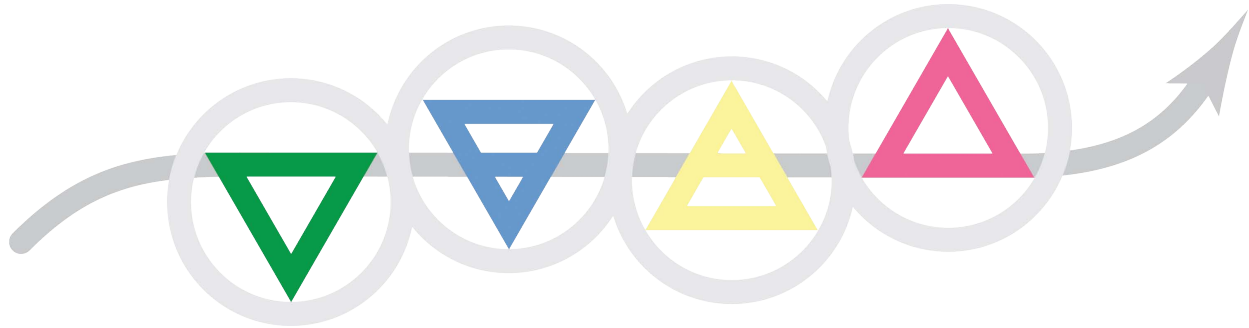


THE ELEMENTS AS AN ARCHETYPE OF TRANSFORMATION:
An Exploration of Earth, Water, Air, and Fire



by

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Abstract



I propose that the alchemical cycle of the four elements Earth, Water, Air and Fire provides a useful and exact analogue for the processes of transformation of a wide variety of types, and as such can be considered an archetype. The elemental cycle is a potent symbol for a transformative, qualitative language (*logos*) which has the potential to guide human consciousness towards lawful, holistic engagement with essentially any phenomenon. When worked consistently, the elemental cycle leads us beyond 'everyday' modes of cognition to what could be called Imaginative, Inspirative, and Intuitive modes cognition. In these modes, thinking not longer takes place 'about' a phenomenon, but 'with', 'through', and 'within' phenomena. The elemental cycle provides a content, a method, and self-regulating feedback mechanisms for working with transformation, and can help engender a consciousness that can fruitfully dialogue with the interiority of the world by making it explicit. Its power lies in its ability to act as a template for the structuring of human consciousness; it is a tool which makes available a coherent, archetypal patterning which can help guide and transform a human consciousness in healthy and practical ways.

This essay comprises a detailed study of the nature of the elements and the elemental cycle, through which it is hoped the reader may gain a solid enough foundation to work experimentally with the elemental cycle independently if desired. Therefore, the cycle is introduced via the phenomenology of the individual elements, which are then connected, compared, and brought together to form a complete picture of the cycle. The breadth of applicability of the cycle is then explored through a series of specific instances that also serve to illuminate the qualities of the cycle itself. A report on third-party work with the elemental cycle provides complementary and contrasting experiences, while an in-depth review and application of the cycle to the nature of images opens up the complexities and demonstrates the recursive, self-generating quality of the cycle. Lastly, an introductory series of practical steps and

specific exercises, advice, and questions for each elemental stage is provided to help the reader use the cycle independently.

Chapter 1 – Introduction and Background to the Study



“It is by virtue of the constitution of the human soul that questions of knowledge arise when the outer world is perceived. In the soul’s own impulse to question lies the power to penetrate the perceived world in such a way that it, together with the soul’s activity, brings the reality of the perceived world to manifestation.” – Rudolf Steiner

Situations or events which are undergoing some type of transformation¹ are numberless – indeed, it appears that nothing manifest is exempt from transformation. The whole extent of the physical universe seems to be in continual flux at every scale, from the very largest scale to the smallest. But transformation is just as prevalent in the inner world, both from second to second as well as over a whole lifetime. The absence of truly static situations is a powerful indicator of the dynamism of the universe, but because this dynamism crosses all scales and boundaries, it begs the question: is there an underlying pattern to this transformation, or does transformation actually occur in a variety of ways which share no deeper similarity other than the simple fact of the transformation itself? In other words, if there are a variety of “laws” which describe accurately transformative events within specific fields, do these laws themselves work according to a higher level of patterning?

The alchemical tradition of the West provides a useful starting point from which to address this question, because the entire discipline revolves around understanding and producing transformation. The discipline of alchemy is unique in that its development has explicitly dealt with transformation both in the outer physical world as well as the inner, non-physical world of the alchemist’s own soul and consciousness. By seeking to transform base metals into higher forms, alchemists had to observe outer nature very carefully, with an eye for every subtle change in a substance or process. The alchemical literature is replete with admonishments to studiously observe the minutest transformations, lest a crucial stage be missed and the work destroyed. On the other hand, this careful and pain-staking training with respect to the outer world was accompanied by a corresponding awareness of the

¹ What is meant by transformation is described in the “operational definitions” section below.

alchemist's own inner process of transformation. It was noted that the processes taking place in the outer physical world within the alembics, pelicans, crucibles, and retorts, corresponded to changes in the alchemist's own consciousness, and that the techniques used to transform physical substances had exact analogues to equally effective techniques for inner transformation.

Over time, metaphors were developed which explicitly linked the inner and outer transformations, and they often became the basis for the entire teaching of alchemy. The alchemical language is obscure² precisely because it is a language of metaphor; and not simply that, but a language of transformation of those metaphors. Certainly the process of symbol creation occasionally resulted in obscurantism, but it would be remiss to discard entirely the potential wisdom of the field without first gaining the capacity to distinguish between its ripe and spoiled fruits.

As Jung so clearly pointed out, these fruits are its metaphors. They are powerful because their development occurred not solely out of the particular inner life of individual alchemists, but were, in the best fashion of modern science, transmitted and verified externally by the experiments of other alchemists. At the same time, the alchemists were able to work with the metaphors on an inner level, in which a different sort of verification could take place. This dual-testing (both inner and outer) led to an understanding that transformations could be characterized accurately by a well-developed metaphorical and visual language, and followed predictable patterns that led through various stages. Metaphors, in this sense, are like active powers containing symbolic energies by which real transformations can be affected (imagine the power of a country's flag, for instance).

² While on the one hand we have part of the alchemical tradition falling into esoteric obscurantism, on the other we have hints of the budding physicalism which was ultimately to more or less replace the entire field of alchemy, transforming its outer aspect into chemistry through the work of Robert Boyle (*The Sceptical Chymist*) and others. The alchemy which is the focus of the present research is neither of these, but one that attempts to walk along the dynamically shifting membrane between these two potentials (the Above and Below). Avoiding the first case means paying attention to the tendency for the metaphorical language to inflate itself into such wide spaces that it loses all applicability, while avoiding the second case means steering clear of the tendency to conflate all symbols with their objects so that ultimately the only thing that remains is an 'object' with no subject to perceive its unfolding (see Chapter 5: Limitations and Boundaries for a related discussion).

One of the most powerful metaphors developed by the alchemists in order to understand how situations transform can be found in that of the alchemical “elements”: Earth, Water, Air and Fire.³ These four elements formed the foundation for the experimental work of the alchemist, and are at first glance eminently practical categories for classifying the various states of matter: solid, liquid, gas, and what we would now call plasma – but this is a modern usage. A more appropriate understanding recognizes the elements as more akin to forces or powers rather than simply as states of being. As powers, the elements also related to the inner soul state in which the alchemist successively and repeatedly had to place him or herself in order to successfully complete the “Great Work” – known as the philosopher’s stone. This philosopher’s stone is a metaphor – which means that it has both an inner and outer *reality*, neither of which can be taken for granted or understood exclusively. The development of the philosopher’s stone could only occur through a refinement of the initially untransformed base material of the world – the “prima materia” or black earth, which is simultaneously the alchemist’s own psyche, both conscious and unconscious, as well as the actual underlying physicality of all the worlds substances. The prima materia cannot be apprehended directly, but can be fruitfully approached through its manifestation as the four elements, understood qualitatively and archetypally. As Titus Burckhardt states, “The four elements are simply the primary, and most general, qualities by means of which the amorphous and purely quantitative substance of all bodies first reveals itself in differentiated form.” (Burckhardt, 1967 p. 66) Within each element the prima materia rests, acting as the inner potential whose activation transforms and purifies the elements into the philosopher’s stone. Nature, for many alchemists, is at first the uncompleted work of the divine principle, asleep to itself, unable to express its innate divinity (the Gospel of John states that the Logos was “in the world, for the world came into being through it, yet the world did not recognize it”). The role of the alchemist is then

³ The four elements were identified at least as far back as the ancient Greeks; their first overt synthesis finding expression in the works of the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles. See the literature review for more details on the Greeks.

to help in the fulfillment of nature's potential through the purification of the prima materia of the alchemist's own soul as well as through actual physical manipulations. The inner and outer processes are mutually inclusive transformative cognates of each other, and proceed simultaneously.

The four elements signify the qualitative modes of manifestation that occur along this path, representing "the stages in various processes of growth and transformation." (Opsopaus, 1998) They are linked in a continuous spiral of refinement, from Earth to Water to Air to Fire to a New Earth. These signposts can be of great use when trying to understand how one event is linked to what came before and after it, because it can provide a context in which the underlying tendencies within the process of manifestation itself occur. Because the cycle of the elements is an expression of an archetype, it can provide a useful template to understand how change happens in a variety of situations, and can help structure our consciousness so as to align more harmoniously with the underlying archetype of lawful change. In other words, the elemental cycle facilitates a practical understanding of transformation by putting us in contact with its inner laws, thus enabling effective and efficient action in situations that might otherwise be experienced as confusing, static, or unstable.

Thus, in seeking a way into the original question concerning patterns inherent within transformation, this study explores the workings of the alchemical mandala of the elements Earth, Water, Air, and Fire to see the extent to which they act as archetypal symbols of the transformative process. The following questions form the basic outline of the issue to be explored: What is the nature of each element? How does each element relate to the next through a process of transformation? How do all of the elements together form a complete cycle? What are the different levels from which this cycle can be understood (material, psychological, archetypal, etc.)? To what extent does the alchemical mandala help in understanding a variety of transformations from various domains? How can the alchemical mandala be applied to specific situations encountered in daily life? What are the strengths, limitations, and weaknesses associated with the application of the alchemical mandala? Finally, it is

hoped that by working with the elements, both theoretically and experientially, their principles can be developed into a practical, communicable tool that can be of service to those working with situations that are under transformation, whether inner or outer.

Part of the goal of this study is to produce in the engaged reader a change in consciousness with respect to what will at first likely appear to be abstractions – the elements. In the beginning this type of relationship is to be expected, as the intellect struggles to make sense of the information for the first time. My goal will be accomplished if the reader is able to have the sense that the alchemical cycle of the elements is not an object for the thinking alone, but can take on the character of a language, in which the words are the carriers of a deeper meaning that requires a heart-felt thinking. In this sense, then, it is possible to feel that the experience of trying to understand the alchemical mandala is like that of meeting someone for the first time who does not speak the native language. It is only with an open, flexible interest in the other that their inner world begins to open for us so that we can experience something of the nature of their being. The alchemical mandala is like a foreign language – strange and abstract at the beginning, but ultimately capable of holding the space for meaning to flow between beings.

The topic of how transformation occurs is well researched in a vast number of specialized areas, from chemistry to economics to psychology. In each discipline, laws are identified that seem to describe the transitions between the various events identified within the discipline. For example, in physics, Newton's Second Law provides an excellent approximation of how a given mass will change its velocity when under the influence of external force. Such specificity works very well within a given field, where the phenomena in question safely fall within the realm in which the particular laws at work have already been identified. In other words, the laws of physics work very well in describing how physical systems change, but does not help the therapist, the baker, or the layman, who encounter phenomena of diverse types. If larger, more subtle patterns of transformation are at work, as the alchemists believed,

then their understanding and use would potentially bridge the specificity of the laws of each individualized discipline, acting as a 'meta-pattern'. The cycle of the four elements provides just such a potential set of patterns.

In particular, an understanding of the elemental cycle can be of use in a wide variety of ways, due to its universal character; it can be used by the physicist, the therapist, the banker, and the layman alike, because it helps guide and structure what is shared by all of these: human consciousness. Therefore a study such as this one has the potential to yield real fruits. Although at present there are many indications that an 'elemental' approach to phenomena is both valid and useful (see the literature review for more detail), an understanding of the elements *as a cycle through which to understand transformation itself* is at best usually only implied, if mentioned at all. Additionally, most of the present literature involves using the elements as a classificatory scheme to organize a particular area of knowledge. Only a very few authors explicitly address the philosophical background of elemental theory, and generally do so only briefly. Because of the tendency for specificity, no modern works attempt to address the possible breadth of application of an elemental theory to a wide variety of situations (although Deborah Lipp's work begins to approach this). Therefore much remains to be explored with respect to a theory of the elements in and of itself, and in particular with respect to its potential role as a mediator in human consciousness between our sensory perception of change and our conceptual understanding of change. Lastly, it does not appear that the elemental cycle has been addressed from a phenomenological standpoint in the way that is attempted here. This study is therefore an attempt to advance the philosophy and application of the elemental cycle as a tool for the development of human consciousness around situations undergoing transformation.

My personal interest in this topic came about through an unexpected introduction to the alchemical cycle of the elements in a seven month long course taught by Dennis Klocek called "Goethean Studies" (now called Consciousness Studies) in 2001. This wide-ranging course was profound

in a number of ways, but this particular aspect stuck with me, as it had a very unique feature: the more energy and attention I invested in working with the elemental cycle, the more interesting and fruitful it became. Rather than becoming stale and dry, over the years it continued to lead me towards new insights which proved useful in many areas of my life. This study serves a dual purpose for me: it provides me with an avenue through which to directly explore the elemental cycle in a rigorous way, while simultaneously acting as a means to consolidate and share the potential fruits that it has to offer. It is my hope that readers of this study will be able to understand and use the elemental cycle to both understand and affect meaningful, harmonious change in any area of life.

A note should be made here about the Table of Contents. The somewhat non-standard layout of this document is an explicit demonstration of the application of the elemental cycle to the topic of writing a thesis, and shows one way in which the cycle can be used to communicate a complex, detailed, subtle, and interconnected set of concepts: the alchemical mandala itself. As such, the particular sections and their ordering naturally arise from the archetype of the mandala of the four elements, and by design provides another way engage with the elemental cycle. The reader can refer to the “Alchemical Table of Contents” (and the associated elemental symbols included marginally within the text: ▽ = Earth, ▿ = Water, ▲ = Air, △ = Fire) as a way to find orientation within the text from the standpoint of the alchemical mandala. Indeed, attentive readers may notice stylistic differences between the sections – this is a conscious effort on my part to work with the qualities of the element which correspond to each section and is designed to act as an additional tool by which I can communicate the essence of the elements. In other words, the Earth sections have something of an Earthy style, while the Water sections are more Watery in style, and so on.

Chapter 2 – Method



The completion of this study involves multiple components. In terms of the written portion of the study, the elements and their relations are developed on the basis of the work already mentioned in the literature review, and out of phenomenological observations of the elements in their natural setting as well as of their 'inner' character via the a Goethean phenomenological method (see Appendix B for explicit details on this methodology and how it is used for this study). The Goethean phenomenological method is the most appropriate for this study because of its unique ability to weave together subjective and objective aspects of experience. A study such as this one could conceivably be approached entirely theoretically – that is to say, from the perspective of purely logical relations between the elements. The Goethean method, however, requires a complex, open-ended dialogue between theory and application; in Goethe's words, the phenomenon *IS* the theory. That is to say, the Goethean methodology is designed to lead one to the state in which the apparently outer phenomenon (percept) is brought together with the apparently inner phenomenon (concept) in such a way that they are intimately united into a single whole. The percept and the concept are then found to be the expression of two sides of a single, underlying reality. In the process, both the percept and the concept can be mutually modified – percepts lead to new or more insightful concepts, while new concepts reveal more subtle perceptual aspects of the phenomenon which would otherwise remain unconscious.

The elemental cycle is then applied to a variety of situations with varying depth, followed by a discussion of modifications, clarifications, and further developments of the theoretical aspects. Further insight is gained via an examination of the experience of volunteers who are familiar with the basic workings of the elemental cycle and who have applied it to an area/phenomenon of their choice. Finally, after a review and application of the elemental cycle, the whole body of work is distilled into a practical guide to using the elements, with actionable suggestions for further work that the reader may immediately take up if desired.

The entire study itself is organized and written using the elemental cycle as a guide. Each major section works according to the nature of an element, including within it a complete sub-cycle from Earth through Fire, providing an additional layer through which the reader may contact the 'gesture' of each element their relations, as well as acting as an in-depth (although tacit) example of how the cycle may be applied to the writing of a long document. The elemental aspects of the text itself are indicated with their alchemical symbols in the margins to this end.

The "research population" for the above will include volunteers from the communities of which I am already a part or have access to, including online communities. Additionally, my population (from which I attempt to gather 'data') could be said to include various non-human elements (according to the Goethean phenomenological method noted in the appendix) such as the conceptual, psychological, and social realms, as well as that of the natural world itself.

Operational Definitions

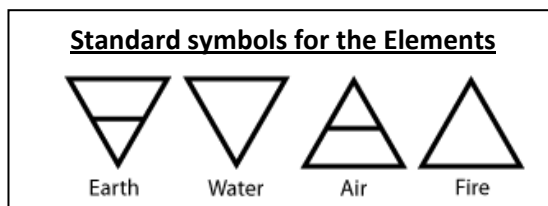
While many of the terms used in this study will be taken from their respective historical traditions, their usage will not strictly conform to any particular historical text or personage, but (apart from terms here defined) will be developed in the context of the study. Although potentially helpful, no special background in alchemy or Western hermeticism is required for an understanding of the principles discussed – the text is meant to be understandable on its own grounds.

Transformation: The word transformation is used in the text in a liberal sense, essentially synonymously with 'change'. That is to say, transformation is characterized by two distinct states of a phenomenon separated and joined by an intermediary process. The process is paramount and is inseparable from the phenomenon itself (autopoiesis and evolution both play a role). Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, "transformation" will refer to any *event* of any *type* (inner, outer, singular, collective) which undergoes a change from one qualitative state to another. This usage is about as

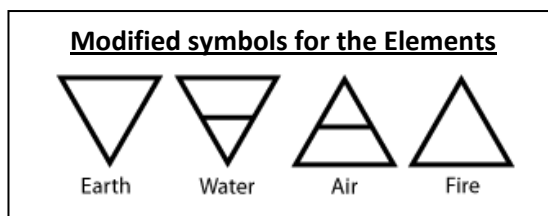
general as it is possible to be, in order to be able to account for the widest range of situations. For example, under this definition, the following are understood as transformations: a seed into a flower, a change of heart, a government's decision to go to war, reading a book, a process within projective geometry, the Hero's Journey, and interpreting a dream. Levels of transformation are acknowledged and will be dealt with in the text.

Archetype: This word essentially means "original pattern", but additional connotations are implied when used in the present study. In addition to its psychological elements (pointed out nicely by Jung), the archetype is understood as signifying a subtle *ontology* – a logos of being. In this sense, an archetype is not seen as a 'concept' in the normal sense, but rather like an active organizing principle which ultimately has – *is* – indistinguishable from being, in the same sense that one implicitly attributes the thoughts and actions of another human to their particular *being*. Although this understanding is embedded in our very language, viz. "human being", its significance takes the form of what Goethe would call an 'open secret'; "Human being" is esoterically a verb. Pondering this leads one towards recognizing the nature of the term archetype as used here.

Symbols for the elements: The most commonly found symbols for the elements in alchemy are as follows:



However, an alternate usage exists, which switches the symbols for Earth and Water:



The modified version of the elemental symbols will be used in this text. Each usage has its own etiology. Justification for the modified usage of the symbols is presented in Chapter 7, a note is made here specifically to clear up any potential confusion for readers who may have encountered the standard versions of the symbols.

It could be possible to approach the topic of the archetypes of transformation from any number of perspectives, but this study is geared towards the traditions that were largely active in the West, particularly alchemy and the hermetic tradition. It should be noted that the esoteric traditions of the East have much to say about the way in which transformation occurs, and many striking parallels exist between Eastern and Western wisdom. Alchemical traditions of great depth have been a part of both Indian and Chinese systems for millennia. For example, the Indian tradition of alchemy, *Rasayana* (Path of the Juice), is a subset of Ayurveda, a health science, and is concerned mainly with formulaic preparations promoting youth and rejuvenation.

In China, an active alchemy flourished as early as the fourth century B.C.E. This alchemy, based in Taoism, had both an outer aspect (*wei-tan*) and an inner aspect (*nei-tan*). The outer aspect dealt with drugs, herbs, and other external substances, while the inner aspect dealt with transformations of the inner life force itself through various practices. In this respect then, the inner aspect of the Taoist alchemy has many similarities to the esoteric traditions of Qabalah and Tantra. Ultimately these two aspects of Taoist alchemy cannot be regarded as separate, but rather as two sides of the same wisdom, a wisdom whose expression in the Tao Te Ching is quite salient for the present study:

*The Tao gives birth to One.
One gives birth to Two.
Two gives birth to Three.
Three gives birth to all things.*

*All things have their backs to the female
and stand facing the male.
When male and female combine,
all things achieve harmony. (Laozi & Mitchell, 2000)*

Here we have the prima materia and its resulting expression in the various objects of the world, formed by the various elements. The harmony is achieved by virtue of the uniting of the male and female principles – a transformation via purification of the separate elements into a unity. This verse is like a condensed version of major principles recognized in the Western alchemical tradition. Many more similarities could be expressed, but for the purposes of this study, the underlying stream will be that of the tradition of alchemy as it evolved in the West. At least one scholar of alchemy goes so far as to say that “in its essentials, Indian alchemy is the same as Western, and Chinese alchemy, though set in completely different spiritual climate, can throw light on both.” (Burckhardt, 1967, p. 8)⁴

⁴ It should be noted that at various points in history much contact existed between East and West, and it would be unreasonable to think that Western and Eastern alchemical traditions evolved purely separately. On another level, it is likely that many similarities may be due not to cross-pollination but rather to the similarity of the ‘terrain’ travelled, regardless of era or culture: hence the 16th century phrase, popularized more recently by Aldous Huxley, the “perennial philosophy”.

Chapter 3 – Literature review



The Greeks

There are a number of individuals who have taken the four elements and used them to explain, illuminate, or categorize various aspects of the world and our human experience of it, as well as of ourselves. In ancient Greece we find the first philosophers proposing individual elements to be the basic principle of the world:

Xenophanes (570-480 BCE): “All things come from the earth, and they reach their end by returning to the earth at last.” (Wheelwright, 1966 p. 33)

Thales (624-546 BCE): “The first principle and basic nature of all things is water.” (Wheelwright, 1966 p. 44)

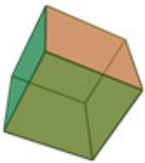

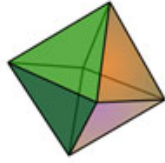

Anaximenes (585-525 BCE): “As our souls, being air, hold us together, so breath and air embrace the entire universe.” (Wheelwright, 1966 p. 60)

Heraclitus (535-475 BCE): “There is exchange of all things for fire and of fire for all things, as there is of wares for gold and of gold for wares.” (Wheelwright, 1966 p. 71)

It later fell to Empedocles (490-430 BCE) to propose that not just not one single element but that each of these elements were fundamental principles, or “roots” of reality. He states that “Out of these, all things are formed and fitted together; it is by means of them that men think, suffer, and enjoy,” (Wheelwright, 1966 p. 137) and that “In reality there are only the basic elements, but interpenetrating one another they mix to such a degree that they assume different characteristics.” (Wheelwright, 1966 p. 130) Empedocles subscribed to the Eleatic idea that the real cannot either come into or go out of existence; thus all that is must be a consequence of an admixture of fundamental, unchanging elements. It was up to the dueling powers of Love and Strife to mold the elements into the ever-changing forms of the world.

Yet for Empedocles, the elements were not simply material in their nature, but arise from the power of the Gods: “Hear first the four roots of all things: shining Zeus, life-giving Hera, Aïdoneus [Hades], and Nestis [Persephone] who with her tears fills the springs from which mortals draw the water of life.” (Wheelwright, 1966 p. 128) Empedocles’ conception of the elements therefore included not just their material aspect, but their “spiritual essences (modes of spiritual being), which can manifest themselves in many ways in the material and spiritual worlds (they are form rather than content, structure rather than image).” (Opsopaus, 1998) Empedocles is therefore recognized as “a source for the major streams of Western mysticism and magic, including alchemy,” (Opsopaus, 1998) because it is just this type of thinking that is later refined by the alchemists.

Plato took up the elements in his work *Timaeus*, relating them physically to what became known as the Platonic solids in his honor. In fact, we must credit Plato with first using the term *elements* for these principles of the world.

Earth	Water	Air	Fire
Cube	Icosahedron	Octahedron	Tetrahedron
			

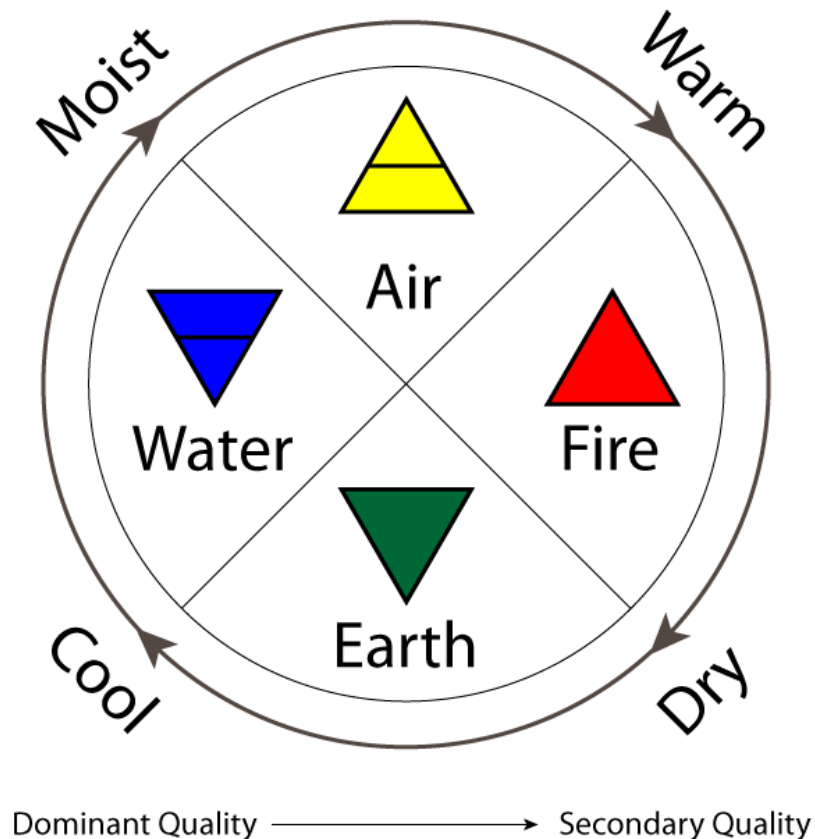
The word for element in its original Greek, *stoicheia*, has a root which means *to proceed in order*. This suggests an inner relationship between the forms which is the expression of a pattern. Each form was like an atom, or fundamental constituent of the material world, with the dodecahedron (the fifth and last Platonic solid) standing for the whole universe and therefore a ‘quintessence’ or fifth element. Plato, heavily influenced by the mystical Pythagorean school, indicated that because each of the forms could be broken into either 45-45-90 or 30-60-90 triangles, each form could be broken down and recombined with other triangles to form any of the solids. In other words, each element was

capable of transforming into the others – an idea that is taken up much more directly through the experiments of the later alchemists.

The mathematical-geometrical ideas of Plato were abandoned by Aristotle for a more qualitative approach. Rather than focusing on number, Aristotle used two sets of polarities to describe the primary nature of the four elements: cool-warm, and moist-dry.

Earth	Water	Air	Fire
Cool and Dry	Cool and Moist	Warm and Moist	Warm and Dry

This relationship is better expressed in the following image, where we can see that the two diameters of the circle indicate the polarities that divide the four elements from each other. Additionally, the arrows indicate the dominant and secondary qualities of each element. For example, the element Earth is predominantly dry, and secondarily cool, while Water is primarily cool and secondarily moist, and so on.



These four qualities or ‘powers’, are considered to be more fundamental than the elements, and are thought to be the essences out of which the elements are formed. They can be seen over the course of the year in the seasons, and are therefore directly and intimately related to the processes of growth and decay, i.e. transformation of a cyclical nature. Growth begins in the spring under the influence of moisture, ascends to the warmth of summer, moves into the dryness of autumn, and descends into the coolness of the winter earth. This is the most obvious basis for considering that the elements manifest through an ordered, cyclic process, from Earth to Water to Air to Fire, and finally back to Earth.

Aristotle also recognized a fifth essence, the ‘quintessence’, calling it the aether, of which the heavens were made, but explicitly did not relate this to the last of the Platonic solids, the dodecahedron. The aether, according to Aristotle, was a substance completely different than the four ‘sublunary’ elements; it was incorruptible, unchanging, and eternal. It moved only in perfect spherical rotation (Decaen, 2004) and made up the heavenly bodies (the Moon was made of aether tainted by the four elements). Also called *ἰδέα*, “Idea”, the fifth element was linked to decidedly non-material phenomena, and corresponds to the Hindu concept of “akasha”. The fifth element will be addressed directly in appendix A of this study.

Through Aristotle’s wide-ranging influence, the four elements became one of the foundational modes of understanding the manifest world. Galen (circa 129-200 CE), whose medical theories dominated Western medical science for over a millennium, took an important step in using the four elements as a basis for the four humors and the four temperaments. Aristotle’s experimental and practical approach pushed the more esoteric connections of the elements (such as Empedocles’ and Plato’s) underground. It took many centuries until the elements started to be understood again as more than just descriptions of the makeup of the material world. This shift occurred primarily within the alchemical tradition (with roots in Neoplatonism), where the elements started to be approached not just as descriptors, but as archetypes. Especially with the later alchemists, the elements became a way of

speaking about intrinsic qualities not just of external substances, but also of psychological and spiritual states.

Later Alchemy

Greek alchemy was directly informed and inspired by earlier Egyptian wisdom, where the oldest alchemical texts originate (Bridges, 1999), and in its turn was taken up by Gnostic sects of early Christianity until their persecution by an organized, orthodox Church around the fourth century. This drove much of the Gnostic wisdom, alchemy included, underground, where it percolated until the rise of Islam and the rediscovery of the ancient Greeks by the Arab world. In the 8th century it underwent massive exposition and refinement in the minds of such thinkers as Jâbir ibn Hayyân (known as the ‘father of chemistry’, and from whose confusing documents the term ‘gibberish’ arose), Muhammad ibn Zakarîya Râzî, and Al-Tughrai, (whose translations of the oldest known alchemical texts of the Greek Zosimos, circa 300 C.E., were discovered in 1995), among others. It is through the Islamic scholars and seekers, and in particular the Sufi sects, that the ancient alchemical wisdom was preserved, refined, expanded, and given back to the West through the Knights Templar and others, where it sparked widespread cultural revival.

The alchemists are renowned for their deliberate obscurity and individualism of expression. Technical terms and phrases comprise the bulk of many alchemical works from the Middle Ages onward, reaching a height around the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe, where it became inextricably linked with the dilettantism of the ‘puffers’ and the search for easy money. Alchemists were generally a secretive lot – for two reasons. On the one hand, the Church considered many of the alchemical practices heretical and persecuted its practitioners, necessitating the need for secrecy. At the same time, the alchemists recognized that their work was not for everyone. It was recognized that alchemical processes, following the relationship between the microcosm and macrocosm, could not be undertaken

successfully if done purely as operations on material nature. Rather, the moral capacity of the alchemist, as well as the alchemist's overall character and development, necessarily played a role in the success of the sensitive alchemical operations. Being prepared for the knowledge in this way was a crucial element of success. To this end, alchemists would usually only transmit the greatest secrets of their art orally to trustworthy individuals, and when they set down their doctrines in text, their tactics to keep the information accessible to only the most sincere seekers included omitting or obscuring information with vague hints or purposefully neglecting to include crucial aspects of the process (often with some sort of appeal that the adept would surely discover the appropriate next steps with concerted effort), providing deliberate misinformation, or encoding of secrets in codes or in the form of seemingly abstract images and technically obscure language. This had the dual effect of safeguarding their knowledge from the uninitiated while preventing the Church from discovering the true teachings and any potential grounds for persecution.

Despite the obscurity of many alchemical writings, some trends can be discerned. In particular, throughout Western and Islamic alchemy, the four elements played a primary role as manifestations of the *prima materia*, an Aristotelian term that refers to the primal essence out of which the philosopher's stone was to be formed. Alchemists worked with the four elements both in their manifestation as the various forms of physical matter, but also esoterically as the physical carriers of the divine potential of transformation, the result of which appears physically in the element of gold and spiritually as the 'alchemical marriage' of the diverse parts of the alchemists body, soul, and spirit.

Yet even in the alchemical tradition, the elements were not explicitly developed into a tool for the analysis of transformation in isolation. The alchemical literature contains an extremely wide variety of descriptions, indications, and usages of the elements. In fact, each element can have multiple forms or manifestations (different kinds of fire or water, for example) (Jung, 1970 p. 184). They were seen by many alchemists as the central players in the various processes. The 13th century Italian monk and

alchemist Ferrarius even defines alchemy as “the science of the Four Elements, which are to be found in all created substances but are not of the vulgar kind. The whole practice of the art is simply the conversion of these Elements into one another.” (Quoted in Klossowski de Rola, 1973) The role the elements played, however, was generally in service of the larger drama of the “Great Work” – the search for the philosopher’s stone and the self-purification of the alchemist’s soul.

As this study is not intended to be of the elements in alchemy proper via its personages and historical texts, a detailed review of the role of the elements, which could easily fill multiple volumes, will be avoided. For the purposes of the present study, alchemy stands as an inspirational body of work from which many insights are taken and developed, but independently and in a way according to the outlined methodology. Therefore, a large portion of the proposed study will require the refinement of the theory of the four elements into one that directly and explicitly addresses the central theme of transformation.

Jacques Vallee

Jacques Vallee, in his book *The Four Elements of Financial Alchemy* (Vallee, 2000), explicitly uses the four elements as a template for individuals to use when planning their finances. He uses the elements in a straightforward, classificatory way, identifying investment categories according to their level of risk and volatility. Interestingly, Vallee states that he “came to recognize four major categories of risk and reward, because they triggered four distinct emotions” within him. (Vallee, 2000 p. 14) In other words, it appears that even if the elements are “only a metaphor” (Vallee, 2000 p. 14), their usefulness arises out of the way in which they can be related to states of human consciousness – in this case the variety of emotional states arising around monetary concerns. With this background, Vallee is then able to trace his emotional responses back to the types of investments that triggered his particular ‘elemental’ responses. What is useful to point out here is that the process involves not just a

recognition of a state of consciousness, but that once this state has been recognized, it can be projected back out onto the world as a lens that helps bring to focus patterns that may otherwise be unrecognized. In other words, he uses the overt qualities of each element as a way to make sense of all the potential types of investments by finding qualitatively similarities; T-bills are an Earth investment because they are virtually risk-free and backed by the United States government, whereas stocks in individual companies are a Fire investment, carrying a much higher risk of fluctuation and no guarantees of any sort, but with potentially large returns. In Vallee's work, the elements themselves, let alone their philosophical underpinnings, are never addressed. Yet his work demonstrates that even without an obvious understanding of the intricacies of the elemental cycle, its application can be both straightforward and fruitful.

Heather Ash

Heather Ash, a student of Toltec wisdom, shows how the four elements can be "used as guideposts of transformation" in her book *The Four Elements of Change* (Ash, 2004). Here, she describes how each element represents a different body of the human being: Earth → Physical body, Water → Emotional Body, Air → Mental Body, and Fire → Energetic Body. Ash's primary approach could be termed psychological. She briefly describes each element, relating them to the seasons and to a few basic qualities which double as psychological descriptors. For example, Fire corresponds to the season of Summer, of "blossoming and tremendous energy" in which "any thoughts or inspirations need to be energized. This is a time for action." (Ash, 2004 p. 22) Although more philosophically cognizant than Vallee's work, Ash focuses on stories of personal transformation and practical techniques for working through psychological challenges. In particular she relates each element to a different capacity or "art", which – if mastered and integrated with each of the other capacities – can help create a strong, fluid, adaptable, and effective personality, a "master of balanced change" (Ash, 2004 p. 19). These four

capacities are as follows: Earth → the art of Nourishing, Water → the art of Opening, Air → the art of Clear Perception, and Fire → the art of Cleaning. The structure of the book, and her overall presentation, places the elements in the order Air, Fire, Water, and Earth, suggesting some recognition of a deeper patterning at work between the elements, but does little to justify this choice. She does state that “We begin with air, but working with the four elements is not a linear process. The elements and their actions blend and support one another to create [a] container for change.” (Ash, 2004 p. 43) The present study attempts to show that while on the one hand this sentiment is quite accurate, in-depth analysis shows that the elements present themselves via a fractally based cyclicity which is implicitly ordered.

Deborah Lipp

Deborah Lipp, a high priestess in the Pagan tradition, has done extensive work with the four elements, summarized in her book *The Way of Four*. (Lipp, 2004) She takes a very practical approach to the four elements, utilizing them as a classificatory scheme that she applies to the natural world, personal psychology, home life, attire, dating, work, ritual, and meditation, among other arenas. In her first chapter she explores the history and background to the four elements, and states that “Everything that is whole contains all four [elements], and can be understood more deeply by dividing it into four and viewing it through that lens.” (Lipp, 2004 p. 3) This characterizes her overall approach to the elements very well; she divides the various fields mentioned above into four categories, and analyzes the results from the perspective of each individual element. She consistently emphasizes the need for balance between the elements in any given arena, and to accomplish this she generally recommends identifying the unbalanced element and then working to recognize and bring into play its opposing element. According to the elemental cycle as discussed in this study, this would essentially be an Air approach to balance, in which the polar element is brought in for its complementary aspect.

Although Lipp's work is excellent at identifying elemental aspects of various parts of daily life, there is little phenomenological and philosophical background or justification beyond the more or less overt sympathetic relationships found when the qualities of each element show up in some new domain. The 'law of sympathy' is very powerful, but Lipp rarely moves beyond the most obvious level of sympathetic relation, giving the work a somewhat superficial feel. This may be by design in order to reach a larger audience, as the book is interspersed with many practical workbook-type questionnaires that help readers type themselves in various areas according to the elements, as well as including many practical exercises to work with each element (although often in a fairly superficial way).

From the perspective of the present study, what Lipp is most obviously lacking is an integrated theory and practice concerning the elements which includes not just the individual elemental qualities, but coherently relates each element to the others in a unified whole. Practically speaking, such an approach would be more flexible and potentially useful both in a wider variety of situations, while – more importantly – providing a structured avenue for a deeper and more integrated exploration of a given issue or topic to which the elemental cycle could be applied. For example, rather than, as suggested by Lipp's approach, balancing an overabundance of Water by adding Fire aspects, it may be more useful to balance an overabundance of Water by showing how Water can lawfully transform through Air into Fire – an approach more cognizant of Aristotle's recognition of the antagonistic nature of the elemental opposites.

TetraMap

Jon and Yoshimi Brett have taken the four elements as a basis for developing a tool for understanding and engendering healthy communication in the business world. They place the four elements on the four faces of a tetrahedron, which unfolds into a map (their business, [TetraMap](#) derives from this form). In this scheme, the elements have the following major qualities: Earth – firm, Water –

calm, Air – clear, and Fire – bright, which are seen as metaphors for a holistic basis upon which healthy transformation can grow. (Y. Brett, personal communication, March, 2007) To quote from their website:

TetraMap and its user-friendly workbooks and Leader Guides take learners on journeys that reflect our potential to consistently add value - individually, as teams, and as whole organizations. The strategy is long-term, and uses TetraMap as a guide through broader organizational issues involving diversity, human capital and business development. (Brett, 2008)

Additionally, in the workplace the elements work according to the following relations:

Earth	Water	Air	Fire
Goals	Values	Rules	Spirit
Direction	Unity	Reason	Motivation
Healthy Competition	Healthy Morale	Healthy Feedback	Healthy Fun

The Bretts find that the four elements, found everywhere in nature, provide a very basic and rich common ground from which many levels of transformation can be addressed. They explicitly recognize that the four elements are not capable of transformative effects in isolation, but together work as a whole, metaphorically found in the tetrahedron. This form demonstrates the qualities of the elements when taken as a unity: each side requires all the others for its stability (which is remarkable – Plato felt that tetrahedrons were the geometrical foundation of the physical world), and no face opposes any other face directly, but all work together with mutual complementarity.

The work of TetraMap closely parallels some of the outcomes indicated by the present study, which show much promise for applications of the elements to psychological self-understanding, dialogue work, and corporate leadership. Although within TetraMap the four elements necessarily form a unity, the Bretts do not overtly utilize the sequential patterning from Earth to Water to Air to Fire that is found by the present study to be both implicit in the elements and central for a complete understanding of how they work together.

At the same time, the Bretts are very clear about the distinction that the map and the territory are different, and that the TetraMap is “just a map”. This is quite true from an introductory perspective, which utilizes the elements as signs; the present study attempts to show how the elements can engender a consciousness in which the map and territory actually merge together in an experience that bridges the normal inner-outer boundary.

The fact that even a basic application of the four elements can yield a useful and successful corporate and group counseling model attests to the element’s inherent potential as both a language of and facilitator for change.

Carl Jung

C.G. Jung’s contributions to the study of alchemy in the modern era are wide-ranging and difficult to comprehend, but particularly bring out the symbolic and psychological aspects according to his own theories concerning the unconscious mind. Jung notes the power of four-fold arrangement:

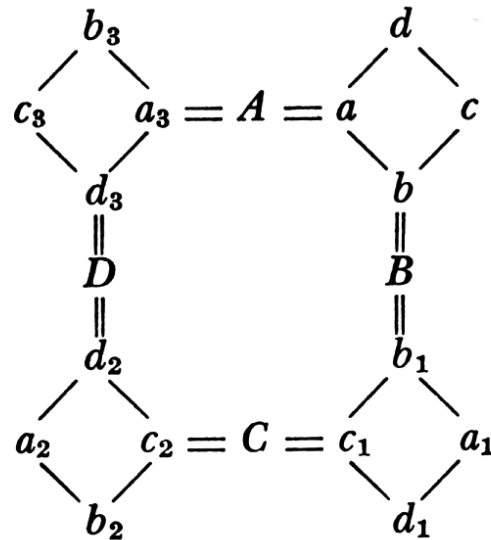
“The quaternity is an organizing schema par excellence, something like the crossed threads of a telescope. It is a system of coordinates that is used almost instinctively for dividing up and arranging a chaotic multiplicity, as when we divide up the visible surface of the earth, the course of the year, or a collection of individuals into groups, the phases of the moon, the temperaments, elements, alchemical colours, and so on.” (Jung, 1978 p. 242)

Jung does not explicitly expound upon the doctrine of the four elements in and of itself. Rather, he shows how it forms an echo of the patterns inherent in the symbolism of the Gnostics and of its continuation in alchemy. He does, however, explicitly recognize that the four elements form a *rota* or wheel, which acts as a mandala. Mandalas, for Jung, are almost invariably symbols for the archetype of wholeness, which he calls the self.

The most important of these [symbols] are geometric structures containing elements of the circle and quaternity; namely, circular and spherical forms on the one hand, which can be represented either purely geometrically or as objects; and, on the other hand, quadratic

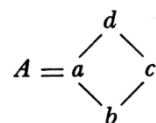
figures divided into four or in the form of a cross. (Jung, 1978 p. 223)

The most interesting and directly related aspect of Jung's work with the quaternary archetype concerns its formulation as an equation. "With regard to the construction of the formula, we must bear in mind that we are concerned with the continual process of transformation of one and the same substance." (Jung, 1978 p. 257) He arranges his equation spatially in mandalic form:



As Jung points out, this formula "reproduces exactly the essential features of the symbolic process of transformation." (Jung, 1978 p. 259) It embodies the rotational movement from one phase to the next in an ordered and cyclical fashion which Jung points out occurs "by a kind of enantiodromia." (Jung, 1978 p. 258) It includes as well

the antithetical play of complementary (or compensatory) processes, then the apocatastasis, i.e. the restoration of an original state of wholeness, which the alchemists expressed through the symbol of the uroboros, and finally the formula repeats the ancient alchemical tetrameria, which is implicit in the fourfold structure of unity:



What the formula can only hint at, however, is the higher plane that is reached through the process of transformation and integration. (Jung, 1978 p. 259)

Jung's diagram is nearly identical to the mandala used to express the elemental cycle in the present study (see page 79 of this work) which can indeed be seen as symbolically equivalent of the

uroboros. Jung's formula makes explicit some of its major qualitative aspects, particularly the recurrence of the basic pattern as an element of itself – i.e. is self-similarity. Interestingly, Jung also mentions that the transformative re-working of the “totality into four parts four times, means nothing less than its becoming conscious.” (Jung, 1978 p. 259) This astonishing statement, like many of the gems of wisdom to be found in Jung's works, remains essentially unexplained, but the present work provides a detailed foundation that naturally shows how this can be the case.

Jochen Bockemühl

Jochen Bockemühl, a biologist and student of Rudolf Steiner's Spiritual Science, considers the elements as *modes of observation*, that is to say, as modes of human consciousness. Bockemühl, like so many others who are familiar with Goethean phenomenology, develops the elements in this way through the example of observing plants. His concise and insightful work presents a number of conclusions that support the present study, both in terms of method and content, for example by noting that the “division of the sense world into different ‘layers,’ [the four elements] experienced at first purely outwardly, can, when we look inwardly, make us aware of the different layers of our thinking.” (Bockemühl, 1985 p. 5)

The Earth mode of cognition gives us the impression that “we come to *firm* conclusions, that we are always *limited to the surface* of things and see them as *separate*, exactly because the qualities of *solidity*, *impenetrability* and *separateness* are rooted in our cognitional attitude itself.” (Bockemühl, 1985 p. 9) The Water mode of cognition, which we “employ continually, but most often in a dreamlike way,” (Bockemühl, 1985 p. 11) leads beneath the initial surface impressions to deeper underlying processes, which are always fluid and in motion. In the air mode we are able to contact the *gesture* of the phenomenon by opening ourselves to its subtle characteristics by “offering the image the opportunity to appear and to speak.” (Bockemühl, 1985 p. 25) The fire element is most difficult to

characterize, but yields a mode in which we “feel ourselves *united with [the] energizing activity*” (Bockemühl, 1985 p. 36) of a phenomenon – we perceive it almost as if we were ourselves stood in the place of the phenomenon as a subject.

Bockemühl’s admirable presentation of the four elements as observational modes [*Betrachtungsweisen*] is given primarily through a discussion of plant observation, but as the work is introductory in nature he does not explicitly generalize his understanding to alternate circumstances, although that this could be done is clear. He does not appear to view the elements as forming a cyclical pattern, addressing them instead in a more directly hierarchical manner. However, Bockemühl’s research directly parallels the aims of the present study (likely because of his anthroposophical background) and gives an alternate and complementary way into looking at the four elements.

Nigel Hoffmann

Nigel Hoffmann, similarly inspired by Rudolf Steiner and anthroposophy, explicitly connects the four elements to the Goethean methodology: “The Elements are a way of understanding and entering into the different ‘dispositions of thinking’ which belong to Goethe’s way of science.” (Hoffmann, 2007 p. 22) He connects the four elemental modes of Earth, Water, Air, and Fire to the mechanical, sculptural, musical, and poetical; each of these represents a unique and complementary way of dealing with phenomena. These capacities are both active and passive – being both a frame of mind and a way to interact with the world.

Hoffmann devotes a good portion of his book, *Goethe’s Science of Living Form* to explicating each element and its corresponding qualities. The underlying philosophy is addressed through connection with three ‘higher’ capacities of knowing elucidated by Rudolf Steiner, called Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition (written with capitals to distinguish them from their more common meanings), and the phenomenological work that Goethe accomplished and which has direct implications for the

way science is done today. Hoffmann, in recognition that “to properly understand what is meant by the Elemental modes of cognition one must literally *do* them,” (Hoffmann, 2007 p. 71) then fruitfully applies his understanding to the Yabby Ponds area north of Sydney, Australia, in an attempt to elucidate and demonstrate how the elemental modes inform a Goethean study of place. If any reader is unsatisfied by the present study, Hoffmann’s book would be the first stop for a complementary approach to the topic at hand. Like Bockemühl, Hoffmann does not explicitly address the elements as a cycle or mandala, nor is the breadth of the elemental approach explored. In particular, it seems that the most amenable way in which the elemental modes are broach is through (in the Goethean vein) a study of plant life. Although there is a certain logic to this pattern – if most of the time our modern culture calls upon an mineral-based mode of thinking, then using an example from the next-higher kingdom of the plants would be a sensible next step – the present study aims to universalize the elemental modes to the extent to which that is possible; this requires application to as wide a variety of phenomena – not just ‘natural’ – as possible. For help in this endeavor, we must turn to the work of Dennis Klocek.

Dennis Klocek

The most directly significant modern works that deal specifically with the alchemical elements of Earth, Water, Air, and Fire with respect to their mandalic, cyclical nature and relationship to transformation are those of Dennis Klocek. My own approach is therefore heavily influenced by his works, *Seeking Spirit Vision* (Klocek, 1998), *The Seer’s Handbook* (Klocek, 2005), and particularly the Consciousness Studies Program (formerly called Goethean Studies) he directs at the Rudolf Steiner College, which I had the great fortune to attend twice. He expressed the basic premise for this study succinctly: “These four stages [of the elements] are an archetypal pattern underlying most interactions between humans as well as most patterns of change in the natural world.” (Klocek, 1998).

For the most part, the elemental cycle is used by Klocek in terms of its esoteric, symbolic relationship to stages of the transformation of the human soul. He clearly identifies the four alchemical elements as forming a continuous cycle, and works with the qualities of each element particularly with respect to how they form analogues to states of consciousness. This study builds upon much of the foundation laid by Klocek, but is more focused on providing an in-depth look at the elemental mandala as a phenomenon in its own right. Because Klocek's work with the elements is deeply interwoven with a number of other specific concepts from various disciplines, it is difficult to extract directly from his works information about the elemental cycle so that it stands on its own. The present study is partly an attempt to do just this, so that its nature, usage, and boundaries can be understood in what hopefully will be a direct and clear manner. Although Klocek works deeply with the alchemical mandala, its development is secondary to his more fundamental goal of providing context and help to those wishing to undertake the work of self-transformation. Klocek's work has many fruits (see Chapter 5: Areas of Potential) – this study is the outcome of the tending of only one of the seeds.

