



*Nathan Schwartz-Salant*



# The Mystery of Human Relationship

*Alchemy and the Transformation of the Self*

**Also available as a printed book  
see title verso for ISBN details**

## The mystery of human relationship

Introducing the concept of the interactive field, Nathan Schwartz-Salant shows how the states of mind that can secretly undermine our relationships, both private and public, can become positive factors in transforming a relationship when brought to consciousness.

Drawing on the insights of the ancient art of alchemy, he explains how a transformative process can be set in motion once the partners in a relationship learn how to enter the interactive field between them and discover the 'mad' states of mind that exist in every individual. This process of exploration increases mutual understanding, strengthens the relationship and releases creativity. The relating individuals are able to move beyond the apportionment of blame for 'wrongs' they perceive to be perpetrated by the other and which are often the unresolved cause of conflict between them. By acknowledging the subjectivity and states of mind that affect their reactions to one another and the existence of a 'third area' that affects both of them, they are able to transform a good enough relationship into a passionate and exhilarating experience.

Illustrated by numerous clinical examples, *The Mystery of Human Relationship* builds on the work of Jung to create a thought-provoking and inspiring text for anyone who wishes to engage the mystery of growth within themselves and within their relationships.

**Nathan Schwartz-Salant** was trained as a Jungian analyst in Zurich, Switzerland. He is the director of the Center for Analytical Perspectives in New York and has a psychotherapy practice in New York City and Princeton, New Jersey. He is the author of numerous clinical papers and books including *Jung on Alchemy* (Routledge).



# **The mystery of human relationship**

Alchemy and the transformation of the self

*Nathan Schwartz-Salant*



First published 1998 by Routledge  
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

*Brunner-Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis group*  
This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or  
Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to  
[w.w.w. eBookstore.tandf.co.uk](http://w.w.w. eBookstore.tandf.co.uk).”

© 1998 Nathan Schwartz-Salant

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or  
reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic,  
mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented,  
including photocopying and recording, or in any information  
storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from  
the publishers.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data*

Schwartz-Salant, Nathan, 1938–

The mystery of human relationship: alchemy and the transformation of self/  
Nathan Schwartz-Salant.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Psychoanalysis.
2. Interpersonal relations.
3. Unified field theories
4. Jungian psychology. I. Title.

BF175.S387 1998

158.2–dc21 97–21851

CIP

ISBN 0-203-36043-5 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-37299-9 (Adobe e-Reader Format)

ISBN 0-415-08971-9 (hbk)

ISBN 0-415-15389-1 (pbk)

# Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	vi
<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
<b>1 Alchemy and transformation in human relationships</b>	1
<b>2 Activating the experience of the field</b>	18
<b>3 Mad parts of sane people</b>	34
<b>4 The dynamics of the interactive field</b>	59
<b>5 The transformative power of the interactive field</b>	75
<b>6 The alchemical view of madness</b>	92
<b>7 The central mystery of the alchemical process</b>	119
<b>8 The alchemical attitude to the transformation of relationship</b>	143
<b>9 Union, death, and the resurrection of the self</b>	168
<b>10 Appreciating the mystery of relationship</b>	209
<i>Bibliography</i>	222
<i>Name index</i>	226
<i>Subject index</i>	231

## List of figures

1	First painting from the <i>Splendor Solis</i>	95
2	First engraving from the <i>Mutus Liber</i>	96
3	Michel de Morolles' engraving of the alchemical chaos	97
4	'Mercurial Fountain': first woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	99
5	Sisiutl, the Kwakiutl Indian god	101
6	<i>Coniunctio</i> from the <i>Turba Philosophorum</i>	125
7	Eleventh painting from the <i>Splendor Solis</i>	129
8	Ninth painting from the <i>Splendor Solis</i>	137
9	'Left-hand Contact': second woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	157
10	'Naked Truth': third woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	161
11	'Immersion in the Bath': fourth woodcut of the <i>Rosariu Philosophorum</i>	162
12	'Conjunction': fifth woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	164
13	Mylius's version of the first woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	166
14	'Coffin of Putrefying Conception': sixth woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	170
15	'Extraction and Impregnation of the Soul': seventh woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	171
16	'Falling Dew': eighth woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	173
17	'Return of the Soul': ninth woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	175
18	'Rebis': tenth woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	176
19	Sixth painting from the <i>Splendor Solis</i>	190
20	Tenth painting from the <i>Splendor Solis</i>	191
21	'Fermentation': eleventh woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	192
22	'Illumination': twelfth woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	194
23	'Nourishment': thirteenth woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	196
24	'Fixation': fourteenth woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	198
25	'Multiplication': fifteenth woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	199
26	'Revival': sixteenth woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	200
27	'Perfection': seventeenth woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	201
28	'Mortification of the Celestial Marriage': eighteenth woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	203
29	'Assumption and Coronation': nineteenth woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	205
30	'Resurrection': twentieth woodcut of the <i>Rosarium Philosophorum</i>	206
31	Twenty-second painting of the <i>Splendor Solis</i>	210

# Preface

*The Mystery of Human Relationship* examines transformation of the self—both individually and in interaction with others—by combining a scientific understanding of the way personality unfolds with the perspective afforded by the ancient and imaginal lenses of alchemy. Because alchemical attitudes differ so radically from the modern scientific methods which have with such apparent success superseded them, it is impossible to avoid the question of how a contemporary work about relationships could possibly benefit from, and indeed be based upon, the mysterious and seemingly irrational models of alchemical thinking.

The most heralded and perhaps even the definitive process of alchemy was the attempted transformation of a base substance such as lead or mercury into a precious material such as gold or silver. We know less about how the alchemical tradition, which endured for more than two millennia before being discredited by modern science only in the last three centuries, applied itself to subtle areas of human experience situated in the realm between mind and matter, areas which science has almost completely dismissed or discarded.

In fact, alchemical thinking is filled with strange metaphors and complex images which provide illuminating insight precisely into the way that a process between two people can develop and transform. In its recognition of the vital interplay between order and disorder and the transformative potential of chaos, alchemy can help us to accept and to appreciate areas of intense chaos within the mind, areas that I have called in earlier works ‘the mad parts of sane people.’

Alchemical thinking differs from modern approaches to personality development and relationships that tend to stress causality and to base validity upon replicability of experiences and results. For example, whereas modern approaches might focus on such issues as developmental failures or the way these failures are revisited in the so-called transference and countertransference process, alchemical thinking offers an appreciation of the depth and mystery of relationship which can allow one to experience a space that is animated, that is alive with meaning, and that contains its own process. In this book I want to use alchemical thinking within the context of the scientific perspective of psychotherapy to gain an understanding of the mysterious underside of relationships, because experiencing the depth of relationship involves embracing these different orders of thinking and perception. In particular, I want to explore the alchemical notion of a subtle-body realm that exists as a ‘third thing’ or a ‘third area’ between people.

