

# The teacher: the Other as the Self. On decentered subjectivity and the teacher-student relation

**Joakim Larsson**

*Karlstad University, Sweden*

**Bo Dahlin**

*Waldorf Teacher Education College, Sweden*

**ABSTRACT.** In the context of poststructuralist and postmodern philosophy, the concept of a decentered subject has always retained a powerful, deconstructive potential – tracing its conceptual history all the way back to Nietzsche and beyond. But are we not yet to realize its constructive potential, from an educational-philosophical point of view? In this paper, we attempt to reassess the potential of a decentered subject using a variety of resources – leaning for instance on notions from a Romantic philosophical tradition, as expressed by Schelling; on Jungian depth psychology; and on Rudolf Steiner’s writings on the central and peripheral self. In conclusion, we argue that a teacher may benefit from differentiating his/her understanding of decenteredness as well as from the ability to act out of a variety of psychic centers – of which the conscious ego is an important example, although not exclusively so. Also, we conclude that such attempts are likely to find success to the extent that they are grounded in the teacher’s ability to align him/herself to centers that are of a more spiritual nature; for instance as described by Jung’s writings on the nature of the Self archetype.

*Keywords:* decentered subjectivity, teacher-student relation, Romanticism, Jung, Steiner



But what a dimension that adds to the business of living, Johor, this idea of mine – *this idea of yours?* – that as I go about my work and my business, looking after this or that, meeting a hundred people in a day, then of these people it is possible I am meeting, not strangers, not the unknown, but *myself*.  
(Doris Lessing, *The making of the representative for Planet 8*)



## Introduction

The theme of decentered subjectivity counts as a significant, and quite common, aspect of philosophical genres such as deconstructionism, post-structuralism and post-humanism (Adams St. Pierre, 2004; Braidotti, 2011; Critchley & Dews, 1996; Semetsky, 2003). Quite common it also is for such genres to convey the theme of decentered subjectivity by dint of a *negative conceptual momentum*: either the subject – precisely by virtue of being decentered – finds itself thoroughly degraded in terms of significance compared to the Otherness that caused this decentering; or it must acquiesce to being ruled out of further discussion altogether. It is very rare for poststructuralists, for instance, to recognize a *positive conceptual momentum* in

the concept of decentered subjectivity – and even rarer for them to investigate the subject’s own experience of being decentered. Perhaps they owe this tendency to the man often dubbed as “godfather of postmodernity” – Friedrich Nietzsche – who ascertained that “[b]ody am I through and through, and nothing besides; and soul is just a word for something on the body” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 23). To the forces of this body Nietzsche most certainly proclaimed a glorious future; his *Zarathustra* remains a living testimony to the positive conceptual momentum inherent in his understanding of the body: not as mere organism, but a sage and a self of its own:

”I” you say and are proud of that word. But what is greater is that in which you do not want to believe – your body and its great reason. It does not say I, but does I. [...] Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a powerful commander, an unknown wise man – he is called self. He lives in your body, he is your body. (ibid.)

To the soul, on the other hand – as well as to spirit and the ego – Nietzsche ascribes little more than a petty minded bourgeois morality. The I, for Nietzsche, “as a thing in itself, is indefensible”, as Marshall aptly points out (Marshall, 2001, p. 82; see also Yacek, 2014). On this note of Nietzsche’s, we find a forceful resonance with 20th century poststructuralists such as Deleuze and Guattari: here, the subject, at best, also becomes a satellite “on the periphery, with no fixed identity, forever decentered, defined by the states through which it passes” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2008, p. 20). Perhaps, then, we should heed Nietzsche, Deleuze and Guattari and do something better with our time than ponder on subjectivity, once decentered. But what if we are missing something? What if there, in fact, may be a hidden educational potential in the concept of a decentered subject; a potential that, if explored, could help us steer between the Scylla of a subjectivity completely lost, and the Charybdis of rigid essentialization on the other? Perhaps such a potential can be explored if we affirm the Other as an active agent of decenteredness, while at the same time refraining from reducing the subject to a state of passivity, or worse: of non-existence?

We believe that such a positive potential can be found in some of the forerunners to the present poststructuralist perspectives, such as the early Romantics (Izenberg, 1992) and their (more or less marginalized) extensions into the 20th century. In present day philosophy of the subject, the early Romantic thinkers (Schelling, Schleiermacher, Novalis, Schlegel a. o.) seldom appear, in spite of the fact that they anticipated many of the arguments against grounding reason in subjectivity, which are voiced today (Bowie, 2003). Furthermore, “they also show why it is a mistake for philosophy to relegate subjectivity to being merely a function of something else, such as language, ideology, history, or the unconscious” (ibid., p. 8; italics in orig.). Perhaps it is Novalis who, in his cryptic yet immediate style, also makes us realize that the quest for a more substantial sense of subjectivity carries not only a philosophical – but also an educational – potential; in fact, education’s highest task is this very reaching out for a transcendental self; “to be at once the I of its I” (Novalis, 1997, p. 28).

The concerns of the German Romantic philosophers – and some of their solutions – have actually re-appeared in present post-modernist or -structuralist discourse; with the possible difference that the Romantics dwelled in the feeling that they had great things awaiting them in the future, whereas to many of the post-modernists it seems that everything important has in a way already happened (Safrański, 2009). For example, a deconstructivist theme anticipated by the Romantics is the disbanding of the demarcation line between philosophy on the one hand and literature and poetry on the other (Bowie, 2003). The dissolution of this border is itself a consequence of decentered subjectivity; reflecting the insight that a purely rational ego is a mere fragment of our being, maybe even an illusion. In any case it does not represent individuality as a whole: the latter includes also the pre-, sub- or unconscious realms of aesthetics, desire and will.

Our purpose in this paper is to explore the teacher/student relation in the framework of decentered subjectivity. We intend to sketch an alternative to the notions inherent in present educational policies, which tend to reduce teaching and learning to processes of transmitting and acquiring commodified packages of knowledge. Furthermore – and more important to our purpose – there is a tendency to depersonalize these processes in attempts to create efficient and evidence-based teaching methods on which the teacher’s subjectivity or personality presumably has no influence, neither on the acts of teaching, nor on the learning outcomes.