Rudolf Steiner

It is important to mention that Klocek's work, the methodological approach of Goethean phenomenology (and its corresponding epistemology) used in this study, the works of Bockemühl and Hoffmann, and this study itself, are deeply inspired by the work of Rudolf Steiner. Steiner, a difficult to classify scientist, educator, and spiritual researcher of the early 20th century, provides the underlying context and foundation for my interest in the topic. Steiner spoke and wrote much about the elements and their nature, but primarily from an esoteric standpoint and not in the specific formulation that will be addressed in this paper. Yet much of Steiner's insights are modern developments of alchemical principles. Those readers who are familiar with Steiner's works might read much 'between the lines' of the present work, which may be seen as a continuation of impulses whose foundation was laid by

Steiner's work in bridging through clarity of thought and depth of perception the seeming split between the world of the spirit and the world of the senses.

Chapter 4 – The Theory of the Elements



The Elements in Isolation



The ultimate goal of this study is twofold: to discover and reveal the nature, vicissitudes, and applications of the elemental cycle, while providing at the same time a way for the reader to learn the language of the elements that does not solely rely upon the treatment given here, but instead relies upon the reader accepting the invitation to explore the topic directly through their own life experience with the help of examples and thoughts indicated in the text. In order to accomplish this, it will be useful to begin not with a detailed listing of the phenomenological experiences that I have personally had with the elements and their mandalic nature, but with an overview of some of the results of this process. Therefore, we will work in the beginning to form a solid conceptual foundation that can later be put to use.

As we shall see more clearly later, the elements form a cycle; a choice must be made to begin somewhere, and the most accessible beginning point is in a basic treatment of the elements and their cycle in a conceptual manner. This being the case, a reader who is not already familiar with the material presented here might feel some amount of arbitrariness to the presentation of the concepts and their ordering that may give rise to feelings of confusion and frustration. The reader is asked to read fully through the entire document, as what appear at first to be confusing or even insignificant details may upon a second reading make much more sense once the overall picture can be gained (this is one way in which the cyclic nature shows itself).

In trying to access the qualities and nature of each element, it is useful to take up the alchemical practice of forming exact metaphors whose source is external to us. In this way we can take what appears to our senses directly and find correlations with the more subtle aspects of phenomena which may not themselves be directly sensible. This is one way to approach a phenomenon from a Goethean perspective, and is designed to slowly and methodically make obvious and mitigate any predispositions

of thought that we may initially bring to the subject at hand. This method requires that we be able to distinguish the difference between an overt sensible content and the underlying source of that content. For example the alchemical concept of Mercury is not strictly limited to the sensible *substance* we identify as mercury, but indicates (among other things) the relative tendency for *any* given substance to relate to and mix with another substance. Thus an alchemist might speak of how a sugar, for example, is able to dissolve in a liquid solution because of the sugar's Mercuric nature, whereas a substance like tin must first be put through a number of processes because its Mercuric nature is hidden more deeply within the substance and must be coaxed into manifestation. The elements of the elemental cycle too, can be seen in this way; i.e. metaphorically. Therefore when a sensible physical substance such as earth is meant, no capitalization will be used; when the non-sensible element of Earth is meant, capitalization will be used (although our planet Earth, being a proper noun, is also capitalized, but the distinction should be clear by context). With this in mind, let us begin with the element of Earth.

Earth



In trying to understand the Earth element, we can turn to the physical elements of our surroundings that are directly sense-perceptible but which include as little of the other elements as possible. In other words, when we try to isolate from our experience everything that partakes of the elements of water, air, and fire, what



is left? We can imagine the following: bare mountains, rocky crags, cliff-sides, crystals, caves, canyons, mesas, and the like⁵. In short, we can imagine all that presents itself to us as being of a purely mineral nature as representing the earth. Physicists identify the mineral nature as a particular phase in which matter can exist, i.e. as a solid. Approached in this way, we can then seek the qualities that become apparent to us through our sensible contact with these elements which outwardly manifest as part of the Earth itself.

To begin with, we can notice that these aspects of the earth all have the quality of being able to be clearly and definitively located in space. There exist definite boundaries to the substances; the mountain top is precisely *here*, the rock occupies just *this* specific space. We could therefore describe earth elements as *definite, shaped, and located*. Earth elements also have the tendency to be *rigid* and *resistant to change* – that is, to maintain their shape and position. When a change does occur, it usually occurs quickly and definitively: for example in a rockslide, or in the breaking of a clay pot. Changes in purely earth elements are therefore usually manifestly obvious, because the element has changed its shape or its location. Physicists refer to this tendency of the mineral world by the term *inertia*, which we can simply understand as the tendency for all that partakes of a mineral nature to resist change of any type: some kind of *outside* force is generally needed⁶ if any change is to be produced in them.

This leads us to a sense of the way in which the earth elements are *structured*; their tendency for precise positioning extends to their inside as well as their outer, visible borders. Within a crystal, which is perhaps the very best example of a pure earth element⁷, every piece of the substance is

⁵ It must be pointed out that the complete separation of the elements here referred to is only meant hypothetically. We are not speaking of the elements in their chemical sense (see footnote 7 below), but rather of their qualities, in which case the elements are always found together. This is a point that will be discussed later in more depth.

⁶ Readers with a background in physics may point out, for example, that in the case of radioactivity a drastic change in the element occurs that involve inner forces. Here we see the consequences to what is pointed out in the previous footnote; the radioactively decaying element can be seen as involving all the stages of the elements (see number 41 of the Broad List of Applications in Chapter 5).

⁷ It should be clear that the usage of the word “element” does not here correspond directly to the scientific conception of elements in the sense of the periodic table, although this usage is also meant, but rather is being

precisely related to its neighbors through a definite arrangement, which can be made manifest if the crystal is broken. In this case, it will be apparent that the crystal will have a tendency to break along very specific fracturing planes, betraying its inner structure. We can therefore also speak of earth elements as *ordered*. In this sense, the earth elements do not really hide anything from us: their outside is essentially just like their inside, and vice versa. There is no necessary difference between what lies within a rock and what it presents on its outer surface. Therefore we could also consider earth elements to consist of *all surfaces*, even on the inside.

At the same time, each earth element is manifestly different from every other. This difference can be of type: a canyon is not a cave, and quartz is not gold. Yet even within a particular type, we can still find an obvious difference that results precisely from what is at first qualitatively apparent as aspects of the various earth elements described above: their locatedness. In the realm of physics this tendency takes the form of a law known as the Pauli Exclusion Principle, which in oversimplified terms can be expressed as the principle that no two objects of the same type (in this case fermions, which make up the bulk of 'normal' matter) can occupy the same space. This particular amethyst crystal is unique among the totality of amethyst crystals because it occupies a definite and particular space. This hill is unique because it is just here, and no other hill can occupy this same spot. In this sense, one quality of earth is its capacity for *difference*.

If we continue to think further about this aspect of the earth element, something else reveals itself. The very aspect that makes each earth element different from every other at the same time introduces a certain arbitrariness to it. It doesn't matter *which* brick is placed next in the wall, as long as its shape and structure meet the requirements for the task. There is nothing about an individual brick apart from its Earth-like aspects already discussed which make one brick better or worse than another;

used more colloquially to avoid the need for abstract distinctions not directly available to simple sense perception, such as between a pure element like silicon and silicon that has been doped with another element. The general sense of the term element will be enough for our purposes at the moment.

within these limits they are perfectly interchangeable and equivalent. In this sense then, the facts that make a particular earth element what it is – in other words, the very *difference* between this bit of earth and any other – is just what leads to its *indifference* with respect to every other earth element that shares the same qualities.

What produces a change in an earth element can only do so by virtue of contacting the earth element directly and only through the very qualities that describe the earth element, such as its position, its structure, and so forth. In other words, if a cliff-face begins to crumble, it does so because of some external contact with another mineral element. One surface makes contact with another surface and forces are exchanged according to Newton's Third Law. All movement, changes in shape, and so forth, can be adequately described in like manner. We do not need to consider, for example, any motivation on the part of the cliff-face for its crumbling; such a consideration would be fantastic.

Furthermore, with respect to an earth element undergoing a change, the effect produced occurs only by virtue of the position, structure, shape, and force of the contacting agent – in other words its earth-like qualities. In this respect, we can find that in addition to the indifference discussed above, earth elements are also indifferent with respect to everything that is not already earth-like. The full nature of what is responsible for a change in an earth element is irrelevant; what is relevant is only the immediate cause inasmuch as the cause itself is of an earth-like nature. Thus the earth element is very restrictive in its ability to respond to change, and has the tendency for activity that is best characterized as *binary* in fashion, for example as in motion towards or away from another object, or in the exchange of exactly opposing forces, etc. At the same time, such changes can be characterized as *fundamentalist*, in that earth elements are all on an equal footing which is at its most basic and primitive form (i.e. characterized only and purely by physical law). The tendency of earth is to seek just this 'bottom-line', which is characterized physically by the state of lowest stable energy.

Lastly, we can see that changes occurring in earth elements are always strongly subject to the force of gravity. Their movements can be said to be *centric*, or tending always towards what physicists identify as the center of gravity of the system of bodies under consideration. In the case of our own planet this basically coincides with its positional center. It was Newton who realized that the centric character of the movement of mineral bodies (the force between them) depends only upon the quantities of each mass and their distance from each other. This principle extends across all of the vastness of space, so that, for example, the Moon and the Earth are attracted to each other in the same way that an apple and the Earth are attracted together. What is important for their motion is not the makeup of the Earth or the apple, but only their masses and relative positions.

Although much more could be said at this time about the various qualities of earth elements, particularly in regards to their various manifestations in various 'impure' ways, this preliminary series of qualities will suffice for the moment. Already it may be more or less obvious that all that has been described above with respect to these elements can likewise be applied to a whole variety of forms, situations, behaviors, and ideas when considered as descriptions of phenomenologically experienceable qualities. Rather than delve immediately into the realm of metaphor in this way, we will first consider at some length the remaining elements in a similar fashion, to see how their manifestation by way of their most natural and 'pure' external forms fills out the picture of fundamental elemental qualities that will form the basis for the rest of the study.

Water



Of course, the most obvious and directly available manifestation of the natural and pure form of water is the substance known by the same name, or via its chemical formula H_2O . Oceans, lakes, ponds, and puddles are all manifestations of the water element, but so also are all liquids, such as mercury, oils, alcohols, and the like. Additional natural phenomena include waterfalls, springs, rivers, aquifers, and

various forms of precipitation. When considered in relative isolation, what can we discover about the nature and properties of these watery manifestations?



Here an important caveat must be discussed. Whereas the qualities of the earthy element can be considered in isolation with relative ease (this is a picture of the element itself!), the qualities of the further elements are brought out to some extent only by virtue of their relationship with the lower elements. Each successive element takes the previous as its basis and adds something new to the mix. To the extent that our concept of Water corresponds only with the modern physical idea of the

liquid phase of matter, it may be felt that strictly speaking, all that applied to the earth elements must also apply to the water elements, as these too, are manifestations of the mineral realm when considered in this way, i.e. materialistically. This is true, so as far as it goes. However, what is here being asked is that the reader considers the various qualities of the watery elements in their own right, independently of their nature qua minerality, in order to get a sense for precisely those qualities that are present for our experience of the watery elements which do not yet manifest in the purely mineral realm. In other words, we are trying to examine what newly enters into our experience when the water element is taken as its own phenomenon.

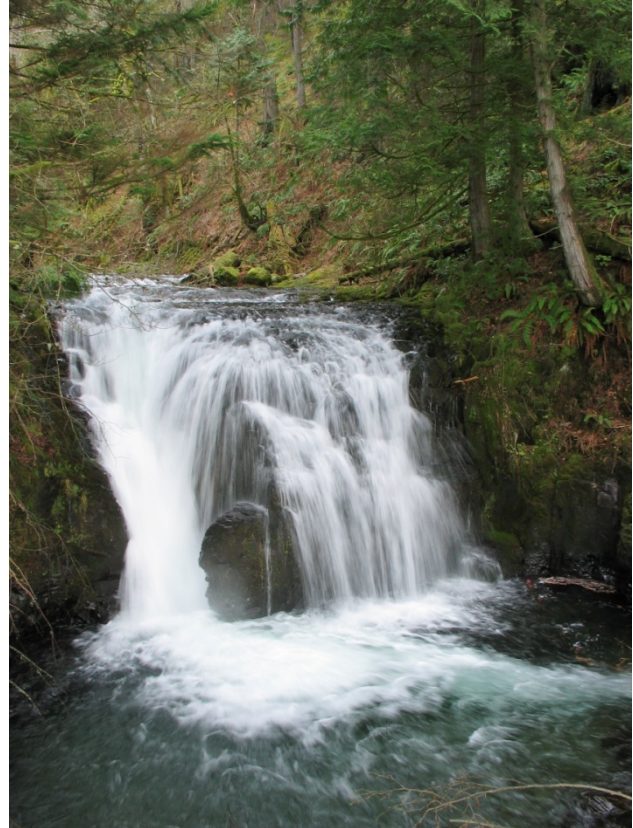
Immediately we see a vast difference from what manifested as the earthly elements. Water has no intrinsic form – its form is given entirely by its context. Left to itself, and taken *out* of other contexts, water (and this is true of liquids in general) will tend to form itself into a sphere. This minimizes the surface area, which is another way of saying that it tends towards the greatest *self-connection* and *self-continuity*. Water is still greatly under the influence of gravity, and will seek the lowest local position, where it will gather and form itself into an exact complementary shape to its surroundings; it is *conforming* (it forms-together). It also completely covers and conforms around any body that is submerged within it. Water also *penetrates* its surroundings, moving into objects as much as possible (permeation), while actively coating the surfaces of what it contacts even when not submerged. When water forms a standing body such as a puddle or lake, while its sides and bottom conform to its container, its top surface tends towards planarity. This behavior occurs when, under the influence of gravity, the intrinsically formless water meets the air above, also intrinsically formless; the result is a planar membrane. Similarly, liquids of different density will form planar boundaries with each other when in a gravitational field.

Interestingly, even a drop of water in a vacuum (which, rather than simply formless is formlessness, or potential), can be said to form planar boundaries with the vacuum. Every point on the sphere of a drop of water is a point on a unique plane which is tangent to the sphere only at that point. In other words, it is as if each *point* acted as a plane. This is not so absurd when one imagines the sphere increasing in size – as its diameter increases to infinity its curvature becomes planar all the way “around”!

The inside of a liquid acts very differently than its ‘outside’ – that part of the liquid that is in contact with something other than itself. This leads to whole host of unique properties. The surface tension of water is one such phenomenon, where the individual water molecules strive to have as many neighbors as they possibly can (a property called cohesion, yielding the planarity discussed above). This

maximizes relation and continuity within the volume of water. Water spreads out and covers surfaces that it contacts. This gives rise to water's ability to act as a solvent; indeed water is known as the universal solvent. It readily takes other substances and mixes them into itself internally, dissolving or at least suspending foreign substances in its own body (a property called adhesion); for example acid rain is a consequence of water dissolving gases in the atmosphere (N, S, CO₂) as it falls. This capacity for water to dissolve points to the way in which the forces of gravity begin to lose hold once we consider the elements beyond the strictly mineral. Alchemists would call this decrease in the effectiveness of the force of gravity a force of levity, the polar counterpart to gravity. The earthly elements are most subject to gravity – they do not spontaneously move against it. With water, we in fact find that, as a consequence of its *relation* to earthly elements, it can actually rise up against the force of gravity in a phenomenon known as capillary action – for example when a sponge pulls water into itself. Whereas two earthly elements in contact obey the force of gravity just as each would individually, when water is placed in contact with an earthly substance it can exhibit the tendency to overcome gravity to a limited extent. Capillary action occurs only when water is in contact with another element, but water exhibits an even more anti-gravitational effect (a levity effect) when considered on its own, as in the case of the transpirational pull that brings water from the ground up to the tops of trees. This occurs because as water evaporates in the leaves of the tree, it forms a slightly concave meniscus on the surface of cells in the interior of the leaves. The surface tension of the water (tending towards planarity) exerts a negative pressure on the water below, drawing it upwards to replace the lost water in the leaves. This surprisingly strong transpirational pull combines with capillary action (preferential binding of water to the cell walls), which serves to further stabilize the water columns in the trees xylem (and which would otherwise collapse in a process known as cavitation). These two simultaneous effects allow the very tallest trees to pull water up to heights of over one hundred meters (328 feet) from the Earth!

The most striking difference from the Earth element appears in the *fluid* capacity of water. It is the most *changeable* element; always in motion. Even a supposedly 'still' glass of water, will, upon closer examination, show itself to be internally in constant motion: a drop of dye will, without any stirring, disperse itself throughout the whole volume. Even the atomistic model of liquids indicates that, unlike the 'jiggling in place' of atoms in a solid, the atoms of a liquid are continually sliding over one another in a Brownian motion dance of interconnectedness.



The pH of water is neutral, and as a substance it can act either as an acid or a base, depending upon its context – further demonstrating its fluidity. Even water's capacity for fluidity is *itself* fluid, depending entirely upon its physical surroundings and, particularly, the temperature. Similarly, its surface tension and dissolving capacities are largely dependent upon factors *other than* the water itself – these properties of water change drastically in different circumstances. Water is, in this sense, selfless and accommodating, a substance that directly reflects all processes and activity around and within it.

This reflection of its environment takes place in rhythmical patterns. Any disturbance of the properties or motions of water is transmitted throughout the entire substance in the form of rhythmic impulses, either chemical or mechanical. Wave formation – that is to say, *rhythm* – is thus a primary property of water. Indeed, Theodore Schwenk, perhaps the most detailed modern observer of water (also a Goethean researcher inspired by Steiner), identifies its "close connection with all rhythmical processes in time and space" (Schwenk, 1965 p. 80) as one of water's three major characteristics

(surface waves are only the most obvious manifestation of this). Indeed, he notes that any body of water will have its own unique resonating rhythm in which it naturally oscillates, in particular and most strongly in connection with the Moon's orbital rhythms (Schwenk, 1965 p. 30) (most obviously manifested in tides). The other two major characteristics he identifies are first water's connection with "all metabolic processes in the great organism of the Earth and in each separate living creature," (Schwenk, 1965 p. 80) and its "sensitivity of boundary surfaces, indicating that water is a cosmic sense organ of the Earth." (Schwenk, 1965 p. 80)



When an obstacle blocks the flow of water, such as a rock in a stream, a *static wave form* is dynamically created behind and around the rock to balance the forces involved. The wave form itself remains static while new water continually flows through the wave form. The wave form, although static in form, is involved in a continual *forming* of itself out of the new water. We could say that

formative forces are particularly able to find expression in water, or that water is the element in which *forming*, rather than form takes precedence. This aspect of water is an indication of how it stands on the border between the static form of the earth element and the chaotic dynamism of the air element. Indeed, water, as mediator between the elements of earth and air will readily dissolve and mix with both.

Water has the highest specific heat of all common substances – it takes quite a lot of energy to heat water, and when heated, water therefore has a lot of energy to release. This property is directly and deeply involved in all metabolic processes such as digestion and internal regulation of temperature and chemical balance, as well as their counterparts on the Earth: climate and weather. All life as we know it requires water; all our speculations about what is possible for alien life also involve, if not water, then *some* type of fluid substance.

All of these considerations point to the *relational* nature of water. It is impossible even to speak of water without addressing its *motion*, and thus its role as a *mediator*. Water is less a “thing” than an “activity”; indeed, it is typified most clearly by its *rhythmic processes*. It is the “sensitive chaos” of Novalis, in constant flux, totally dependent upon its environment, yet actively sculpting (ala Hoffmann) that environment at the same time. Any reader desirous of a deeper understanding of water is referred to Theodore Schwenk’s amazing work, *Sensitive Chaos* for a subtle and thorough treatment of all its aspects, from the physical to the spiritual.

Air



We meet the element Air primarily as the substance of the same name, composed of a mixture of various gasses such as nitrogen, oxygen, argon, and carbon dioxide. Air is what fills up the space between the lower elements (earth and water) and the outer void of space. Gases are also found underneath the Earth, as well as dissolved in the oceans. The air element is also within all living

creatures in varying amounts: in both the earthy and watery parts such as bone and blood, not to mention its central role in respiration in animals as well as plants. In short, it is difficult to find places *without* some kind of airy element, although by far the atmosphere is its most direct and voluminous manifestation.

Air shares a number of properties with water, and in fact scientists consider both liquids and gases to be “fluids”, precisely because of their similarities; yet the two types of substances are unique in their manifestation. Air is somewhat paradoxical in its nature: it is the most directly all-encompassing element, yet is simultaneously the hardest to notice. We move in the air and the air moves in us, but it is invisible, almost intangible. It is that element whose nature it is to let the nature of the other elements become manifest. We see the objects



around us precisely because the nature of the air does not disturb the connection between our eyes and the objects we gaze upon. It is as if the air is continually in a process of getting out of the way of the other elements – and in this sense can be considered *selfless*.

The forces of *levity* are more apparent in the air element, which actively fills any container equally, no matter the size. It *disperses* itself with great speed into any volume, and can penetrate into areas that water cannot reach. Where water conforms to the sides and bottoms of its containers, air conforms to the whole volume – it *seeks the periphery* of its container with little regard for the direction

of gravity's pull. In this sense, the form of the air is always an exact *inverse* of its container – its *complement*.

Air has no equivalent of water's surface tension, and in fact is marked not by self-association but *self-dissociation*. The kinetic molecular theory of gases even postulates that the molecules in a gas act as essentially volumeless points, that collisions between molecules are perfectly elastic (no energy is gained or lost), and that attractive or repulsive forces between molecules are negligible. These tiny points zoom around at tremendous speeds: molecules of oxygen gas move on average approximately 750 miles per hour, while hydrogen – the lightest gas – averages more around 3,500 miles per hour (these numbers vary greatly with temperature). So we have a picture of a truly staggering number of collisions between an uncountable number of tiny molecules, while at the same time each collision is the most transient possible, characterized primarily by changes in momentum. In other words, *diffusion* is a key aspect of gases; smells propagate with great quickness throughout a given volume of air, allowing, for example, the smell of morning coffee to permeate a whole house with ease. At this small scale, the movement of each molecule is essentially *random*, and is best described by a probability distribution. Air is itself the most diffuse element, and our atmosphere simply fades out into the not-quite-empty-void beyond – it is *borderless* in its nature and finds no boundary that is not imposed upon it by some other element.

The micro scale picture of air exhibits some interesting polarities with its macro scale behavior, in which large, coherent effects, both in time and space, play a central role. In particular, the movement of air *as a whole* in the process of convection is paramount. Whereas the density of water varies within only a very small range, gas densities can fluctuate wildly. The effect of these differences is what drives our entire climate, as well as local weather, in a phenomenon known as convection. Less dense masses of air rise while denser masses fall towards the Earth's surface, driving convection cells across a range of scales. Although such patterning is the dominant feature of both climate and weather, these are two

phenomena which are very difficult to predict – the underlying physics is so difficult that most weather predictions begin simply as averages of past data, rather than as analytical determinations based on physical models. Trying to physically predict climate and weather requires the fastest supercomputers on the planet just to get reasonable estimates.

An important quality of air is brought to light when we consider its strange capacity to be highly random at small scales while yielding ordered, predictable patterns at larger scales. When examined analytically, even though the patterns formed are predictable in their general



forms (convection cells, spiral vortices, etc.), their occurrences in any particular instance is almost impossible to predict. The larger ordered patterns are not simply organized, but retain a level of unpredictability in their sequencing. The technical word that describes this kind of behavior is *chaotic*⁸, which is a strange simultaneous mix of order and randomness, predictability and unpredictability. Indeed, air is the most *sensitive* of the elements, responding simultaneously to the slightest changes in heat, volume, and pressure. Air has very little momentum because of its small mass, and of all elements it therefore responds most quickly to environmental shifts, particularly changes in heat. Additionally, any change in the air can and does propagate down to the smallest possible scales, whereas in water such effects are mitigated by the stronger internal forces between individual water molecules. Such sensitivity can easily be seen by opening a door at one end of a house and observing how the slight

⁸ Hence the title of Schwenk's book about the patterns of fluids: *Sensitive Chaos*

change in pressure is transmitted almost instantaneously throughout the connected volume of air in the rest of the house. Such sensitivity is a breeding ground for chaotic effects; in fact the technical term for one of the major qualities displayed by chaotic systems is “sensitive dependence upon initial conditions” (also known more colloquially as the ‘butterfly effect’). Indeed, it was the accidental discovery of just this quality which led Edward Lorenz, a meteorologist concerned with modeling movements of the air, to become one of the pioneers of the field now known as chaos theory. (Gleick, 1987)

Chaos (which manifests also as *turbulence* in connection with fluids), understood in this way and not simply as disorder or randomness, is the natural domain of air, whose intrinsic movements take the shape of the vortex, the infinitely layered spiral of dynamically shifting energy. On the one hand air, considered in comparative relation to its environment (composed usually of water and earth), is boundaryless and seeks the periphery. On the other hand, when considered in relation only *to itself*, air consists of nothing *but* an infinite series of internal boundaries. As a consequence of air’s quality of self-dissociation, internal boundaries between one layer of activity and another are continually formed and dissolved in a chaotic, invisible dance. These internal boundaries are the signature of air’s supreme sensitivity, and are constantly in flux according to the whole variety of influences that the environment transmits to the air. For example, any object embedded in flowing air is associated with a dynamic shape that is formed out of the streaming air as it passes around the object. Every object, even to the smallest scales, creates some disturbance in the air, which dynamically responds by forming a series of layered internal boundaries marked by changes in speed and direction. The resultant form is not simply a static inverse to the object, but is itself a continually moving and forming shape that responds with the utmost sensitivity to the details of the original shape and its relative speed through the air. Of course this is precisely the quality that leads experimentalists to use wind tunnels to analyze the shapes of objects that have to move efficiently through the air – something that is simply too complicated to be understood through theoretical understanding only.

As Schwenk indicates, it is in the nature of air to flow much faster than water, and indeed the characteristics particular to air are more greatly expressed as its speed increases. (Schwenk, 1965 p. 114) As the most sensitive element, the vortices formed in air naturally span a wider range of scales than those in water, while at the same time having more complexity. Every obstacle to the flow of air creates a moving train of vortices that is in constant interaction with the whole volume of air. Indeed, the flying formation of birds utilizes just this phenomenon in order to dynamically share the energy costs of migration; the vortices formed by the birds act as a unitary whole into which and out of which energy is given and taken by each individual bird as needed (Schwenk, 1965 p. 115).

Of all the elements, air has the greatest tendency to exhibit chaotic effects. It is true that many aspects of air considered here apply also to water – convection and chaotic effects being two of the most important (these, among other, qualitative similarities are what prompt scientists to call both liquids and gases *fluids*) – but air exhibits the effects more prominently and readily. Indeed, when forced by other means to flow faster, water begins to behave more like air in this respect. When a blockage in an air stream occurs, the resulting air formation that results is generally *not* static as in the case of water, but is itself involved in a constant shifting and oscillation. Where in the water element the wave form, an expression of oscillation, is essentially static with continually changing substance flowing through it, in the air element *both* the substance *and* the form itself continually change. The vortexial train itself oscillates chaotically – a phenomenon which performance aircraft manufacturers must take into account. Objects create their own particular vortexial forms, and when the relative speed of the air increases, such forms become more chaotic. In aerodynamics, the meeting between streaming air and objects creates what is known as a “boundary layer”, which at higher speeds can actually become detached from the object itself, lifting off it and creating its own shape which is quite different than that of the physical object – a boundary formed entirely of air that itself changes sensitively with the shape of the object, the speed of the flow, and so forth. (Benson, 2006)

Air is thus uniquely interesting in that its qualities do not manifest only through one fairly restricted set of possibilities, but rather seem to span much wider ranges of potential activity. Its variable relationships between temperature, density, and volume, as well as its chaotic movements over time and scale, demonstrate this well. In other words, the air element seems to manifest through sets of *polarities*: rising/falling, less dense/more dense, warm/cool, ordered/random, borderless/all-border, contracting/expanding, selfish/selfless, as well as the polarity between its abundance and lack of obvious presence. In fact, when considering air, it is not simply a question of static polarities, but of a process of *active reversal*. This is most clearly *seen* in the reversing oscillation of the vortex trains in the motion of air, which curl alternately one way and then the other, yet is a hallmark of all of its polarities. For example, a warmer mass of air will become less dense and thus rise. But the very activity of rising has the effect of expanding, and thus cooling the air mass, which then as a result becomes denser, falling around the rising warm air. It is a characteristic of air that any change it undergoes has a tendency to engender another shift that is polar (opposite, complement, or reciprocal) to the original change, whether it be in temperature, pressure, density, or motion.

Seen from the perspective of polarity, we can take a deeper look at the micro/macro levels of air. We can imagine that on the micro scale the individual molecules do not share their own properties with the other molecules – their *chemical* properties are less active with respect to each other. It is as if each molecule were *selfish*. Each molecule shares as little as possible of itself, transferring only momentum to any other molecule it encounters. Also, at this level, each molecule encounters hundreds of thousands of neighbors every second, with a little momentum transfer at each encounter – they are very busy bumping around while trying to keep to themselves. Yet at the same time, it is *precisely* this ‘selfishness’, along with the molecular flurrying of activity on the micro scale that gives rise to air’s *selfless* and *clear* nature on the macro scale. In particular, the ability for air to be invisible and to allow light to be transmitted coherently and undisturbed between objects and our eyes is due in large part

directly to the fact that air molecules are, as we have indicated, 'selfish'. If they interacted more strongly with one another the potential for disturbances would increase and could cause a variety of distortions. Additionally, we have the polarity of the high speed and number of molecular interactions on the micro scale, while on the macro scale we have coherent, ordered effects such as pressure gradients, convection cells, and the ability to clearly transmit vibrations (sound) without distortion.

A special note must be made here about the special connection between the air element and sound. Although all physical mediums are capable of transmitting sound, it is only in the air that sound finds its true home, as it were. The sensitivity of air is, we could say, *tuned* to the nature of sound, a fact clearly demonstrated by an examination of the difference in aquatic animals and animals that live in the air. Although underwater animals can, and often are, sensitive to sound vibrations, nothing can rival the variety of audible expressions, and ears to hear such expressions, that occur in animals that live in the air. Air, which is most easily able to transmit both sound and light, is the element of *communication* par excellence. One physical reason for this again lies in air's lack of internal connection and low inertia – the most subtle vibrations are able to be transmitted because the internal forces between individual air molecules are negligible, attenuating the vibrations least of all the elements.

A last polarity can be considered when we examine the properties of the two most abundant gases in the air: nitrogen and oxygen. It is interesting to note that nitrogen as an element is very benign, and for this reason is used (for example) in preservation of paintings such as the Mona Lisa, which are held in sealed, pressurized containers of nitrogen. What is being kept *out* of the containers? Oxygen! It is precisely the oxygen present in the air which would act to degrade the paintings over time. This occurs because oxygen is a *highly* reactive substance – it has a tendency to 'burn' (oxidize) many common elements in a destructive chemical process. Thus our air (78% nitrogen and 21% oxygen) is composed of gases which have qualitatively polar aspects.

Fire



Speaking of oxidation brings us finally to the element of fire. It is easy to think of fire as flames, but this is only one aspect of fire. It may be more properly termed *warmth*, as this is its most defining characteristic, and because we do not have any clear visual associations with such a word that



may arbitrarily limit our exploration to a particular area. Indeed, one of the most important qualities of warmth is its inability to be contained or limited; any time two objects of different temperature come into contact, warmth spontaneously flows from the hotter object to the cooler. This is one way of understanding the second law of thermodynamics.

Warmth is the least definable of all the elements. It is the least formed, having no definitive boundaries. The lack of boundaries for warmth is different than that for the air. Air as an element is at the edge of the influence of gravitational forces, but still falls under their sway (gravity, after all, is the primary force that holds our atmosphere on the Earth). This fact points to the materiality – however slight – of the air. Thus air still forms boundaries made by the lower elements of earth and water. Warmth, on the other hand, *will* move through any boundaries composed of the three lower elements. It is uncontainable by physical matter, and by its nature moves actively from place to place in an attempt to harmonize every difference in temperature. Indeed, in order to block the movement of warmth, the most effective method is to try and create a vacuum boundary; yet even then, warmth can be carried in the energy of light, which has no problem crossing a vacuum.

The way warmth moves is not random, but is always indicative of some underlying process. Where any medium (of earth, water, air, or some combination) is actively changing, we find that warmth makes its appearance. The motion of our muscles produce prodigious warmth, and the relative warmth and coolness of fluids is generally the source of their convection (as in the differential heating of land vs. water, light vs. dark objects, etc.). In other words, the signature of warmth is *activity*, and we could even say that all activity is the signature of warmth. The most important and obvious indicator of this is the Sun. The primary physical way in which the Sun interacts with the Earth is by transmitting its own warmth to us through its fiery rays. The heat energy from the Sun fuels almost every life process on the Earth, and drives a host of cycles as well – all those that are dependent upon seasonal and diurnal rhythms. Warmth, actually, can be considered to be the most fundamental ‘element’ required for the activity of life, as without it there simply could be no basis upon which the necessary life-processes (metabolism, movement, etc.) could operate. Even the life forms that may have evolved completely without the aid of direct energy from the Sun could only have done so because of the warmth energy available in the sub-oceanic heat vents. We shall return to the Sun in a moment.

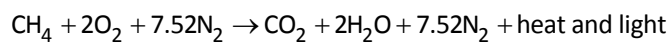
When considered on the microcosmic scale, we find warmth as *heat energy* – which is simply a measure of the average *activity* of the molecules, i.e. their motion and vibration. So even at the smallest scales, we cannot find any particles of warmth – there is *no substance* to warmth; it is rather *the activity* of substances. For this reason it is difficult to ‘pin down’ warmth as an element, which is exactly one of its important characteristics: its *dynamism*.

The energy of warmth itself is *necessarily* constantly in motion, but this motion is always involved with the changing of whatever substance the warmth is moving within. In other words, warmth actively *affects change* whenever it is present – where there is no change, warmth is least present. In physical reality this is observed when techniques are employed to slow down the motion of atoms (for example in an ultra-cold gas). The slower the atoms, the colder the temperature, until

almost all motion stops at a temperature known as absolute zero (-459° Fahrenheit, or 0° Kelvin), where only the tiniest amount of internal energy remains. What is interesting is that *there is always some warmth left*; it cannot be eradicated, and it therefore literally permeates every part of the entire universe – there is even energy for activity available in the coldest, most matter-free places, i.e. the deepest vacuum of interstellar space, out of which whole particles of regular matter can momentarily come into existence. Indeed, the very fabric of space and time seems positively *filled* with energy! We therefore cannot separate warmth in a *substantial* way from any of the other elements – it is present within them all. Furthermore, all activity is in some way connected with differences in warmth – its movement from place to place, its transmission from one object to another, its dispersal or concentration. Every engine on the planet somehow utilizes an energy differential to create work.

Warmth is *creative* – it is the source of change. As fire, we see that once engendered, a fire will expand and continually renew itself if the conditions are favorable. It is self-engendering, self-creative. As Hoffmann perceptively states: “Fire ‘lives’ by virtue of the substance that it destroys, but that substance is not *causing* it, only allowing it to become active.” (Hoffmann, 2007 p. 57) And we can see that the destructive act of fire is just a more obvious and violent way in which warmth affects transformation. In the case of burning, the activity of fire is a simultaneous combining and separating – elements are taken apart and recombined into new forms; burning *transforms* elements, and in the process gives off heat and light⁹. Such a burning process also takes place in the cell in processes known as cellular respiration (a slow burning), where a variety of methods yield usable energy for cellular function through the transformation of other elements. The creative processes of life are in a real and deep sense warmth-based.

⁹ For example, one possible chemical expression of burning is:



This is another way of saying that Fuel + Air yields Carbon Dioxide, Water, Nitrogen, Heat, and Light. What you want to notice is that heat (and light!) are not represented chemically by any single element.

Warmth processes have the tendency, in their role as transformers, to render into a state of higher levity any aspects that have the potential to be transformed in this way. Other aspects are solidified out of the process and rendered back into a state of gravity. For example, when burning a log in a fireplace, a good portion of the log ends up going out the chimney, having transformed from its original state into a form that is able to move against the force of gravity. At the same time, what is left in the fireplace is not the original log, but all the parts of the log that could not be thus changed, although they also are transformed: into an ash. In the process of digestion, part of the food is transformed into the energy of movement, feeling, and thought (levity) while the rest is slowly solidified (gravity) and readied for expulsion.

All of the other elements are dependent upon warmth, which is the primary agent for the change in a substance from solid to liquid (melting), liquid to gas (evaporation), and gas to plasma (ionization); these are known as phase changes, where the state of matter changes from one manifestation to another¹⁰. Obviously, of all the states of matter, the plasma state most exemplifies the element of fire. Indeed, the flame of a fire is a plasma. When examining the nature of the fire element, we must therefore look closely at what plasmas have to tell us.

Plasma is a unique state of matter in which a gas (generally) is ionized. This means that there is enough energy (often provided by heat, but also of light) present in the gas to tear the electrons away from their atoms, yielding a sea of ‘free’ electrons. The atoms, sans one or more electrons, are now known as ions – hence the term ionization. It is interesting to note that the word ‘ion’ was coined by the great experimentalist Michael Faraday from the Greek root meaning “to go”. Not only is the word itself synonymous with ‘activity’, it is also in participle form (non-finite verb), thus actually meaning “going” - i.e. the name refers not just to activity, but is even itself in an active form!

¹⁰ Modern physics has identified ‘new states’ of matter, so that at the coldest end we should add Fermionic and Bose-Einstein condensates before we arrive at solids, liquids, and gases, with plasmas taking up the hot end.

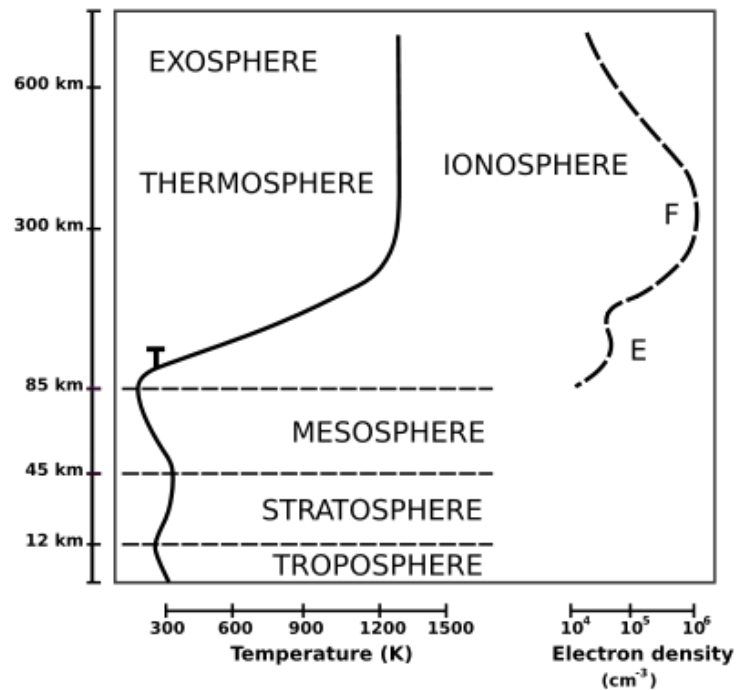
Plasmas, although similar to gases in some important ways, are quite unique and display a number of special properties, such as high electric conductivity (so high that in many circumstances it can be treated as if it were infinite) ("Plasma (physics)," 2007), high heat conductance, as well as responsiveness to electromagnetic fields, i.e. *light*. All the lower elements are responsive to light, primarily inasmuch as the light is able to transmit heat energy into the substance. Generally substances are selective in their ability to absorb such energy, and are not equally responsive to all frequencies. Plasmas, on the other hand, are much more directly and easily affected by all electromagnetic fields. Discovered by Sir William Crookes in his 'Crookes tube', what we now call plasma Crookes termed "radiant matter", ("Plasma (physics)," 2007) and plasmas are everywhere associated with radiance, with the actual production of light. In fact, we come into contact with man-made plasmas every day in the form of neon lights and plasma display screens.

Although plasmas are less common than the other elements on the Earth, many natural sources do exist. Lightning of all kinds is plasma, as are the auroras that frequent the Earth's Polar Regions, and of course regular old flames. Lesser known plasmas that are not quite as well understood take the form of 'sprites', 'elves', and 'jets' – all high altitude atmospheric effects related to lightning in which light assumes particular forms and colors. Yet even though plasma is relatively rare on the Earth, it is by a large margin the most common phase of matter in the rest of the universe, considered by mass as well as by volume. Approximately 99.9% of the total mass in the universe is in the form of plasma. (Mullen, 1999) This is primarily because all stars, including our Sun, are made of plasma, as are nebulae and even the space between the stars.

Just as the Earth has a mineral nature in its crust, a watery nature in its oceans, and an airy nature in its atmosphere, the Earth has a fiery nature as well. As might be expected, the Earth expresses its fiery nature in the space above its atmosphere. Scientists speak of three marginally distinct but

overlapping areas called the ionosphere, the plasmasphere, and the magnetosphere¹¹ – all three of these are characterized in large part by the activity of the plasmas that they contain. Moving outward

from the Earth, the ionosphere is the uppermost region of the atmosphere, marked by the fact that it contains plasmas – gases ionized primarily by the radiant energy of the sunlight. The ionosphere (~50 – 400 km above the Earth's surface) smoothly fades into the plasmasphere (also known as the inner magnetosphere) which is an area of relatively low-energy plasma extending as



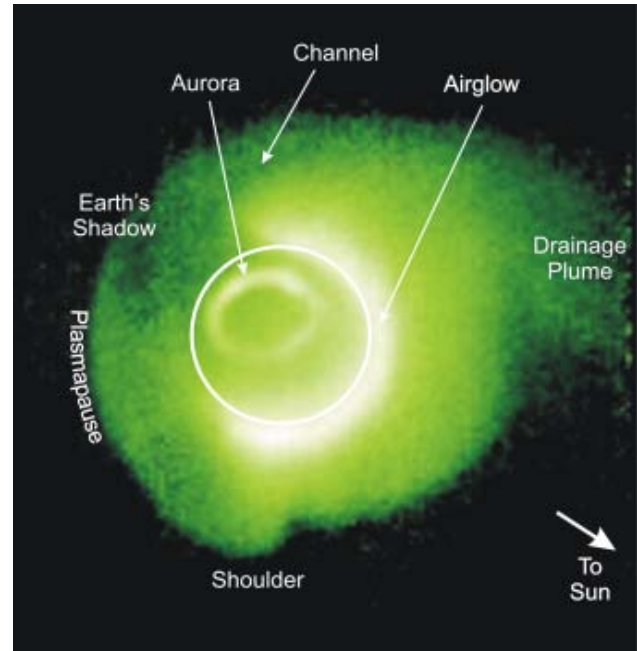
much as 2-6 Earth-radii (~6300km) from the Earth's surface. The magnetosphere itself is the region around the Earth in which activity is dominated and organized by the Earth's magnetic field. The magnetosphere is very large compared to the Earth, and takes a comet-like shape centered around it, ranging from about 10 Earth-radii on the Sun-side, to 15 Earth-radii on the sides and as much as 200 Earth-radii in the tail region.

A number of interesting phenomena associated with these regions around the Earth bring to light some of the qualities of the fire element in nature. These three interpenetrating layers are in constant flux. They consist primarily of plasma with varying temperature, density, and rhythmic movements (daily, seasonal, as well as in rhythm with sunspot cycles). The plasma of the ionosphere is in large part created through the ionization of the Earth's upper atmosphere by sunlight (primarily UV and x-rays). Although the Sun is the largest single contributor to the ionization of the Earth's

¹¹ The magnetosphere is also connected to the ionosphere through heating effects due to electrical currents between the two which are seasonal in nature (i.e. related to the Sun). (Odenwald, 2004b)

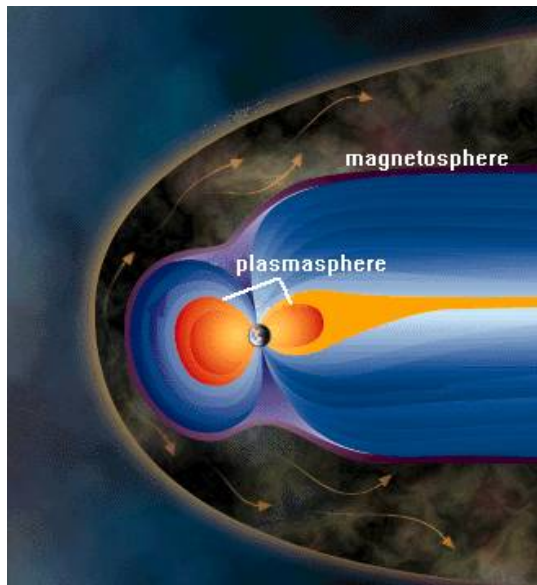
atmosphere, the plasmas on and near the surface of the Earth in the form of lightning also play a role. The heat energy of lightning can add ionization directly, while some of the light produced by lightning can actually precipitate plasma that is further out in the magnetosphere into the ionosphere.¹²

The Earth is embedded in continuous streams of plasma emitted from the Sun. This “solar wind” moves at approximately 500,000 miles per hour, and contains about ten atoms per



A photo of the Earth's plasmasphere in UV light (30.4 nm) from 6 Earth-radii and from above the 73° N magnetic latitude.

cubic inch of space near the Earth. The plasma layers around the Earth are in a continual dynamic dance with the plasma from the Sun, the boundary of which is formed by the Earth's magnetosphere. The



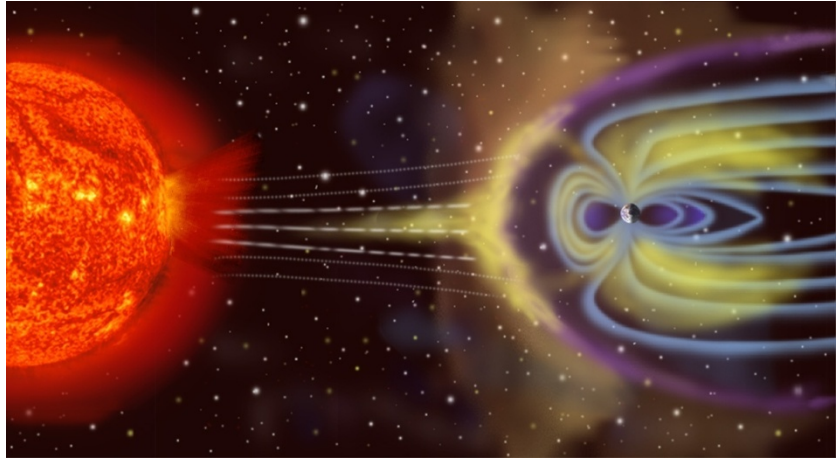
activity of the plasma in the three layers is an expression of the interplay of the fire-processes of the Earth and of the Sun. The streaming solar wind would be deadly to surface life – molecules necessary for life will absorb its high energy and vibrate so strongly as to break apart¹³; our magnetosphere protects us from these particles, deflecting much of the solar wind. At the same time, some of the particles are actually trapped by the

¹² Additionally, the plasma in the two Van Allen radiation belts is separated by a less energetic 'Slot Region'. It has recently been confirmed that lightning on the Earth helps to create a “plasmaspheric hiss” which serves to evacuate this region of energetic particles. (Odenwald, 2004a)

¹³ This is a real concern for astronauts!

magnetosphere and funneled in towards the magnetic poles of the Earth, resulting in the fantastic plasma-display in the sky known as the auroras.

Thus we see a strong connection between the Earth's outer "fire-layer" and the activity of the Sun. Indeed, the very magnetosphere of the Earth itself is thought to be continually generated only



because heat processes at the core of the Earth spin the liquid iron there in a convection process. A mirror process occurs in the plasma of the Sun, which has its own very strong magnetic field. In other words, we can show that the fiery layer surrounding the Earth is created by processes which require *both* the Earth's inner-fire processes *and* the fire-processes of the Sun – and the original heat energy for both the Sun and the Earth came from the same rotating, collapsing gas and other trace matter that formed our solar system.

The ionosphere/plasmasphere/magnetosphere trio is thus a dynamic expression of the mixing of the warmth energy of the Earth and the warmth energy of the Sun. We cannot isolate the fire of the Earth, but must consider it only in the context of the entire surrounding field of warmth in which the Earth is embedded. This is a signature of the fire element, in which the *greater context* becomes a dominating feature. Processes that at first seem small or independent suddenly become manifestations of global patterns, of higher-order dynamic activities which structure and relate all of the seemingly independent, disconnected phenomena, creating a monumental *whole* which operates according to its own set of inner principles, but into which all of the lower phenomena are embedded in a coherent, integrated, and dynamic fashion.

Elements as Facts

Below is a summary list of qualities of the elements so far discussed, derived from the behavior of the physical elements, but also with clear metaphorical implications.

Earth:

Definite
 Shaped/formed
 Located/positioned
 Rigid
 Solid
 Static
 Resistant to change
 Inertial
 Structured
 All surface
 Difference/uniqueness
 Indifference to other elements
 Gravity
 Binary
 Fundamentalist
 Centric

Water:

Self-connection
 Self-continuity
 Conforming
 Covering
 Penetrating
 Planar/Spreading
 Formless
 Relation
 Cohesion
 Adhesion
 Fluid/Flowing
 Changeable/Changing
 Selfless/Dependent
 Accommodating
 Rhythmic
 Wave forms
 Formative forces/forming
 Mixing
 Dissolving
 Balancing
 Relational
 Mediating

Air:

All-encompassing
 Invisible
 Intangible
 Clarity
 Selfless/Independent
 Levity
 Dispersing
 Peripheral
 Complementing
 Self-dissociation
 Diffusion/Expansive
 Random/probabilistic
 Borderless
 Formlessness
 Chaotic/turbulent
 Sensitive
 Vortexial
 Internal layering/boundaries
 Speed
 Polarity (opposite, complement, reciprocal)
 Reversing
 Selfish
 Sounding
 Communicative
 Either/or

Fire:

Warmth
 Unlimited
 Boundaryless
 Radiation/light
 Active/activity
 Dynamism
 Affects change
 Omnipresent
 Creative
 Transformative
 Both/and
 Greater context
 Whole
 Integration

So far we have encountered the elements through their appearance in their various forms in the natural world. In this sense, we have examined the elements as *facts*, as more or less independent bits of isolated information – an Earth exercise. As Hoffmann points out, this Earth cognition is a *physical* thinking, in which the objects under consideration are experienced not just as “separate from and alien to *oneself* but ... as separate from each other.” (Hoffmann, 2007 p. 26) Our next task will be to bring to light some of the *connections* between the elements and their relations to each other, while at the same time examining how they appear in less overtly ‘natural’ forms.

The Elements in Relation



Examining the elements in their natural formations has given us a solid foundation upon which to build our further understanding of the elements. But considering each element in relative isolation is a quality of Earth thinking that has the tendency to lead only to more facts – to an ever-burgeoning list of data bits. Alchemically, such a process of continually breaking down information into smaller and smaller components leads to what is known as *dust*. If we take a physical metaphor, our science of particle physics has reached the boundaries of this process in its understanding of the fundamental particles of the Standard Model. Yet our world is only capable of existing because the individual bits of dust do not remain isolated within themselves, but instead operate according to processes that continually bring them into relation with their surroundings.

