

# Going Down

Guy Dargert

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*In the old Indian temples the altar is sunk six to eight feet deep in the earth, and what we hide most shamefacedly is the holiest symbol to the Indian.*

C.G. Jung

When I was a young lad all the F and C words appeared as dashes in books (if indeed they got that far) and even the dictionary was morally censored. Back then I learned that the only legitimate sexual relationship was within a loving marriage, although (wink, wink, nudge, nudge) as a young man I was expected to be unable or unwilling to take this idea too seriously. It seemed as if I was supposed to 'sort of' believe it, but to have a different personal agenda. It seemed as if I was expected to be split. I had to straddle a gap between being 'decent' and being a 'normal healthy male', as though these two weren't quite the same thing.

By the end of the 60s things had changed. In 1969 I 'lived in sin' with my girlfriend. I had never met anyone else in my life who had done this. It was quite a



new idea. Her parents found out. Her mother went onto trunks and her father wrote an outraged and indignant letter demanding that I do the 'decent thing' and desist. However this was the 60s (just) and we knew better. So long as you were in a 'committed relationship' and loved one another, sex was perfectly okay. Nothing to be ashamed of.

Well, it seems as if things have moved on quite a way since then. Sex isn't tucked away out of sight so much these days. AIDS has forced the issue into our collective awareness and we deal with things more frankly. We're more pragmatic. Maybe we're even a bit more accepting of how things are and don't expect one another to be striving to reach 'heights' of virtue. Maybe even a lot of people might agree that there can be something rather

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suspect and perhaps a little unwholesome about attempts to rise above our sexuality.

Besides if we are into humanistic psychology we have other (Maslovian) peaks to climb. In the name of growth and development we're almost morally obliged to satisfy those 'lower' needs in order to get on with the 'higher' business of self-actualisation. The low is just fine so long as it is integrated into the service of the high. Go out there and get a good sex life, get satisfied. It'll free you up to get on with higher purposes — to go up that hierarchy of human needs. A secure base makes possible even loftier peaks.

### *In Praise of Annie Sprinkle*

There is a rather wonderful American performance artist by the name of Annie Sprinkle. She calls her work 'post pornographic'. Her surname refers to her capacity for ejaculatory orgasms which she is able to demonstrate on stage with a fair degree of reliability. Having featured or starred in some 150 pornographic movies she cheerfully explains in a very thoughtful and articulate way that sex is what she enjoys most in life and what she is best at. It is her talent. She has chosen and succeeded in being an artist and making a living doing what she loves.

Loves? Heart in the service of the genitals? Higher in the service of the lower? Sex as a part of a loving relationship is hardly contentious; but, to love sex? Both imply a meeting and integration of heart and genitals, yet I think most people would agree that, while the upward integration is perfectly respectable and acceptable, the downward movement is a little off the wall, to say the least. It's the walk on the wild side. Yet why so?

Aren't we supposed to be living in a materialistic and permissive society? What's the problem with going down? If Annie had named herself 'Fairjudge' or 'Goodheart' she'd hardly have raised an eyebrow. But to be named after your orgasmic prowess . . . well, that's a bit much, isn't it?

Psychotherapy seems to find it difficult to envisage a worthwhile change without somehow imagining that this must also be an uplifting experience. Can there be any value in taking our awareness downward other than that of sorting something out so that we can go even higher? James Hillman points out that we have 'confused the general category of motion with one of its varieties, growth, so that all movements and change become witness to growth. We call adaptation "growth", and even suffering and loss part of "growing". We are urged, nay expected, to "keep growing" in one way or another right into the coffin.'

### *The Healing Power of Pornography*

I learned on the TV today that Paul Raymond, the 'soft porn king', is now the wealthiest man in Britain, with a personal fortune of some £1½ billion. This is one man's fortune at the near-respectable end of the pornography market. What the total worth of the industry in this country might be is anyone's guess. Doubtless we could run the health service for less. We seem to invest a lot of money and energy in an area which few would profess to value greatly.

By 1994 the British public had only just been treated to the first TV ad to expose a female breast, and in 1995 there

seems little danger that male erections will be used to enhance sales appeal (even of condoms) in the foreseeable future. We are more than a little sexually closeted. Could there be a connection between this and the megamoney pornography industry? We are still a society that systematically and methodically splits off sexuality from the rest of life, no matter how 'permissive' we may claim to be.

Psychotherapy tends to give 'splitting off' a bad press. Whether splitting is in itself a 'bad thing' may or may not be the case, depending on the circumstances. What does seem clear, however, is that we have a very different approach to split-off sex than we do to the split-off heart or intellect. Traditional science and academia, for example, reward and value the specialist. The drive towards expertise produces obscure disciplines and specialisations, the more analytic and 'truly objective' the better. To be uncontaminated by ego drives or subjective emotions is regarded as a strength in traditional research.

If the same specialisation and focus is placed on sex, however, with analysis and emotion systematically avoided, it is generally known as pornography. We look up admiringly to academia and down disparagingly on pornography (multi-million pound industry though it be). If it isn't the element of splitting off that makes us denigrate the low, then what is it? What kind of culture do we have that both condemns and finances pornography?

Pornography is like the cutting room floor of every film you've ever seen, every book you've ever read, that has implied and then 'tastefully', coyly or fearfully turned away from depicting the sex act. It's as though someone somewhere has

been dedicatedly reassembling all these offcuts and oversights. In pornography the very things the mainstream media avoid are virtually the sole focus of interest. There's not much cinematography, not much plot, not much anything else to hold your attention except genital sex. And it's fine. It's harmless. You can slo-mo and freeze-frame, masturbate if you want to. Or you can experience your discomfort, disapproval and the hangups about sex that you thought you'd overcome. You can discover in Reich's terms whether you are more of a 'genital character' or a 'sexual sophisticate'. Either way this can be enlightening.

