

# Complex Multiplicity and the Multiplicity Complex: A Relational Reflection in Honor of Ann Belford Ulanov<sup>1</sup>

LISA M. CATALDO

“There can be no religious or psychological experience of consequence without recognition of otherness.”

—Ann Belford Ulanov<sup>2</sup>

## A GRAND PARTY

Imagine being invited to a huge party, a gathering of theologians, philosophers, artists, mystics past and present, and just about everyone who's anyone in the world of depth psychology.<sup>3</sup> There is Freud conversing with Tillich, here is Jung in an exchange with Simone Weil and Mondrian, over there Theresa of Avila and Winnicott, chatting with W.E.B. DuBois and Augustine. Now imagine that this whole party is for *you*, that every one of these people wants to interact with you, to know you, to dance with you. It's exciting. It's a whirlwind. Truth be told, it is sometimes a bit scary, and often quite serious, but mostly thrilling. At the end of the party you will be asked, “how have you changed, and how will you now change the world?” Now you have a picture of what it's like to study with Ann Ulanov.

Ann's students in Religion and Psychiatry attended this party by reading what seemed like nearly every foundational text in the canon of psychoanalysis, a fact that has gained the UTS program a reputation as among the most rigorous in the field. But mere intellectual mastery was never a sufficient criterion for learning in Ann's courses. She communicated not only with words, but most convincingly with her own personhood, that all the theoretical knowledge in the world means nothing if it doesn't change you, if it doesn't visibly and powerfully affect your living and your working, if it has no impact on your relating to yourself, others, the

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2 Ann B. Ulanov, *Receiving Woman* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 91.

3 The term “depth psychology” refers to psychologies that focus on the unconscious and unconscious process. It has fallen somewhat out of favor in contemporary psychoanalytic circles, but it does have the ability to hold together in one general category all the different types of psychoanalytic thinking that focus on the unconscious dimension of experience. I use the term here for that reason, and because it is the term that Ann has always used to describe her approach to psychology and religion.

world, and to what is beyond all of those things. In the end, with Ann it is never about simply knowing (although you will come to know a great deal), but about feeling, and doing, and most importantly, *being*. It is about being psychologically and spiritually engaged, being receptive and creative, being oneself, being *alive*.

And while Ann has always situated herself clinically in a Jungian context, her approach to the conversation between depth psychology and religion has had a wide embrace that welcomes vastly different perspectives that have in common the urge toward expansion and growth. Like all of Ann's students I was deeply immersed in Jung's work during my time at Union, and also like many of her students, I did not pursue a Jungian clinical path. My own orientation is grounded in relational psychoanalysis, a school of thought that descends from Freud, Harry Stack Sullivan, and object relationalists like Fairbairn, Winnicott, and Klein.<sup>4</sup> I will discuss some of specifics of the relational approach below, but it has always been clear to me that Ann's perspective on depth psychology and religion has at its core a deep sense of relationality that is both consistent with, and helpfully critical of, my own relational psychoanalytic approach. Maybe this is because Ann's rich and diverse perspective is so fully steeped in a living practice of relating—to her students, to herself, and to that which has clearly addressed and called her to the vocation of teaching and healing.

### WHAT'S NEW?

During my doctoral studies, I asked Ann if I could do an independent reading of relational psychoanalytic theory as part of my course work. "That's a great idea," she said, "Maybe you can help me understand what's new about it. I can't seem to find anything." I admit that as a budding relational analyst, I was a bit taken aback at the time, but I came to see wisdom and truth in her words. While I thought that relational theory offered something decidedly new and fresh with its postmodern emphasis on intersubjectivity, multiplicity, and the relational foundations of personhood, it didn't sound new to Ann, because her take on psychoanalysis in connection with theology has always embraced those ideas, even if in slightly different language.