In our case, we can see how the elements are capable of being more than simply external physical objects, or even a list of qualitative descriptors of such objects. Rather, the elements have the capacity of relating to objects, events, and other phenomena which are outside themselves and – from a completely Earth perspective – different from them. It is precisely the element of Water which at first transcends this lower boundary, below which each element is simply a *sign* for itself, a disclosure of its overt nature to the overt nature of the wider world. With the addition of Water, a new character is

brought into play that heretofore has been lacking – a character which is already encoded in the qualities that water as a physical object possesses, but which have yet to be brought to light.

In other words, the Water element brings a fluidity, a relational capacity, and a mediatory influence – not just to itself but to all the elements, just as each element has its Earth nature (discussed in the previous section). In this sense, then, we can consider now, from the perspective of water, how each element is capable of being not just a sign for itself, but what we could call a cipher, in which a stream of meaning has been encoded through a process which relates signs to other signs, viz. $A = B$.¹⁴



With respect to the elements we can see that, in the Earth realm, what stood as isolated facts now can take on an additional layer of meaning – a layer that does not obscure the initial facts, but rather enhances them by bringing them into connection with surrounding facts. A wonderful example of this occurs in the tonal languages of Mandarin, where speakers are limited to approximately 200 phonemes (individual sounds). The addition of distinct tones allows speakers to differentiate words, but this alone is not enough, as many different words sound *exactly* alike (homophones). It *requires* context – often significant context – in order to be able to distinguish the variety of possible meanings. This is a picture of how the Water element is strongly present in such languages. It makes for a wholly different kind of poetry, in which a standard four-character poem is capable of carrying a vast multitude of meanings through its aural associations and contextual combinations. As Alan Watts indicates, “Chinese has the peculiar advantage of being able to say many things at once and to mean all of them.” (Watts & Huang, 1975) It is perhaps not too far a stretch to speculate on the relationship between this

¹⁴ See Chapter 7 for an in-depth discussion of *sign*, *cipher*, *symbol*, and *archetype*.

quality of the language, the cultural formulation of Taosim¹⁵, in which the qualities of Water are uniquely addressed, and Watery movement arts such as T'ai Chi.

At first this applies to the previous discussion concerning the nature of the elements by offering a path from one element to the next. The qualities of the Earth element have within them the potential for transformation along many paths. The particular quality that the Water element offers serves to structure the flow of such transformation so that it occurs with a certain smoothness, a delicacy that is continually cognizant of the immediate environment, of its nearby history and future. In this sense, then, we can see that no element remains completely itself for long, but that each element is continually evolving out of the previous element and evolving into the next. The Earth element transforms into the Water element, which transforms again into the Air element, which finally yields the Fire element.

The same pattern helps each element transition from one to the next. The solidity of the Earth, due to a warming process, reaches a point where it can no longer maintain its form, and must yield to a higher, more energized state: Water. With increased warmth, the Water too, can no longer keep its self-connectedness, and is transformed into an Air state, where each tiny aspect becomes freed from its neighbors. This state, more energetic than the Water state, still can be warmed further. Here the warmth itself, having been the active principle of transformation all along, finally yields up its own nature. In so doing, we are treated to its all-encompassing activity, inherent in all the lower stages but now finally revealed in its own light.

The fact that such transformation is possible at all is a stunning fact about our universe. The elements, which we at first encounter through the outer multiplicity of the physical objects around us, have the capacity to relate to each other so deeply that they can actually become each other. Earth, although having quite definite qualities, has the potential to manifest Water qualities, just as Water can

¹⁵ Alan Watts even calls Taoism the “watercourse way” and has a book by that title.

become Air and Air can become Fire. Indeed, every element can become any other element through the regulation of processes properly linking the first and last element.

This understanding points the way to the fact that beneath the seeming proliferation of the manifest substances of the world lies some potential unity which is itself *not* manifest. This is the insight that led the alchemists to recognize the difference between water and Water, between air and Air, and so forth. The base, physical substances – all of them – are not absolute, but are all manifestations of the *prima materia*, the ‘first substance’ which has the potential to become any particular substance that has qualities accessible to our normal sensory organs. The four elements, then, are understood not simply as outer physical substances, but as categorical stages of development through which the *prima materia* is endlessly passing. The four elements are groups of qualities – patterns, modes of being – into which the all-encompassing potential of the *prima materia* presses itself in order to become manifest.

This is the background for the principle of sympathy, or the doctrine of ‘signatures’, which played an important part in alchemy: things which are seemingly quite different may in fact be expressive of one and the same set of principles. Although most commonly relating plant forms and growth patterns to human anatomy and physiology, the doctrine of signatures was also understood as a general principle linking the unseen world of the spirit with the manifest world of matter, for example as presented in *De Signatura Rerum*, a major work by the early 17th century Christian mystic Jacob Böhme, who was heavily influenced by alchemy, notably through Paracelsus.

The principles forming the links – the ‘signatures’ – between phenomena are discovered through an awakening to their Water level; that is, the signatures of the phenomena can only be read once they are understood not just as objects but as processes. It was indeed felt that the book of Nature was continually being written by unseen hands, and that the apparent multiplicity carried beneath it deep currents of patterned behavior; the four elements were such patternings.

Yet the realization of the processual nature of the external world was inherently mingled with the co-discovery of the processual nature of the alchemists own inner experience. The alchemists understood that the only reason the processes of the natural world could be elaborated and understood was because the same processes were at work within the individual – the forces that work in building up a particular flower can also be found in the human: transformed but recognizable if one knows where, and more importantly *how* to look. Rather than seeing this, as would a later, materialistic science, as simply a projection of fantasy onto a dead, abstract world, the alchemists recognized the specific workings of their central principle: “As above, so below; as below, so above.”

The question of *how* we approach the disparate phenomena of the world is central to understanding the Watery nature of the elements, as each element offers a lens through which we can interact with our surroundings and our own selves. Earth, Water, Air, and Fire are thus, as recognized explicitly by Bockemuhl, Hoffman, and Kloczek, descriptive of *states of consciousness* – habitual modes of ‘being-in’ oneself and ‘being-in’ the world. They describe patterns of potentials which can be variously activated through our thoughts, our emotions, and our outer behaviors, forming a subtle web of underlying meanings that run through the different aspects of our being like an artist’s color scheme.

Thus we see that through examining the qualities of each element not in isolation but as stages which are continually moving from one to the next, we find that these qualities are not simply descriptions of outer physicalities, but are expressive of our own inner processes as well. The elements are like similes, connecting through a shared set of qualities two seemingly separate phenomena: the outer world and our own, personal inner world. We can have the experience that the qualities that are at first found purely externally are in fact precisely representative of the inner drama of our own consciousness, which can manifest itself through the patternings at work within each element. A whole book could be written detailing how the four elements manifest within the explicitly human realm, so only a very brief introduction to some important aspects the inner nature of these states is taken up

below. It should be explicitly noted, however, that the descriptions below are general and somewhat superficial, and that the actual manifestation of the elemental qualities can be much more subtle, interconnected, and deep than the broad strokes below might indicate. Each element has manifestations tempered by every other element, and it is not as if the states below ever show up in isolation. Therefore, these descriptions are meant to be taken as guides for our thinking, and should not be taken in too “Earthy” a way.

Being-in-Earth



The Earth element is the domain of all the infinite *what's* – it is the process of falling out of process. It is the tendency to resist transformation, to resist modification, interpretation, change, compromise, and the unknown. It helps us determine the answer to the question “What?” and makes demands on our thinking, often requiring a particular concept or set of concepts, which allow for ‘correct’ understanding. It is properly only within the Earth realm that truth and falsehood are at home, and here they are mutually exclusive and generally tend towards black and white formulations which are opposed to each other. We can see that fundamentalism and literalism in all their forms are an expression of what happens when human beings are allied closely with the processes exemplified by the Earth element.

The archetype of the Earth element is at work in us whenever we focus, select, distinguish, separate, determine, isolate, formulate, hold, affirm, complete, restrict, control, or judge. These activities are a constant part of what it means to be human, and can take on an essentially infinite variety of forms. Although archetypally emotionless, a certain ‘mood’ is present when we are in an Earth state, or are interacting with some phenomenon that displays predominantly Earth characteristics. The mood of being in Earth is like standing on a solid rock: “This is how it is,” and seemingly nothing can be done to change what is so manifestly obvious. We may have the sense of rightness, and feel that we

cannot budge because any movement would simply result in a falsehood. When in an Earth state, it may seem that our job is to try and point out the obvious to those unable to see. If we do this without the benefit of the lessons provided by the other elements, we will likely fail, as the Earth element's uncompromising stance does not work well for communicating¹⁶ (for this we must move at least into Water). If we find ourselves in an Earth state, we may notice that we make statements rather than either listening or asking questions, and our statements may take the form of the listing of facts, or result in detailed explanations which have the effect of overwhelming the other party in technicalities and minutia.

The strength of being-in-Earth is quite central to our everyday lives, however. It forms a sort of 'default' state of consciousness that allows the majority of our attention to be focused on aspects of our experience which are *not* Earth-like, precisely because we have an assumed background, we could say a *point of view*, which remains both tentative and yet relatively unquestioned. In this way, all the facts of all our past experience comprise a basic Earth which is implicit in all further aspects of our consciousness. We could say that *everything* – every thought, desire, habit, feeling, etc. that is distinct for consciousness is Earth. Luckily, this Earth aspect of our consciousness is itself constantly being revised through new experiences, so it is neither monolithic nor unalterable¹⁷.

Being-in-Water



As mentioned previously, the Water realm is centered around *process*. Therefore all our activities, which are the expressions of relations between some aspect of our consciousness and our environment, are indicative of the Water element. This is the most obvious and ubiquitous manifestation of Water – it is present whenever our consciousness takes into account some Earth aspect

¹⁶ See Chapter 6 for an in-depth discussion on how the elements illuminate human communication.

¹⁷ Eugene Gendlin's fascinating work on the sense of implying, the felt bodily sense of meaning, and direct referent formation is an exploration of this aspect of the Earth element.

and responds to or acts upon it in some way. We are involved in the Water element when we ask ourselves “how?” questions – “How did _____ get to be like _____?”, “How will _____ change if _____ happens?”, “How are _____ and _____ connected?”, “How do I _____?” Every ‘how’ question implicitly necessitates the activity of the Water element, both overtly in the asking of the question and in the form that every possible answer must take.

Becoming conscious of the nature of the Water element allows us the recognition that the Earth element can only exist because it is embedded in the Water. Indeed, we immediately notice that we are involved in the Water element when we are *judging*, *conceiving*, *forming*, *isolating*, and otherwise *exhibiting* any of the aspects previously found in Earth. More properly, however, we can see that it is possible to ‘be-in-Water’ quite directly. In this case, every Earth-fact, every ‘*that*’ which rises up in consciousness is immediately taken out of isolation and joined to a surrounding context. The task of consciousness then is to find the connections and relations between the fact and all the other facts which most supports both the facts own implicit nature and that of all the other facts. In other words, being in Water is like being a solver of puzzles, where no fact is taken for granted: is this little green section part of a tree leaf, part of a painting of pasture, or part of an elf’s hat? Whereas the meaning for a consciousness in Earth is patently obvious, to Water consciousness it is constantly shifting and morphing depending upon its surroundings, its associations and relations. Indeed, the unconscious has traditionally been associated with water because of its ability to connect, associate, and otherwise meld together aspects normally seen as separate¹⁸.

We are immersed in the Water element when we explicitly engage in connecting, relating, comparing, withholding specific judgment, keeping open channels for new experience and information,

¹⁸ In fact, Freud’s whole psychology is built out of the recognition of the Water nature of the unconscious and its ability to be self-connected – manifested in his reliance upon the Water technique of association. The particular ways in which consciousness expresses these self-relations can result in neurotic behaviors and other psychic problems which consist in their inappropriate persistence or initial formulation. See also number 8 in the Broad List of Applications section of Chapter 5.

remembering, situating, imagining, wondering, processing, orienting, sequencing, and balancing. Being-in-Water sensitizes us to the processual nature of every experience – everything is always ongoing, involved in continual reformulation, evolution, progression, regression, growth, decay, some other type of transformation. Consciousness of Water helps us recognize that whatever something looks like now *cannot* hold true for the indefinite past or future: “This too, shall pass.”

The Water element allows consciousness to take one step away from the solidity of the Earth, letting a creativity of association develop. Fantasy is one expression of the Watery consciousness at work, and we can see how the rhythmic nature of Water, in combination with fantasy, can set up a powerful force for maintaining addictions, which are like processes that get stuck in a seemingly endless cycle where there is constant change but no evolution. Whereas the Earth element naturally manifests in isolated experiences, the Water element encourages repetition, revisiting, mulling, developing, and dwelling. This results in the potential for *patterns* to emerge as many experiences are strung together into a sequence. Although change is the most direct aspect of how Water manifests, the type of change that is promoted, recognized, or manifested is often minor, or is made up of ‘single steps’ rather than great leaps and bounds. In this sense, the Water element becomes our own tendency for self-situation within in our immediate environment. Because of this, the Water element is the major element in which most ‘everyday’ communication takes place, where we are more or less riding along the slowly undulating waves of our everyday activities in the presence of various currents not in our control. Water helps us to meld gently with our environment, to smooth any rough edges and mitigate the tendency for over-specificity, radicality, or any impulse that swings us far out of balance. This is one reason why Water is associated with the social realm.

At the same time, Water can lead to the tendency for relativism and the feeling that in such a complicated and subtle world, we can only find local meanings, ‘meanings-for-me’, which maintain a certain relative, inner coherence, but which cannot be held up objectivity or universality. A Water

consciousness has real difficulty assessing things from ‘outside the box’, and would rather perpetuate endless variations on a single theme, which seems much safer. Change, for a Water consciousness, must proceed methodically from point to point, from A to B to C and so forth, with no skipping, additions, or other funny business, which cause derailment and necessitate a cleanup job to get back on track. This tendency causes change to occur slowly – but inevitably – when Water consciousness rules.

Being-in-Air



Just as an understanding of the nature of the Water element reveals that it is what allows for the Earth element to become what it is, so too an understanding of the Air element shows us how the Water element is an elaboration of what occurs in the Air element. In this case, the Air element represents the invisible playing field within which all the prior relations made in Water consciousness occur. It is the recognition of the underlying polarity that implicitly accompanies every change. The shifting occurring in Water happens within the context of wider tensions at work in a multitude of polarities. Change isn’t random or even simply local; every change from one state to another implies a whole infinity of potential states which are not explicit in the actual shift, but which can be elaborated through work with the Air element. A consciousness that sensitizes itself to the Air element can thus form connections and relations between radically different experiences, times, or qualities. This can result in expressions that seem random from a Water or especially an Earth perspective, but have potential value for an Air consciousness, which recognizes that asking “What if?” and “Why?” opens the playing field considerably. For Air, nothing is out of bounds; all experiences are respected as potential sources of meaning.

A Water consciousness is quite malleable, but can only be molded gradually into radically new shapes. An Air consciousness is completely versatile, able to shift from one aspect to another without the need for supporting facts or processes. This ability for consciousness to reconfigure itself is one that

depends highly upon circumstance – an Air consciousness can, because it has the capacity to engage with any possibility, become vacuous and devoid of its own content, relying instead picking up on queues from the surroundings. The primary quality of a consciousness that is in Air shows up not just in its ability to take on any form or content, but in its actual tendency to do so. It is like being in the midst of a brainstorm – whatever an Air consciousness encounters is immediately taken up – until the next thing is encountered. This allows for rapid change, but often such changes won't last or be effective as they lack the coherency provided by the self-connection of the Water realm, and can be apt to dump supposedly established Earth facts for other contradictory facts without much notice. Indeed, it is possible for consciousness in an Air state to hold something to be both true and not true without much difficulty – in fact it can be quite natural for an Air consciousness to immediately point out the opposite of any postulate put forward, for the sake of 'seeing all sides', regardless of the consequences. The logic of Air generates polarities in order to try and make the invisible visible; this can be a great source of creative potentiality while also being a great source of rubbish – and an Air consciousness might swing from one end to the other many times around a single fact.

Yet within this tendency is a polarity that brings out a completely different aspect of Air. The lack of intrinsic form when consciousness is in an Air state can be made into its most useful capacity. When taken up consciously, work with the Air state can lead to a profound inner silence, in which our normal self-dialogue is quieted. This opens up a whole new 'inner space' that is most often filled with every sensation, thought, emotion, and experience that comes to us – mostly unbidden. But this inner, Air space can become a phenomenon in its own right, in which it takes on the quality of a profound *listening* that is more sensitive to potential meaning than was previously possible. The lack of self-engendered (or forced) meaning in the Air state can become an experimental testing ground for the appearance of what otherwise would be drowned out in the course of daily events. An air consciousness lets the nature of the other elements shine through, so that it can sometimes seem

invisible or be hard to notice, but it is always present in every experience as the capacity to *let go*. Letting go of an experience is required for all new experience, as our attention must have a way of freeing itself from what presently occupies it in order to be receptive to what is *not* already present for it – i.e. everything else! In this way, Air is responsible for our capacity to forget, to be inwardly silent. If done consciously, this can be made into a capacity that can be willfully applied as a technique for approaching the more coherent and all-encompassing meaning of the Fire element. This can be done through practices such as thinking through sequences of experience backwards, by conscious forgetting or putting away of persistent experiences, and by inserting pauses into thinking processes that would normally flow from point to point without cease. In fact these Air moments are naturally built into consciousness in the process of sleep, in which our consciousness goes through a necessary period *away* from the incessant input from the body and its sensory organs. Every night our consciousness is pulled into an Air state upon sleep, but it is when we work with the Air element directly that its fruits can be best nurtured.

Being-in-Fire



What is it to be in Fire? Whereas the Air state can be characterized by a certain feeling of unknowing, being-in-Fire is accompanied by a sense that a completeness has been brought to the processes of the lower elements. An order or logic that can seem as if it comes from outside ourselves presents itself, almost as if we had an additional sense that could perceive the objective nature of the whole phenomenon before our view, but as if from within. Unlike an Air consciousness, which is usually completely filled by its environment, the work of the Fire consciousness burns away every inessential thought, feeling, or action, leaving only the most subtle – but most real – essence, which has an undeniable inner nature. The Fire is the crucible in which the dross is annihilated and only the aspects which can stand the heat remain – such aspects are experienced as coherent, objective, and true. We

can have the sense that all that has come before was only leading up to the insight or realization of the whole that we contact in Fire. In this sense our consciousness is both a crucible and a womb for the birth of a more refined substance, whether this substance take the form of a thought, a feeling, or an action.

In fact, one of the major characteristics of the Fire state is how it is almost incapable of appearing without an accompanying activity – an action, a doing, an impulse of some kind, even if it is ‘merely’ the sudden intake of breath and the expression “A-ha!” along with a quickened pulse and a light in the eye. Action flows naturally from a consciousness in a Fire state – to such a consciousness they are actually coincident, identical.

When we have a Fire experience we may begin to recognize an accompanying subtle sense of something both beyond and within our experience, a sense that can be described as the same kind that we have when we are in the presence of another human being – i.e. the sense of the *being of the other*. This sense is one that can creep up into consciousness almost without our awareness, but can be indicative of the Fire state. It is the feeling that our Fiery experience comes to us not just through our own willful effort, but that it is only possible because *some other being comes to meet us* in our experience; our experience at the Fire level actually constitutes the residue of such a meeting. In this way we come to experience our own embeddedness as beings of consciousness in a conscious world, and for this reason the question that can express this Fire relation is the question “Who?”

The problem with Fire is that the intense energy behind it is difficult to contain in a necessarily bounded action, which can therefore seem too limited and constraining. The task of the Fire consciousness then, is to re-acquaint itself with the Earth, to ground itself and find the most effective and appropriate means of acting on the basis of its insight. The tendency for action can easily result in a complete combustion of the energies that allowed the Fire insight to appear in the first place. Without engaging with the next step – the creation of a New Earth – the Fire consciousness can burn itself out

and be left in a sort of 'default' Earth state that was not prepared through the necessary self-limitation that must follow a Fire experience.

When we enter into a Fire state, we can recognize how the nature the lower elements are actually expressions of the central insight and coherency of the Fire. The facts of the Earth, the processes of the Water, and the polarities of the Air are all ways in which the whole of the Fire manifests itself, and they are all experienced simultaneously as a single coherency, an interconnected, self-sustaining unity which could not be otherwise than it is. For everyone that is *not* in the Fire state, the self-assurance that accompanies a Fire experience is difficult to distinguish from the clinging to facts found in the Earth realm, and the difference is almost impossible to point out unless a similar progression to the Fire insight is made possible. This can make people in a Fire state seem both like visionaries and crazies.

The Elements in Polarity



The alchemists understood that transformation could not be relegated to either only the internal realm or the outer realm, as these two separate domains are intimately linked and become one as we learn to approach them from a higher state of consciousness. The physical scientists at work today in their particle accelerators have come to an analogous conclusion, with the belief that with higher and higher energies, the various forces that govern the material world – electromagnetism, the weak nuclear force, the strong nuclear (or 'color') force, and gravity – are united into a single 'superforce'. The differences between the forces are real, but only become manifest through a reduction of energy – a cooling – and in this way are recognized as lower level manifestations of what exists as a single, unifying force at a higher level. Indeed, physicists have been able to demonstrate how the electromagnetic and weak nuclear forces are actually two expressions of the "electroweak" force, and it is believed that all the other forces follow a similar pattern.

This similarity between the particle physicists (modern-day physical alchemists) and esoteric or traditional alchemy is not just skin deep; it leads us to a deep realization about the nature of the transformation in the universe. The alchemists recognize that the border between what is experienced as subjective (coming-from-me) and what is experienced as objective (coming-from-not-me) is completely malleable, and that in the end each domain expands to penetrate the other, completely overlapping to form a new type of experience, which could be called the 'subjective objective' – a term coined by Goethe. This unification of consciousness with the world is directly connected to the way in which the unification – we could say transformation – of the physical forces occurs. The four fundamental forces appear completely separate from each other in their nature, effects, and domains of operation, yet it is just these contrasts which prove central to the very existence and operation of our everyday world; the *separation* and *simultaneous operation and existence* of the forces results in the normal operation of the physical laws which govern the bulk of the reactions in the physical world. So too, for a consciousness which is transforming itself towards a more integrated manifestation, it is the *separation* and *simultaneous operation and existence* of its contents and states of being which form the substrate for all further work towards unification. In alchemy, this principle is embodied through the spagyric method, which follows the basic pattern of separation, purification, and unification.

With respect to the four elements, we can see that it is the complementarities, the opposites, and the reciprocities formed between each that provide the underlying background upon which and through which transformation occurs. These different polarities are the stage upon which transformation proceeds. At this level – the level of Air – we become cognizant of how the ability for each element to manifest as something specific and unique arises through tensions between fields of polarities. Nothing is simply 'what it is' or 'what it just was or will be' – rather, accompanying each experience is the sense that its contents are but the minutia of a vast, unseen world in continual oscillation and flux. In the Air we glimpse the nature of the tensions at work within our particular

experience and see how these tensions are much greater than just our individual experience, spanning across all *potential* experiences, providing the structure of the field within and through which any experience might appear.

Another way of saying this: we can have the sense that not only do the elements provide a template for how our own consciousness is structured, but that the elements are objective metaphors – minute expressions of a vast field of potentialities – which are at work equally in our inner world as in our outer world. Remember that we are here speaking of the patterning at work through the Air-nature of the elements as a whole. The elements are not simply qualitative aspects of the natural, material world. They are also not simply a way of organizing our inner experience. They are indications of the underlying unity of both of these realms; the elements cross the membrane between the inner and the outer in a sensitive oscillation, polarizing experience while at the same time indicating its potential unity through the very act of polarization. In this way the elements are objective metaphors, self-involved and self-overcoming, at once both concrete and ephemeral, literal and meaningless, fragmented and complete. They surround and inform experience while negating themselves in the process, disappearing so as to let experience happen. The alchemist is one who learns to keep them from this disappearance through an act of the trained will, a higher holding in which the holding and the held are equivalent.

When the alchemists saw the elements forming, combining, and separating in the natural world, they recognized the processes of *natura naturata* – nature as created. It was understood that the forms and activities found in the natural world qua *natura naturata* were not representative of their highest potential; they were, in some sense, incomplete. The natural world could reach a higher perfection with the creative, *non-natural* help of the alchemists work of transformation, which was a work against nature, an *opus contra naturam*. To accomplish this transformation, the alchemist took cues from nature, but developed them further in way that could only be done through conscious effort; nature itself

doesn't produce the philosopher's stone, it can only be created as a further refinement at a higher level of processes which already occur by default in nature.

The work with the four elements is representative of one way of approaching this relationship: the natural processes associated with the elements in the outer world mentioned earlier act as the starting point for a process whereby the qualities of the elements make an appearance as valid descriptors of our own inner life, before further transforming into active, objective metaphors which serve as mediators for a consciousness attempting to cross the subjective-objective membrane between 'I' and 'the world'. Stated another way, the patternings found in working with the four elements have both a passive, 'given' nature which can usefully describe various phenomena stemming from our experience of the world, while at the same time these patternings provide the basis for a new, creative form of interacting which can further the development of both our own experience and our interaction with the world in a way that brings to fruition processes that would otherwise remain latent.

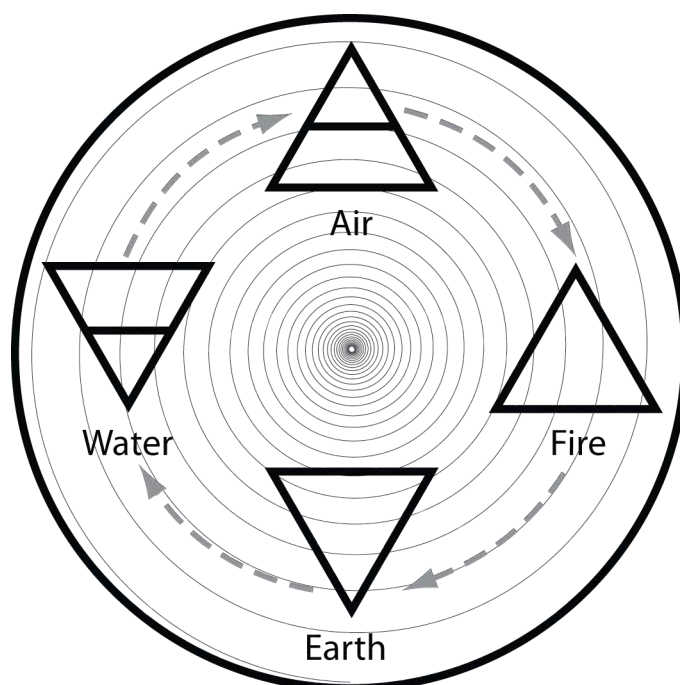
In this way, an experience of the Air aspect of the elements leads to a sense of their ability to work *from the future*, as it were, bringing into the present the possibility for a further development according to the nature of the elements, which on the one hand has its roots firmly in the outer, objective world of *natura naturata* while also forming a basis for the *opus contra naturam*. This reversal of the qualitative aspects of the elements from passive descriptors to active potentials marks the Air quality of the elements as a whole. Stated algo-rhythmically, consciousness can become aware that in addition to some fact A yielding B, it is *also true* that B yields A. The effect is present in the cause; the cause in the effect – each is embedded in the other without losing their separate natures. If this is confusing, remember that one major quality of the Air element is paradox!

The Elements as Mandala



An understanding of the Air aspects of the elements acts as the turning point from the elements as a passive ordering scheme to their nature as an active principle with transformative potential – their Fire nature. We have seen that the transformative pattern of the elements moves from Earth to Water to Air and Fire, with the further creation of a New Earth. The initial content of the Earth element evolves through the successive revelations given by each higher element, with a culmination in an insight at the Fire level. This quite quickly becomes another *'that'*, the New Earth of another fact that can be categorized, questioned, forgotten, or tested further – it becomes a seed that can itself be brought into its Water, Air, and Fire states.

This archetypal movement through the elements forms a higher-order pattern, a continuous cycle, significant for its completeness, coherency, and capacity for evolution. Any single element is incapable of affecting a complete transformation, yet within each single element are the threads which naturally lead to each of the other elements and thus to a picture of the whole, of the elemental cycle, which we can picture thusly:



At the Fire level, we recognize that the elements are in fact not capable of purely isolated existence, but require all the others; the elements comprise a *unity*. At the same time, the elements are *holographic*: the whole is present in each of the parts. If we examine the Earth element very closely, we will begin to notice that aspects that might normally be seen to belong to the other elements cannot be kept completely isolated, but are 'embedded' within the Earth. Uniqueness, Relatedness, Polarity, the Whole - each of these qualities describes each element; it is only through a conscious act that we separate them. This is the work of the alchemist: to consciously work to identify the pieces, which begin as an unconscious unity, purify and understand them individually, and then bring them back together into a new, higher unity.

The elemental cycle is also *fractal*. This is different than simply being holographic in that the self-embeddedness of fractality is structured through patterns, specifically in this case the movement from one element to the next in a spiral/cycle. Thus, what seems to be an Earth (or a Water, Air, or Fire) aspect of some situation, thought, or phenomenon is understood as having the potential to 'unfold' and 'enfold' all the other elements. In other words, there is always both a lower, more intricate, detailed, or "Earth" level of the entire cycle within each element, as well as there also existing a higher, larger, more general and expanded "Fire" level of the entire cycle within each element.

This dependency of each element upon the next works in both ways: from Earth to Fire but also from Fire to Earth. We can think of the dependency from Fire to Earth as one of *potential* and the dependency from Earth to Fire as one of *content*. This corresponds to the involution/evolution theme prevalent in alchemy and hermeticism. In the involutory direction we see that the archetype of the Fire element is actually required for its (the archetype's) appearance in the form of the polarities of the Air, which are the necessary background within which the rhythmic processing of the Water must occur, out of which a solidification can occur into the bare facts of the Earth.

Working from Earth to Fire, in the evolutionary direction, we see that the insight and experience gained in working with the Fire level is only possible because of the ready silence engendered in Air, which requires the rhythmic processing of Water which itself requires the initial facts and data of Earth, which could only have become Earth because they are the result of a previous fruition in the Fire – even if only implicitly.

This is a powerful insight because it points us towards the activity of the Fire element at work within every Earth. Any thought, any experience, and any feeling which once enters our consciousness as something graspable in itself (an Earth), has behind it a complete process which allowed it to become something particular for us in the first place. So much of our daily consciousness is taken up with Earth elements that we naturally ignore the bulk of their content – paying attention to every fact of experience separately would be quite an impossible burden. Even more so is the underlying elemental process at work behind each fact kept concealed from our normal attention. Indeed, we can see how the very coming into being of a single Earth fact is actually a way in which the underlying elemental process clothes itself so as to become visible to our gaze. We are beings who are continually falling out of process through the activity of our consciousness – but our consciousness has the capacity to discover this process anew if it undertakes the necessary work.

The elemental cycle provides the basis for just this work, which allows us to train our consciousness to move with the various aspects represented by the elements in a controlled way. With an understanding of the elements, we can begin to see how within our own consciousness we have distinct tendencies to embody, reflect, and manifest according to the nature of our situation particular aspects of Earth, Water, Air, or Fire. With some elements we find ourselves quite at home, capable of dwelling for long periods of time with relative ease, while the same prospect with other elements makes us feel anxious, irritated, even fearful or worse.

If we begin to train our consciousness by patterning its movements after the archetypal movements embodied by the four elements, we begin to open up a wider palette for potential experience. We gain the capacity to respond in novel, creative, and *archetypally sound* ways to situations that previously had our souls locked in a stimulus-response pattern. By entering consciously into the underlying archetypes of the transformation of the elements, we train our souls in the elemental game of our own lives, learning to skillfully transition from one element to the next as the situation requires. This creates a sensitivity that before was lacking; we can experience the elemental qualities of any situation, thought, feeling, or behavior, and have a sense for how that experience might have been brought into its present state and how it might evolve to the next.

The fact that the patterning of the elements is in part built up from and deeply corresponds with the evolution seen in processes which take place naturally provides a built-in safeguard when we begin to transform *natura naturata* into our own *opus contra naturam*. We become artistic experimentalists, learning to descry the objective potentials for transformation with greater and greater skill, and every result provides feedback on the process as a whole, which further reflects on our own capacity and skill. In other words, the elemental cycle has a self-limiting nature – it does not, when used in accordance with its own nature, yield runaway results or overwhelming feedback. Rather, its tendency is to always move towards a larger coherence that avoids stasis, repetition, randomness, and self-inflation, precisely because it includes just these aspects in a healthy, progressive interrelation, i.e. in the elemental cycle itself.

This self-inclusion also shows up in the fact that work with the elemental cycle proceeds *iteratively*: an input yields an output which becomes a new input. In the previous drawing this is represented by the dotted arrows moving from one element to the next. In fact the fractal nature of the elemental cycle naturally results from its iterative nature: the results of a single movement/form/process are not isolated from the activity of the process itself - there is a reciprocation,

a relation from the results back to the process, which then continues to produce new results on this basis. The process continually modifies itself.

As a consequence of this, the cycle produces results which have the tendency to shift levels. This is an interesting aspect of the Fire nature of the elemental cycle – its application over repeated cycles does not produce results which stay at the same qualitative level as the original Earth. Rather, iterating the results of an application of the elemental cycle generally widens and deepens the playing field considerably, allowing transitions of scale both on an outer (content) level as well as on an inner (meaning) level. This is indicated by the many-layered spiral in the background of the image, and upon which we can trace a movement both inward and outward – corresponding to the inward involution of the levels of potential represented by the elements and to the outward evolution of actual content within these levels of potential.

Treading the path of alchemical transformation through the four elements has not only the effect of dissolving the barrier between objects and their processes, but simultaneously leads to a sense that the processes themselves are traces of the movements of *beings*. The alchemists spoke of the *anima mundi*, the World Soul, which was the name for an experience in which the alchemist's material manipulations became directly and objectively understood as the speech of ensouled beings – the beings of the World. Matter was not completely separate from Spirit, but rather these two polarities came together to manifest as the middle realm of the Soul, a realm to which the alchemist's own soul-life could gain access in an objective way through work, study, and prayer.

Working with the four elements becomes a soul-training in which we learn the alphabet, grammar, and lexicon of the World Soul, whose speech takes the form of objective images which are freed from the historical psychography of our personas. Craig Chalquist, founder of terrapsychology, indicates that

the alchemists were listening into, digesting, and writing down *what their ensouled materials precipitated into the alchemical imagination*:

the alchemists were hearing the psychic sound of an animated world, with the substances they sought to transform serving as psychological portals into the world's interiority. (Chalquist, 2007 p. 94)

Work with the elemental cycle as a mandala, a tool for meditative focusing, can lead to this experience, where we no longer identify ourselves as the sole creative agent of the contents of our imagination of the elements; rather we experience what the *elements themselves are speaking to us*. This is the potential that Goethe was hinting at when he said “There is a delicate empiricism that makes itself utterly identical with the object, thereby becoming true theory. But this enhancement of our mental powers belongs to a highly evolved age.” (Miller, 1995 p. 307) Of course to a modern, soulless science of matter this seems like a profound self-delusion, an absurd, animistic projection which is at best worthless as an approach to understanding the world. But, as Chalquist rightfully points out

If the alchemists weren't projecting, if the things we manipulate bear their own psychic reality, as Jung believed now and again, then the capacity for entertaining 'animism' is not a symptom of primitivism, but a quality of active engagement with things. (Chalquist, 2007 p. 93)

The adepts understood this, and recognized that their work helped to bring nature to a higher state through loving human attention. In fact, Chalquist redefines the *prima materia* as “a happening waiting for an attention-triggering agent.” (Chalquist, 2007 p. 96) This agent is the fire of a human attention that dares to delve through the surfaces presented to our outer senses to touch the interiority of the beings at work there. The alchemist, then, is one who creates new organs of perception – we could call them psychic organs – which can be made sensitive to the various ways in which the beings of the world reveal themselves. In so doing, human attention triggers the attention of these beings, opening the possibility for a new kind of dialogue with the world. This dialogue happens ‘on the inside’ but is not ‘merely’ subjective for that, as it is a direct sharing and intermingling of our ‘inside’ with the world’s. At the same time, it is a dialogue which also occurs ‘on the outside’ in every physical interaction we have with the world, and the activities of nature given to our sense organs becomes a language that shines with the inner light of the beings of the world. As we have seen, and as Goethe

indicates, the outwardness and inwardness actually comprise a single unity, and in the actual experience are not distinguished from each other.

Using the Elemental Mandala in an Earthy Way



The elemental mandala is an extremely diverse tool. Its strength lies in its ability to illuminate the ways that our consciousness situates itself within the world and within itself. In other words, the mandala can be used as a way for us to identify our present mode of consciousness, flexibly shift into adjacent modes, expand beyond our perceived limits to entirely novel modes, and finally integrate all of these modes into a completely new way of being that includes all of the modes in a dynamic evolution of our whole consciousness. Using the elemental mandala can thus be a powerful tool for self-transformation. Because using the elemental cycle is simultaneously a training of the potential modes of our consciousness, we can naturally ask how the elemental mandala can be applied to the using of the elemental mandala itself. What does it look like to use the whole elemental mandala in an Earth, Water, Air, or Fire way, and what type of consciousness does each type of usage engender?

When we take up the elemental cycle in an Earth way, we are able to move through complete cycles, from Earth through Fire, in such a way that our consciousness gains information about the world, or about itself, which was previously hidden or unrevealed. It essentially allows us to make lists of facts about the Earth, Water, Air, and Fire levels of the given object of attention. In this way, the elemental mandala acts as a tool for classification and organization.

When used like this, the elemental mandala provides not only information about the world, but also serves to structure our consciousness itself in a similar way; it trains and orders our consciousness so that it begins to more naturally perceive the elemental structure of the patterns in which it is embedded. We hone our ability to dissect a phenomenon into pieces, to identify each piece according

to the inner laws of the elemental cycle, and place each piece in its proper place according to the pattern. The whole world becomes data for our ordering.

If we only take up the elemental cycle at an Earth level, then this ordering can become rigid and inflexible: everything becomes divisible into four according to a more or less predetermined arrangement, and whenever our consciousness turns towards a new phenomenon it cannot help but rely upon the same taxonomy. We have the sense that the results of our application of the cycle either fit the scheme or they don't; at this level we can have the feeling that the elemental cycle was *applied correctly or incorrectly*.

Working the elemental mandala in an Earth mode has the benefit of helping us make sense of the world, and can give us a feeling that the universe is well-ordered, and that our thinking can find a lawful foundation for its contents.



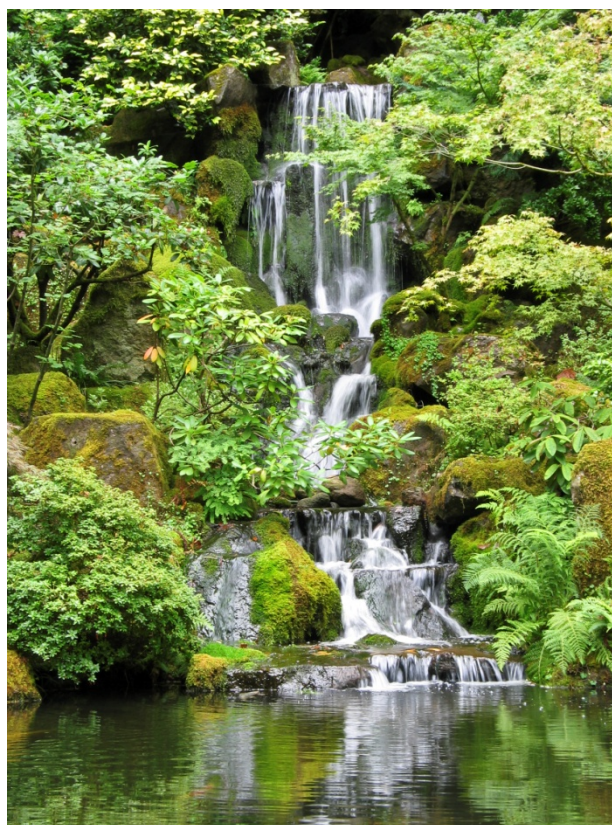
It thus helps alleviate the fear associated with darkness of unknowing, but in the long run provides little of value for the soul. Indeed, such fears can in fact be exacerbated, as using the cycle in an Earth way can increase the likelihood in our consciousness for grasping, solidifying, uncompromising behaviors in which we stubbornly refuse to move beyond what appears to be the obvious 'truth'. Our consciousness becomes robotic, where a given input produces a singular output. This type of thinking is rightfully recognized by Hoffmann as the mechanical. It is the cold, scientific appraisal of fact, devoid of emotion and concerned with the details of 'the truth', a domain where logical thinking is the highest arbiter.

Using the Elemental Mandala in an Watery Way



If we avoid the tendency to use the elemental cycle primarily in an Earth way, but allow ourselves to use it according to its Watery nature, we find it to be a much more flexible tool. Rather than simply disclosing in a factual way its elemental structure, the cycle serves to connect us to the underlying flow of the inner processes of the world. When used in this way, we move beyond simple classification and allow our consciousness to actually participate in the becoming of the universe. We then feel ourselves to be not observers looking *at* the elemental nature of the contents of the world, but rather feel ourselves to be inextricably mingled with the very processes out of which the elemental identifications precipitate into our consciousness in the first place. In this sense, we learn not simply to live in the individual moments of the world, but to dwell within the flow of evolution as life-long partners who recognize that the journey is not different than the arrival.

Using the elemental mandala in a Water way unmoors our consciousness from the overt classification of the Earth level and sets us afloat on the interweaving streams of continuous evolution. When applying the elemental cycle to a given phenomenon, we recognize that our results may not necessarily be simply correct or incorrect. In fact, rather than simply feeling like our chosen phenomenon just ‘doesn’t fit’ into the cycle, we recognize that even an incorrect application of the cycle is useful, because it places our consciousness at the level of the becoming of



the events rather than at the level of their instantiated facts. Alchemically, we have not allowed the fire

of our attention to wane, but have kept it at an even heat, allowing the facts to mix and flow together, allowing entirely new patterns to emerge. At this level, we see that the obvious truths of the Earth level are in fact not quite so cut-and-dry as we might have suspected – each logical relation is tempered by their connections to other logical relations, and a whole weaving web of potential begins to manifest itself to our consciousness. In such a state, a single fact can no longer have independent worth, but has value only by virtue of its relative placement within the whole stream of facts which surround it. When we place our attention on some phenomenon in a Water mode (which requires, in accordance with the element's nature, a rhythmic application) we become privy to aspects of the phenomenon which are not available to logical thinking alone. Even though the laws of logic still apply, we cannot rely upon them for new discoveries, but must learn to move our consciousness with the flow of becoming(s) around and within the phenomenon, for it is out of this Watery realm which the overt sensible aspects precipitate and become part of the world to which the object-based logic of the Earth element applies.

Ala Hoffman's sculptural mode of thinking, applying the elemental cycle becomes a lot like forming something out of clay: we continuously mold and shape our consciousness around our chosen phenomenon with the elemental tools, looking as much at the procession of our thoughts as at their contents. Working with elemental mandala in a Water way frees consciousness from pure reliance upon the facts of consciousness and allows the stream of consciousness to exist as a phenomenon in its own right. In this way the imaginative capacity of consciousness is released and encouraged. If worked with regularly, using the elemental cycle in a Water mode leads our personal imagination (small 'i') towards what Rudolf Steiner calls Imagination (big 'I'), in which we are able to perceive as inner moving pictures the formative processes at work in the universe. Like a higher octave of normal imagination, this state is one in which our emotions, into which our consciousness normally *dreams* itself, are purified of their personal content, leaving us with the capacity to perceive in a *feeling* – non-emotional – way the objective relations hidden within our environment. With this Imaginative capacity we can have, in the

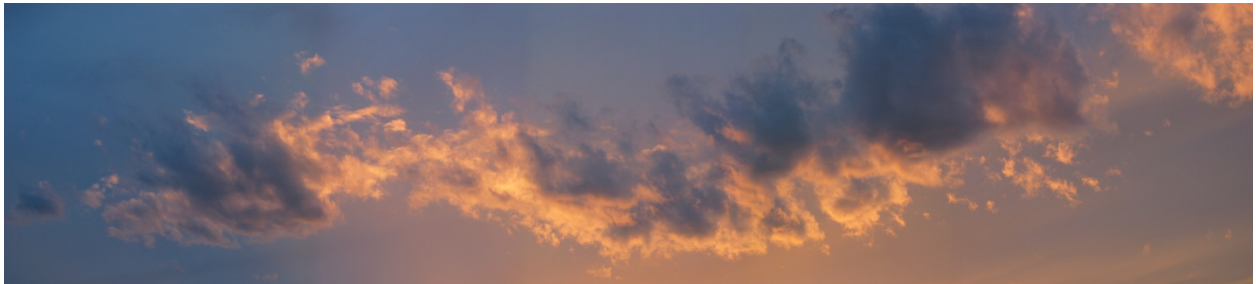
language inherited from alchemy, the experience of ‘feeling the movements of the World Soul’, in which our own inner life is elevated to the wider objectivity of the palate of patternings available to the becoming of the world itself. This is the type of consciousness that Goethe was working on developing through his extensive work with morphology. His discovery of the intermaxillary bone in the human skull (upon which the supposed lack of such a bone in the human the dogma of his day pinned a major difference between man and the apes) was a result of the technique he called ‘exact sensorial imagination’. Goethe repeatedly observed his chosen phenomenon across a wide variety of situations, building up a sense for the underlying developmental sequences and movements of (in the case of the intermaxillary bone) the vertebral column. Even though the intermaxillary bone was not to be found in the adult human skull, Goethe knew that the laws of the morphology of the vertebrae required such a bone to be a part of the developmental sequence. The bone was subsequently found – it is a bone which fuses in early development to the upper jaw – but his ability to perceive the *becoming* of the human vertebrae as opposed to what everyone else at the time was able to observe (the finished, already having become vertebrae) was possible because of his development of this type of Watery consciousness.

If we only apply the elemental cycle at the Water level, we may have the feeling that such application can be accomplished endlessly, but that we aren’t actually *getting anywhere* as a result – we simply make the rounds from sea to cloud to rain to river to sea over and over again. Using the elemental mandala thus can become a repetitive mode of consciousness that, although not locked to any particular detail or interpretation, is unable to find real inspiration. We may even find ourselves dreaming into our phenomenon, floating with it as it morphs and changes without any real purpose or goal, and it may seem like the elemental mandala doesn’t *do* anything – it just flows alongside the phenomena, which may become ‘waterlogged’ as a result.

Using the Elemental Mandala in an Airy Way



When we take up the elemental cycle in an Air way, we suddenly leap out of the lateral connectedness of the Water into an expansive realm of infinite possibilities. We apply the cycle to a phenomenon and experience not just an ordering of facts, nor an embeddedness of the facts in the flow of their mutual manifestation, but sense as well the possibility for something completely new with respect to our phenomenon. We may be continuously led to new insights over a number of applications of the cycle, and find ourselves elated and joyous over how it expands our once limited view.



At this level we consciously recognize that while it may be possible to apply the elemental cycle to a phenomenon so that some particular ordering of information results, it is also simultaneously possible for the order to be reversed and still remain completely appropriate or correct. Rather than being either true or false, the working of the elemental mandala can reveal a number of simultaneous contexts which completely overlap and penetrate one another, yielding a complex, multilayered experience that can be bewildering. At the same time, individual insights may occur with a momentary clarity and brightness that fill our consciousness to the exclusion of aught else – but then recedes into relative obscurity or confusion as a new context or complementary fact reveals itself. We learn that higher truths can only be properly expressed as paradoxes, and that any singular statement of truth is a limitation still awaiting its transformation through the elements.

Working with the elemental mandala in an Air way yields the sense that every fact conceals some inner secret, a hidden connection penetrating through its very nature to contexts wider than we

had ever imagined. We can have the experience that heretofore our thinking and our vision had been limited almost entirely to the surface level of things, no matter how deeply we felt our own experiences to be. We realize that the once mute faces presented to us by the outer shell of our experience now begin to speak, and if we but learned how to listen properly, we could hear that they have unceasingly been voicing their innermost truths to the world with every form, every motion, and every gesture.

Yet working with the cycle only up to the level of its Air nature can lead us into a sort of evaporated space, in which our consciousness loses its ability to hold onto anything solid because it is overwhelmed with the new vistas available to it – we can become interested in so many things that we find ourselves incapable of moving to the Fire level with any one thing in particular. At its worst, this can lead to dilettantism, or a feeling that ‘anything goes’, which if followed to an extreme undermines our ability to recognize higher truths because we have not also worked to maintain a level of distinction corresponding to our level of insight. At its best, however, working with the elemental mandala in accordance with its Airy nature can help our consciousness to become a clear vessel in which the words of the “hidden text” of the world – normally obscured by our everyday consciousness – can be read. It really is as if the world contains a subtle text continually being written by the activities of a multitude of beings. The consciousness engendered through successful work with the Air element can help us to calm our own inner scribe, whose writings (because they are so close to their source in our own “I-being”) blot out and obscure the more delicate weavings that are not our own. Steiner calls this Inspiration (big “I”), in which we gain the capacity to experience the inner workings of other beings, to perceive something of their spiritual nature. The root of the word is indicative of its Airy aspect and its relation to the breath, which is cross-culturally associated with the spirit: *pneuma* (Greek), *prana* (Sanskrit), *chi* (Chinese), *ka* (Egyptian), *Silap Inua* (Inuit), *Awen* (Welsh), *Olorun* (Yoruba) etc.; all link the Air element to the spirit.

Using the Elemental Mandala in an Fiery Way



If we are able to work with the elemental mandala in a Fire way, we find that we are completely connected to the subtle realities experienced in Air at every level. What stood symbolically before us, bridging our inner world to the outer world, now comes together – at the Fire level, there is separation



without isolation, as we experience a singular archetype at work both within and without. The Fire aspect of the elemental cycle lets our wonder and reverence for the beauty and sublimity of the cosmos, or of its tiniest part, be filled with a coherency won through the transformation of the lower elements. We can have the experience that the highest truths are not expressible, but are imminent in the very phenomena themselves (“Do not look beyond the phenomena; they are the doctrine” (Goethe, 1963)), and within which we ourselves are included. In other words, truth is lived in every aspect of being – it is manifested as a whole. At this level we can have the experience of what Steiner calls Intuition (big “I”), in which the normal veils between beings is momentarily lifted and we can *directly* perceive what normally is completely hidden from our view, the inner state of another being. This is what Goethe called the “subjective objective”, in which the purely personal elements of our own inner state are willingly sacrificed for the ability to accept the seemingly subjective state of another being into our own life in a completely objective way. In other words, we can have the experience *as if* we were another being – not just as an imagination, but as an actuality.

Work with the elemental mandala’s Fire nature has a completely transformative effect: our consciousness becomes expanded but robust, able to hold multiple possibilities together without requiring any one to arbitrarily overrule any other. At the same time our outer actions gain a completely new context that works to minimize extreme manifestations in favor of novel approaches

based in sound principles. We find that the Earth level of our experiences no longer serve to isolate us, but are each important steps on pathways of transformation, potential resources which can be of great aid not only in our own development, but the simultaneous development of those around us. Indeed, our greatest wounds are revealed as our most profound medicines, and we recognize these medicines



as gifts we can bring to the world. Our sense of self expands without dissolving, and we are led towards what we could call our destiny, which no longer seems abstract or remote, but rather is discovered to be inherent in each moment as a holographic piece of the archetypes at work in our lives.

