

SUICIDE: AN ARCHETYPAL PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

“The secret is that only that which can destroy itself is truly alive.”¹

The following is a brief excerpt from a larger study on the analysis of the archetypal patterns of suicide.² My intention with this sensitive work is to explore the complexities of suicide, not as a form of tourism, but as a pilgrimage, with respect for those who have chosen this path and the loved ones that remained as witnesses. A review of mythological accounts of suicide, ancient and current histories of suicide, the patterns in specific populations where growth of suicide is currently unfolding, and the mechanisms and chosen places of suicide are presented.

The depth and breadth of the knowledge base of past suicides that is currently accessible suggests that suicide symbolizes different things for different people. Nevertheless, it remains the most private act of independence one could choose. The various paths into and out of suicide are laden with symbols and images that are as dense and sticky as a silken spider web, suggesting a core archetypal nature of suicide that indeed is a threshold where one chooses to leave life on one side and enter the field of death on the other.

1 Carl G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, Vol. 12 of *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 74.

2 Katherine A. Best, *The Archetype of Suicide* (Sarasota, FL: Runaway Press, 2013, in revision).

The Epidemiology of Suicide

In spite of the fact that there are established guidelines for the prevention of suicide, rates have increased by 60% worldwide in the past 45 years with nearly one million people dying each year of suicide, or one suicide every 40 seconds.³ These figures do not include suicide attempts, which are 20 times more frequent than completed suicide. Historically, rates have been highest among older males, yet rates among young people have increased, placing suicide as the second leading cause of death in the 10-24 years age group.⁴ Across the globe, it is estimated that a child dies from suicide every six hours.⁵

Suicide has grown to epidemic proportions in the United States. Within one year in the United States, 8.3 million people seriously considered suicide, 2.2 million have made a plan for suicide, 1 million attempted suicide, and every 15 minutes a person completes suicide.⁶ Overall, males complete suicide at a greater rate due to lethality of method; however, females attempt suicide three times more often.⁷

The highest levels of suicides are found amongst Native Americans; 27 percent of Native American adolescents have attempted suicide.⁸ According to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, each day 22 veterans commit suicide, one veteran every 65 minutes.⁹ Shootings that involve police officers where an individual intentionally escalates the potential for a lethal encounter, threatening officers or civilians, are classified as suicide by cop, and have risen to 36% of all lethal shootings.¹⁰ Suicide with hostile intent is the term used to describe instances where either an individual uses self-

3 *The World Health Report 2013, Mental Health: Evidence and Research*, <http://www.who.int/mentalhealth/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en/index.html> (accessed 10/12/2013).

4 Ibid.

5 Children's Defense Fund, <http://www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/moments-in-america-for-children.html#sthash.Alz6ej7u.dpuf> (accessed 10/12/2013).

6 United States Department of Health and Human Services, *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action* (Rockville, MD: US Public Health Service, 2012).

7 Institute of Medicine, *Reducing Suicide: A National Imperative*, ed. S. K. Goldsmith, T. C. Pellmar, A. M. Kleinman, and W. E. Bunney (Washington, D. C.: National Academies Press, 2002), <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309083214/html/> (accessed 2/10/2004).

8 Ibid.

9 J. Kemp and R. Bossarte, *Suicide Data Report, Department of Veterans Affairs. Mental Health Services: Suicide Prevention Program*, <https://www.va.gov/opa/docs/Suicide-Data-Report-2012-final.pdf>

10 K. Mohandie, J. R. Meloy, and P. I. Collins, "Suicide by Cop among Officer-Involved Shooting Cases," *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 54 (2008): 456-462.

killing methods that harm others in the process (bra bombs/car bombs), or instances where an individual commits suicide after a killing spree. Soldiers in ancient Mediterranean cultures demonstrated the earliest manifestation of killing sprees, known as the *devotio*.¹¹ Two conditions are generally present for *devotio*: (1) an individual issues a message to their fellows, which may include their reasons for committing this act; and (2) the individual then stages their assault/killing raid, where they aim to take out either as many as they can before they are either killed or they commit suicide. Last year in the United States there were 316 mass shooting sprees, many ending in suicide.¹²

Shame-Motivated Suicides

Like a wound made from the inside by an unseen hand, shame disrupts the natural function of the self...the inner experience of shame is a... sickness of the soul. To experience shame is to experience the very essence or heart of the self as wanting. The excruciating observation of the self...this torment of self-consciousness, becomes so acute as to create a binding, almost paralyzing effect.¹³

The following are descriptions of deep shame: wound, searing pain, mortifying, sense of degradation, total loneliness, terrifying, soul murder, horror, cursedness, torment, dread, and despair.¹⁴ Shame has been part of the human drama since the beginning of recorded history. For the Greeks, the goddess of shame and respect, *Adios*, represented a sense of duty and honor and served as the handmaiden to *Athena*. In the *Iliad*, the battle cry was *Adios!* History is filled with examples of shaming strategies used to ensure social agreements. Subsequently, breaking social agreements has frequently meant isolation from the collective, death, or suicide.¹⁵

11 A. Preti, "School shooting as a culturally enforced way of expressing suicidal hostile intentions," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online* 36/4 (2008): 544-550.

12 N. Wing, "We've Had So Many Mass Shootings in the U.S., We've Had to Redefine the Term," *Huffington Post*. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/17/mass-shootings-us_n_3935978.html

13 Gershen Kaufman, *The Psychology of Shame* (New York: Springer Publishing Co., 1989), 5-18.

14 Sandra Edelman, *Turning the Gorgon: A Meditation on Shame* (Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications, 1998), 34.

15 *Ibid.*, 40.

Recent research is suggesting that there is a direct relationship between shame and suicide. Children wounded by abuse, incest, or exploitation report a sense of worthlessness permeating and branding them with shame. They are frequently belittled until compliant. Shame is also found in military personnel, one of our highest groups of suicides, where social shaming is dominant in the initial conditioning of boot camps. In addition, shame is the most salient factor when determining suicidality in prisons or a first arrest. The profile of the most likely to commit suicide is a white male, under age 22, non-serious offender. Typically, this individual normally is a law-abiding citizen and it is their first offense.¹⁶ Nevertheless, due to the level of shame incurred by the arrest they frequently demonstrate confrontational behavior patterns such as belligerence or attempting to physically assault an officer. The timeframe for suicide is usually within 3 hours after a booking, and the method is typically by hanging.