The particular question that drives our inquiry has to do with the teacher-student relation: what significance can the person of the teacher have for students' decentered subjectivities? The answer to this question depends of course on how decentered subjectivity as such is understood. We construct our view by a somewhat nomadic or "rhizomatic" reading of various sources (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). Having sketched a backdrop by the early German Romantics, we find substantial and/or structural similarities in Nietzsche, Carl G Jung and Rudolf Steiner. We also sense an affinity between our interpretations and the notion of subjective truth as promoted in existential education (Reindal, 2013). An element in common to the Romantics, Nietzsche, Jung and Steiner is the notion of subjectivity as basically bipolar; as a relation between an ego and a "Self", where the former is conscious and (more or less) rational; the latter unconscious, a-rational, and "higher" or "deeper" than the ego.

## Our nomadic approach

Considering the ingredients hinted at above, the reader already infers the eclectic nature of our endeavor. To be sure, the conceptual horizons of thinkers such as the Romantics, Nietzsche, Jung and Steiner are far from uniform. Aware of this, we would like to call our onto-epistemological approach one of *metaphysical pragmatism*. This may seem an odd couple, since pragmatism usually implies lack of interest in metaphysics (cf. Rorty, 1982). But to our mind, metaphysical currents are paramount when attempting to address the subject, especially in its state of decenteredness. However, our approach to such ideas is pragmatic. We do not intend to arrive at eternal and objective truths, but at such which help us live and act – as educators but also as human beings – in a felicitous, joyful and responsible way. We therefore allow ourselves to expand our scope of discussion to any field deemed necessary. This is what we call nomadic or rhizomatic reading, thinking, contemplating, and writing. We take concepts out of different fields of knowledge, each field ruled by its particular system of signification, and plant them into a new field of our own making – a new "plane of consistency" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). Indeed, we hope that this approach also makes us – at least to a humble extent – worthy of doing philosophy in the vein of Novalis: believing that "[h]e attains the maximum of a philosophy if he combines all philosophies into a single philosophy" (Novalis, 1997, p. 77).

Our approach is therefore somewhat similar to Rorty's (1991) account of *philosophical recontextualisation*; i.e., the possibility to juxtapose heterogeneous theoretical and philosophical sources for mutual cross-interpretation. There are no rigid rules for what contexts can be evoked in such an inquiry, as long as the result is a coherent understanding of the sources used, or the phenomenon inquired into. (An example from history is what the early medieval scholastics did with Aristotle, placing his philosophy in the context of the Holy Script and biblical exegesis.) However, we do not agree with Rorty's anti-essentialist stance. We believe ideas and concepts do have "essences", but essences are . Essences are virtual forces, which means that concepts have momentum. Concepts have an inherent power to drive our interpretations and constructions onwards in persistent attempts to create consistency and coherence.

## The Romantics: individuality and infinity

Towards the end of the 18th century the question of the nature of subjectivity became a rather prevalent theme in many fields of European culture (Bowie, 2003). The growing insights of natural science seem to have propelled this question to the foreground. On the one hand, the subject was the primal agent in uncovering the laws of nature, thereby establishing a rational or causal order and meaning in the world; on the other hand the subject itself seemed not quite able to understand its own nature and origin within the same scientific paradigm.

The early German Romantics, in their strong objections to an increasingly reductionist natural science, and in their emphasis on the central role of individuality, freedom, and creativity in human life, found themselves obliged to take the issue of subjectivity seriously. In order to establish a conception of individuality in which such qualities were paramount, a limited and rather petty notion of an ordinary, everyday ego was not enough. An idea, or a feeling, of a level of being that is greater, deeper, of more cosmic dimensions,

stirred in their minds. It seems that Fichte's conception of the I that posits itself and the world, megalomaniac as it may be, was seen as a bold but problematic attempt to give clear expression to a vague intuition that was hard to get rid of for the sensitive thinkers and poetic minds of the time.

In their rebellion against what they saw as a barren and merely instrumental conception of reason, especially in natural science, they also had to question the common notion of adulthood as based on a purely rational ego governing the forces of emotion, desire and will. Childhood, it seemed to them, held a neglected promise of an alternative, more creative subjectivity. A similarly appreciative view of childhood later resurfaced in some postmodern thought, becoming a paradigm for a positive take on (moderately) decentered subjectivity. The child is "in rapid and continual reorganization, a being in which the elements of self are in dialogue, both internally and with the external world" (Kennedy, 2002, p. 158).

Romantic philosophy has been described as primarily a "metaphysics of integration" (Abrams, 1971), or rather of *re*-integration, in which the development of human life (as well as the whole of creation) is seen according to the schema unity – differentiation/multiplicity/conflict – and back to unity, but on a higher level, in which individuality is retained. One might consider a condition of possibility of such a process to be that the differentiation into the multiplicity of individualities does not imply a complete loss of relation or contact between the particular individuality and its "ground" in the totality or the primordial cosmic unity. However, this inevitably leads to contradictions and paradoxes:

The Romantic contradiction is that the individuated self's dependency on, even fusion with, this [all-inclusive] totality [...] is the very condition of absolute free individuality; or to reverse the terms, the absolute ungrounded agency of the self is seen to derive from the dissolution of the self into a larger whole. (Izenberg, p. 8)

But the Romantics were not afraid of contradictions, they rather reveled in them. The truth they were after could not be grasped in the limited rationality of logical thinking. Since the Romantic thinkers themselves admitted the paradoxical nature of their thought, the interpretation of their philosophy cannot stop at such contradictions; it must rather start from them. And the basic Romantic contradiction is that individuality "is not only compatible with infinity, it is the very vehicle for realizing the union with infinity" (ibid., p. 15). Many of the Romantics (such as Schelling, Schleiermacher, Humboldt, and Novalis) were also clear that such a realization does not happen by itself; it presupposes a certain kind of inner work and self-development. There is always the risk that we remain "merely grown up" and "lost in the desert of rationality" as Novalis put it; that we fail to see the potential for union with the infinite inherent in the human soul, and to find the means to realize it (see for instance Novalis, 1997; Furness, 2000).

This short general account of the early German Romantic philosophers may create the impression that these thinkers were, if not megalomaniacs, at least suffering from severe forms of cosmic narcissism. However, many of them clearly saw the psychological dangers of their enterprise and emphasized the necessity of genuine self-knowledge and even self-denial. One example is Schelling, who said that "*freeing oneself from oneself* is the task of all *Bildung*" (quoted in Bowie, 1996, p. 125).

