**Process, Image & Intelligence:**

**How Krishnamurti’s experience of the “process” is or is not relevant to models of consciousness***.*

Krishnamurti’s unusual painful “initiation,” labelled the “process” may have been a sort of portal that ushered him into a self-transcendent mode of existence. Herein I will endeavour to reflect on the significance of this life transforming “event” from a number of angles. I will be grappling with it hermeneutically drawing from my own experiments in bodywork as well as the literature. As I will be comparing K’s metamorphosis with that of others’, I will be using the word “process” in a broad way.

It seems to me that what we call Krishnamurti’s “process” could be approached from a variety of perspectives. It could be an illness in need of medical attention (as David Bohm conjectured, i.e. tangled nerves), a spiritual exercise of the sort that entails pain as a requisite to growth, a sort of penance reminiscent of Dante’s pilgrimage through alternate abodes of suffering and purgation, or a salvific operation overseen by higher beings (as theosophists believed). Further, these categories may not necessarily be mutually exclusive.

Let us begin with a question concerning our society’s image of a “process” such as K’s. Our society, leaving aside the contrarian views of subcultures, considers the concomitant benefits of the “process” as compensation for its nefarious aspects (illness, suffering etc.). In other words, the “urban shaman” (or the artist who went through a “baptism of fire,” as it were) is a higher version of the idiot savant. Yes, Mozart was a genius, but at what price? Yes, Michael Jackson is electrifying, but is he a normal individual?

Native cultures, on the other hand, view the nefarious aspects of a “process” as a payment for the gifts it bestows. The accent here is on the gift, rather than the illness. This attitude is reminiscent of our own value that genius is 90% sweat, 10% talent. You have to pay for it. It is not natural and it is not free.

Of course, some illnesses are considered an act of God—benign or otherwise (i.e. cancer) while others are considered to be a vice (drunkenness, drug addiction, sexual molestation etc.) In the case of competitive cyclist Lance Armstrong, his cancer almost took on hagiographic proportions in the light of his subsequent Tour de France victories. Nevertheless, it was not a portal to a metamorphosis. Cancer is not a prerequisite to winning the Tour de France—training is.

We do not usually view illness as a portal into other worlds. Mainly because in post-Christian Western society there are no other worlds. And if there were, they would have to be approached via the science that has now become the standard of reality and truth: physics. Did Krishnamurti reach Samadhi by going through a worm-hole? Did Jesus release the dead from the underworld by mental tricks via modal logic? Did Dante reach paradise via a computer program? Or is Lord Maitreya an image in the brain that can be solicited via hallucinogenics?

It doesn’t take much for a modern scholar with inter-cultural training to acknowledge that we are living with a dissonance of epistemologies. Perhaps, for many who have dismissed the worlds of theology and Greek mythology this dissonance between modal worlds and underworlds is a moot point, but it returns disguised as literary criticism that would have us believe that literature can be diagnosed with a medical condition. Was Virginia Woolf also a higher form of idiot savant?

Without getting into the argument of whether the whole of the arts has been co-opted by reductionist science to the point of justifying transplanting “the humanities” to hospitals where they can be re-contextualised as therapies, it is clear that the humanistic heritage of the West has fallen into disrepute and that any Westerner who would import alternative epistemologies—such as those pertaining to the self-transcendent aspects of yoga or zen—would also find it necessary at some point to reconsider the contradictory epistemological claims between scientism, subjective art and mystical religions.

Was Krishnamurti’s “process” really knowable through any kind of objective empirical means? What can you say about a “process” that was not really understandable by the carrier himself? Krishnamurti conjectured whether he was not a freak of nature. He claimed that he could get no more of a handle on his identity than a portion of water in the sea could about its own “self”. If Krishnamurti could not understand the “process” how could *we* fathom it—regardless of whether we are brain specialists, priests or social workers?

As an outsider, we can analyse, compare and label all we want—but the word is not the thing, is it? What then is the word? A copy? A simulation? A counterfeit? An assumption postulated too early? And what if Krishnamurti’s “process” was repeatable and we repeated it to become not “Krishnamurti” but The World? What then? What would “we” the “infinite” know of ourselves? It seems that we’re damned if we do (analyse and formulate a pre-judged opinion) and damned if we don’t (and allow the “experiencer” to become the—infinite—experience).