Bullicide is a term coined from youth suicides due to bullying. This is a phenomenon that is increasing, with as many as 160,000 students missing from school each day due to fear of being bullied. Cyber-bullying, which can include chat rooms, Facebook, and text messaging, is a contributing factor. A recent study reports that 14% of high school students have considered committing suicide due to bullying. Of students bullied, 40% have disabilities.¹⁷

Familicide is the act of a parent killing their child or children and then killing themselves and their spouse. Over half, 61%, of the children murdered in the United States are murdered by one of their parents, with approximately 35% ending in parental suicide.¹⁸

Carrying shame causes an individual to question the measure of their worth to society and to family. For many, suicide is seen as the only way of ending the shame and the experience of the internal battle with failure. For many honor and shame are blood brothers. "The stain on honor is washed clean in blood," says a Spanish proverb.¹⁹ This proverb implies a sense of redemption is gained with the shedding of blood.

16 David Lester, "The Role of Shame in Suicide," *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, The American Association of Suicidology* 27/4 (Winter 1997): 352-361.

17 Bullying Statistics.org (accessed 11/12/2013): 1.

18 Susan Hatters Friedman, Sarah McCue Horwitz, and Phillip J. Resnick, "Child Murder by Mothers: A Critical Analysis of the Current State of Knowledge and a Research Agenda," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 162 (2005): 1578.

19 James C. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead, *Shadows of the Heart: A spirituality of the painful emotions* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Co, 1996), 147.

Suicide Prevention Efforts

Contemporary efforts at preventing suicide stem from the historic approaches of public health. This approach implements interventions at three points in time: pre-event, event, and post-event. Examples include suicide public awareness campaigns, hotlines, medical interventions of prescribed medications or hospitalizations, restriction of guns, and warning signs on dangerous substances. Environmental interventions include railings on highways and nettings around high bridges with signage and emergency phones to call if thinking of suicide.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, one of the largest and longest studies ever conducted (now over a decade), is a collaborative effort of a number of scholars participating with the Centers for Disease Control to assess the cumulative impact of deleterious traumas on health outcomes including suicide.²⁰ This type of empirical evidence, reflective of the pragmatism of today's social and behavioral scientists, allows for the classifications of suicides and the ability to determine correlations and therefore address populations most at risk. Nevertheless, the complexity and mystery of self-destruction across social groups, ethnicities, and ages suggests that a critical undercurrent of unseen factors still remain.

The Need for the Study

If we want to move towards self-knowledge and the experience of reality, then an inquiry into suicide becomes the first step.²¹

Despite efforts of suicide prevention by the medical and public health communities through engaging in restrictive medicalization to help ensure safety of the suicidal, the death toll grows. Treatments are often surrounded by fear and a pervasive sense of helplessness. Historical efforts of criminalization of the act of suicide, as well as financially stripping the families of suicides of all property as methods of shaming have failed; if anything this has driven the topic of suicide further into the shadows. This paper speaks to the epidemic of suicide, to the survivors of loved ones who have committed suicide, and also it serves as a lament for those who have chosen to commit suicide.

20 Shanta Dube, Robert Anda, Vincent Felitti, Daniel Chapman, David Williamson, and Wayne Giles, "Childhood abuse, household dysfunction, and the risk of attempted suicide throughout the lifespan: Findings from the adverse childhood experiences study," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 286/24 (2001): 3089.

21 James Hillman, *Suicide and the Soul* (Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications, 1997), 15.

SUICIDOLOGY: FOUNDATIONAL THEORIES

Human awareness fails, according to a psychology based on soul, because the soul's metaphorical nature has a suicidal necessity..., an underworld affiliation..., a 'morbidism'..., a destiny—different from day world claims.²²

The word “suicide” is Latin in its origins, a compound noun: sui (of oneself/one's own) and cidium (killing/slaying). The ancient Greek language used a more comprehensive term, autocheir, or to act with one's “own hand.” This implies choice, planning, and self-determination. Other terms used for self-killing included “seize death,” “grasp death,” and “break up life.” By the 19th century, phrases like “death by choice,” “self-deliverance,” “mercy death,” and “euthanasia” began to legitimize types of voluntary death.²³ From ancient times, political, religious, and philosophical beliefs have determined whether suicide was considered appropriate, or whether it was criminalized or medicalized.

Emile Durkheim's Taxonomy of Suicide

Considered the father of systematic approaches to the study of social problems, Durkheim claims that suicide is a social phenomenon that results from a breakdown of the vital bonds of social life. The psychiatric literature insists that the majority of people who take their own life are in a pathological state, but Durkheim emphasizes that the force which determines the suicide is not psychological but social.²⁴

In his classical study, *Le Suicide*, which was published in 1897, Durkheim demonstrates that neither psychopathic factors, nor heredity, nor climate, nor poverty, nor unhappy love, nor other personal factors offer a sufficient explanation of suicide; rather, he proposes that suicide is caused by some power which is over and above the individual, a super-individual power.²⁵ Durkheim classified suicides on the basis of the relationship between the actor and society, according to four categories:

22 James Hillman, *Archetypal Psychology* (Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications, 2004), 33.

23 Thomas Szasz, *Fatal Freedom: The Ethics and Politics of Suicide* (Westport CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999).

24 Emile Durkheim, *Le Suicide* (1897), <http://www.preservearticles.com/201101173440/types-of-suicide-given-by-durkheim.html> (accessed 10/10/2013).

25 Ibid.

(1) Egoistic suicide: results from social isolation or the feeling that one has no place in society.

(2) Altruistic suicide: results from over-integration or enmeshment of the individual into a society, as in the case of warriors.

(3) Anomic suicide: results from certain breakdowns of social equilibrium which have cropped up suddenly, such as bankruptcy or extreme wealth after winning a lottery.

(4) Fatalistic suicide: results from overregulation in society and are associated with shame and despair, such as a servant, slave, or barren woman.

James Hillman's Taxonomy of Suicide

"Suicide is the attempt to move from one realm to another by force though death."²⁶

Almost one hundred years later, James Hillman brought us his profound and thoughtful book, *Suicide and the Soul*. He proposed that suicides are "A cry for help, but not to live. Rather it is a cry for help to die, to go through the death experience with meaning."²⁷ His taxonomy generates four categories:

(1) Collective suicide: for others, such as soldiers, Kamikaze pilots, Hara-Kiri, Seppuku, and political deaths and assassins.