C.G.Jung found that the ancient symbolism of alchemy was admirably suited to understanding the complex interactions created by the conscious and unconscious psyches of analyst and analysand. I have used Jung’s work in my attempt to understand the nature of a ‘third area’ which two people in relationship create and which, in turn, can have a transformative effect on each person’s internal structure. The true mystery of relationship lies less in the quest for understanding who is projecting what on to whom

and more in the exploration of ‘third areas,’ the ‘in between’ realm which was the main focus of ancient science in general and of alchemy in particular.

Through a study of the symbolism and practices of alchemy, I came to recognize and to appreciate the states of extreme chaos (often chaos containing a secret kind of order) that not only live within all people but which also define an important aspect of an interactive process between individuals in relationship. In coming to see that this interactive process had its own life, I also saw that the chaos at its heart was truly the life of the relationship. Rather than seeing a relationship as something two people did to one another, or as a kind of partnership, I began to see a relationship as—to use a mathematical phrase—a field that both people engaged and which, most mysteriously, moved and molded their processes, both individually and together, as if these processes were mere waves upon a larger sea.

At this point, understanding the mystery of relationship required a way of thinking that was different from modern scientific approaches. For the ‘in between’ world that people can (consciously or unconsciously) experience requires an approach that was the mainstay of cultures prior to the new paradigm of science and causality that began to emerge in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was precisely such ‘in between’ areas—for example, those between mind and matter—that drew my attention to alchemy as a way of understanding relationships. I have found no better guide to this form of ‘primitive’ logic than the ancient science of alchemy.

My interest in alchemy has helped me to meet the challenges in relationship posed by numerous analysands in my psychotherapy practice, by my own marriage, by my own children, and indeed by life itself. Certainly whatever this book has to offer on contemporary relationships has been profoundly informed by the work with my patients, whose clinical material—often focusing upon the complexity and vulnerability of shifts between intimacy and a madness which, like an invading god of ancient cultures, overwhelms thinking and emotional coherence—forms the substance of much of this book. I am most grateful for their integrity, for their involvement, and especially for their teaching.

I would also like to acknowledge my gratitude for the participation of the students in the ‘Alchemy Seminar’ at the Center for Analytical Perspectives in New York. The challenging nature of the discussions in these seminars led to a new depth of understanding and revealed important meanings of alchemical imagery and texts, some of which I have used in this book.

Furthermore, I have been deeply moved by the editorial help that I have received in writing this book. Roger Riendeau, a professional editor and writer, in addition to being an instructor and advisor in scholarly writing at the University of Toronto, has had to become something of an alchemist himself in the process of editing this book. He has learned a great deal about the mysteries of chaos from dealing with my earliest manuscript. I have profited in numerous ways by engaging in the interactive field that his indefatigable energy and intelligence helped to constellate between us. The editorial process has also been generously and vitally enhanced by Geraldine Fogarty whose critical capacity to identify and to question the ambiguity or obscurity of ideas, assumptions, and phrasing has significantly clarified the perspective and the structure of this book. I am very grateful for her friendship and for her commitment throughout this

process. And to my friend James Haba I owe a serious debt of gratitude for his careful reading, and re-reading of the manuscript. His contribution is something I deeply cherish, and his efforts have made this a far better book than it would otherwise have been. I must also express my gratitude to the Van Waveren Foundation for a grant that greatly helped in financing the editing of this book.

Ultimately, relationship has a mystery that can only be known through the challenge of intimacy and through the wisdom and sight of the person with whom one interacts, over and over again. My wife, Lydia, has contributed to this book, often by finding a way of expressing ineffable experiences and nascent ideas. But more than that, I would not today be the person I am were it not for my relationship with her. Nor would I have been able to understand the patterns put forward in this book had I not experienced the challenges and insights which came of living the pain and joy of our relationship. She has been my main guide in this our ongoing process and to her I dedicate this book.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the Kantonsbibliothek, St Gallen, Switzerland, for permission to reproduce the pictures from their copy of the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, St Gallen, Kantonsbibliothek (Vadiana), Vadianische Sammlung, Ms. 394a.

I wish to acknowledge the British Library for permission to reproduce pictures of the *Splendor Solis* from their Ms. Harley 3469 and 1582.

I wish to acknowledge Press Gang Publishers for material from *Daughters of Copper Woman*, by Anne Cameron (Vancouver, Canada: Press Gang Publishers, 1981). Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

# **1 Alchemy and transformation in human relationships**

## **EXPERIENCING THE MYSTERY WITHIN RELATIONSHIPS**

All people in committed relationships inevitably experience conflict within themselves and with each other which endures despite their best efforts at resolution. Whether subtle or blatant, the nature and sources of such conflict are usually hidden within the equilibrium that can be maintained within a normal relationship, particularly in its earlier stages. One person has not necessarily 'caused' the other to feel hurt, angry, unappreciated, unloved, guilty, among countless possible negative emotions. And even when an allocation of cause or blame may have some validity, an attempt to determine who is right and who is wrong or who is conscious and who is unconscious fails to resolve the conflict, and surely fails to reveal its mystery.

A common example of the dynamics of such conflict is the situation in which a husband is snoring contentedly, sleeping the sleep of the blessed, while his exhausted wife, lying beside him, keeps hearing his snoring and is so far away from sleep that she feels as if she is being tortured. Beyond the levels of physical causes and practical solutions which such a situation immediately brings to mind lies the realm in which a kind of insane conflict lives, ready to erupt into ordinary time. The natural inclination is to assume that somehow someone is at fault. Is the husband deliberately snoring loudly to keep his suffering wife awake and in a constant state of personal disequilibrium? Is the wife merely a light sleeper who is unappreciative of her husband's vital need for rest at the end of a strenuous day? Whether the answer to these questions is, in fact, negative or positive is ultimately irrelevant.

Instead, these two people must penetrate into a deeper level of their relationship, into a domain they both share, in which neither is 'doing' anything to the other. Indeed, they would have to discover that they share not only a conscious but also an unconscious relationship. This unconscious relationship can be far larger and more encompassing than the conscious one. If they could work together to explore this deeper level of their relationship, they would find that the conflict between them was a mere fragment of a larger, more complex, and ultimately more meaningful pattern of interaction.

For most couples, it is far easier simply to avoid exploring such conflicts at a deeper level of their relationship and to tolerate ongoing emotional distractions as they try to communicate and to be intimate with one another in their customary way. But such conflicting states deeply affect relationships in ways that can easily go unseen or be dismissed. The result is a growing gulf between people, a decline in trust and intimacy, a dwindling of a passionate and exciting sexual life and, above all, an absence of any sense that their relationship holds the mystery of growth, individually and together. And without this mystery what do they have? They may play mutually denned roles, or if they are psychologically sophisticated, they may help each other deal with individual

projections. But they will not feel and know the mystery of passion and change that can be explored and discovered through their relationship. Thus, their relationship diminishes in passion and becomes merely ordinary. Love, compassion, and caring may exist, but a shadow cast by the absence of passion and meaning enables both of them to know that they are choosing to live in shallow waters and to settle for an apparent security that actually diminishes them.

This book is intended for people who want to deal with such normally hidden areas in relationships, who are able to go beyond the assignment of blame or a concern with being 'right' or 'wrong,' and who wish to recognize and to engage the mystery of growth within themselves and within their relationships.