Of course, each element can present itself in an unbalanced way. Working with the Fire level of the mandala is difficult – regulating our ‘inner temperature’ is one of the most profound things we can accomplish – and it is easy to create a situation in which the central insight of the Fire level passes us by without our comprehension. Herein lies the “art” of alchemy; it is the skillful harmonization of all of the above principles in both the inner and outer life of the adept, an evolving work which changes with the growth of each practitioner, who must over time creatively learn to work with the various levels of consciousness as a painter uses a palette of colors. Just as a painter chooses colors appropriate to the particular soul qualities she wishes to render, and would over the course of time develop a sense for what colors are most adequate for the expression of any given scene, the adept weaves through different modes of consciousness that are germane to the particular transformative stage in the Great Work of conscious transformation.

Chapter 5 – Applications of the Elemental Cycle



Broad List of Applications



Now that the basic ‘theoretical’ picture of the elemental mandala has been presented, it will be possible to explore the theory experimentally through its application to a wide variety of topics. To begin with, a list of such applications is included below. Many of these applications have generally resulted from a ‘first pass’ with the elemental cycle, and therefore have the overall feeling and depth of the Earth element when presented in list form. The particular areas represented below are widely diverse in nature, and are meant to show the potential breadth of the elemental mandala’s applicability. Some examples may seem quite straightforward and obvious, while others may seem either confusing or even incorrect (some examples even have two polar representations), particularly by readers who enjoy advanced familiarity with a specific area. This possibility is to be expected, and in fact celebrated, as this response can only occur when some basis of understanding of the qualities of the elements has been established. The examples below are not meant to exhaust the possible ways in which the elemental cycle can apply to the individual phenomena represented, but are given here more as seeds for further reflection by the reader; it is hoped that if one particular example stands out – for its illumination, its implausibility, or its seeming confusion – that you will make an attempt to apply the elemental cycle yourself to the same phenomenon and see what occurs, and whether this provides any new insights into the working of the cycle itself.

Any one of the following examples could be expanded – some might be rounded out in a paragraph while others might require a whole book for proper exploration. Following this list, a few of the topics will be discussed in more detail to show the kind of thinking at work and to demonstrate the depth of the elemental cycle.

1. The Earth:
 - a. E – Lithosphere
 - b. W – Hydrosphere
 - c. A – Atmosphere
 - d. F – Ionosphere/Plasmasphere/Magnetosphere
2. The Hero's Journey (Campbell)
 - a. E – The Call to adventure
 - b. W – The Descent into the abyss
 - c. A – Encounter with the Shadow
 - d. F – The Return, integration with the Self
3. Jung:
 - a. E – Sensate
 - b. W – Feeling
 - c. A – Thinking
 - d. F – Intuitive
4. Alchemical stages:
 - a. E – Nigredo – black (melanosis)
 - b. W – Albedo – white (leukosis)
 - c. A – Citrinitas – yellow (xanthosis)
 - d. F – Rubedo – red (iosis)
5. Dreams (Jung)
 - a. E – Stage/mood/context
 - b. W – Build up (plot)
 - c. A – Climax/encounter
 - d. F – Resolution
6. Heuristics (Moustakis):
 - a. E – Initial engagement
 - b. W – Immersion
 - c. A – Incubation
 - d. F – Illumination
 - e. E – Explication
 - f. W – Creative synthesis, future directions
7. The Cosmological Background to the Four Elements:
 - a. E – Earth, Water, Air, Fire (the manifest elements)
 - b. W – Salt, Sulfur, Mercury (the processes between the elements)
 - c. A – Center and Periphery (the fundamental polarity)
 - d. F – The One (the whole)

8. Dream Interpretation:
 - a. E – Calvin Hall (Content Analysis)
 - b. W – Freudian (Association)
 - c. A – Jungian (Compensation)
 - d. F – Gestalt (Gestalt Completion)
9. Personality layers encountered in moving toward maturity in gestalt therapy:
 - a. E – the cliché or 'as-if' layer
 - b. W – the role-playing layer
 - c. A₁ – the no-way-out layer, or neurotic layer
 - d. A₂ – the implosive layer, or death layer
 - e. F – the explosive layer, or life layer
10. The process of Goethean research (Holdrege)
 - a. E – the Riddle
 - b. W – Into the Phenomenon
 - c. A – Exact Picture Building
 - d. F – Seeing the Whole
11. Protein Folding (e.g., hemoglobin):
 - a. E – Primary Formation – String of amino acids (acid-C-N, 2 R-groups off the C)
 - b. W – Secondary Formation – neighbor to neighbor bonding (alpha helices and beta-pleated sheets)
 - c. A – Tertiary Formation – Hydrophilic (polar – moves to outside) and Hydrophobic (non-polar – moves to inside)
 - d. F – Quaternary Formation – requires multiple proteins, the whole working together
12. Projective Geometry - Pole and Polar:
 - a. E – the basic facts – the circle, the point, the line
 - b. W – the relation itself, embedded in and expressed by the 'rules' of the process, the process itself whereby the point and the line are related across the circle
 - c. A – the inherent duality between the inner space of the circle and the outer space of the circle through the polar movement of the point and the line, the circle as a membrane marking the shift between inner and outer worlds, the skin, the place of reversal
 - d. F – the entire field of activity itself, the inherent structuring of the entire plane through the form of the membrane (circle), the complete, simultaneous picture
13. Pottery:
 - a. E – The clay itself
 - b. W – Sculpting, molding
 - c. A – Drying
 - d. F – Firing

14. The derivatives (Arthur Young):

- a. E – 0th derivative (position)
- b. W – 1st derivative (velocity)
- c. A – 2nd derivative (acceleration)
- d. F – 3rd derivative (jerk)

15. Human Body (Steiner):

- a. E – Skeletal-Muscular
- b. W – Blood, Lymph, CSF, Enzymes, Secretions
- c. A – O², CO², N², H⁺
- d. F – Warmth

16. Human Organization:

- a. E – Physical
- b. W – Etheric
- c. A – Astral
- d. F – I-being

17. Ontological Manifestation:

- a. E – Material Existing
- b. W – Growing
- c. A – Feeling
- d. F – Thinking

18. The Four Ethers:

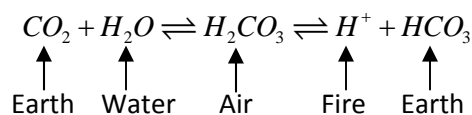
- a. E – Life Ether
- b. W – Chemical/Tone Ether
- c. A – Light Ether
- d. F – Warmth Ether

19. Cognition:

- a. E – Object Cognition
- b. W – Imaginative Cognition
- c. A – Inspirative Cognition
- d. F – Intuitive Cognition

20. Acid-Base Regulation in the Human Body:

- a. E – CO₂
- b. W – H₂O
- c. A – H₂CO₃
- d. F – H⁺
- e. E – HCO₃



21. Goethean Science (Hoffmann)

- a. E – Mechanical
- b. W – Sculptural
- c. A – Musical
- d. F – Poetic

22. Interpersonal relationship:

- a. E – “This sucks.” / You hurt me.
- b. W – “This is *my* experience.” / I am hurt.
- c. A – “What is *your* experience?” / I recognize that I have hurt you.
- d. F – “I experience *me* from within *your* soul.” / I directly experience how I have hurt you, as if it were being done to me, and no one is to blame for it.

23. Tests:

- a. E – True/False
- b. W – Short Answer
- c. A – Multiple Choice
- d. F – Essay

24. Education:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| a. E – High School | Also: Kindergarten |
| b. W – Junior High | Elementary School |
| c. A – Elementary School | Junior High |
| d. F – Kindergarten | High School |

25. Communication (Klocek):

- a. E – Informational
- b. W – Discussional
- c. A – Conversational
- d. F – Dialogical

26. The Climate Cross (Klocek):

- a. E – cold
- b. W – wet
- c. A – dry
- d. F – hot

27. The Mineral Cross (Klocek):

- a. E – Lime
- b. W – Feldspar
- c. A – Quartz
- d. F – Phosphorus/Sulfur

28. Evolution:

- a. E – Mineral
- b. W – Plant
- c. A – Animal
- d. F – Human

29. Organs:

- a. E – Lung
- b. W – Liver
- c. A – Kidneys
- d. F – Heart

30. “Ways to Wisdom” (Angeles Arrien):

- a. E – Way of the Teacher
- b. W – Way of the Healer
- c. A – Way of the Visionary
- d. F – Way of the Warrior

31. “Four gifts of knowing” (de Quincey):

- a. E – Scientist’s gift of the senses
- b. W – Shaman’s gift of feeling
- c. A – Philosopher’s gift of reason
- d. F – Mystic’s gift of sacred silence

32. Light:

- a. E – Particle-nature
- b. W – Wave-nature
- c. A – Particle/Wave-nature
- d. F – Light itself

33. Storytelling:

- a. E – Plot/Setting
- b. W – Squeeze/Drama
- c. A – Crisis
- d. F – Resolve

34. Sciences:

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| a. E – Physics | Also: Material Sciences (Physics, Chemistry, etc.) |
| b. W – Chemistry | Biology (Literally, the logos of life) |
| c. A – Biology | Psychology (Literally, the logos of the soul) |
| d. F – Ecology | Spiritual Science |

35. The process of understanding something new:

- a. E – Understanding individual facts (knowledge)
- b. W – Understanding how the facts are related (knowing)
- c. A – Understanding the limitations of the facts, the spaces around the facts (unknowing)
- d. F – Understanding the gestalt behind the facts (meaning)

36. Music:

- a. E – Rhythm
- b. W – Melody
- c. A – Harmony
- d. F – The whole piece

37. Galen's Humors:

- a. E – Black Bile
- b. W – Phlegm
- c. A – Blood
- d. F – Yellow Bile

38. Temperaments:

- a. E – Melancholic
- b. W – Phlegmatic
- c. A – Sanguine
- d. F – Choleric

39. The Life-Cycle of a Star:

- a. E – Gas condensation (birth)
- b. W – Burning (life)
- c. A – Nova, Supernova, etc. (death)
- d. F – Nebula, galactic seeding and new star formation (re-birth)

40. Getting to know someone:

- a. E – Introductions, basic facts about each other (separateness, self-contained, surface differences)
- b. W – Shared experiences (togetherness, investment, sameness, relatedness)
- c. A – Realization of non-surface differences (questioning, pulling back, new discoveries, potentials)
- d. F – Acceptance of the other (renewed enthusiasm, caring, acceptance, love)

41. Radioactive Decay:

- a. E – Original element
- b. W – Inner relationships undergo a change (process of decay)
- c. A – Emission of various kinds of particles results in a reversal into a new form
- d. F – Wholly new properties of the new element manifest, both inside and outside

42. Bockemühl:

- a. E – Finished Form and Concept
- b. W – Formative Movement / Context of Transformation
- c. A – Gesture (Expression)
- d. F – Being

43. Dimensionality:

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------|
| a. E – Volumes – 3D | Also: Points |
| b. W – Sheets – 2D | Lines |
| c. A – Lines – 1D | Planes |
| d. F – Points – 0D | Volumes |

44. Images:

- a. E – sign
- b. W – cipher
- c. A – symbol
- d. F – archetype

45. Operational Principle:

- a. E – Facts
- b. W – Process
- c. A – Polarity
- d. F – Transformation/Whole

46. Alchemical Form:

- a. E – Wrought work
- b. W – Ongoing work
- c. A – Revelation
- d. F – Being

47. Incarnational Process (which proceeds from Fire to Earth):

- a. E – Form
- b. W – Movement
- c. A – Idea
- d. F – Will

48. Optical Quality:

- a. E – Opaque
- b. W – Translucent
- c. A – Transparent
- d. F – Self-Light

49. Punctuation:

- a. E – Period
- b. W – Comma
- c. A – Question Mark
- d. F – Exclamation Point

50. Parts of Speech:

- a. E – Nouns
- b. W – Adjectives
- c. A – Prepositions
- d. F – Verbs

51. Syntax:

- a. E – statement
- b. W – simile
- c. A – metaphor
- d. F – archetype

52. Grammar:

- a. E – Sentences
- b. W – Clauses
- c. A – Questions
- d. F – Imperatives

53. Making a Tough Decision:

- a. E – Listing the facts. Identifying pros and cons. Attention to thoughts.
- b. W – Relative weighing of facts. Attention to emotions, desires.
- c. A – Asking “What if?” Expanding the context. Attention to possibilities, release of desires.
- d. F – Finding the ‘right’ context. Making the decision. Attention to morality, to will.

54. Combustion Engine:

- a. E – The physical components – fuel, air, a container, etc.
- b. W – The rhythmic relationship of the components – a mixing of fuel and air
- c. A – The continuous oscillation between polarities – high and low pressure, opening and closing of valves, influx and outflux of fuel and exhaust
- d. F – The transformation of fuel into the energy of motion and heat, the production of the ash of exhaust

55. Computer Languages:

- a. E – The binary language of machine code (first-generation low-level languages)
- b. W – Assembly languages (second generation low-level languages)
- c. A – General purpose languages (third generation high-level languages)
- d. F – Goal-oriented languages (fourth and fifth generation very high-level languages)

56. A Committee meeting:

- a. E – The agenda
- b. W – The discussion
- c. A – The tension of unresolved impulses moving in different directions
- d. F – The decision for action

57. A House:

- a. E – The physical components – planks, nails, drywall
- b. W – The ordered relationships – walls, ceilings, floors
- c. A – The created spaces and polarities – the rooms, doors, windows
- d. F – The whole house – the potential for activity and meaning to unfold through inhabitation

58. Polarities:

- a. E – Opposite
- b. W – Complement
- c. A – Reciprocal
- d. F – Enantiodromic

59. Gazes (Ways of 'seeing'):

- a. E – Fixed
- b. W – Fluid
- c. A – Open
- d. F – Inner

60. Baking:

- a. E – The ingredients, the recipe
- b. W – The sequential connecting of ingredients, the process
- c. A – The balancing of polarities – dry/wet, salty/sugary, hot/cold, etc. The waiting.
- d. F – The transformation into a finished whole

61. Human-Computer Interface:

- a. E – The physical hardware
- b. W – Machine Code
- c. A – Programming Languages
- d. F – Programs and applications, the User Interface

62. Questions:

- a. E – What? / Where? / When?
- b. W – How?
- c. A – Why?
- d. F – Who?

63. Individual Psychology:

- a. E – Self-objectifications, “I am <that>”, Unconscious behavior
- b. W – Emotions, “I am feeling <this>”, Habitual behavior
- c. A – Thoughts, “What am I?”, Experimental behavior
- d. F – Being, “I-AM”, all behavior and no behavior (Wu Wei)

64. Images as:

- a. E – Data Bits
- b. W – Outer Meaning
- c. A – Inner Meaning
- d. F – Universal Meaning

65. Some sentences:

- a. E – This sentence is a statement of fact.
- b. W – This sentence attempts to relate how sentences facilitate the flow of information through their underlying feeling tone.
- c. A – No sentence actually carries information by itself.
- d. F – All sentences carry meaning as structuring agents of consciousness.

66. Communication:

- a. E – Speaking (one’s-self)
- b. W – Hearing
- c. A – Listening
- d. F – Speaking (the other)

67. The Elemental Gifts:

- a. E – Objectivity/Clarity
- b. W – Flexibility/Adaptability
- c. A – Possibility/Openness
- d. F – Activity/Transformation

68. Levels of the Will:

- a. E – Instinct
- b. W – Urge
- c. A – Desire
- d. F – Motive

69. Asking a Question:

- a. E – Initial Facts
- b. W – Relations between facts reveal patterns
- c. A – Tension of ‘empty’ spaces in the pattern draw need for resolution
- d. F – A question arises as a place-holder of and in the shape of the empty space

70. Courtroom Proceedings:

- a. E – The ‘issue’
- b. W – The presentation of cases and cross-examinations
- c. A – The deliberation by judge/jury
- d. F – The ruling

71. Scientific Process (with respect to knowledge):

- a. E – Initial observation or fact piques interest and attention – a tentative question
- b. W – Successive observations form localized patterns and potential ‘threads of meaning’
- c. A – A whole ‘field of questions’ arises, with associated possibilities
- d. F – Creative generation of hypothesis as a synthesis/outgrowth of Air questions
- e. E – Strengthening and refinement of hypothesis into the basis for an experiment
- f. W – Research, design of experiment
- g. A – Carrying out the experiment, gathering raw data (‘dust’)
- h. F – Analysis of results yields evidence for/against hypothesis (‘cooking’)
- i. E – Revision of hypothesis, refinement of original question

A Personal Note about the Process



It is understood that the reader will not necessarily gain much from the list above without both having worked through the previous chapter and having some familiarity with the individual realms of application. At the same time, the creation of the list directly reflects my own areas of interest and expertise, and as such represents a very limited set of potential areas in which the elemental cycle can be applied. As we have worked extensively with the Earth element in the establishment of the elemental theory, it will now be appropriate to give something of a picture concerning the process by which the list above was generated. Hopefully this will provide a feeling for the actual usage of the elemental cycle that can be directly related to the reader’s own life and experiences, not as a definitive

statement of how the cycle should be used, but as a report from a preliminary explorer who is attempting to survey the whole territory from a necessarily limited vantage point.

In trying to apply the elemental cycle to a diverse range of topics, a particular pattern is immediately clear to me. Already I have the question – not always consciously – in mind: “To what can I apply the elemental cycle?” This is the Fire that begins the process. Then, in my daily life, I encounter sensations and ideas, from reading books, from conversation, from surfing the internet, from sitting and thinking, from quietly gazing up at the trees outside my window, from my dreams and from the peripheral moments surrounding sleep.

Sometimes a thought or sensation will trigger the question, “What if the elemental cycle applied to this?” Occasionally this occurs as a sort of rote impulse that seems to stem from the part of myself which feels the need to get a thesis completed and therefore requires many examples of the cycle in action. This type of impulse is a very Earth-like impulse, and feels weighty and laden with responsibility and the possibility for judgment (of myself by myself, and of myself by my own vision of the potential responses of others – i.e. projection). When I follow through with the thought I often lack energy and creativity, and may not get very far, or I tease out a few associations between the topic and the elements but certain elements just don’t seem to fit. This can sometimes lead me to frustration, and immediately calls up the fear “What if the elemental cycle is more limited than I would wish and claim it to be?” This fear either pushes me to essentially force-fit the given topic into the elemental scheme or to abandon the topic for the time being. Luckily this Earth-application of the cycle isn’t very common, nor is it the only way to approach its application.

More commonly, what seems to occur is the following. Within my field of experience, just as a part of my normal activities, some particular aspect will contain a highlighted feeling-tone, as if it had a potential depth, or was calling out to be seen more directly. If I place my attention on the particular feeling X – for example it may be the way my soul moves in response to a particular kind of glance from

an interaction with a stranger – then often an association with one particular element suggests itself simultaneously as a feeling and as a thought, such as “This is Watery.” In these types of situations, it is very distinctly *not* like the feeling that “I am applying the elemental cycle to X,” but rather that my work with the elemental cycle has sensitized me to the qualities of the individual elements, which then simply begin to show up in my environment almost like *sensations* in addition to showing up as *ideas*. In other words, I feel like I *perceive* Water-ness as a part of my experience of X directly, just like when I see my friend Mark, I perceive, in addition to his facial features, voice, and normal sensory elements, something like his “Mark-ness” that cannot be linked *solely* to the normally recognized sensory channels such as touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound. Rather, it is the feeling of Mark as a whole being, of his potential as well as his actuality¹⁹. The “Water-ness” of X is likewise present in my experience, as well as the thought “This is Watery.”

This experience is then naturally followed by the idea “What about the other elements, then?” and I begin a very conscious process of trying to at first identify the ‘topic’ that feels Watery, and then to work with the other elements to see how things fit together. When the association between a topic and an element occurs in this way, the whole experience is much more like the asking of a question, and I can much more easily tolerate seemingly ‘different’ answers to the question of which element applies to the different parts of the topic without the fear of being incorrect. Instead I am just trying out the feeling of different possible relations between the topic and the elements in a sort of flowing, undulating way.

Sometimes the connections just flow right out, one after the other, in more or less complete fashion. At other times, one element, or sometimes two, seem to resist ‘being Earthed’ and stuck to a particular part of the topic to the exclusion of other aspects. The option to ‘force’ the application is always present, but it is very obvious when I do things that way, and I try to avoid this tendency to find

¹⁹ Rudolf Steiner identifies twelve senses, including the sensation of the Ego of the Other.

the Earth too quickly. In a stuck place, then, I might find that I have to completely re-think the whole topic from a polar perspective before the elements will 'settle' into place. When I'm having difficulty with one or two of the elements, I therefore will explicitly ask such questions as "What if this part of the topic, which I thought was Water, is actually some other element?" This takes me on an expansive journey where I can ultimately consider each major part of the topic from the perspective of each element, without necessarily connecting any two such associations together. This sort of 'trying things on for size' approach can really open up the whole field, and on occasion has led me either to a whole new formulation of how the elements work with the topic, or has resulted in a reversal of the original way in which I was applying the elements, or even has allowed me to see that my original identification of what constituted the particular topic was either too narrow or too broad. For example, it often has occurred that in thinking about a particular topic and the possible elemental relationships, I would be confronted with the fractal nature of the elemental cycle, in which the connection of one aspect of the topic to an element resulted in the recognition that the connection worked simultaneously on multiple scales. In other words, if I saw how a certain experience was connected to the element Air, when looking for the Water element I might see it both in some smaller-scale, local event, and in a much larger scale, more peripheral or general event. This might even occur on three or four levels at once, and each level suggests a valid application of the elemental cycle in a sort of co-incident spiraling of meaning.

Another useful technique that helps when I get stuck is to ask for someone else's opinion – preferably someone with familiarity with the elemental cycle or expertise in the particular content area I'm working on, but even just speaking my thoughts aloud can help. This is because the actual speaking of my own ideas to another about the topic requires an inner process of formulation that can often lead to more clarity around the nature of the particular sticking point, while the addition of the other

person's own ideas can be very helpful in reorienting my thinking around a completely different set of experiences and assumptions, completely irrespective of their 'correctness' in any sense.

Generally, most of the varied associations made with these techniques fly off into the periphery of awareness without leaving much impression, but usually one or two associations will 'stick' and suggest a potential fit. Sometimes one association is so strong that it immediately constellates all the other elements into a unified experience of how the elemental cycle applies to the topic – these are the wonderful "Ah-ha!" moments which keep the work interesting and worth pursuing. In other instances, the associations need further exploration before they yield the feeling of overall 'rightness', and sometimes such a feeling never comes, and the process has to be worked with again.

Finally, I use the wisdom suggested by the elemental cycle itself to better learn how to apply it in a given situation. In particular, I will try to identify the facts concerning the phenomenon, and then connect them in some coherent way (or multiple ways). This part is one that I have to 'massage' a bit, until the connections really seem to flow and not simply bump up one against another. This is a point where I most commonly get stuck, and when this happens I will, upon going to sleep, imagine whatever sequence I have been able to ascertain in both a forward and backward direction at least three or four times with some level of detail. Then I will quickly imagine the forward and reverse sequence with less detail, ending after thinking the sequence backwards, where I try to be inwardly silent, not letting any images come to consciousness. Upon waking, I may have a completely new feeling about the topic, even if no clear insights came to me, or perhaps the feeling like I need to 'rephrase' my question and my approach to the topic. Other times I awake sometime in the very early morning with new insights that take me deeper into the phenomenon and require that I rise and write them down. I have the feeling like a valve was opened up somewhere which allows thoughts and images of a different quality to emerge. The general sequence of working with the cycle in this way was suggested by Dennis Klocek,

and although sometimes I have to repeat this sort of process for a number of days, it has served me well overall.

Discussion of Example Applications



It is too much to hope the application of the elemental cycle in such a short list form as above will provide sufficient insight into its depth. Therefore, a more detailed explication of some of the above examples is necessary. While all of the above examples can be explicated in more detail, a representative set has been chosen that hopefully reflects and illuminates the elemental mandala's overall diversity and capabilities.

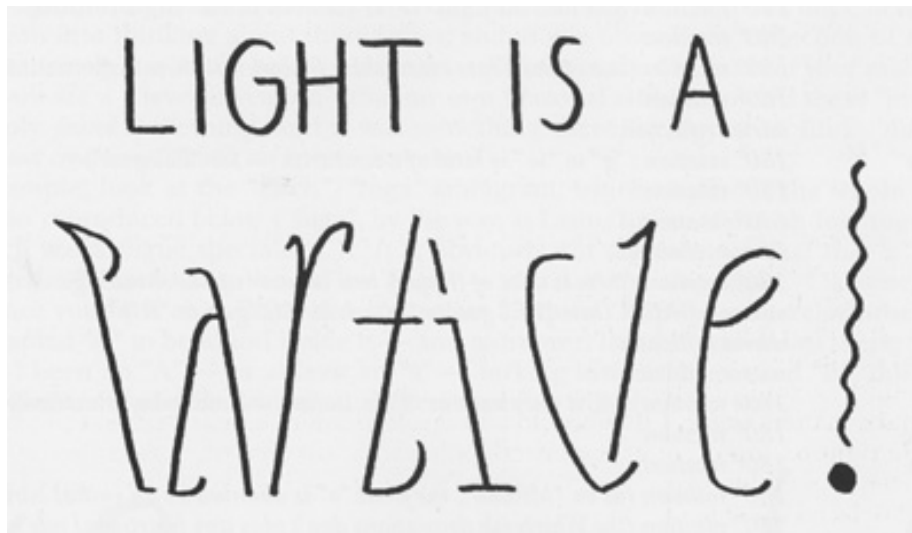
The Nature of Light

The advent of quantum mechanics brought startling realizations about the nature of light. Depending upon the way in which an experiment is carried out, physicists could seemingly change the way that reality manifested. In other words, when physicists set up an experiment in which detectors are used which are sensitive to the particle-nature of light, then particles of light are detected, such as dots on a photographic plate. If detectors that are sensitive to the wave nature of light are used, then waves are detected, such as in an interference pattern on a screen. It turns out to be impossible to successfully set up an experiment in which both types of detectors are used simultaneously – the extent to which we gain certainty about the particulate nature of light in an experiment is related to the level of *uncertainty* we have about its wave nature. We seem to get one or the other types of behavior but not both simultaneously.

The particulate nature of light is Earth in this case: when light manifests in this way its photons are uniquely located, producing a single dot on the photographic plate. The wave nature of light is its Water nature. This is a direct analogy, as the waves of electromagnetic radiation literally display wave

behavior – interference, diffraction, reflection, etc. The Air aspect of light is the strange polarity of its behavior, where it will oscillate along the scale of particle-nature and wave-nature depending upon the context of the experiment. Indeed, this aspect of the behavior of light has been identified in the formulation of quantum mechanics by Neils Bohr the “complementarity principle”.

Yet the very reciprocation between the forms in which light manifests gives us a hint as to its Fire nature. There *is something* that manifests as light – it can take on a variety of proscribed forms, but somehow the light *itself* is not either particulate or wave-like in nature. Nor is it particulate *and* wave-like in nature. Rather, it is singular in and of itself – light *qua* light is not accurately describable with the terms particle or wave at all, but is rather like the metal out of which two seemingly opposing sides of a coin is made. The coin itself is singular, but in any given coin toss you can only get heads or tails. In other words, the Fire nature of light is the part of the universe that has the capability of showing up as either a particle or a wave, while never itself being reducible to either a particle or a wave. A beautiful ambigram by Douglas Hofstadter illustrates this duality perfectly (Hofstadter, 1999):



Plant Physiology

As Goethe recognized, all parts of a plant – such as the roots, leaves, flower, and seeds – are linked to each other via a process of growth whose archetype is a singular formative principle that he termed the “Urpflanze”. This ur-plant is something very much like an Idea – itself without physical manifestation – yet simultaneously instantiated in and through the existence of the entire plant kingdom in all its variability. All plants are participants in the unfolding of the idea of the ur-plant, which is hidden as an “open secret” in the form and growth cycles of actual plants around us.

It was Goethe’s sensitivity to morphology that led him to the experience of the archetypal Plant, and was the fruit of long labor and considerable training in what he called “exact sensorial imagination”, by which every stage of a plants growth and decay could be reproduced inwardly as a sequence of coherently connected moving images and feelings. In this way he was able to notice that *regardless* of the species of plant under observation, all its unique qualities and patters derived from a high-level pattern of growth and decay which could likewise be found – albeit transformed – in any other species.

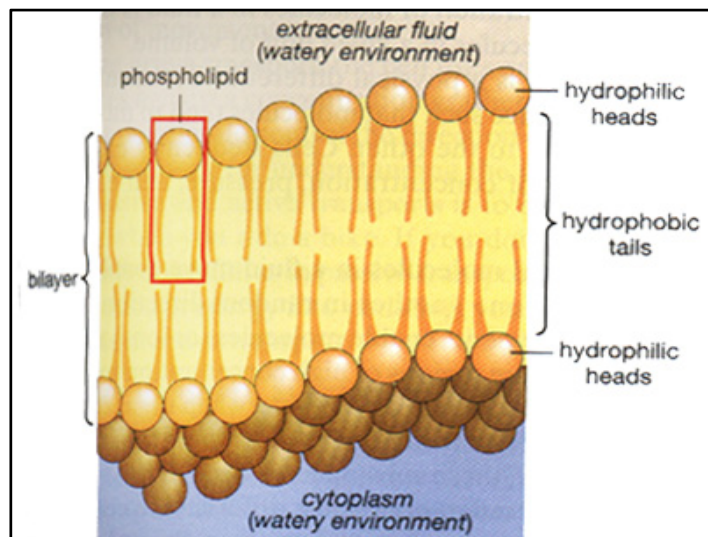
We can use the elemental mandala as one way of approaching the nature of this ur-plant, out of which Goethe claimed he could – hypothetically, if he had the appropriate means – produce *completely new* and viable plant species that Nature herself would be able to produce in her own evolutionary course with sufficient conditions. The elemental cycle helps elucidate the processes by which the ur-plant – and by extension, all plants – operate.

Because we are speaking of the ur-plant, and not any single plant species, it will be important to recognize that in some sense it is *life itself* that is under discussion; the deepest and most pure expression of ‘living-ness’ is to be found in plants (not minerals or animals), and therefore most clearly in the plant’s highest expression, the archetypal plant. While the beginning of life on our planet is shrouded in mystery and debate, it is quite clear that a number of factors needed to be in place before life could arise, for example, the abundance of water, a source of energy, and the raw materials to

create amino acids and ultimately nucleic acids (such as RNA and DNA). This is the Earth element at work: all the constituents of the physical situation had to be in place for the next phase.

The Water element alerts us to how the mere presence of these factors themselves are not enough to produce life. Individually, no single amino acid, nor any arbitrary concatenation of amino acids can be called living – something more is required, and the Water element makes clear that the next phase of the manifestation of life requires an ordering of *relationships* between these diverse materials. The raw materials must combine together into forms which have higher-level structuring and functioning. At this stage (some theories suggest a ‘chemical soup’), although patterns of chemical synthesis can be established, life does not appear – still something is missing, which is only provided in the Air element.

William Martin and Michael Russel, in a 2003 study, (Martin & Russel, 2003) note that with respect to all living organisms, physical compartmentation through establishment of cell membranes is one of the most highly conserved attributes. The formation of cell membranes itself occurs because of a polarity in the molecules (usually phospholipids) which interact with the surrounding water: one side of a molecule likes to be near water (hydrophilic), while the other side of the same molecule likes to be far from water (hydrophobic). This polarity²⁰ creates the tendency for the hydrophobic ends of molecules to get together in pairs, which then link to other pairs to create a sheet, which can then ‘close the gaps’ at the edges of the sheet by forming a sphere. Thus the Air polarity arising



²⁰ Indeed, molecules displaying this behavior are said to be “polar”, while “non-polar” molecules do not display this imbalance.

directly out of a Water relationship (between the phospholipids and the water) results in the establishment of a higher-level polarity: that between the inside and the outside of a newly formed 'cell', which is made up of a thin, flexible membrane.

Life requires this inner/outer polarity. The cell membrane creates an *inner space*, which is relatively (but not completely) isolated from the surrounding environment. This allows for a higher ordering to occur within the cell that would otherwise be impossible because of the high number of uncontrollable interactions with all the other products of the environment, many of which



would destroy the delicate chemical harmonies exhibited by every living cell. The regulation thus established by the existence of the membrane works precisely because the membrane selectively limits and accepts interaction with the outer environment according to the cells own inner processes along a scale of polarities, in particular with electrolyte balance such as sodium and potassium levels and the taking in and expulsion of nutrients and waste products. As stated in NASA's astrobiology roadmap, "boundary membranes also divide complex molecular mixtures into large numbers of individual structures that can undergo selective processes required to initiate biological evolution." (Rothschild, 2003) Thus, the creation of the inner space of the cell provides the right situation for something even higher to occur: the actual beginning of life, where all of the processes occurring in the cell can find mutually enhancing relationships that allow not just for their replication and continuation, but their *evolution*. This is the Fire element at work. The cell is a whole entity, capable of complex interaction with the environment as well as internally, and it exists as an integral part of the environment while providing something unique to it. In other words, the evolutionary capacity of the single cell becomes

linked to the evolution of the whole environment and all its other unique entities – other plants, animals, even the very rocks and atmosphere are all involved in a coevolutionary process of which the plant is an integral piece.

This diversion into the origin of life is important because it provides one round through the cycle which has direct analogs when we consider the patterns of the archetypal plant. To begin with, we can see how all plants have some physical form and structure, with a primal origin in the cell. This is its Earth nature. All the diverse forms of plants result from modifications and adaptations of the basic structure of the cell. The raw materials present in the plant – water, starches, cellulose, phosphorus, carbon dioxide, etc. – are all a part of its Earth nature, they its identifiable, individual parts.

But if we were to restrict our vision only to the Earth level of a plant, it would be as if, instead of listening to a live performance of a Bach symphony, we simply procured a copy of the score and counted up the number and duration of each note with the idea that this gave us all the information needed to fully ‘understand’ the music. With respect to the plant, there is more to it than the sum of its parts; life does not work by simple summation. The Water element brings to light the need for connection – not just between all the parts of the plant itself, but also between



the plant and its environment. At the Water level, we notice that all of the Earth aspects of the plant are neither arbitrary nor isolated, but are all embedded in a myriad number of processes, all of which help relate the plant to its environment.

Rooting keep plants in place, stemming provides optimal usage of space by separating the leaves, which themselves drive the whole system through the process of photosynthesis, which allows

for the production of a concatenated, compressed image of itself as in the form of spores or seeds. All of these processes are ways through which the archetype of the plant expresses itself in the context of an actual physical environment. The Water element keys us into the idea that the plant, with respect to its *life* is essentially completely contiguous with its environment. A plant can, in this way, be thought of as a direct expression of its environment, and the environment can be thought of as expressing itself in the form of the plant. Even though every plant has an obvious physical form, if we look beyond the form to the processes, we cannot find any non-arbitrary boundary between the plant processes and the processes of the wider environment – they are seamlessly meshed into one another at all levels. This is made more obvious when we consider that a plant will grow precisely in accordance with the specific ongoing situation it finds in its environment. In other words, changes in the environment are also changes in the plant – although not necessarily in a one-to-one correspondence (because of the Air and Fire elements, yet to be discussed). The Water element sensitizes us to the fact that a continual exchange and interplay between the inner nature of the plant and its required situation in an outer environment are in fact what produces the specific forms and qualities of a given plant in the first place. Indeed, the plant can be experienced as a continual streaming between the manifest physical components available to our base senses and a *manifesting* but non-physical component available only to our thinking – the ur-plant.

How the plant actually accomplishes this is expressive of the Air element, and we can see that the polarity between the manifest plant and the ur-plant has already been active even in the Earth level. Yet despite the continuity between the plant and its environment, there is more to the puzzle. Plants are not simply expressive of their environment – they themselves fit reciprocally into the environment through processes which are unique to each species of plant. In other words, plants *give something back* to the environment that was *not* there before. On the one hand this occurs at a purely Earth-type level, in which plants can be used in any number of ways, obviously by humans but also more generally

by the entirety of nature. The growth and decay processes (another polarity) at work within a plant give rise to new expressions within the plant which are capable of actively changing the environment. The highest example of this occurs in the flowering plants, which have an amazing relationship with the insect world, where the production of flowers, pollen, nectar, and so forth, become absolutely entwined with the behavior of the next highest form of life that the plant itself cannot achieve. We also see such reciprocation over larger scales, in the fact that most plants take in carbon dioxide from the air which, through the process of photosynthesis is transformed into starches and sugars for the plant while creating the oxygen necessary for the higher forms of life on the planet – the plants are the lungs of the Earth.

We could say that each plant has a ‘gesture’ which arises out of the boundary conditions formed by the meeting of its internal life processes with its embeddedness in the wider environment. This ‘gesture’ is well known to those who work with plants on a daily basis, and has led to the discovery of



uncountable instances of the most fascinating Air polarity exhibited by the plants: their healing capacities. The plant world is abundant with pharmaceutical compounds – indeed, essentially all active medicines are created directly from or are synthetically derived from plants. These compounds are formed when the plants own life processes are forced to respond to and reciprocate with the surrounding environmental conditions – such as the rhythms of night and day, of hot and cold, of dry and wet, and so forth. This capacity for the plant to form something within itself out of the flowing of its life processes in the context of the

impulses of the environment is directly analogous to what in the human being would be the formation of an inner experience on the basis of a sensation of the outer world, such as the arising of a mental

image. In each case, something from the environment is taken hold of by inner forces which transform the outer impulse into something analogous but also completely new – a medicine, a thought form.

Within these polarities, the plant is capable of moving further – to the Fire level. Here, amongst all the various pushes and pulls from the environment, as a transformation of its own life processes to a new level, the plant becomes capable of producing a concentrated bit of itself that is capable of manifesting anew as another plant. This



capacity for reproduction is, of course, a hallmark of life in general, and its foundation is in the plant world. At the Fire level, all the physical aspects and elements of the plant, all its life processes, and all its reciprocating relationships are harmonized together to allow the production of a seed. The whole constellation of forces that *produce* the seed as a harmonic maturation of the unique plant is properly expressive of the Fire element, while the actual seed itself (in whatever form it may take) is in fact the 'New Earth'. Each plant species is unique, and it is through the Fire element that this uniqueness is maintained. Walnuts produce walnut trees, acorns produce oak trees. But all of these are *plants*, and the Fire element shows us how regardless of the species, it is possible to speak of the plant as an archetype.

We can even see this in the geometry of plant growth, in which the four elements manifest quite distinctly as processes of pointing (Earth), elongating (Water), planarizing (Air), and spherizing (Fire). We begin with the New Earth of the seed, spore or pollen, a point-like structure capable of nothing but maintaining itself independently of its original plant. The seed, a protective Earth structure, has within it something Fiery – all the information needed to create an entirely new plant, but only if the conditions (Water) are right. If the environment is suitable – generally meaning water is readily

available – then elongating occurs through rooting and stemming processes. But this stemming is only there so that the leafing process of the plant can occur. This planarizing process is directly expressive of Air, in that the leaf is the most prominent and important membrane between the plant and the environment. The processes of transpiration and photosynthesis are continually regulated by the leafing process, which sensitively optimizes itself according to the conditions in each species and each individual plant through modification of its planarity. The form and function of the leaf is therefore a direct manifestation of the polarity between the inner nature of the plant and its outer environment. In



the most evolved plants – the flowers – we can see the planarizing forces taken to another level in the flower, which is itself a plane, made up of planar petals, and even the ‘flowering plane’ upon which all the individual flowers, at a specific height from the ground, produces flowers so as to form a connected plane across an entire area such

as a field. But all these leafing processes are then transformed again, into the spherizing activity of fruiting. Here, a completely separate inner space is formed that provides an environment in which the next activity – the pointing of seed formation – can take place in such a way as to propagate the species, even at great expense to the original plant, which can burn up much of its resources in the fruiting process. As the highest level of plant manifestation, this capacity is not manifested overtly in many lower plant species. Indeed we can take these four activities described by their geometry of pointing, elongating, planarizing, and spherizing, vary each of them independently, and find actual plant species which correspond to our parameters²¹.

²¹ As another layer of the elemental cycle, we can see these four activities of pointing, elongating, planarizing, and spherizing at work within each separate part of the plant as well as along the whole development of a single plant. The simultaneous presence of these activities in each part of the plant is even more pronounced when a

Going one step further, we can imagine that in some sense the whole process also moves in reverse – that the seed is, in a way, an excuse for the ability of the plant to root and stem, which is itself an excuse for the leafing process, which is only there to create the ability of the plant, through its fruiting process, to produce new seeds. In other words, we can have the sense that simultaneous to the normal direction of growth of a plant from seed to roots and stem to leaves and flowers to fruit and seed, another process is occurring *as if backwards*, by which the seed works to create the fruit, which makes leaves to gather the required energy from the environment, but which themselves move all the way down and into the earth through stems and roots in order to ground the whole thing. Thinking imaginatively in this way is a step towards achieving for ourselves the experience of Goethe when he perceived the archetypal plant.



Dimensionality, Kingdoms of Nature, and Consciousness

As indicated in the discussion of plant physiology, there is a relationship between the four elements and dimensionality. It will be interesting to discuss this further, as dimensionality will provide an Air aspect of how the elemental cycle can apply to a given domain, i.e. in reverse. At the same time, the discussion of dimensionality will take us further afield into other realms in which the cycle also applies. We will see that many seemingly separate phenomena are in fact coherently linked together in a way made clear through the lens of the elemental mandala. This shows a Water aspect of the cycle.

comparative morphological approach is taken and many species are examined side by side – obviously such a study is far beyond the confines of the present work but is quite illuminative.

Following the way that plants develop, we can associate Earth with the point, Water with the line, Air with the Plane, and Fire with the volume of 3D space, the sphere²². Such association makes a great deal of sense. The point is an exactly defined, unique geometrical construct – it has no dimension whatsoever, and is precisely what it is only because of its position, its complete isolation from every other point. It is the primal fact of geometry, its foundation. The line is what occurs when any two points come into relation with each other. In a line, an infinite stream of points now connect each point to every other through its neighbors. The arising of the plane from the line is the foundation for the membrane, the division of one world from another. It polarizes space and allows the possibility for three points which do not exist on the same line, allowing for enclosed two-dimensional shapes. There can thus be an ‘outside’, and an infinite multiplicity of lines connecting one point to any other. The volume of space contains all the lower dimensions and integrates them at a higher level, allowing each of the basic elements of geometry, the point, line, and plane, to make their diverse relations.

However, it is equally possible to examine dimensionality from a completely reversed approach, in which Earth is the volume of space, Water is the plane, Air is the line, and Fire is the point. In this case, the volume of space is expressive of the Earth in that it is within three dimensional space that the highest level of isolation and uniqueness of form is possible. The diversity of forms present in the world is possible only because of the three dimensionality of space. Following Arthur Young’s insightful links between dimensions of freedom and constraint (Young, 1976), those entities most directly expressive of the Earth element – the crystals – are symmetrically ordered in three dimensions; they are the most bound and therefore have a fixed position (zero degrees of freedom, three degrees of constraint),

²² Any three dimensional form could be serve to typify volume, but the cube and the sphere are the most directly appropriate. The cube has six faces all at right angles, expressing three dimensionality with unquestioning clarity at the expense of fixing a particular frame of reference, while the sphere includes all possible frames of reference (any rotation of the cube’s directions) at the expense of the definition of any single one. The cube is the Earthy representation, the sphere is Fiery.

expressed both atomically in the arrangement of the individual atoms and macroscopically in their lack of self-motion (all their motion is a result of outside impulses).



Correspondingly, in the Calculus we could express the positionality of Earth with a function, of which we can take the 0th derivative, which is another way of saying we simply take the function itself (in this case of position) – this will come into play once we see the other elements at work. We can thus begin to perceive a relationship between the kingdoms of nature, the geometric entities, degrees of freedom and constraint, symmetry, the derivatives, and the elemental cycle. In the case of the Earth element, we can relate to it the mineral realm, volume, 0 degrees of freedom and 3 of constraint, 3-fold symmetry, and the 0th derivative.



We have already seen that the element of Water has an intrinsic planarity in its tendency to form surfaces, whose manifestation in the plant realm is most typified by the leaf form – which, remembering Goethe, is the essential unit of the plant whose transformation yields all the other parts.

Thus we have a number of connections linking the plant world, the world of life – and its Goethean archetype in the leaf-form, with the element of Water. Notwithstanding that water regulation is perhaps one of the most important requirements of the plant realm (and the leaf is the primary organ for this), plants also exhibit two degrees of symmetry (a radial symmetry), while having one degree of freedom. The additional degree of freedom, which the mineral

realm does not enjoy, is expressive of²³ the plants ability to *grow*. This remarkable capacity occurs along the vertical line of polarity established between the Sun and the Earth, between the forces of levity and those of gravity. We could say that it is along this idealized line that the drama of plant growth is played out, and that (following Goethe's style of thinking) all the myriad aspects of plant growth which are seemingly *not* along this vertical line result from the complex individual context of the particular plant's nature within its particular environment as *modifications* of the archetypal rule. The fact that plants grow means that instead of simple positionality, plants must be described through time: the height of a tree changes over time. In the Calculus, this is expressed by the first derivative, which takes the position function and relates its changing to time; the first derivative of position with respect to time is known as *velocity*.



When we examine the *outer movement* of the plant realm, we find it to be essentially linear. The reader may wonder how this helps support the supposed link between the plant realm and the geometric entity of the plane. Here we are led to something new, and potentially strange-sounding: we must distinguish between an outer movement

and what occurs within an *inner* realm, the *inner movement*. Certainly we can immediately reflect on this difference, in which it is directly apparent that such a distinction has validity; I have an inner life which is different from, but connected with, the motion of my physical body. When I have the inner

²³ Indeed, the link between dimensional degrees of freedom and the kingdoms of nature may be a very deep one in terms of cosmological evolution. This is certainly felt to be the case by Young.

experience of wanting to go somewhere, some process is required for the inner movement to be translated into an outer movement.

For now, the reader is asked to consider the possibility that humans are not the only beings with inner lives, and that in fact we can consider this distinction to hold across all kingdoms. Animals, plants, and yes, even the mineral realm can be experienced as having both an inner life as well as an outer one which is available to our physical senses. Perception of the realms in which these beings have such an inner life requires organs capable of sensation in the corresponding realm, just as an eye is an organ for the perception of sight but will not yield any other sense experience than a visual one to the perceiving being.

It is beyond the scope of this study to provide a complete and coherent account of the nature of these beings and their differences. The following discussion may therefore be far enough from 'normal' experiences and concepts that it seems fantastic to some readers, in which case it is only asked that the reader consider the points made from a logical but open-minded standpoint. Interested readers are referred to a very accessible introduction relevant to the material presented here, found in Steiner's book *Theosophy*, particularly the first chapter.

With this distinction between the inner and outer made, we can recognize that the polarity of binding and releasing must also be present in the inner realm – we could say that on a non-physical level, the beings of each respective kingdom have some level of self-restraint, as well as some level of inner freedom, or non-restraint. If, following the insights of Steiner, the alchemists, and countless others from a variety of traditions the world over, we can imagine that in addition to human beings, of which each individual is like an entire species, other beings too exist: the animal species, plants – even mineral beings, each with their associated inner life and level of consciousness. The elemental cycle can help us understand the differences between these various beings, and in the process illuminate something of our own humanity.

So for a moment we must backtrack to the mineral realm, where we have already indicated that the outer positionality of the minerals was correspondent with a lack of self-motion. We can see now that this is really indicative of the inner life of the mineral being: it has essentially no self-restraint, which results in its full *outer* constraint in all three dimensions. In other words, we can point to the idea that a degree of inner freedom requires a degree of outer constraint. Or stated another way, the lack of inner restraint requires the physical manifestation of the being (its material aspect) to become subject to outer laws. As Young indicates, “Laws describe constraints; they do not create.” (Young, 1976 p. 30) What the being cannot take up within itself inwardly is dealt with (from the perspective of that being) by forces other than what it provides itself, i.e. outwardly. We can think of inner-restraint almost like it is indicative of the level of ‘binding’ or ‘interest’ by a being in its mineral body, or we could say, its level of incarnation. In this sense, the mineral realm is the least incarnated of the beings of the various kingdoms under discussion – its inner life is unrestricted (zero degrees of restraint), yielding three degrees of outer constraint.

With regards to the Water element and the plant kingdom, we find now one degree of inner restraint; the plant being is more incarnated than the mineral being. As the incarnating being focuses itself more and more closely on its evolutionary development – in which the physical component plays an important role as the most ‘dense’ part of the evolving being – the effects in the material realm of the work of that being become more and more evident. The inner restraint requires that the outer aspect of the plant being – its manifestation in the physicality of the plant realm – submit to one less degree of outer constraint, manifesting in the plant’s capacity for growth. This results in the vertical velocity descriptive of the plant realm – the outer manifestation of an inner restriction. On the inner level, the plant has freedom, as it were, in two dimensions: the being only restricts itself in one dimension. Therefore there is a sort of planarity in the *inner* world of the plant – this planarity is found only when we consider the whole plant realm in its entirety and not just an individual plant. With

respect to the forces that produce the *life* of the plant, we cannot distinguish an absolute boundary from one plant to the next – the life of the *entire* plant realm is, as it were, a singular whole, across the whole surface of the planet. Although not available directly to our outer senses, we can still have something of a feeling of this aspect of the inner life of the plant realm when we travel from one biome to the next and notice that a certain transitional coherence – the life of each area flows into the next, with all the plants constantly exchanging life forces. The growth and decay of the plant realm operates by forces which are, in a sense, planar, and which cover the planar surface of the Earth as a whole.



We can thus link the Water element to the plant realm, “outer” linearity, 1 degree of outer freedom and 2 of outer constraint, “inner” planarity, 2 degrees of inner freedom and 1 degree of inner restraint, 2-fold (radial) symmetry, and the 1st derivative. Examining the chart at the end of this section will be helpful in seeing all these relations at once. Now on to the Air element.

With the line, we can immediately note that the quality of polarity exhibited by the Air element is naturally expressed by the two-directionality of a single dimension. Every line is necessarily the establishment of a polarity, and it is precisely this polarity that provides the foundation for all measurement through a continuously additive and subtractive scale of defined segments: inches, meters, and so forth. As with Young, Steiner, and many others, we can recognize that in the animal realm, something lacking in the life of the plant realm manifests itself, which we can call *desire*. Desire

arises only because animals have an inner life (we could say a *soul*²⁴); they have sense organs which perceive the outer world and represent that world inwardly to the animal, which can then respond and act on the basis of those sensations. This is expressive of the Air element's quality of reversal: the outer becomes inner. In other words, an animal has the capacity to *feel*: pain, lack, excess, comfort, etc., all of which fall within the polarity between sympathy and antipathy. This reversal itself goes through a reversal, whereby the inner state



of the animal is transformed into an outer expression: a movement. The animal's outer movement, as an expression of the linear polarity in its inner life between sympathy and antipathy, allows it an additional degree of freedom not found in the plant realm – the animal is free to move in essentially two dimensions (a plane)²⁵. Correspondingly, instead of exhibiting two degrees of outer constraint it is only limited to one, because its inner life is correspondingly restrained by an additional dimension, to be line-like. This also finds a relation in the animal tendency for bi-lateral symmetry, where the front and back as well as the top and bottom are asymmetric, while left-right symmetry is generally preserved. The animal can thus act out its desire by either moving away from or towards sense-objects in any direction

²⁴ Indeed, the Hebrew word *Nephesh*, commonly translated in English as “soul” literally means “animal”, though this term is generally meant to refer to *breathing* animals. This term, which does *not* refer to some type of immortal essence, corresponds quite closely with the usage meant here. The soul, in this sense, can be understood as the meeting ground between the body and the spirit.