(2) Symbolic suicide: aimed at public reaction, exhibitionistic and voyeuristic, such as the immolation of the body as protest, in which the individual finds his own symbolic death.

(3) Emotional suicide: Occurs under the influence of passionate emotions, such as desire to seek revenge against one's enemy, guilt and the avoidance of punishment, shame over financial ruin or public exposure, grief, abandonment, and the subsequent loneliness as in old age; also, includes suicide as a desire to be rescued, to kill or be killed.

(4) Intellectual suicide: adheres to a higher principle or cause, such as the deaths of Socrates and Seneca, the martyrs of the early church, and hunger strikes.

²⁶ Hillman, *Suicide and the Soul*, 68.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

Suicide as a Complex

The concept of “complexes” denotes associations, images, ideas, and memories that are the vehicles that create a path transporting instinctual and raw archetypal material from the great unconscious and give shape to the archetypal patterns and blueprints of potentiality.²⁸ The complex of suicide is particularly evident in family histories of suicide where the complex as a vehicle of suicide is teeming with associations in survivors of parental, sibling, or child suicides. National and racial complexes of shame and honor also provide a path or vehicle for political suicides.

Jacobi sums up complexes as having (1) two roots, either infantile or actual events; (2) two natures, either morbid or healthy; and (3) two modes of expression, either negative or positive.²⁹ More succinctly, a complex has bipolar features or two opposing manifestations.

Michael Conforti describes complexes as highly charged quanta of energy organized around an archetypal core that tune into a specific facet of a universal archetypal field and then begin to take shape in matter eventually presenting an image or concretization of the archetypal alignment.³⁰ The application of this theory suggests that there are complexes present within individuals that provide a sense of radar allowing one to tune into and align with a specific frequency of the archetype.

It is argued by some Jungian theorists that suicide is simply a complex with the core archetype being death.³¹ This notion stems back to the work of Freud and his theory of the death instinct or death drive. Hillman argues that the suicide impulse is instinctively a transformation drive.³² Rosen argues that self-destruction, or suicide, is not instinctive.³³ The justification Rosen offers is that there are relatively few fairy tales that have emerged from the collective unconscious that we can rely on to guide us in the amplification of the behavior of suicide.³⁴ Rosen further argues that “myth doesn’t represent

28 Erel Shalit, *The Complex: Path of Transformation from Archetype to Ego* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 2002), 25.

29 Jolande Jacobi, *Complex, Archetype, Symbol in the Psychology of C. G. Jung* (New York: Bollingen Foundation, Princeton University Press, 1959), 25.

30 Michael Conforti, *Field, Form, and Fate: Patterns in Mind, Nature, and Psyche* (New Orleans: Spring Journal Books, Inc., 2003), 128.

31 John Betts, “Towards a Jungian Theory of Suicide: Questions,” *Dissertation for Diploma in Analytical Psychology* (Zurich: C.G. Jung Institute, 2003).

32 Hillman, *Suicide and the Soul*, 68.

33 David Rosen, *Transforming Depression: Healing the Soul through Creativity* (York Beach, Maine: Nicholas Hays, Inc., 2002), 31.

34 *Ibid.*, 32.

grounds for archetypal amplification because it is not universal but is embedded in specific cultures that endorse suicide as did the Greeks and the Japanese, thus we find no shortage of mythological accounts from these two cultures.”³⁵ I find this particular statement disturbing, curious, a bit Eurocentric, and dismissive of original myths or sacred texts as archetypally rich. The first use of the term “fairy tales” was not until the 1600’s by a Parisian woman named Marie Catherine d’Aulony, in her book *Les Contes des Fées*. The Grimm brothers followed 150 years later. One could argue that these early books of fairy tales were also culturally embedded, subjective storytelling. Furthermore, all myths, legends, poetry, music, and any form of art carries the soul-signature of the author; thus we can readily differentiate between the work of Shakespeare or Rumi. So, I propose that all forms of art and storytelling are subjective experiences (the individual artist bringing forth their experience) of the collective unconsciousness.

The requisite for a fairy tale is that there are fairies, elves, dwarfs, or talking animals. There is no reason to leave out fairy tales from India, Indigenous North American tribes, Latin groups, Islanders, China, nor Africa, where all of our ancestral roots find their origin. During my research, Kwame Scruggs, founder of Alchemy, Inc. in Chicago, brought to my attention the African fairy tale, “Killing Virtue,” which meets the criteria for a fairy tale, as it has as one of the main characters a talking lion.³⁶ Interestingly, this story also contains two suicides with very different motivations. The first is of a young man that did not heed the lion’s guidance, his childhood companion and protector. The lion is killed by the order of a woman of wealth and power. The young man takes the arrow from the lion and kills himself seeking redemption through his own bloodshed after he has betrayed and disobeyed the instinctive wisdom of his lifelong friend, the lion. The second suicide is by the young man’s wife; grieving after finding both the lion and her husband dead, she hangs herself. This legendary tale offers amplification for two very different types of suicide.

Often, the ancient myths and folk lore from the borderlands were codified and distilled into fairy tales for the European children, as Max Muller suggested: “The gods of ancient mythology were changed into the demi-gods and heroes of ancient poetry, and these demi-gods again became, at a later age, the principal characters of our nursery tales.”³⁷ According to Mircea Eliade, the first manifestation of initiations and rituals developed during a mythical time, a sacred time, pointing to the very ‘once upon a time’

35 Ibid., 32

36 Roger D. Abrahams, *African Folktales* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 120-122.

37 Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth, Myth as Fairy Tale* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

utilized in fairy tales but not original to fairy tales.³⁸ Myths and folklore are found in every culture, and within every culture are the faces of suicide: suicide as sacrifice for a perceived higher good, the suicide of lovers, the suicide of the aging, and the suicide of those who carry stigma and shame.