Attempts to make rational sense of chronic conflict within normal relationships invariably fail when these attempts do not probe the depths of the human psyche to discover the underlying nature and source of the conflict. Within this deeper realm, totally contradictory states of mind can exist simultaneously within each person and as a quality of the relationship itself. These contradictory states which define 'mad' (see p. 36ff) aspects of the psyche actually annihilate one another, so that attending to one state totally destroys an awareness of the preceding state. Anyone relating to a person exhibiting such contradictory states will tend to feel this process, to become confused, and to withdraw or feel an impotent rage. But to a certain degree, such an area of madness is an integral part of everyone's existence. Embracing the mad areas of our psyche and acknowledging the ways they limit us is a way to discover the mystery of the self and the other. This subtle 'madness' becomes a kind of chaotic shore that the relationship is destined to wash up against and to be bounded by.

Madness is a frightening concept, for it implies that one is out of control, distorts reality, is overwhelmed by compulsive responses and very strong emotions, and does things that are destructive to one's own best interests, all while assuming oneself to be totally in control. The mad parts of sane people are always dangerous; but if recognized and their power acknowledged, they are potentially healing. Mad areas continually confront us with the borders and limitations of ourselves and our knowledge, and they cause us to reflect and re-frame our attitudes over and over again. Without embracing our own madness, any approach to understanding relationships becomes dull and dangerously repetitive, tending to become a matter of technique and knowledge alone. Madness seems to be our best ally in restraining the dangerous and soulless tendency of knowledge used to shield ourselves from the shock of new experiences. As we accept such areas, we do not necessarily solve the problems within our relationships; instead, we transform ourselves and our relationships.

Transformation is always a very difficult process for us to contemplate and to embrace, for the psyche tends to revert to its most stable forms, typically the older ones that have been tried in the crucible of time. New forms are unstable and consequently dangerous in that they may lead us to lose a sense of identity, to become subject to strong emotions, and to become susceptible to the will of another in a way that feels threatening. So, in our established forms of relating, we tend to operate within a comfortable, chosen structure. We may be polite; we may recognize certain roles; or we may act in kind or unkind ways. For example, a couple may continually but politely poke 'fun' at each other in a public setting and deny that this behavior might point to their underlying contempt for each

other and to their desire to humiliate each other since such an admission would destabilize their relationship. However, probing beneath such interactions reveals that this form of politely hostile behavior actually serves to protect against exactly those deeper and more dangerous levels of engagement. At these deeper levels, people would have to take responsibility for areas of their psyches within which they were not only harboring resentment and other negative feeling but where they were also truly out of control, that is, mad.

Transformation within a relationship can only begin with an acknowledgement that we are unconsciously projecting on to the other person, thereby distorting the other's reality and our own. Through the process of projection, we tend to diminish or enhance the identity of others by presuming that we actually know the nature and motivation of their interactions with us. The other person's own reality has little credibility in our mind, but more important, the other's unfathomable nature is not even considered. In other words, through projections, we 'know' only fragments of truth about the other and consequently deny the essence of the other's spiritual being. Therefore, the more we can withdraw projections and recognize the reality of the other person, the more each person is empowered and the relationship between the two people is enhanced.

But to sustain and deepen the process of transformation, we must move beyond the recognition and acknowledgement of the dynamics of projection. Such a possibility may be difficult largely because psychoanalytic thinking about human relationships has developed within scientific models which regard projection as a key concept. Starting with the early twentieth-century work of Sigmund Freud, the analysand was believed to project his or her inner contents on to the analyst who, through the device of an 'even hovering attention,' could perceive the nature of the projection. Within this causal structure, the interpretation of the projection is seen to unlock and resolve unsuccessful developmental transits which were part of the analysand's early life. The precise nature of this process is controversial since many competing ideas exist about how people develop in a successful or unsuccessful way given the nature of their childhood experiences.

For example, focusing on certain 'absences' in early childhood and/or on emotional or physical intrusions into the child's vulnerable psychic state is a valid and useful approach to understanding personal development. Infants can suffer specifically from the absence of a maternal presence that could calm their anxieties or generally from the absence of a parental figure who could stand against the physical and emotional intrusions which invariably leave the young child with no sense of safety or integrity. Such absences and such intrusions prevent the infant from ever experiencing a 'container' for his or her distress, and the adult may therefore suffer from neuroses such as dissociative disorders, or narcissistic, borderline, and psychoid personality disorders, or in extreme instances, psychotic disorders. Psychoanalytic treatment attempts to create a containing space so that experience of psychic states is possible. Ideally, through the transference, such early absences and insults to development can be recapitulated, understood, and most significantly, survived without regressing to primitive defenses; and the individual's development essentially can be allowed to find its natural ways of expansion. Progress on this scale requires an unusual amount of courage from the patient, and often from the therapist as well.

The personal unconscious, as defined by C.G.Jung, is a reservoir of disowned contents and processes which can be experienced as separable parts in normal space and time, and which have location. In the process of projection, the parts of the personal unconscious are experienced as existing 'in' the person, or they are projected 'out of' the person and 'into' another person. Projection has an effect, and through it one does things to another person. Approaching people and their relationships from the vantage point of someone's 'doing something' to someone else—for example, one person is unconsciously projecting on to another either expectations of abandonment, loss, and hatred, or qualities of great value, perfection, and wholeness—is a powerful lens through which to understand relationship. A great deal of modern psychological thought has gone into understanding that projections affect people, either by diminishing the ego strength of the projector and distorting his or her sense of reality, or by causing an emotional and cognitive change in the object of the projection. Projection can be employed to get rid of distressing feelings and ideas. And projection can also be a state that accompanies the emergence of consciousness: one always projects before one becomes conscious of one's ownership of unconscious contents. Projection can also be a way of disowning one's psychic structure through an imaginal process in which contents are felt to be 'put into' the other person, and subtly watched in a trance-like way in order to discern what the other does with these projected contents. This latter process is known as projective identification, and an analyst may spend many years becoming aware of its subtleties, so that he or she may recognize its existence where less trained or less sensitive souls might just act out the contents that have been projected into them.

Freud and other subsequent psychoanalysts essentially recognized that the projection-based model of recapitulating early conflict and resolving it was over-simplified, for the analyst also projected on to the analysand. From this notion of counter-projection evolved much of the current psychoanalytical thinking about transference and countertransference, the mutual projections of both people. Still, psychoanalysts believed that these projections, in the spirit of scientific inquiry, could become objectively perceived data. Some even hoped (and many still endeavor in most quarters of psychoanalytical thought) to make use of countertransference to understand objectively the inner workings of the analysand's psyche.

In an effort to overcome the difficulty of separating projections and counterprojections and to meet the standards of scientific objectivity, some analysts began to think in terms of a 'third area' or a 'field' that was comprised of a kind of mutual subjectivity. Created by mutual projections, this 'third area' could then be used to derive some objective understanding of the inner workings of analyst and analysand. Whether it was through the work of Self Psychologists or the contributions of Thomas Ogden and his notion of the 'analytic third,' the analyst becomes aware that subjectivity can never be denied in the interaction. And through the use of his or her perceptions of the nature of this 'third area,' the analyst can still craft interpretations, feel empathy, and effect interventions to help the analysand recognize his or her unconscious and maladaptations.