Indeed, any model would fall short of its object. Let us reconsider, Alcibiades’s panegyric in Plato’s *Symposium* where he praises not what is knowable about Socrates, but what is unknowable and unpredictable about him…hence, this latter’s spontaneous discourse, his mysterious physical prowess, his extraordinary devotion to philosophical research to the detriment of his social standing, etc.[[1]](#footnote-1) Socrates was extraordinary not because of any definitive “Socratic” traits, but becaus*e* he was unknowable. He also must have appeared invisible or ridiculous to those, like Xenophanes, who were sheltered from the unknown.

We end up faced with the paradox of formulating an infinite model in order to understand great souls like Krishnamurti, Jesus, Socrates and Buddha. Yet, what would it mean to communicate or teach an infinite model, or even worse, what would it mean to emulate it, so that we do not remain detached observers spying on a bird-in-the-cage named Krishnamurti, but become of the same “species” as he?

Further, how could one model the infinite? Which technique or discipline would catalyse its generation? And, to return to what we were saying earlier, how could an illness or a descent into the underworld lead to a mathematical formula? I am reminded of a humours occasion directly after a viewing of one of Krishnamurti’s video-tapes many years ago during a discussion over coffee with friends where I enquired what they had thought about an enigmatic statement Krishnamurti had made in the tape….”what did you think of ‘all the numbers are in the zero’,” I asked? To my amazement, no one could remember K. making that statement.

Krishnamurit made mince meat of the separation between mathematics and metaphysics as he inversed our general way of understanding “0” as just another number in a set. For him, zero was also a sort of general metaphysical principle, perhaps not unlike the Logos of Heraclitus or the Primal Water of Thales or Parmenides’s Sphere, for that matter. This is not new, of course; it dates back to the Pythageans and Plato who conceived number with the same deep symbolic ontology now only reserved, if anywhere, for poetic and artistic metaphor.

Krishnamurti also made mince meat of our separation of sexuality and spirituality, by proclaiming that sex was a natural part of a young person’s life as well as a natural constituent of a whole life. To my knowledge he never derided sex *per se* but only our sloppy obsession with it. Have we also become sloppy with our minds by proclaiming that a calculus of mathematical steno-signs can define the world?

Truly, Krishnamurti stood at the apex of all dichotomies: art vs. science, sex vs. holiness, male vs. female, politics vs. religion, time vs. eternity. Not so for the rest of us who have to consider these sets of pairs (in contradictory fashion) as both the same and not the same no thanks to a contaminant deep in our psyches he called conditioning. It was neither operant nor classical conditioning, because it was an undying stream (of suffering) that survived the death of the body. Perhaps it was more like Karma, yet if the conditioned “self” was always there, who was it that reincarnated? Obviously nobody.

Who, within Krishnamurti, was it that “transformed” or “metamorphosed”? Who were the voices present at those excruciating sessions of the “process”? Were they the original fragments of the boy-K’s ego? Did they integrate and unify into one spirited self? Was the “process” then the catalyst for purgating the conditioned sediment of the boy-K’s constitution? One catalyst among many?

Is every illness, tragic accident, or rite of passage a portal into Death? A well known psychiatrist, Kubler-Ross defined a five stage grieving process that we must all go through when confronted with something as absolute as death, made up of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.[[2]](#footnote-2) Krishnamurti’s *modus operandi,* on the other hand, seemed to be constituted of only one or two stages: staying and observing the fact (what is) deeply enough, so that what is (anger? jealousy?) dissolves along with its observer…the observer becoming the observed, where the accent is on the becoming.

What on earth does this imply? I the observer observe my jealousy, become jealousy itself, so the separation of observer and observed collapses into just a flow of observation, or perhaps, more correctly, a flow of jealousy—within my field of awareness. But where is the denial? The anger? Bargaining? Depression? That everyone else goes through…Of course, I am correlating the death experience of the average individual with Krishnamurti’s de-conditioning “process”, since he often suggested, that becoming the world required paying down the debt of dying to one’s ego-s.