Suicide as an Archetype

No archetype can be reduced to a simple formula. It is a vessel that we can never empty, and never fill. It has a potential existence only, and when it takes shape in matter it is no longer what it was. It persists throughout the ages and requires interpreting ever anew. The archetypes are the imperishable elements of the unconscious, but they change their shape continually.³⁹

Hillman juxtaposes the archetype of the soul with that of the individual choice of death, and proposes that we view the matter from a mythopoeic perspective: The archetype of death is first found in Greek literature in the poem of Hesiod where he describes Thanatos as the god of death. Death in this understanding can be non-violent, often depicted as an angel, gentle, like that of his twin brother Hypnos (sleep). Alternately, death can be violent, belonging to the domain of their sister, Keres. Hillman suggests the archetype of death represented by the gods of Thanatos or Keres are tricked out of a victory. Who is the opponent? The archetype of suicide is summoned by the ego complex and one enters into death's field on one's own terms, choosing to walk directly into the death field. Hillman states:

It is the thought that my soul is mine, and so my death belongs only to me. I can do with my death what I choose. Because I can end my life when and how and where I please, I am wholly my own being, utterly self-determined, free of the fundamental constraint that oppresses each human's being—the uncertain certitude of death. No longer am I Death's subject, waiting on its will to pick the when and how and where of its arrival. I have taken my death out of the hands of Death. Suicide becomes the ultimate empowerment. I am my own redeemer—'Death where is thy victory.'⁴⁰

38 Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1969).

39 Carl G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Vol. 9, Pt. 1 of *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 179.

40 Hillman, *Suicide and the Soul*, 197.

To further the argument that suicide is archetypal let us consider what Jung and others frequently spoke of as the bipolarity of an archetype. It seems that Jung's understanding of the dynamics occurring in the tension of the opposites, and the compensatory function of maintaining the tension and taking the middle ground, is why he insisted on the container of rites and rituals to hold the chaos ensuing from an archetypal possession.⁴¹ The opposing pole of self-destruction is self-preservation. Marie-Louise von Franz refers to Jung's idea of an archetypal constellation having a corresponding instinct.⁴² She references the "instinct of self-preservation as an automation of the body to run or defend," what we typically refer to as the "fight or flight" response. This automatic response is also seen in those who immediately commit suicide after the death or perceived death of a loved one. There is little reflection, just an automatic destruction of the body. This automatic response is illustrated in an adolescent boy who jumped in front of a train, thinking he had killed his father after pushing him in an argument when his father had fallen down but was simply stunned.⁴³ Tragically, this confirms Jung's description of archetypes as "systems of readiness for action."⁴⁴ Hillman advocates that suicide is an instinctive drive of transformation.⁴⁵ The "dark night of the soul" is the death experience of an old pattern, or lifestyle, as the new way of living is gasping to be born, the soul crawling towards transformation like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon.

Conclusions

Death typically arrives by disease, accident, or by murder. However, suicide is always a possibility. The time, place, and method can be chosen by an individual, rather than being killed by a mosquito that carries a deadly disease or someone running a red light. Hillman suggests that the one who commits suicide does not fear the hereafter but is heeding the call of the soul for transformation. He proposes that "as individuality grows so does the possibility of suicide."⁴⁶ The multiple faces of suicide further justify the position that suicide is not only a complex, but has at its core an archetypal

41 Ibid.

42 Marie-Louise Von Franz, *The Problem of the Puer Aeternus* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 2000), 144.

43 M. Lewis, *Shame, the Exposed Self* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

44 Carl G. Jung, *Civilization in Transition*, Vol. 10 of *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 31.

45 Hillman, *Suicide and the Soul*, 68.

46 Ibid., 63.

energy crouching, a ready alternative, a threshold through which to exit life and enter into the field of death. This archetypal instinctive response is also seen within the animal kingdom. We have documentation of elephants, chimpanzees, dogs, swans, lions, whales, and dolphins self-destructing from mourning the loss of a mate or family member via starvation, drowning, or beaching themselves. Animals and humans will self-sacrifice to protect their loved ones as a way of genetic self-preservation. When a pea aphid is threatened by a ladybug it will explode itself, scattering and protecting its brethren and sometimes even killing the ladybug. Joiner notes that they function as tiny suicide bombers, just as we see within human groups.⁴⁷

SUICIDES FROM MYTHOLOGY TO THE PRESENT DAY

Myths, folklore, fables, fairy tales, religion, and literature depict suicide as a story of moral significance from ancient civilizations to current times. These examples provide the reader with various archetypal motifs surrounding suicide.

The legendary Sphinx is said to have guarded the entrance to the Greek city of Thebes, devouring anyone unable to answer her riddle: “Which creature has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?” Oedipus solved the riddle by answering “Man—who crawls on all fours as a baby, then walks on two feet as an adult, and then uses a walking stick in old age.” Outsmarted by Oedipus, the Sphinx threw herself from her high rock and died. An alternative version tells us that she devoured herself in rage.

In the related Greek tragedy written by Sophocles, *King Oedipus*, we see the dark thread of suicidality running between the above figure of the Sphinx and Queen Jocasta. Oedipus was sent to death at birth by his father Laius, who was trying to escape the prophecies of the Oracle about a curse for abducting and raping his student Chrysippus, after which he was instructed never to produce a child. At the birth of Oedipus, Laius pierces his son’s foot and has him placed in a field to die. Fleeing from the prophecies of the Oracle as well, Oedipus encounters King Laius and unknowingly fulfills the first half of the prophecy by killing his father. After solving the Sphinx’s famous riddle, the grateful city elected Oedipus as their new king. Oedipus accepted the throne and married Laius’ widowed queen Jocasta (his own mother). Later King Oedipus learns of his patricide and incest. Upon discovering the truth, Jocasta hangs herself. In an alternative version, Jocasta commits suicide by stabbing herself.

Canace and Macarues, from the *Heroides*, written by Ovid c. 25 B.C., each commit suicide, Canace by her father’s instruction and Macarues in response

⁴⁷ Thomas Joiner, *Myths about Suicide* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2011).

to his sister/lover's suicide (this may have been added in a later retelling of the story). In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Myrrha, the daughter of Cinyras and Cenchreis, attempts to hang herself because of her lustful thoughts for her father, but is saved by her nursemaid. Later discovered by her father, Myrrha flees as the gods turn her into a myrrh tree. Her father kills himself in shame. Adonis was later born from the tree. A number of versions of the suicide of Narcissus exist as a moral myth concerning pride and vanity. The notion of a narcissistic wounding and the rage and deep sense of shame that follows are correlated with suicide in our present day literature as well.⁴⁸

The above legends and myths speak of suicides from shame of incest and wounded pride. A different archetypal motif is that of self-sacrifice for transformation, as seen in the famous Norse myth, later written into Wagner's opera, *The Ring of the Nibelungs*, a story of an authoritarian Father/King, Wotan, and the suicide of his daughter Brünnhilde. The intention of her sacrificial offering is for transformation in the alchemical fires as she seeks an end to the old order of power and greed of her father. Before riding her horse into the funeral pyre of her husband, Brünnhilde sings to the Rhine maidens who were the guardians of the Ring of Power: "What you desire I will give you: from my ashes take it to yourselves. The fire...will cleanse the curse from the ring."⁴⁹ Considering the story as a transformational sacrifice (sacrifice meaning "to make sacred"), we can see a similar motif throughout the history of Christianity and within the Buddhists traditions of self-immolation for political reasons.