And if pornography's addictive? Are we really afraid of becoming addicted? What does that say about our personal level of repression? Our personal splitting? And isn't the problem with addiction the fact that we are addictive, rather than what we happen to be addicted to? Doesn't addiction point to something that needs to be resolved and worked through? Isn't it better to deal with this and to find a better way of handling our own energy and vitality?

The American artist Jeff Koons has become both notorious and controversial for the graphic paintings and sculptures he has taken from photographs of himself and his wife Cicciolina (the Italian porn star and former minister of the Italian parliament) making love. He paints and sculpts the scenes larger than life, embellishes them with flowers and cherubs and exhibits them in galleries where they fetch handsome fees. He speaks of 'depornography' pornography.

If we deal with sex frankly, lovingly, if we take our heart to sex, if we love and celebrate it on its own terms, then maybe

what we now know as pornography begins to dissolve into something more like erotic art. The loved becomes lovely.

This is something better understood in the East. I was once present as a tourist at a Balinese funeral. Tourists seem to be okay with the Balinese. We seem to be regarded as a part of life and do not seem to be resisted, unfairly exploited or resented. Amongst the people processing with lovely handmade offerings to the deceased was an exquisitely dressed and refined looking woman carrying a coke bottle with flowers in it. I don't think it was a question of the poor woman having no taste — or no time to make something nicer — or that she didn't care very much for the deceased. It seemed more like honouring the ordinary, honouring the 'low'. Similarly the Balinese stone carvers carve images of airplanes, cars and bicycles right into the temple walls amongst the sacred iconography, the images of the Hindu gods. Just as their homes, shops, hotels, bridges and buses all contain a shrine. Homage to the ordinary, homage to the low.

### *On Shit and Piss and Sex*

In the West we pride ourselves on our advanced standards of sanitation. Perhaps as some long after-effect of the plague years our culture abhors and devalues shit. Good sanitation is without doubt an immense blessing and a considerable cultural achievement. A side effect however seems to be that we have broken the connection in many people's minds between shit and the fertility of the land. It is as if no good can come out of the low — out of our lowness — only disease, contamination and pestilence. Shit is simply the

living tissue of the earth (which includes our own bodies) that has been processed and broken down by one stage. It is no more and no less than this. It can have an important role to play in renewing and replenishing the earth if we treat it for the value that it has. Along our coasts we pump it out to sea as we stimulate the tiring soil with artificial fertilisers. And if it washes back ashore we build even longer pipes in the hopes that it will just go away — perhaps somewhere down into one of those deep dark oceanic trenches where we have ransomed our futures to radioactive waste. Shit deserves better.

Similarly we regard pee as 'unclean', when in fact it is a sterile body fluid (which again has much to offer as a soil enricher). Our kidneys process some 33-40 gallons of body fluid every day. Most of this is circulated straight back into the bloodstream; only around 2½ pints, on average, is passed out of the body as urine. What are we suggesting to ourselves when, say, in a public lavatory we are reminded 'Now wash your hands'? Why exactly might we want to do this? If for the moment we can set aside the possibility that we have been unfortunate enough to wet our hands or that we have a genital disease, what is the point? Surely it is the hands that tend to do life's dirty work. The genitals as a rule bide their time quite innocently cosseted away from harm's reach. Wouldn't we do better to suggest to ourselves 'First wash your hands', or (less practically) 'Now wash your genitals'?

Is there perhaps an abiding fantasy that it is the genitals that do the 'dirty work'? Is it sex that is seen as dirty? Well, Sir/Madam, that kind of dirt doesn't rub off with soap and water. Take a tip from

Lady Macbeth. We're talking sexual hysteria here and it's not good — for us, for our wholeness, for our holiness.

## Conclusion

Now I want to be clear that I am not proposing that moving energy down is in any way superior to or intrinsically more desirable than sublimating it, or moving it up. I am suggesting that it is psychologically healthy to circulate our energy (our valuing and attention) in a way analogous to the physiologically healthy circulation of our blood. I am proposing that we are not prisoners of some corrupt earthly existence struggling toward an eternal, pure, immaterial and 'spiritual' heaven. The 'transpersonal' is not inherently any 'better' than the personal or the 'intrapersonal'.

Our words 'matter', 'material', 'maternal', 'mother' and 'mother Earth' all share a common Latin root. My proposition is that, as well as being the source of our physical existence, the 'mother' may well be deep, dark and dirty, low, mysterious, perhaps at times frightening, and many other possible things; but whatever she is, she is not essentially 'corrupt'. She doesn't need to be 'overcome', transmuted, sub-

limated, outgrown, overgrown or transcended. She's not in need of improvement. She's okay as she is, thank you very much.

We may well be in a cultural position where we need to put the balance right and bring our hearts and our heads to the 'low'. We need to think, consider and love the earth rather than use it as a burial ground for our toxic wastes. And we need to think about, consider and love the earth in ourselves, in our own physicality. We need to 'go down'. Maybe its time that our 'altars' were set six feet down and decorated with genitalia, if only to move toward restoring a balance.

Ultimately, though, I think what we are talking about is contained in the Taoist yin/yang symbol, where the seed of the high is contained in the low and the seed of the low contained in the high and together they turn the wheel of our lives. It is hidden too in that word 'altar' which in our tradition is an elevated place and in the Indian tradition is a sunken place. The Latin root of this word makes no distinction between the two. The high and the low are not distinguished one from the other. The deeper we go the higher we fly.

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## Further Reading

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