²⁵ Readers might point out that animals move in three dimensions, as in fact do plants. This is quite true from a purely Earth perspective that takes into account only the relations between physical bodies. If we expand our view to include the more subtle qualities of the other elements, we can see that the dimensional links are quite justified. In particular, we can point out that it is first in the animal realm that ‘planar’ attention comes into play: animals must generally be concerned about not just what is (for a plant) above and below them (or for an animal before or behind), but also what is to the side. The whole predator/prey relationship is built up in a certain way along planar relationships. This is strikingly evident, for example, in the way prey animals have a tendency for lateral eye-placement on the skull, the better to see their surrounding plane, while predators have a tendency for forward eye-placement, allowing them to focus on their prey while circling or spiraling around them.

in the plane. This movement is not, like the plant realm, best characterized by the 1st derivative of position (velocity), but requires something new: the 2nd derivative, also known as acceleration, which is



the rate of change of velocity with respect to time. Animal movement is best characterized by *continual changes in velocity*, in particular movement in circular or spiral motions, which always require acceleration.

Thus we can see that the animal realm continues to follow the pattern

established previously, where an additional level of inner restriction yields both a corresponding addition to its inner life as well an additional level of outer freedom. The Air element is thus linked to the animal realm, “outer” planarity, 2 degrees of outer freedom and 1 of outer constraint, “inner” linearity, 1 degrees of inner freedom and 2 degrees of inner restraint, 1-fold (bi-lateral) symmetry, and the 2nd derivative.

Now we come to the Fire element. Whereas our original connections between the elements and the geometric entities followed the outer aspects of the relevant kingdom, from Earth as a point to Fire as a sphere, we see now that, in accordance with the nature of Air, following the elements into the inner world requires a reversal, proceeding from Earth as a sphere to Fire as a point. The human being enjoys something beyond what is available to the animal world. We can, through a certain kind of inner restriction, live not just through the acting out of our desires, but instead can raise ourselves up to the level at which we can contemplate our own inner life as well as the cosmos in thinking, allowing us to lead our lives in accordance with principles beyond those available to the animal realm. In other words, humans have the potential to act morally. This is indicative of the deeper level of incarnation of human

beings, in which our spiritual component restricts itself even further, to be point-like. The ability to not let desires rule our life requires a one-pointed concentration. Keeping our inner life from immediately seeking satisfaction of sympathetic or antipathetic desires through the grasping or releasing of the object of our desire takes an additional degree of self-restraint that is the hallmark of what we could call the Ego²⁶, or “I-being”. Thus the Ego is the most bound – the most point-like, the most constrained – of all the aspects of the human makeup. The Master, says Novalis, is self-limiting.



This additional degree of inner restraint yields an addition degree of outer freedom. Thus, the 3-degrees of outer freedom of the human kingdom are a result of the fact that on an inner level we have something point-like. We could say that the incarnation of our I-being all the way into the physical realm allows us to have the *creative* thoughts that can then be turned into reality (cars, airplanes, spaceships, submarines, and so forth) which provide us with a true three-dimensional freedom, in which we can even leave our planet entirely if we wish – *in our physical bodies*. This is representative of the general link between the inner and the outer –constraint on the inside provides the capacities which yield outer freedom – but in the human this happens only through the non-natural element of creativity

²⁶ Ego here should not be confused with the popularization of the term via Freudian psychology. Whereas the Freudian ego is expressly situated within the psychic – i.e. *soul* realm, the Ego here mentioned is properly an expression only of the *spirit* realm. More on this in a moment.

in our *thinking* – a capacity of the spirit – which allows us the freedom to externalize our inner state through creative production.

It might be thought that the human kingdom is still bi-laterally symmetrical, and that this is evidence against the above distinction between the animal kingdom and the human kingdom; indeed, modern physical taxonomy clearly identifies the human being as belonging to the animal kingdom. But even if we only view the human being inasmuch as we are physical beings, we can still see this progression, which moves more and more towards asymmetry in the human being. In particular, the physical organ that serves as the basis for the human capacity for thinking, as well as for the overcoming of desire and our creativity, is our brain, and the asymmetry predicted by the model above is most rightly found in just this realm. Whereas the ‘oldest’ parts of our organism, considered ontogenetically, are quite bi-laterally symmetrical, the ‘newest’ parts – our neo-cortex, are the most asymmetric. The folds and undulations of the cortex itself are quite asymmetrical, and it is becoming more and more apparent to modern science that the two halves of the brain are not at all mirror images but are unique and complementary to each other. Even colloquially we now consider ‘right-brained’ people to be creative while ‘left-brained’ people are thought to be more analytical.

It should also be apparent that the 2nd derivative, acceleration, is now no longer capable of correctly describing what is uniquely human – we require a 3rd derivative. The 3rd derivative of position with respect to time is the change of a change of a change – a change in acceleration. This is known in physics as ‘jerk’ for the type of motion it produces: jerking motion, as when you press on the brakes with increasing force and not with steady pressure. Quite independently, however, Arthur Young, who first pointed out this quality of the derivatives (in correspondence with the quantum of action, associated with light, but this takes us too far afield in this already diverse discussion), called the third derivative “control” (Young, 1976 pp. 43-44), precisely because it expresses the ability to work from a realm above that of purely natural law. Even though the complete physical system of the car and the human being’s

physical body in the seat follow the laws of physics when braking is applied, no law of physics could initiate the braking without the control of the human being who has an incarnated ego and the ability to make such decisions in the first place. Hopefully it is clear how we can coherently relate to the Fire element the human kingdom, the “outer” sphere, 3 degrees of outer freedom and 0 of outer constraint, the “inner” point, 0 degrees of inner freedom and 3 degrees of inner restraint, asymmetry, and the 3rd derivative.

Taking this one step further, we can point out that, when speaking of the movement of the Elements from Earth to Fire, we can see quite a progression with respect to the kingdoms of nature, both in a purely outer way as well as an inner way. But humanity is not completely separate from all the other kingdoms of nature – quite to the contrary, we are completely connected with them. In fact, we carry within ourselves each of the lower kingdoms. The mineral realm provides the physical foundation of our being in the material world; we have a physical body. But we also, like the plants, have a body that is characterizable only when we leave what is purely physical and enter the realm of growth and decay. We can call this realm, immediately above the physical, the etheric, or life realm. If we only had a physical body, that body would immediately begin to decay – ashes to ashes, dust to dust – as it does at death. The life body continually maintains and generates the physical form. We also, like the animals, have a soul life, a life of desires full of sympathy and antipathy, which is like another body which is subject to laws beyond those present in the etheric realm. We can call this realm the astral realm, and our body of desires the astral body. But humans also have something that works from beyond the astral realm into it, allowing us the capacities of creativity, for objective thought about things outside ourselves and the ability to control our desires: the Ego, or I-being, which can be understood as the most directly spiritual component – the essence of – the individual human, living in the spiritual world.

Thus, we can see that, because human beings contain all four of these components, human consciousness must take part in each of those realms in some way. Indeed, we can see that human consciousness is in no way singular in nature, but has a wide variety of potential states inclusive of, but modified from, the states of consciousness of the lower kingdoms. The human being can be completely “awake” in the physical realm, and we have the corresponding capacity to say “I” to ourselves, to think about ourselves objectively as both subject and object, and to know the difference. Our day-waking consciousness is possible only because of the level of incarnation of our I-being – it has united with the lower bodies in a unity, and provides us with the capability to awaken to our own being: thus we are humans.

We also contain the animal world within us, but although we can, because we have an incarnated Ego, be aware of our desires, we have almost no control of their actual arising: they simply present themselves to our experience, which we can then become conscious of. In other words, we experience the arising of our desire life to be like that of a dream: the dream simply goes by and happens, as it



were, *to us*, while the dreamer is essentially a watcher.²⁷ We could say that we are dreaming in our astral body. This insight can actually help us to understand, in at first a purely conceptual way, the inner life exhibited within the animal realm.

In our life body, we are, as it were, in a state corresponding to dreamless sleep. We are only conscious of our etheric body when something is unbalanced enough that our astral body is able to have a sensation, which can then be experienced by the Ego. For example, the regulation of our lymphatic system proceeds according to the laws inherent in the etheric realm, but when it gets out of whack we

²⁷ Lucid dreaming is a state in which the I-being is more present in the dream, (more incarnated into the physical and etheric bodies) corresponding to the normal level of consciousness available when awake, with the difference that the sensory organs do not equally provide reports of the outer world, resulting in consciousness of the inner-world of the dreamer instead of the actual physical environment as would normally be the case.

notice it in our stuffy nose and feeling of malaise. The consciousness of the plant realm does not rise to the level of sensation, let alone to day-waking recognition; where the animal realm is dreaming, the plants are in a dreamless sleep, and their inner life consists in the regulation of the processes of growth.

The human being also has a body that is completely in the mineral realm, and within this body human consciousness is at its most dull. We have some access to the astral realm and the desire life in our consciousness – we can awaken from our dream to the conscious recognition of our desires – but we can only sleep into our etheric body, while into the physical we are almost completely unconscious. The consciousness of the mineral realm is something like this, whose function is only to harmonize with the outer world, hence the lawfulness inherent in its behavior (Steiner, 2005 p. 147).

The four-fold division of the human being follows the overt hierarchy of the kingdoms of nature, and through and through is permeated with the qualities epitomized by the elements. The spiral nature of the elemental cycle applies here as well: the Ego, once it awakens to itself, has the capacity to transform the lower bodies, the astral, etheric, and even the physical, yielding a higher octave of the elemental cycle completely in the spiritual realm, but this perhaps takes us too far afield.

The above discussion, although likely introducing thoughts about the world that at first seem bizarre, unlikely, or at least unfamiliar, can in fact be thought through on quite logical grounds on the basis of our normal experiences. The elemental cycle provides a guide and key to which we can return again and again in order to find our bearings when our everyday thoughts begin to fail us. Thus one of the strengths of the cycle is in its ability to act as a sort of scaffolding for our consciousness which might otherwise be overwhelmed in the inability to distinguish the relations and importance of one fact from the next. A chart depicting all of the above information can help clarify this:

Element:	Earth	Water	Air	Fire
Kingdom:	Mineral	Plant	Animal	Human
Symmetry:	3-fold	Radial (2-fold)	Bi-Lateral (1-fold)	Towards Asymmetry
Outer Degrees of Constraint/Freedom:	3/0	2/1	1/2	0/3
“Outer” Geometric Entity:	Point	Line	Plane	Sphere
Outer Movement:	Point-like (No self-motion)	Line-like (Above-Below)	Plane-like (Circle, Spiral)	Sphere-like (Unrestricted)
Derivative (with respect to Time):	0 th – Position (No Change)	1 st – Velocity (Change)	2 nd – Acceleration (Change of a Change)	3 rd – Control/Jerk (Change of a Change of a Change)
Inner Degrees of Restraint/Freedom:	0/3	1/2	2/1	3/0
“Inner” Geometric Entity:	Sphere	Plane	Line	Point
Inner Movement (Will):	Completely Unrestricted	Shared Etheric across Surface	Linear (Sympathy-Antipathy)	One-Pointedness
Human Consciousness:	Completely Dull, Simple	Dreamless Sleep	Dreaming Sleep	Day-Waking Consciousness
Ontological Aspect:	Physical	Etheric	Astral	Ego
Capacity:	Persistence	Growth	Desire	Control
Science:	Material Sciences	Biology (Life-ology)	Psychology (Soul-ology)	Spiritual Science

We can even notice how the elemental cycle applies to the reading of the chart: the Earth level is the individual cells containing their own unique fact of information. The Water level is found in the connections and movements from one cell to the next, either across rows (from left to right or right to left), and columns (up to down or down to up). The Air element is apparent in the reciprocal relations between the rows or the columns, and the Fire element is found when we consider the chart as a whole and its underlying meaning that unites all of these facts together into a unified concept. The above is an almost completely superficial pass over the relationships described, and should be understood as in no way a definitive statement. Much more could be said about the relationships expressed or implied, but

for the sake of brevity – such as it is – this will be left for another time. Suffice it to say that the above discussion is meant to illuminate the elemental cycle's potential for depth and its embeddedness as an active pattern in the various cycles of the world around and within us.

Limitations and Boundaries



The elemental cycle is very schematic in nature. This provides both its primary strength and its major limitation. The mandala is not meant to be primarily a classificatory scheme, whereby any given phenomenon is reduced to a four-fold division, yet using the cycle in this way is likely to be the most agreeable and direct way of gaining familiarity with it. In other words, the elemental cycle is easiest to understand and apply in its Earth mode, but (if we have learned anything about the elemental cycle) this is only representative of its lowest potentiality. Regardless of this, the quaternary nature of the elemental cycle is unavoidable.

Other ways of approaching process and transformation exist – methods that are twofold, threefold, sevenfold, ninefold, and twelvefold in particular can be found in a wide variety of disciplines. Even in alchemy we can quite usefully integrate a threefold approach (Salt, Sulfur, and Mercury) and a twofold approach (Gravity and Levity) with the quaternary nature of the elements, all of which proceed from Unity. Yet from a purely experimental standpoint it seems that the quaternary division simply more quickly and easily yields useful, actionable information and nurtures transformation than other methods. We could speculate that this is because the fourfold division, on the scale of unity to multiplicity, has a uniquely balanced position. A ninefold division (such as the Enneagram) can be too complicated and difficult an instrument to wield, for all its potential capacity for discrimination. A twofold (say, Yin-Yang) or threefold scheme (say, Hegel's thesis-antithesis-synthesis model), although containing a much more direct power on the basis of their closeness to the archetype of Unity, can tend to yield fascinating information that makes us feel more in contact with the archetypal movements of

the universe without actually backing them up with the necessary practical details that solidify such feeling into actual transformation. The fourfold division seems, therefore, to occupy a special place with regards to the present situation of human consciousness, drawn as it is both into the multiplicity of the world and towards the underlying unity of its continual becoming. It provides enough discriminatory power to be able to work within the most specific and detailed realms found in the multiplicity while retaining a harmonious amount of generality because of its relative closeness to the archetype of Unity. Nevertheless, the quaternary nature of the elemental mandala means that it sacrifices both some of the global power of two and threefold schemes as well as some of the detailed potential for discrimination of the more divisitory schemes.

Obviously, it would be too much to ask of the elemental mandala for it to somehow comprehensively make sense of the entirety of existence at every level. Even though the mandala can be applied across an astonishingly broad range of disciplines, there is a certain sense in which this capacity for breadth seems mitigated by its potential for depth. For example, although I can apply the elemental mandala to essentially any phenomenon, such as “Why did I get a flat tire?” (E: My tires are rubber compounds in a torus shape filled with air. There is a nail in my tire. W: I must have run over the nail, which embedded itself in my tire, causing a slow leak. A: The air pressure inside the tire is greater than the air pressure outside the tire, and this opposition cannot be maintained without an Earth-like isolation. The nail allowed for communication of pressures across this boundary, thus the full tire reverses its state and becomes flat. F: I have to get a new tire!), this is an extremely superficial application, and the elemental cycle in this case is essentially being used like a toy.

At the same time, this seems to indicate that the level of depth of the initial phenomenon is directly related to the level of depth that the elemental cycle can reveal. This is to be expected, and is an indication that what one gets out of applying the elemental cycle is quite correlative with the quality of attention that is present in its usage. For this reason, it can actually be quite difficult to get real depth

out of the elemental cycle – simply because this requires a certain effort on the part of the user. This principle is completely in line with the instructions accompanying any alchemical toolset: the work of conscious transformation does not simply “happen”, but is a *skill* requiring training in the proper concepts so that the practice may be most fruitful. Part of the whole purpose of this thesis is to serve as a conceptual resource that can allow for more efficient application of the elemental cycle by the reader.

In other words, it is not really possible to simply “pick up” the elemental cycle like a hammer and use it with pleasing results as if everything were a nail (this would be an “Earth” expectation). Rather, it takes a familiarity bred over repeated encounters in which our consciousness is specifically heightened in accordance with the principles of the elements themselves. Certainly this would bar its usage by simply anyone, and there is no question that this tool, like any alchemical process, requires the Fire of our attention to be stoked to just the right level – not too hot and not too cold. This is why alchemy is the Royal Art.

Areas of Potential



The elemental cycle, like any tool, has areas in which it excels and areas for which other tools are better suited. Although the potential domains in which the elemental cycle can be applied are quite broad, the actual utility for such applications varies. It seems that the major strength of the elemental cycle is in its capacity as a *guide for consciousness*. It can act as a basic structuring agent, a scaffolding around which attention can be woven into different modes of interaction with the potential contents of the world which are only made manifest with the right organ of perception. It can act both as a magnifying glass and telescope for consciousness, helping bring to light potentially ignored avenues of thought and experience, i.e. it can illuminate new facts about our world and ourselves. It can also serve as the focal point for meditations, acting as content for experience in itself. All of these aspects act to

pave the way for and facilitate the transformation of consciousness according to a robust, healthy, holistic model provided through the archetype of the elemental mandala.

The potential utility of any application of the elemental cycle thus occurs on the basis of the extent to which – and the way in which – it engenders the following: an expansion and refinement of self-awareness, a freedom in thinking from personal historical limitations, a flexibility and resilience of soul states, a widened palette of ‘objective feelings’, and a strengthening of the capacity for willed attention. Work with the elemental cycle addresses all of these areas, and can be ‘tuned’ to any individuals particular personality, habits, and potentials. Because the elemental cycle is naturally iterative, consistently and rhythmically applied attention is rewarded with constant feedback which helps to actively regulate the work itself, providing both mitigation for excessive reliance upon any single element and impulses towards compensation through active inclusion of the harmonizing qualities of all the other elements. In other words, the elemental cycle can be a guide for its own unfolding – it serves as its own primer. All it needs is the initial seed (the Earth) and attention (the Fire). Putting the Fire under the Earth begins the alchemical cooking process, while the elemental cycle itself serves as a sort of *rotundum hermetica*, a sealed vessel made of our own willed attention upon the archetypal principles at work in the elemental cycle, within which our attention evolves.

Based on the above considerations, the elemental cycle can be very fruitfully applied by individuals as a tool for self-illumination and self-transformation. In this case the content (the Earth) placed into the vessel of the elemental cycle is some aspect of one’s personality or behavior that is identified as in need of transformation. It almost doesn’t matter what this content is, as long as it is self-reflective, as the fractal nature of the cycle will naturally help the practitioner become aware of both deeper and broader issues to which the original Earth is connected, while the iterative nature will lead to direct exploration of these.

Of course, the nature of the elemental cycle is not transparent; nor is it opaque. Rather, it is a turbid medium whose clarity is reflected by the quality of the attention brought to bear on it. For this reason, it can be quite useful to have someone already versed in some of the more subtle aspects of the elemental cycle as a guide. In other words, the elemental cycle can be a powerful addition to any therapeutic repertoire. The cycle can be used both actively and passively; actively if taken as an overt tool for use by the client under the guidance of the therapist or counselor, passively if used exclusively by the therapist as a tool to help bring to light and regulate aspects of the client's transformative potentials. Used therapeutically, the scaling abilities of the elemental cycle can help structure anything from a single interaction to the entire course of therapy, and can be applied directly in the therapeutic situation or can be used solely as a reflective tool by either or both the client and therapist. Its deep connection to processes and substances easily experienced in the natural world provide an easy entrance into the basic concepts and provide a rich continuous reference as we cannot escape the elements in our environment, particularly once we are aware of them in a new way.

As an extension of the potential therapeutic usefulness of the elemental cycle, one of the areas in which it can be applied with direct and quick results is that of communication. This is one area in which the elemental cycle has had explicit previous development in the work of Dennis Klocek. He has used the cycle to develop a template for different modes or styles of communication; additionally he shows how communication can be elevated when we work with the elemental cycle as a tool to structure communication habits. Klocek has successfully worked with the elemental cycle in this capacity (and many others) for a number of years in a variety of workshops given through his organization, the Coros Institute²⁸, a few of which I have been fortunate to attend. On the basis of the dialogue work with Klocek, I have been inspired to explore the elemental cycle in its relationship with

²⁸ <http://www.corosinstitute.org>

communication further; an overview and the results of these explorations forms the content of the next chapter.

More than just a psychological tool, the elemental cycle can be linked directly to the work of spiritual transformation detailed in the relatively unknown but radically important work of Rudolf Steiner. In this respect, the elemental cycle relates deeply to a healthy process of spiritual growth, acting as a guide for the formation of organs of spiritual perception, which nurture the previously mentioned capacities for Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition. The elemental cycle can be an invaluable guide through spiritual evolution, making sense of, holistically contextualizing, and helping directly steer processes of spiritual growth and associated experiences.

The elemental cycle has also been used as a central tool for guiding the artistic process, most notably in the work of Frank Chester. Frank has worked for years with the elemental cycle in his art, which is unique in that it directly bridges the realms of art, science, and the spirit, much like traditional sacred geometry, except that Frank is creating completely new forms. In an interview with Mr. Chester on the subject, he indicated that the elemental cycle was like “the divine designer’s way of developing natural forms” and that he used the elemental cycle as an active meditation to support his artistic work, but that it literally “helps in everything”. His work, the early part of which is profiled in some detail on Dennis Klocek’s Goethean Studies website²⁹, indicates that the holistic balance between form, process, openness and meaning brought through work with the elemental cycle can be very useful for artistic creation. The results yield art that does not arise from the level of the persona, but works across the subject-object boundary according to the archetypal qualities of the elements. Frank is now exploring the healing power of art on this basis.

Despite the strength of the elemental cycle’s individual and personal applications, it has also shown itself to be very useful when applied to phenomenological studies, such as with climate

²⁹ Accessible at <http://www.goetheanstudies.org/whatis/frank/frank.html>

variability, biodynamic agriculture, and ecology. Dennis Klocek has used the principles of the elemental cycle to explore the links between soils, plants, and weather, as well as in his original work in long-term accurate climate predictions³⁰. The work of Nigel Hoffmann details the elemental 'modes' of consciousness while successively applying them in a Goethean study of place, and related work is being done by Craig Holdrege and the Nature Institute³¹ in a number of areas.

We can even discover the elements at work in the most abstract and detailed of scientific realms. I will give only one example here, from the strange realm of quantum physics. In a very recent article of April 2, 2008 from PhysicsWorld.com (Cartwright, 2008) concerning the unexpected discovery of 'superinsulators' (materials in which resistance to electron flow is infinite), we can see a very pronounced working of the Air element on a number of levels. The article details the discovery of the 'reverse' side of a superconductor in thin films of titanium nitride near absolute zero – but in a magnetic field. Whereas this material is normally a superconductor at this low temperature – i.e. it has absolutely zero resistance to the flow of current – with the addition of the magnetic field it can completely reverse its behavior, displaying instead an infinite resistance to the flow of current. This behavior is "quite an unexpected and beautiful example of this: a superinsulator on the boundary between the ordinary insulator and the superconducting ground state," declares Stephen Julian, a low-temperature physicist at the University of Toronto, Canada (Cartwright, 2008). If this seems gibberish, only note that *in the same material* we find a manifestation of the absolute extremes for electrical conductivity: zero resistance and infinite resistance. This is a physical embodiment of the enantiodromic principle of Air, in which some quality can go so far that it flips into its opposite. Note also the keywords, 'unexpected' and 'boundary' – both descriptive of Air.

Delving further, we can read that the actual reason behind the strange flipping phenomenon has to do with a *polarity*. Superconductivity is possible because electrons bind together in pairs (known as

³⁰ Accessible at <http://www.climatrends.com>

³¹ Accessible at <http://www.natureinstitute.org>

Cooper pairs) which then all act as a single quantum entity (this is expressive of the Water element, where self-connection is completely maximized in this case). The *breaking* of this connection into a polarity is what creates the opposite effect: superinsulation. The article states that

“When a superconducting material is flattened into a granular film, however, the entity [all the Cooper pairs] becomes partitioned. Strong disorder forces the Cooper pairs into isolated ‘puddles’ separated by insulating regions known as Josephson junctions, and individual Cooper pairs can only pass between puddles by quantum tunneling.”
(Cartwright, 2008)

Disorder is a primary feature of Air, where previous relationships (in this case the Watery connection between electrons in a Cooper pairing) becomes broken. This is different than the having-yet-to-be-connected isolation that would be more appropriate of the Earth element; i.e. one would not expect to find the superinsulatory quality in materials that were not also capable of hosting Cooper pairs (and thus being superconductors). This is exactly what we find: “A superinsulator cannot appear at all without the existence of superconductivity in the same film,” explains Valerii Vinokour of Argonne National Laboratory, one of the original members of the team which made the discovery. “That is why we refer to the superinsulator as the reverse side of superconductivity.” (Cartwright, 2008)

For those that can stomach more, the details are quite interesting; in order to explain superinsulation, the team of physicists suggests that “the roles of charge and magnetic flux become mirrored. In the superconducting phase, a magnetic field penetrates the material in quanta called vortices, which rotate in alternate directions. The Cooper pairs are free to circulate the vortices by tunnelling between puddles. But in the superinsulating phase, the roles of charge and vortices are swapped. Vortices circulate bound pairs of opposite charge, which prevents a current from flowing.” (Cartwright, 2008) We see again that this particular phenomenon is completely dominated by the Air element in the ‘mirroring’ and ‘swapping’ of the roles of electric and magnetic aspects (already two forces of physics linked by a deep polarity), and in the quantum ‘vortices’, which rotate in ‘alternate directions’. Basically a reversal occurs: instead of stable magnetic vortices and freely moving electric

Cooper pairs (as in a superconducting material), superinsulation results from magnetic vortices which freely move around the split-up, Cooper pairs, each half of which is now locked together with a positive ion, completely disallowing current-flow. This is an example of the Air element showing itself quite objectively through a physical situation. Other examples from the realm of physics could easily be endlessly discussed. The point of this example is to show how the qualities of the elements can appear even at the lowest boundary of our physical knowledge.

In short, the elemental cycle can be of great value in the development of a holistic science. The ability for the elements to have fruitful applications both in the inner worlds and the outer world is a signature of its archetypal nature and objectivity.

Chapter 6 – Into the World: Dialogue and the Elemental Cycle



Basic Theory of Elemental Dialogue



The elemental mandala can facilitate robust and healthy communication between individuals as well as within larger group settings. It can be used as a diagnostic tool, helping to identify entrenched communication patterns, while providing a practical set of exercises and principles upon which these patterns can be shifted towards a style of communicating that is more appropriate to the goal of the particular situation. When the elemental mandala is used consciously by a group, it can provide a powerful tool for regulating dialogue when situations arise in which communication might normally get stuck, move too fast, or leave participants feeling disempowered or frustrated. As a mediator, the elemental cycle serves both as an objective diagnostic tool and as a source for understanding as we seek more balanced and holistic modes of communication.

In a group setting, the goal is to provide a shared language of process which opens avenues for heightened awareness of the movement of meaning within the group. The elemental qualities help objectify the often murky and complicated realm of communication by providing powerful metaphors which help focus consciousness on specific strategies for raising the level of communicating. Taken up individually, the elemental mandala becomes a major tool for working through difficult interactions, helping bring a flexibility and resilience while suggesting strategies that help smooth communication. In this chapter I introduce the four elemental modes of communication, give an overview of some practical work, share responses to people who have used the elemental cycle, and end with a series of practical techniques and considerations that can be useful for actually applying the elemental cycle to communication.

Earth Communication: Informational



Dennis Klocek has linked the elements to the following modes of communication:

Earth	Water	Air	Fire
Informational	Discussion	Conversation	Dialogue

The Earth mode of communication is dominantly content-based, comprised of statements of fact which strongly indicate 'how things are'. The primary goal of Earth communication is to clarify the facts of a situation, to provide information, and to create a shared foundation upon which the further stages of communication develop. The content of such communication generally takes a form that carries a sense of being undebateable, matter-of-fact, or unchangeable. An Earth communication can seem to fall from above like a heavy weight, tearing through any subtler aspects of an exchange until it comes solidly to rest in consciousness like a foreign object, unmoving and careless of context. Often when in the course of higher levels of communication an Earth moment occurs, the solidity of the Earth aspect at work in the speech halts the developing flow of meaning, even to the point of creating complete silence as the energy of the participants struggles to free itself from the sense of inevitability and lack of motion that infiltrate the conversational mood.

In other situations, as exchange of data, Earth communication can be extremely efficient, direct, and clear, as well as the least emotionally charged way of communicating. Earth communication works best when it follows established channels, moving from the source to the destination without interruption or modification, and when the participants – specifically the receivers – are properly prepared. Without preparation, Earth communications have a great potential to damage an exchange between participants by damming the contextual flow of meaning that normally constitutes the bulk of the interaction. Earth moments (and luckily they do generally take the form of isolated moments) lack contextual relationship and sensitivity to the potential movements of a conversation, and 'fall out' of the

movement like a precipitate out of a solution: visible crystallizations of aspects of consciousness which can no longer be held in solution.

The primary response to Earth communications when in an unready state generally takes the form of reactions, which can follow any number of personally-determined avenues (which we could discuss from the perspective of the elemental cycle: a cold, factual Earth response, a more sensitive Water deflection or reorientation, an Airy confusion and complete recontextualization, or a Fiery retort, to name only one set of possibilities). Preparation for receiving an Earth communication without reaction is a natural part of the process of communication, and happens when we are allowed to form a question.

In fact, the elemental cycle helps illuminate this process of what occurs in the asking of a question and why it works to mitigate the potentially negative aspects of an Earth communication. When asking a question we begin with some set of facts, some underlying strata of information (Earth). We process this information and connect it (Water) to other facts via a local contextualization, where some lack of perfect symmetry or communion between the facts acts like a negative space that draws our attention, calling out for resolution. Into this space (Air) we formulate a question, which is like a vocalization of what the shape of this space looks like from the inside. By getting to the Air state in this way, we set up an inner tension within ourselves that opens us up to potential new perspectives (Fire) and information, even when difficult to take. In a very specific sense, any response to a question is 'an Earth', and the process of forming a question can thus create a buffer zone of attention around the topic through which 'answers' are eased into and integrated more easily with the whole of consciousness.

The strength of Earth communication lies in its ability to transmit factual details with the least amount of interpretation, spin, and emotion. Scientific training is one framework through which an Earth communication style is developed, and the scientific method itself – inherited from the materialistic tradition of the West – holds the qualities of the Earth element as its highest goal:

predictability, repeatability, precision, quantitivity (yes, that is a *quality*), and objectivity, to name only the most obvious. Such qualities both typify Earth communications and offer a stylistic language, we could say a 'mood', that can be utilized consciously by a speaker. Using the Earth element to communicate in this way is very difficult, however, particularly where it is most needed – in difficult, emotionally-charged situations – because as humans we are whole beings, and cannot usually isolate one element from the rest without much effort. Commonly, Earth communication can go awry because of this inability to keep the 'bare information' separate from its emotional connotation, historical relations, or future potentials. In such a case, some of these aspects from other elements are grandfathered into the Earth communication, whose 'facts' then become the unwitting carrier of higher layers of meaning which, because they are folded into the overt facts, become very difficult for the receiver to process effectively. In this way, Earth-techniques can be appropriated – either consciously or unconsciously – as a psychological masquerade, a pretension to objectivity and clarity that lends a postured strength to an otherwise watery or airy state hiding insecurities, additional contextual information, alternate/simultaneous agendas, and/or fear.

Quite often the impurity of an Earth communication remains just below the level of overt recognition, because its Earthy shell – which on the outside seems like a mere statement of fact – is so hard to penetrate. Our lack of ability as hearers to mine through the surface of an Earth communication that isn't pure may leave us with a sour feeling on the inside, while on the outside we find we have to capitulate to the explicit aspect of the communication for lack of anything better to hold on to in our consciousness, even though we feel something funny going on; we simply "take someone's word for it." On the other hand, if we do find ourselves able to penetrate through the Earth-shell of a communication to find only the bare facts present before us, we gain a sense of confidence that is built out of a strengthened feeling of evidence that is otherwise hard to come by. This is the kind of experience that can easily be had in geometry, logic, or mathematics.

In order to have healthy Earth communication, the task of the speaker is to be straightforward, impartial, complete, and precise. The task of the hearer in Earth communication is to simply recognize the presented facts without reaction or judgment, but *with* distinction, and to request clarifying information if needed.

Water Communication - Discussion



Communication that leaves the Earth mode and enters into the Watery realm can be called discussion. Dis Pater, literally ‘rich father’, was one of the Roman names for Pluto (meaning wealthy), the god known in Greece as the ruler of the underworld: Hades. ‘Dis’ even became another way to refer to the underworld itself. The Latin ‘Dis’ is a root which also means ‘asunder’ or ‘apart’, while ‘cutere’ means ‘to shake or strike’. Together we see the connotations of the word discussion, which can be experienced as a breaking apart and sending to Hell. In an ideal Earth communication information is simply presented – it doesn’t matter by whom – and is available as a fact quite independently of either the speaker or listener: “This watch says 4:30pm.” Water communication, on the other hand, only occurs on the basis of a continual exchange between partners. As a proto-Indo-European root, ‘dis’ has the meaning ‘twice’, and it is precisely in pairs that discussions take place; even if there are many participants, Water communication is found to work on the basis of the context provided by another person’s words. Discussion thus takes the form of a back and forth debate where the goal is to take apart the other person’s meaning and expose the implicit connections (or *lack* of connections) flowing within and between the overt facts of the other’s communication.

At this level, the meaning of the communication is carried not by the overt facts or details, but in the process through which the details either do or do not link together and through their style and method of presentation. It is the *way* in which the facts work together to create a stream of meaning

that forms the basis of Water communication. It is, in this way, a higher level of communicating than can occur in a purely Earth situation, but as such it creates both new problems and new capacities.

With its focus on the way facts are linked, the processes of logic become much more present in any exchange that moves into the Water realm. When two people are able to be 'on the same wavelength' with respect to the underlying assumptions and implicit logical connections at work in a train of thought, an amazing sense of flow and compatibility can arise. This acts as something of a lubricant for moments when each individual's stream of thinking diverges from the other's, providing the basis for a willingness to come back into relation with the other. This occurs when the moment of disjoint is recognized and each person traces their thread back to a common ground before proceeding further.

This process of moving forward, then backward, then forwards again can become a rhythmic pattern of re-hashing data, which can often create a sense as if the conversation is foundering in murky waters. As a tendency, the re-hashing manifestation of Water communication is exacerbated when new information is brought into the flow, which must be thoroughly processed and worked over from seemingly endless perspectives in order to be integrated. Any time a new person enters the discussion re-hashing arises as a natural response to the completely new background and set of assumptions brought by that person, adding another stream to an already potentially turbulent flow. What is unfortunate is that real integration cannot take place solely through the Water element, which is limited by its inability to see beyond the immediate context and connections at work between the given facts. This is to say that Water communication still looks primarily 'downward' and is easily brought under the influence of the gravity of the Earth aspects of communication.

As 'hearers' in a Water mode of communication we constantly relate what is said to our own personal patterns of meaning. These links are both of the logical variety as well being purely emotional in nature, causing the communication to enter the personal realm, as we have invested something of

ourselves in the facts by linking them in a certain way that fits with our own inner life but not necessarily with anyone else's. This is what creates the basis for the sense of 'discussion' as explored above, where the flow of meaning is more or less completely individualized. When these individual flows oppose one another, they can create great chaos as they interact, throwing off vortices and semi-stable eddies of meaning around which attention gravitates as the two energies spiral together. In such situations, the potential for a higher, complementary flow of meaning *between* participants is sacrificed due to the inability of the participants to swim along with the other's experience; this causes the exchange to default to Water's basest manifestation, in which personal elements precipitate out of the interaction to become stones which get in the way of a smoother interaction.

Much of the stones created in this way are formed unconsciously, and find expression as our habitual thought patterns, our unquestioned assumptions, our emotional attachments, our assumed meanings behind particular words, and through the inherent bias we carry for whatever process we went through to link two things together. When a speaker is unaware of such personal aspects creeping into their communication, they risk alienating, offending, or simply losing their audience. These subtle inclusions of meaning commonly act as triggers for defensive or reactive behavior, initiating discussion in the negative sense, which is really just the staging ground for the bringing to consciousness of just these hidden aspects. If a speaker is *conscious* of these aspects when communicating, then it becomes much easier to avoid the potential pitfalls noted above, both because the assumptions can be made public to begin with, and because any unwanted ripples can be addressed directly and without the feeling for needing a defense on the part of the speaker. Needless to say this task is quite a difficult one to accomplish, but can become something of skill with practice.

Depending upon the context, the potential 'moods' of Water communication can be well-described by the way water as a substance moves: like a pristine mountain spring, like a meandering river, like a stagnant bog, like a vast ocean, like a waterfall, and so on. Each of these physical

manifestations of water accurately describes the way in which an interaction might feel to a participant. Paying attention to the mood that accompanies the flow of an exchange can be an invaluable technique for regulating the desired outcome of any situation. Is the situation best served by a tightly-sequenced presentation that sticks closely to the facts, by a wide, ruminatory meandering through fields of data, by a flash-flood of content that sweeps away everything before it, or by slow eddy-circulation around a single point?

Because the bulk of day-to-day communication happens as an oscillation between the Earth and Water modes, with only occasional moments that rise up into the Air – let alone Fire – levels, awareness of these potential Earth and Water aspects can greatly enhance one's ability to sail through the waters of communication without hitting too many obstacles.

For healthy Water communication, the task of the speaker is to bring to the surface any assumptions, implicit associations, and logical gaps present in their own speech, making sure that each fact is properly connected to the previous and the next. The task of the hearer in Water communication is to become sensitized to the way meaning flows through the speaker's speech while 'testing' that flow against the hearer's own flow of meaning, so as to gain better insight into the hidden elements of both the speaker's and hearer's perspective. The hearer's internal state is like a thermometer that gauges the coherence, logic, and validity of the speaker's meaning, allowing the hearer to ask pointed questions that target the potential weak areas in the other's speech in the spirit of providing a whetstone against which the speaker can hone and refine his or her meaning.

Air Communication: Conversation



Communication at the Air level takes the form of making verses together: conversation.³² What was primarily lacking in Water – the ability to get beyond one’s own personal set of associations, train of thought, assumed meanings, and unquestioned assumptions – becomes a central feature in Air, where it is precisely these aspects which are consciously put ‘on hold’. The hallmark of Air communication is the ability for participants to not simply hear the words spoken by the other for purposes of discussion, but to really *listen* to them. This means that a listener creates an expanded, empty space within, which is kept free from the Water tendency to relate everything to “me”. What fills the space created by the absence of those lower aspects is the mood of a question, expressed so beautifully in the Parsifal story: “What ails thee, Uncle?”

By drying out the rhythmic impulse to associate everything that we hear to our own default assumptions and experiences, we open up the possibility that a completely new set of experiences be made available to us, as if blown on the wind of the other’s words. When in an Air conversation, we are less inclined to take the other’s words and their immediate context as the sole carrier of meaning. If you can imagine that the words of the other take on a particular form and movement, an Air listener pays attention to the shape of the space *around* the form and their *polar* movements. In other words, what is *not* said becomes just as important as what is directly expressed, and the avenues and associations that are *not* made speak just as loudly as the ones that are made. All of this is a way of saying that the listener has the capacity for sensing what we could call the ‘gesture’ of the other.

Being sensitive to the gesture around the other’s speech allows a much deeper insight into their meaning. In Earth communication we simply have ‘your’ facts butting up against ‘my’ facts with no real hope of relation, let alone resolution. In Water communication all of ‘your’ facts flow together into a stream of meaning, as do ‘mine’, and the movement of the interaction depends on how we each direct

³² Although this word has been used in the Earth and Water sections in a colloquial sense, from here on it will acquire the specific connotations now discussed.

these flows around each other. In Air communication, what is 'mine' is held peripherally, allowing the more subtle facets of 'your' meaning to appear in the space that used to be occupied by my own self-investments.

Just as might be expected in Air, a conversation is not dominated by a one-way flow or process; rather, each party reciprocates between listening and expressing, and as this oscillation finds a natural rhythm, one can truly have the experience that verses – subtle but clear carriers of meaning – are being created. Because the direction of the conversation is not being controlled explicitly by either party (whereas in Water communication each party's primary goal is to direct this flow and get the other person to move in the same way), a sense of freedom, of space, and of potential can permeate the interaction. At the same time, a danger exists in that these feelings can begin to drive the conversation for their sake – because it feels quite nice – in which case the actual content of the conversation (its Earth) all but drops out of the picture. This can be fine and even desired in some circumstances, but in others can afterwards leave people confused about what, if anything, was communicated, let alone accomplished or agreed upon. On the other pole, it can happen that, because each person has the sense of freely being able to express their own truth in way that is met with a real listening by others, it is taken for granted that the others must also agree with their truth. Of course, being in the listening state of Air is in no way associated with assent or dissent for what is thus held in consciousness – it is in fact the very *lack* of such assent or dissent that marks the Air experience. We are so used to dealing with others at the Water and Earth levels of communication that it can be difficult to recognize that it is possible to really listen to someone without either agreement or disagreement.

Just as the listening in Air is unique, so is speaking, which is most effective at this level when it is able to be completely clear and transparent, i.e. not full of hidden assumptions and associations that dominate the Water realm of communication. In other words, in Air speaking, these aspects are brought out and dried up, lending a much crisper and unattached sense to the otherwise sticky and wet

aspects so prevalent in Water communication. Leaving behind one's assumptions and attachments is quite difficult, and therefore requires something of a compromise. On one hand, it is recognized that the speaker has a direct effect on the listener, who has opened up a receptive space for the speaker's meaning. On the other hand, the listener trusts the speaker to be sensitive to what is placed in the listener's soul, and the speaker trusts that the listener will hold what is placed there with at least tact if not delicacy, and will not allow their personal attachments, feelings, and associations to come out of the Water and devour the meaning that is sensitively taking flight on the speaker's words. Similarly, a speaker in Air consciously weeds out much of the personal aspects that might otherwise drag the conversation down into a discussion, aiming at expression which is intended to truthfully and objectively make what is present in the inner life of the speaker available to the listener.

One danger of Air conversation is that in opening up a space for the other, one's own perspective is lost. In conversation, a healthy balance is achieved not by walking down a tightrope line between extremes, but by oscillating back and forth over the line in a way that keeps the momentum moving forward through constant reciprocation of the polar tendencies at play so that no single one dominates. Air is a shared space. In other words, Air listening is not a question of repression of one's own perspective, feelings, and thoughts. Rather, it is a fully conscious withholding of these aspects from entering the soul so that they don't overwhelm the gesture of the other. While held in abeyance, we can have the sense of being filled with the qualities of the gesture of the other, and when the time comes to let the space we have created fill up again with our own content, we ideally find that while it was 'away' it became modified by the experience of what we were able to perceive in the other's gesture, allowing us to express something completely new. Holding our own personal content just at the edge of consciousness without completely annihilating it allows the greatest amount of contact between it and what the other participant offers of him or herself. The whole point of Air conversation, then, can be

understood as an attempt to expand shared perspectives through a reciprocal oscillation between speaking and listening.

For healthy Air communication, the task of the speaker is to explore the potential directions suggested by paths not yet taken overtly in the conversation without personal attachment to their outcomes. The hearer in Air communication creates a space which acts on the speaker like a negative pressure, drawing out the more subtle aspects and helping them to freely express themselves without fear of being shut down. The hearer attempts to surround themselves with the speaker's gesture, and any questions that arise are asked as from the point of view of the speaker. Both parties keep their personal attachments, associations, and implications from entering the conversation unless they are first completely desiccated of their personal content.

Fire Communication: Dialogue



The highest form of communication can be called dialogue. Earth communication corresponds to a completely objectifying consciousness, where any received content simply becomes a 'that', a fact, to be manipulated, dodged, ignored, and so forth. It does not take the other party into account at all, except as another fact to be assimilated. Water communication corresponds to an Imaginative consciousness, in which we form inner pictures of the movements of the other's speech, but these pictures are still heavily tinged with our own personal associations and assumptions. Air communication corresponds to Inspirative consciousness, in which, through silencing our own expressive tendencies, we create an inner space in which the gesture of the other can speak, in a spiritual sense by breathing into our own soul something of itself. In Fire communication, this process takes on the form of the even more unitive process of Intuition, where it is possible to have the experience that the normal duality separating 'me' from 'you' is burned away, so that I feel as if something essential of you is living inside

me, and vice versa. This may sound strange, but it is rather more as if both parties have the experience of a spiritual comingling *outside* of themselves, filling the space *between* each other.

In Fire dialogue, we can have the feeling that, in truth, we are not alone, and that a higher principle has, as it were, come down to take part in the exchange, filling it with something completely beyond what any individual is capable of bringing, but only because of the work done by the participants. We could say: the state of the will in dialogue is transformed into one in which it becomes a conscientious mediator between the individual will and the group will. In this sense, a true dialogue transcends every individual while bringing each individual along a transformative ride. Indeed, having the experience of dialogue is almost always transformative, providing a foundation for an understanding that leads directly to action. This is quite unlike the Air experience of conversation, which can leave people 'up in the air' and confused about what to do among all the myriad perspectives and possibilities presented, let alone the Water experience of discussion, in which one or the other parties dominates the action with a forceful 'either you're in or you're out' perspective.

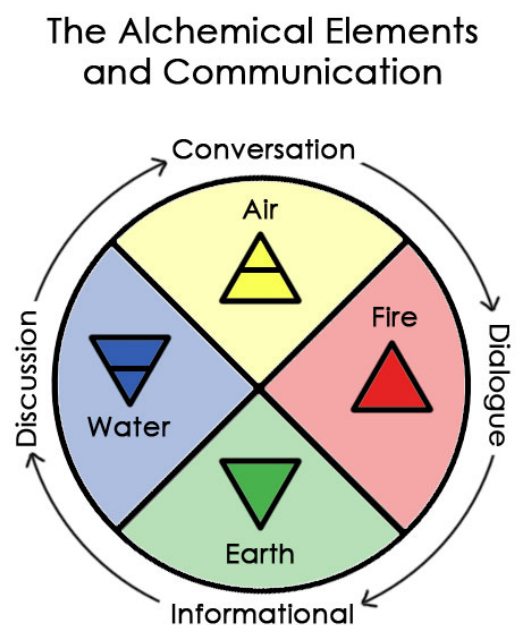
In dialogue, silence and speaking are coincident, and the spoken and unspoken are equally apparent, because the meaning of an exchange is no longer bound to the actual uttered words. In Earth, meaning is absolute, independent of the speaker. In Water, meaning arises from the personal trail of connections and associations of the individual, who defends, justifies, and pushes for its acceptance with great attachment. In Air, each individual's meaning is allowed to live together with all the other's meanings simultaneously, but is still experienced personally through oscillation between active and passive roles. In Fire, meaning cannot be attributed to any individual, but seems to be spontaneously generated out of the combined will of the group (or pair) as a whole. In this way it has the characteristic of being quite objective, but objective not in the Earth way of pure-otherness. Rather, the objectivity of dialogue is one that, as with Goethe's 'subjective-objective', dissolves the boundary

between inner and outer, so that the meaning is both 'mine' and 'not-mine' equally; it is simply what it is.

Even though it is consciously recognized that the meaning-occurrence in dialogue is completely dependent upon what each individual brings, at the same time it is recognized that what each person brings is not merely personal, but has something of an archetypal character that is quite beyond what any individual's experience can contain. While these are the elements which lift the meaning out of the purely personal realm, this is not to say that a dialogue experience is not personal. The situation is quite the opposite: in dialogue the shared meaning between the members illuminates the personal in light of the universal, simultaneously including and transforming the personal in a larger picture that keeps all that is essential from the personal realm while burning away all that is inessential, so that we feel that everything that needed to be included actually is – nothing feels left out or in need of completion.

Needless to say – and this is true for every element – there are an infinite number of ways in which each element can manifest, even while expressing only their own natures; this is another way of understanding what it means to be an archetype. By becoming sensitive to the archetypes at work in the elements, we can learn to recognize the variety of their manifestations in all types of communication. This opens up a methodology by which we can consciously work to shift the energies present in communication to a higher level, according to the cyclic nature of the elemental cycle.

For healthy Fire communication, the task of the speaker is to authentically speak on behalf of the higher workings of the will of the group, allowing it to develop and transform through their individual consciousness.



The task of the hearer in Fire communication is to be completely open to the potentially transformative intuitions that may arise, and to be ready to become a speaker if so called.

Experiences and Applications



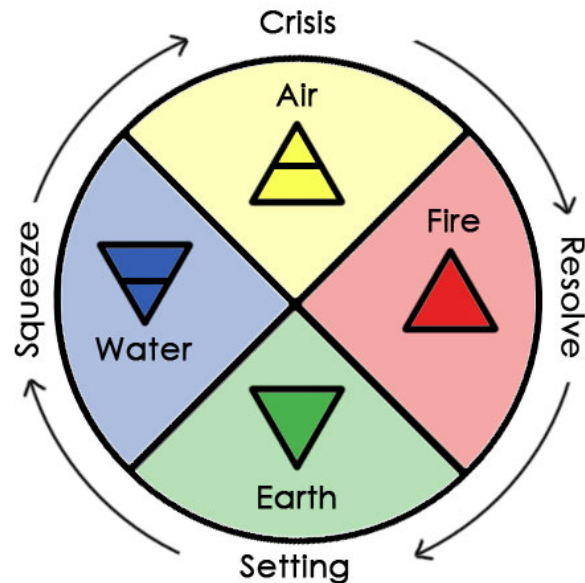
Apart from individual work with the elemental cycle, I have had the opportunity to work directly with the elements in a number of ‘experimental’ group situations. In addition to attending a seminar for this purpose with Dennis Klocek, I have been involved in working with the techniques in a small group setting that met for a number of weeks. I have also been able to work with elemental communication in a professional setting through two separate series of weekly faculty meetings in a Waldorf High School, one lasting 3 sessions and another lasting 6 sessions. Lastly I have also presented an introduction to elemental communication to the community at JFK University in a short workshop. Below I will briefly describe the basic processes followed in each situation, which provide a few practical examples of how to bring the elemental cycle and communication into various group settings.

Seminar with Dennis Klocek:

Over the course of a weekend participants – most of which had basic familiarity with the elemental cycle – were asked to work with the process of storytelling as a metaphor and stage upon which communication at the various levels could occur. The following took place essentially in one long session, with a break or two when needed. After an introduction to the elemental cycle we began in pairs with an artistic image that had a number of people, such as Renoir’s *Ball at the Moulin de la Galette*, or *Luncheon of the Boating Party* or Rembrandt’s *The Little Children Being Brought to Jesus* (“*The Hundred Guilder Print*”). We then were tasked with making a metaphorical story about a figure we individually chose from the image according to the elemental cycle: Earth – Setting, Water – Squeeze, Air – Crisis, Fire – Resolve.