Fairy Tales, Märchen, and Folk Tales

The following list, though in no way exhaustive, of fairy tales, folk tales, and Märchen (German for story or folk tale, from *mari*, meaning "news, famous, illustrious") provides a sample of suicide themes and motifs from various cultures: *The Master Thief* (Norwegian); *The Little Match Girl*, *The Little Mermaid* (Danish); *Rumpelstiltskin*, *How Children Played Butcher with Each Other* (German); *Princess Finola and the Dwarf* (Irish); *A Killing Virtue* (African); *The Dwarf with the Long Beard* (Slavic); *The Haunted Mill*, *Rogers's Slide* (North American); *The Tragedy Of The Yin Family*, *The Sentinel*, *The Mysterious Buddhist Robe* (Chinese); *Good Luck to the Lucky One*; *Or, Shall I Fall Down?*, *A Royal Thief-Catcher*, *How Greed for a Trifling Thing Led a Man to Lose a Great One*, *The Adventures of Maya the Bee*, *The Talkative Tortoise* (Indian); *The Whirlwind* (Polish).

48 Lester, "The Role of Shame in Suicide."

49 Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Ring of Power: Symbols and Themes, Love vs. Power in Wagner's Ring Cycle and in Us: A Jungian Feminist Perspective* (York Beach, Maine: Nicholas-Hayes, Inc., 1992).

Historical Suicides

Plato and Aristotle believed that suicide was a means of escaping an unbearable life and with permission from either the state or God, a means of escaping dishonor. Socrates taught that humans were possessions of the gods, and by killing ourselves we defied divine law. When sentenced to death in a public trial, he perceived this as a divine message and drank hemlock. Practices in 200 B.C. incorporated suicide in the legal code as compulsory for prosecutions of the Roman elite; avoiding public trials and imprisonment, they could return to their families if they committed suicide within a day. Within Roman colonies, individuals expressing suicidal intent applied to the Senate and, upon evaluation, were given hemlock free of charge, with three exceptions: no one convicted of capital crimes, soldiers, or slaves could apply. The reason for rejecting them was not moralistic but economic. However, soldiers were allowed to commit suicide if they experienced irrevocable loss of honor on the battlefield. This attitude was also used as political persuasion, as a rival would infer loss of honor by suggesting suicide. As an example, Emperor Nero sent daggers to his political rivals.

Famous examples of Roman suicide were Cato the Younger and Marc Antony. Cato the Younger first attempted suicide after his defeat by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C. To avoid capture, he escaped to Africa and tried to kill himself with a sword. Only succeeding in gravely injuring himself, he ripped at his wound until he died. When the Senate declared war on his lover Cleopatra, Marc Antony deserted the Roman army and fought alongside her. Cleopatra took refuge in her Mausoleum and sent messengers reporting her intent to commit suicide. Distraught, Marc Antony plunged himself upon a sword. Before he died, Antony had himself carried to Cleopatra's retreat, where he died after bidding her to make peace with Octavian. Rather than fall under Octavian's domination Cleopatra committed suicide.

Political and Religious Suicides

Throughout the Old Testament there are a number of examples of suicide including the Warrior-King of Israel, Abimelech, who did not want to die at the hand of a woman, and Saul who chose to fall on a sword after losing the war to the Philistines.⁵⁰ Samson's act of suicide, by pulling down the temple of Dagon upon himself and the Philistines, along with his declaration, "let my soul die," was interpreted in the rabbinic tradition as an act of heroism, martyrdom, and self-sacrifice for God.⁵¹ Death by choice is an example of

50 Suicide in the Hebrew Scriptures, retrieved 2014: http://www.religioustolerance.org/sui_hscr.htm

51 R. Harri, "Samson's Suicide: Death and the Hebrew Literary Canon," *Israel Studies*

supreme sacrifice common among members of the world's military forces, and exemplifies an archetypally rich symbol of self-sacrifice for the greater good. Still a death by suicide, it would be considered altruistic suicide by Durkheim and collective or intellectual suicide by Hillman's taxonomy.

Perhaps the most well known Christian account of suicide is the story of Judas. He became his own judge and executioner driven by the emotions of shame, despair, and guilt: "When Judas, his betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he repented and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, 'I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.' They said, 'what is that to us? See thou to that.' And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself."⁵²

For the early Christians, exposures to horrific persecution increased the incidents of suicide and martyrdom to epidemic proportion. Burdened with the savage slaughters in gladiator circus-like shows of the Roman coliseum, the appeal from St. Augustine to cease the killing catapulted the idea of suicide as a 'sin' in the early 4th century with his monumental book, *The City of God*.⁵³ The morality in the choice of suicide as an act to protect chastity is seen throughout history and across cultures; examples within the Catholic Church⁵⁴ include the patron saints of suicide, the 15 year old girl, Saint Pelagia from Antioch, who jumped from a roof top fearing sexual assault when threatened to be taken captive by a group of soldiers⁵⁵ and Saint Appoliana, who was tortured by having her teeth pulled or bashed out, and ultimately threw herself into the fire rather than renounce her Christian faith.

Within Hinduism, a dominant motif of suicide is seen in the case of uselessness. Prayopavesa (non-violent fasting to death) is accepted for old-age monks who have no more responsibilities left in life. The Sati tradition, demanding a widow throw herself onto the funeral pyre of her husband, has gone on for centuries. It was not until 1987 that the Prevention Act against Sati was passed.

In Japan, shame is used to socialize children, a culture where ritual suicide is normalized to preserve honor. Tragically, Japan has one of the highest rates of adolescent suicides in the world, suggesting the morphic resonance and cultural memory of shame working in tandem with honor. Honor suicides such as Seppuku (also known as hari-kari in spoken language)

17/3.

52 Matthew 27:3-6, *Revised Standard Version* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1972).

53 A. Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (New York: Norton & Company, 1990).

54 Simon Wessely, "Preventing suicide: are the best barriers physical or philosophical?," *The Lancet*, Vol. 383, Issue 9920 (8 March 2014): 861-862.

