Politics and the Numinous: Evolution, Spiritual Emergency, and the Re-emergence of Transpersonal Consciousness

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ABSTRACT *Philosopher Herbert Marcuse observed in 1964 that modern people's materialistic and consumer-based lifestyles have resulted in societies becoming more one dimensional, which has contributed to a growing attitude of 'uncritical conformity'. Marcuse advocated that in order to transcend a one-dimensional existence people will have to engage and actualize their human potential. The increasing environmental and ecological crisis that is confronting the world today identifies a pressing need for change and adaptation at all levels of society including governments, businesses, individual and collective consciousness. The transformation of a one-dimensional consumer-based society will require people and societies to engage different dimensions of conscious experience in order to bring about change. This article discusses how developments within human consciousness have evolved in conjunction with spiritual capacities and how collective ritual encounters with the numinous have contributed to developments in the human brain, mind and culture. I propose that the modern phenomenon of spiritual emergencies can be evaluated from an evolutionary perspective, which may be revealing transformational patterns within consciousness that go beyond a one-dimensional materialistic existence. Spiritual emergency reinforces the need for spiritual awareness to challenge the one-sided materialistic consciousness prevalent within modern consumer based societies. The process of psycho-spiritual transformation could lead to a resacralized socio-political vision and validation of a re-emergent transpersonal consciousness. Copyright © 2008 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

Key words: politics, numinous, evolution, spiritual emergency, transpersonal, consciousness

INTRODUCTION

In 1964 Philosopher Herbert Marcuse (1991) observed that people in modern technological societies tend not to be critical of the prevailing structures in which they live and he identified that people's thoughts and actions were increasingly passive and bound to one-

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dimensional societies. Marcuse commented on the need to engage thought and action in order to fulfil human potential and transcend the limitations of a one-dimensional existence. He commented that in the modern world, human agency – masked as freedom – is allied to overly administered structures and human productivity is mostly centred on the creation of affluence, material gain and consumption. Marcuse identified that the specific characteristics of conformity include a lack of constructive criticism of society's administrative and bureaucratic structures, which he believed curtailed people's interest in exploring their full human potential. The observations made by Marcuse (1991) can be witnessed in the modern use of mass media, which have been implicated in the political economy of 'manufacturing consent' (Herman and Chomsky, 1994). Mass media have the power to reinforce norms, expectations and consensus values leading to what Marcuse (1991) described as 'unchecked conformity'. The consequences of not recognizing how the destructive power of mass-mindedness can lead to the perpetuation of self-ignorance and self-deception, contrasts with the fact that it also leads to avoiding the challenge of cultivating self-knowledge (Sheets-Johnstone, 2008). Marcuse postulates that human beings need to engage the tension between 'potentialities' and 'actualities'.

Ervin Laszlo, Stanislav Grof and Peter Russell (2003, 5–9) have discussed the notion of a 'consciousness revolution' in the modern world. They identify how there is now widespread and deep questioning of materialistic consciousness within modern cultures and they believe that the only solution to tackle the unsustainable trend of consumerism is to engage in a process of psycho-spiritual transformation. However according to Grof, psycho-spiritual transformation has its own complexities. Grof asserts that a substantial group of people currently treated for psychosis are actually experiencing a crisis of transformation, otherwise known as a spiritual emergency. In addition Russell declared that 'our whole culture is going through a spiritual emergency'. Grof spoke about his work as a transpersonal psychiatrist and how he witnessed shifts in people's orientation once they discovered the numinous dimension of their psyches, which changed from being in therapy to a spiritual quest, leading people to discover 'a whole new orientation toward themselves, toward other people, nature, and life in general' (Laszlo, Grof and Russell, 2003, 98–9). The current challenge for modern societies to engage in a process of psycho-spiritual transformation is discussed by research psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1993) who emphasizes the need for an 'evolving self'. He believes that if the new millennium is to be an improvement on the past more people will have to build selves around transcendent goals. This corresponds with Kelsey's (1981) observation that the material world cannot satisfy people's deep need for transcendence and meaning in life. In view of this, the numinous is identified as an important factor for engaging human beings psycho-spiritual potential, which has ancient links going back to early human evolution.