Christ’s metaphor, as well, of being born again obviously suggests the pre-requisite of dying. What we have here are metaphors of life. The man who would transform himself, as opposed to his image (by becoming a doctor or buying a Mercedes), would need to take stock of his entire constitution, including anything of the sort we label subconscious, the dream life, past lives etc. But of course, in such a way as to bypass his gatekeeper-ego who would oversee this transformation and detour it away from “itself” towards a surrogate copy thereby surviving the “delivery room” operation.

What Krishnamurti was talking about, I think, was something that occurs in between the five stages defined by Kubler-Ross. Just as grieving and accepting death happens through and beyond the five stages, K.’s “self-transforming observation” also happens somewhere inside and outside all its external markers, though his collective term for it was “suffering.” Suffering, via his self-effacing observation, is the equaliser that transforms the illusory distinctions of grandeur or humility each ego carries into something generic to the whole race.

A remarkable initiation in Taoist-Buddhist meditation called turning around the light (because it is much more than a mere technique) involves a sort of “translation” of the “thinking matter” in the brain—technically called the cogito—into a series of hard knots in the torso, the prime one being around the heart.[[3]](#footnote-3) It is then within the scope of the body’s awareness to open these knots and “bleed” out what I can only call the body’s conditioned sediment. In yoga this is known as opening the charkas and purgating one’s interior rubbish via the *bandhas*. All of this is done below the radar of the ego’s control and as such, pulls the rug out from the ego, transforming it in a radical way. I bring all of this up in order to demonstrate that, in the West, not only can my sanity be called into question by talking about this as if it was concretely real (rather than as an abstraction culled from scholarship) but that I have to borrow a word from another discipline, such as geology’s “sublimation” to name it. [[4]](#footnote-4)

This knowledge is secret by virtue of being taboo in an odd way. For all our permissiveness in the West about pleasure and sexuality, very few will explore the deeper dimension of these latter at the cost of meddling with the internal nuts and bolts of the mind-body constellation as held together by the ego. I remember reading about an unusual seminar in Toronto’s Globe and Mail newspaper many years ago on Tantric Sexuality. It involved deep breathing exercises, yet the energy the participants were seeking to invoke with their techniques escaped them. Why would anyone believe that engaging a technique would work in the first place? Could a technique then rehabilitate a hardened criminal? Could it heal neurosis? Psychopathy? Will it correct vices? Can it produce an ethical human being? A happy marriage? A beautiful mind?

Krishnamurti would often talk about Passion in contrast to pleasure and sexuality. A number of “universals” seemed to be linked for him, in Platonic fashion, intimating a higher world of wholes or ideas: energy, attention, love, awareness, space, death (and of course, the humorous zero). The mental space of the common man, though, is populated by a fragmentary collection of concepts, often competing in self-contradictory ways in their combined project to map the world for him. I am reminded here of a notorious fragment from the pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides of Elea…#16 to be exact: “For according to the mixture of much-wandering limbs which each man has, so is the mind which is associated with mankind: for it is the same thing which thinks, namely the constitution of the limbs in men, all and individually; for it is the excess (*of the Light or Night-element*) which makes Thought.” [[5]](#footnote-5)

In the sixth century B.C. Parmenides had already linked fragmentary thought in the cranium with “conditioned marrow” in the body. He had also postulated a transcendental wholeness to life, via the metaphor of the sphere, which modern English philosophers interpreted in a static way thereby attributing an immobile block universe to him…as if Parmenides was the first global-real-estate agent. His pupil, Zeno, came up with ingenious logical paradoxes in defence of his master’s thesis of wholeness (not stasis) and of course, Plato redeemed both Parmenides and Socrates by reconstructing a paradoxical philosophy that wed their fragments in a way that, in modern times, has baffled as many as Krishnamurti has with his own enigmatic paradoxes.

At the pinnacle of metaphysical stupor, Western mathematicians thought they had solved Zeno’s paradoxes in the 19th century, setting the world in logical motion again.[[6]](#footnote-6) Krishnamurti advanced a challenge to both Eastern and Western thought as old as that of the pre-Socratics and the Buddha. And yet the latest edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica entered him as a footnote to Theosophy and Modern Hindu movements.[[7]](#footnote-7) How can we expect politicians and business men to come together to solve the shrinking world’s ever linked problems when the intellectuals cannot link a mathematical formula with a poetic symbol? Fragmentation is deep indeed!