## Schelling: the I and its ground

Schelling can be taken as one of the first philosophers that began to question the model of metaphysics as a system of true representations of universal, objective being. He also objected to the Cartesian notion of the possibility of a subject completely transparent to itself (Schelling, 1994). Schelling viewed the Cartesian "I think, therefore I am" as a fallacy, because neither thinking nor being belong to me; they are "only of God or the totality".<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of the principal impossibility to establish a universal objective truth about existence, he held on to the idea that reason (*Vernunft*) and philosophy do have an important part to play in human life. It is in this context that the notion of the unconscious becomes central to Schelling's philosophy, especially his *Naturphilosophie* (Schelling & Peterson, 2004). "Nature is visible spirit, spirit is invisible nature" is a famous and pregnant saying of his, demonstrating the link and connection between

1. Bowie, Andrew, "Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2010 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/schelling/>> (Accessed 2016-06-22).

outer nature and inner, subjective consciousness. It also partly reflects his view of the relation between consciousness (subjective spirit) and the unconscious (nature). Schelling's notion of the unconscious is of course very different from the modern Freudian version, which tend to dominate the general understanding of the unconscious today. However, there are a few contemporary non-Freudian notions of the unconscious, including primarily those derived from Jung, from archetypal and transpersonal psychology, and from the philosophy of Deleuze. These perspectives may be seen as representing a "counter-movement in Western intellectual history which is at least as old as Renaissance Hermeticism and as contemporary as Tolkien" (McGrath, 2012, p. 22). Schelling viewed the borderline between the conscious and the unconscious as very thin, and as always immediately present. The unconscious is a realm that actually creates, surrounds and supports our conscious experience. It can be understood as a realm of *non-discursive experience* continuously going on in parallel to our conscious life (cf. Welsh, 2012, who presents a similar view, drawing upon Merleau-Ponty).

As Spinoza distinguished between *natura naturata* – nature as given and formed, as an object – and *natura naturans* – nature as creative activity and energy, so Schelling found a similar distinction in the human being as on the one hand able to act and be creative, on the other hand able to externalize and reflect on itself as an object (Schelling, 1994; see also Bowie, 2003, p. 104). As for natural science, it dealt only with nature as a set of given objects; it was the task of *Naturphilosophie* to understand the transcendent creative activity, of which nature as a scientific object was the result. From this perspective Schelling criticized Fichte's view of nature as merely instrumental, based on "the economic-teleological principle" (Schelling, quoted by Bowie, 2003, p. 103). Thus, Schelling was one of the first ecological thinkers in modern Western culture, and his ideas were later echoed by Heidegger, Horkheimer, Adorno and others.

The creative activity of *natura naturans* cannot be objectified and grasped by the senses and rational understanding; for this something deeper is needed, viz. reason and what in German idealism was called *intellectual intuition* (*intellektuelle Anschauung*). The debates around this concept started with Kant, for whom intellectual intuition meant knowledge without sense perception, which he considered impossible for a finite subjective consciousness to achieve (cf. McGrath, 2012, p. 96ff). For Fichte, who took up the problems left unsolved by Kant, it was the subject's transcendental experience of its own activity in constituting itself as a living spirit. For Schelling, who tried to distance himself from the solipsistic tendencies in Fichte while retaining his critical idealistic stance, intellectual intuition was a form of non-dual, absolute knowledge, in which subject and object cannot be distinguished from one another. Intellectual intuition is therefore not a conscious act, because consciousness presupposes the subject-object duality. It is rather "an absolute knowledge hidden in the subject's unconscious, that undifferentiated unity that consciousness has always already left behind but that *continues to make possible everything that the ego knows*" (ibid., our italics). Intellectual intuitions can never be defined, but they can be artistically or aesthetically expressed. True art is the objectification of intellectual intuition. It makes visible what cannot be conceptualized, because philosophical thinking takes place in a condition in which the identity of subject and object has been lost.

Art is obviously the expressive result of spontaneous human creativity and the forces that drive this creativity are unconscious from the ego's point of view. However, what is unconscious from *ego's* point of view may be conscious from another, i.e., what *we* experience as the unconscious ground of our being and actions is, from its own perspective, conscious. The original state of human consciousness, continuously recurring in the un-self-conscious state of the infant (cf. Dahlin, 2013), is for Schelling nothing less than a non-reflective grasp of the reality of God, the absolute, cosmic totality. Before we become self-conscious, we are conscious of God, but this is not a consciousness we *have*, it is one that we *are*. It is therefore unconscious from the point of view of the ego.

It may be interesting to note that Schelling's theory of consciousness finds a certain resonance in the present day development psychology of Jacques Lacan. For Lacan, when the ego achieves its conscious position in the symbolic order of language, this comes at the price of losing its identification with *life*. Similarly, for Schelling the attainment of the conscious I *think* is "an achievement of individuation at the expense of being, at the price of the fullness of the intuition, 'I am'" (McGrath, 2012, p. 98).



## C G Jung: the ego and the Self

Embarking on a study of Jung's writings one soon comes to realize the sheer diversity of his research: the *Collected Works* bids quite a challenge to anyone interested in systemizing his view of the Self; or of any of the other *archetypes* for that matter. Now, this fact is not only due to Jung's drawing on such a wide array of influences; discussing philosophers such as Nietzsche, Schiller, Goethe and the romantics<sup>2</sup>, medieval alchemy, mythology and Christian Gnosticism, oriental religions and much else besides. It is also due to the fact that the whole of Jung's analytical psychology is dynamic by its very nature. Different conceptions of subjectivity are discussed from different perspectives, related to different walks of life and different problematiques, depending very much on whether Jung is talking as a psychiatrist, as a psychologist, or as a kind of historian of religion.

Perhaps the case gets clearer if we, right from the start, realize that Jung identifies a common goal for the development of human subjectivity, what he calls the individuation process. Owing not a little to his spiritual forefathers in Romantic philosophy, Jung considered individuation to be a development of an all-round personality, harmonized with respect to its many constituents; able to stand its ground in the face of unconscious factors, as well as adapted to more worldly endeavors. It could even be said that in his writings on individuation, no less so than in his writings on other matters, Jung certainly makes vivid flights in the uncharted territories of abstruse symbolism - but nevertheless aims at always touching ground in a more pragmatical setting. This intent is highly obvious also when Jung discusses, as he frequently does in relation to the individuation process, symbols of centrality (for instance Jung, 1981e). Thus, when referring to Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus, Jung wants to argue that this ancient philosophers' symbol of a circle, generated as it is by the soul's circumambulation around a center, still holds a relevant symbolism for modern man, and he quotes the *Enneads*:

Self-knowledge reveals the fact that the soul's natural movement is not in a straight line, unless indeed it has undergone some deviation. On the contrary, it circles around something interior, around a center. Now the center is that from which proceeds the circle, that is, the soul... tending towards it, she will attach herself to it, as indeed all souls should do. The souls of the divinities ever direct themselves towards it, and that is the secret of their divinity; for divinity consists in being attached to the center... (Plotinus, from the *Enneads*, cited in Jung, 1981c, p. 219.)

