



\* Archetypal Analyses \*

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## **Trans-Forming Tantra** **Tibetan Buddhist Tantra, Imaginal Western Alchemy and** **Genderal Consciousness**

By Leslie Emery

This brief association of imaginal practice in Tibetan Tantra, Jungian depth psychology, and Western Alchemy, is offered as a reference for contemporary experiences of 'bi-genderal identity.' Significant resonances of 'alchemical transformation' of ordinarily oppositional and literalistic consciousness between these Tibetan religious and Western psychological practices are here proposed. Those concurrences of spiritual and psychological methods for attaining more complex relationship of self to totality appear mutually affirming. Taken together, they suggest the effectiveness of imaginal practice for re-orienting identity toward a less oppositionally defined status. Both practices involve evocation of a bi-genderal composition of consciousness in a non-dualistic status. These deliberately engaged practices, and their conceptual bases, are thus regarded as providing a reference for understanding contemporary changes in gender categories as bases for both intra-personal identity and inter-personal relations.

### **Tantra as Spiritual Seeking through Embodiment of Imaginal Transformation**

Religious and spiritual practices can be distinguished between those emphasizing theological, philosophical or metaphysical concerns versus those attaching more significance to ritual practice, mystical experience, and magical effects in the phenomenal realm. The former might be termed 'high' forms of religion for the emphasis on an abstract, logical, 'heady' conception of spirituality and the divine, exemplified by reference to a singular, perfect, and unearthly divinity or spiritual status. The more phenomenological category, with focus on the mystical and magical in personal sensate life and materially embodied context, could be termed 'low' forms. The latter also often associates with some secret or esoteric aspect of 'spiritual practice.' This 'low' is not low in the sense of lesser, but reflects a 'coming down' to the body and literal place on the planet to seek spiritual consciousness, and to chthonic cult practices that honor such context. The 'high' seems to seek spirit beyond or above matter, the 'low' to engage it 'within' or 'below.'

Tibetan Buddhist Tantric practice is somewhat unusual among 'high' religions with complex philosophical dogma, liturgical ritual, institutionalized hierarchical clergies, and celibate monastic orders. While traces of archaic chthonic cult practices survive in most such religions, like the remnant of blood sacrifice in the Christian Eucharist service, they usually lack elements of consciously sought magical effects. Abilities to 'transform oneself' or others are generally associated with the effects of spiritual/religious practice in non-institutionalized and non-scriptural shamanic cults. Transformation in 'high' religions is primarily the providence of divine agency, not human. Yet the very aim of Buddhist Tantra, the "short path" or "fast vehicle," is to transform oneself into a divinity, a Buddha, within this very life time. Further more, this transformation is accomplished by mere mortals within mortal bodies, enabled by the assistance of a self-transformed mortal teacher.

The 'short path' is distinguished by its emphasis on the teacher and on initiation. The two together constitute an interesting detail. The teacher is looked upon as possessor of siddhi, capable of transforming the pupil and determining his destiny. 1

The 'supernatural' abilities of the teacher (lama), said to empower the pupil's transformation, are a religious notion likely derived from the influences of non-institutionalized chthonic goddess cults in India which predate Buddhism. Those sources are said to have contributed to the initial development of Tantra, in conjunction with indigenous shamanic Tibetan traditions. It is significant to note that the original Tantric movement occurred outside and in reaction against hierarchical 'high' forms of clerical Hinduism and Buddhism. This integration of magical cult practice and metaphysical religion appears to have occurred as a reaction against social caste discriminations and politicized ceremonial priesthood. The indigenous cultic religion of Tibet further emphasized the integration begun in India.