Early humans cultivated their transcendent awareness through ritual encounters with the numinous (Oubré, 1997). According to Oubré (1997) *Homo transcendalis* has evolved through engaging with altered states of consciousness, which have contributed to developments within the brain, mind and culture. It is cogent to the understanding of evolutionary encounters with the numinous that the collective uses of altered states of consciousness occurred in a socio-cultural context, as evidenced through cross-cultural comparisons of early ritualistic shamanic practices (Winkelman, 2002, 2004). The role of the numinous in human beings biological-cultural development (Oubré, 1997) coheres with Mindell's (1989)

observation that the numinous lies at the core of a community. Numinous experiences have been discussed in relation to the altered states of consciousness associated with spiritual emergencies (Collins, 2008). When viewed through the lens of evolution, spiritual emergencies reflect numinous, mythical and archetypal dimensions of transcendent phenomena that could be revealing a re-emergent transpersonal consciousness; moreover, the numinous is identified as being important in the resacralization of political consciousness (Samuels, 1993). McLaughlin and Davidson (1994) suggest that 'spiritual politics' can be transformed by 'changing the world from the inside out', which identifies the potential value of psychotherapy for addressing numinous phenomena.

Jung (1995) was adamant that numinous experiences could be expected with some regularity in psychotherapeutic work. Psychotherapists are inclined to take a more holistic view of mystical experiences (Allman et al., 1992); furthermore, people who engage their self actualizing potential in terms of psycho-spiritual growth are more likely to have/report mystical experiences (Hood, 1977). Psychotherapy provides an important context for engaging numinous experiences, which could encourage wider discourse in the collective about the value of mystical experiences. In this article the antecedents for mystical experiences are discussed in relation to human evolution; identifying how developments in the brain, mind, and culture are associated with numinous encounters, which recontextualizes spiritual emergencies and the process of psycho-spiritual transformation; thereby linking modern human beings to an ancient sacred heritage. I propose that spiritual emergencies – which have a numinous dimension (Collins, 2008) – have the potential to initiate a collective process of psycho-spiritual transformation that goes beyond a one-dimensional consumer consciousness as identified by Marcuse (1991). The meaning and integration of spiritual emergencies in modern societies could occur through engaging in a process of deep democracy (Mindell, 2002) in order to address the evolutionary and emergent potential of transpersonal states of consciousness towards socio-political change.

EVOLUTION AND THE EMERGENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The science of emergence has been discussed in relation to complex systems (Holland, 1998), and it has been recognized that complex systems can function at far from equilibrium, where they not only survive but they thrive to produce new levels of organization, which enables adaptation within a system to meet environmental demands (Bűtz, 1997). Corning (2002) has discussed how human evolution is an emergent phenomenon, as reflected in Van der Hammen's (1983) concept of 'organic evolution', which emphasizes how processes of transformation and change occur in living nature. The evolution of the human brain is a good example of a complex system and the science of emergence provides a valuable framework for addressing human beings developments in consciousness from the beginnings of human evolution to the present. Evolution in the human brain is revealed through the three distinct anatomical structures that have evolved; reptilian (behavioural), paleo-mammalian (emotional), and neo-mammalian (informational) (MacLean, 1990). A phenomenal increase in brain capacity is revealed through the evolutionary processes of encephalization, which is regarded by Holmes (1996) as being an emergent phenomenon.

Holmes (1996) illustrates how the brain developed its encephalization quotient (EQ) in early hominids. Four million years ago the brain size of *Australopithicus afrensis* was

400 cm^3 and reflected an EQ of 2.5, which is contrasted with the more recent *Homo sapiens* lineage that started 80,000 years ago, whose brain size of 850–1,000 cm^3 reflects an EQ of 5.8. Encephalization as an emergent process has increased the cranial capacity in human beings that has resulted in greater functional applications for living. The mass of brain power relative to body size has arisen because of early humans' multifaceted engagement in order to survive, which has evolved through tool use, the forging of social bonds and the development of language (Palmer and Palmer, 2002). The 'ascent' of the human species throughout evolution has occurred through experimentation and innovation (Bronowski, 1973) and consequently the emergence of human capacities such as consciousness, imagination, intelligence, and spiritual activities have led to the creation of more sophisticated levels of meaning (Holmes, 1996).