55 Edwin S. Shneidman, *Autopsy of a Suicidal Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

were originally reserved only for samurai. Part of the samurai bushido honor code, seppuku was used voluntarily by samurai to die with honor rather than fall into the hands of their enemies. The ceremony is performed in front of spectators. Females belonging to samurai families were carefully taught Jigaki as children, which is female ritual suicide by cutting the arteries of the neck. Before committing suicide, a woman would often tie her knees together so her body would be found in a dignified pose when the invaders arrived. The main purpose was to achieve a quick and certain death in order to avoid capture and to prevent rape thereby preserving chastity as also seen within the Christian cultures. Kamikaze, or “Divine wind,” were suicide attacks by the Empire of Japan against naval vessels in the closing stages of World War II. It is believed that during World War II, nearly 4,000 kamikaze pilots were sacrificed.

Within the Buddhist community there have been 120 public suicides by self-immolation since 2009. Monks are not encouraged to commit suicide, but are praised for their courageousness and inherent selflessness and sacrifice by self-immolation for political change. One very famous example is Thich Quang Duc, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, who protested the South Vietnamese Government’s harassment of Buddhists in the early 1960s. The demonstration was effective in pressuring the United States to encourage the South Vietnamese government to sign the Joint Communiqué, listing concessions to Buddhists. This archetypal motif of suicide as sacrifice dominates across cultures when transformation of corruption and power is needed.

Contemporary Faces of Suicide

“To look life in the face, always, to look life in the face, and to know it for what it is...at last, to love it for what it is, and then to put it away.”⁵⁶

Since the romantic era, writers and artists have dominated the lists of suicides: Van Gogh, Kafka (dying of tuberculosis, he wanted all his writings destroyed as an artistic suicide), Bruno Bettelheim, Hart Crane, Dylan Thomas, Cesare Pavese, Sylvia Plath, Modigliani, Arshile Gorki, Jackson Pollock, Virginia Woolf, Earnest Hemingway, Robert Frost, and more.⁵⁷ The list of celebrity suicides is extensive as well: Marilyn Monroe, Valentino, Elvis, Michael Jackson, Heath Ledger, Greg Giraldo, and so on. It is hypothesized that perhaps the reason celebrities are more inclined to commit suicide is because they are so far disenfranchised from the norm. Celebrities seem to experience a much

56 “Closing Scene,” *The Hours*, directed by Stephen Daldry, screenplay by David Hare.

57 Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide*.

heavier influx of narcissistic shame, and the cost of their actions are perceived as much higher given the degree of visibility in the public eye.

The Right to Die

“Suicide is the paradigm of our independence from everyone else.”⁵⁸

Sigmund Freud, the founding father of psychoanalysis, turned to his doctor, Max Schur, after discussing the terminal stages of his cancer: “Schur, you remember our ‘contract’ not to leave me in the lurch when the time had come. Now it is nothing but torture and makes no sense. Talk it over with Anna, and if she thinks it’s right, then make an end of it.”⁵⁹ Dr. Schur convinced Anna it was pointless to postpone her father’s death. An overdose in morphine resulted in Freud’s death. Decades before, Freud had written about his need to keep control of his life to the end: “when thoughts fail or words will not come? ...with all the resignation before destiny that suits an honest man, I have one wholly secret entreaty: no invalidism, no paralysis of one’s powers through bodily misery. Let us die in harness, as King Macbeth says.”⁶⁰

The idea that we should have a right to die by choice versus an unknown death sentence is not new. “Euthanasia” is from the Greek root meaning “good death.” It is the act or practice of ending the life of an individual who would otherwise experience severe, incurable suffering or disability. Historic practices range from the Romans’ petition for hemlock, to the practice by elders in various cultures and tribes who choose to die by exposure to the elements.

Today, advocates of voluntary euthanasia believe there should be legal and medical provisions available so that one would be allowed to die or assisted to die with dignity. The typical guidelines for voluntary euthanasia include: suffering from a terminal illness; unlikely to benefit from the discovery of a cure during the time that remains of the life expectancy; suffering intolerable pain or impaired quality of life due to dependency on others or life support; the person has an enduring, voluntary, and competent wish to die (or has, prior to losing the competence to do so, expressed a wish to die in the event that conditions become irreversible); and lastly, the person is unable without assistance to commit suicide.

58 Hillman, *Suicide and the Soul*, 91.

59 Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1988).

60 Ibid.

ARCHETYPAL FIELD THEORY

To this point we have briefly reviewed suicide from the perspective of epidemiology, mythology, and history. Exploring the phenomenon of suicide through the lens of archetypal pattern analysis provides an explanatory frame utilizing symbols, images, place, and non-linear dynamical systems theory. Building a bridge from classical systems theory to the more recent development in the new sciences that includes complexity and chaos theory, archetypal field theory describes the archetypal orientation as an objective pull, like the magnetic north pole pulls the needle on a compass.⁶¹ Thus, an archetypal field is the energetic, dynamic component of an archetype, which exerts its influence over space and time; not unlike gravitational fields, or electromagnetic fields, it functions as a pre-existent blueprint that continually dictates our plans, behaviors, and outcomes.⁶²

Methods of Suicide: Dominants of the Archetype

“The emergence of a group of archetypes split off from the basic archetype, and the corresponding group of symbols is the expression of spontaneous processes in which the activity of the unconscious continues unimpaired.”⁶³

An objective analysis of an object or image can serve to orient us to the archetypal dominant within a field.⁶⁴ In light of the above quote by Neumann, that corresponding symbols to a basic archetype give rise to spontaneous unimpaired processes that are frequently felt in the desperation of someone contemplating suicide. The thoughts of suicide dominate their minds as plans develop. The most common methods of suicide seen today are bleeding to death through cutting or stabbing, drowning, suffocation, jumping from a height, firearms, hanging, poison, drug overdose, immolation, starvation, and explosion. These objects and images may manifest before the suicide attempt in dreams, artwork, or conversations of the contemplator. It is critical during suicide assessments and interventions to attain information on weapons or objects that may be readily available or considered as a means to ending one's

61 Conforti, *Threshold Experiences: The Archetypes of Beginnings* (Brattleboro, Vermont: Assisi Institute Press, 2008), 6.

62 Ibid., 14.

63 Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 324.

64 Yoram Kaufmann, *The Way of the Image* (New York: Zahav Books, 2009).

life. Frequently, those contemplating suicide are very particular about method, objects, and place. The disciplined approach of reading an archetypal pattern or trajectory offers some ability to assess risk as well as possible points of intervention to potentially interrupt a suicidal intent.