In the pre-Buddhist Bon [religion of Tibet] there were lamas, but the influence of Buddhism transformed their role. He not only imparts secret oral instructions but communicates 'hidden power.' Among the three basic necessities of this path, the teacher (with his lineage) comes first and takes precedence even over the patron-divinities and the beneficent dakinis and dharmapalas. 2

The effort to free mindfulness from consciousness-confining ego-attachment to oppositional mentality, by becoming ultimately identified with an imaginal patron divinity, and thereby actually acquiring enlightenment and Buddhahood, depends on the practitioner's "root teacher." The human teacher, or lama, is the central figure in what is called "guru yoga." Through a ritual initiation the teacher confers upon the practitioner a power that has the effect of a rebirth. Some divine aspect must be active first in the teacher to assist the student in initiating the practice and then, subsequently, in the student to bring it to fruition. This 'power' is not seen as being derived simply from intellectual knowledge of theological doctrine and dogma, or from a clerical title, but rather from a developed psychic state of non-dual consciousness. Tibetan Buddhist lamas were also said to participate in rituals directed to expiation of local demons and divinities related to the indigenous Bon religion, in which context they were required to demonstrate the manifestation of psychic

powers.

Magic, ritual, and supernatural powers are integral to Tantric Buddhism as methods to convert people and demonstrate mastery over phenomenal reality. Claims of supernatural powers and expertise in magical arts may seem dubious to modern Western readers, but within the Tantric Buddhist context they are accepted as evidence of spiritual attainments. 3

### **Transforming Imagination East And West**

The esoteric powers derived from lama and initiation (through him/her) serve to drive the central transformative practice of imaginal identification with the patron divinity until the practitioner ideally acquires its enlightened, non-dualistic consciousness. This student/guru relationship resembles that of analyst/analysand in Western Jungian psychotherapy. It creates an opportunity for the practitioner to experience a transference to the guru of the practitioner's attitudes, and to receive some from the guru. Yet unlike the psychoanalyst, for whom the transference can have negative psychic effects, the guru is said to be protected,

. . . having attained high spiritual realization, [and] is immune to such contamination and cannot be affected by the student's negativities. In fact, some meditation practices in Tibetan Buddhism include a mental offering to the guru consisting of all objects of one's greed and hatred, in brief, all negativities. 4

In the effort to become less mentally fragmented and more whole through meditations on the wisdom of Buddhist non-dualist philosophy, the student can imaginably transfer his or her innate powers of self healing to the lama, just as the analysand is said to do to the analyst. The guru or analyst can then 'channel' back both a 'power' he/she has previously attained and that of the practitioner/analysand. The same gesture is openly made toward the Buddha in its many personified manifestations, and also toward the doctrine of non-dual wisdom as an entity itself.

With the faith of the great clarity I go for refuge to the Buddha, the master from whom supreme initiation has been attained, to the doctrine of undifferentiable method and wisdom taught by them—supreme immutable bliss and the great seal of emptiness. . . 5

This seeking 'refuge' in the Buddha, the doctrine, and the Lama (their living aspect), appears as a powerfully conscious recognition of the psychoanalytic transference process. Similarly, the gesture of offering one's negative energies to the Lama would also likely facilitate the transference. The reclaiming of the student practitioner's personal powers of 'self-healing' during the course of practice (paralleling the course of analysis or therapy) appears

to be actuated by a process of imagining the powerful images of the Buddha deities in meditation (with their panoply of iconographic signifiers) and eventually moving these 'into one's own heart' such that one becomes the balanced and purified consciousness they embody. These images are thus truly ones of transformation in Jung's terms.

The anthropomorphic Tantric images are regarded as archetypes, yet become real to the meditator. According to Jung, archetypes come to life when they are meaningful to an individual. Like all powerful symbols, Tantric images when infused with emotion, gain numinosity and supply meditators with energy that carry them a step forward into another psychological realm--the transpersonal, spiritual. 6

Buddhist Tantra provides a formal practice, liturgy, doctrine, and sets of images for this process while the psychoanalytic one relies on spontaneous transference and imaginal generation in the patient. While the support and guidance of the formalized Tantra seems a helpful tool, a student's 'belief' in the numinous power of the doctrine would seem helpful to engage the practice. However, Tantric teachers often maintain that only practice, not faith or belief, is required for transformation of consciousness. Similarly, psychoanalysis does not require a belief in its transformative potential to 'work.' Another Western counterpart to Tantric employment of imaginal engagement with numinous imagery is found in the practices of Alchemy. And study of Alchemical practices intended to engage practitioner in the release of spirit from matter proved essential to Jung's psychological understandings. The notion of 'alchemical processes,' in which one status of consciousness becomes another, aided by transformative imagery and actual performances, is central to Jung's concepts of developing conscious relation between personal or egoic self identity and the 'larger field' of Self and psyche.