Jung's research sowed the seeds of an alternative model of analysis based on the exploration of an intermediate realm between analyst and analysand. Jung recognized that two people create an unconscious relationship that is comprised of psychic contents not only derived from personal experiences in early life. These psychic contents, which Jung

called 'archetypes,' are the spontaneous self-organizing structures of the impersonal layers of the collective or objective unconscious. Unlike personal contents, such archetypal aspects of the collective unconscious cannot be fully perceived as stemming from inside one person and being directed outside of that person, into another. In fact, archetypal processes create a 'third area' between people that cannot be experienced or understood through the spatial notion of insides and outsides. The sense of space created within a relationship cannot be understood as an 'empty space' characterizing the area through which (largely) personal projections pass. Rather, this 'third area' has its own peculiar objectivity: a subjective-objective quality. The individual projections cannot be separated from the objective transformative trends as they interact within this 'intermediate realm,' and neither causes the other to exist. When Jung analyzed this largely unconscious third area between people, which was his way of explicating the transference-countertransference process, he also approached the archetypal aspects within the scientific paradigm of projection. Indeed, Jung's work helped us to see that more than personal psychic contents could be projected.

Moreover, archetypal levels create a 'third area' that cannot be embraced simply as things, like the projected parts that two people may encounter. Rather the archetype creates a paradoxical sense of space in which one is both inside and outside, an observer but also contained within the space itself. Furthermore, and in distinction to the emphasis on subjectivity in psychoanalytic approaches to the 'third area,' I find that a concomitant objectivity of process derived from the inclusion of archetypal dimensions must also be considered.

Indeed, we must move beyond the notion of life as consisting of outer and inner experiences and enter a kind of 'intermediate realm' that our culture has long lost sight of and in which the major portion of transformation occurs. As we perceive such a shared reality with another person, and as we actually focus on it, allowing it to have its own life, like a 'third thing' in the relationship, something new can occur. The space that we occupy seems to change, and rather than being the subjects, observing this 'third thing,' we begin to feel we are inside it and moved by it. We become the object, and the space itself and its emotional states are the subject.

In such experiences, the old forms of relationship die and transform. It is as if we have become aware of a far larger presence in our relationship, indeed a sacred dimension. We become aware of a sense of 'oneness' that permeates being alone and with our partner. It is a 'oneness' that seems to infuse the relationship with a sense of awe and mystery. When this experience is intense, respect takes over where power once ruled. Fear becomes accepted as a marker of being on the right path, because one now walks towards the unknown, on a path of expanding horizons and a willingness to be moved by the truth as it exists within the relationship. And always we look for and reflect upon our projections and our personal history as if these form the boundaries that give the interactive experience its own uniqueness and particularity, thus preventing the interactive experience from flowing into a 'New Age' haze.

Just as archetypal contents create a third area that cannot be sufficiently apprehended through the model of projection, so too do the mad parts of sane people. Such archetypal areas are never reducible to a sum of individual projections. Consequently, the mad aspects of sane people have never been successfully embraced within rationally oriented

approaches to personality development. Attempts to reduce the mad aspects of sane people to some failure in development that can be projected will amount to little more than a repressive ruse. The psychological models we have gained from studying infant development or observing development in time, that is, from infancy to adolescence and onward, do not help in grasping the strange qualities of the space that underpins the depth of relationships. We never 'know' madness as something to be 'studied' in a relationship; rather we experience it, and we must find some kind of imaginary vessel to contain it. For madness is a strange phenomenon which can be understood not only as existing within oneself or between people but also, like archetypal processes, as encompassing and influencing both people in a relationship within its indefinable realm. Indeed, if relationship is to be the place of the transformation of individuals and culture, then we must not only expose the madness within the relationship but we must also discover the mystery of that madness.

Relationship may be viewed as the container for dealing with the archetypal and irrational forces of madness within our culture. For this reason, we must think of relationship as far more than two relatively conscious or unconscious people interacting. Relationship must be viewed as resting upon a great sea of emotional life, a dimension that is never understood by rational means alone. This fact was noted by Freud and also used extensively by Jung in his investigations of the depth of relationship in the transference.

Whereas modern scientific models do not help us much to think about such experiences of madness and of 'third areas' between people, traditions that preceded scientific discovery and its primary emphasis upon causality can enable us to rediscover and reformulate more ancient ideas which were precisely concerned with such 'in between' areas and experiences. To understand and appreciate the transformative potential of such 'third areas,' we may profitably turn to the ancient ideas and practices of alchemy. Jung employed alchemical symbolism to grasp the nature of the largely unconscious 'third area' between people. By making fuller use of Jung's alchemical research than I believe he himself did, one can learn to experience the 'third area' and to be changed by this experience rather than depend upon analyzing it into component projections.

I am conceptualizing and analyzing the alchemical way of thinking, as presented in its myths and stories, as a central approach to psychotherapy. This alchemical approach contrasts not only with those using alchemical symbolism to amplify developmental or failed developmental processes, but also with any scientific approach to understanding the psyche's structure and changes that is based upon causality. An alchemical approach, therefore, is not primarily concerned with what people do to one another, such as through projections on to one another, but instead with their experience of a field both people occupy.

The structure and the methodology of alchemy are extremely valuable in attempts to probe the mystery of relationships. When the methodology of alchemy is applied to the psychological process, a new model of analysis emerges, a model based not on behavior modification or changes in object relations but on the recovery of soul. Coming to this new model of analysis has required, of course, a 'translation' of alchemical terms into psychological terms as well as a rethinking of the nature of the analytic session and the

role of the analyst. In my experience when working with the ‘third area,’ including the mad parts of otherwise sane people, Cartesian thinking breaks down, and another kind of logic of opposites emerges that is strikingly similar to that embraced over the course of 2,000 years by the alchemists.

### **THE EMERGENCE AND DECLINE OF THE ANCIENT ART OF ALCHEMY**

The ancient art of alchemy was primarily concerned with qualitative changes of substance, notably transforming a metal into another form, changing the color of a material and stabilizing that change, or creating the Elixir of Life or *Lapis Philosophorum*. Beyond such generalities, the origins, nature, and scope of alchemy are subject to conjecture and controversy. As Raphael Patai has noted in his comprehensive study *The Jewish Alchemists*, ‘when it comes down to deciding what alchemy actually is (or was), scholars who have written about alchemy are far from agreement’ (1994, 4). The spectrum of scholarly attitudes ranges widely from a view of alchemy as a foolish and embarrassing episode in human thought to a perspective which regards it as the most sublime, spiritual science whose true focus was the transformation of the human personality. Patai offers some insight into alchemy’s ambiguous and controversial nature:

Alchemy was everything its practitioners claimed it was, and its aims comprised everything historians attributed to it. They included the transmutation of base metals into silver and gold, the doubling or otherwise increasing the weight of gold, the manufacturing of pearls and precious stones, the production of all kinds of tinctures and other substances, the concoction of dyes, and the making of all kinds of remedies for healing every disease which humankind suffered, and the creation of the quintessence, the fabulous elixir, which healed, rejuvenated, and prolonged life for centuries...All this was part of the practical aspect of alchemy.