I want to say a few words here about relational psychoanalysis to provide a context in which to consider my claim that Ann's work provides both support and critique of this contemporary theory. What does it mean to be "relational" in the sense that relational psychoanalysts refer to? It certainly means to put the relationship between the therapist and the patient front and center in the understanding of clinical work. Therapy is not about an "anonymous" or "neutral" therapist analyzing a patient from a position of superior knowledge or insight, but is a mutual, "two-person" interaction that includes attention to the subjectivity of the analyst

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<sup>4</sup> For an excellent summary of the "relational turn" in psychoanalysis, see Stephen A. Mitchell and Lewis Aron, "Preface," *Relational Psychoanalysis: The Emergence of a Tradition*, ed. Stephen A. Mitchell and Lewis Aron (New York: Routledge, 1999), ix–xx.

as an integral part of the therapeutic process.<sup>5</sup> The analyst and analysand are in an ongoing process of evoking each other, creating each other, and being created by the mutual exchange between them. On a developmental level, the relational approach also gives central place to the primary relationality that grounds our formation as persons. Relational psychoanalysis rejects Freud's notion of persons as closed systems motivated primarily by inherent drives or instincts. Rather, it proposes that our subjectivity is always already a subjectivity-in-relation. We are fully dependent on others to become a subject who can say "I." Without you, and all the significant "yous" in my life, there is no "I" to speak of at all. This intersubjective process of mutual creation plays out in all our interactions, often outside of our conscious awareness.

Relational theory also recognizes the inherent multiplicity in the formation of what we call self. In basic terms, our early significant others and our emotional experiences with them get internalized in a less than fully cohesive way. These internalized experiences, in interaction with our genetic makeup and environmental realities help to form parts of that which I experience as "me." Each person then is not one self but many, a kind of subjective network that in health allows us to have an experience of "me" that feels real. In health, there is an ability to relate internally to the others in myself. To create connections among the multiple selves that make up the "I" entails a willingness to engage in conversation, sometimes across what feels like a vast divide. It is experientially an encounter with the other, in which we are invited to be vulnerable and open to transformation. In the best of circumstances, this vulnerability and openness inheres in our engagement with all others—people, systems, ideas—outside ourselves as well as within.

Theologically and pastorally, relational psychoanalytic theory plays well with postmodern theologies that question hegemonic views of persons or monolithic views of God. Relational psychoanalysis, like much of contemporary theology, considers questions of power and marginalization. It emphasizes interdependence and vulnerability, and the tentative nature of that which we call "self."<sup>6</sup> Relational theory encourages clinicians, ministers, and pastoral and practical theologians to consider the diversity and dynamic relational nature of the religious experience of those whom we serve. Is this so different from what Ann has been doing all along? Not really. And yes, in a good way. Drawing significantly on Jung, but deeply influenced also by Winnicott and object relations, as well as Freud and the exis-

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5 Lewis Aron, "One Person and Two Person Psychologies and the Method of Psychoanalysis," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 7 (1990): 475–485.

6 Perhaps the most significant contribution to the fields of psychology of religion and pastoral theology around the theme of multiplicity has been made by Pamela Cooper-White. See Pamela Cooper-White, *Many Voices: Pastoral Psychotherapy in Relational and Theological Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006); and *Braided Selves: Collected Essays on Multiplicity, God, and Persons* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011). See also my own work on multiplicity and faith: Lisa M. Cataldo, "Multiple Selves, Multiple Gods? Functional Polytheism and the Postmodern Religious Patient," *Pastoral Psychology* 51, no. 1 (2008): 43–58; and "I know that My Redeemer Lives: Relational Perspectives on Trauma and Faith," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 6 (2013): 791–804.

tentialists, Ann's approach to psychology and religion has always presumed a norm of multiplicity, has always emphasized the meeting of subjects, and is in the end about inclusivity and expansion of the person in relationship to the other, whether that other is internal or external, human or divine. No wonder she didn't think I'd found the "new" thing.

## MULTIPLICITY AND INTERNALITY

In virtually every one of her many books, whether solo endeavors or products of collaboration with her late husband, Barry, Ann invites the reader to reflect upon and enter into relationship, first of all with the complexity of internal reality. From her Jungian perspective, Ann sees the internal world as inherently multiple, comprised of a whole host of complexes and the deep archetypal realities they reveal. For Ann, the spiritual and psychological journey consists first in "collecting and recollecting" the many parts of ourselves, especially those that are scattered, rejected, or forgotten, because the denial of parts of ourselves is "a kind of refusal to be."<sup>7</sup> This internal world can present itself to us in prayer, as we "hear all the bits and pieces of ourselves crowding in on us, pleading for our attention."<sup>8</sup> She challenges us to engage the parts of self expressed in our envy,<sup>9</sup> our internal experiences of masculinity and femininity,<sup>10</sup> our aliveness and deadness,<sup>11</sup> and all of our fantasies, whether grandiose, perverse, or falsely humble.<sup>12</sup> And always, she insists on engaging the relationship with that which transcends and includes all of our disparate parts: relationship to the sacred Other. It is this relationship to the transcendent Other who addresses us, who calls to us and awaits our answer, that is the moving force behind all the rest. For Ann, it is the journey inward and the discovery and acceptance of the multiplicity and otherness *within* that opens us to more genuine engagement with external others, and allows us to receive the address of the ultimate Other.