In the 'un-spiritualized' acculturation of contemporary Western society, individuals must rely on the unguided personal imagination to supply the images of transformation. This unstructured spiritual 'work' can generate original images or associate to cultural ones as repositories of numinosity, including those foreign to the analysand, such as the Tantric deities.

The possibility for negative effects of transference/counter-transference on the guru and the guru/student relationship in the Tantric context might also be diminished by the lama having his own Tantric practice to direct his 'negativities' toward. Similarly, the psychoanalyst has his/her own process of analysis and imagination to integrate the effects of transference.

This entire context of Tantric practice brings the potential 'divine' power for personal transformation down from 'on high' into the living figure of the lama and the "undifferentiable method and wisdom." The related teachings emphasize that all persons are potentially enlightened Buddha mind (divinity itself) but awareness and experience of such potential is blocked by illusions about the duality of self and the phenomenal world. Each person contains/is wholeness, but does not experience it consciously. This sense of extant but unrecognized inner wholeness that can be elucidated to alter one's consciousness resembles much of the thought in Western depth psychology, particularly Jung's notions about the Self. His model of confrontations between self and ego in which ego-centric

consciousness is diminished and the teleological cause of the Self fostered coincides with the Tantric objective of embodied non-dual consciousness.

The actively imaginal method of Tantra contrasts to other schools of Buddhist practice which renounce the senses and desire as dire obstacles to enlightenment, and it obviously relates to Jung's own active imagination

technique. While seeking enlightenment from dualism it does not conceive such status as divorced from sensate experience, from body or imaginal reality. Most important perhaps in seeing the similarities of Tantric Buddhism with, and therefore its appeal to, Western psychology is its emphasis on the positive uses of imagination and of erotic connection and sexuality in promoting spiritual enlightenment and psychic wholeness. Here most emphatically the 'high' metaphysical aspiration of attaining transcendent godly consciousness (all-inclusive Buddha-mind) is grounded in the 'lowly' chthonic cult of embodied psyche.

### **The Bi-Genderal Image Of Transformed Consciousness**

Central to the imaginal process of Tantric Buddhism is the use of intricate and attitudinally varied images of the Buddha. In modern practice, these images are predominantly of male anthropomorphized figures. By doctrine, however, the Buddha is neither male nor female, being the universal Buddha Mind in/of all sentient creatures, of which any image or individual is only a representation. Yet, echoing the essence of European alchemy that so influenced Jung's model of individuation, Tantric practice utilizes images of male and female opposites to guide the development toward an experience of non-dualistic wholeness. As in alchemy, Tantra provides various steps/stages in the progression of numinous imagery toward unity or "coniunctio." These images are essential in Tantric practice to purify body, mind and speech of dualistic, either/or consciousness. There are fierce and benign images of both male and female Buddhas, as well as many other 'spiritual' figures—some ghastly, some voluptuous. The ultimate image guiding the practitioner is that of a male and a female human form engaged in sexual intercourse while meditating on emptiness and emanating supreme immutable bliss—a state of *passionate desirelessness*, and so, of perfect union. Such a divine couple, termed a "yabyum," represents not two but a single deity consciousness.