For Earth we introduced the characters by stating the facts about them, trying to use natural metaphors as we did so. A good Earth narrative has a particular detail or 'hook' that, although seemingly just another detail, has a central importance only revealed later. We attempted to write only a few sentences for the Earth level. After writing these sentences, we each shared the details with our partner, who was tasked only with being clear about the details, and who could only ask clarifying questions. We were not allowed to respond to the questions, but were instead supposed to pay attention to the feeling of what it was like to receive the questions.

The Alchemical Elements and Storytelling



For Water we wrote a few sentences (individually) indicating a basic 'situation' that develops between characters. We created a context into which the Earth facts were placed, forming a plot that lead towards some sort of crisis. In Water, it is clear that things must change, but it is as yet unclear how this might occur. After completing the Water sentences, the other person was tasked with asking Water questions³³ that explore the linking of the details, the implicit logic, and the flow of events, such as "How did the protagonist get to this point?", "What makes you think that...", or "What evidence do you have that...?" The person to whom the questions were addressed was not allowed to respond; rather they were supposed to pay attention to what it felt like as they listened.

³³ See the section below on Practical Communication Through the Elements for more examples of Water questions.

For Air we experienced our own crisis moment: we were told that now we had to combine our story together with our partner's. We had to write a new sentence that expressed a crisis moment that came out of the melding of the two stories. In Air the characters met with a situation which leads them into a seemingly impossible situation, where old facts that used to be important become secondary and unexpected twists may reveal new aspects. Working together with our partner in this way required a back-and-forth exploratory communication.

For Fire we had to write a single sentence that resolved the crisis and brought the drama of the Water level to a close. Once we had come up with a resolution, we had to come up with a single sentence that encompassed the whole drama from Earth to Fire. This was the 'elevator pitch' that could somehow communicate the essence of the whole story in a single sentence. Everyone joined back into a large group and we presented our pitches. After this we then moved into a session of 'questions only', where the only rule for the group was that anything spoken must take the form of a question.

Communication can become sticky quite fast if we are not careful, but the story format provides a quick, contained, and relatively 'safe' way to create an 'artificial' situation in which to test out the movement between the different elements. Although personal attachments to individual characters and stories were certainly formed, they gave just enough of a basis upon which participants could 'taste' each element in the context of communication. An introduction to the elements in communication such as this can be used in groups who have little to no background with the elements or who do not already know each other.

Small exploratory group work:

The success of Klocek's seminar prompted a few of the participants to try and work with the elements in a small group setting on an ongoing basis. Over the course of about 8 weeks a group of 4-6 of us met informally to explore with and discuss the elemental cycle. We revisited the major techniques

from the seminar and also experimented with variations. Using the story format again provided an interesting insight: even though we all now had an intellectual understanding of what kinds of feelings and emotions we had when working with each individual element, this in no way mitigated the actual experiencing of the same qualities when we repeated the exercise. This seemed important because this meant that there was something truly persistent about the different qualities of soul present around the exercises for each element, and that this effect was true for everyone who did the actual exercises. It was quite easy to identify the major aspects of what it felt like to experience each element as a result of the exercises, but it also seemed like there was quite an opportunity for subtlety in the way that each element could arise out of any specific communication. These initial results were promising, and it seemed further exploration was called for.

Faculty Meetings – First Series:

As a teacher at a Waldorf High School at the time, I had an opportunity to try to bring the basic techniques of working with communication to the faculty there. We were already having weekly meetings, which contained a 15-20 minute section set aside for artistic activities or other, non-agenda related items; I was allotted three of these sessions to introduce the work. I was eager to present the basic picture of the elements and how they applied to communication styles, because in a setting where a small group (~10 people) meets to deal with difficult, pressing, boring, and weighty items on a regular basis, skilled communication is perhaps the single most essential tool for encouraging efficient work while also fostering morale and participation. It seemed to me that it was when a group such as this was unable to move through all the different elements that trouble arose, making tempers flare, exacerbating power issues, and lowering morale.

A few days before the first session I handed out a few pages explaining the very basic aspects of the elemental cycle. Not everyone was able to read the packet, so during the first session I had to

extend my introduction. Below is a chart indicating both the original plan and a revised plan for the sequence of events.

Original Plan	Semi-Revised Plan (After first session)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Session One – 20 minutes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 5 min: Intro ➤ 2 min: Partner up in pairs. With your partner, choose the same 2 figures in the image. ➤ 3 min: Individually, write 1-2 sentences Earth narrative ➤ 4 min: Individually, write 2-3 sentences Water squeeze ➤ 3 min: Take turns “Discussing” the other’s story – the writer is not allowed to respond ➤ 3 min: Take turns “Conversing” about the other’s story – writer still can’t respond 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Session One – 20 minutes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 5 min: Intro ➤ 2 min: Partner up in pairs. With your partner, choose the same 2 figures in the image. ➤ 5 min: Individually, write 1-2 sentences Earth narrative ➤ 6 min: Individually, write 2-3 sentences Water squeeze ➤ 2 min: Take turns reading your story to your partner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Session Two – 20 min: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 2 min: Individually choose a new figure in the image. ➤ 13 min: The “re-write”: Together with your partner, merge your stories into a single one, adding one or both of the new figures chosen (a crisis emerges). You may drop an original figure if you wish. Come to a resolution in your story. ➤ 5 min: Individually write one sentence pitch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Session Two – 25 min: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 2 min: Take turns (re)reading your story to your partner ➤ 3 min: Take turns “Discussing” the other’s story – the writer is not allowed to respond ➤ 3 min: Take turns “Conversing” about the other’s story – writer still can’t respond ➤ 2 min: Individually choose a new figure in the image. ➤ 12 min: The “re-write”: Together with your partner, merge your stories into a single one, adding one or both of the new figures chosen (a crisis emerges). You may drop an original figure if you wish. Come to a resolution in your story. ➤ 3 min: Individually write one sentence “pitch”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Session Three – 20 min: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 5 min: Read pitches ➤ 10 min: Questions Only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Session Three – 20 min: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 5 min: Read pitches ➤ 10 min: Questions Only ➤ 5 min: unstructured/more Questions Only/feedback

Needless to say, practically presenting and working with elemental exercises in only three short sessions is a very difficult task, but overall the results were encouraging and feedback was positive. Three sessions of 30 minutes each seemed a better solution, as it would give just a little bit more

breathing room for the exercises, but it was possible to work with it in the above format. Although 'just following the instructions' can produce the range of experiences related to the elemental cycle and communication, adding a quick example for each stage seemed necessary.

Faculty Meetings – Second Series:

A year later I was given another opportunity to bring the elemental cycle to the same faculty. This time a completely different format was taken. For our 'artistic' activity at this time our group was practicing a unique form of movement called eurythmy, in which sounds are given expression through particular gestures and movement patterns. For this reason, instead of using storytelling as a way to work with the elemental cycle I decided to let the eurythmy provide the initial content around which the elemental cycle would be introduced. The High School Coordinator, also a trained eurythmist and somewhat familiar with the elements, came up with a series of forms that she felt would be appropriate for the task. The first session was just the introduction of the eurythmy forms themselves, and the elemental cycle was brought in during the second session. Below are my records of the processes carried out and some observations about the work. This, admittedly, may not be of much interest to the general reader but gives a more detailed picture of how the elemental cycle can be utilized in an actual situation as well as giving a little insight into some of the problems and insights encountered.

1. First Meeting – 30 minutes.

- a. Process:
 - i. Eurythmy forms.
- b. Notes: The faculty did not know that the second meeting would not be eurythmy, but would instead be the alchemical process. They went along with the eurythmy and had a good time. The eurythmy naturally laid itself out into a nice four-step pattern on multiple levels.

2. Second Meeting – 30 minutes.

- a. Process:

- i. Introduction to the alchemical process of Earth, Water, Air, and Fire. Brief explanation of each level. Sample application of process to the eurythmy forms. Faculty come up with their own sequence that applies to the eurythmy on their own. Discuss and share results. At the end I gave each faculty member a handout explaining in more detail the alchemical process, its relationship to dialogue work, and a selection of Klocek's "Metaphors, a Dialogue with the Spirit".
- b. Notes: Faculty receptive to the overall process. They were able to come up with new ways to apply EWAF to the eurythmy. This meeting was done in an "Earth" style: it was primarily the communication of information to the faculty members about the process itself.

3. Third Meeting – 30 minutes.

- a. Process:
 - i. New Eurythmy form. (See below).
 - ii. Standing in circle. Moving into center, back to periphery, with words from Blake:

"To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour."
- b. Notes:
 - i. Again all receptive to eurythmy. The particular eurythmy form was chosen by our HS coordinator and eurythmist because it fit into a "Water" mood.

4. Fourth Meeting – 30 minutes (ended up at about 35)

- a. Process:
 - i. Review of EWAF process, written on board (E). Representation of the process as: Facts, Process, Polarity, Whole. The fifth element, consciousness (the Witness) is introduced. The work is explained as the strengthening of the fifth element via an ordered sequencing of exercises undertaken with intent. Two basic motions are introduced: gravity and levity, and their effect on the movement from one element to another.
 - ii. I introduced the idea of the "Water question", giving a picture of the mood behind it. I mentioned that there are levels within levels to the process, and one can be on the Earth side of Water, or the Air side, etc. The archetypes are recursive and can be applied universally like a fractal.
 - iii. I noted that at the Earth level there really aren't any questions per se, only statements. A question that is really a statement is an "Earth question". A genuine question is always at least in the Water realm, even when it is asking for or demanding facts, because it requires that the asker not answer their own question until a response has been given. Even if they are 'predicting' and counting on a certain answer, their soul cannot be entirely rigid, but must remain open at some level to the possibility of receiving an answer they didn't expect. It is in fact the relationship of the soul to the question in this way that will determine "where" a given question is on the cycle (if it is in Earth it is really

a statement, if in Water it is a real question but can still – and probably will – be used to bolster preconceived notions and biases, if in Air it means the soul is truly listening to the other and the lower ego is quieted, and if in Fire it is communicating directly with the other in empathy).

- iv. I mentioned the idea of “mud” (bringing Earth into Water – a gravity process) and noted how, without taking on the alchemical inner work in some form, when any two or more people are forced together out of some ‘external’ circumstance, viz. Faculty Meetings, mud is often the default level of communication.
- v. I handed out an alchemical picture (from Michael Maier’s *Atalanta Fugiens*, below) and asked them to apply EWAf to the picture, one sentence or phrase for each level. (E)



- vi. Then they got into groups of two and explained to the other person their particular sequence, *without* giving any supporting arguments – just communicating the basic idea. (W)
- vii. The partner's task was then to ask a 'discussion' question: "Why do you think that?" "Show me the evidence that supports your claim." (W) The original person is not allowed to respond to these questions, but they are asked to reflect on their internal response to these questions, and to record them on a piece of paper using key words or phrases. (W/A) The questioner is asked to note their internal response when asking the questions. (W/A)
- viii. Roles are switched and repeated. (A)
- b. Notes:
 - i. This meeting was primarily a Water meeting, in that faculty were asked to enter into communication with another individual about an idea they had generated. The role of discussion was primary, and the idea was to give them a situation in which it was safe to witness the effect on themselves of being in various Water modes.
 - ii. The overall process went very well. There was a comment about how going through the process from Earth to Water to Air to Fire was only one way (the alchemical tradition), and that there were other ways of moving from the "Earth" directly to "Fire". I mentioned that sometimes going directly from E to F may result in a fire experience that doesn't really produce a 'refined seed' that can be the basis for a new cycle at a higher level. Going lawfully through each stage is a process of refinement that invests something (consciousness) into the final fire experience so that the result is a purified seed that can bring a continuing impulse for further working. I also noted that in the alternative events that take one from Earth 'directly' to Fire, that if one really looked into it there would likely be a full sequencing with some elements emphasized more than others, with perhaps some of the preparation being done implicitly beforehand, etc.
 - iii. 35 minutes was just enough time to get through the intro and do the exercise until the point of switching roles at the very end. Had there been no 'discussion' about the pictures I was bringing it would have been right on time.

5. Fifth Meeting – 30 minutes.

- a. Process:
 - i. Eurythmy forms:
 - 1. Warmup with all in circle, moving counterclockwise over the circle in a curvy form: inwards of the original circle line (eee – 7th), then back outwards over the original circle line (oooo – fundamental) and back over the original circle line, in a full clockwise curly-que, landing back on the original circle line (aaaah – 3rd).
 - 2. Then the Cassini curves: everyone moving in ellipse, then a dip inwards on the long side, then into lemniscates, then into two little circles.
 - ii. Work towards Conversation (AIR):
 - 1. I had them try and analyze the eurythmy in groups of two using EWAF/facts-process-polarity-whole template, in particular trying to pay attention to the Air realm. We then shared our insights with the group.

2. Then I gave them the following instructions: Think of a time when you realized that there was a part of your personality that was somehow problematic. Perhaps it was hurting someone around you, perhaps it was keeping you from achieving your goals or from becoming the person you want to be. Express in a written sentence this aspect of yourself.
3. I then told them that they would need to pair up again and that one person in the group would read their statement to the other person. <pregnant pause> I explained that the other person should just listen, and then ask them Air questions about the event. I then explained further that Air questions are questions that are designed to tease out the subtleties of another's point of view so you can really enter into what it is like for them without bringing your own emotional baggage into the situation. No advice can be given, no responses other than those of an interested, sympathetic (not sappy) friend. The idea is to create a space in which it is easy for the other person to express delicate, subtle ideas and feelings without having a fear that they will be squeezed for their "Water" or dissected into "Earth", but will just be allowed to live, floating in the atmosphere created between you.
4. I didn't give them the following examples right out, but just described the feeling of an Air question. Then if they got stuck or couldn't figure out how to ask an Air question, I gave them some examples like: "What did that feel like for you when you realized this part of yourself was there?" or "Can you tell me more about what this realization meant for you?" or "How were you able to come to terms with this part of yourself?"

b. Notes:

- i. This is a difficult type of meeting, because it requires a transition into a mode not normally experienced in everyday situations, and particularly not artificially created ones where attendance is expected. I felt I could do this 'trust exercise' because of the foundations laid in the previous meetings.
- ii. When going back to regular faculty meeting, we say a verse together, and on this day everyone started exactly at the same time with no cue and no hesitation – very different than usual.

6. Sixth Meeting – 30 minutes.

a. Process:

- i. This is a Fire meeting: context, whole, transformation, impulse, higher reflection.
- ii. What is the point of this work? At first we need to give ourselves an opportunity to get familiar with the process, this is the point of the previous three meetings. It may seem somewhat artificial because it *is* artificial in the beginning – until you internalize it and make the pictures start to live and move in your soul (Water), they will remain abstract (Earth). The basic practice of applying the process must occur on a fairly regular basis – you can then start to contact the archetypes, the organizing principles, behind the definite events you are observing, until you become friendly with them, at which point they start to speak back to you. We can learn to check our initial feelings against the actual

archetypes themselves by tuning our listening instrument to the frequencies of the speaking of the archetypes themselves.

- iii. The direction I want to go with this process is to utilize it to work at two levels: the individual, and the group. They happen simultaneously. How does this work? By getting a feeling for the process and the infinite number of ways in which it can manifest, we can learn to see how we affect ourselves and those around us. We can sensitize ourselves to the situations that exist, and experiment with different ways of dealing with these situations within the context of the alchemical process. Where is our discussion now? What is its motion? It is in a levity process? Gravity? What is the need of the group at the moment?
- iv. We will start with an experience we all had last week when some pointed questions were asked, basically to the effect: what is the point of the work? Everyone had some kind of inner response to that event. Take a moment to recall what it felt like. What was the mood of your soul? Now ask yourself, what was the mood of your soul before the event and what did the moment in which it shifted feel like? Could you characterize it with a metaphor?
- v. Upon sufficient reflection, it will be seen that there will be a moment that occurs in your soul where something definitely changes... a moment where you first recognized that 'something was changing' or even reversing. Expand this moment in your consciousness.
- vi. Share and discuss.

After the sixth meeting a certain closure had been reached, and the time allotted to work with the elemental cycle was up. The overall results of the process were quite encouraging, and the feedback from faculty members was positive. During the weekly faculty meetings in which we did the above exercises, and for a number of weeks after, a very different air permeated our meetings, and it was clear that the elemental work had sensitized people both to differences in communication and to techniques for mitigating the normal patterns that keep communication from flowing effectively. The slow return of old patterns shows that the elemental cycle – with respect to communication – is not a one-shot, quick-fix technique, but requires some sustained energy. This is to be expected, because the way in which we communicate is a deeply embedded part of ourselves, and is not easily modifiable. At the same time, it is just this deep link which makes work in this area both satisfying and important in the long run.

JFKU Consci

During my time as a student at JFK University in the Consciousness Studies Program, I had the opportunity to present the elemental cycle to the public in a 'Consciousness Café' event, in which I was allotted two hours. After an extensive introduction (about 45 minutes) to my work with the elemental cycle, its potential, background, and applications to communication (most of which is now included in Chapter 4 of this document), I had the participants break up into pairs. I asked them to think of a short personal story from their life, not as intense or dramatic as "I'm about to get a divorce and here's why" and not as superficial as "I went to the store to get some bread." With this story, which has definite personal attachment without being too anxiety provoking, the following instructions were given:

1. EXERCISES: (The content is an excuse for the process. The attention is what is important.)
 - a. Earth:
 - i. Person A tells story to person B: 3 min
 - ii. Switch: 3 min
 - iii. Each writes down the other's story from memory: 3 min
 - iv. A reads B's story to B: 1 min
 - v. B writes how it feels to have his/her own story read back to him/her: 2 min
 - vi. B reads A's story to A: 1 min
 - vii. A writes how it feels: 2 min
 - b. Water:
 - i. A (not reading, but from memory) re-tells A's own story to B: 2 min
 - ii. B asks Water questions to A: 2 min
 - iii. A, not responding to questions, writes how it feels: 2 min
 - iv. Switch roles (i-iii): 2 + 2 + 2 min
 - c. Air:
 - i. A tells B's story verbally from memory: 3 min
 - ii. A then asks Air questions of B: 2 min
 - iii. B, not responding to questions, writes how it feels: 2 min
 - iv. Switch roles (i-iii): 3 + 2 + 2 min
 - d. Fire:
 - i. Open dialogue between A and B, no rules: 5 min
 - ii. Back to group:
 1. Sharing of results: 10 min
 2. Intro to group dialogue: 3 min
 3. Questions only: 5 min

The overall results of the process were encouraging (see the next section below). It seemed that the elemental cycle could be introduced in a wide variety of ways, but that practical exercises or applications were essential to supplement any intellectual understanding.

Responses to the Elemental Cycle



The responses of the group to the seminar were quite positive. One attendee, who had also been introduced to the elements in Dennis Kloczek's year-long Consciousness Studies course, expressed that the practical exercises made the principles of the elemental cycle much clearer and more understandable than it had been before. Another person applied the elemental cycle in a personal way after attending the seminar, with the following thoughtful response:

I have experimented with applying and integrating your ideas of the alchemical elements into my daily experience. I must say that I have been pleasantly surprised with the effectiveness and clarity that has arisen through the implementation of your ideas, as I understood them.

The following is the method I used to apply your findings. First, I began by viewing my experience as a network of relationships. Then I started examining each relationship through the lens of your alchemical model.

I found it to be quite helpful in discerning where I was stagnant in various activities. For instance, in my meditation practice I became aware that I was stuck in the Air elemental. I found that I was not engaging in 'listening' during my meditation practice. I had passed through the Earth stage and spent much time in the Water state in which I was processing my meditation. I started then applying the model to other areas of my life and found that I have a general deficiency in the Air element. This allowed me to focus more attention onto the Air qualities and alleviate some blockages and stagnancies in my mode of communicating.

While focusing on the Air element, I found myself feeling a two-fold process that seemed to be quintessential in creating experience. I felt that every interaction or relationship comes down to two distinct but dependent forces, namely Push and Pull or Attraction and Repulsion. I brought this up to another participant of the seminar who pointed out to me that the Air element is in fact one of polarities, which fit into my experience during engaging the air element. Basically, I found the model and ideas to be quite helpful and served as a good metaphor to examine

how one relates to various experiences in one's life.

Another experience I had was the recycling aspect or nature of the process. I found that there is no ending (as is evident in the diagram), but even after 'completing' a cycle of transformation one is left with new facts or information that allows you to restart the process, but with a new vision or perspective. In some ways it seems to be a never ending process of change. It is actually a little daunting if you sit with that feeling, but it is also a freeing feeling that removes the worry of completion or end goal from the equation.

Another person, familiar with the elemental cycle from Dennis Klocek's Consciousness Studies course, provided a detailed record of what occurred when trying to work with the elemental cycle in a difficult work setting. The response is included here in its entirety because it gives a complete summary of one way that to work with the elemental cycle, as well as to preserve its unique flavor and flow:

Seth Miller asked me to try to apply Earth, Water, Air, and Fire to an area of my life and to write a short summary of what came of that application. This, I thought, would be complicated because I live in a hospital.

Well, I don't actually live there but close enough. I am a physician. Actually I am a brand new physician, also called a resident. I'm pretty certain that they call us residents because we basically live at the hospital. We are not supposed to work more than 80 hours per week because some resident killed a patient after working 30 hours straight a few years back. So someone made a "work hour rule" that limits our in-hospital duties to 80 hours per week. Most of us log many more hours than that in reading and just trying to figure out how to treat our patients. It's stressful and it's hard.

What I am trying to say is that I work long hours so I don't have very much time for "spiritual research". In fact any "spiritual work" that I do has to also be compatible with my "day-waking" work because that is what I spend most of my day-waking-hours doing.

So when I was asked to do some research I was slightly dubious as I don't have much time to dedicate to that sort of thing. I was worried that I wouldn't have the time for it. I wasn't always this way. I once in fact took a 7 month sabbatical before getting accepted to medical school to meditate and do artwork and relax (imagine how hard that can be for a type A person!). It was torture (just kidding, it was great) and it was during that time I became familiar with some alchemical

principles and the concept of Earth, Water, Air, and Fire.

I knew that even a couple of minutes per day should be enough to do some meditation and to pay attention enough to foster a space internally to get in touch with something beyond just work. So I set out to spend a few minutes a day and failed miserably in paying attention every day because I was so busy. Even so, I have many many examples of how this alchemical method of paying attention to my day helped me overall to maintain perspective and to be (I hope) a better doctor and (I really hope) a better human. I have so many examples in fact that I'll try to stick to one example because it would be too hard to write everything down. The example I'll use occurred during the hardest month of my life and it felt like the universe was hitting me over the head trying to get me to pay attention. (I can be sort of dense when it comes to spiritual matters since starting residency so the universe sometimes has to do that...)

Here then is a retelling of how Earth, Water, Air and Fire helped me to survive the ICU (Intensive Care Unit). Overall, the elemental cycle helped me to organize my information gathering before rounds and to give better presentations to the head physicians. This allowed me to take better care of my patients and to get out of the ICU in less time.

The ICU is what we call the Intensive Care Unit because of the intensity of care that the patients there require. It is where all of the sickest of the sick patients in the hospital go to have very close monitoring and get life-saving interventions. As an intern (first year doctor) in the ICU I had to be the workhorse of the unit. I had to get up a before 4am every morning in order to find out what happened overnight (when it wasn't me staying overnight to babysit the patients as one new doctor had to do nightly) and present all of the new data to the boss-doctors by 7am rounds. During rounds we would discuss the data as a group, presenting what we thought was going on and what treatments were planned for the day to help the patients.

When I first started working in the ICU I was terrified. I was a brand new resident. All of my patients seemed to be hooked up to machines which keep them alive. There were a lot of machines, many of which I had only read about. I had no system for handling data, working through each patient. I had no idea what I was doing.

I knew how to write a SOAP note as I had learned in medical school. For decades doctors have organized their problem solving in the setting of patient care using SOAP notes. SOAP notes are how doctors write down their interviews with patients. It's how we organize our thoughts, S is for subjective data, or what the patient tells the doctor. O is Objective data, vital sign, labs, and the recording of the doctor's exam (with the silly assumption that the doctor's exam is "objective!"). A is for

assessment or what the doctor thinks is going on. P is for Plan, what the physician plans to do about the problem. Here's an example of a simplified SOAP note:

S: 33 year old female complains of chest pain. 5/10 burning chest pain began this morning after eating breakfast. Nothing helps the pain or makes it worse. It is accompanied by nausea but no vomiting.

O: vital signs (blood pressure, pulse, temperature, respiratory rate-numbers go here)

Exam of patient: gen-young woman in some distress; when asked to point to her pain, she points to her right upper abdomen. Lungs clear to auscultation; heart regular rate and rhythm without murmurs. Abdomen obese with normal active bowel sound, tender to palpation in the right upper quadrant; positive Murphy's sign; externals warm with good pulses. Electrocardiogram is normal.

Labs: cardiac enzymes within normal limits (data, data, data, numbers, numbers); Ultrasound of the Abdomen shows gall stones and gall bladder findings consistent with inflammation.

A: 1) Cholecystitis (inflammation of the gall bladder)

P: Will observe the patient here and obtain a surgical consult to assess the patient for immediate surgery versus antibiotic treatment and follow up cholecystectomy (removal of the gall bladder).

That's a basic SOAP note. Basically, this lady came in with "chest pain" which turned out to be her gall bladder and the doctor realizes this and then decided to call a surgeon instead of calling the heart specialist. The SOAP note helps with this process. That's why it is the universal format that physician's use to communicate with one another.

When I first thought about using the Earth, Water, Air, and Fire cycle in terms of medicine I thought that the work had been done for me. I thought that the SOAP format fit the EWAF format as follows:

Subjective Data = Earth

Objective Data = Water

Assessment by Doctor = Air

Plan of Action = Fire

When I thought about that further though, I realized that this was wrong.

Unfortunately I still had to write a SOAP note every morning on every patient in the ICU. I had no idea how to apply EWAF to SOAP. I had to get up to get to the hospital in enough time to gather data to present to my attending physicians by morning rounds. I was so busy the first

week I didn't really try to apply EWAF; I just wrote SOAP notes.

ICU SOAP notes are LONG documents. They have a lots of data to present (the "O" section is REALLY HUGE and confusing to a new doctor). As a newbie in this process I could gather data but then I had a ton of information and didn't know what to do with it. I was supposed to be ready and prepared by 7 am to tell the experienced physicians what I thought was happening, what was wrong with the patient, and what we should do about it.

This was awful. They tore us apart. They were mostly civil about it but there's no way to nicely say you're wrong – about everything – most of the time. It was really difficult as a new intern to come in and write notes and gather data and then feel stuck (and stupid and unprepared) as to how to turn it into a bigger picture. The attending physicians (attending equals head physician – the 'boss') could just walk up to the patient glance around their room and glance at the flow sheet (full of data) and they could announce what was wrong with the patient, why it was one thing and not something else and what the plan would be for the day's work with that patient. In about 2 minutes. It made the interns feel terrible.

Luck (luck?) would have it for me that I have been blessed with a pretty strong sense of intuition. If I were to pick an element that I most often use and am "in" it would be Fire. So I have always been one of those people who clinically "just knows" what is going on with someone. I quickly gestalt the bigger picture. It is a skill that I can't explain with my data and my lab values. I often have a difficult time explaining it to attending physicians. Especially on a really hard case where nobody can figure out what is going on, I would sometimes say what I thought was happening and why the patient was sick. Then the attendings would look at me intensely with that expression of "what the hell does this kid know?" and then they ask me how I knew. I would often just stand there during ICU rounds speechless (after pronouncing what was wrong with the patient) when they asked me HOW I knew what I knew. I mean I didn't even know what half the machines in there did on my first day but I'd just know it was the guy's pancreas and not his liver that was making him so sick. I just couldn't explain why. This made for some awkward moments there during rounds. Then we'd get some lab value back later that day and then things would get really uncomfortable with questions from the attendings when they realized that I had been right.

The attendings had good intentions, they were just trying to help me to clarify my thoughts and to strengthen my thinking process. A good doctor practices a mix of art and science. I felt rather uncomfortable and scrutinized during the whole process even though they were helping me to develop into a stronger clinician. It was also a matter of there being so much information, it felt overwhelming and I often didn't

know where to begin.

I also found that our attending physicians change very often and it was hard to know what each new head doctor (attending du jour) expected from me. I had to be able to figure out how to quickly go through Earth, Water, Air and Fire on each of my patients AND realize who my audience was and how to present to them in a way during rounds that was harmonious and appropriate.

My presentations during rounds to each new head physician became easier once I realized that I could use the elements to communicate more effectively with them. I had always realized that there are different kinds of people (so different kinds of doctors) out there. Some are more Earthy, or Watery, or Airy, and some are much more Fiery. What I mean by this (in regards to the head doctors to whom I was presenting to) is that is that some people like the data and the research and they quote studies to support their treatment plan (Earth). Others see the change in labs over time and see the trends and they base their decisions about how to treat on how things are trending (Water). Still others like to come up with long lists of different diagnoses of things that could be wrong and then rule them out (Air). And some are like me and they just know (Fire) and often have to work backwards to fill in the other parts.

So after a few frustrating days during rounds I had to figure out how my SOAP notes connected to Earth, Water, Air and Fire, and then I could present accordingly to the head physician of the day. I had done enough work with the elements before becoming a doctor to have a fairly good sense of different people and what element that they tended to be in. What I had to figure out was how the ICU SOAP note fit into elemental cycle.

I felt stuck in my work during the first week in regards to alchemical elements and how I could relate them to my daily grind of SOAP notes and work. So when I went to sleep at night for a couple of nights, I asked the question of “how do I relate Earth, Water, Air and Fire to the SOAP note?” Nothing. Then I tried asking, “which element should I focus on to make this process easier?” Then God or the Universe or whatever/whomever you want to call it started leaving little signs around – the hitting me over the head kind of signs that I seem to need when I'm busy so that I pay attention to what the Universe is trying to help me with.

By the end of the week I had nurses coming up to me and telling me about surfing, about their sons surfing, and about fishing. Random pictures would be left up on the work computer stations from people's internet searches, and I'd sit down to work and there would be pictures of huge waves, of surfboards, of water. Everywhere, water. Now the

scientist in me chalked all of this up to coincidence. There are a lot of people who like water activities who happen to work in the ICU. They put things on the computer. (The logical part of my brain is always looking to explain away anything that could be construed as a message from the spiritual world.)

Then one day after one of my patients literally had water pouring out of his abdomen after a surgery (he had a liver disorder...the liver is the organ most associated with Water in traditional alchemy), another came in with too much water in his lungs from a liver problem (he was literally drowning) and three different conversations were happening around me having to do with surfing, fishing, or a trip to the beach, I finally (I did say that I could be dense) went "Oh water!"

So what about water? I then realized then that I didn't even know which part of the SOAP note was the water. There was no section of my notes which gave attention to the Water question "what is changing?" I went around before I left for home that day and tried to compare trends on my patients to what had happened over the week. Suddenly patterns emerged that I hadn't seen before and I had a whole new aspect of ICU patient care which literally jumped out at me. By just being relaxed and wading through the changing data I could see how our treatments were working over more than just the snapshot that I had been paying attention to. The next morning I added a new section to my data section which took a little extra time but made the assessment and plan section faster. I just jotted down the *directions of change* on the important labs. That's all, it seems really simple. It's really obvious if you are watching one or two pieces of data. With the huge number of things that we have to keep track of in the ICU though, I just had too many changing variables to keep track of without writing them down. Suddenly I had a way of organizing SOAP notes that honored each part of Earth, Water, Air and Fire and this was helping me to understand the patient better. I was also able to present more effectively to the attendings because I had a more well-rounded view of the patients.

Here is my system for using EWAF for organizing my SOAP notes:

Earth is the facts and data. In the Soap note, this is the S and the O (the subjective and the objective data).

Water for me is running the data through change over time. So not just asking what is Mr. Smith's sodium level today, but also paying attention to how was it yesterday and where I think it will be tomorrow. The direction of change in the data helps immensely in processing large amounts of data as we do in the ICU. This is the unnamed part of the SOAP note that I added to the data (S and O) sections of the note to remind me of the trends.

Air for me is the assessment part of the SOAP note which is not usually an answer in the ICU but more of a perpetually changing question. For instance, I have someone whose sodium is getting lower and I come up with all of the things that it COULD be (this is called a differential diagnosis in medical lingo). Air in medicine for me are the questions “is it this, OK is it that, is it this, what about this, how about that?” You just keep going until every possibility that you can think of is exhausted.

Fire is the gestalt of the patient, the “big picture” which is where the P (plan) of SOAP notes comes from – i.e. an answer to the question “what we should do about it?”

This also helped me in my presentations to attending physicians because I could talk more in whatever section/element which that attending wanted to hear. This made rounds less anxiety-provoking and more fun. Plus when I got a gut instinct about what was going on with a patient, I knew to do the extra step of researching the Water level (how the data changed) to have a ready answer when the attending asked me “how do you know that?”.

So this is how I applied Earth, Water, Air and Fire to the Intensive Care Unit while I was a new doctor working 80 plus hours per week. If alchemy could help someone in that situation, then I certainly think that it has utility in many more aspects of life.

This kind of feedback was very encouraging, and expanded my interest in coming up with a better way of communicating the essential aspects of the elemental cycle in an efficient but detailed way. I wanted to provide just enough of a basis upon which individuals could apply the cycle fruitfully without need of additional help. To this end I wrote a primer (a revised edition of which is included here as Chapter 8), along with a series of feedback questions, and distributed it to everyone I could think of who might possibly respond.

I only received a handful of responses, but some of the most pertinent results are included below:

To the item “On a scale of 1 to 10, rate how likely you would be to try using the elemental cycle again in your own life, where 10 is ‘would definitely use it again’ and 1 is ‘would definitely not use it

again”, the lowest response was an 8, with one response indicating a 2-9 scale, depending upon the topic.

To the item “On a scale of 1 to 10, rate how easy it was to actually apply the elemental cycle to your chosen phenomenon, where 10 is ‘extremely easy’ and 1 is ‘very difficulty’”, the lowest response again was an 8, while one responder usefully pointed out that “I find it is less a matter of the mandala and more of my time/patience on my part”.

To the item “On a scale of 1 to 10, rate how useful the elemental cycle was in helping you understand and word with your chosen phenomenon, where 10 is ‘extremely useful’ and 1 is ‘not useful at all’”, the lowest response was a 9.

Every respondent reported that they felt they were able to fully complete at least one cycle from Earth to Fire.

Participants were asked to describe, to the extent that they were willing, of any Fire experiences or insights. One response: “An amorphous question that I have held for a long time gained shape, became objective, and seemed to speak to me, from outside of me, seemingly larger than myself.”

Another response:

I have had a few fire experiences. I think the most clear was in mediating. I simply was working on a meditation exercise. After a few months of working on it, and going through some hard parts where I felt like giving up - one day I just understood - I had been doing the mandala. It was a deep knowing about something which had eluded my consciousness for months. The total lack of expectation of any answer on my part I feel was what lead to the clarity of the insight.

and another response:

My question was “How can I grow spiritually?” It did feel like an “aha” insight as I responded to the Fire questions. There was a great complementarity to working with the elemental cycle while reading a book by Eckhart Tolle on spirituality. It was interesting to note a feeling of release of tension, a sense of peace, once completing the fire part of the cycle.

The insight that I came to that was most powerful to me is that right

now my spiritual growth is not so much about searching (my assumption going into this – need to read and study more, think more etc.) as it is about learning to be, to be in the moment and alert. I recognize that I've been in a frame of mind that "it" (the truth) is out there and I just need to find it. Now I believe my spiritual growth is about being open and letting go of fear about what I might learn along the way or what anyone else will think of what I learn. Open, attentive, awake...this is my spiritual "work."

Responses to the question "Is there anything you can note about the process of working with the elemental cycle that seems important to indicate?" included "The journal – the activity of noting my impressions and thoughts in the journal helped me to focus and move along" and

Due to family circumstances, my responding to the questions was erratic timewise from the suggested way of doing it. This didn't seem to make a difference. I think that may be because I had read through all the questions prior to starting my journal and so I had an overall concept of the process. What I found was that I carried the sense of the questions in my head and would be thinking about them off and on even when I wasn't sitting down to write anything. So in some sense, work with the cycle was going on almost continuously over a period of several weeks.

as well as a useful series of questions:

I'm wondering how far can [the elemental cycle] be abstracted away from the "strange" language of alchemy, and into easy to approach terms and concepts? Is less more? Or does there need to be a certain level of complexity? Could you get away with explaining it less? How much does the reader need to know of the background, or can they simply apply the questions and go with it?

All of the responses I received, including less formal ones from a variety of people aware of my attempts to work with the elemental cycle, have been generally encouraging and positive. The theoretical and experimental basis for the practical value of the elemental cycle seems beyond doubt. As noted above, however, much depends upon the investment of the individual, as it provides the 'fuel' upon which the elemental cycle operates. More on this in Appendix A: The Fifth Element; now we turn back specifically to how the elements provide a practical way of approaching communication.

Practical Communication Through the Elements



Learning to recognize how the elements play out in our daily communication styles can be difficult on the basis of theory alone. In addition to this more intellectual and reflective approach, what is needed are a set of useful instructions and techniques that can be directly called upon from within the actual evolving situation. To begin with, it will be useful to identify the common characteristics of the different elemental styles of communication in terms of easily observable cues. These cues are representative of how each element finds actual expression in real situations, but are not either exhaustive or absolute, and each element can manifest in an essentially infinite variety of forms. Nevertheless, some general cues are quite common³⁴ and can be useful aids that help us quickly and easily recognize the element around which an interaction is 'orbiting'. Most importantly, the specific individual characteristics below are only guides; what primarily determines the center of communication is the feeling of the mood, tone, and color of the interaction. In other words, it is quite possible to have the overt elements of the exchange take the outer form best described by the Air element while in fact the communication is Earthy or Watery in nature; this is not usual, however. It should also be noted that in any situation in which we try to identify the dominant element at work, we should be careful that such a judgment can itself be made under the influence of and fall prey to the individual elemental characteristics, like feedback, particularly with respect to the Earth and Water elements. The elemental cycle is meant to provide pathways from the lower to the higher elements, and it would be unfortunate if it was instead used as a justification for staying within the space one already occupies.

³⁴ Some cues are quite specifically linked to idiosyncrasies of the particular culture in which the communication takes place, some can apply more widely with slight variation, and other cues approach universality amongst humans.

Earth Characteristics and Techniques



You can recognize when you are in a situation of Earth communication when almost no questions are being asked and the most common utterances take the form of statements, often with a downward tonal inflection at the end indicating finality and rigidity. If questions are asked, they are generally rhetorical in nature and are used as statements. Eye contact will tend to be either non-existent or lifeless, and a sense of apathy, unconcern, or complete emotionlessness may be present. Responses to statements usually take the form of one-syllable answers, or are absent altogether, as there is little need for any kind of actual back-and-forth when communicating in Earth – just enough to indicate ‘message received’. This creates a feeling of a lack of flow, and you may also feel like the actual presence of the other person is irrelevant to the information given, and that it could just as easily have been sent via an impersonal medium such as email, a text message, or a memo. It may in fact feel like no interaction is occurring at all, or that you have no recourse or ability to respond as information seems to move in one way only. The language of Earth communications can often take an impersonal form even when everyone knows it is coming from a real person, for example, “A decision has been reached” rather than “We have all come to a decision”, or “Company policy states...” instead of “I would love to help you but I have to adhere to company policy” and so forth.

Earth communication in daily life happens in very short, isolated moments, as if contained in little capsules that stand somewhat independently from the interactions of the higher elements which take up the bulk of communication (particularly Water). Once we start noticing the Earth aspects of communication these little capsules will suddenly seem to proliferate, and we may even start to see that every single interaction is full of Earth aspects. This is a consequence of the fact that what manifests in accordance with a higher element includes each lower element. In other words, although the Earth aspects of communication are present at all higher levels as the foundation upon which these higher levels operate, the Earth aspects are also transformed and integrated into these higher aspects, so that

we can speak of “Water communication” and so on with relative distinction and clarity while still recognizing that each lower element is still present, although in a transformed way.

Phrases and keywords that typify Earth communication:

“That is...”, “This is...”, “The fact of the matter is...”, “Clarify for me...”, “Yes”, “No”, “Mmm-hmm”, “Right”, “Okay”, “Whatever”

Because of our generally persistent attachments to personal aspects of communication, it can actually be somewhat difficult to maximize and/or move into Earth communication, as most natural exchanges will tend already to move into the Watery realm. To keep working with Earth, try to restrict your verbalizations to statements of fact. Most importantly, try to keep the tone and style of your communication neutral, clear, and as non-reactive as possible. Point out details. Make a list. Take notes. Ask questions only to clarify or gather specific information. Be succinct. Tackle one thing at a time. Don’t stray from the topic. If things start to heat up, move for a short break and wait for things to cool a bit. Being prepared and oriented is important for streamlined Earth communication – get the facts beforehand.

Water Characteristics and Techniques



You can tell that you are in Water communication when there is a prevalence of “you statements”, such as “You just said...”, “You make me feel...”, and “You should...”. Often these kinds of statements can lead to biting or acrid remarks which may directly address some personal feeling about the other person. In discussion, the other person acts as a template upon which we project our unconscious. Because they are also human beings, if they sense this occurring (which they usually do at least at some level, even if only tacitly) then a pattern of attack/defense is initiated, and the exchange starts to feel a little bit like a battle. When you notice you are becoming defensive or aggressive, and responses seem to rush up from below and come out of your mouth without being bidden, you are in

Water. The punishing push/pull feeling that creeps into the interaction can easily become dominant, and a natural response to this is expressed in our need to exert control in order to mitigate any damage done, often at the expense of damage to the other. This is the “eye for an eye” level of communication, even when filtered through a modicum of self-restraint and decorum. Questions are asked in Water communication, but they are designed to reveal or probe for weaknesses, to evade direct responses (as in answering a question with a question), or to lead the other participant along. Often the discussion will center around immediate history, and it seems very important for each person to express their ‘version’ of events. A major tactic in Water communication is to ‘build up’ a case by connecting all the possible facts that support a particular position. It is often not enough to simply present such a case – the other person’s case must also be diminished, because in Water it is the *relative* differences between participants that matters.

A common feature of Water communication is the inability for one person to express a thought to completion, and interruptions are frequent. Additionally, the self-connected aspect of Water manifests as the inability for either partner to let silences into the situation. Rather, the exchange is filled completely with words because any pause by the other is taken to be an opportunity to either defend one’s own position or attack the other’s. The gazes of the participants are direct, even piercing, and often focus on the other person to the relative exclusion of all else. Faces become a stage on which a dramatic play is enacted; eyebrows, lips, tongue, eyes, and head, as well as the rest of the body, usually betray immediate responses and reactions that are only semi-conscious or partly controlled. “Points” may be conceded by both sides but generally the mood after a discussion lacks the sense of completeness, clarity, or finality, let alone agreement. Rather, the sense is that the same discussion could be had again and again, with infinite variations but little actual progress. Indeed, the Water element may make a physical appearance in the form of tears shed in frustration, anger, sadness, or self-pity.

Water communications can also manifest in ways that are a little more subtle, tamed down, or less overtly polarized than the above description may indicate. These more mild situations are characterizable by exactly the same tendencies, just in a softer and more muted way that doesn't necessarily force everything to the surface and into the actual words of an exchange. Nevertheless, the same emotional patterns, tendencies for projection, and need for self-defense are activated, even in a completely unconscious way that is difficult to detect even when we are looking for just such things.

Phrases and keywords that typify Water communication:

"You said...", "You indicated...", "You <anything>", "I feel...", "How do you know?", "What evidence do you have?", "What makes you say that?", "Can you show that...?", "How was <some past event>?", "Tell me about...", "Let me finish!", "Hold on a second...", "Do you mind?", "Yes, but...", "How do you feel about...?", "Is that *really* true?", "Show me."

To maximize and/or move into Water communication, try to be attentive to the local context and environment. Bring up the immediate past, and try to discern how the present moment came out of some past sequence. Ask, either aloud or to yourself, "How did it get like this?" Similarly, bring up the immediate future, and try to discern where the present tendencies lead. Imagine what the other person will say or do next. Point out logical fallacies. Don't let the conversation skip randomly from topic to topic – rather make sure that each new topic follows appropriately from the last.

Air Characteristics and Techniques



One of the most obvious features that lets you know you are in Air communication is laughter. The levity of the Air element makes the default expression a smile, and laughter or at least a light-hearted feeling comes easily. Indeed, we have the Air element's physical presence in the great intake and oscillatory expulsion of air that is the material basis of laughing, as well as in sighing, which can often accompany the transition between listening and speaking. Tears can also be present in Air, but as

tears of joy. Often Air communication is very lively and carefree, involving everyone. If the exchange seems to wander and diverge from any specific aim, or lots of tangents are taken that are not then connected back to an original thread, you are probably in an Air conversation. Another major characteristic of this level of communication shows up in that the most common responses are questions. Here, such questions are designed to help the speaker explore their perspective more fully and communicate it more clearly. The phrasing of these Air questions are open ended, whereas Water questions are almost always designed to elicit/avoid particular answers in accordance with the questioner's desired outcome. Air questions give themselves up to the possibility of any outcome. Eye contact includes every participant more or less equally, with no dominant personal pairings. If the communication is only between two people, the listener can often have a 'soft', steady gaze towards the speaker. In Air communication, long silences are a natural part of the conversation. Air can be characterized both by a back and forth oscillation between speaking and listening as well as by an exchange in which the listener and speaker keep their roles throughout. When you end a conversation and feel like you have really connected with someone, expressed yourself, or felt like you saw a new side of thing, but nothing specific was accomplished and no decisions or new steps were taken, then you probably had an Air conversation.

Phrases and keywords that typify Air communication:

"Is is like...?", "What about...?", "Are you trying to say...?", "Have you considered...?", "What if...?", "So what I'm hearing you say is...", "So if I have this right...", "And then what happened?", "How did you respond to...?", "What was it like for you when...?", "Could you try to rephrase that for me so I can understand you better?"

Because so much of daily interaction takes place in the Water realm, techniques for moving into Air can be some of the most practically valuable. Try to look at the other person without speaking, and wait an extra bit before responding. It can help to take a few deep breaths, not thinking of anything but

the breathing. Smile. Suggest something complementary or reciprocal. Ask “what if...?” Ask more questions than you make statements. Try switching seats with your partner, or everyone can get up and move to different seats. When trying to move out of Water, it can be important to avoid conversations in spaces that are designated for other purposes, especially work areas or places in which you can be easily interruptible. It is best to create and keep a ‘safe’ place for communication – a neutral place not associated with personal attachments and drama. For this reason places that are new to the participants can be good for Air conversation, and moving to a different location can be very helpful in the midst of a discussion.

Fire Characteristics and Techniques



It’s hard to miss being part of a Fire dialogue – basically you will know when such a moment occurs and no one will need to tell you. However, there are some tell-tale signs that can indicate such a state. Whereas crying in Water is an expression of holding onto personal aspects and in Air is an expression of the joy of sharing a space in mirth, in Fire crying can occur as a manifestation of deep transformation involving both a release and the opening up of new directions; we cry because we are capable of compassion. In dialogue, you can have the experience of holding something in your mind and heart which then is expressed by another person as if they were speaking on your behalf. Fire communication can retain aspects from all the previous elements, but often includes lots of nonverbal indicators of assent and participation, such as the nodding of heads and an attentive, open gaze. When in a Fire dialogue, participants generally have the sense that ‘something is happening’; exchanges are deeply felt and full of meaning, spoken and unspoken. Awareness is heightened, and a feeling that the line between possibility and actuality is dissolved or dissolving can lead towards an excitement and tendency for action. The active nature of the Fire element permeates the mood, even being accompanied by physical interactions such as hugging, or the placing of a hand in contact with another

in gestures of compassion. Verbalizations that express moments of insight or realization may occur: “Aha!”, “Wow!”, “I see!” etc.

There are less restrictive parameters for common phrases and keywords that typify Fire communication, because what comes in anew with the Fire element isn’t bound by outer forms – it is something in which each individual directly participates as a member of a larger whole. To an ‘outsider’ looking in on such an exchange, nothing particular may stand out, and the whole interaction might seem perfectly ordinary.

It is not possible to ‘force’ dialogue; however, moving towards dialogue can be encouraged by moving repeatedly through the elemental cycle into Air. Generally moving into dialogue requires an already well-established background and history between participants, or at least have a high level of self-actualization. For this reason, regular interactions over time, particularly with a shared language of process such as that provided by the elemental cycle, can maximize the possibility for dialogue. Although you can’t plan for dialogue, if you get into a good conversational situation you can try the following techniques. Let silences lengthen and don’t ‘close them down’ by speaking, rather, speak when ‘called’ to do so. This is a difficult thing to judge, but if in doubt, wait, and hold on to whatever it is you were going to express until the situation ‘ripens’ for it. It can help to ask questions that deal with biographical aspects and long-view perspectives. Ask about motivations. Pay attention to the whole. Give up any expectations about where the conversation might go or what it might hold, consciously surrendering your personal will to the potential of a higher will moving between participants. Trust the development of the dialogue, which can seem like it has a ‘mind of its own’.

Chapter 7 – Review and Summary Example: The Alchemy of the Image

The Image in Alchemy

More so than any other tradition, religion, philosophy, or discipline, that of alchemy deals with images in a way that is fundamental. Certainly alchemy does not have a monopoly when it comes to images – either in their formation or meaning. But the alchemical tradition exemplifies the use of images not just as pictures of various elements, but rather as instantiations of processes which simultaneously call for transformation in the imaging subject while providing the key for that very transformation. Thus alchemy is rife with images, symbols, mandalas, and other visual content which aim at being much more than static carriers of facts. From the beginning, alchemists understood the nature of the logos through the help of images, and they expressed themselves in images. We must not narrowly restrict our understanding of “image” to the realm of “pictures” or other physiologically visual phenomena. Rather, image, alchemically understood, is a strange sort of djinni existing on many levels at once, moving freely between the above and below, the inner and outer, serving as an actual link between these seemingly disparate worlds. At first we see simply an old lamp or bottle (we may say: a flask). But this flask contains a heavenly being in embryo, waiting to be called forth through a particular process – a process that inevitably leads towards transformation. Like Aladdin, our task is to uncover the process behind that which at first appears as the simple word: “image”. We must open this flask, the image, and examine it carefully, for like everything else, it is in a process of continual evolution. In so doing, we will discover a variety of masks worn by the image, and if we pursue these transformations actively we ourselves will be transformed.