Some might say that Ann's focus is too internal, too concerned with the individual spiritual journey at the expense of concerns for justice and the community. Is it fair to say that Ann focused more inwardly than outwardly when it comes to relationship? Perhaps so. But her work also brings an important balance

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7 Ann Belford Ulanov and Barry Ulanov, *Primary Speech: A Psychology of Prayer* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 2.

8 Ulanov and Ulanov, *Primary Speech*, 2.

9 Ann Belford Ulanov and Barry Ulanov, *Cinderella and Her Sisters: The Envied and the Envyng* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983).

10 Ann Belford Ulanov and Barry Ulanov, *Transforming Sexuality: The Archetypal World of Anima and Animus* (Boston: Shambhala, 1994). Ann Belford Ulanov, *Receiving Woman: Studies in the Psychology and Theology of the Feminine* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1981).

11 Ann Belford Ulanov, *The Unshuttered Heart: Opening to Aliveness/Deadness in the Self* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2007).

12 Ulanov and Ulanov, *Primary Speech*.

to our overly extroverted efforts to change the world (and ourselves) from the outside in. Ann, as any good introvert does, works instead from the inside, out. She encourages us first to see to the log in our own eye, to be the change we want to see in the world. At Union, Ann often made the point that working for justice in the community and the world can lead to burnout, disillusionment, and even contempt unless we are willing to deal with our own “internal disorder.” The external approach alone cannot solve our problems because,

We fail to see how fundamental to social disorder is the disorder within each of us. We conceive the individual psyche—or rather misconceive it—as somehow existing in a vacuum, isolated from all other psyches, instead of gathered with others in an interdependent life, with a common set of symbols, a community of joys and sorrows, of clarities and puzzlements, of triumphs and defeats.<sup>13</sup>

So for Ann the journey inward, and the embracing of our multiple parts, leads to realization of the interconnectedness of all of life, and creates the ground where our individual suffering meets the suffering of others and the world.

Ann’s reference to a “common set of symbols” gestures toward her Jungian commitment to the power of the Collective Unconscious, which undergirds her vision of the fundamental interconnectedness of all humanity. Beyond the shared symbols of our faith tradition, grasping, or being grasped by, the collective symbols of the shared human story helps us to see ourselves reflected in the suffering of the other. To recognize this connectedness means that the “social disorder” cannot be separated from our individual neuroses, our unique conflicts, struggles, and failings, because to the extent I refuse to change myself, I am refusing to change the world. From this point of view, we are all personally and collectively responsible for one another and therefore for the suffering and injustice in the world.

### CONSIDERING THE OBJECTIVE

Ann’s invocation of the Collective Unconscious and the archetypal represents an element in her work that for some might raise the specter of universalism and essentialism, those awkward ghosts of modernity. Certainly Jung’s notion of the “objective psyche,” often cited by Ann, can make any postmodern relational analyst nervous. How can we talk of real subjectivity and intersubjectivity if we are imagining some kind of universal human nature or universal subject, or an “objective” psyche that somehow exists outside of the person, and that can be known? I confess I argued with Ann—literally for years—about whether we should use the term “objective” to refer to *anything* psychological (Ann, if you are reading this, I hope you are laughing). But once again, I have come to understand her perspective as uniquely helpful.