(1994, 4)

In the process, medicines were made; vessels for chemical transformation were developed; and remarkable theories were postulated about the process of change in the form or inner structure of matter.

Furthermore, alchemical efforts at ‘outer’ material changes corresponded with the ‘inner’ changes in the alchemist’s psyche. This mutuality of transformation fascinated the best minds of many centuries and many cultures. Thus, alchemical practice is extensively documented in a cross-cultural body of literature spanning three millennia.

Alchemy was based upon a belief in the fundamental unity of all processes in nature. All of nature—stone, metals, wood, and minerals along with the human mind and body—was formed out of a single substance. This essence, the *lapis*, was the basis out of which everything grew, and if one could gain some of it, even a minute drop, then considerable healing and transformation could be accomplished. One finds this fundamental belief in India, Europe, China, the Near East, the Middle East (especially the Arab world), and in all other places in which alchemy flourished (Patai 1994).

While the origins of alchemy reached well into pre-history and the wisdom of the shaman, the alchemical tradition appears to have crystallized in GraecoRoman Egypt during the third and fourth centuries BCE. At this time, Greek and Stoic thought combined to create alchemy's basic theoretical structures which were elaborated upon and refined over the next 2,000 years. Alchemy began to emerge as a coherent body of thought in the work of Bolos-Democritus about 200 BCE. Alchemical thinking grew out of the nexus of ideas associated with metallurgy, brewing, dyeing, and perfume-making. By the third century, alchemical ideas had spread and become linked with a large number of kindred developments in the religious and philosophic spheres (Lindsay 1970, 67). Prior to this time, alchemical practices were often a secret affair, hidden away out of a fear of persecution rooted in charges of counterfeiting gold and precious metals. Early authors of alchemical texts often assumed pseudonyms adopted from mythical figures such as Hermes or Moses or from some great master. This tendency in alchemy was not merely an act of modesty or a desire to hide from persecution as a forger or counterfeiter. Instead, it reflected the desire in alchemy to link its origins and practitioners to a mythical dimension, a tendency also found in magical practice.

The exoteric or the extroverted side of alchemical practice was largely informed by established Greek thought which was essentially Aristotelian. According to the scholar of the exoteric alchemical tradition, E.J.Holmyard, Aristotle believed the world was comprised of a prime matter that only had a potential existence. To actually manifest, it had to be impressed by 'form,' which not only meant shape but also something that gave a body its specific properties. In the Aristotelian cosmology, form gives rise to the 'four elements': fire, air, water, and earth. Each of the elements is further characterized by the 'qualities' of being fluid (or moist), dry, hot, or cold. Each element has two of these qualities. Hot and cold, and fluid and dry, are pairs of contraries and cannot be coupled. The main thrust of the theory, according to Holmyard (1990), is that any substance is composed of each and every 'element.' The difference between one substance and another depends upon the proportions in which the elements are present. And since each element, as the theory goes, can be transformed into another, any substance can be transformed into any other kind by changing the proportion of the elements in it. For example, in the Aristotelian theory, the element fire is hot and dry, and the element water is cold and fluid. If one could combine them in a way that resulted in the elimination of the dry and cold qualities, one would have an element that was hot and fluid, the attributes the theory assigns to the element air. Through such processes, the form of things changes. Accordingly, by being able to alter the qualities and thus the form of things, one should be able to transform any substance into another: 'If lead and gold both consist of fire, air, water, and earth, why may not the dull and common metal have the proportions of the elements adjusted to those of the shining, precious one?' (Holmyard 1990, 23). The alchemical search for the right form of the '*prima materia*' to work on and the alchemist's relentless and often futile, but sometimes successful, laboratory efforts, informed as much as possible by divine revelation and moments of grace, make up most of the exoteric tale of alchemy.

Along with this theory of the four elements, a more introverted or esoteric basis for alchemy is found in related ideas from Greek thought which were established from the seventh to the fourth centuries BCE: (1) the idea of a unitary process in nature and of

some 'ultimate substance' out of which all things are built up; (2) the idea of a 'conflict of opposites,' held together by the overriding unity, as the force driving the universe onwards; (3) the idea of a 'definite structure' in the ultimate components of matter, whether this structure is expressed by varying aggregates of atoms (*atomon*, indivisible unit) or by the combination of a set of basic geometrical forms at the atomic level (Lindsay 1970, 4). To this body of thought was added the Stoic position that the 'psyche' was material, that there was a mutual penetration of soul and body, of *physis* and the world of plants, of *hexis* and the world of inorganic matter. Stoic physics consistently saw all the more solid or specific elements as permeated and held together in the infinite network of pneumatic tensions (Lindsay 1970, 22–23).

Alchemical ideas were prevalent in Europe after the Dark Ages, and new forms were created in the culture of the imagination that graced the Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These new forms of alchemical thinking were vividly expressed in texts such as the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (1550) and the *Splendor Solis* (1582). The *Rosarium* was initially a set of images that were meditated upon, like a rosary. The *Rosarium* is believed to have originated in a German fraternity in the sixteenth century; or possibly this group was responsible for adding the text to the pictures, so that what now exists is a series of images and commentaries on them that dates to 1550. There are several collections of the *Rosarium* in the world; some are in color, while others are in black and white, and others have been partially colored. The most beautiful collection, found in the Stadt Bibliothek of St Gallen, have a Picasso-like lyrical quality. Some of these commentaries seem to make great sense, and others seem so obscure as to make one wonder if they were added at random. But most importantly, this series of twenty woodcuts addresses one of the major problems of alchemy, the union of mind and body as it is achieved through the process of the union of two souls, or the union of two aspects of a single personality. The *Splendor Solis*, usually dated 1584, is also of unknown origin. Its copper plates have given the world the most beautiful images of alchemy. The *Splendor Solis* approaches a complementary problem of alchemy, namely the incarnation of spiritual life into material/ bodily reality. Whereas the *Rosarium* is based upon a horizontal process like a face to face meeting of two people, or a joining of separated aspects of psychic life in a person, the *Splendor Solis* is concerned with the vertical dimension of incarnating spirit. It also has different variants in libraries, but the most beautiful rendition is the Harley manuscript found in the British Library.

Works such as these formed the backbone of Renaissance alchemy. The *Splendor Solis* is the most important example of a work that combines outer and inner reality, focussing both on actual substances and on the inner level of the soul (McLean 1981). The *Rosarium* is concerned with that other major issue of alchemy, the union of opposites, such as male and female, body and mind, and hot and cold. Together these two texts provide the basis for analyzing the alchemical symbolism discussed later in this book.