Krishnamurti’s method of linking technical measurable knowledge with mystical or poetic symbols in his overall comprehension of consciousness was very simple. He just deleted the “reality” of psychologically laden data—such as, what he called psychological time. For example, he stated that it takes (sidereal) time to go from one place to another, and in this way time is intimately wedded to space and distance. It need not take any “psychological” time, however to complete this.

What did he mean by psychological time? I am reminded of a true story recounted to me by a friend about the protocols and etiquette of business. One day, Mr. Péladeau the President of Quebecor, and one of the richest men in Canada had two business men sitting in his waiting room. It was the end of the day and each man had been waiting a long time for his highly coveted interview. One of the two made a deprecatory remark about how long he had to wait which was overheard by the President’s executive secretary. Finally, Mr. Péladeau only had time to grant one interview and it did not go to the man who had made the negative remark.

In this example, (waiting) time is part and parcel of much more than just the movement of the stars and planets. A whole slew of psychologically added values come into play here. Mr. Péladeau’s time was far more valuable than that of the two men soliciting him. Time in this scenario is intimately wedded to status, power, pleasure, control etc. One might even add that these alternate universals are part of a surrogate self-world-image, as Bohm suggested. In other words, the ego’s time, is a far different affair than the objective time a plane needs to travel from New York to London, for example. Krishnamurti seemed to be deleting those “universals” associated with the ego—which, of course, he preferred to call *images* whose root meaning in Greek and Latin is: to imitate, to copy, to counterfeit, pretend etc. (as if they were a sort of derivative copy of a more genuine prototype).

This suggests that the ego itself is an imitator. An actor rather than an original character. What then would be the difference between the ego and its original, or to put it in Hindu philosophical terms, the Brahman (Universal Self) and the Atman (personal ego). Would the ego be a sort of reflection of its original? And how many egos would there be? Krishnamurti never spoke on the record about such an internal anatomy, nor would it do us much good to blindly follow a particular school of psychotherapy in this regard. My own lived research suggests that the egos are none other than sibylline fragments of the coherent Self, which may or may never be recovered (from the pre-egoistic childhood state). There are at least three egos (or imagos to use the technical term from Jungian psychology) in all of us: a paternal one, a maternal version and a sibling ego. These in turn can be further divided into sub-egos and form an entire world whose exploration motivated Dostoyevsky’s famous novels, for example.

Krishnamurti’s “method” for lack of a better name, involved not so much a transcendence of this fragmented anatomy, but rather a re-coherence via a release of the resistance that maintained it. Hurt, and fear of being hurt again, is the cause of the original division, though these, over time, become hard wired and inherited as if they were congenital. Further, on the surface, our anxiety about being left economically behind, compels us to invest in power and status—giving the ego and its world image an extraordinary legitimacy. Try to tell people today that there is no more truth to the idea of a French man than there is in the idea of a French tree and you will probably be slapped in the face by a French passport.

In English we have the expression, a “hardened criminal.” The Rabbis also talk about having a hardened heart. In at least one school of psychology, they speak of working on body armour. Phenomenologists refer to our conditioning as sediment. In yoga we speak about the light from the eyes of childhood descending during puberty and converting into eros which then the yogi endeavours to release back into en-lightened consciousness. It is quite clear I think that we are speaking about something that is positioned at the frontier of mind and matter, a dichotomy which may after all be only fiction, as Bohm suggested. Are we then working with the mortar and bricks of the soul? Given the great progression of our civilization in technology and its regression in the arts and humanities since the time of the Greeks, one wonders which truly are the hard and soft skills, if the hard ones are understood to be harder to acquire.

In ancient Greece, temples to Asclepius were also centres of dream healing. For all the ego’s armour and conceit, it cannot defend “its” territory when it is sleeping. At this point of vulnerability one can enter his or her body-mind matrix beyond the ego’s control. Likewise with hypnotic meditation states replicating this. Hence, dreams and imaginal states such as those solicited by play and art are very important in this work. And yet what does this connote about a contemporary Western culture that has repressed the validity of dream work and the kind of fabulous literature that issues from there? Where did Plato’s myths come from? Who was the “Diotima” who trained Socrates in dialectic? Why have they been trashed and replaced by cognitive therapy supplemented by anti-depressants?

