
Archetypes*

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The idea of the 'archetype' has been the source of much misunderstanding among Jung's followers as well as among his critics. The danger lies in not going beyond a single formulation of the archetype and in not following through a gradual and difficult theoretical elaboration to its logical end.

Inherited Systems

In 1910 Jung had already abandoned the idea that the psyche begins to take shape only after birth.

Man 'possesses' many things which he has never acquired but has inherited from his ancestors. He is not born as a tabula rasa, he is nearly born unconscious. But he brings with him systems that are organized and ready to function in a specifically human way, and these he owes to millions of years of human development. . . . man brings with him at birth the ground-plan of his nature, and not only of his individual nature but of his collective nature. These inherited systems correspond to the human situations that had existed since primeval times; youth and old age, birth and death, sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, mating, and so on. Only the individual conscious experiences these things for the first time, but not the bodily system and the unconscious.

(C. W. 4: par. 728)

He does not yet use the term 'archetype,' but the basic idea is already there: The psyche consists of unconscious predispositions that make possible an organized human existence. Archetypes, which have slowly evol-

ved through the course of history, are *a priori* conditions to actual experience.

Original Images (*Urbilder*)

In order to know and analyze these unconscious predispositions, Jung took the path opened up before him by images.

As he listened to his patients' spontaneous imaginings and dreams, Jung was surprised to encounter the same images, situations, and scenes in the dreams of many different patients, but also in fairy tales, myths, and stories indigenous to diverse cultures.

Over the whole of this psychic realm there reign certain motifs, certain typical figures which we can follow far back into history, and even into prehistory. . . . They seem to me to be built into the very structure of man's unconscious, for in no other way can I explain why it is that they occur universally and in identical form. . . .

(C. W. 16: par. 254)

As early as 1911–12 when he wrote the *Symbols of Transformation*, Jung compared different hero myths to the fantasies and the life of a woman patient (Miss Miller) whose case Flounoy had studied. This comparative study clarified for Jung the unconscious processes that lead to symbolic sacrifice and incest. At that time, Jung called the schema common to a set of collective and individual representations an original or primordial image (*Urbild*).

He stated more precisely, and rather vehemently later on, that his goal in formulating this theory of the primordial image was therapeutic and not hermeneutic.

It is inevitable that the mythologem and its content will also be drawn into the limelight. This is not to say that the purpose of the investigation is to interpret the mythologem. But, precisely in this connection, a widespread prejudice reigns that the psychology of unconscious processes is a sort of philosophy designed to explain mythologems.

(C. W. 7: par. 436)

In fact, Jung was particularly sensitive to images. He observed that his patients' psychic difficulties disappeared, or at least were attenuated, once patients began to understand and sense the images underlying their difficulties. For many years, Jung was little inclined to pursue his theoretical reflections further.

When he advanced the concept of archetype for the first time in 1919

in 'Instinct and the Unconscious' (found in C. W. 8), he chose a term that connoted far more the idea of *model* than of *process*. He borrowed the term from St. Augustine for whom this word signified '. . . a *typos* [imprint], a definite grouping of archaic character containing, in form as well as in meaning, mythological motifs' (C. W. 18: par. 80). The French dictionary *Petit Robert* defines the word *archetype* to mean the following: 'A primordial type or idea – an original that serves as a model, an exemplar.' The word refers to a fixed, normative concept and does not easily lend itself to the meaning Jung would later give to it.

The Image Clears the Way (*Bahnung*)

Jung observed, in fact, that the image not only makes an imprint but also directs activity as well. Dreams and fantasies organize human behavior, even when the subject is not conscious of them, in the same way that myths in primitive times suggested possible answers to life's principal problems.

The image is not then a flat representation like a poster. It is a 'functional form'; and '. . . the term "image" is intended to express not only the form of the activity taking place, but the typical situation in which the activity is released' (C. W. 9/1: par. 152).

Jung compared certain representations to the '. . . pattern of ideas, of a numinous or fascinating character, which . . . compels the moth to carry out its fertilizing activity on the yucca plant. . . .' (C. W. 10: par. 547).

Jung thus considered the image much more for its activity than for the representative elements that comprise it. The archetypal idea, then, approaches that of instinct.

In any situation of panic, whether external or internal, the archetypes intervene and allow a man to react in an instinctively adapted way, just as if he had always known the situation: he reacts in the way mankind has always reacted.

(C. W. 18: par. 368)

From Representations to Potentials

Another factor contributed to the evolution of Jung's thought. Very early on, Jung came across the question of the transmission of original images. If these fundamental representational schemes are at work everywhere and at all times, and if it seems unthinkable that they are invented anew in every situation, how then are they transmitted?

Jung believed that the theory of cultural and educational transmission inadequately explains his observations:

But, in point of fact, typical mythologems were observed among individuals to whom all knowledge of this kind was absolutely out of the question, and where indirect derivation from religious ideas that might have been known to them, or from popular figures of speech, was impossible. Such conclusions forced us to assume that we must be dealing with 'autochthonous' revivals independent of all tradition, and, consequently, that 'myth-forming' structural elements must be present in the unconscious psyche.

