference in quality. But one day an unforgivable mistake was done by humans; the cost was being expelled out of the heavenly world and fallen on the earthly world. From that moment on humans constantly long to go back to their original place. Out of the desire, they believe that there was still one place where the primordial place can be actualized: the Center of the World. Additionally they believe that a shaman is the only person who can approach the area.

To be a shaman, shamanic candidates must go through a set of initiative trials (symbolized by the journey of a hero: isolation, death, and resurrection) confirmed by the whole community. It is not up to each candidate but to the entire community members to decide whether or not a candidate becomes the true shaman. In this sense, it can be seen that from the outset of the shamanic initiation there is a play-element the whole community participates in. The shamanic initiation is the communal play where community members observe and judge the potential ability of a candidate and candidates compete against one another to be the winner.

In the shamanic healing ritual a psychodrama (play) is actualized in a dramatic way that a shaman is identified with the entire community members. What the shaman does in the ritual can be interpreted as what the community in one does. The purpose of the shamanic healing ritual is to stabilize the psyche of a patient at a microcosmical level but at a macrocosmic level to re-stabilize the ontological dichotomy between the two differentiated worlds. It is only possible through the ecstatic experience of the shaman. As Mircea Eliade defines shamanism as the archaic technique of ecstasy, at the core of shamanism there are ecstatic experiences. Normally it is assumed that ecstasy takes place only in the psyche of a shaman. However, it is important to note that the psyche of the shaman in ecstasy is psychologically equalized with that of the entire community members. I argued that the ancient shamanic community played with shamanism in which they wanted to live their life more coherently and healthily. Here it seems difficult to draw a line between reality and fantasy in shamanism because they lived shamanism and shamanism was their life-play.

### **Life-Play in self-psychology**

Self-psychology of Heinz Kohut is strongly anchored in the Freudian psychology in the sense that Kohut's narcissism is an interpretation of Freud. When it comes to secondary narcissism their view becomes divergent; while Freud considers it as a psychologically regressive behavior that prevents 'transference' from occurring between analyst and analysand, Kohut regards it as a psychologically natural phenomenon. On top of this, it is argued that self-psychology is a new psychology radically different from the Freudian in the sense that while the Freudian handles how to relieve the tensions taking place in the relationship among id, ego, and superego, self-psychology is concerned with a more basic structure of the psyche than the triadic constituents of the Freudian. Kohut insists that Oedipus complex, the core element of the Freudian psychology, is a byproduct of the fragmentation of the self, that is, the basic structure of the human psyche. Thus, what it aims to deal with is the degree of cohesiveness in space and continuity in time of the self that helps maintain our sense of self-esteem and self-confidence.

What is most important in understanding Kohut's self-psychology is his belief that the primary structure of the human psyche cannot be established by itself. It should be established by the help of others with empathic responses, namely, psychological food. It is empathic responses that give rise to the first and foremost important continuity and cohesiveness of the self, that is, the nuclear self that is constituted of the two poles, the *grandiose-exhibitionistic* self and the *idealized parental imago*. The two poles are not established without a series of frustrations to a non-traumatic degree, caused by the unemphatic responses of the first caregiver(s). In other words, when confronted by the

indifferent aspects of life, the sense of grandiosity and omnipotence latent in primary narcissism becomes divided into the two poles that later lead to the nuclear self for psychological survival. In this sense, it is contended that from the beginning the self is dependent on others.

To clarify the nuclear self more concretely, Kohut imagined the possibility of a matrix of selfobjects. By selfobject it is meant what the self needs for its psychological food, that is, what invigorates self-esteem and self-confidence. Although it exists outside of the self, the self considers it as part of itself; the self constantly identifies itself with potential selfobjects that seem to helpful in attaining and maintaining the cohesiveness and continuity of the self. In doing so, the self keeps re-experiencing the first life experience that provided emphatic responses from its first caregiver(s). Put in more realistic terms, in such processes the self heals its fragmented parts (lack of self-esteem) and strengthens its cohesiveness (self-confidence). Kohut insists that as long as the self can get or imagine emphatic responses, everything in life can be a selfobject of the self. By a matrix of selfobjects it is meant that our life is filled with things that can work as selfobjects for our psychological health. Self-psychologically taken, life exists in a matrix of selfobjects. Just as we need physical nutrition for physical survival, so we need psychological nutrition for psychological survival.

In *Heinz Kohut; The Making of a Psychoanalysis*, Charles B. Strozier seems to discover the origin of the development of self-psychology by tracing back to the life of Heinz Kohut. Throughout the book, implicitly he argues that the development of self-psychology is similar to how Kohut led his personal life. In this light, it is possible to

approach Kohut's self-psychology from the play-theory perspective. In talking of the origin of self-psychology, it is evident that Oedipus complex did not make sense to Kohut in dealing with the lack of his self-esteem. When attention is given to the facts that he was a first Jewish-German American immigrant who came to the US during the Second World War, that at first he became an advocate for the Freudian psychology but later became a heretic owing to his belief that Oedipus complex is the psychology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that throughout his life he wanted to build up a new identity beyond his past life in German, his self-psychology can be viewed as his way of leading a new life in the US. On this basis, I argue that Kohut played with his self-psychology. Under the aegis of cohesiveness in space and continuity in time of the self, he was able to conduct his life as the first self-psychologist. In a matrix of selfobjects, whenever he was frustrated, indicating that his self became fragmented, he attempted to re-stabilize his fragile self with the help of selfobjects that are the loyal road to his first experience of self-esteem and self-confidence in life like the *mysterium tremendum* experience that aims to readjust psychological homeostasis. Thus, his life in a matrix of selfobjects can be viewed in a sense as a self-psychological play.