If the ego is indeed a sort of hardened knot hidden away somewhere in the crevasses of our body-mind matrix, then loosening and untying this knot should integrate what previously were disparate parts of our personality. Instead of making us more one dimensional, it should make us, paradoxically, more balanced and complex. Krishnamurti, not only appeared androgynous at times, but he also exhibited more tolerance and greater authority than the average man. He accepted having his money and property confiscated for more than ten years, but, one day, he also fired most of the staff at one of his school’s in India. The self-conscious mind of the ego cannot plan out neither the procedure nor the radical personality change that results from genuine self-metamorphosis. It can, at best, mimic these with self-contradictory consequences.

Hence, the average man, and woman, invests their entire energy in satisfying the proclivities of the (one) ego’s piece-meal agenda. One wakes up at 45 yrs. of age after the children have left the nest and fiscally successful but with a gnawing sense that something has been left out. Or, if the ego’s agenda was to pursue the flip side of self-aggrandisement (which is essentially the same thing), one may wake up in the monastery or the church with very pernicious desires that will not let up. Our society is full of middle aged men in sports cars, CEOs with dominatrix obsessions, celebrities with errant sex videos, married women who also need boyfriends, priests who cannot be chaste, and so on. Or when the ego’s obsession is channelled into sexual pleasure, as it sometimes is in religious cults and hippyish sub-cultures, one wakes up at 45 as a wrinkled pot head without any wealth or social status to show for it.

Most of the religious communities have been scarred with sex scandals, if not also financial ones. The same goes for mainstream universities. The private boarding schools in England have been just as guilty of sexual molestation of children as the Catholic church, but this usually goes unreported or is rarely believed, as if the church had a monopoly on this vice. In Canada recently the director of the public water supply of Walkerton, a small Ontario town made notorious for its water contamination scandal, got a one year prison term for his involvement in the deaths of five citizens and the long-term illness of many others, while in Saskatchewan a native Indian woman got 60 years for killing the same number of people by driving drunk. But what was truly troubling was how everyone was weeping for the executive (whose lawyer nearly appealed the one year sentence) but wanted to lynch the Indian. Or how about the difference in how Canadian society regards persons like Mr. Marc Lepine who slaughtered 14 women at the Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal compared to how it regards women who kill their children during post-partum depression. In recent Canadian telecasts on each of these subjects, Mr. Lepine was dismissed with disdain as a “psychopath” by a documentary that focused only on the victims from a feminist agenda. The fact that Lepine himself was a victim of severe child abuse was never even mentioned. On the other hand the women who nearly killed their children during post-partum depression were considered sympathetically to be the victims instead of the perpetrators. *Their* “victims” were never mentioned in the documentary. The author is not taking sides here, but simply pointing out some glaring lopsidedness that makes one wonder if the whole country is not suffering from some sort of jaundiced bi-polar perspective. It gives new meaning to the citation of Parmenides above (only 2, 500 years later).

The art of living was the highest art, according to Krishnamurti. He achieved it by metabolising his fragmented ego into a whole self. The “process” may have been the mysterious catalyst. But I do not believe that it began there. Even before the “process” K. had supernatural experiences: his out-of-body meditation in 1922 in Ojai being a case in point. The “process” would not have been enough of a motivation to produce a Bodhisattva, any more than my own illness-inspired initiations could have produced my own healing-transformations, or anybody else’s for that matter. Ultimately life is far too mysterious and deep to capture in a concise set of truth values.

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1. Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. Walter Hamilton (New York: Penguin Books, 1951). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Kubler-Ross, Elizabeth, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Tung-pin Lu, trans. Thomas Cleary, *The Secret of the Golden Flower, The Classic Chinese Book of Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sublimation: to cause to sublime as from a solid to a gas without passing through an intermediate stage. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers, A Complete translation of the Fragments in Diels*, “Fragmente der Vorsokratiker” (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. see Dedekind and Cantor. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See “Hindu Reform Movements” in Vol. 20:528:1a, and “Theosophy” in Vol. 11:696:3b [↑](#footnote-ref-7)