On this level, the male figure represents the experience of great bliss [purified mind/speech/body] while the female is the symbol of non-dual wisdom. Thus their union has nothing whatsoever to do with the gratification of the senses but rather indicates a totally integrated state of blissful wisdom and completely transcends ordinary sense desires. [. . .] it is necessary to cut through the influence of the over intellectualizing conceptual mind [. . .]. This is one reason why symbols and images such as those used in tantric art and visualization can be so much more effective than mere words in introducing us to our essential nature. 7

This image of bi-genderal unity is distinct from some European ones of alchemical *coniunctio* of male and female opposites, in that the male/female pair is not hermaphroditically joined in body, only in 'spirit.' Also, the Tibetan Tantric pair is always aligned face to face on a vertical axis, whether sitting or standing. This arrangement gives a sense of equality to the figures, contrasted only by the male's typically larger body size and, often, greater number of arms, faces and symbolic ritual adornments portrayed. Philosophically, however, the essence of the female form is given slight transcendent value as the truly active force. "While in ordinary sex it is the man who enters the woman's body, in true Tantric embrace it is the woman's energy that penetrates the man!" 8. This notion is represented perhaps more vividly in some images from Hindu Tantra that show the female form in the 'active' superior coital posture with the male supine (typically the goddess Kali and god Shiva).

Such vivid inclusion of erotic sexual imagery and bi-genderal identity in the most central representations of divine consciousness is shocking to the views of many, particularly Western, religious traditions. Yet even in institutionalized Tantric Buddhism, literal sexuality is distinguished from the significance and uses of this transformational image. It is one to be meditated on, not imitated (at least not for a long, long time).

There is a certain point in the mastery of the completion stage when physically embracing such a consort is necessary for bringing all pervading energy winds into the central channel, a prerequisite for opening the heart center completely and experiencing the profound level of clear light. 9

According to the Dalai Lama [. . .] "Truthfully, you can only do such practice if there is no sexual desire whatsoever. The kind of realization that is required is like this: If someone gives you a goblet of wine and a glass of urine, or a plate of wonderful food and a piece of excrement, you must be in such a state that you can eat and drink from all four and it makes no difference to you what they are. Then maybe you can do this practice [literal sexual intercourse in a state of immutable bliss]. " When asked to name any lamas who he thought had attained this level of enlightenment, the Dalai Lama admitted that he could not. 10

This paradox of denying the sensuality of the numinous sexual imagery which is also paramount in re-orienting consciousness suggests a puritanical element has crept into the tradition. However, sexual intercourse is not said to be avoided by Tantric Buddhists, only by those monks who have taken vows of celibacy. There is a hint here, though, that for one to experience the transforming numinosity of the sexual imagery one must work to imagine it as something more than literal physiological pleasure. It is the very potency of carnal sexual desire that provides the energy for Tantric practice to 'transform' into the "immutable bliss" of "undifferentiable method and wisdom."

Contemporary Buddhist Tantric philosophy expresses a somewhat androgynous attitude toward the relevance of gender in the practitioner. The male/female images are regarded rather like the anima and animus aspects of psyche in

Jungian psychology: traits that exist in both men and women. Both these aspects must be activated to achieve a psychic balance that will allow for a non-dual consciousness.

Men try to hide their female side and women are afraid of expressing their male energy. As a result we always feel cut off from something we need. We do not feel whole and therefore turn expectantly towards other people for the qualities missing in ourselves in the hope of gaining some sense of completeness. As a result, much of our behavior becomes contaminated by insecurity and possessiveness. [ . . . ] If our internal male/female mandala were complete, however, we would never experience the pain of loneliness at all. 11

While Tibetan society seems to grant women more autonomy than many others, including other Buddhist ones, it is still patriarchal, and its organized religious structures are clearly male-dominated. Yet to a Western culture fraught with general conflict and sexual violence, its numinous bi-genderal images functioning to transform and harmonize consciousness suggest some hope of dealing differently with the entanglements of anima and animus projection between individuals. Jung's conception of personal psyche as constituted through a masculine animus aspect and a feminine anima whose conflicts pose the intra-psychical struggles of individual identity is potently corroborated by these Tantric references. The attraction of these 'seeming opposites' that can become a 'co-existence of mutuality' not defined either by dualistic opposition, monistic unity, or hierarchical dominance and submission, is central to both 'practices.' However, in both the religious as well as the psychological expressions, one must be wary of the distortions of 'power relations' and 'puritanical idealism' upon practice.