Thresholds: The Power of Place

Finding our orientation to a particular location in time and space is a behavior we each engage in regularly as we shift from one place to the next. Reflection upon the archetypal field we are in provides information, which often exists in potentia at those particular places. Many of us have had the experience of crossing the threshold of a room where active dying is occurring or death has recently happened. Most of us would have a visceral response, as our physiology and psyche reads the death field seeking clues.

During the 3rd International Global Conference on “Making Sense of Suicide,” held in 2012, Sinead Roarty presented a thought provoking paper. I quote her here:

This paper seeks to question whether the very popularity of a suicide site can influence one’s suicidality. Whether a history of voluntary death narratives creates a *loci memoriae*—memory places that reframe a landscape or a landmark as a suicide destination, codifying and transforming a very public place into possibly the most private space of all—the environment in which someone chooses to end their life. It aims to explore the interstices between these sites of cultural memory and the lived experience of them in an attempt to understand the potency and ‘pull’ of a site impregnated with a history of suicide. By looking at the interplay between national identity, history and cultural representations of voluntary death, we can explore whether these sites are, as French historian Pierre Nora has described, ‘inscribed in the flesh of memory.’⁶⁵

The implications for the power of place are profound and illustrative of “attractor sites,” one of the primary suppositions in archetypal field theory. This parallels the work of Pierre Nora in “Realms of Memory,” where he establishes the role of physical places and events in the creation of our collective memory. Nora notes that “sites of memory” function as signs, symbols, and rituals with topographical features that serve as a magnet to attract some and repel others.⁶⁶ This magnetic pull of a place is not only evident in suicide

65 Sinead Roarty, “Death Wishing and Cultural Memory: A Walk through Japan’s ‘Suicide Forest,’” <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/projects/in-hibernation/suicide/conference-programme-abstracts-and-papers/session-8-suicide-and-the-future>

66 Ibid.

destinations, but apparent in religious pilgrimages to places such as Lourdes and the Wailing Wall. It is also experienced as palpable at sites of human atrocity such as war memorials, Holocaust sites, or even the Coliseum in Rome where more blood has been shed than any location on the earth.

The top five most notorious locations for suicide are now easily found on the internet as suicide destinations. Even though those locations are well marked with warning signs and suicide hotline numbers, they remain the top five choices for suicide: The Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, Suicide Forest at the Foot of Mount Fuji, The Gap in Australia, Beachy Head in the south of England, and Humber Bridge in England, the fifth largest suspension bridge in the world.⁶⁷

Iterations

Even in light of the above archetypal dominants and the power of place, suicide attempts are still greater than suicide completions. People presenting behaviors of self-harming, cutting, or burning typically report wanting to stop, yet feel an obsessional pull to continue to repeat the behavior. Importantly, archetypal field theory furthers the work of Sigmund Freud on the repetition compulsion, suggesting that this repetition of a pattern is an entrainment into the psychological dominant of a particular archetypal field. This repetition of patterns of interaction, or behaviors, is referred to as an “archetypal possession” by Conforti.⁶⁸ The assumption is that the pattern exists as a constellation of an archetype via a complex, which could be developed through a number of exposures, such as: suicide of family members, the classic mother or father complexes, the dominant suicidal culture as seen in Rome, Japan, and the romantic period in France, or even stemming from religious complexes and beliefs in such behaviors as mortification of the flesh to achieve spiritual goals.

Thinking in terms of archetypal patterns and morphic resonance, the cultural memory of self-harm has been pervasive since ancient times. During the Black Plague, flagellants were frequently depicted in 15th century art. People were taught to whip themselves as a way to purify the soul for salvation. Mortification is a ritual of self-harming to deaden ‘evil desires’ of the body, for the sake of the soul. This takes on many forms depending on the culture and beliefs, but includes flagellation, cutting into the flesh, laying on spikes, piercing, fasting, or genital mutilations. The goal of deadening the body’s instinctive desires and preserving the soul is deeply intertwined with the archetype of self-sacrificing.

67 Environmental Graffiti, *Five Most Notorious Suicide Spots on Earth*, <http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/news-5-top-suicidespots>

68 Conforti, *Field, Form, and Fate*, 74.

Today, from a medical perspective, self-harming is seen as pathological, as self-harmers report a need to relieve internal pressure or anxiety, guilt, or shame. It is important to note that this dynamic and archetypal energy is deeply linked with the archetypal field of suicide. Perhaps it would be best understood from this perspective that the field of suicide functions like an attractor site with a long cultural memory. Expressive of this is a form of suicide that is gaining in popularity today: auto-erotic suicides, where there is evidence of numerous enactments and iterations of various forms of self-harming behaviors that include hanging oneself during masturbatory activities that are accidentally ending in death.

The iterative function within a chaotic deterministic system creates the repetitive development of a system of self-similarity as seen within nature: a snowflake, a coastline, or a head of broccoli. This underlying pattern is called a fractal and is applicable to the phenomenon of suicide and can be seen through charting the repetitive patterns circling around the attractor site of the archetypal field: a patient that self-harms and/or engages in multiple suicide attempts across their lifespan; copycat suicides after media reports; or multiple suicides within families. Van Eenwyk suggests that fractals are indeed symbols, like mandalas, where the inner structure and meaning is fundamentally hidden from us.⁶⁹ Many survivors often feel the meanings and intentions of a suicide are unclear and hidden; yet, with further exploration, patterns emerge that are telling. In the images of fractals one can see the meandering, but also discern the constraints and design of the underlying morphogenetic field or the core archetype that is dominant. Jung expressed this poetically and succinctly:

Archetypes are like riverbeds that dry up when the water deserts them, but which it can find again at any time. An archetype is like an old watercourse along which the water of life has flowed for centuries, digging a deep channel for itself. The longer it has flowed in this channel the more likely it is that sooner or later the water will return to its old bed.⁷⁰

A person suffering with suicidality is journeying over and over into the terrain of the archetypal field, until the lethality increases, or a significant perturbation occurs, bringing one to a standstill at the bifurcation point, the proverbial fork in the road. Transformation will occur, one way or the other.

69 John Van Eenwyk, *Clinical Chaos: The Strange Attractors of Childhood Trauma* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 2013).