Image and Fact – Earth

Every image contains a basic structure, its shape and color as manifested to our visual sense. This is the first level of the image, its overt form. Additionally, this level includes the existence of the

image as a specific representative of a fact, a bit of information. Here the image simply stands in for a definite piece of content and is more or less unambiguous. For example, an image of a cigarette underneath a circle with a line through it represents a singular fact: no smoking. Thus we can speak of images at this level as *signs* – signifiers which are visual placeholders for some specific content, and in this sense they are designed to mitigate attempts at variegated interpretation. When an image is primarily a sign, great attention is paid to the details of the form in order to make it different enough from other signs so as to make its associated ‘fact’ unambiguously clear. This provides for great efficiency in communication. Because images are inherently gestalts, they present themselves to us all at once in a non-linear fashion, and our visual brains can grasp the underlying fact without having to rely on the sequential nature of written or verbal language. This level is the foundation and beginning of all further working with images, and is the bedrock upon which a deeper understanding can be achieved.

Thus alchemists, in working with images, always begin with an understanding of this most overt aspect of images as signs, and have found it useful to actually form a sign which expresses this fact. This sign is one of many for the element Earth. Stated another way, when working from the first level of the image, we can recognize that this sign simply codes for the ‘fact’ that the basic level of the image constitutes its facts: its form, color, structure, and signification.

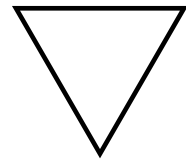


Image and Process – Water



If all images could be reduced solely to signs, then our visual experience and its associated capacity for imagination would be reduced to particles of dust – a collection of separate identities linking images and facts. Such identities are essentially static, with surfaces that actually constitute the thing itself. One can see the tendency for literalism and absolutism in people who tend towards this

level of Earth, alchemically understood. Yet beyond the capacity of images to act as signals, they also contain something at a deeper level.

At the second level of the image, we can come to understand that the manifest sign does not simply exist as a singular, independent entity, but rather is embedded in a flowing context of meaning. For example, in the symbol for Earth, we see a triangle. But this triangle is pointing downwards, as if to say, “things come to a point, right... *here*.” The sense of gravity is evident, and we can imagine the triangle tipping easily to either side; reliance upon facts *qua* Earth is a precarious position, where the slightest imbalance tends to force a collapse to one side or the other (for example, in literalism and fundamentalism of all sorts). In order to avoid this fate, we must consciously connect the overt fact with other facts, to create a stream of meaning in which an individual fact is upheld by surrounding facts. In this discovery we recognize that any individual sign bears the weight of its meaning by virtue of the surrounding system of signs in which it is embedded.

Exoterically speaking, we can call this level of the image the *cipher*. As a cipher, an image is a cryptographic encoding of meaning – but the meaning isn’t only in the manifest form. Rather, it exists by virtue of the fact that a particular *process* of encoding has occurred that allows the sign to take a particular form. The form cannot exist without a preceding process. In this sense, the Earth level of the sign is actually a residue or solidification of a series of related processes, which taken out of context looks like an individual, separate, and simple particular. When seen as an Earth, a coded cipher looks like gibberish: “ifmmp.” This is simply a series of seemingly separate, individual facts – letters – which bear no apparent relationship to one another. The Water task is to identify the process by which the letters got there in the first place, the *rule* that connects the apparent individualities in a meaningful way to another set of facts. In this case, the rule is “every letter is replaced by the next in the alphabet.” Discovering this pattern allows the gibberish to take on meaning: “hello.” The key to understanding

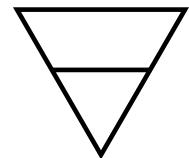
images from a Water perspective is to identify the relationships between the various forms, until coherent movements or patterns of meaning start to become apparent.

Image and Reversal – Air



Going still further, we come to another level beyond that of the flow of meaning between signs. This level of the image can be the most subtle and difficult to understand at first. The primary quality at this level can be experienced as a reversal, often occurring in a moment of insight. While swimming through the river of facts, a moment will come where concepts get stretched so far that suddenly something snaps and the direction of the energy flow shifts and reverses. A wonderful word used by Jung, *enantiodromia*, expresses precisely this aspect, where something is taken so far to one extreme that it suddenly flips, in a kind of singularity, into its opposite. An example of this principle of Air in action will help.

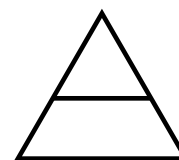
If we examine the alchemical symbol for Water, we see a downward pointing equilateral triangle with a bisecting horizontal line. This is just the sign for Earth with the added horizontal component; therefore we can see how the element of Water



still bears some of the qualities of Earth, but in a slightly transformed way. Something has arisen from within the Earth, and is now permeating the lower half of the sign. The Water forms a kind of lake in the lower half of the triangle, within and bounded by the Earth below, which acts as its container. But rather than fill the entire sign, the Water reaches a self-made boundary (the horizontal line). This is an analog to the physical property of water: it takes on the shape of its vessel, and spontaneously forms a coherent, flowing barrier when no vessel wall presents itself. This horizontal surface acts to connect the whole periphery of the shoreline, allowing waves in any one part of the surface to reach all other parts of the surface. A *moving balancing* lacking in Earth is now present, as if the horizontal bar is that of a tightrope walker. This type of Water-thinking, a thinking that takes place in the space between the

facts, now leads us to an Air moment, when we realize that this new horizontal line, a boundary, is not simply a connector of facts, but must be a boundary *between* the water and something that is not actually represented in the sign: the *air*. It is just at this place, where the Water has become liberated from the Earth, that it meets not just itself, but something beyond itself, the Air – a new context in which it finds itself embedded, exactly opposite in quality to its previous environment. These considerations lead us naturally to the sign for the element of Air: an inverted sign for Water.

The triangle now points upward, but this shift is not simply a geometric, it is also symbolic. The dividing line of the Water sign is maintained, but symbolizes now the Air experience of polarity in general, of the formation of opposites, complements, reciprocals, and enantiodromias. Whereas in the water sign the horizontal bar symbolizes the lateral connection made between various points on a surface, in Air it represents a vertical division of one volume from another; completely polar domains are established which dominate the activity of Air thinking.



This example points more generally to the Air level of the image, which we can call the *symbol*. What at first appeared to be a sign for some bit of knowledge ‘out there’, which was then linked to other external facts to embed it in a stream of meaning, now is recognized to be something even more subtle. Rather than simply being a string of related facts, a moment occurs where the external image takes on a whole inner dimension. Our consciousness may suddenly shift into a strange type of experience, which may be called a dual polarity.

In such an experience, we have two complementary polarities arising essentially simultaneously. The first polarity is an awakening in consciousness to the differential recognition of two things: the *fact that* the sign is experienced as *a fact* outside oneself, and the necessary complement to this recognition – that in order to have such an experience, one must also have a whole inner realm in which the fact is placed in order to be experienced. The first polarity, which we can call recognition of the outer sign,

simply sets up in consciousness a complementarity between the inner and the outer. The reader should be able to see how this first polarity is expressive of the Earth element.

The second polarity is expressive of Water. In the second polarity, simultaneous to the first polarity, we can experience that the pattern of flow between external bits of information in the sign out there sets up complementary patterns of meaning within. Thus we can speak of an *inner* sign as well as an outer one. In the second polarity we recognize that in addition to the ‘fact’ out there, a correlate, a *mirror image* of the sign, exists inside of us as well, and that its flowing relationships are analogs to our own inner states.

Thus a symbol is precisely that which acts as a bridge between our inner world and the outer world. Looking at the image at the level of the symbol literally puts us into a polarity: we are taken simultaneously out of ourselves into the wider context in which the flowing patterns of meaning in the facts find themselves while having a direct experience of our own inner relationship to those same patterns. The symbol takes us beyond ourselves by taking us into ourselves.

Thus, the modern alchemical scholar Stanislas Klossowski de Rola can point out that the alchemist’s pictorial language,

in which not a single detail is ever meaningless, exerts a deep fascination on the sensitive beholder. This fascination does not even necessarily depend upon understanding. If the reader will *contemplate* these images, that is to say go beyond their surface, he will often perceive that they correspond to another timeless dimension which we all may find deep within ourselves. These profoundly haunting pictures have a polyvalent symbolism, and lend themselves therefore to various interpretations.³⁵ (Klossowski de Rola, 1973)

³⁵ A further level of analysis shows the Air quality of the thinking present in this passage. Sensitivity is precisely the capacity developed and expressed in Air. Contemplation can be examined as an exercise in which one proceeds from Earth to Water, to sit at the gates of silence in the Air, where without understanding (having given away the facts and relations into the silence), and beyond the surface, a timeless correlation between the inner and outer appears as if solidifying out of the nothingness. Additionally, the “polyvalent symbolism” and “various interpretations” that can be made only occur when meanings are not fixed in a static way to the image or to each other, but have the quality of Air to form all potential combinations. It is only in the next level of Fire that the polyvalence becomes resolved – we could say coagulated – in the larger context of the whole. This digression serves to point out that de Rola, in speaking about the symbolic level of images, is actually led (consciously or

This forming of connections beyond oneself is an essential element of alchemy. Rudolf Steiner, who could be seen as a modern Rosicrucian alchemist, states that “true alchemy makes itself independent of sense-perception in order to behold the spiritual nature of the world that is external to man, but is concealed by sense-perception.” (Allen & Pietzner, 1981) This ‘independence’ from sense-perception is a capacity that is trained by rhythmically going into the Air element – a capacity that is most easily exercised through alchemical work with lawful images. By working with an image from Earth, through Water, into Air, one builds a capacity in which, despite the polyvalence noted by de Rosa, one’s thinking capacity becomes strong enough (Earth) to not dissipate in the face of multiplicities and paradoxes (Air) while simultaneously remaining flexible enough (Water) to keep from fixing a multiplicity into a single, dead answer. This helps to maximize the potential for a greater meaning (Fire) to present itself.

One sees from the preceding type of discussion that the Air element is complicated, having to do with polarities, reversals, complements, opposites, reciprocals, and multiple simultaneous levels. One simply has to look to the movements of warm and cool masses of air in the atmosphere to notice that it is precisely these qualities that permeate and rule climate and weather. Yet the whole system of weather is driven by a principle beyond the atmosphere itself: the sun.

Image and Meaning – Fire



We have discussed the image as sign, cipher, and symbol. What exists beyond the level of the symbol, an analog to the Sun? The pattern from gross to subtle continues with this new stage, the stage that is expressed alchemically through the element of Fire. An understanding of the Fire element requires looking again at the previous three elements in a new way. Just as the movement of Water led

unconsciously) into an Air state of thinking, and both the content and manner of his words express this unequivocally to an alchemically sensitive understanding.

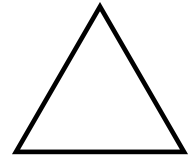
us naturally into Air, so a natural progression through the element Air leads one to ask of the image: “but what does it all *mean*?”

A minimal amount of meaning exists in the identity of a sign with its labeled content in Earth, but this meaning is like a single bit of data. In Water, the cipher encodes a whole stream of meaning through a process that connects each bit to its neighbor, but this meaning is essentially an outer meaning. The Air level opens up the image from its inside – but in doing so we discover that the image ‘out there’ was really a mirror in which we were gazing at the opening of our *own* insides; the meaning at this level exists on an inner plane. Now in the Fire element, something remarkable happens to the constellation of meanings being toyed with in Air. Rather than multiply into infinity, the Fire element burns away all the insubstantialities and leaves only the most subtle shell of meaning – a meaning that links all the various interpretations through an underlying *archetype*. Thus we can speak of a *universal* meaning, in addition to the inner and outer, and factual.

At this level, the image takes on the quality of an actual *being*. All of the data, flow, and insight of the previous levels becomes a manifestation of a primal, objective, and peripheral but real coherence that although inexpressible, is directly knowable by higher human faculties, particularly the transformed heart’s capacity for intuition. Here, the image itself is experienced as if it were actually speaking. In Air, the image itself becomes silent, which, in true Air polarity-style, creates the space which the viewer fills in with a variety of interpretations. This is why the transition from Air to Fire involves the capacity we could call *listening* to the image. The last reversal required in passing beyond the Air level is a shift in the location of the silence from outside to inside. By shutting down the factory that produces one’s inner dialogue, the image is then allowed to present itself to the inner silent space created willfully in the viewer. This is where it speaks its truth – and it is a truth that is inclusive of all the previous aspects of the image. In fact, the experience at this level involves a perception of *why* all of the previous levels

take the forms that they do. They seem to all fit perfectly and necessarily into a coherent whole as logical manifestations of the archetype through successive layers.

Using our example of the elemental signs, we first see that the sign for Fire is an inverted sign for Earth: an upward pointing equilateral triangle. What used to be pointing downwards to a singular manifest fact, has, in a progression through the elements, been inverted. Now it points upwards towards a singular unmanifest archetype, which doesn't exist itself on the earth as a *particular* form, but rather is the underlying principle of the particular's ongoing *formation*. Just as the signs for Water and Air share a boundary, so too the signs for Earth and Fire share an inner space. But while the inner space of the Earth sign is filled with a mass of dense facts, the space in the Fire sign is filled with the potential for meaning. The main quality of Fire is that of transformation, and the Fire is in effect a transformed Earth, where all that was subject to gravity is rendered into something new via the forces of levity. But at the same time, the Earth is also a transformed Fire. How can this be? It is only now, having worked through Earth, Water, Air, and Fire separately, that we can see something of the Fire, the archetype, lying behind the elemental signs *as a whole*, which will help to answer this question.



The Elemental Mandala



The reader should recognize that the approach to the elements taken so far in this chapter is primarily indicative of the Earth element. To a minor extent some relations between the elements have been brought to light (Water), but a comprehensive picture is missing. This should bring to awareness a whole new level of thinking with respect to the elements: perhaps in the form of the following question: "What if the system of the elements were to be applied to itself?" This presents an interesting test of the system *at the Fire level*. If the system claims that there is a Fire level, which is somehow the

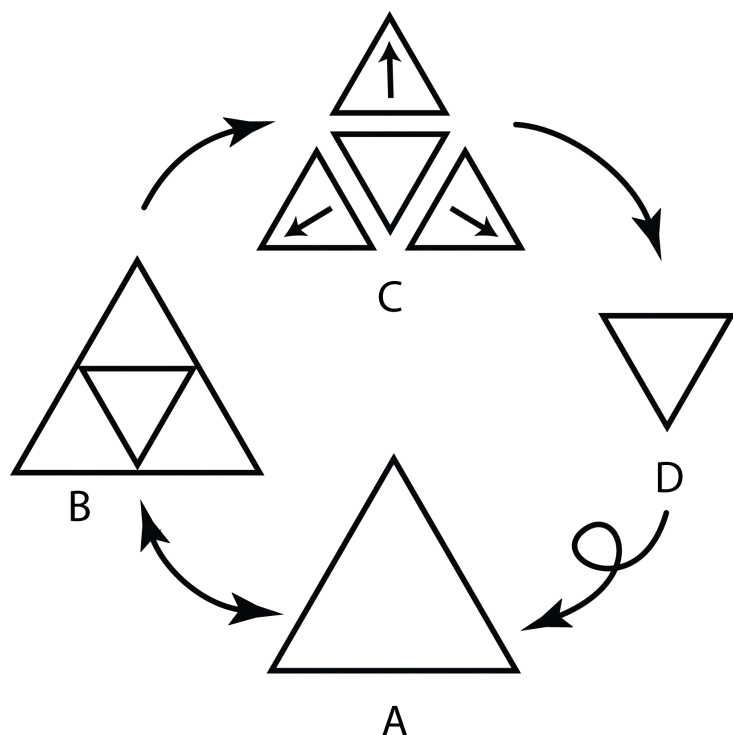
reaching towards an archetype or driving, unifying principle, then what would this Fire level be for the system of the elements as a whole?

Here words and concepts begin to fail us, in the sense that no individual sentence or phrase can embody the principle entirely. Not even the linking of sentences can do it. Rather, we must shift our thinking itself – we must make our thinking *elemental*. This requires a certain capacity for intuition and a willingness to surrender what one already knows in order to let the process itself lead one forward. We could say that a proper examination of the Fire element will lead one into an understanding of the whole of the four elements: as facts, processes, polarities, and as wholes, which themselves all form a single, more encompassing whole – the archetype of the elemental process itself.

Now we can make explicit, in an image, something of the nature of this process, using the signs discussed above. Working to understand the Fire level of the image leads to a larger picture of how everything fits together to make a single, coherent process. Each individual element exists as a manifestation of the Fire element itself. Although speaking of the elements in this way may seem elliptical, it is meant to be both explicit and exact – because at the Fire level, it is not only the specific nature of Fire that must be addressed, but the *whole* itself, including all the previous elements.

Thus we come to recognize the larger nature of the Fire element, both in its inexpressibility and its all-encompassing nature. We can see that as a cycle, the Fire element leads to a *new* Earth. We can show this relation through a sequence of images, pictured below.

We begin with the symbol for Fire at stage A. This Fire does not arise arbitrarily but is a direct consequence of the ongoing evolution and transformation of the facts of the Earth level. No individual fact, nor all of the individual facts *together* can make the Fire. Rather, the arrival at the Fire level is simultaneously accomplished along with the transformation of each individual fact into its own Fire state. It is precisely the coherent, interconnected, simultaneous transformation of each individual fact in the context of the whole that allows the whole to arise for us – they are one and the same process.



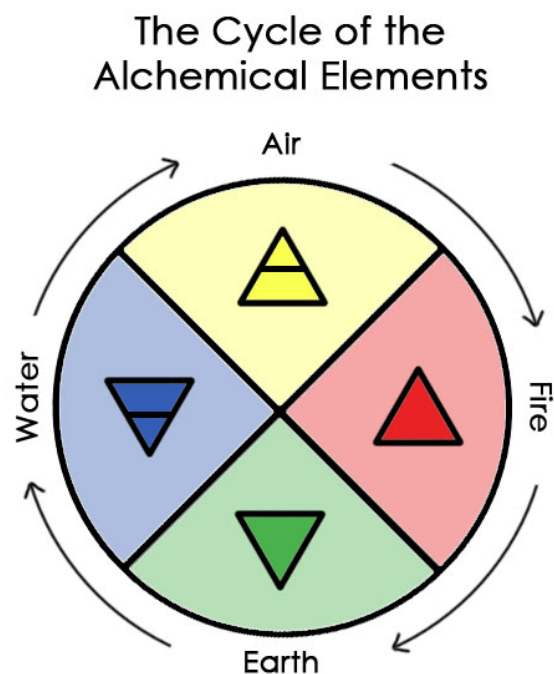
This is represented in stage B, where three individual Earths have been simultaneously transformed through the elemental cycle to the Fire level in a lawfully connected way, forming the larger Fire triangle. The arrow points both ways to indicate that stages A and B are actually interchangeable and identical.

The coming together of all the transformed Earths has led to something

new, embedded within the original Fire element, and it looks suspiciously like a symbol we have already encountered! It is a *New Earth*. The experience at the Fire level is generally not one to be sustained: the *activity* of the Fire quite quickly expands beyond the capacity of the individual system to contain it. This is represented at stage C, where we picture the individual Fire elements flying away in all directions, toward the infinite periphery. We could say that the contents of the original Earth facts combust themselves in their transformative Fire process, but while they leave their old natures behind, they do not simply disappear. Rather, all of the bits of Earth form out of their combined burning/transformation something which falls out of the process and is 'left behind', pictured above at stage D. What we are left with is an insight – *not the activity that produced the insight*, which has now disappeared from our view. This insight becomes a new 'fact', which can itself evolve through the process again towards its own Fire state, signified by the looped arrow to stage A; the loop can actually represent another complete cycle through the elemental mandala, but one that works at a higher level, as if moving along a spiral. The

actual Fire sign itself is thus revealed to be an alchemical crucible for the transformation of its own constituent Earths. This is an exact analogy for the spiritual alchemical work undertaken by an adept.

With respect to the discussion of images, our Fiery insight yields up *a new sign*: the elemental mandala pictured at right. Thus, by undertaking the alchemical cycle with the signs for the alchemical cycle, we are led to a new sign – one which embodies, integrates, and completes in a coherent package all of the previous stages. Alchemists would call the production of this new Earth an *ash*. This new sign, the mandala, implicitly expresses the overall meaning and interrelationship of the individual signs in a



singular representation, so that the feeling of the whole takes on a quality of *rightness* that is lacking in any of the individual elements taken out of this context.

The development of this quality of exact imagination is ultimately one of the major reasons for the use of images by the alchemists themselves. It was implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) recognized that the alchemical language of the image could act as both a carrier of the content of the practice of alchemy, while also serving as a key that unlocks the alchemical process itself in the developing alchemist. In other words, the alchemist, in order to glean the meaning of the content of the alchemical image, had to work with the alchemical cycle – but the image itself actually served as a guide and teacher to the alchemist, training him or her in the very faculty required to read the image. Thus, alchemical images are meant to be not simply bearers of content, but transformative agents.

The archetype of alchemical images is to act as a direct teaching of the alchemical process itself – not as a specific content but as a living process. In this way the image can act as a transformative process in the viewer. Marie Louise von Franz, a pupil of Jung, points out this power inherent in the symbol:

Jung called the symbol-making function of the unconscious ‘transcendent,’ for not only does it transcend our conscious grasp, but it is the one thing which, through symbol-formation, enables man to pass from one state to another. We would be forever stuck in an acquired habit of consciousness if this transcendent function of the psyche did not help us over into new attitudes, by creating the symbol, which shares in both worlds. The symbol is associated with both present and future psychic states, and therefore helps us over.³⁶

Although here interpreted psychologically, with our modified understanding of the elemental cycle we can see how it is the archetype itself which helps us with this transformation from one state to another. The image is then experienced to be a coagulation of the archetype – in other words, the Fire level of the image *is* the archetype. The primary difference between alchemical images and other images has to do with the fact that the alchemist, in creating the image in the first place, has already worked through multiple cycles of the elemental process, so that the new Earth of the image embodies all the stages that have come before. We could say that the image is ‘warmed’, having already been through a process of ‘digestion’.

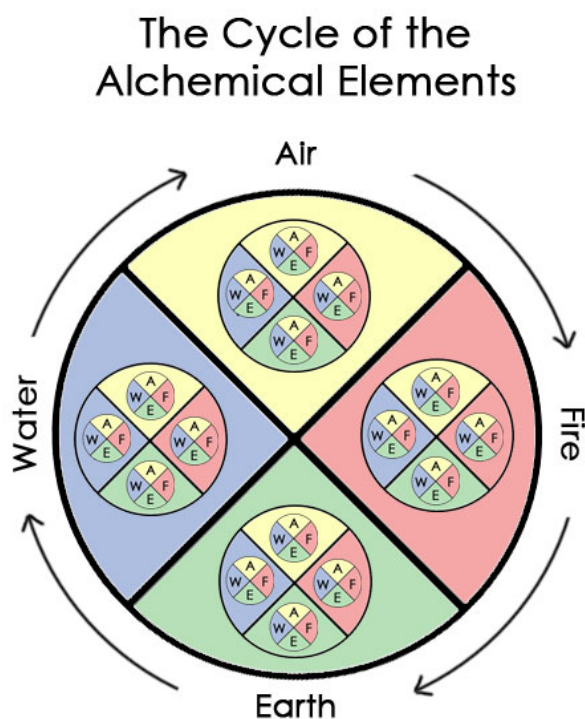
This consideration leads us to a further understanding, which has been implicit in all of the above discussion both in its form and content, viz. the fractal nature of the alchemical process. It becomes clear that each element is not fundamentally ‘pure’ in the atomic sense of the word. Rather, each element is actually a particular expression of the whole process itself. That is, the alchemical process can be said to consist of nothing but itself – its own archetype – its *being*. We can formulate a new image expressive of this fact, although with the recognition that at these levels such a thing cannot be *actually* embodied, in words or images, but can only be hinted at. Thus, the process is infinite and

³⁶ Quoted from “In the Hands of Alchemy” website at <http://www.handsofalchemy.com/ourwork/talks.htm>

fractal – self-similar at all scales. This is a new way of getting at the idea which alchemists called the ‘prima materia’ – which is both heavenly and earthly, one and many at the same time.

The signs for the elements are therefore somewhat unique in their character, as the images are pictures of *themselves* – of their own archetypal processes. Although the alchemical process can be used to examine any image, when used to examine the elemental symbols, the process becomes doubly self-reflexive. This transforms the signs themselves into keys for their own unlocking. Here we see a real example of the highest alchemical principle in action: as above, so below, as below, so above. And we can see that this *must* be the case – that the alchemical cycle of the elements, all the way from its archetype to its physical manifestation in signs, must holographically carry the meaning of the whole.

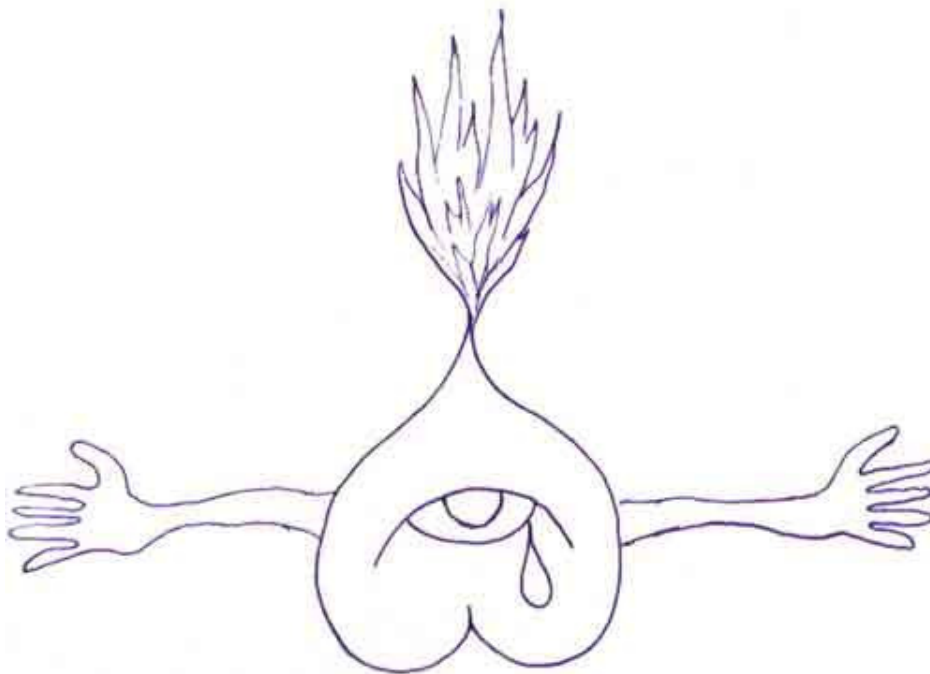
Let us now return to our starting point and see if we have made any progress. What is useful about an alchemical approach to images? What does it teach us about the image that may be missing otherwise? Let us use our new-found tool, the alchemical mandala, to very briefly address this question. At the Earth level, we can see that images are not simply facts, but are multilayered manifestations of hidden (but not secret) realities; they are signs. In Water, we notice that these manifestations arise through a specific process and are expressive of relations; they are ciphers. In Air, we notice that images additionally have the capacity to bridge the inner and outer worlds, and thus can act as potent tools for communication (or manipulation!); they are symbols. The Fire tells us that images even have the



capacity to transform us in profound ways, because ultimately *everything is an image of the Fire*; they are archetypes.

An alchemical approach to images, in true alchemy-style, leads beyond a strict consideration of images into the field of transformation itself. It should by now be obvious that the archetypal nature of the elemental process truly *is* archetypal, working as an active patterning principle by virtue of which manifestation occurs, both in images and elsewhere. Thus, the elemental mandala, as an archetype, is expressive of transformation itself, and can therefore be fruitfully applied in any arena in which transformation occurs. And this, as the Rosicrucian saying “This too, shall pass” subtly implies, means essentially every process. The elemental mandala is powerful tool that can be used for efficiency and directness in understanding any situation involving transformation.

In other words, it shouldn’t need pointing out that the discussions taken up in this paper can be approached from the perspective of any single element. Yet it is only by actually working through the cycle experientially from Earth to Fire that you, the reader, will be able to discover the extent to which there is more to these words than simple dust.



Chapter 8 – Understanding and Using the Elemental Cycle



A Practical Introduction and Primer

By Seth Miller

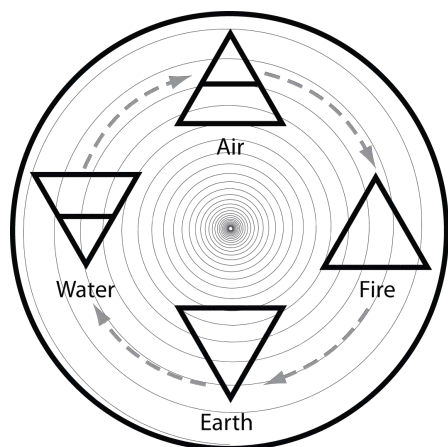


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Introduction



The following pages³⁷ are meant to serve as a layman's introduction to the elemental cycle in a completely self-contained and practical way. No previous experience with the elements or the elemental cycle is necessary to gain both a conceptual understanding of their usage and potential as well as a practical experience of the qualities of each element.

The elemental cycle is an amazingly versatile tool which helps structure consciousness on the basis of the archetypes of the four elements of Earth, Water, Air, and Fire. Among an almost endless number of potential applications, working with the elemental cycle can:

- Help you sort through and process difficult personal issues
- Help you illuminate and better engage with your specific and unique inner processes
- Provide a coherent and well-grounded template that you can apply to any research question
- Reveal your hidden assumptions, habitual patterns, and default modes of consciousness
- Help you transform your consciousness to be more grounded, connected, capable, and resilient
- Give you avenues for proactive engagement with a variety of situations
- Reawaken your sense of the mystery of your own depths
- Reconnect you with the amazing world you live in but rarely perceive
- Help you study effectively

Reading through this document will help place you firmly on the path towards discovering how you can use the elemental cycle in ways suited to your own particular situation and goals, as well as giving you a set of practical tools with which to begin applying the elemental cycle to an area of your choice.

The most useful outcome of working with the elemental cycle is not to obtain an answer to any specific question. More important is the way that such work changes our sensitivity to the subtleties of the whole range of potential manifestations of phenomena *in general*. In other words, working with the elemental cycle develops our capacity to understand and work with phenomena in a robust, integral, and healthy way. It objectifies our consciousness, smoothes out our tendencies to approach things from a one-sided or entrenched perspective, opens up possibilities for change on any number of scales and levels, allows deeper entry into otherwise complex, subtle, and confusing phenomena, and provides continuous feedback about our own evolution.

³⁷ If you wish, a stand-alone version of this primer can be downloaded as a PDF file (for easy printing or reference) from: <http://www.spiritualchemistry.com>.

The Elemental Cycle – Overview



What is the elemental cycle?

The elemental cycle is a universal tool that can help you understand and connect to phenomenon around and within you more deeply and effectively. For any given topic, it can help you clarify what it is actually like, flow with how it is changing, be open to its possibilities, and illuminate its inner meaning. You can think of the cycle as a key that fits almost any lock – all you need to know is *how to turn the key*. Stated another way, the elemental cycle is a tool for structuring human consciousness according to objective patterns of manifestation.

What is the elemental cycle good for?

Training in using the elemental cycle has a number of benefits. As the cycle is quite objective in nature, it has the ability to help us understand external phenomenon, such as those present in the natural world (the growth of plants, the constitution of our Earth, weather patterns, physiology, etc). On the other hand, the elemental cycle is just as potentially useful as a tool for personal illumination and is a living spiritual technology facilitating our own transformation. Working with the elemental cycle can help you become a more effective learner, a smoother communicator, a more open listener, and a more insightful ‘understander’. It can help you transform.

To what types of situations can I apply the elemental cycle?

The elemental cycle works with the archetype of change, and can thus be instructive at some level for any phenomenon that is transforming. Because essentially every situation is changing, the cycle can be applied to any phenomenon you choose. What this means is that when you encounter some event, topic, or occurrence in life that seems confusing, difficult, interesting, mysterious, or that simply presents to your soul the feeling of questioning, the elemental cycle can be used to help you skillfully enter into the archetypal background that informs its unfolding, allowing a deeper glimpse into its structure, relations, potential, and overall meaning. The elemental cycle helps streamline your effort, and lets you know where your attention might be best concentrated.

How do I use the elemental cycle?

This document is designed to provide a practical introduction to the usage of the elemental cycle. Unlike training in a strictly scientific discipline, where terms and laws are formulated exactly so as to eliminate alternate interpretations, work with the elemental cycle is more like an art, where analogy and metaphor are just as useful as “facts”. Luckily, it is an art that has at its core an objective set of principles – we could call them archetypes – which yield something interesting: the elemental cycle itself helps train you in how to use it! In fact, it would be possible for you to arrive at the principles of the elemental cycle on your own simply by paying attention to the world around you, or your own physiology, or to music. Indeed, you already have a wealth of experiences which will help you understand the elemental cycle. Because the elemental cycle is a way of accessing the lawful patterns of change and transformation embedded within the processes of the world, paying attention to those processes – even ones that you are already familiar with – provides potential feedback from the world that can tell you about the elemental cycle itself.

The point is that you don’t need to know everything about the elemental cycle to use it effectively. Simply rhythmically paying attention according to the principles laid out below will serve to lead you towards a more complete understanding of how the cycle works and how you can use it. There are as many ways of using the cycle as there are individuals, and no way is necessarily better or worse than any other. Like anything in life, you get out what you put into it. My goal is to help you streamline what you “put in” so that you maximize your potential return.

How long will it take?

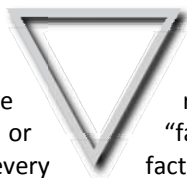
Work with the cycle can be undertaken on almost any scale. It is possible to work through a full cycle in a single sitting; alternately, fruitful work with the cycle can also take years. Practically, you should expect to gain a basic *theoretical* understanding of the elemental cycle simply by reading through this document. Working through the included introductory example and allotting at least five minutes a day to actually try the exercises can give you a basic *practical* understanding in a week or so. I have been working with the elemental cycle for over eight years and still continually find new aspects and layers of the cycle!

Introduction to the Elements



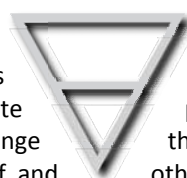
Below is a very brief description of each element along with its associated qualities. On the next page starts a guided example that will help you experience these qualities directly for yourself. The triangle images are symbolic representations of each element that can give you a visual identifier to refer to when thinking of an element.

Earth – The Earth element is the base, factual. It is the data of the sensory experience of the definitive statements can be made, such as “It me feel queasy.” These are all facts; they can be of the phenomenon can therefore be “true” or seems unambiguous: it just is what it is, and every fact.



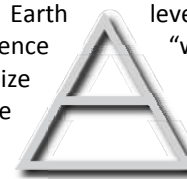
level of the phenomenon. It is the ‘obvious’ phenomenon. It is any aspect about which is red,” or “it happened at 4:30”, or “It makes recorded as statements, A, B, C. The Earth level “false”, “correct” or “incorrect”. The Earth element fact seems more or independent from every other

Water – The Water element brings the facts of the Earth into relationship. No fact is stable, or exists in isolation. Rather, every fact is a precipitate that falls out environment in time, space, and mind, just like when the water evaporates. Water is what is already moved from A to B. It is the immediate. It is the tendency for the phenomenon to change phenomenon relates to other aspects of itself and create a stream of evolving meaning. In the Water realm, the truth of one fact leads naturally to the truth of another, related fact.



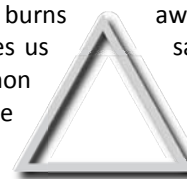
of the interweaving contexts of its immediate a crystal of salt precipitates out of a solution changing, what is moving from B to C and has past and immediate future of the phenomenon. the way it appears over time. Water is the way the other phenomenon; facts connect to other facts to

Air – In the Air element, the movements and changes of the phenomenon are found to exist between sets of polarities, whether opposites, complements, or reciprocals. The movement from A to B to C is understood as existing somewhere along the polarity of the scale A to Z. The facts are no longer static, nor are they simply related to other facts. Now the facts of the Earth inverted or reversed. In Air we have the experience or more of the polar points of view. We recognize moving the other way, A moves into Z, and in the other as we may have thought. Air is the space we make the apparent solidity of its Earth. In Air, the phenomenon presents aspects of itself that are simultaneously one way and another way. Facts might be both “true” and “false” at the same time, and the context of the Water level expands to include so many additional aspects that it is like there is no real context at all, or that everything is contextually relevant. We may get very confused, and lose track of what seemed to be stable facts from the Earth level when we reach the Air level of the phenomenon.



level of the phenomenon are experienced as if “what if?”, and we see the phenomenon from one that once we get to Z, we go back to A – and end A and Z aren’t quite so far away from each around the phenomenon, what arises when nature become as invisible and mobile as the

Fire – The Fire element resolves the tendency towards dissipation of our understanding at the Air level into a coherent, meaningful, encompassing whole. It burns of some aspect of the phenomenon that makes us have some real understanding of the phenomenon an insight. The facts from the Earth level, the the Air level now all fit together simultaneously ‘sense’ to us. We recognize that in fact the at each level like a secret waiting to be discovered. We may feel like the insight came from outside of us, as if the world is speaking to us in a language that we are just beginning to learn.



away all the extraneous fluff and gives us a glimpse say “Ah-ha!” to ourselves. We feel now that we that was previously unavailable to us; we have movements of the Water level, the reversals of as an ordered whole in a way that makes Fire insight was present all along, embedded

Guided Example



Here is an easy and quick way to get a taste of the qualities of the different elements. In particular this exercise is good for giving you an experience of the most subtle element, Fire. On the next page of this document is an image – don't look at it yet! I want to prepare you first so you can experience each element fully.

Your task is twofold, and both parts are simultaneous. The first instruction is easy: look at the image after reading through the rest of the instructions and ask yourself the question “*What is this an image of?*” The second instruction can be difficult: *pay close attention to your consciousness* while you are trying to figure out what you are looking at. That's basically it, but here's some more detailed help, specifically for the second task:

Following these two instructions will take you through a whole process which will include aspects from each of the four elements. Many things will go through your mind as you gaze at the image, but see if you can become aware of the following – (it can help to keep very brief notes, even in the form of keywords, to help you reflect on this process later):

1. The overt *content* of your actual thoughts – (*what* you are thinking, which you could speak to another).
2. Your *emotions* – Track how your emotional state changes as you look at the image. Are you excited, frustrated, curious, dubious, bored, exacerbated, annoyed, jubilant, carefree, restless, sad, jaded, critical, joyful, timid, aggressive, patronizing, etc? See if you can jot down a sequence of emotions in the order that you experience(d) them.
3. The *changing qualities* of your consciousness – (for example, would you describe your consciousness as: sharp, clear, focused, dizzy, muddled, absolute, oscillatory, simple, spread-out, hazy, expanded, linear, fixed, etc.?) This will very likely change and shift dramatically while you are examining the image – try to get a feeling for how your consciousness *changes* from one quality to the next as you explore the image in different ways.
4. Any *insights* or moments of *revelation*.

Okay, now examine the image – it is best if you cut it out in a circle so that you can look at it from any direction, but this is not necessary if you instead wish to turn the page around. Take a minute to look at the image and then come back here.

Can you identify what the image represents? How sure are you? Here is a hint: of all the possible interpretations of the image, *one in particular* is “the right one,” and any other interpretation is significantly less right. How does this make you feel? The dilemma is: *how do you know when you have found the ‘right’ interpretation?* What if I told you that once you have found the ‘right’ interpretation, what you see will agree with everyone else who also finds the ‘right’ interpretation; that is, the ‘right’ interpretation is not based on your own personal imagination, but will have an objective quality.

Keep looking at the image until you “see it”. *You will know when you see it, and you will be 100% sure that what you see is the right interpretation for the purposes of this exercise.* Once you have seen it, proceed to the discussion on the next page which will help you see how your experience was a complete cycle through the elements. And don't go reading ahead hoping that I tell you what the correct interpretation is (I won't) – this would detract from your experience!

What is this image³⁸?

Cut out the image below along its circular border so there is no preferred orientation.



³⁸ The original image is from E.A. Burtt. 1980. *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. P. 83, but was scanned from a reference in Bortoft, H. (1996). *The wholeness of nature : Goethe's way toward a science of conscious participation in nature*. Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books p.50

I'm assuming at this point that you have discovered what the image represents. On this basis, we can speak of your experience of first seeing the image (A), your experience of working to identify the image (which I will call B and C for reasons that will become apparent), your moment of recognition (D), and your experience after recognizing the image (E). All four elements were at work within this sequence.

When you first saw the image (A), you almost certainly didn't know what you were looking at. You were presented with a visual fact – an Earth – a bunch of irregular black and white shapes surrounded by a black circle. This visual experience is 'objective' in the sense that it is available equally to everyone with a normal pair of eyes (barring deeper philosophical considerations), while at the same time, what was present for your eyes never changed throughout this experiment – the same shapes kept the same relative orientation to each other regardless of how or when you observed it. You can rely on the shapes... but that's about it!

If you were careful in your self-observation, you probably noticed that as soon as you saw the black and white shapes, a whole process began inside your consciousness. You had a goal: determine what the image represented. You went through a series of mental processes whereby you tried to make 'sense' out of what you were seeing (B). What is the scale? The right orientation? Is it an abstract figure or does it represent something tangible? At some point you probably got a linking that seemed to have some promise: maybe the image is a figure of a mountain? Somehow you internally 'tested' this idea against the idea that there is one 'right' interpretation of the image. You probably went through a number of cycles of finding some interpretation of the image, testing it, and discarding it because it just didn't *feel* right. This drama proceeded, your thoughts flowed one into the next, forming a sequence of associations, while your emotions also changed on the basis of your tolerance for working within the imposed instructions. This whole process of relating ideas to the visual experience of the image is a Water experience.

Unless you saw the figure very quickly (some people see it almost immediately), this type of Water processing likely proceeded until you approached a kind of limit. You started to run out of ideas, of ways of looking at the figure, of tolerance for the exercise, and everything that occurred to you didn't pass muster when you asked yourself: Do I know with 100% surety that what I see is 'it'? Maybe you even started to wonder if maybe this whole thing was some kind of manipulation. Maybe there is more than one 'right' answer? Who is to tell me that if I see a baby's face I am wrong?

At this point you probably didn't quite know what to do or how to proceed so as to fulfill the requirements of the instructions and 'see the right thing' in the image. This is the Air state (C). Your initial enthusiasm for the exercise may have been replaced with frustration – even anger – at its seeming difficulty, even impossibility, and any number of emotional responses and thoughts might have started to occur to you. Maybe I'm just stupid, maybe I don't care about this and I'll just skip to the end, maybe I'm determined to buckle down and win this little war no matter what it takes, maybe I'll find a way to cheat, maybe I think this is now too boring to proceed, maybe it's just not worth my time to continue, maybe I just need to see it 'fresh', maybe I shouldn't give up because I trust that there really *is* some specific thing to see, etc. Generally, getting into an Air state can bring out the widest possible responses, each of which shows something of your own patterns and habits when things start to come up against limits or are taken to their extremes. We each have a different tolerance for being 'in Air', where we are farthest from the solid, dependable facts of the Earth. In the Air state we feel both like "this can't go on forever – it has to change" while also sensing "yet this may actually go on forever and I'll never get anywhere!" This is the polarity of Air.

Luckily, this polarity does come to a resolution; at some point you *finally see the intended image* (D). This recognition occurred, unlike the previous states, almost instantaneously – first you didn't know what the image represented, then suddenly you did. How did this happen? What actually changed? You likely had the experience of a real release, of a coming together, of satisfaction and completion. Now everything makes sense, you 'get it', and probably made some exclamation like 'Aha!' or had some other change in your breath pattern. This is the Fire element at work. We must be very careful here to distinguish the actual experience of the moment of revelation from what immediately follows, which is quite different in quality and content. When you relate your 'before-seeing', 'moment-of-seeing' and 'after-having-seen' experiences with the image, you might point out some aspects like those which are presented in the following chart, which indicate something of how the Fire experience acts on the previous stages and creates a new one:

Before: (Earth, Water, and Air)	During Revelation: (Fire)	After: (New Earth)
Randomness, chaotic	Ordering	Ordered
Disconnection	Connecting	Connected
Confusion	Realizing	Coherency
Percept (seeing) doesn't match concepts (thinking)	A concept unites with the percept	Percept and concept inextricably linked together
Many potentials	Constellating together into unity	Single actuality
Incomplete	Completing	Complete
Questioning, testing	Discovery	New knowing
Hidden	Self-revealing	Revealed

Once you have 'seen' the right thing in the image, and the moment of recognition passes, you are no longer directly in the Fire element, but have passed on to a New Earth. Now, regardless of the orientation, distance, angle, and position of the image you can almost effortlessly see the same figure. Your conceptual interpretation is now inextricably linked to the visual experience of the black and white pattern, to the point where it becomes difficult to *not* see what you now see. This is the addition of a stubborn new fact to your world, which is the ash that falls out of the burning process that occurred in the moment of recognizing the image for what it was.

Your particular experience with the image is of course specific to you, and will vary somewhat from the general outline presented above. I have attempted to make the above not so specific that I inadvertently alienate any possible likely experience with the process while not being so general as to fail in providing useful information about the actual similarities at work in the process which are resiliently consistent from person to person. Hopefully upon reflection you can see that the simple process of seeing an unknown image and figuring out what it represents actually quite clearly takes you through an experience of each of the four elements in their proper order, from Earth to Water to Air to Fire and finally to a New Earth.

Now, with a basic understanding and experience of the four elements, you can use their principles to help you explore, illuminate, and discover creative ways of working with any type of phenomenon you choose, which is what the next section will help you achieve.

Here is another image to work with in the same way if you wish to try this procedure anew (again, look at it from every orientation):



How to Use the Elemental Cycle



The following presents only one way of working with the elemental cycle. As you become more familiar with its subtleties, new ways of working will become apparent. There is no single 'best' way to use or understand the elements, but the following can give you a foundation for further work:

First, very briefly:

Choose a phenomenon and express your phenomenon as a question (see appendix 1, number 2 for sample questions). Write this question down. Then use the questions appropriate to each element as described below, beginning with Earth, to explore your phenomenon. Record your feelings, thoughts, and any insights or 'answers'. Repeat the asking of the questions from Earth to Fire in a rhythm that seems natural.

Then, with more detail:

1. **(Fire)** Choose a particular phenomenon of any kind around which you have a question, or with which you feel a need for transformation, or an area which you have identified as needing your attention for one reason or another (again, see a sample list of potential questions in Appendix 1, number 2). Try to formulate this phenomenon or issue as a concise question, which you should write down in a small journal designed for work with the elemental cycle. Don't worry that you have the 'right' question – the elemental cycle includes helping you recognize when to shift your question.
2. **(Earth)** Concentrate on your chosen phenomenon. Try to notice as many of its details as you can. The idea is to get as clear as possible about the basic facts of the situation. Spend between 5 and 15 minutes identifying as many facts about your phenomenon that you can, using the following questions as a guide. You don't have to actually answer each and every question (this is true for each element) – if you feel there are too many questions, let your intuition guide you to one or two, focus on those for a while, and change if needed (see appendix 1, number 3).
 - a. Ask: What are the facts? What is different? What is unique? What could everyone else agree upon? What stands out? What seems constant? What can I count on? What is irrefutable? What are the pieces? What categories do the pieces fit into? What feels like a heavy weight, like a solid stone, or like gravity with respect to this phenomenon?
 - b. Write down the facts that you notice. Also record how you felt as you did this exercise. Did you feel stifled, sure, apprehensive, robust... etc.?
3. **(Water)** Do not proceed directly to Water, but try you take at least a short break where you are not thinking about your phenomenon at all. Then approach your phenomenon again, this time with the purpose of seeing if there are any patterns to what you noticed in the Earth level. It can be helpful to try and remember as many of your Earth facts as you can. Once you can't remember any more facts, re-read your written record. Then spend between 5 and 15 minutes working with the following questions as a guide.
 - a. Ask: What is changing? Do any of the facts connect to each other? Do the facts manifest in a sequence? Are there parts which at first appear different but upon reflection have some similarity or are like each other? What is the immediate context of the facts? What patterns do I notice? Are there any rhythms or cycles? What are the processes that give rise to the individual facts? Is there a specific context that makes the phenomenon more (or less) pronounced or apparent? How is one aspect turning into another, seemingly different aspect? What about my phenomenon makes me feel like I am floating along, caught in the waves, drowning, or repeating the same thing over and over?
 - b. Describe in your journal the impressions, insights, feelings, and any images that arise when you consider the Water level of your phenomenon.
4. **(Air)** After a break of no less than 5 minutes and no more than a day or two, try to move to the Air level. Your goal is to expand your awareness of the polarities of the circumstances, and to lessen your reliance

upon the overt facts or entrenched aspects of your phenomenon. Briefly remember your Earth facts. Then recall their immediate context and movements. Then spend between 5 and 15 minutes working with the following questions as a guide.

- a. Ask: What is reversing? Where do I go if I extrapolate the movements I identified in the Water level to their extremes? What is the overall range of manifestation of the major aspects of the phenomenon? That is, what are its limits? Where does the phenomenon seem to 'run out' or dissolve? What parts do I seem to be unable to focus or concentrate upon? If I could imagine the opposite of one part or the whole phenomenon, what would it be? How would I feel if this reversal actually occurred? What about this phenomenon makes me feel like I am losing my moorings completely, like my knowing runs out, like there is no truth, or like every part is equally important or unimportant?
 - b. Describe in your journal the impressions, insights, feelings, and any images that arise when you consider the Air level of your phenomenon.

5. **(Fire)** After a break of no less than 5 minutes but no more than a day or two, return to your phenomenon. After very briefly recalling the facts, feeling their embeddedness in flowing processes, and their simultaneous polarities, place yourself in a mood of open questioning, where you do not expect any answers. You cannot *make* yourself experience the Fire level, but can only increase the likelihood of its appearing to you by getting yourself out of the way of its manifesting. Rhythmically moving from Earth to Air will prepare you for the Fire level, and the entrance into the Fire level may occur at any time or while doing any of the other exercises. Your goal at this stage is to silence yourself inwardly after working from Earth to Air in an open, listening, ready state of quiet enthusiasm for your phenomenon without expectation, need, or fear. The following questions will help you recognize when a Fire moment occurs or has the potential to occur.
 - a. Ask: What is the whole? What lies within or behind the phenomenon that allows the seemingly conflicting aspects of the Air level to coexist in a harmony, in a way that is not mutually destructive, but rather is mutually enhancing? Do I have a new insight that makes better sense of all the previous levels? Is there some subtle aspect of the phenomenon that once seemed insignificant but now seems like the key to the whole thing? Do I have the feeling of participating in something larger than myself? Do I suddenly notice how this phenomenon shows up in places I never expected or noticed before? Do I have the experience that the phenomenon is speaking to me through other, seemingly unrelated aspects of my life and experience? Do I feel transformed in some way?
 - b. If a Fire moment does not seem to occur, do not worry – this is expected; it will occur when you are ready. To become ready, you must establish a rhythm of working from Earth to Water to Air. This is best if done every day for about a week for 'medium-juicy' questions. More difficult or deep phenomenon may require *years* of work before any answer appears. In the mean time, describe in your journal any impressions, insights, feelings, and images that arise when considering the Fire questions above. This is the place where you may be led to a new question. In fact, your Fire moment may consist of the realization that you need to ask a different question. Pay particular attention to this possibility by asking your original question again at the end of the Air exercise. Then let your question go and return to daily life.
 - c. If a Fire moment does occur, describe in your journal any insights, feelings, images, and experiences. Try to encapsulate your experience or insight into a statement. Sit with your insight for a while. Then try to formulate a new question about your phenomenon based on your Fire experience. This becomes the seed – the new Earth – for a higher level of working with your phenomenon. You can begin the elemental cycle again from the newfound vantage point of your modified question.