While its pinnacle was reached in the culture of the European Renaissance, alchemy's demise was precipitated by the emergence of science, and especially by the Reformation's attacks on the role of imagination. The demise of alchemical thinking was primarily caused by the need for a less imaginative and more rationally conceived approach to the world. Grounded in imaginal thinking and fantastic imagery, alchemy was totally unsuited to understanding nature in causal terms, as postulated in the great

scientific advances of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Science saw the world differently, with matter no longer alive and order in the form of the scientist's equations, to be applied to any problem. The 'mechanical philosophy' of the Age of Reason drove alchemy into a distant corner of human endeavor. Its wisdom eventually was carried on secretly, often in occult groups, and its prominence rapidly diminished as did respect for occult activity.

### THE CLASH OF ALCHEMICAL AND SCIENTIFIC THINKING

Since at least the seventeenth century, alchemy has been widely scorned for its metaphor-based process that sharply conflicts both with modern scientific demands for objectivity and modern science's essential premise of causality. In contrast with modern scientific methods, the alchemical tradition is a testimony to the power of subjectivity. Rather than an 'objective' attempt to carefully situate a difference between processes in matter and the psychology of the experimenter, in alchemy the spiritual and physical transformation of the subject is an integral part of the work of transforming matter. This merger of the inner reality of the alchemist and the outer reality of the matter to be transformed exists in an area of imaginal discourse, which ancient alchemists referred to as the *imaginatio*, that was not subject to notions of insides and outsides. The merger of outer and inner occurs in a space that alchemists called the 'subtle body,' a strange area that is neither material nor spiritual, but mediating between them. Along with other 'imponderables' of ancient science that held sway for many centuries, this 'intermediary' domain of existence has long since left our conscious awareness.

Because alchemy is characterized by a peculiar identification between the alchemist and the material with which he or she works, personal and material transformation are intertwined so closely as to defy their separation. This linkage is part of the complex metaphor of alchemy which accepts the possibility that changes in the personality of the artisan somehow effect changes in the matter with which he or she is working. It was only when this intermingling between outer and inner could no longer be maintained that alchemy became subject to scorn and contempt for its failure to make actual gold from base metals. The alchemical furnaces and theory were obviously not up to the task, no matter what powers of imagination the adepts brought to it. In any event, gold-making was not the major concern of alchemy but rather was part of the alchemical metaphor of personality transformation. The intention to transform gross metals or inferior personality structures ('lead' into 'gold' in an alchemical sense) was no different from the Christian idea of the resurrection of the dead. In essence, alchemy was a system of transformation, and its genius lay in the assumption that change was part of an interaction between subject and object in which both were transformed.

Ultimately, alchemy's metaphor of change runs squarely against the notion that the essence of an individual is separate from others and is stable and unchanging amidst all the vicissitudes of life. Prior to this time, people had little concept of individualism; instead, they considered themselves to be part of a collective reality and organized their lives through myth and custom. The individual was of little import, save for the heroic changes which the 'great individual' brought to bear upon the collective. As long as

people functioned through broad, mythical patterns, the individual ego held no mass appeal or value, and in fact was considered a danger. Science became the great catalyst of change in consciousness in which the ego emerged as an entity-creating order. For this reason, the Church initially viewed emerging science as the work of the Devil.

But once individual consciousness became the *summa bonum*, the ways of alchemy and the metaphor of transformation that it represents became anathema to the developing Western scientific mind. For now the scientist, as beholder of principles and governing equations, attempted to order what otherwise appeared to be disordered systems. According to the inexorable law of entropy increase, order in nature itself tends to run down and to become less ordered, but the scientist, as beholder of order, is not believed to suffer this fate. He or she may modify the conception of how to create order by changing the paradigm that science embraces. But he or she is still considered to be structurally unfazed by what the order created, save for the possible moral consequences of one's creative and technological accomplishments. Seriously engaging an experiment is not thought to change the scientist's personality, nor is the experiment thought to function to a greater or lesser degree as a consequence of the scientist's own meditative efforts and accompanying imagination. This stability and self-sameness are central qualities of an emerging ego that takes on the task of apprehending the order of the universe through a causal metaphor. Cause=effect is the motif of scientific investigation; and it is essential to understand that previous ages—those prior to the great achievements of Galileo, Kepler, and Newton, among others—did not follow this formula. If anything, the alchemical approach, rooted as it was in Greek and Stoic thought, was essentially 'uninterested' in causality (Lindsay 1970). In effect, the alchemists were not exclusively interested in the way parts of a system or stages in human development interact with one another, either within an individual or with others in the environment.

So it is not that scientific logic is superior to the so-called 'primitive' logic of alchemy, but that these systems of thinking are fundamentally different (LéviStrauss 1966, 1–34). In essence, alchemical and scientific thinking serve different goals and attempt to solve different problems. Alchemy is a science of the soul; science is a study of material change along an irreversible sequence of time. The extroversion of alchemy to outer, material life, was as unsuccessful as the attempts of science to understand the inner workings of the psyche by reducing them to some materialistic premise.

It should also be understood that science did not supplant alchemy. In fact, alchemy was a major concern of Isaac Newton who came to alchemy after a thorough study of 'rational' chemistry. For Newton, alchemy was no aberration; according to Richard Westfall, 'what he took to be its greater profundity' was central to his thinking:

In the mechanical philosophy, Newton had found an approach to nature which radically separated body and spirit, eliminated spirit from the operations of nature, and explained those operations solely by the mechanical necessity of particles of matter in motion. Alchemy, in contrast, offered the quintessential embodiment of all the mechanical philosophy rejected. It looked upon nature as life instead of machine, explained phenomena by the activating agency of spirit, and claimed that all things are generated by the copulation of male and female principles...Where [the mechanical] philosophy insisted on the inertness of

matter...alchemy asserted the existence of active principles in matter as the primary agents of natural phenomena.

(1980, 112, 116–17)

Newton actually stood at the crossroads of two currents: that of a new science championing causality, and that of an ancient science which found causality limited and incapable of explaining how phenomena such as the affects of the human soul emerged without any experienced or observable cause. As the seventeenth century ended, and educated Europeans fully embraced the Age of Rationalism, the alchemical approach to nature all but vanished; the mechanical philosophy and the mechanism of causality dominated, as it has up to the present time.

This domination, however, was only accomplished by choosing different and indeed much simpler problems than those which alchemy addressed. For example, science knows little about the way the form of things, such as a leaf's shape, is created and changes. In science, an equation is applied to a system, and that system may change over time, but not a great deal is known about systems whose external shape or boundaries, and internal constitutive nature, also change as a consequence of processes in the system. Alchemy focused precisely upon such systems, notably the human being and ways that psychic structure changes. Why can a person have devastating responses at one period of life, but with a growing awareness and internal integration of disowned experiences begin to re-experience trauma with far less disturbance? How does internal structure change to allow such a development? What are the laws of this change, or what metaphorical properties govern it?

Science's need to separate from spiritual factors—as emphasized by Descartes' separation of earthly science from spiritual concerns, and from finality as well—and science's need for objectivity, which could be so clouded by the subjective-objective intermingling of alchemy, drove it more and more towards abstraction. The metaphorical basis of alchemy, like metaphor in general, combines different orders of reality, like matter and psyche. Science splits them and becomes the beholder of order, ordering the supposed disorder of matter.