Hunt (1995) has asserted that early hunter-gatherer communities were adept at cultivating methods for inducing transformations in consciousness through ritual methods associated with healing and social integration, and he posits that the connections between cognitive, phenomenological, and transpersonal levels of experience are important when evaluating conscious experience. Indeed, it is because interactions between neural systems cohere throughout the physical brain that a more holistic view of consciousness could take into account the connections between psychological and spiritual domains (Lancaster, 2004).

Oubré's (1997) anthropological hypothesis provides an important proposition for understanding the evolutionary connections in early hominids neural and cultural development, which she suggests have been advanced through ritual encounters with the numinous, thereby providing an important link in the integral understanding of the interactions between biological, psychological, cultural and spiritual domains.

Oubré (1997) has argued that by the time of the Upper Paleolithic (30,000–40,000 years ago) early humans had evolved meaningful ritual behaviour that formed the foundation for developing a transcendent awareness, thereby providing the context for understanding early religious experience and behaviour. Oubré's (1997) hypothesis states that the numinous mind was interwoven through feedback in the brain in direct relation to collective ritual behaviour. The recent discovery of mirror neurons (Dobbs, 2006) lends support to Oubré's (1997) hypothesis; whereby, the passive act of observing meaningful behaviour in other's actions can elicit neuro-physiological arousal in the relevant part of the observer's brain. The next section will discuss why the numinous was potentially relevant to the evolution of the brain and behaviour, and discusses how the modern concept of 'emergence' provides an important framework for considering the sacred dimension (Braxton, 2006) and the evolutionary developments within human consciousness.

EVOLUTION AND THE NUMINOUS

Theologian, Rudolph Otto (1959) explored the essential human experience of sacred encounters across different cultures and religions. He termed the human capacity to experience the sacred directly the 'numinous'. His central observation was that an encounter with the numinous – *mysterium tremundum* (awesome and overpowering mystery) and *Mysterium fascinans* (fascinating and captivating mystery) – is active and carries an import of energy. Otto believed that in the journey of spiritual awakening human beings retrace a process akin to evolution. Otto (1959, 26–7) illustrates two qualitatively different experiences of the numinous that impact on human consciousness:

> It may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship…thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its 'profane', non-religious mood of everyday experience.

> It may burst in sudden eruption…or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy…and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering…it may be developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious.

Otto's (1959) research into the numinous highlights the direct connection between human consciousness and the sacred dimension, which does not require the interpretation or mediation of religious beliefs or ideologies. Moreover, Otto's research into the numinous provides a deep connection to a primeval heritage that relates back to ancient history and early human experiences of the sacred and transcendent dimension. Encounters with the numinous were believed to have occurred through rituals that led to the development of transcendent awareness in early humans', whom Oubré (1997) refers to as *Homo transcendalis.* The act of engaging in collective rituals played an important role in facilitating the development of perceptions and multisensory engagement, which contributed to the evolution of symbolic thought and the development of cognitive capacities, such as abstract thinking, as well as feelings, and existential inquiry. Engaging transcendent awareness correlated with the development of psycho-cultural levels of meaning and methods of transformation, and ritual contact with the numinous revealed far more than a primitive religion; it enabled the development of more sophisticated brains that guided the modification and evolution of human consciousness. Oubré (1997, 119) asserts that: 'Alterations in the connections between different parts of the hominid brain furnished new and more sophisticated biological substrates for a human like consciousness.'

Anthropologist Michael Winkelman (1993, 2002, 2004) provides support to a theoretical perspective that connects biological, cultural, and spiritual domains. His cross-cultural considerations of ritualized shamanic practices have illustrated the importance of altered states of consciousness within early hunter-gatherer societies, which included ritualized practices such as drumming, dance and chanting. Shamanic rituals evoked and mediated physiological arousal through symbolic representations and action, and facilitated the engagement of sensory perception that helped to forge neuro-cognitive structures in the brain (Winkelman, 2002, 2004). Shamanistic rituals are believed to stimulate therapeutic states of consciousness through community bonding, enhanced psycho-physiological integration, coordination, and coherence across many areas of the brain. For example, the altered states of consciousness activated in the paleomammalian and limbic structures of the brain result in an integrative mode of consciousness that is enhanced by the calming effects of parasympathetic activity in the autonomic nervous system, which enables synchronous slow-wave discharges across the nerve pathways to connect the hierarchical structures in the brain (neuraxis) (Winkelman, 2002, 2004). Conversely, ecstatic states of high arousal are induced by increased activity in the sympathetic pathways of the autonomic nervous system (Taylor, 2005). Together, these biogenetic structures and operations in the autonomic nervous system appear responsive to, and can be stimulated by sacred and altered states (d'Aquili and Newberg, 1999; Lahood, 2007), moreover they reveal the sophisticated level of engagement and depth of spiritual realization in our prehistoric ancestors (Walsh, 2001).

