I was sitting having coffee with a friend yesterday, noticing, as usual, the number of couples at the other tables who, instead of interacting with one another, were bowing their heads intently attending to their cell phones. It is a scene that all of us are familiar with, and are probably guilty of at times. I often wonder when I am sitting with a psychotherapy client who is under 30 how much “face time” (no, not the Apple application) they are spending with their acquaintances, and what price we as a society are paying for the wonderful array of technology that has imbued our lives with so much information and entertainment. Children younger than three are familiar with I-pads and smart phones these days, and sometimes are better at operating these devices than I am.

Audrey Punnett’s splendid book, *The Orphan: A Journey to Wholeness*, is a musing on the archetype of the orphan that has stimulated my own thoughts about the expression of the orphan archetype in our culture.
What I took away from Audrey’s book was a new way to look at the symbol of the orphan. Not as something that only children feel at the loss of a parent or as the result of childhood trauma, but the pattern of energy of existential loneliness that we have all felt at some point in our lives, and that is becoming prevalent in our collective unconscious today. We seem to be increasingly interacting with our various “devices” more than we do with face-to-face encounters. So the book had a deep resonance for me, as I thought about the loss of letter writing (remember what it was like receiving a long letter from a dear friend?), conversations on the phone, walks which included perhaps a light touch on one’s arm, and enjoying a meal with a friend, pre-cell phones, texts, and I-pads.

Technology seems to be frequently replacing any live, interactive relationship for many of us. So I wondered yesterday if we are all experiencing the orphan archetype, often replacing our face-to-face encounters with technology. And if that is the case, what, as Robert Romanyshyn queried, (1989) is this symptom of loneliness, the by-product of technology, asking of us?
Punnett writes that the orphan archetype in its solitude “is a kind of abandonment, but what is prominent is the feeling of not being valued in relational moments. This may also be an inner-psychic experience in the revelation or experience of the dark side of god, as it were. The Other may be there, but not present in ways that bring meaning to the child or any orphan. Thus, the feminine or the relationship is not present, and yet, what is needed” (p.129). With our technological communication, we interact with the Other, but is it still in a way that is meaningful for us? What happens to that mysterious alchemy between the glances and gazes of the eye? In the technological realm of Apollo, where is Aphrodite and the feminine relational Other?

I wondered if our devices are becoming “the Other” that Punnett describes; simulacra of the living, reflecting gaze of the human eye, the eyes that looked back at us when we were infants. The eyes that orphans so wistfully long for and desire to see. The living body, the warm touch of a human hand on those walks in the park, the reflecting gaze, so critical in early childhood development and in times of crisis in adulthood. Are we increasingly losing that connection to the body, the symbol of the feminine and relationship? Is technology making orphans of us all? Or, paradoxically, is technology bringing us more connectedness to the world, and to many more people than we could ever meet in our communities in person? Is it opening up relationships with people we would otherwise never have a chance to meet, people who live in other countries and communities, housebound people who cannot get out, providing people like Stephen Hawking a way to communicate? And if that is the case, are we dealing with the “dark face of god” that Audrey Punnett mentions? (p.133). Is it the technological god that we are assisting in its individuation process? If technology has become a modern-day god in that sense, are we creating some kind of alchemical redemption of technology as the suffering god? Or are we creating our own collective isolation in order to experience the symbol of the orphan, who “necessitates an individuation journey… to come to our own true nature. However, the development of this higher consciousness is equivalent to being all alone in the world” (pp.140-141). As Punnett tells us, “one must stay with the suffering because it will become our teacher” (p.2). She adds that part of the suffering is that “the path of individuation must be embarked upon alone, but paradoxically it also must be done in relationship to an Other” (p.138). So perhaps we have manifested the symbol of the orphan through our use of technology, which at times can be expansive and assist in our creation of meaning and the individuation process, while at other times is so very isolating.
H ummm... Maybe this was what Punnett meant about the two sides of the archetype of the orphan; she “stands alone and has on the one hand a potential for growth and new beginnings, and on the other hand, the potential for remaining isolated and on the outside. The tension of these opposite poles... perhaps give us the orphan within us an even greater opportunity for reconciliation” (p.19). So now there is a place for hope within the technology perhaps; a potential for growth, but also a danger of isolation and despair. And here again the individuation process manifests, the “synthesis leading to integration” between the opposite pairs of the symbol (p.6).

Punnett’s book has stimulated thought and investigation surrounding the symbol of the orphan for me. The symbol and the pattern of energy associated with the orphan archetype encompass more than I had imagined when I began her book. I now see the orphan in a different light, and I am quite curious about how it is manifesting in our collective and cultural unconscious, as well as in my personal life and the lives of my clients. I see how the opposites in this symbol spark various discussions, and how they unite and synthesize as well. Punnett states in the beginning of her book that “one’s own journey, despite whatever suffering it entails, is an individual journey and must be honored for the product of the inner change that occurs over a lifetime. Jung thought this was achieved not by analysis, but by synthesis leading to integration...” (p. 6).
Perhaps we are collectively attempting to synthesize the different aspects of relationship through the ubiquitous use of technology. If, as Punnett says, the orphan is the image for the alchemical Philosopher’s Stone, maybe we are attempting to find redemption for the loss of the feminine Other in our technology, the realm of Apollo (p.53). “The symbol of the child without parents indicates a content of the unconscious that is far removed from or very unrelated to the consciousness of the times... the orphan is unrelated because he or she does not have parents and new caregivers must be found” (p.80). What kind of caregiving do we give ourselves within the realm of technology, and how do we become sensitive caregivers to the technology god? How do we assist that god in its individuation process, while reconciling the opposite poles of isolation and relatedness within ourselves? Audrey Punnett’s book holds many clues to the answers we are searching for. This is a very timely book that gives us much needed information regarding how we will proceed in all of our relationships: with each other, with technology, with spirit, and with the earth.

REFERENCE
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