### **Life-Play in ecstatic naturalism**

Created by Robert S. Corrington, ecstatic naturalism is an American naturalistic philosophy the primary aim of which is to investigate the origin of things in the world and its activities in a given period of time. The key to understanding this philosophy is Corrington's belief that all things in the world can be considered as a sign system created



by nature out of itself. To be more specific, what Corrington is preoccupied with is as he revealed in his biographical book *Riding Windhorse* (2003), how to interpret the world, a cosmic-scaled composite of innumerable sign systems. For a person with manic depression, everything in the world comes up as a meaning to be interpreted. Hence, he bases his philosophy on the assumption that nature has the two different aspects: *nature naturing* and *nature natured*. While the former refers to immeasurable potencies that perennially desire to create something out of itself in a manic state, the latter the total-sum of manifestations of the former in a melancholic state that unendingly each sign-system longs for going back to its origin although it also recognizes that it is not possible. It is important to point at the correlations between his manic-depressive experiences and the manic-depressiveness of nature in his philosophy.

However, provided that Corrington adds the laws of survival of the fittest and of entropy to his semiotic world of nature, it becomes more evident how tough the life of a sign system in nature he imagines is. Survival means the intensification of the meaning of a sign system; to intensify its meaning, a sign must be in touch with its origin. For doing so, not only should each sign system struggle to stand with the mood swings of nature embedded in itself but also it should go successfully through the evolutionary process such as natural selection, random variation, and semiotic cooperation, etc. The goal of the life of each sign system is to reach the state of semiotic nirvana symbolized by stillness that indicates remaining in some place located semiotically beyond the boundary between *nature naturing* and *nature natured*. However, it cannot be done by a sign system alone. Interestingly enough, what helps the selving process (semiotic individuation) of a sign

system is nature itself. In the guise of spirit, nature stimulates its own salvation history bit by bit. Here, a semiotic development is made possible by the return of *nature naturing* to *nature natured* in a state of ecstasy that can cause an extra semiotic energy with which a sign system can attain its own psychological homeostasis between the extreme mood swings between ecstasy and melancholy. Unfortunately there is no one-time salvation. A salvation is temporary in that the stability remains only for an instant. After that, the sign system is again required to confront the semiotic reality that itself alternates between ecstasy and melancholy perennially.

Such a philosophical cosmology cannot be easily understood without knowing the fact that Corrington is bipolar disorder that seems to be caused by his 'Evil' mother and his genetic factors. As clearly revealed in chapter 5, Corrington constantly heals his fragmented or unstable self by developing his philosophy. It is an interesting point that there is one clear correlation between his mental suffering and his philosophy: the mother earth issue. Ecstatic naturalism is the monologue drama of the semiotic Mother Nature where we are all nothing but a supporting actor or actress, his bipolar disorder is itself a psychological drama taking place in his self. In reality he was not able to make peace with his mom who already passed away, in his play he tried and is still trying to do so little by little. Though he states the destination of his play as a state of mind in stillness, we can assume that it could be the moment his mother (*nature naturing*) graciously embraces him to help him finally overcome it. In this sense, it can be said that ecstatic naturalism is Corrington's life-play.

### **Life; play; *mysterium tremendum* for homeostasis**

I began this thesis with Zhuang Zhou's butterfly dream in which Zhuang Zhou could not distinguish who he was between the person who dreamt of the butterfly and the butterfly that dreamt of Zhuang Zhou. On this basis, I argued that life is a mixture of life and fantasy; we cannot draw a clear line between them because often life is like play and play is like life. Our investigations of play lead us to the conclusion that to have a good life we need play (fantasy) recurrently. When we enter the arena of play and play it seriously, play provides us with some experience similar to what Rudolf Otto coined: *mysterium tremendum* in which we transcend our ordinary self and attain psychological homeostasis and make extra room for creativity in mind although for a limited amount of time.

Joseph Campbell insists that the reason why we created myth is that it helps us look at the harsh and indifferent world in a sacred way that everything in the world has its own reason of being. On this basis, it is arguable that, except for what we have to do for survival, what we do on a daily basis can be viewed as play to some degree. We watch TV because it makes us stay away from our daily life. We play soccer because it gives us a new reality where we can sacrificially cooperate with others to beat the opposite team. We swim because it gives us a sense of nature that we unconsciously feel where we come from a few million years ago. We study because it gives us the possibility that we can have a better life or that we can know what we are curious about. We marry because we are tired of being alone with the expectation that a new life will be given out of the marriage. We sleep because it provides us with the loyal road to our unconscious life. We

try hard to achieve something in life because we know that our life has its own totality constituted of a beginning and an end. And we eventually die because...

I maintain that serious matters deserve our serious attention, but trivialities do not; that all men of good will should put God at the center of their thoughts; that man, as we said before, has been created as a toy for God; and that this is the great point in his favor. So every man and every woman should play this part and order their whole life accordingly, engaging in the best possible pastimes – in a quite different frame of mind to their present one.<sup>124</sup>

We die because it is the time for our life-play comes to an end. At the moment, can we acknowledge who played whom? Did we play life? Or did life play us? To find or make an answer pertinent to our personal needs, we need live as if we play and we need play as if we live.

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<sup>124</sup> John M. Cooper, ed., *Plato Complete Works* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 1471.

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