Brain researcher, Rhawn Joseph (2001) suggests that the limbic system (amygdala and hippocampus) and the inferior temporal lobe structures are implicated in the brain's capacity to have spiritual experiences, to love and experience intense emotions such as fear and awe. The function of the brain in relation to spiritual experience has resulted in the development of a specialized field of neurotheology, which seeks to understand the impact of mystical experiences on the brain-mind to further the scientific study of human beings in relation to spiritual phenomena (Newberg, 2001). Professor of religion and personality, James Ashbrook (1997) has discussed how the mind has played a crucial role in humanizing the brain through the mediation of sensory input, experience, and symbolic construction; whereby the dynamic qualities of the mind constitute a 'differentiating-integrating process of meaning-discernment and meaning making'. The neural substrates involved in human beings ability to construct meaning have evolved and developed through narrative structuring (language) and cultural myths, which are connected to emotional shaping and the development of higher cognitive functions (Teske, 2006). From an evolutionary perspective the development of cultural myths have been highly influential within primitive cultures (Campbell, 1991a).

MYTHS, NUMINOUS, AND THE ARCHETYPAL DIMENSION OF TRANSPERSONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Otto (1959) has pointed out how mythical lineages provided a way of objectifying the mysterious and irrational nature of the numinous. The function of myth in spiritual experiences is put into context by mythologist Joseph Campbell (1991b, 4) who illustrates the connection between myths and the numinous in the following passage: 'The first function of a mythology is to reconcile waking consciousness to the *mysterium tremundum et fascinans* of this universe, as it is.' Indeed encounters with the numinous bring the sacred alive; it becomes a living myth. However, modern societies have few guiding myths that reconcile waking consciousness to the numinous and Campbell (1972/1992, 74) refers to the modern separation between matter and spirit as a 'mythic dissociation'. This view is supported by Edinger's (1984, 17) assertion that Western materialistic societies have been heading towards a state of 'mythlessness', suggesting that a 'new myth' connected to the purpose of life, 'is the creation of consciousness'. It is here that myths connect to archetypal potential as explained by Jung (1998: 95) 'archetypes create myths, religions, and philosophical ideas that influence and set their stamp on whole nations and epochs'.

A translation of the Greek word for archetype – *archétupon* – means 'original pattern' (Wyld, 1961). Saunders and Skar (2001) discuss Jung's concept of the archetypes and how they have manifested in conjunction with the evolution of the human brain and consciousness. From an evolutionary perspective the archetypes can be conceived of as being 'neuro-psychic' in nature (Stevens and Price, 2000), which identifies how inherited biological patterns of instinctive behaviours – or propensities – are independent of cultural traditions; yet they can be found as symbolic representations in cultural myths and fairy tales across the world, which reflect typical situations that are encountered in life (Stevens and Price, 2000). Archetypes, when viewed through the lens of complexity and self-organizing processes, have been identified as being an emergent property of the brain/mind (Saunders and Skar, 2001) and they have also been associated with socio-cultural developments (Greenwood, 1990; Pietikainen, 1998). Jung identified how the archetypes manifest in

consciousness through archetypal images (Sharp, 1991) and indicated that the archetypes are empowered by virtue of the numinous 'affect' that accompanies them (Jung, 1964). In essence, an archetype can be viewed as a compelling tendency toward a specific experience (Mindell, 1990), which has a numinous dimension.