Turning back for a moment to the concept of multiplicity, I note that Ann's work holds that the more we engage our multiplicity, the more we encounter a solid, real something that is our unique self, in relation to a real (if not so solid) Other that transcends us. For Ann, there is always, really, a "there, there." The existence of a "there" means dealing with the tricky concepts of subjectivity and objectivity. For Ann, the way to the latter is through the former; looking inside, starting with subjective experience, Ann finds the simultaneous presence of radical uniqueness and a shared human story. The more we welcome what we find uniquely in ourselves, the more we find that we share with other humans. The more we engage sincerely with the shared symbols, the more clearly our unique self emerges and can be expressed. She writes, "The subjective experience of the psyche leads one quickly to see that everyone has the same *kinds* of experience. [It is] the details that set off the uniqueness of each individual existence, but the outlines are unmistakably similar from subjectivity to subjectivity."<sup>14</sup>

Those unmistakable outlines, which form the "objective" layer of the archetypal, frame experiences that make us recognizably human, and so allow us to approach one another: birth and death, love, loss, fear, joy, rage, longing. I read them as the outlines of what makes a desiring subject: a longing to see, to know, and to connect with the world, with other people and nature, with all of that which, although it is intimately connected to me, is not me. It is the desire to respond to a call or invitation from the Other which exceeds the individual and which is both unknowable and intimately known.

It is this idea of the Other that frames the concept of objectivity in Ann's work. What is objective is not fixed content, and certainly not fixed meaning. What is objective is that which exists beyond or outside of my limited ego. It is the thing, or the one, who is experienced as addressing me from outside myself. In a very relational way, Ann's idea of the objective is ultimately an ethical demand for the recognition of otherness—that which is not controlled by my wish or desire. How I experience the chair may be different from how you experience the chair, but even my insistence that it does not "exist" in any objective way does not prevent my shin from hurting when I walk into it. More even than chairs, other human beings (and animals, and nature, and God), similarly deserve to be recognized as existing outside of my construction of them. Ann emphasizes that "essential to . . . experience is the perception of the other, not as an extension of myself, not as I would like that other to be, not as I may try to force the other to become, but as that other really is."<sup>15</sup>

These words resonate deeply with those of intersubjective analyst Jessica Benjamin, a central figure in the relational approach, who frames the ideal of psychological maturity as the ability to recognize the "irreducible autonomy" of

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14 Ann Belford Ulanov and Barry Ulanov (*Religion and the Unconscious*. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1975), 76.

15 Ulanov, *Receiving Woman*, 91.

the other.<sup>16</sup> This irreducible autonomy is evidence of the objective existence of the other; she is one I cannot control; although my projections shape my perceptions of her, they do not “create” her except for myself, and so I must come to accept her as a separate subject. It is not that I can *be* objective about the other, but that I must acknowledge the objective quality of other subjects. In the end, I can interpret you, but I cannot will you away.<sup>17</sup>

The subjective side of relating is about bringing to this encounter with the other, whether an internal or external other, our individual agency, will, and desire. On the subjective side is our personal creativity, our unique passion, always shaped by the mutually influencing field of subject-object relations. Without the subjective, we are stuck in a non-creative and deadened submission to what is other. But without the appreciation of what is objective—that which is not controlled by us—we are thrown back only on our subjective self. We are stuck in our illusions of omnipotence, imagining that we control the world, making of others what we will. This is the stuff of narcissism, fanaticism, racism, sexism, and all the other destructive results of an individual or communal identity that fails to register the other as real.

In my understanding, what Ann means by her insistence on the dialogue between the “objective psyche” and individual subjectivity connects ultimately to her commitment to *being*. In the spirit of her teacher, Paul Tillich, as well as Winnicott, Ann carries throughout her work a concern with Being, and what it means to “be” as well as to face the anxiety of “not being” in Tillich’s sense.<sup>18</sup> She is concerned with what it means to be alive, to feel alive, and to welcome that which IS, including the being of self and other. For Ann, God, the ultimate Other, is and manifests the fullness of objective reality. God, as Other, approaches, addresses, confronts, woos, and we are invited to respond. “We do not get to God from our side,” Ann is fond of saying. But this ultimate Other, not bound or limited by our individual subjectivity, still comes to us through that subjectivity, through our unique bodies, feelings, experiences, and neuroses. Being, for Ann, is a meeting at the border, between inside and outside, subjective and objective, conscious and unconscious, self and other.

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16 Jessica Benjamin, “An Outline of Intersubjectivity: The Development of Recognition,” *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 7S (1990): 33–46. See also Jessica Benjamin, *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

17 Ann also acknowledges the ethical implications our own “objective” existence for other people: “The way we conduct our daily business either builds up other people or tears them down, because we are, in our actions or words, or feelings, objects for each other to take in.” Ulanov, *Picturing God*, P. 150.