### **Historical Transformation Of The Transformational Practice of Tantra**

There is an aspect of 'transformational' practice essential to early Tantric Buddhism that has not survived into recent centuries. It is the role of women practitioners ("yoginis") as central to the path of enlightenment for male ones ("yogins") and the literal sexual practices that evidently accompanied it. The early source period of Buddhist Tantra in India can be shown to have recognized as essential the independent spiritual development of women practitioners, who's initial training was among themselves to the exclusion of men. Miranda Shaw has exhumed the historical evidence for the early role of women practitioners in Tantra.

We have examples of women imparting their teachings to other women and at times addressing exclusively female audiences. [ . . . ] Several factors supported the participation of women in this movement century after century. One factor can be found in Tantric doctrines, which provide explicit affirmations of femaleness and guides for behavior toward women. Terms like dakini, "yogini," and "heroine," help to create a numinous aura around women. 12

Early practices were based on a model that encouraged women to attain

identification with female forms of Buddha divinities independent of male affirmations of their value as women. Subsequently, male practitioners who had attained some similar identification with masculine Buddha figures and accepted the teachings' admonishments to revere and protect women would seek out the tutelage and spiritual partnership of an advanced yogini.

Respect for women was a touchstone of a man's spiritual progress, and the man's reform was necessary for the cooperative practices and higher octave of intimacy envisioned in the tantras. Women, on the other hand, cultivated the psychological independence that would enable them to maintain parity in relationship. 12

This model suggests a psychological process in which individual practitioners directed their erotic desire inward through the process of intra-personal identification with anima and animus figures, manifested as enlightened divinities liberated from obsessive desire and attachment to the material world. These images would then be imaginably inducted 'into the practitioners heart' as a divine energy until an eros relation with them developed. Once assured of their own capacity to identify and reclaim such 'projections of psyche' imaginably, individuals would be at a much greater advantage in managing interpersonal erotic engagement with its 'desire enhancing carnality.' Where the Tantric Buddhist philosophy seems to have been particularly insightful and effective is in dealing with the seeming inherent superiority of men over women—while not rejecting sexuality.

I contend that in Tantric Buddhism a balance is achieved in practice by privileging the female in theory, to counteract an erosion of total loss of balance by even the slightest male strategy of appropriation. [. . .] In Mahayana thought, the equal treatment of the two genders, although liberative and egalitarian in intent, meant that even a minor male gesture toward expropriation resulted in loss of gender equality. In Tantric Buddhism, the gynocentric philosophy provided a preventive and corrective counterweight against male attempts to elevate themselves at the expense of women. Women had the incontrovertible authority of scripture and enlightened precedent at their disposal to counteract male attempts to devalue or displace them. This gender ideology armed women against individual male attempts to gain psychological ascendance or religious authority over them and against collective male attempts to dispossess them of the religious movement the women had worked to create. 14

Scholarly work from a gynocentric perspective and command of Tibetan and Sanskrit languages enable Miranda Shaw to reveal the gap between the full intent of Tantric Buddhist doctrine and recent historical expressions of practice. The majority of Western scholars have ignored this evidence, or actually skewed their view of Tantric practices toward an even more extreme portrayal of male dominance than is historically accurate. Such exaggeration of male dominance in Tantric practice suggests a 'projection' of Western male-dominant assumptions onto Eastern contexts.

Perhaps the scholarly characterizations of the Tantric Buddhist yoginis as "lewd," "sluts," and "depraved and debauched" betray a vestige of Victorian indignation not only at non-marital sexual activity of women but also shock at a religious exaltation and worship of women/the feminine. Theologian Hans Kung acknowledges that religious awe of women is so antithetical to Jewish and Christian values that it poses a major barrier to understanding:

"It is especially hard for the Christian theologian to discuss. . . Shaktist Tantrism with its orientation toward female power or divinity. [. . .] no one could fail to see that all the Tantric systems, and the Shaktist practices especially, are extraordinarily alien to Christians, more alien than anything we have met thus far in Buddhism or Hinduism. 13

One might ponder which affinity for the feminine figure—the real or imaginal—is more significant in equalizing the actual relations between genders represented by earlier Tantric Buddhist practices. It might be the 'interior' psychic one of the male practitioner for the female image of divine consciousness that most effectively diminishes male dominance in literal interpersonal relations. Evidently images of the Buddha as female were much more prevalent during the era of overtly accepted female religious and spiritual authority. This might suggest the intrapsychic imaginal relationship was the principle factor, as opposed to reverence for the literalized, sexually female body. Yet today, in a more patriarchal religious context than was once extant, the psychic image is still utilized by many practitioners—at least in conjunction with the male form in the divine couple representation.