Frequently in Jung's production, symbols of a circle, or of a child, or of animals, are regarded as guiding lights toward the state of psychic unity. Thus, they are symbols of the *Self*, an archetype in the human psychic constitution that – paradoxically enough – can be described as the center as well as the periphery (Jung, 1981a). It is defined first and foremost as the totality of the psyche (containing conscious as well as unconscious contents), but *also* referred to as a potential center in a future to come, slowly and gradually leading the conscious ego towards a better and brighter understanding of this very totality.

It might, however, be the case that this road to a brighter understanding comes with a dark detour or two. The path to unity of the self is not to be taken lightly; it necessitates the art of uniting opposites, of managing light as well as shadow; in effect, of learning how to create and deal with symbols that combine highly heterogeneous, if not directly opposed ingredients.<sup>3</sup> The same goes for symbols of divinity. Far from being Gods of light alone, divinities for Jung must also incorporate a principle of evil – otherwise they could not be symbols of totality, could not lead the path to true unity of Self. This is a fact that, besides from being an indication of the complexities inherent in individuation, also gives us a valuable hint as to the background of Jung's consistently maintaining that the major factors in our psyche must be regarded

2. Jung, at least to our knowledge, never made explicit use of Schelling's philosophy although he did recognize him (as he also did Nietzsche) as an early and important pioneer of the unconscious: "[t]here had been talk of the unconscious long before Freud. It was Leibniz who first introduced the idea into philosophy; Kant and Schelling expressed opinions about it..." (Jung, 2014, p. 102). Jung further adds that the "first medico-psychological theory of the unconscious has as little to do with these antecedents as it has with Nietzsche" (ibid.)

3. On this note, it is possible to sense a resonance between Jung and Schelling: the latter certainly also recognized that dark, irrational elements are inherent in the human psychic constitution seen as a whole. Thus, he asks himself and answers: "[w]hat, then, is the foundation [Basis] of the human spirit in the proper sense of the word foundation? Answer: the irrational." (Schelling, 1994, p. 233).

as *autonomous* in their own right. We can, for instance, never hope to fully integrate the Self into our own personal ego-consciousness – its material is much too numinous, and ours is too small a vessel (Jung, 1981c).

Now we can – and indeed we must if we wish to pursue the Jungian development of our own unity – engage in circumambulation around our soul's center; but we do well to ponder that this journey may be one without definite end. It might even be the case that the reckoning of what we learn from each revolution makes up a more important self-knowledge than does the final entry into the inner courtyard. In other words: there are dangers involved in taking the kingdom by storm, attempting as it were to incorporate contents into our personal psyche which, in effect, do belong to a more collective psychological domain. Jung in fact has a clinical term for such a pathological development: it is called *inflation*, and it is a risk we run every time we fail to realize that psychic phenomena have a reality of their own, quite apart from mankind's doings and non-doings. Failure in this regard may lead us to unwarrantedly empower the conscious ego with a sense of authority that it simply does not deserve; encouraging it, as it were, to rule a kingdom that is not its own. And while a more sound approach would be to *project* some of one's unconscious material, allowing it to manifest in outward symbolism, too much of this medicine may prove detrimental too. Too strong a projection, lending the outward symbol *too much* authority (whether this symbol be a religious leader, psychiatrist, or a teacher) would cause the ego to dispossess itself of a far too large portion of the psychic energy that stands at its disposal.

By way of Jung, then, we may come to the realization that a *moderate* amount of projection, causing the student to project *some* of his/her Self archetype onto the teacher, could be useful for pedagogy as well. Provided that the teacher encourages this projection to be of the *active kind* (Jung, 1981a); that is, at least partly conscious; and that the teacher encourages the projection to be withdrawn when its purposes has been fulfilled, it may have the potential to enhance a teacher's sense of inspirational leadership. However, any attempt on the teacher's part to *deliberately* seek out such a mode of projection would lead, most probably, to failure. If any such strategy were to be successful, it would be not by means of rational pre-calculation but by virtue of the *teacher's own relationship to his own Self archetype* – that is, drawing strength from his/her own path of individuation. On such a basis, the teacher may have a shot at stimulating that kind of active relationship between teacher and student that *also* recognizes the creative character of the unconscious:

... if some great idea takes hold of us from the outside, we must understand that it takes hold of us only because something in us responds to it and goes out to meet it... [w]hat comes to us from outside, and for that matter, everything that rises up from within, can only be made our own if we are capable of an inner amplitude equal to that of the incoming content. (Jung, 1981d, p. 120)

We are, in such situations, faced with content rising up from within, such as ideas, images or emotions, that may be just as much “other” as that content which meets us in the form of images, actions and communications from the external world. Otherness, in other words, is part and parcel of our interiority, to no less extent than it is of our exteriority; very much like the poet Rimbaud expressed the situation: *the I is an other* (“Je est un autre”; cf. Whidden, 2007, p. 123). We realize that it may very well be the case, at least from a Jungian perspective, that Lévinas' (2006) recommendation of a moral imperative towards the other is valid for our inner world, too: *everywhere* we encounter him/her, we are obliged to assume responsibility for the Other; obliged to make ourselves capable of the “inner amplitude” to match their style of communication; obliged to act as a subject in order to meet them not as an object but precisely as a subject in their own right (see also Zhao, 2014). A tempting idea, an alluring emotion, a friend in need; indeed as teachers we are called upon to respond, and indeed the calling in itself carries a pedagogical promise: to answer is to learn a valuable lesson of life.

At the end of this section, we must soberly realize that we probably have come no closer to a final understanding of the properties of a decentered subject. The same goes for the other psychic centers, such as the Self. Like Jung, we must refrain from theorizing what these centers of otherness “really are” in themselves – let it suffice to regard them as “unknowable... only [to] be expressed symbolically through [their] own phenomenology” (Jung, 1981e, p. 218). The crux of the matter is, in other words, not the essentiality of various metaphysical properties of subjectivity, but the very specific way that we – as subjects – pragmatically deal with and come to terms with these properties as they manifest in our lives.