Alchemy's insistence on the linkage between subject and object followed from its concern for the soul, the inner life that moves of its own accord, independent of cause. This quality of soul is the reason that causal concerns are of far less significance for the alchemical mind than for our own. Because the soul lives in relationship, the quality of relationship, characterized in alchemical science by a concern for the relation *per se*, and not the things related, define alchemy.

Thus, a different universe of experience is the object of the alchemical endeavor. It is an 'in between' world of 'relations,' occurring in a space that is not-Cartesian, and instead is characterized by a paradoxical relationship in which 'outer' and 'inner' are alternately both distinct and the same. Within the paradoxical geometry of this space, known as the subtle body, that is an 'intermediate' realm between matter and psyche, the alchemist believed that 'relations *per se*' could be transformed.

Alchemists were concerned with this intermediate realm and were hopeful that the 'things related,' such as the matter worked upon, could be transformed as well. This magnificent attempt did not simply fade away before the obvious superiority of science in

dealing with causal processes in the material world. Rather, the fantasy of objectivity which is central to science, and the heroic invincibility of the ego, which developed with that fantasy, rendered the alchemical metaphor, and its quest for the imaginal perception of relations *per se*, an obscure and a dangerous domain. Yet within this domain, one builds egos that have an imaginal base and that know that their perceptions are rarely more than a flicker of the truth of a larger intertwined reality, for example, between a person's ego and his or her unconscious or between two people. The ego as developed within the scientific approach to nature surely corrects the wild misuse of subjectivity and fantasy that the alchemical approach can manifest, just as the Reformation was not only repressive but also a necessary corrective to the imaginal excesses of the magical practices of the Renaissance (Couliano 1987).

Because of their lack of interest in quantitative measurements or in conceiving material processes in terms of their purpose or final cause, the alchemists' understanding and transformation of matter was surely far inferior to what has been accomplished by modern science. Generally, alchemy is commonly misunderstood as a pseudoscience that gave way to the enlightened discoveries of chemistry. Although much of chemistry's initial development was an extension of alchemical ideas, the tale of alchemy's fate is far more complex. On the one hand, alchemy chose to address problems that are so difficult—issues of the qualitative transformations through which substance takes on new forms—that modern science has yet to truly explore them, let alone master them. On the other hand, the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century practitioners of alchemy lived in a world that was entirely animated, one in which matter was not dead or chaotic but had a living soul. This kind of consciousness sees relationship among all levels of existence, animate and inanimate, spiritual and profane, but it does not deal with distinctness and separable entities within a causal process. The alchemical approach to the world gave priority to a background sense of oneness which kept it from ever successfully separating from and adequately evaluating its most potent tool: the imagination. In a strong sense, the ideas and practices of alchemy, like the ideas underlying transformations in the Renaissance, had to retreat to allow the individual ego to develop, an ego that could believe it was separate from other people and the world and from God, and an ego that could believe in the usefulness of understanding nature as a process in historical time.

During the time of the emergence of alchemy in the Renaissance, ego-consciousness had barely developed. But without the careful discrimination of the ego, a sense of what is inner and outer, especially in union states between people, readily regresses into a hopeless muddle of fusion that blurs any subject-object differentiation. The mind in the Renaissance, and before, was characterized by an immersion in images and by a lack of critical reflection on fantasy and the use of fantasy to prove anything in an idiosyncratic way (Huizinga 1954, 225). Scientific objectivity in any experimental sense simply did not exist. Problems in relationships and disputes were resolved by reference to mythical and philosophical precedents. Everything was based upon prior models and not upon discerning the significance of events in the historical moment. This latter development came about only with Descartes' separation of mind and body as two qualitatively different entities, and with the exclusion of God and finality from theorizing about nature. These splits were radical but necessary.

This great achievement in consciousness—an objectivity about nature and the

development of self-awareness—which began in the seventeenth century (Whyte 1960, 42–43) made possible the modern scientific approach. With it came the attitude, which was to become habitual, of separating processes into distinct parts and of focusing attention on the parts, broken down into smaller and smaller units. Eventually, wholeness and a unitary background to existence, mainstays of alchemical thinking, were lost sight of altogether, resulting in the fragmentation so characteristic of the lives of modern-day people. Science can thus be seen as unburdening alchemy of its need to be competent in investigating outer, material changes. But alchemical approaches and a return to alchemy's metaphor of subjectivity can be a gift to science and, in turn, unburden it of its soul-killing attempts to grasp the mystery of the psyche and its transformations.

The enduring strength of alchemy in ancient and medieval times and its innate weakness in the modern age is its tendency to relate all human activity to an awareness of the essence or Oneness of all creation. Alchemy's theoretical structure is based upon a connection to a oneness of process, in distinction to the parts that are the focal point of causal descriptions of events in space and time. Human life, organic and inorganic forms of natural process, and the vast extent of the Cosmos and whatever powers it holds—'God' in the religious sense of the term—are all linked together. This sense of Oneness permeates all alchemical thinking. In this way, ancient alchemical thinking was in sharp contrast to modern scientific thinking which attempts to understand human organic and inorganic life without reference to their interaction and without reference to 'higher' or 'spiritual' powers. Depending upon one's point of view, humanity progressed or regressed as it distanced itself from the embrace of Oneness that pervaded alchemical science.

The alchemist's belief in a unity or Oneness of process is based on the notion of an 'essence' which pervades all creation and which connects qualities as opposites. All of alchemical thinking is concerned with opposites, states we know in our psychological being as mind and body, love and hate, good and evil, conscious and unconscious, spirit and matter, left-brain and right-brain function, imaginal perception and rational, discursive thinking (lunar and solar in alchemical terms), love and power, and empathy and scientific deduction. Somehow, the alchemist had to recognize opposites inherent in any process and then to unite them. A spiritual sense of Oneness plays a vital role, for a kind of illumination is often necessary to 'see' opposites, an act of discovering order in chaos. The 'seeing' involved may be, as William Blake said, 'through' one's eyes rather than 'with' them, but the 'seeing' is always non-ordinary, a kind of perception informed by a spiritual reality. It is as if one's being must be permeated by this 'Other,' or as if one must sense its existence in order to lift opposites out of chaos. In this it is not difficult to discern the biblical act of Creation which is often a background model for the creative process of the alchemist.

The union of opposites is a notion that contrasts strongly with modern ways of thinking. For the union process occurs in a 'medium,' a way of thinking that has long since been discarded by science. The medium is known as the subtle body in alchemy, or as the *pneuma* in its origins in Stoic thought, which also informed the early theoretical foundations of alchemy. There is no more important concept to grasp for understanding alchemical thinking. The *pneuma* is a substance that is more gross than ordinary matter and less spiritual or fine than the spirit. It is 'in between' the two and comprised of both.

It permeates all of creation and links all qualities—human, organic and spiritual—together. The *pneuma* forms a vast net-work of pathways that carries information, and through these pathways all aspects of creation influence one another. A person's imagination can, if he or she is actively linked with another person, be transmitted to that person. In other words, a level of substantial transmission is posited, something which would be anathema to both science and psychoanalysis alike. Yet such is the nature of alchemical theory and belief: within and through the medium of the *pneuma* or subtle body, the union experience occurs. Many alchemical drawings indicate this level of a 'third area' with its own life of which two people may partake and by which they may be changed.