70 Jung, *Civilization in Transition*, 189.

Chaos and Oscillations: Wavering at the Crossroads

A major tenet of chaos theory that is relevant to suicidology is the impact of a perturbation, and the sensitivity to initial conditions at various points in a life and the subsequent patterns that emerge.⁷¹ This is commonly described as the “butterfly effect” (e.g., weather patterns that have changed due to minor shifts in the environment). The impact is minimal at first, but dramatic over time. Suicide seems to be similarly sensitive; with minimal shifts in relationships and a sense of meaningfulness there are frequently very large changes in outcome.

An example of this was the successful intervention that was conducted at the number one site for suicides, the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. This place, which serves as an attractor site for would-be suicides, was used in a research project brought to light by John Bateson and presented in his writing of “The Final Leap.” The executive director of the San Francisco Death Wishing and Cultural Memory Centre called for installing a protective net under the bridge, though his requests were ignored. Bateson defended his proposition by referencing a 1978 study conducted by Richard Seiden, a psychology professor from the University of California. The study tested the question “Will a person who is prevented from suicide in one location inexorably tend to attempt and commit suicide elsewhere?” The results showed that of the 515 would-be Golden Gate jumpers who were pulled back from the railing between 1937 and 1971, 94% were still alive twenty-five years later.⁷²

The implications of this study and other similar interventions are tremendous when considering the possibility of disrupting the suicidal impulse of physical destruction at the very threshold. The agonizing dilemma over suicide as a means of redemption is wrought with contradictions and chaos. As the soul of the individual struggles to release the shackles of biographical history or the burden of the clay body, there seems to be a sensitivity to perturbation or intervention. Presenting individuals with another meaningful choice, a relationship for change and transformation can serve as a powerful energetic and generative attractor site. The relationship representing change, someone caring enough to say “stop, please don’t jump,” seems to offer the opportunity for a quantum shift versus a linear change. This notion of quantum change, though originally from complexity theory, is now being applied by public health in analyzing motivation for all sorts of behavior change that may preserve life as well as the epiphanies that individuals report at critical moments in their life.⁷³

71 James R. Rogers, “The Anatomy of Suicidology: A Psychological Science Perspective on the Status of Suicide Research,” *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior: The American Association of Suicidology* 33/1 (Spring 2003): 9-20.

72 Ibid.

73 Kenneth Resnicow and Scott Page, “Embracing Chaos and Complexity: A Quantum Change for Public Health,” *American Journal of Public Health* 198/8 (August, 2008): 1382-1389.

This type of data suggests a powerful intervention for disrupting suicides. Bonds were formed with the jumpers and the rescuers. The most critical risk factors for suicide are loss of relationship and hopelessness. Within dynamical systems theory this phenomenon is seen when relationship or connection to another system, that could insure generativity or offspring, is missing or deteriorating; the system begins to die and move into entropy. It is not surprising to note that within the literature on risk and resilience, connections or relationships are considered protective factors for suicidal adolescents exposed to cumulative adversities.⁷⁴

Future Directions

Today, we most frequently treat suicidality with restraints, hospitalization, and medication to enforce homeostasis on the chaotic episode. Yet, we see in the many repeated attempts of suicide that without honoring the chaos the person is experiencing and suggesting a symbolic death of that which is no longer serving the individual's growth and transformation, suicidality returns. This suggests that the bifurcation, the fork in the road—"to be or not to be?"—will not be ignored for long unless there is someone to walk with during this dark state. Without a containment of relationship or a "holding arms," in Winnicottian terms, the literal death seems to be the only option. In this container, or cauldron, as it more aptly feels, insight and the third option can begin to emerge. This is the underlying premise of individuation proposed by Jung's metapsychology. The notion of holding the "tension of the opposites" involves generating psychic energy and creating psychological growth.⁷⁵

Being able to sustain the uncertainty of wavering, and maintaining the balance and the pressure between the opposites, is the challenge. The work is to introduce alternatives to suicide and allow for suggesting symbolic death of the elements in an individual life that must be released for transformation at this juncture. Even in the cases of grave illness, teaching and allowing for deep grieving, mourning, and even celebrating the closing of a life introduces the idea of the body ensouled, and the soul embodied within its own temple of physical expression, permitting the dialogue to soften with the body by embracing the transformation that is occurring. This approach can be enough to stop the intervention of euthanasia and to let nature take its course.

Hovering over the crossroads between destruction of the physical self and the death or deconstruction of a way of being or thinking has also been suggested by Jungian analysts. Marian Woodman introduced the term

74 Iris Wagman Borowsky, Marjorie Ireland, and Michael D. Resnick, "Adolescent Suicide Attempts: Risk and Protectors," *Pediatrics* 107 (2001): 485-493.

75 Van Eenwyk, *Clinical Chaos*.

psychic suicide,⁷⁶ and David Rosen speaks of an ego-cide, or shadow-cide.⁷⁷ Turning away from suicide calls for an active transformational experience of surrendering or sacrificing something either symbolically or real. Whatever has become a barrier or obstacle for our body and soul to engage in a sacred relationship of respect and care may have to be released.

In my work I have found it helpful to ask one contemplating suicide: What really does need to die? A relationship? A false belief? A social mask or role? Physical power? Your shame? Is it possible to have a symbolic suicide and to surrender that which needs to be released?

To be present for someone at the crossroads of choosing life or death requires deep compassion and empathic acceptance for the individual to begin again to care for their body, mind, and soul. This process can be aided through story, through creative work, and through compassionate relationship with another. In perhaps most cases we see today, suicide is the mistake of bringing an ending to something that must die within our lives and making it a literal death rather than a symbolic ritual of releasing the chains of past experiences and choices.

Utilizing archetypal field theory as an explanatory model offering both understanding and meaning-making serves us as a trans-disciplinary approach to a monumental problem. I am suggesting in this paper a further differentiation and clarification of suicidal behavior as a powerful archetypal pattern. The archetype manifests with various motifs ranging from self-sacrifice for a perceived higher good, mourning and tragic loss, disease and illness, narcissistic wounding, shame, despair, and loss of honor. The mythological accounts and records of history suggest that suicide has been with us since the beginning of time and will perhaps remain with us forever unless we find the courage, love, and honor for all that are part of the divine dance of creation. In that place of wisdom, permitting the drive of transformation to occur with grace and support would make all the difference in the world.

76 Marian Woodman, *The Owl Was a Baker's Daughter: Obesity, Anorexia Nervosa, and the Repressed Feminine* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980).

77 Rosen, *Transforming Depression*, 80.