## Rudolf Steiner: the central and the peripheral self

Although Jung drew upon sources in philosophy, and the history of religion, his approach to the human being and culture was basically that of psychology. He does not claim to deal with *spiritual* reality; nor with the physical one. He claims to know that there is an archetype of the Self, which can be experienced in the psychic realm, but takes an agnostic attitude to the question whether the Self as such actually exists as a spiritual entity.<sup>4</sup>

Steiner, in contrast, deals mainly with what he claims to be spiritual facts, but to some extent also with psychological and natural ones.<sup>5</sup> In one of his early texts, which he called his Credo<sup>6</sup>, Steiner commits himself to the typically Romantic view that it is possible for the individual to become part of a greater whole without losing himself. But he was no fanciful dreamer. He appreciated the emergence of natural science and its technological inventions as a necessary step in the development of human consciousness and culture. However, just like the Romantics before him, he also realized that the self-conscious ego could never find a place for itself within the scientific world picture. The human self would remain alienated from the external world unless it could come to the experience of living thinking. This experience is not “inner” in a purely subjective sense; it is, Steiner claims, the experience of a life that is capable of existing also outside, in the objective world. Similar to Schelling before him, Steiner did not agree with the Cartesian *cogito*: thinking is not as a mere subjective activity, but also something beyond the subject-object duality. Indeed, the subject-object distinction is constituted in thinking. The subject actually “lives from the grace of thinking” (Steiner, 1977, p. 49); it appears to itself as subject because it participates in thinking (see also Dahlin, 2009).

In the experience of living thinking, a connection between the subject and the objective world is realized. The modern, scientific world conception therefore urges the human being to take this step: “to find the thought in the self-conscious ego that is felt to be alive” (Steiner, 1973, p. 110). However, to come to this experience, thinking as a self-transcendent activity must be intensified through spiritual exercises like meditation and contemplation. Such exercises may eventually lead to conscious experiences of the spiritual world. Steiner tried to show that this view is not the consequence of wishful fantasies but that it can be founded on trends, notions and strivings within the Western philosophical tradition since early scholasticism, not least among the Romantics (Steiner, 1984). This claim can be said to have been somewhat corroborated by the recently established academic research into Western esotericism; see for instance Hanegraaf (1998; 2012). In the 19th and 20th centuries, however, mainstream philosophy was according to Steiner led astray by the Kantian notion of the “thing-in-itself” and the firm belief that there are principal limits to human knowledge. The early Romantics, who had also objected to this idea, were neglected and forgotten as the views of a materialistically oriented science and technology became more and more predominant. Steiner recognized that from this point of view his own spiritual approach to science and philosophy must certainly appear as nonsense.

Similar to how Spinoza and Schelling made a distinction between the productivity and the products of nature and of the human self respectively, so Steiner makes a more fine grained distinction between thinking as a spiritual, creative activity, and thought as the outcome or products of this activity (one of these products is the subject-object distinction). A thought can become an object for our contemplation and reflection; but the actual thinking that produced the thought cannot. We can with some degree of accuracy give an account of how we arrived at a particular thought, but this account will consist of a number of different thoughts arranged in a certain order, as stepping stones. The actual thinking, however, is what happened between these thoughts. In our normal state of consciousness thinking happens in darkness, it is unconscious and transcendent, like Spinoza’s *natura naturans* and Schelling’s ground of being. However, Steiner also maintained that the line between the conscious and the unconscious mind can be as thin as a spider’s web. Therefore, in meditative practice we may cross this line in full consciousness (cf. Sparby, 2015).

4. This applies at least to his academic/scientific works. It is possible that in his personal life Jung held more affirmative views of the reality of the spiritual world. For instance, in an interview towards the end of his life he was asked if he believed in God, to which he answered: “I don’t have to believe, I *know*”.

5. For a comparison of the views of Steiner and Jung – both similarities and differences – see Wehr (2002). Among other things, both viewed mythical images as expressions of facts about the historical development of human consciousness.

6. The text was published posthumously by Marie Steiner in *Das Goetheanum*, December 24, 1944.



As noted earlier, Schelling saw it as the task of philosophy to come to terms with *natura naturans*, the creative aspect of nature. This could not be achieved on the basis of mere outer observation – the method of science – but had to be produced from within. Steiner saw in Schelling a thinker particularly gifted for this task, because of his ability of conceptual imagination (Steiner, 1973, p. 151ff). Fichte's thinking had managed to reach the kernel of the human self, but he lacked the power to proceed from this center to a world conception that gave the not-I, the objective being, its proper standing. It was in the capacity for intellectual intuition (*intellektuelle Anschauung*) that Schelling saw the faculty needed for taking this step.

An interesting illustration of Schelling's mode of thinking – which will lead us further into Steiner's decentered view of the subject – is his understanding of gravity. It is well known that when Newton proposed his concept of the force of gravity he was accused of introducing occult concepts into science, because gravity implies “action at a distance”, i.e., an invisible force is supposed to proceed from one object and affect another. How can the sun keep the planets in their orbits when it is visibly not in any physical contact with them? Schelling simply reverses the basic assumption: a body can certainly only act where it is; on the other hand, it also is where it acts. If the sun acts where it is not visibly present, we must assume that it is invisibly present where it so acts. The sun's being transcends what we see with our eyes, it is invisibly present in the whole solar system (this has in a way been established by modern astrophysics).

For Schelling this is an illustration of how we must understand the relation between spirit and nature, and for Steiner it becomes of central importance for grasping the nature of the I – the spiritual aspect of the human being. The spirit is not only in the living organism, in which it is in a way perceived from the outside. The spirit is also where it perceives, observes, experiences, i.e., where it is active. When the human I grasps in thought the law of a natural process it is not only a neurological process taking place in some corner of her brain, or merely the reception of a mirror picture of an external event; it is an expression of the law itself. “The spirit has moved to the place where the law is active”, and “the law is then, in addition to being active in nature, expressed in conceptual form [in human thinking]” (Steiner, 1973, p. 153).