18 Paul Tillich. *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952/2000).

## BACK TO MULTIPLICITY

I sometimes think that psychoanalysis has developed a multiplicity complex. When I say this, I am thinking of two issues, one broad and one narrow. In the narrow sense, relational psychoanalysis has engaged in ongoing debate about whether one should “believe in” multiplicity as a model of human selfhood. Those who embrace multiplicity often see the notion of a unified or integrated self as an illusion. Those who are proponents of the integrated self see multiplicity as an unhelpful metaphor at best and fragmentation at worst.<sup>19</sup> In the broad sense, psychoanalysis since Freud has become increasingly denominationalized, dividing itself into smaller and smaller groups and schools, insistent on differentiating themselves from each other, often based on what seem like very minor differences. Just as in the history of Christianity, the formation of new movements in psychoanalysis has brought about reform and innovation in much-needed ways. But also like the Church, psychoanalytic schools can fall into unhealthy sectarianism that limits people’s access to knowledge and growth (this pertains to both analysts and patients).

To my mind, Ann’s whole approach to the psychology of religion has all along been a counter-cultural movement positioned in a complex multiplicity that could answer the multiplicity complex that can dominate in both the psychological and religious worlds. This complex multiplicity is firmly planted in the uncomfortable and spiritually rich soil of paradox, and to understand Ann’s work, one has to be willing to stand there in the fecund discomfort. Ann dares to be a Jungian who teaches (and uses, and loves) the theories of multiple schools of thought that at first glance might seem radically incompatible. She presents us with a multiply-formed self, full of internal others, that is yet deeply unified at the core, even if it is a core we can never fully articulate. Our ethical obligation to others in the world is only fulfillable through an engagement with the others within. The insistence on a “there, there” even if we cannot articulate it, draws our multiple identities back to an experience of being grounded, standing on the same ground. We are fully and completely dependent on others for being, fundamentally interconnected in shared human experience, and yet our willingness to stand apart, to own our own suffering, and to release the other from our projections makes true relating possible. The objective exists in and through our subjectivity. What is Other is fully external to me, and yet intimately interwoven in my very being. From this place of paradox the clinician, the minister, and the believer can approach life and work in a spirit of self-knowledge that leads to compassion and care.

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19 I clearly embrace the notion of multiplicity, although I do not see the unified self as an illusion. For a discussion of this debate, as well as my interpretation of it in terms of religious experience, see Lisa M. Cataldo, “Multiple Selves, Multiple Gods?”

## A SPACE FOR TRANSFORMATION

It is this between place, this both-and and neither-nor place, this Winnicottian transitional space, where transformation can happen. For Ann, good conversations always take place in the borderlands; these conversations challenge every kind of one-sided thinking, because they insist on holding the “both” and the “all” even when it is really uncomfortable to do so. Ann’s work exemplifies a kind of ecumenism that defies easy categories and exclusionary rhetoric, because she is always looking for (and asking her patients, her students, and her readers to look for) what is left out. An engagement with Ann’s work, as well as with Ann herself, is an invitation to become aware of, to welcome, and to relate to what is left out. We are invited to seek and find the left-out parts of ourselves (the denied, the repudiated, the dissociated), the left-out parts in our communal life (who is marginalized and why? What denials in ourselves lead to the denial or rejection of others?), and left-out parts of what transcends us (can we welcome the images of God that do not conform to what we think God should be?). These borderland conversations reach across boundaries and create space for the unexpected, the surprising and the new, which can arise in the relational space between self and other.

As a teacher, a writer, a clinician, and just as herself, Ann radiates the validity of what she says, because she lives it. She stands in the spaces in a way that feels creative and alive and full of possibility, and she shares that possibility with all of us who have been privileged to work with her. For me, Ann’s most important legacy is the conviction that if your study of psychology and religion does not disrupt you, if it does not dismantle your comfortable assumptions, if it does not shake the foundations, as Tillich put it, then you are simply not getting it. This invitation to being shaken, disrupted, and reconfigured as a human being is to my mind where Ann Ulanov’s work really makes a difference, and it is what I try to pass on to my own students. This kind of learning has powerful consequences not only in terms of self-knowledge, but in terms of the way we respond to the suffering of those we meet in our clinics, churches, communities, and world. In it is a hopefulness, an openness, and an invitation to become bigger, more spacious, more caring persons. It is an invitation I hope to respond to for the rest of my life.