Archetypes were described by Jung as forms without content that held the possibility for certain types of perception or action (Mindell, 1987); however, archetypes are not static forms – rather they change over time through life's deep interactions (Mindell, 2001, 153). Progoff (1987, 83) suggests that the archetypes also bring an experience of the numinous which carries 'a sense of transcendent validity'. Encountering the numinous can confront human consciousness with feelings of awe, terror, and fascination and these transcendent experiences can lead to a new attitude and relationship to life (Collins, 2008). This highlights the potential for engaging in processes of psycho-spiritual change, which Jung (1940, 89) referred to as the 'archetypes of transformation', or typical situations that symbolize deep patterns of change. Jung (1954/2002) emphasized that archetypal situations only manifest when they are specifically called for. In the context of a growing global crisis the evidence of 'unsustainable growth' is certain to confront the 'uncritical conformity' of modern human beings with the limitations of one-dimensional consumerism.

Jung (1964. 94) was troubled by modern man and woman's one-sidedness, which favours associations to everything rational and tends to dissociate from myth and mystery; he suggests that we have stripped all things of their mystery and numinosity, 'nothing is holy any longer'. Jung (1964) believed that modern attitudes have widened the gap between conscious life and a productive relationship to the unconscious and he stated – rather provocatively – that if modern people had a mystical experience they would be sure to misunderstand its true character and are likely to avoid or repress its numinosity; even going as far as to suggest that modern people run the risk of pathologizing their experiences or developing symptoms as a result of one-sided attitudes. Indeed, modern society is organized in such a way as to avoid encountering the numinous; albeit, Jung understood only too well the psychological and spiritual implications of encountering the numinous, by taking such experiences seriously (Von Franz, 1993).

The following quote by Jung (1954/2002. 128) is a sobering reminder of the futility of ignoring the inevitability of psycho-spiritual growth and conscious development: 'The only difference is that we become its victims and are dragged along by fate towards that inescapable goal which we might have reached walking upright, if only we had taken the trouble and been patient enough to understand in time the meaning of the numina that cross our path.' The modern trend of one-dimensional consumerism and materialism that Marcuse (1991) observed does not possess a well-developed awareness of how encounters with the numinous can be pivotal for experiences of growth in consciousness as identified by Jung (1954/2002). The parameters for transformation in modern societies have to include a resacralization of consciousness at a socio-political level, which identifies a greater need to engage with the numinous dimension (Samuels, 1993) and the cultivation of transcendent awareness.

TRANSCENDENT FUNCTIONING AND THE RE-EMERGENCE OF TRANSPERSONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Thomas Moore (2002) quotes an interview by Mircea Eliade with Carl Jung in 1952, who suggested that modern societies are desacralized, and the ever increasing crisis in the

modern world requires people to rediscover a deeper source of their own spiritual life. Allen and Sabini (1997, 215) ask the following question: 'Where are we to turn for healing when the rationality we so highly value has itself severed us from the healing grace of the numinous? Our de-sacralized institutions cannot offer restoration of wholeness because there is no culturally cohesive foundation of belief in – much less knowledge of – the reality of the psyche, or soul, and the healing potential of the sacred.'

This highlights the importance of taking psycho-spiritual transformations seriously. Cheyne (2001, 133) states that 'a numinous sense of otherness may constitute a primordial core consciousness'. It is the recognition of this numinous level of consciousness that provides human beings with the possibility and scope for engaging transcendent potential. Lancaster (2004, 270) believes that the transcendent is the 'elusive missing link in our understanding of consciousness', which he also hypothesizes is 'ever present at the core of consciousness'. Developing awareness of a transpersonal dimension of consciousness will enable people to contextualize transcendent encounters with the numinous that goes beyond materialistic and consumer values.

Rudolph Otto's (1959) research into the numinous was concerned with understanding the psycho-spiritual qualities of sacred encounters, which are more allied to phenomenal experience (Merkur, 1999). Importantly this emphasizes the primacy of human experience in relation to a transcendent dimension of consciousness (Collins, 2008) and identifies the important role that the numinous could play in understanding a re-emergent transpersonal dimension of consciousness in the modern world. Psychiatrist Stanislav Grof (2000), one of the early pioneers within the development of transpersonal psychology, refers to the transpersonal nature of numinous experiences and indicates that a direct encounter with the numinous level of reality is radically different from the experiences of the material world, as the following remark by Vaughan-Clark (1977, 78) illustrates: 'once an individual has awakened to the transpersonal dimension of reality, life itself is seen in a different perspective.' This identifies how living in the presence of the numinous requires different attitudes and methods from those that we participate in our ordinary lives (Moore, 1996). There is a need for greater awareness of how the numinous and transcendent awareness can lead to transformations in consciousness at both an individual and collective level.