Thus the wide circulation and attention to the doctrine's teachings on respect and veneration of women as essential to the path of male spiritual development may have been the more significant force effecting literal relations between men and women in that supposed historical past. The principle value of this subject to contemporary social concerns is the extraordinary historical manifestation of spiritual gender equality it provides. Such an example has significant potential implications for contemporary social and political gender relations, whether through conditioning of intra-psychological relations with anima and animus aspects, or by religiously-supported social commandment to revere 'the feminine.'

It is worthwhile to return to consider the cult origins of Tantra in chthonic goddess cults. Early practitioners are depicted as favoring grave yards and cremation grounds for ritual feasts. There were, and are, esoteric teachings that are kept secret, revealed only to those who are deemed worthy of them by the accomplishment of their practice. Female adepts or yoginis were not outwardly recognizable. Yogins had to intuit a woman's state of inner enlightenment and approach by certain rules that would reveal his own high regard. Sexuality was not debased, but a practice conditional to certain levels of conscious spiritual attainment through yogas of mind and body. Such behaviors and practices suggest the importance of phenomenal experience to spiritual engagement. Thus Tantra's equipoise of male/female, anima/animus relations seems clearly derived from a complex engagement of 'high' (philosophical doctrine) and 'low' (physical, phenomenal) forms—both imaginal and literal: "undifferentiable method and wisdom." Furthermore, this combination suggests the importance of Western depth psychology, particularly its Jungian and archetypal formulations, to an effective orientation toward imaginal practices and spiritual rituals in Western cultural contexts.

Transformational Tantra has been transforming consciousness and being transformed by consciousness for over 1300 years. It is quite possible that it holds potential for guiding changes in Western conceptions of gender relations and identity—in spirituality, psychology and social conduct.

The reciprocity of Tantric union may be difficult to recognise for a Western reader who assumes that gender always means a power relation or relation of domination. Tantric Buddhism represents a different cultural realm and a novel variation on gender relations. The power that reigns in this realm of cultural meaning is not a power of domination, but a power of transformation and liberation. This non-hierarchical power is seen as a fluidic, dynamic property variously and momentarily inhering in persons, objects, places, symbols, and especially ritual activities meant to generate and channel power. 16

### **Bi-genderal Identity and Sexual Orientation as Transformation of Consciousness in Individual and Collective Psyche**

The preceding discussion focuses upon an alchemical interplay of masculine and feminine images of psychic aspects in Tibetan Tantra, with associations to Jungian depth psychology, that appears capable of generating a more inclusive, non-dualistic status of consciousness and identity. These notions and practices are related specifically to individual efforts at ‘expanding’ self-identity beyond materialistic and dualistic attachments—such as being exclusively either male or female. Subsequently, an effect on inter-personal relations that lessens competition for dominance between individuals and genders is suggested. A social contexting for these dynamics of psyche and spirit is offered in some observations about contemporary developments in compositions of genderal identity and sexual orientation.

Jung conceived of the totality of personal selfhood as composed of an ‘egoic’ consciousness and a “personal unconscious.” Individual psyches thus present a dialectical relation of a self-conscious “I” and, relatively speaking, unconscious ‘rest of the Self.’ These two can be considered as ‘overt’ and ‘covert’ aspects of consciousness in an individual psyche, the latter being the ‘larger’ aspect and so written with a capital S. That self↔Self field of psychic activity Jung then posed as being embedded in a further encompassing field of the collective psyche, having its own “collective unconscious.” That encompassing field of inter- personal psychic activity constitutes a ‘macro totality’ similar to the ‘micro’ one of the individual self↔Self relationship. The all-inclusive field of collective psyche thus also generates an ‘egoic’ identity, overtly expressed in social norms and structures, as well as a ‘less conscious’ one implicit in those structures or repressed and concealed by them—the collective unconscious. Significant changes in how the egoic functions of either the personal or collective psychic fields identify the status of totality can be termed ‘trans-formations’ of consciousness. An overt status of consciousness so transformed poses a significantly different sense of self, other, and world.