In a lecture given at a philosophical conference in Bologna in 1911, Steiner (2007) presents his idea of the human self in terms very similar to the above (without referring to Schelling). In our ordinary state of consciousness we sense ourselves, our I, as somehow inside the body, although we know that if we scrutinized our body down to the smallest molecule we would never find this I there. However, we would come to an epistemologically more fruitful conception of the I, Steiner argues, if we see it as living in the objective world, in the lawfulness of things themselves. The apparent presence of the I in the body is actually due to the bodily organization's capacity to produce something like a mirror image of this I. Just like an image in an ordinary mirror is dependent upon the nature and the quality of the mirror itself, so the mirrored or reflected I that we experience as “ourselves” and as correlated with our body, is dependent on the state, the qualities and capacities of our organism (*ibid.*, pp. 53ff). Neurological research may provide the laws and principles which govern the appearance of this reflected I, and, Steiner maintains, such natural scientific research is quite justified in rejecting concepts and ideas that purports to explain these processes in a spiritual way.

Nevertheless, in philosophy and epistemology, spiritual concepts are legitimate and the conception of the I as living in the objective world solves the perennial problem of how to account for the possibility of knowledge of the world outside ourselves. The I can thus be understood as experiencing “its relation to the objective world within this world itself” (*ibid.*, p. 57; our italics), receiving its experiences as representations (*Vorstellungen*) reflected by the bodily organism.<sup>7</sup> However, the I must not be understood as living “outside” the body in a literal, purely spatial sense. It is rather a question of being relatively and dynamically “let loose” (*Losgelöst*; *ibid.*, p. 57) from the body. The relation of the real I to its body is analogous to the general relation between the spiritual and the sensible/material world: for Steiner, the spiritual world is not beyond or behind the material world, it is within it. This “within” is again not meant in a spatial sense; obviously we cannot dig into matter and find spirit inside it. Presumably we simply lack words to describe this relation in a literal way.

7. Implicit in this description is a difference between primary pre-reflective, more or less unconscious *experience* on the one hand, and secondary reflective, more or less conscious mental *representations* on the other. This is in line with the notion of the unconscious as surrounding and giving rise to consciousness, referred to above. Steiner, like Jung, saw consciousness as emerging out of the unconscious (cf. Wehr, 2002, p. 110).

Our everyday sense of ourselves as an ego, our normal self-consciousness, is basically only a thought, a mere reflection of our real I, produced by our bodily organism. It can therefore, in the final analysis, be seen as an illusion. We do not confuse an image in a mirror with the reality of the thing mirrored, even though the mirror image as image is real. Our “higher” self, as a real spirit, lives in our perceiving and thinking, and these take place in the objective world. The relation between the two is similar to that between the center and the periphery of a circle. The real I lives in the periphery around its center, in which it mirrors itself and which thereby becomes the mirrored I, reflected by the body and the brain as our mental representation(s) of ourselves.

Naturally, this conception of the human I cannot be justified merely by its ability to solve the epistemological question of how we gain knowledge of the external world. Some kind of experience or insight into its truth is also needed. It seems that such insights are available in phenomenology, and in some phenomenological interpretations of brain research. An example of the latter is philosopher and medical researcher Thomas Fuchs (2000), who maintains that in lived-body experience there is primarily no distinction between object and subject, but a participatory relationship to the world. We are not inside our bodies but among the things and the people that we perceive. Fuchs draws upon many phenomenologically oriented thinkers, not least on Merleau-Ponty. Throughout his writings, Merleau-Ponty drops hints about the *ek-stasis* of consciousness and about the I as dwelling among the things perceived around us, not in the body, at least not only within the body. In his *Phenomenology of perception* he says; “Inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself.” (1992, p. 407); and in a paper read at the first international Symposium for Phenomenology he says:

When I speak or when I understand, I experience the presence of others in myself and of *myself in others*, a presence which is the cornerstone of the theory of intersubjectivity [...] and finally I understand the enigmatic saying of Husserl: “The transcendental subjectivity is intersubjectivity”. To the extent that what I say makes sense, I am for myself when I am speaking a different “other” (*un autre “autre”*), and to the extent that *I understand I no longer know who is speaking and who is listening*. (quoted in Spiegelberg, 1994, p. 571; our italics)<sup>8</sup>

This quote raises a new aspect of the *ek-stasis* of the I; that of intersubjectivity. We will return to this quote in the next section. Let us end this section with a quote from Dillon (1991), which nicely sums up Merleau-Ponty’s twofold perspective on the I:

Inasmuch as I only dwell on the hither side of my skin, my body individualizes me to a unique and concrete existence. But inasmuch as I lose myself in the generality of prereflective communality from which I emerged as ego, I participate in a world without center. (p. xvi-xvii)

The I that dwells “on the hither side of my skin” is analogous to what Steiner calls the mirrored I, reflected in the body. As for “the generality of prereflective communality”, it does not sound much like an I in the ordinary sense, but we must remember that this peripheral I is precisely *not* our ordinary sense of self, and note also that it *is* an I that *participates* in the objective world, “a world without center”. Furthermore, the expression to *lose* oneself in prereflective *communality* is actually a good formulation of Steiner’s view of intersubjectivity, to which we will now turn. It is about losing oneself in the I of another being.

### Steiner’s theory of intersubjectivity: the I-sense and the thought-sense

Western philosophy and culture is perhaps more obsessed with subjectivity and personal identity than any other cultural tradition has ever been (cf. the concept of identity-crisis in development psychology).<sup>9</sup> An extreme opposite example would be Japan, in which the understanding of the subject as decentered is probably commonplace and self-evident, considering the fact that the Japanese language has many different words for “I”, depending on the social relation of the speaker to the one spoken to. Thus, for a Japanese, my

8. Spiegelberg notes that the alleged quote from Husserl has not been verified.

9. Steiner saw this as a basic characteristic of Western spirituality, in contrast to that of the East, in which there is much more emphasis on the ego losing itself in *Brahman*, the world spirit, or *Nirvana*.

subjective identity is not independent of who I am to you (Böhme, 2008). In the Japanese Zen Buddhist tradition one also finds the following story (a so-called *koan*). It may serve us well to prepare our minds for Steiner's view of intersubjectivity:

Zen master Sansho went to visit Zen master Kyosan. When he arrived, Kyosan said: "Welcome! What is your name?" "My name is Kyosan," Sansho answered. "But that is *my* name!" Kyosan exclaimed. "All right, my name is Sansho then." Kyosan laughed heartily.