The numinous confronts the 'known' world of a person with the mystery of the 'unknown' (Schlamm, 2007). The dialectical process between two poles of experience; between the 'known' and the 'unknown'; the 'me' and the 'not me' is discussed by Miller (2004, 115), who outlines Jung's concept of the 'transcendent function' as a form of mediation, which enables human beings to connect with a larger consciousness of which we are all part, 'there is something numinous and unexplainable about the transcendent function that implicates powers greater than ourselves'. The transcendent function enables an individual to transcend previous attitudes, which can potentiate psychological growth. Schlamm (2007, 407) describes the role of the numinous in relation to the transcendent function, which 'requires a persistent confrontation between numinous contents of the unconscious – even stupefying experiences of the mysterium'.

Modern societies have dissociated from the guiding myths that formerly provided a healthy foundation for understanding encounters with the numinous. Encountering the numinous can have a healing effect (Corbett, 2006) as well as leading to transformative experiences (Main, 2006). However, Stein (2006, 47) points out that there are complexities

involved, which he refers to as the 'shadow of the numen'. Stein (2006) illustrates how there can be negative fallouts from encounters with the numinous, such as grandiosity/inflation, loss of ego boundaries, and being caught in a paranoid psychotic defence, which can all have a destructive effect on groups and individuals. The complexity of encountering the numinous also reveals how spontaneous spiritual emergence can result in a transformational crisis or spiritual emergency, which often highlight the socio-political attitudes and consensus evaluations of altered states of consciousness (Collins, 2008). The following quote by Tacey (2006. 219) is instructive to the theoretical position outlined above; 'as soon as anyone touches on the numinous, a kind of spiritual complex is triggered in the culture, which immediately sets up a resistance'.

Modern society's ever present dissociation from the numinous could be understood in the context of Mindell's (1991) observation, which describes how processes that are 'split off' in the collective can become 'city shadows'. The concept of the 'city shadow' adds another dimension to Stein's (2006) 'shadow of the numen'; as it identifies how the collective disavowal of the numinous results in a process of resistance as discussed by Tacey (2006). The 'city shadow' also explains why the disavowed numinous, which can trigger spiritual emergencies are often thought of as mental health problems; in short, numinous experiences threaten the established socio-political consensus – thereby reinforcing the collective denial of the numinous – which continues to perpetuate the mythic dissociation that is already so prevalent in the modern world (Campbell, 1972/1992). The 'mythic character' of life is essentially an expression of universal human validity (Jung, 1954/2002) and this identifies the need for a 'mythic association' to numinous experiences. Human beings need to re-evaluate spiritual emergencies and consider how these transformational experiences may be validating an authentic re-emergence of the sacred/transpersonal dimension. Numinous experiences have to be treated with respect and handled with wisdom; moreover, they should not be avoided. There is a reciprocal relationship between individuals who are experiencing spiritual emergencies and the collective response/awareness towards such events. Frey-Rohn (1991, 267) suggests that when people are working through complex processes: 'Whatever consciousness the individual struggles for and is able to transmit benefits the collective.'

SPIRITUAL EMERGENCIES AND SPIRITUAL AWARENESS

Spiritual emergencies confront and challenge the consensus expectations and norms within modern societies (Collins, 2008). Transpersonal psychiatrist Stanislav Grof has discussed how the people who undergo a transformational crises associated with spiritual emergencies can often end up being treated by the psychiatric services (Laszlo et al., 2003); which highlights the political imperative for determining what constitutes 'legitimate' states of consciousness (Collins and Wells, 2006). I propose that the experience of spiritual emergency can be considered predictable in view of the current global crises, which may even result in an escalation of spiritual emergencies as societies are confronted by the numinous power of nature (Schoen, 1998). It is important that modern societies recognize the transformational potential of encounters with the numinous – and spiritual emergencies – even though they might temporarily disturb the prevailing consensus reality.