Appendix 1: Helpful Tips, Hints, Caveats, and Secrets



1. This one bears repeating: the most useful outcome of working with the elemental cycle is not to obtain an answer to any specific question. More important is the way that such work changes our sensitivity to the subtleties of the whole range of potential manifestations of phenomena *in general*. In other words, working with the elemental cycle develops our capacity to understand and work with phenomena in a robust, integral, and healthy way. It objectifies our consciousness, smoothes out our tendencies to approach things from a one-sided or entrenched perspective, opens up possibilities for change on any number of scales and levels, allows deeper entry into otherwise complex, subtle, and confusing phenomena, and provides continuous feedback about our own evolution.
2. Your initial question can be about anything – there are no wrong questions. However, you may find a list of potential areas to which one might apply the elemental cycle helpful. The following is a tiny sample of valid ‘research questions’:

“Why do I have difficulty communicating with _____?”	“How do I learn this computer program?”
“Why do I feel fearful when the topic of _____ arises?”	“How does the weather affect mood?”
“What should I eat?”	“Where should I live?”
“How can I reduce the stress in my life?”	“Should I change jobs?”
“How can I change my habit of _____?”	“What are the effects of watching television?”
“What is my purpose in life?”	“How can I find something sacred in my life?”
“How can I communicate more effectively?”	“Am I investing my money wisely?”
“How should I plan a presentation about _____ for _____?”	“What school is best for my child?”
“What is the nature of cell division?”	“Why do I have this health problem?”
“How is granite formed?”	“How can I find time to _____?”
“How does a lily grow?”	“What is the nature of the elemental cycle?”
3. The questions for each element are just guides designed to connect your consciousness to the archetype behind the element. Do not feel that you must answer every question. Feel free to make up your own questions at each level. Once you get the ‘mood’ of each element, you might dispense with the verbal aspect of the questions and simply approach your phenomenon in the mood of each element, where your consciousness embodies each elemental mode in its structure and function according to your will.
4. When recording your impressions after each exercise, anything is game. Do not feel that you must restrict yourself to thoughts or feelings that seem overtly well-connected to the phenomenon. Allow yourself to be aware of the subtleties of your experience, and do not necessarily discount anything. Sometimes the key to the phenomenon lies in a subtle or seemingly unrelated image or feeling that occurs.
5. Everyone will move through the elemental cycle in a way that is unique. There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way.
6. As you become more familiar with each elemental stage, feel free to spend more or less time with each elemental stage as appropriate, or as guided by your intuition. Pay particular attention to any feelings that may occur when considering how long to stay with a given element, or when considering the question “Am I done with this element?” This will help inform you about which elements you have a tendency to ‘live’ in by default. The goal is to be able to build the capacity to work from any element according to the needs of the situation at hand.
7. Try to find a rhythm of moving through the elements that is right for you. You may try one element every day or so, or you may try to move from Earth to Air in one sitting, repeated over a period of a few days or a week.

8. You will likely find a particular element in which you feel like you “don’t get” or alternatively that you just “get stuck”. This is an important realization and working through the area that you can’t get into, or that you can’t let go of, can often provide the key to the rest of the process, as well as to your own transformation. The most common difficulties are of two types: firstly, you can have difficulty moving *into* an element after feeling like you successfully and completely engaged with the previous one, as if you just “don’t get” the new element. You try to ask the questions but feel like you have no idea about what you are looking for or what an appropriate response might look like. Secondly, you can have difficulty *getting out* of an element to move into the next one, as if you “got stuck” in the element and can’t move beyond it, even though you may “get” the next element. When you “get stuck” in an element you may find that you feel very comfortable asking the questions associated with that level, and that you have plenty of responses to those questions, but just feel like you can’t leave the element when the time comes to try the next one.



- a. If you **“don’t get” Earth** and have trouble engaging with it, or feel like you are noticing too few details, try to consult a resource that can give you help identifying different elements of your phenomenon. Such resources may include Wikipedia, encyclopedias, or other expert sources – even just asking your friends or family about the phenomenon can help. Alternatively, or additionally, it may help to leave the phenomenon for the day and come back to it fresh. Try to look at your phenomenon from a new angle, literally and metaphorically. It may also be helpful to work with the Water element, as familiarity with the process level of your phenomenon will naturally suggest new places to look for facts.
- b. If you **“get stuck” in Earth**, you may feel like every experience is an Earth experience, or that all that exists are details. This can make you feel like there are an infinite number of facts to notice, and might lead you to feel overwhelmed, trapped, or like you cannot continue with the process because it is too suffocating. If this occurs, you may want to alternate your focus on the questions of the Fire and Water elements. The Fire element will help you remember why you are doing this in the first place, why the phenomenon interests you, and of your enthusiasm for reaching a transformative understanding; the Water element will help loosen any anxiety around the solid facts of the Earth element, and will show you both that there is an underlying flow that keeps things connected and moving, and that things don’t have to stay the way they are.



- c. If you **“don’t get” Water**, you may feel apprehensive about the inevitability of change. You may feel like you are pulling up your anchor and to set yourself adrift on a wide sea, with no land in sight, and that as a consequence you have no clear indication about where to go or in what direction you should place your effort, because every direction looks the same. You may feel like there are infinite avenues to explore, and too many aspects that are shifting, forming connections or dissolving connections to make sense of anything. In this case, returning to Earth and reviewing the facts of the situation helps summon a mood in your soul that there is something you can rely upon, something objective and solid that gives you a firm foundation to proceed. Try to take one aspect of your phenomenon and then imagine it changed just slightly, like it took a single step to the left or right. Then try to imagine the potential repercussions of this for the rest of the facts – do they change too? If so, how? If your phenomenon allows it, you do not have to imagine this sequence, but can actually manipulate your phenomenon like an experiment: keeping all but one variable constant, shift that variable slightly and see what happens. Paying attention to only one shift at a time can be a good place to begin dipping your toe into the Water realm. Following the resulting domino trail when one fact shifts leads you under the surface entirely, but gives you clarity around *how* you got there, allowing you to feel more at home.
- d. If you **“get stuck” in Water**, you may feel like everything connects to everything else, but that the patterns are so entrenched that you lose the forest for the trees. You may also feel like you have more or less completely understood the gesture(s) of your phenomenon, and that there isn’t

really much left to explore, like it's the "same ol' thing day after day", or like what you are dealing with is just another cog in the wheels of a big machine – "things are changing all-right, changing the same way as before". In this case, you can propel yourself out of the 'mud' by taking any fact about your phenomenon and imagining the consequences for the whole if that fact suddenly became its opposite. Working with the Air element in this way can shake of the momentum of repetitious cycles and open up new vistas. You may also benefit from another person's perspective on the matter, particularly if they do not agree with your present view. Simply try to imagine what would have to be the case *if* the other person's perspective was accurate.



- e. If you **"don't get" Air**, you might find it difficult to see alternate points of view. The connected flow of meaning in the Water realm might make great sense to you – so much so that alternatives just seem theoretical, even not worth pursuing. Entering the Air may seem like trying to grab onto an abyss, where there isn't anything obvious to hold on to. When trying to engage with it you might find your mind filled with disconnected, seemingly random thoughts. Your feelings might become amplified and may tend towards what may appear to your rational mind as excess. We have a tendency to experience one meaning at a time – Air requires that we be able to simultaneously experience multiple meanings. Because of this, there can be a great temptation when trying to deal with the Air level of a phenomenon to give up entirely, or to have the feeling like you cannot tolerate continued confusion and lack of knowing. This is both natural and useful, and indicates that you are doing the work. If you can't engage with the Air element, try to imagine some sequence you identified at the Water level in your mind's eye. Now see if you can push the sequence forward just slightly to a new stage that you have not yet observed or imagined, making sure that the feeling of the movement of your sequence is maintained. Now reverse the sequence in your mind and play it backwards. When you reach the beginning, push the sequence backwards to a previous stage that you haven't yet observed or imagined, again while maintaining continuity. Run this sequence forwards and backwards, trying to expand the range just a little each time. You can do this multiple times, where in each instance you take the phenomenon in a different direction on its forward and backward ends. This lets you use the principles of the Water element to expand naturally into the Air element. Working with Air can be difficult, and you may need to work with letting go of any particular feeling or interpretation you have about your phenomenon (generally established in the Earth and Water elements). You can help mitigate any biases you bring to the phenomenon by creating a space in which you consciously explore the complete range of possibilities associated with the content of your thoughts and feelings when doing the Earth, Water, and Air exercises. To do this, after working normally with an element of your choice, review your experience and pick out the most apparent or important thought and feeling that occurred to you in regards to your phenomenon. Then consciously imagine what it would be like if each one was taken to its extreme, as if they had a volume knob that went past 10 and all the way to 11. What would this feel like? What would the content of your thought about your phenomenon consist of when exaggerated like this? Now try to explore what would happen if the volume knob was turned down, *past* zero until it reaches 11 again *from the reverse side*. If this exercise is too difficult, then simply notice your *mood* as you engage with the other elements, and see if you can imagine what it would feel like to be in a completely opposite mood. For more help, you can even try reversing other aspects of how you perform the exercise: if you usually sit, try lying or standing. Try doing the exercise outside, or even simply face the opposite direction. You can even try doing the exercise 12 hours later/earlier, at the complementary time of day. Oscillating between these polarities every other day will definitely put you in an air state.
- f. If you **"get stuck" in Air**, you may feel like anything goes, and that it is impossible to tell between what is true or false about your phenomenon. You may delight in the infinite possibilities but feel at a loss when you try to see how everything is connected on a higher level. You may become frustrated and feel like you aren't 'getting anywhere', even while feeling like you are on

the border of some realization. This is a time to cultivate patience. It can be useful here to consciously place the exercises aside for a while to let them rest in your unconscious. If you have a creative hobby, practice that instead, particularly if it gives you a sense of accomplishment and enthusiasm. When you come back to the exercises, try to do so with fresh eyes and the feeling of allowing but not requiring completely new experiences to be possible. Try to let go of your expectations – you may need to consciously allow yourself to experience the possibility of ‘failure’. This is beneficial, as long as you do the exercise anyway.



- g. If you **“don’t get” Fire**, you may feel that when you are working with the Fire element you feel like a failure, or that you will “never get it”. You may feel like something important is passing you by, like you are somehow blind to something that should be obvious. As a result of this you may feel like there *is* no bigger picture, no insight to be had beyond what is already apparent to you. There can be a number of reasons why your work may not seem to yield a connection to the Fire level. In any case, a common symptom that shows up before the Fire level becomes apparent is frustration, as if there were a friction process occurring deep in the soul. This is actually an indication that you are moving in the right direction! It is the conscious application of your will to the exercises that is pushing a part of yourself up against the unknown, and the abrasion this causes results in a fiery frustration, potentially even anger – at the exercises, the phenomenon, or yourself for feeling incapable of ‘getting it’. This is the moment in which the will must become even more present – but not in a forceful way. Rather, you must learn how to surrender your will to a higher part of yourself – the part of yourself that can Witness your life without judgment. This higher surrender, or we could say conscious suffering – cleans out the part of yourself that acts like a screen between you and the Fire level of the phenomenon.
 - h. It very difficult to **“get stuck” in Fire** when working with the cycle in the way indicated in this document. The nature of the Fire element generally restricts one’s ability to willfully ‘hold on’ to a given state. However, if you find that you seem to see deep meanings in every aspect of your phenomenon, or if the bulk of your thoughts about your phenomenon are accompanied with the feeling of grand importance, you may need to balance your approach. Alternatively, you may feel so passionate about your phenomenon that you feel full of the need for some kind of action but cannot get a clear sense for where to focus your efforts. You may even lose your ability to identify obvious features of your phenomenon because everything becomes more than it seems. In any case, return to the Earth element and seek to become intimately familiar with the facts and details associated with your phenomenon. Grounding yourself in the Earth element will keep you focused and attentive to the actual phenomenon. This will either substantiate your intuitions or will show you where you need to let go of a particular way of viewing your phenomenon in order to incorporate more of its Earth aspects in a coherent way.
9. Let the cycle itself be your guide. Continue to rhythmically place your attention on each element in a questioning mood as you feel inclined. Do not expect particular results, but allow the process to connect your consciousness to your chosen phenomenon and lead you to the next phase. Be detailed. Be flexible. Be willing to let go. Be creative.
 10. Earth Tip: To begin with, you may find that it is almost impossible to notice details of your phenomenon without also experiencing an accompanying judgments or emotion. In fact, the details may even consist entirely of a judgment you make about the phenomenon. This is normal – simply note your judgment or emotion in your journal. In working with the cycle, you will slowly learn how to notice details about your phenomenon without becoming distracted by any emotional triggers, interpretations, or desires to have the phenomenon be any different than it appears. At the same time, this does *not* mean that such things will no longer occur to you. Rather, it means that you will strengthen your capacity to keep a part of your consciousness in “witnessing” or “observer” mode, regardless of the complexities and drama of your inner experience. This part of you simply and profoundly says “this is what it is”, without any judgment, and is often accompanied by the feeling “and it is really *okay* that it is this way”.

11. The List of Descriptors and Qualities (below) is a useful way to get a handle on the elements and their transformation. Examining the columns (one for each element) should give you a decent all-around impression of the individual elements, while working with the rows should help you get a feeling for the transformative capacity of the elemental cycle. If you “get stuck” in an element, briefly scanning the column for *the next* element in the cycle may help your transition. If you “don’t get” an element, briefly scanning the column for that *same* element may help put you in the right frame of mind for working with that element.
12. Working with the elemental cycle is working with an archetype of change. Although the elemental cycle can be used simply for external research, if worked with rhythmically, it will naturally lead one towards self-transformation, and can be quite instructive and illuminative with respect to the training of the inner life. In other words, do not be surprised if, when working with the elemental cycle in any context, insights about your own inner life occur. This is a gift of the well known principle: “As above, so below; as below, so above.”
13. Because the elemental cycle stems from very objective principles of change, its own nature helps correct any personal interpretations, misconceptions, or blind spots that we may have with regards to how the process works in a given situation. It is, in this sense, self-correcting, and can therefore be relied upon as a guide in a way that we could call hygienic.
14. The effectiveness of the elemental cycle relies in large part upon how you use it. It works best when your will is applied to it with calm enthusiasm in a rhythmic way. The quality and rhythm of your attention is more important than any theoretical understanding or skillful manipulation.

Appendix 2: List of Qualities and Descriptors



Qualities and Descriptors, one transforming from left to right:

EARTH	WATER	AIR	FIRE
Facts	Relations	Polarities	Wholes
Solid	Liquid	Gaseous	Plasmic
Opposing	Complementing	Reciprocating	Enantiodromiating
Gravity	Movement	Levity	Space
Impacting	Pulsing	Turbulent	Resonating
Being	Shifting	Involuting	Creating
Singularities	Comparisons	Simultaneities	Paradoxes
Isolated	Connected	Interpenetrating	Unitive
Self-contained	Contextual	Unbounded	Integral
Uncompromising	Compromising	Indefinite	Facilitating
Stubborn	Conforming	Waffling	Being
Unchanging	Changing	Chaotic	Evolving
Apparent	Subtle	Hermetic	Esoteric
Divisitory	Connecting	Hyperbolizing	Harmonizing
Actual	Relational	Potential	Capacity
Separating	Joining	Complementing	Communing
Objects	Processes	Inversions	Holons
Distinguishing	Relating	Reversing	Unifying
Contrasting	Comparing	Polarizing	Gestaltng
Still	Flowing	Involuting	Exploding
Waiting	Emerging	Reversing	Completing
Information	Discussion	Conversation	Dialogue
Identifying	Trying	Waiting (Consciously)	Surrendering
Analyzing	Processing	Brainstorming	Creating
Reserved	Polite	Gregarious	Luminous
Informative	Orienting	Expanding	Transformative
Structural	Fluid	Inverting	Dynamic
Instincts	Urges	Desires	Motives
Material	Growth/Decay	Sympathies/Antipathies	Self
Separate	Mixed	Layered	Holographic
Solitary Independence	Dependence	Mutual independence	Omni-dependence
Dogmatic	Flexible	Mutually accommodating	Mutually Supportive
Antipathetic	Sympathetic	Empathetic	Compassionate
Knowing	Understanding	Wondering	Meditating
Obvious	Contextual	Subtle	Insightful
Static	Penetrating	Interpenetrating	Omnipresent
Thinking	Imagining	Inspiring	Intuiting
Instantaneous	Sequenced	Simultaneous	Timeless
Individuated	Patterned, Rhythmic	Random, Probabilistic	Archetypal
Known	Felt	Unknown	Intuited
Just Me	Me and You	You? Me?	We
Speaking	Tolerating	Listening	Acting
Just this	This next to that	Either this or that	Both this and that
Maintaining	Balancing, Mediating	Extremizing	Evolving
Having been formed	In the process of forming	Loss of all form	The activity that does the forming

Qualities and behaviors linked to the physical manifestation of the elements, but also meant metaphorically:

EARTH	WATER	AIR	FIRE
Definite	Relational	Chaotic, Invisible	Supersensible
Shaped	No intrinsic shape (shape of container's 'bottom' and 'sides'), or spherical	No intrinsic shape whatsoever, fills all space of a container	Dynamic shape dependent upon the <i>activity</i> of its medium
Located	Shifts location, dependent on balance between outside and inside forces	Attempts to fill all space, actively moves to periphery, Dispersive	Constantly in motion, and constantly moving other things
Inertial (strongly resists change)	Constant change (inner movement), easy to move, changes transmitted via waves to whole medium	Moves expansively, quickly, constant connects/disconnects, supremely sensitive	Actively transforms other objects (warming, burning, melting, vaporizing, etc.)
All surface, all border, all 'outside'	Border operates differently than insides, inside vs. outside (surface tension)	Borderless, diffuse, all internal boundaries, pressure differentials	Activity only, no borders but with location, inside=outside, boundarylessness
Differences, Unconnected	Self-connecting, continuity with immediate environment	Self-disconnecting, Self-negating, self-dissociation	Integrating, Connected to self and others
Indifference	Mixes w/ other liquids and gases, connects to solid surfaces (capillary action)	Makes way for all other substances, tendency to interpenetrate but not truly mix	Contact necessitates change, transformative
Rigid	Flowing	Expansive, Clear	Illuminating
Structured	Dependent, flexible	Amorphous, reciprocating	Dynamic
Centric, Gravity	Lateral, planar, spreading	Peripheral	Levity
No obvious self-movement	Rhythmic forms (waves)	Vortexial forms, spirals	Dynamic forms - infinite possibilities
Cold	Wet	Dry	Warm
Formed	Unformed	Formlessness	Forming
Settling	Spreading, Covering	Encompassing	Pleromic
Existing	Dissolving	Diffusing	Metamorphosing
Frozen	Melted	Vaporized	Combusted

Appendix 3: User-friendly Questions List



Earth

- What are the facts?
- What is different?
- What is unique?
- What could everyone else agree upon?
- What stands out?
- What seems constant?
- What can I count on?
- What is irrefutable?
- What are the pieces?
- What categories do the pieces fit into?
- What feels like a heavy weight, like a solid stone, or like gravity with respect to this phenomenon?



Water

- What is changing?
- Do any of the facts connect to each other?
- Do the facts manifest in a sequence?
- Are there different parts or areas which are self-similar?
- What is the immediate context of the facts?
- What patterns do I notice?
- Are there any rhythms or cycles?
- What are the processes that give rise to the individual facts?
- Is there a specific context that makes the phenomenon more apparent or realized?
- How is one aspect turning into another, seemingly different aspect?
- What about my phenomenon makes me feel like I am floating along, caught in the waves, drowning, or repeating the same thing over and over?



Air

- What is reversing?
- Where do I go if I extrapolate the movements I identified in the Water level to their extremes?
- What is the overall range of manifestation of the major aspects of the phenomenon?
- That is, what are its limits?
- Where does the phenomenon seem to 'run out' or dissolve?
- What parts do I seem to be unable to focus or concentrate upon?
- If I could imagine the opposite of one part or the whole phenomenon, what would it be?
- How would I feel if this actually happened?
- What about this phenomenon makes me feel like I am losing my moorings completely, like my knowing runs out, like there is no truth, or like every part is equally important or unimportant?



Fire

- What is the whole?
- What lies within or behind the phenomenon that allows the seemingly conflicting aspects of the Air level to coexist in a harmony, in a way that is not mutually destructive, but rather is mutually enhancing?
- Do I have a new insight that makes better sense of all the previous levels?
- Is there some subtle aspect of the phenomenon that once seemed insignificant but now seems like the key to the whole thing?
- Do I have the feeling of participating in something larger than myself?
- Do I suddenly notice how this phenomenon shows up in places I never expected or noticed before?
- Do I have the experience that the phenomenon is speaking to me through other, seemingly unrelated aspects of my life and experience? Do I feel transformed in some way?



Appendix A: The Fifth Element

A case has been made for the theoretical validity and practical utility of the four elements, but anyone with a basic familiarity with alchemy will note that the four elements taken alone are not capable of forming a complete system, and this is indeed quite true: a fifth element must be accounted for. This element, the *quintessence*, was already explicitly recognized by Plato, who connected it with the divine nature of the dodecahedron, and by Aristotle as well, who also connected it to the realm of the Heavens. No real mention has been made of it in the present work until now in order to keep the focus squarely on the particular qualities of the four elements and motion from one to the other. Yet we could ask: *what* is it that is moving from element to element?

The elements are metaphors; coherent patterns that serve as a template for transformation. But the four element themselves will not affect transformation in isolation simply by their mere presence. As a template, something more is required to *activate* and *experience* the qualities inherent in the elements. What fills this role is consciousness – the fifth element. All of the transformations that occur through work with the elemental cycle occur only through the attention, intention, and will of a conscious agent. This is why, as mentioned in Chapter 3, the Greeks called the fifth element not only “aether” but also “idea”. In Hinduism and Buddhism it is the “Akasha”, the basis and essence of all things, the source of their being. In Japan it is “Kū”, meaning both ‘void’, ‘sky’ and ‘Heaven’, representing also our spirit, our ability to think, and our creativity. The alchemical tradition speaks of the fifth element as the spirit.

Work with the four elements transforms consciousness, which contains aspects of the Above as well as the Below. Our individual consciousness is a manifestation of our spiritual nature, and has great potential for ennoblement if taken through the alchemical processes of separation, refinement, and ‘marriage’. It is our consciousness which is present within and between the four elements, igniting the initial fire that gives birth to the process of transformation, distilling the waters of the soul, expanding

itself to vast potentialities, and serving as both the substrate and operant for new impulses. It both affects the change and *is* the change. Our consciousness must unveil itself through its working within and through our unique physical body and personal soul in order to discover its capacity for transformation. We must at least momentarily lift the veil from our own eyes in order to see the veil that darkens our vision. The four elements provide archetypal patterns through which consciousness can thus reflect upon itself, providing a useful mirror for the process of transformation.

Appendix B: On Goethean Phenomenology



In scientific research, a hypothesis is a very narrow statement which constitutes the potential extension, application, or test of a larger theory in which the hypothesis is embedded. For example, the Standard Model of particle physics (a scientific alchemy) is a robust theory that describes matter on the smallest scales, yet the theory does not include an explanation of why specific particles have definite masses. A hypothesis exists that masses are determined by interaction with an as-yet-undiscovered particle called the Higgs boson. Assuming the particle exists, the Standard Model limits the possible values for its mass to a narrow range – this is the hypothesis, and is determined conceptually. If the hypothesis is correct, tests will show the Higgs particle experimentally within the limited boundaries; if the hypothesis is incorrect, it will either be discovered at an unexpected value or not at all, and a modification of the theory would be in order.

Such research is appropriate for some situations, in which a well-established theory needs additional refinement to account for a specific phenomenon. On the other hand, such an approach is less useful when no single well-formed theory singularly dominates a particular domain, or when the limits of the domain are not yet mapped out. The present research finds itself in the second category. As of yet there is no singular, coherently developed theory of the four elements as an archetype of transformation which can be applied or tested in a straightforward manner. The development of the theory, however, cannot just be entirely theoretical, in the sense of its development through conceptual linking, comparison, and analysis of ideas on purely conceptual grounds. Due to the nature of the particular topic, it is unreasonable to think that the theory can be developed separately in this way on its own. Rather, the development of the theory is accompanied by its continual and repeated application to specific situations. The central phenomenon under investigation then becomes the continually changing field arising out of the co-evolution of the concept of the four elements and their perceptual manifestation in specific circumstances. This procedure resembles an outward moving spiral, which

adds layer upon layer as the theory and its application grow together out of the fruits of the other. The most amenable methodology that allows for this type of development is Goethean phenomenology. However, as I shall endeavor to make clear, in order to be successful, a modification of the most common way of practicing Goethean phenomenology seems to be required due to the unusual nature of the topic under consideration. Therefore, it will be useful to gain a picture of the Goethean phenomenological method, in order to understand just what modifications are needed to be appropriate to this study.

Goethean Phenomenology, a Brief Introduction:

Goethe's scientific and artistic interests led him to develop a unique method of approaching phenomena in the late 18th century, which he fruitfully applied to areas as diverse as optics, geology, meteorology, osteology, botany, and embryology. At this time, the scientific method championed in the works of Newton was reaching the pinnacle of its development, and had permeated the culture of Europe as the primary method by which knowledge could be gained. Goethe, recognizing the importance of the rigorous methodology of empirical science embodied so strongly in Newton's works, at the same time saw how such a method imposed a false dichotomy between the subject and object, between the experienter and the experienced.

Out of his particular sensibilities, Goethe was able to develop a new method of inquiry that wove together the specificity and rigor of science with the alchemical understanding that subject and object evolve together through mutual interaction (Bortoft, 1996). The method allowed Goethe to move beyond and through the continually narrowing strictures of a growing scientism into a participatory view of the universe that kept specificity and exactness.

At this point, a brief characterization of this method will be useful, by way of listing comparisons with the theoretical approach of Newton, which has developed into the modern scientific method noted

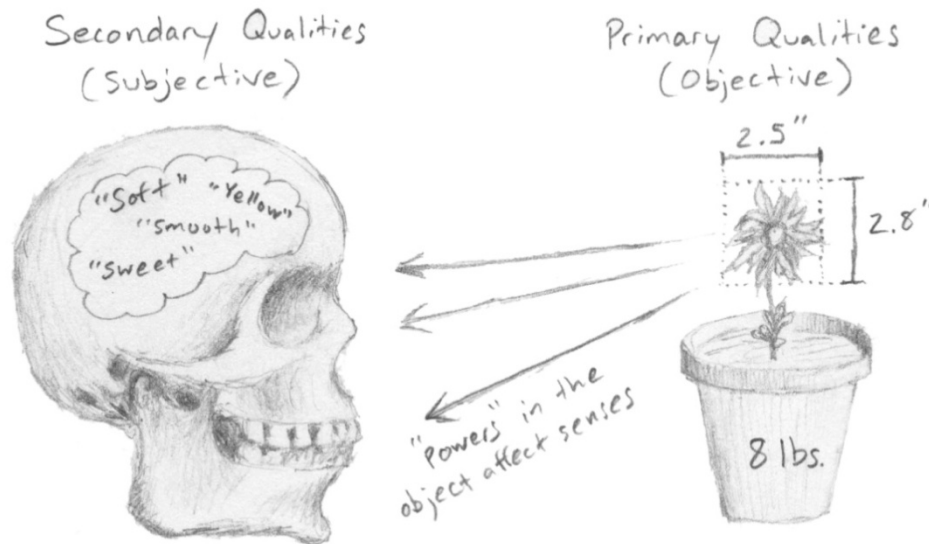
above. Although coming primarily out of Goethe's and Newton's respective work in the realm of optics, the general principles of each approach can apply to any realm of experience, both inner and outer. The list is only a characterization and has been created to reflect a contemporary inheritance of approaches which can be seen archetypally in the experiments of Goethe and Newton, and as such is not meant to be an accurate historical outline of these individual's views. Ultimately, what is important is the recognition that these two approaches are *mutually complementary*, and that using both modalities to approach a given phenomenon will yield a fuller, more comprehensive understanding than either approach taken in isolation (an insight actually gained from within the Goethean approach). At the same time, for the purposes of this study, the Goethean approach will be taken as a foundation, with the noted modifications discussed later.

Goethean	Newtonian
Exploratory experimentation	Theory-based
Process	Facts
Qualitative	Quantitative
Experiments and concepts evolve together	Experiments designed to test previously formulated theories
Many slightly different experiments are performed with the idea of bringing to light connections between all the different manifestations of a phenomenon	"Experimentum Crucis" – a single, definitive experiment "worth 1000 others" that clearly supports one theory over another
Experiments can only be understood in the context of all the others	Isolated experiments make sense
Look at relations	"Prove" a single fact
Make sense of the whole (holism)	Make sense of individual pieces (reductionism)
Look for primary, "Ur-phenomenon" (the archetype) and associated necessary conditions	Everything rests upon a single, often minutely structured phenomenon taken out of the larger context
All other phenomena follow from the primary phenomenon, through a process of complexification and the addition of new conditions (facts 'fall out' of the context)	Experiments are used to "plug holes" in existing theory, not to explain related phenomena (the context is created from the facts as necessary)
Good for situations with little previous conceptual	Good for situations where there is a lot of prior

framework (metaphor: site-assessment)	theory that is already accepted (metaphor: brick-laying)
Includes the observer as a necessarily important part of the whole phenomenon (the subject is included)	Abstracts the observer from the phenomenon in order to isolate as many variables as possible (the object is primary)
Insights reflect inner activity	Insights reflect outer activity
Answers generate questions	Questions generate answers
Synthetic	Analytic

The Beginning of Objects:

Goethean phenomenology developed explicitly in the context of, and with contrast to, the prevailing empiricism of the Enlightenment. Goethe himself called it a “delicate empiricism” (Holdrege, 2005, p. 29) which is not content to rest in theories, but continually returns to the phenomenon. In this respect Goethean phenomenology is quite cognizant of an interesting polarity available to reflective human experience: that between the perceptual and conceptual. The rise of the scientific method itself ushered in and championed a division between what it called ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’, which seemed necessary in order to establish a firm basis for exploring the world in its purely physical manifestation. Yet in terms of human consciousness, this had the effect of actually tearing specific parts of the human experience of the world away from others, so that they could be thrown out of oneself – objectified. This throwing out of specific parts of qualitative experience served as the actual creation – for human consciousness – of the newly developed concept of the deanimated “external, objective world”. The qualities most amenable to this treatment, which most easily found their homes in the new world of objects had the *quality* of being easily quantified: weight, shape, size, motion, position, duration, etc.

Figure 1 – Primary and Secondary Qualities

This was expressed quite clearly in various forms by Galileo, Descartes, and later John Locke, and became an integral part of the scientific method, in which knowledge rested on the ability of the human consciousness to attend only to the primary qualities of an experience. The philosophical assumption, stated most succinctly by Locke, took the position that this selective attention was justified because only the primary qualities resembled the “actual” properties of the “object”. In other words, primary qualities are those qualitative properties of the object that cause sensation in human consciousness in such a way that a change in the property of the object necessitates a corresponding and commensurate change in the consciousness of the observing human. Secondary properties were thought to be unable to claim such a relation. In other words, they could be more or less subjective experiences with no necessary correspondence to some actual property of the object itself.

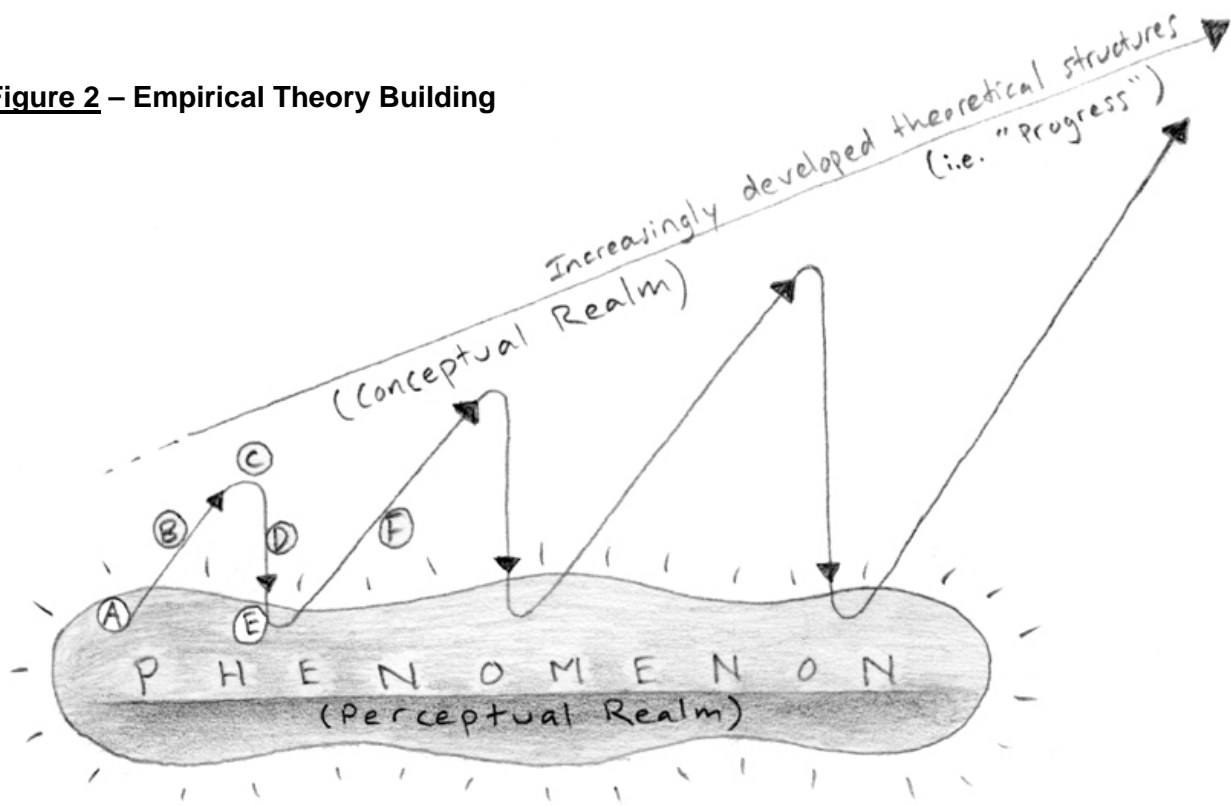
Deeper into Goethean Phenomenology:

This was the prevailing milieu in which Goethe found himself. On the one hand, he had the deeply sensitive soul of an artist. Yet he also had the mind of a scientist, and it was perhaps only out of

his particular combination of sensibilities and experiences (cf. his trip to Italy) that his unique methodology could have been developed.

From the perspective of Goethean phenomenology, a criticism exists towards the standard empiricism, which, due to its reliance upon the primary qualities of experience is seen to miss a good portion, if not the bulk of the potential richness of any given phenomenon. On the one hand, sticking with only the primary qualities proved very effective, particularly for complex model building and technological application. Yet the models and technologies, being built upon and operating through the division of inner and outer, themselves had the effect of furthering the division between subjective and objective in human consciousness, even among non-scientists. Such a process seems to have usefully contributed to the development of human consciousness – and the proliferation of technologies - and a case can be made that the subject/object, inner/outer split is now an almost fundamental, even assumed, part of consciousness for most humans.

Goethe recognized the usefulness of the empirical program, but also felt that it strayed too far from the phenomenon itself. Science, from this perspective, has the tendency to spend too much time in a purely conceptual mode, with only an occasional dip back into the realm of the actual phenomena itself. This primarily occurs when the conceptualization develops until it reaches a point of relative stagnation, in which the only remedy is to once and for all check the objectivity of the conceptualization in an experiment. In order to be successful, the experiment must be capable of showing evidence *against* the conceptual formulation, and usually relies on a highly structured and controlled environment in order to isolate a single aspect of the phenomenon that will link the concept to the phenomenon with a minimum of uncontrolled 'noise'. The process is empirical in the sense that it relies upon and is ultimately founded in the phenomenon itself – but often only minimally. Figure 2 below illustrates one possible way of picturing this method.

Figure 2 – Empirical Theory Building

At point A, the researcher encounters the phenomenon for the first time. This is a perceptual experience, but generally leads immediately to a question *about* the phenomenon, which leads to B, where conceptual theory building begins. At this stage, a tension starts to arise between the phenomenon and the fledgling theory, between the original percept and the subsequent concepts the researcher has with respect to the phenomenon. Soon, it becomes increasingly difficult for the theory to develop beyond a certain point with any clarity, due to a lack of phenomenal evidence. At this point (C), something changes – a critical point has been reached, and the researcher is then drawn back to the phenomenon itself (D), where an experiment is carried out (E). New perceptual data is gathered, and immediately theory building resumes, incorporating this new data (F). At this point the modified theory leaves its brief contact with the actual phenomenon and tension starts to build up again between the modified theory and the perceptual data, repeating the cycle at a more complex or developed level.

Eventually, after many such cycles, a full-fledged theory takes shape that accounts for all of the relevant (i.e. suitably restricted) perceptual data, which in most cases consists more or less exclusively of its primary qualities.

The empirical methodology is robust in that when it is able to restrict itself to aspects of the world which are amenable to quantitative analysis, it can produce repeatable results. The underlying assumption is that anyone who wishes to verify a given theory can do so, *if* they perform experiments that are equally amenable to quantitative analysis. In other words, certain aspects of the phenomenon are minimized or entirely bypassed in favor of its primary qualities, or the secondary qualities are “explained away” through an abstract and often unquestioned reduction to the primary qualities.

Internally, this methodology is weak in that when, in one of its toe-tip dips into the phenomenon, it discovers a perceptual fact that simply cannot be accounted for by the theory. Such contradictory facts – the ones that cannot be subsumed into the main theory through modification – can challenge the prevailing theory to the point of breaking entirely. Thomas Kuhn identified these events as the precipitators of paradigm shifts, where the old view is thrown out and a new one is ushered in to fill its place (Kuhn, 1970). Generally, however, what is ‘overthrown’ in this manner is only the specific content of a theory, and not its underlying methodology. In other words, a new theory derived through the empirical method is usually the best candidate for replacement, and it is less common for theories developed through alternative methods to gain precedence.

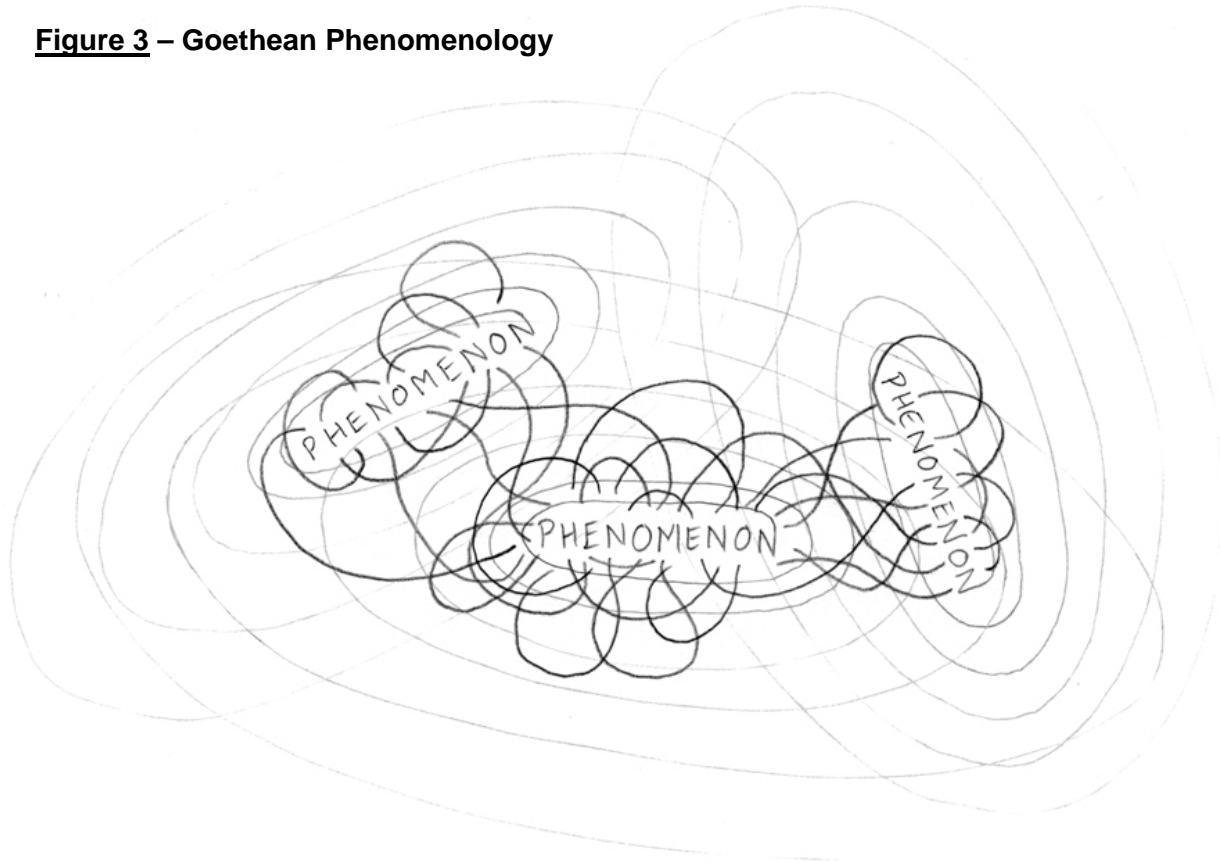
Of course such a picture is too simple to account for the depth of the empirical methodology, particularly as it is used by practicing scientists. In the messy ‘real’ world, science is practiced by actual humans, who do not strictly follow the abstract procedures noted above. Nevertheless, the figure represents a relatively common *conceptual picture* that can characterize the main aspects of the empirical approach.

The phenomenology developed by Goethe took as its starting point the idea that the empirical methodology strayed too far from the actual phenomenon, and as a result often ended up creating castles in the clouds – tightly bound, well fortified conceptual structures with only a scant foundation in the boundless wealth of the phenomenon itself. The only enemies identifiable by these conceptual fortresses are other abstract theories, while the mundane ideas of those living far away on the ground *in* the phenomena are simply to be ignored until they can take it upon themselves to climb up into the clouds and see it from a higher vantage point (i.e. without being distracted by the secondary qualities).

More and more it is apparent that the tension is not between knowledge and ignorance, but rather between various *types* of knowledge. Knowledge gained through the empirical methodology is extremely useful in its own realm, in which primary qualities are held in higher esteem than the merely ‘subjective’ secondary qualities. But outside of this narrow realm, other approaches are possible. The Goethean phenomenological methodology is one such approach, which has much of value to offer in balancing the empirical stance.

The unique feature of the Goethean approach has to do with its epistemological basis, clearly explicated by Rudolf Steiner (1978, 1981, 1988). Whereas the empirical approach is formulated around the continuing separation between the subject and object, the Goethean approach relies on precisely the opposite: a conscious bridging between subject and object through the free action of knowledge, where a percept and concept meet coherently through the expanded consciousness of the observer who continually stays focused on the actual phenomenon itself instead of being taken away from the phenomenon by continual abstraction. Figure 3 is one way to represent this process.

Goethean phenomenology asks that the consciousness of the observer places itself continually “in orbit” around, along, and through a particular phenomenon (center). Rather than being abstractly separated from its context for better analysis, the phenomenon in question is seen as inherently and inextricably embedded in qualitatively significant surroundings (the “field” of interpenetrating levels of

Figure 3 – Goethean Phenomenology

various phenomena). The consciousness of the observer is, through its contact with the phenomenon, slowly forced out of its preconceived (conscious and unconscious) conceptual notions and interpretations and into resonant movement with the actual phenomenon itself. The *enthusiastic* attention of the observer – we could say: the *love* of the observer – provides the underlying force through which the consciousness of the observer is shifted towards the phenomenon in a concrete and direct way, without the overbearing intrusion of abstract theories which potentially darken some of the more subtle aspects of the phenomenon to the observing consciousness. Ultimately, the experience is that of thinking “with” rather than “about”. The specific techniques that can be taken by someone wishing to begin Goethean-style phenomenological research will not be explicated here – the reader is referred to Steiner (1964, 1978, 1981, 1988), Bortoft (1996), Holdrege (2005), and others³⁹.

³⁹ See Janus Head, Summer 2005, issue 8.1, available free at <http://www.janushead.org/8-1/>, for a number of articles.

What is striking about the Goethean methodology is that great care is taken to sensitize oneself not just to a single, pin-point aspect of a phenomenon, but rather to the widest possible range of related experiences with the phenomenon. In other words, a “phenomenon” is actually a whole field of experiences that are constellated in a particular way by the conscious participation of the observer. Such phenomena are multi-layered, multi-faceted “fields” of possible experience held together by an underlying pattern. Intersubjectivity, two-way feedback, interpenetration, and mutual ecology are recognized as the underlying basis of experience, out of which can arise the potentials for linearity, isolation, and ‘objectivity’ in a new sense. The ideal of detachment from the phenomenon held by the empirical view is recognized from the Goethean perspective to be an arbitrary limitation of the potentials of consciousness. Indeed, it is recognized that the observer/observed distinction is a bit of a willfully naïve construction of consciousness in the first place, and not ontologically necessary in some absolute sense.

Modern quantum physics has been forced to come up against this problem in the form of what is known as the ‘measurement paradox’, where the quantum wave function can theoretically account for an infinitely parallel set of possible evolutions of a phenomenon, while every time we actually look we only see one of these possibilities realized in the material world available to our senses. The paradox is that the only absolutely clear place where this ‘collapse’ from infinite to finite can be said to occur is when an observation is made by a conscious agent. This is because any measuring device placed between an observer and a phenomenon must itself be observed before any knowledge is produced, i.e. the quantum wave function can apply just as much to the system of the measuring device + phenomenon as to the phenomenon itself, and *always* an observer is required to end the otherwise potentially infinite chain of measuring devices. This provides some insight into what has been a basic understanding of Goethean phenomenology for well over a century: that the world and consciousness are inextricably bound together in a co-evolutionary process, that subjects and objects are not

separable, and that, as Protagoras indicated in the 5th century B.C., “Man is the measure of all things,” which we can reinterpret as “Human consciousness is inseparable from the objects of its contemplation.”

Normally, the Goethean method takes as a phenomenon something readily available to the perceptual senses, for example a particular species of plant, a piece of music, or a cloud pattern. The actual work of doing the phenomenology then involves an artistic movement from the percepts to associated concepts, which then re-enliven and expand the “field” of the percepts even more. Knowledge arises out of the mutual interplay between the perceptual and the conceptual aspects associated with the phenomenon, and is characterized by their *linking* within and by human consciousness (Steiner, 1964). Human consciousness in this way serves as the active agent within and through which, in the speech of alchemy, the Above and Below intermingle.

Goethean phenomenology is therefore a way of creatively producing knowledge through the continual resonance between two aspects of human consciousness: perceptual content and conceptual content. The perceptual content of consciousness is almost (but not quite) entirely “given” – that is, we do not need to produce it ourselves, but rather it simply ‘shows up’ for us without our having to undertake concerted effort. If a bell chimes, the perceptual content (the sound of the bell) is available to my consciousness without my having to consciously produce anything – my experience is that a sound entered my consciousness of its own accord. The only requirement is that we have attention available for the particular percept, and in fact we can actively direct our attention with our will, so that some perceptual content is enhanced while others are diminished.

Historically, phenomenology in general has emphasized the primacy of perceptual content over conceptual content, perhaps on the assumption that perceptual content is more closely linked with an assumed ‘outer’ world and therefore potentially more ‘objective’. Indeed, it is precisely the apparent freedom we enjoy in the conceptual parts of our experience (we can creatively produce any number of

thoughts about any given perceptual experience, while the perceptual aspects of our experience are in contrast quite stubborn in their persistence) that lends conceptual experience a ‘subjective’ air. In fact, definitions of the word “phenomenon” often explicitly state that a phenomenon is something made perceptible by the senses. Concepts are thus not themselves approached as phenomenon, but are what ‘falls out’ of the perceptual realm somewhat like a precipitation, and the task of the phenomenologist is to remove any pre-existing concepts so that only those concepts most appropriate to the actual datum of the perceptual experience of the given phenomenon arise in the first place. In this sense, conceptuality is often seen as something to be minimized in order for the phenomenon to better present itself to human awareness, as if concepts intrude upon the purity of perceptual experience, tainting them with an ‘interpretation’.

Yet the reliance upon perceptual content is itself a conceptual bias, perhaps stemming in part out of reaction to the seeming over-reliance upon conceptuality to the point of abstraction, in which the phenomenon becomes almost an excuse for the theory. It is naturally easy to rely upon the ‘given-ness’ of perceptual content when examining a phenomenon, but we cannot ignore the equally important conceptual counterparts that we bring to its perceptual aspects. The area of interest is where these meet in a patterned overlap. So, even though Goethean phenomenology generally starts with perceptual content, it is equally possible to begin the process from the *conceptual* side of a phenomenon. The task in this case is equivalent: to illuminate the phenomenon through a continual interweaving of concepts and percepts, i.e. to take advantage of the full range of experiences possible for human consciousness. This is possible because in the end all “phenomenon” *necessarily* have *both* perceptual and conceptual aspects – indeed such a separation into perceptual and conceptual may itself be an artifact of our present mode of consciousness and not ontological in any sense. We can therefore revisit the meaning of the term ‘phenomenon’ to include what Eugene Gendlin refers to as an *implicit intricacy* at work in any experience that goes beyond the merely perceptual or the merely conceptual.

(Gendlin, 1991) *Knowledge* is not solely conceptual, but instead is always situated in and arises out of the interpenetration between the intricately felt perceptual and the conceptual aspects of experience *as a whole*. A balanced phenomenology takes this into account. This is the 'slight modification' referred to above: a recognition of both the unity of experience and its equally important polar conceptual and perceptual aspects.

The present study, rather than beginning with a relatively obvious perceptual experience and attempting to restrain the potentially abstract influence of conceptualization as would be the case in a more strict phenomenological model, attempts to work on the basis of the evolving, interpenetrating, and mutually-influencing progression of experience that works between and with both the conceptual and the perceptual on an equal basis. The reader can judge whether or not any success can be claimed.

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John F. Kennedy University**School of Holistic Studies****Thesis Consent Form**

I, Seth Miller, graduate student in the Consciousness Studies MA program, am conducting a study entitled: *The Spiral of Becoming: The Four Elements as an Archetype of Transformation*

Your participation involves:

Submitting written records of your experience using the elemental cycle.

All information received will be kept in strict confidence. Portions of submissions may be published in the thesis, but your name will remain anonymous.

I, (print name) _____ consent to participate in this study on *The Spiral of Becoming: The Four Elements as an Archetype of Transformation* conducted by Seth Miller of John F. Kennedy University.

I understand that my confidentiality will be protected.

Researcher's Signature  _____ Date: 01/31/08

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

CC: Participant

Thesis Advisor

Thesis Coordinator (Vernice Solimar, PhD)