Another story, this time an event that supposedly actually happened (Zen *koans* lack historical verifications), is about Wittgenstein and a female friend of his. This friend had visited him and was late for her train back home. They both ran to the station, Wittgenstein accompanying her out of courtesy. As they arrived, the train was just leaving. Wittgenstein, being a faster runner, arrived first – and jumped on the train himself, leaving his friend behind (Becchio & Bertone, 2004, p. 124). These two stories can be seen as illustrations of the event of *becoming the other person*. According to Steiner, this is actually what happens in interpersonal communication, due to the senses inherent in the human organism.

In his lectures on educational anthropology (Steiner, 2004), Steiner includes aspects of his theory of the human senses, of which he counts no less than twelve. Of all these suggestions, the proprioceptive senses of balance and movement, as well as the sense of heat, seem to be rather well established. These three senses are also part of the twelve that Steiner describes. In addition to these eight senses, Steiner claims we have an *I-sense*, a *thought-sense*, a *language-sense* and a *life-sense* (here we will disregard the life sense). By the language sense we perceive that other people are performing *speech acts*, even if we do not understand what they say. The thought sense is that which provides understanding of the *meaning* of what is said, i.e., the thoughts behind the utterance. The I-sense is for perceiving the I of *another person*.

The problem of how we know that other people have consciousness and self-awareness like ourselves is well known in philosophy. Basically, two solutions have dominated the discussion: that of conclusion by analogy and that of *Einfühlung* or empathy. However, these solutions do not pay careful enough attention to our experience, and therefore produce a feeling of awkwardness. Our experience of being in the presence of another I is *immediate*, it is not mediated by some kind of reasoned judgment. This is the characteristic of sense-experience. A sense-organ always presents us with something as "given" in the external world, something the existence of which we do not need to form a judgment or conclusion about (cf. Scheler, 1913, pp. 118ff). Thus, we may call anything a sense-organ that makes us feel justified in locating an object of experience in the physical world. The experience of the I of another human being has this character. Confronted with another person, we may have all kinds of sense-perceptions based on sight, hearing, touch or smell, but all of these do not make us wonder whether this is a robot or a mechanical puppet. Rather, they make us immediately aware of the fact that there is something else present "behind" or "within" these perceptions. It is as if the I-sense made all these impressions *transparent* for the spiritual reality behind them: the I of the other person.<sup>10</sup>

Certain brain disorders may be taken as indications that there exists an I-sense that can suffer from dysfunction. As a consequence, something of the transparency of the other senses is lost. For instance, there is the well-known case of "the man who mistook his wife for a hat", described by Sacks (1998). In the previous section we described how Steiner located the real, peripheral I of the human being as "outside" the body, living in what it perceives and thinks. Hence, in perceiving the I of another, the perceiving I lives in that of the other person. In perceiving the other, I *become* the other. But we do not experience this in full consciousness; for infinitesimally short moments we "go to sleep" in the other person, as Steiner puts it. We "lose ourselves in prereflective communality" (cf. above). But then we quickly "wake up" again, because this loss of self-awareness is actually frightful, experienced as an attack on our being and identity. ("Hell is other people", as Sartre famously remarked.)<sup>11</sup> In communicating with another person, we go back and forth between these states of "sleep" and "wakefulness", which happens in fractions of seconds and therefore escapes our ordinary consciousness.

10. Similar to Steiner, Scheler (ibid.) also argues that the perception of the I of another person is "immediately given" in our experience, but he does not assume the existence of a particular sense (organ) for this perception.

11. See Bernasconi (1997) for a discussion of this famous quote.

Falling asleep in the other has the emotional quality of *sympathy*; waking up to ourselves has the tone of *antipathy*, taking a distance (Steiner, 2004). Looking at the trajectory of an individual human life, it is often apparent how the forces of sympathy are more prevalent in childhood. The force of antipathy seems to grow with age (*ibid.*). (There are no moral implications in the terms sympathy and antipathy as used here; they are simply objective psychological forces present in everyone.) This means that it is relatively easy for children to “lose themselves” in the I of other people – for instance, their teacher. Sometimes the force of sympathy is so strong that a child listens with the whole of its being to what the teacher says – and then remembers nothing afterwards, because it did not “wake up” to register it consciously. In such cases, it is important not to blame the child for being inattentive because it is rather the case that it pays too much attention.

In order to communicate verbally with another person, we need in addition the thought-sense, in order to perceive the meaning of what the other is saying. To make it reasonable that even such a sense exists, there are similar arguments as those used to make the I-sense plausible. In listening to another’s speech, I am *immediately* aware that there is a meaning expressed in the words I hear. However, like the I-sense the thought-sense is an intuitive sense. It means that what is grasped is not always at once explicitly clear to our “central I”, i.e., our normal ego-consciousness. At first, we may only feel *that* a meaning is being expressed, but hesitate as to what it is.<sup>12</sup>

Steiner maintains that no sense-organ functions alone and in isolation from the others; there is always a certain degree of *synaesthesia* going on below the threshold of consciousness (cf. Merleau-Ponty, 1992, pp. 228f). In intersubjective communication, the I-sense and the thought-sense work together (the senses of hearing and of language are obviously also involved but we disregard them here). This means that *what I perceive the other as saying is not independent of how I perceive the other’s I*. In falling asleep into the other I become the other; and to the extent that I understand “I no longer know who is speaking and who is listening” (cf. the quote from Merleau-Ponty above). If I do not understand I tend to “wake up” and take a distance from the person and what they are saying. This may explain why one sometimes accepts as reasonable what a person is saying, although one would not accept it if another person said the same thing.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the meaning of what one perceives in another person’s speech is not independent of *who* is speaking (Soesman, 1990). It therefore seems reasonable to assume that *the speaker’s personal relation to what they express* in their speech has a significant bearing on how it is perceived by the listener.

From all of this, it is a small step to conclude that students more or less subconsciously experience the teacher’s personal relation to the knowledge they endeavor to transmit. If this relation is authentic, *i.e.*, if the teacher has engaged themselves in a personal and responsible way with the knowledge they are teaching, the student may have a deeply personal encounter with both the teacher and the knowledge. The teacher, in such cases, may indeed become “the Other as the Self” for the student; a representative of the student’s own real I or Self.

## Conclusion: final notes on decenteredness, individuation and educational philosophy

In conclusion to our article, we claim to have shown, indicated or at least sketched the following:

- 1) that the meaning that students’ gather from a teacher’s oral communication of knowledge depends not only on what the teacher says, but also on what kind of existential relation the teacher has developed to the knowledge material;
- 2) that a student’s creative relation to knowledge demands that they appropriate the material to their own subjectivity;

12. It may be interesting to note that in the Buddhist tradition, “mind” is considered a sixth sense (in addition to the usual five); its function being to perceive “mental objects” such as thoughts (see for instance Lusthaus, 2002.)