Mindell (1989, 137) describes the community dimension of the numinous that is engaged through sacred rituals, which are viewed as attempts to get to a numinous core. Mindell

(1989, 137) believes rituals are programmes that can provide a sense of security and hope as well as prompting human beings to be reminded of the divine background of our world, but he cautions that 'they also tend to reduce our interest in finding the numinous centre of life right here and now, in the everyday problems we feel, hear about and suffer from.' Mindell (1989) has stated that one way to reach our spiritual, practical, and planetary goals is to process any unresolved tensions – and engage with the altered states that arise – in order to facilitate solutions to the global problems that confront humanity. Mindell (1989) has identified the need for a global awareness in order to address disavowed experiences, which could be revealing processes that are trying to emerge in the collective (Mindell, 1992). The concept of worldwork, which has been developed by Mindell (1995) and his colleagues, aims to engage a deeper level of awareness towards issues of conflict and diversity within societies, and these processes are facilitated through a skilful understanding of cultural and psychological dynamics as well as a spiritual attitude of deep democracy (Mindell, 2002). The approach of deep democracy creates the potential for people to dialogue and interact between diverse viewpoints including consensus and non-consensus experiences (Mindell, 2000). Jung (1994. 236) believed that 'true democracy' is a highly psychological process, stating that it is able to tolerate conflict and 'takes account of human nature as it is'.

Mindell's (2002) concept of deep democracy enables a wide variety of consensus and non-consensus experiences to be expressed and addressed. The principle of deep democracy creates space for an interaction between the prevailing consensus reality in societies and the non-consensus experiences that are prevalent within any socio-political context. It is the interface between diverse viewpoints that could support the development of a collective transcendent function towards the experience of spiritual emergency. Deep democracy could provide the impetus for cultivating spiritual awareness and the realization that encounters with the numinous reflect an evolutionary spiritual heritage, which could provide a counterbalance to one-sided materialistic cultures. It must be remembered that our human ancestors used rituals to mediate transcendent experiences; such as encounters with the numinous. However, modern human beings need to develop collective and cohesive responses for developing greater transcendent awareness in order to go beyond a one-dimensional consumer consciousness. Deep democracy forums (Mindell, 2002) are one method that could be used to engage 'transcendent perception' (Elkins, 1998, 94) and encourage the development of what I refer to as 'transcendent action in the service of collective transformation'. This entails exploring the deeper meaning within processes such as spiritual emergencies, and finding the coherence between psychological, social, political, and spiritual dimensions of experience.

The archetypal dimension has been discussed by Slattery (2005), who identifies the need for renewal, suggesting that a 'mythical revision' could include re-imagining the relationships between body, earth, and spirit. Perhaps human beings are on the threshold of experiencing a re-emergent transpersonal dimension of consciousness; in addition the modern phenomenon of spiritual emergencies could be revealing the importance of our sacred evolutionary heritage. These numinous encounters provide a challenge to the dissociated materialism that is so prevalent within modern one-dimensional societies. Spiritual emergencies have the power to shift human consciousness out of its dominant materialistic mode of functioning, but this will necessitate a complete re-visioning of the socio-political struc-

tures that are determining the values underpinning modern consensus reality. The re-emergence of a transpersonal dimension of consciousness situates human beings in a more holistic relationship to conscious engagement with others, nature, and the planet as a whole. Using the language of complexity and emergence; spiritual emergency could be the tipping point or bifurcation towards greater transformation within collective consciousness, towards a more sustainable future.

CONCLUSION

Modern societies have evolved consumer-based and materialistic lifestyles that have been described as one-dimensional. This article has explored the evolutionary role of the numinous in the biological and cultural development of human beings. The modern phenomenon of spiritual emergency is recognized as possessing a numinous quality, which has archetypal and mythical significance for human psycho-spiritual transformation. There is a need to engage the transcendent function at a collective level between consensus and non-consensus experiences. Spiritual emergency, far from having no meaning for the wider collective, can be considered differently when viewed from the perspective of evolutionary developments.

If spiritual emergency is only evaluated in terms of individual experience, this can distort the potential meaning that these experiences bring in terms of psycho-social change. Spiritual emergency could provide a greater impetus for spiritual awareness/transformation within consumer based societies in order to counteract the current destructive trend of unsustainable growth. The emerging global crisis will undoubtedly continue to disturb modern people's one-dimensional consciousness. This article has discussed how 'uncritical conformity' and 'unsustainable growth' could eventually prompt a search for deeper levels of meaning. Perhaps, the wisdom in the symptom that is trying to emerge in consciousness connects to the meaning that can be found in spiritual emergencies.

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