The historical view of Tantric practice offered here suggests how a once overt acknowledgement of the precedence of feminine consciousness, female teachers, and literal sexual engagement to spiritual development became a more covert symbolic expression in institutionalized, male dominated religious context. Thus the collective psychic field of Tibetan Tantric Buddhism could be said to have shifted toward a greater dualistic emphasis on the role of gender in spiritual practice. That is, the Self figured in the dominant references of that practice became more male/masculine associated—despite the ultimately non-gendered doctrine of Buddhahood. Put another way, the social implications of this bi-genderal spiritual practice were repressed.

In contemporary Western societies, there has been a notable shift away from dominance of exclusive heterosexuality as a basis for identity and sexual orientation. Multiple variations of genderal and sexual association in both personal identity and inter-personal relations have become overtly accepted components of social expression. Where once the collective psyche was allowed only two opposing figurations of gender and sex (male versus female), there are now a variety of configurations (transvestite, trans-sexual, trans-gender, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, tri-gendered, etc.). That shift can be regarded as expressing a less dualistic manifestation of collective psyche in the acceptable range of overt social identity, and as a less repressed/reductive expression for the more covert collective unconscious. Such a transition appears to constitute an ‘alchemical transformation’ of collective identification or consciousness toward a more inclusive, less dualistic, and pragmatically embodied status.

While this proposed transformation of psychic manifestation can hardly be said to result from individual devotion to an overtly conceptualized imaginal practice such as Tantra or Jungian analytical psychology, it does suggest the existence of trans-formative energies extant in the collective unconscious. It is such ‘energies’ that the imaginal engagements of Tantra and depth psychological practices appear to be capable of activating in the ‘alchemical transformation’ of dualistic identity status. Thus an association of the spiritual and psychological perspectives provided by Tantra and ‘alchemical psychology’ to the seemingly ‘spontaneous’ shifts in genderal and sexual orientations could well enhance an emergent reconfiguration of collective consciousness, with a less dualistic contexting of individual identity. What is typically described, and even ‘defended,’ as a ‘personal choice’ in selecting genderal and sexual associations for identity, could then be amplified as an indicator of more-than-personal psychic phenomena.

The broadest implications of this notion suggest that the overt expressions of non-heterosexual appearances and conduct can be taken as references for a more covert imaginal engagement with such non-dualistic status. One can thereby regard the more ‘literally’ identified or overt cases of bi-gendered and trans-sexual status as references for the imaginal engagement of individuals who tend to identify the Self as mono-gendered. Thus the heterosexually self-identified person can engage in imaginal practice of becoming or coming into relationship with these less dualistically gendered and sexualized expressions of consciousness. In such a perspective, the self proclaimed extremities of gender con/fusion—the ‘flaming drag queen’ or ‘butch biker babe’—become iconographic expressions of Tantric dakinis and yabyum figures. The contemporaneous collective unconscious, it would seem, is providing us with apt, if unintentional, references for the transformation of consciousness by way of imaginal identification.

The similarities of all the above contexts for ‘imaginal practice,’ as a means for diffusing dualistic or oppositional consciousness, appears to coalesce around a ‘becoming the other who is and is not other.’ Trans-formation in this sense is not a ‘becoming other’ but a ‘becoming more than one form concurrently.’ Thus, in so far as ‘non-heterosexual’ identity is posed ‘in opposition to’ notions of heterosexual status, the attendant consciousness tends to remain dualistic or oppositional. In so far as there is ‘enlightenment,’ it would seem to be attendant upon a sense of differentiation known by ‘participation in contrast,’ some being/becoming both/and neither/nor, rather than a transcendent departure from the complex realities of ‘spiritual embodiment.’

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