13. We might also conjecture, that this “falling asleep” in the other person to some extent can be compared to that of a *passive projection* (Jung, 1981a; see also Nicolaus, 2012). Here, the projector has retained *too little* of his/her consciousness in the ego centre; *too much* of it has been displaced to the periphery of the *Other* – causing also the inability to sufficiently differentiate subject from object.

- 3) that a teacher's ability to facilitate this appropriation demands that they themselves have achieved it;
- 4) that this connection can be further enhanced if the teacher assumes the role of Other in relation to the student, hence decentering the student's sense of subjectivity;
- 5) that the teacher can then be the learner's Other by virtue of representing what Jung called the archetype of the Self – a symbol of completeness and true individuality.

On this final point – the possibility of the teacher to act towards his student by virtue of engaging the Self archetype, we feel the need to make some final explications – that is, to make concrete some of the possible educational-philosophical conclusions to be drawn from our discussions. In order to do so, we wish to realign ourselves to the Jungian perspective on decenteredness as a *resource*, not necessarily a hindrance, for psychic transformation. Recollecting that the ego consciousness, for Jung, acts as a more or less given – natural or at least habitual – center of consciousness, we also remember that the Self, as an archetype for human development towards wholeness, is a *center the construction of which man himself must take a part*. Now, such paths of development may indeed involve a sense of decenteredness, or removal from one's habitual state of mind – but that does not mean, as we have learned from Jung, that *the alchemy of the self can proceed 'under the radar' of the individual's sphere of I-consciousness*. And on this note we find correspondence between Jung and Steiner; since Steiner's take on modern humanity's spiritual evolution certainly also implies that development (indeed learning in the more esoteric sense as well; see Steiner, 1969) must engage the *I as conscious co-creator of the individual's own destiny*.

Connecting such notions more specifically to a context of educational philosophy, we argue that a teacher who seeks to attain to a conscious co-creation, as sketched above, may find Steiner's conception of an "I-sense" (that is, of the human faculty of I-recognition) to be helpful for facilitating a learning that is experienced as real, meaningful and relevant by students. The student, ideally, should be able to sense that he/she encounters a teacher that stands on solid psychic ground – that is, a teacher that is able to hold a firm center in his own conscious ego. But that does not mean that no other centers can be used as points of departure. While of course recognizing the importance of maintaining ground in one's own sense of I, we would like to argue that if we really want to learn profoundly from Jung and Steiner; from Nietzsche and the Romantics, we cannot expect the teacher-student relation to *always* be strictly one of a conscious ego to another. Nor can this relation be a question, in Jungian terms, of a teacher always aligning his communication to that portion of the student's psyche that corresponds to his/her most well-adapted conscious attitude (for instance, that of thought). After all, we remember that for Jung, any given human being possesses one *dominant function* among the four possible ones *thinking, feeling, perception and intuition* – also combining this with a predisposition towards either *introversion* or *extraversion* (Jung, 1981a).

Beyond this we also recall that in Jungian typology, a human being also operates – on the shadow side of his psyche, so to speak – his or her *least* developed, inferior, function. With more than a slight homage paid to his spiritual forefathers – Nietzsche and the Romantics certainly are among them – Jung maintained that any process of individuation that intended to plumb the depths of the psyche had better take this inferior function in due consideration. How else could one find the gates to the unconscious, if not through this the least differentiated attitude? How else could it be possible to arrive at a totality of oneself, if not by actively endeavouring to learn from one's weaknesses and less-than-successful adaptations? Indeed, we find that a teacher attempting to stimulate totality and wholeness in his students; that is, attempting to align himself to the Self as an archetype of this very totality; from time to time may feel the need to stimulate that portion of the student's psychic life that he/she himself is least aware of.

The case however is, of course, not that of a teacher attempting to 'psychoanalyze' a student – it is rather the case of effecting slight decenterings of the student's subjectivity when the teacher feels that this might be a benevolent thing to do – provided of course that this decentering of subjectivity is one that can be consciously assimilated by the student. No doubt, this is a procedure that is highly likely to generate decenterings, resistances and *deterritorializations* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004) on the part of the teacher's subject as well. But that is a prospect, we feel, that should be taken as a challenge rather than as a warning; rather in the same vein that Biesta (2005; 2010; 2012) discusses pedagogy as involving *resistances, obstacles*



and *frictions* in the learning process – in stark contrast to the ambition to always facilitate the smoothest learning curve possible. Learning can, as Biesta tells us, from this perspective be a

...reaction to a disturbance... an attempt to reorganise or reintegrate as a result of disintegration. We can look at learning as responding to what is other or different, to what challenges, irritates and disturbs us, rather than as the acquisition of something that we want to possess. (Biesta, 2005, p. 62).

Provided that the teacher is well grounded in his own I-experience; provided that he also assumes responsibility for the Other that is his student – certainly it would then be possible for him/her to skillfully provide such challenges, irritations, disturbances? It goes without saying, though, that such a take on the teacher's responsibility also necessitates the mandate to proceed beyond such paradigms of performativity (Ball, 2003) that inject little more than the templates of an extraverted, result-orientated and narrow-mindedly rational subjectivity into our contemporary educational debate. It stands equally clear that as teachers, inclined to take the challenge of enacting the Other as Self seriously, we need not feel short-changed of tools and concepts to aid our purpose. Turning to *Schelling* and the Romantics, for instance, we can collect a wider, much wider, conception of human intellectual reason than the one dictated by our current accountability/measurability paradigms. Further aided by *Jung*, we realize the vastness of the periphery that surrounds the conscious ego – in effect providing it with endless positions from which a decentering could be effectuated – but also that this vastness poses not a threat, but a promise, of individuation. Lastly, with Steiner, we realize that this journey of individuation is indeed a real possibility, and as such, needs to be shrouded in mysticism just as little as it needs to unhinge itself from the affairs of our ordinary, daily lives.

Strumming these three streams of thought together like a chord, we finally realize the following: it was never the question of whether we were *decentered or not* – only the question of the depth to which we are able to push this realization, and the degree to which we make ourselves able to turn this very realization into a constructive, creative potential for thought, learning, and action.

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