The alchemist's spiritual and moral involvement in his or her experiment was an essential part of the process. The alchemical approach believes in the existence of a transcendent reality as an ongoing fact, and all theorizing and practice includes this transcendent level of Oneness. In fact, the alchemist believes that, as his or her materials transform, as they are killed and reborn in a vessel, so too he or she dies and is reborn. Often imagery of dismemberment and torture are prominent along the path of reaching the goal of becoming One with the Cosmos. The alchemist carefully studied the process of attaining this state of perfection and, most significantly, while aware of the virtual impossibility of achieving this goal in a lifetime, believed that the path towards this goal was the one to follow.

Much of alchemy reflects very solid thinking which can appear muddled to our scientifically honed minds. In alchemy, the body is no lump of inert matter subject to 'natural law' alone, as Descartes and the origins of modern science would have it. Nor is the mind, let alone the brain, synonymous with spirit alone. Alchemy embraces the great mysteries of matter and spirit and sees these in the microcosm of the human being as the different experiences of our Oneness which we call mind and body.

Alchemy lasted for 2,000 years because it addressed such issues as a person's relationship to the Oneness that every soul deeply knows and easily forgets. It also retained its remarkable stability because it was particularly human, linking people and what they did and how they did it to the processes in which they engaged, to their art, to their science, and to one another. Everyone was not an alchemist, as everyone is not a scientist. But just as a spirit of science pervades our entire culture, one which believes in causes for human, economic, and social behavior, an alchemical spirit instead stressed the ways that things relate to one another. This older model is immensely appealing to the inner life, but also quite lacking in capacity to create new technologies and materials. One can imagine that the persistence of the alchemical tradition reflected the life of the soul in everyday life and in all investigations of nature, while alchemy's demise would follow from a loss of the awareness of soul or of the inner life with its own degree of autonomy. The return to the awareness of soul in modern culture seems to call once again for the values and consciousness of alchemy.

## AN ALCHEMICAL APPROACH TO THE ANALYTIC PROCESS

This book is based on an appreciation of alchemical imagery as remarkably embracing of

those states of mind that are often called mad or psychotic. These states of mind form an important, dangerous, but potentially creative aspect not only of mad or borderline individuals but of everyone. This madness is a central feature of the alchemical *prima materia*.

An alchemical approach further entails establishing the existence of an interactive field between two people, experiencing the contents of the field as not belonging exclusively to either person and, most significantly, recognizing that the field has its own goal-oriented autonomy achieved through dynamic processes that link order and disorder. Objectivity of process distinguishes the field approach characterized by an alchemical attitude from other totally subjective field approaches now emerging in psychoanalytic thought.

Alchemical notions that are neither material nor mental but exist ‘in between’ mind and body, while also encompassing both—such as the ‘subtle body,’ or ideas of the imagination that can be developed into a penetrating and indispensable form of knowledge (imaginal sight), or the mysteries of union, death, and chaos—all open our eyes to a new way of seeing relationships. In particular, an alchemical approach will focus upon an underlying field with its own dynamics within a relationship, or upon a field between an individual’s conscious ego and the unconscious. This focus facilitates experiences that tend to be precluded by scientific approaches and their orientation towards separable parts of a process and towards the effect of people’s projections upon one another. The conscious experience of the field with its own sense of autonomy—an experience that is similar to a vision, or a powerful dream—is the primary transformative factor. One can be changed—often gradually, but at times quite suddenly—by such ‘field experiences.’

Out of alchemical symbolism and texts I believe one can define an ‘alchemical attitude.’ Primarily, this attitude contrasts with a scientific one in that its primary focus is not on causes. Instead, one becomes focused upon relations, on the nature of the ‘third realm’ between people, and not on what people are doing to one another. Consequently, a major principle of the alchemical attitude is that it is not hierarchical. No matter how much one person seems to be doing something negative or objectionable to another, one still looks for the ‘unconscious couple’ the two people share. Another major feature of the alchemical attitude is a respect for chaos. In a sense alchemical thinking parallels the recent discoveries of Chaos Theory in science. While chaos has been ignored in science and is now, in certain limited ways, being re-discovered, chaos has always been central to alchemy. The alchemical attitude learns to embrace and suffer chaos without reaching into reason to dispel and dissociate from it. Moreover, the alchemical attitude recognizes a transcendent dimension of existence without which the process of transformation cannot proceed. In other words, without some degree of illumination, no transformation can take place. Thus, the alchemical attitude is strongly transpersonal, without ever leaving the here-and-now reality of personal relatedness.

Generally, the alchemical and scientific attitudes have a different focus from one another and have complementary strengths and weaknesses. One can understand a great deal from a causal point of view, and it is foolish at best to underestimate the importance of the scientific way. For example, understanding a person in terms of a causal developmental process beginning in his or her infancy is a necessary focus. It acts as

something like a boundary condition that keeps the imaginal approach of alchemy grounded and real. But the alchemical way offers another, complementary understanding based not on what one person 'does' to another, but rather on how people occupy an intermediate realm of relations *per se* and on how these relations are affected by the individual subjectivities of both people and also by deeper and larger currents of the archetypal level of the collective unconscious. Much can be achieved through this approach that can be superior to a scientific developmental approach, especially in the realm of dissolving rigid personality structures and dealing with mad areas of sane people.

Because it was limited to the explicit reality of 'in between' or 'third areas' that do not obey causal laws, alchemy failed as a causal endeavor to create gold from base metals in some linear, dependable and repeatable fashion. Alchemy's metaphor is not well-suited to such endeavors, as science's metaphor of cause= effect has serious drawbacks for understanding and respecting the life of the soul. We need both points of view. While this book contrasts these approaches and employs both at times, it essentially stresses the value of an alchemical approach to the 'in between' realm, the usually unseen state of relations *per se*.

Today, we must recognize the shadow side of the great development of ego consciousness, namely the creation of defenses that allow too much separation of the ego from the unconscious and from the emotions of the body. Alchemical thinking holds out a way of returning to wholeness without abandoning separation and distinctness of process. In a way alchemy's time has come. Perhaps we can now return to those mysterious realms or 'third areas' that are neither physical nor psychic, domains whose existence must be recognized if we are to reconnect split orders of reality such as mind and body. I believe that such 'third areas,' a major concern of alchemy but left behind by scientific thinking, will have to be re-introduced if we are to gain a true sense of what the soul in relationship is, especially under the eye of psychotherapy (Schwartz-Salant 1989, 1995a).

In a sense, I am returning to that juncture in history in which Newton tried to embrace both the mechanical approach to nature and the alchemical path. I do not underestimate in any sense the power of scientific and especially causal approaches to understanding, but the alchemical approach is often more useful for containing the complex states of mind usually referred to as the mad or psychotic parts of an otherwise sane person, and it offers special insight into the complexities of the usually unconscious aspects of relationships.