(C. W. 9/1: par. 259)

He dismissed the 'innate' hypothesis. His knowledge of anthropology forbade him, in fact, from supposing that representations can be transmitted genetically. Yet somehow, his reflections led him to affirm the following in 1921:

Contents of the collective unconscious [are] . . . residues, or 'engrams' . . .

(C. W. 7: par. 158)

The archetypes are as it were the hidden foundations of the conscious mind. . . . They are inherited with the brain structure – indeed, they are its psychic aspect.

(C. W. 10: par. 53)

How can one simultaneously hold two apparently incompatible views: that representations are not innate and that original images are biologically inscribed? Jung hesitated to commit himself until he was helped along by an analogy taken from the development of animal behavior.

No biologist would ever dream of assuming that each individual acquires his general mode of behavior afresh each time. It is much more probable that the young weaver-bird builds his characteristic nest because he is a weaver bird and not a rabbit. Similarly, it is more probable that man is born with a specifically human mode of behavior and not with that of a hippopotamus or with none at all.

(C. W. 8: par. 435)

Psychology can therefore find inspiration in the way biology frames the problem concerning the innateness or the transmission of certain ideas. It is not representations that are transmitted but the structures

from which representations arise. This view allowed Jung to define the archetypes as 'congenital structures.'

Pattern of Behavior

Even if this idea of congenital structure is more satisfactory to Jung, the question of its nature still needs to be asked. However, around 1938 Jung came across an idea that seemed useful to him in defining congenital structures – the idea of *pattern of behavior*. He borrowed this concept from biology and continued to use it well into his later works, even though by then his thought had evolved beyond that idea. In his 1946 version of *Analytical Psychology and Education* (found in C. W. 18), Jung once again took up and explicated an earlier 1910 assertion relating to the topic of inherited systems, using the concept of *pattern of behavior*.

These inherited systems correspond to the human situations that have existed since primeval times. . . . I have called this congenital and preexistent instinctual model, or pattern of behavior, the archetype.

(C. W. Vol. 4: par. 728)

Furthermore, in a text found in the 1952 version of *Symbols of Transformation*, he wrote:

This observation was not an isolated case: it was manifestly not a question of inherited ideas, but of an inborn disposition to produce parallel thought-formations, or rather of identical psychic structures common to all men, which I later called the archetypes of the collective unconscious.

(C. W. 5: par. 224)

Archetypal Images and Archetypes

By following the logic of the idea of the archetype, Jung was led to distinguish the archetypal image from the archetype *per se*. The pattern of the archetype is genetically transmitted, while the circumstances surrounding the archetype flesh it out into a particular image. It is at this latter level that culture plays a determining role.

In 1946 in his article 'On the Nature of the Psyche' (C. W. VIII), Jung arrived at a decisive formulation of the archetype:

The archetypal representations (images and ideas) mediated to us by the unconscious should not be confused with the archetype as such.

They are very varied structures which all point back to one essentially 'irrepresentable' basic form. . . . it seems to me probable that the real nature of the archetype is not capable of being made conscious. . . .
 (C. W. 8, par. 417)

Whatever we say about the archetypes, they remain visualizations or concretizations which pertain to the field of consciousness. But – we cannot speak about archetypes in any other way. We must, however, constantly bear in mind that what we mean by 'archetype' is in itself irrepresentable, but has effects which make visualizations of it possible, namely, the archetypal images and ideas.

(C. W. 8, par. 417)

From the above quotations, there follows this key idea: '[The archetype] cannot be explained in just any way, but only in the one that is indicated by that particular individual' (C. W. 18: par. 589).

Organs of Information

Even while he resorted to using, successively, the notions of form, structure, living form, and finally pattern, Jung indicated from time to time another possible line of thought: '[The archetypes are] a living system of reactions and aptitudes. . . .' (C. W. 8: par. 339); 'Archetypes . . . are living entities. . . .' (C. W. 18: par. 1272).

If the idea of pattern of behavior interested Jung, it was because this concept allowed him to make a link between unconscious psychological organizations, which he sought to understand, and what can be known of animal behavior. But the concept of pattern still bore too close a resemblance to the idea of model. Jung sensed that the 'pattern' concept does not correspond exactly to that of 'archetype.'

He made several attempts to sketch out other ways of seeing the archetype:

The archetypes are, so to speak, organs of the prerational psyche.
 (C. W. 11: par. 845)

For the archetype is an element of our psychic structure and thus a vital and necessary component in our psychic economy.

(C. W. 9/1: par. 271)

[The archetype] is a self-activating organism, endowed with generative power.

(C. W. 6: par. 754)

Jung's characterization of the archetype as organ is excellent because it reflects the archetype's constant activity and the role the archetype plays in the psychic apparatus. In addition, he compared the archetype to the eye, a comparison that precludes description of the archetype as model. Rather, archetypal images are as different from the archetype as optical images are different from the eye. Archetypal and optical images are formed by the relation that their respective organs have to the external object. At least twice in 1946, Jung resorted to another comparison that likens the archetype to the axial system which, while having no existence of its own, somehow directs ions and molecules as they form crystals.

In fact, Jung's thought began to hint at a concept that was not yet available in Jung's time: the concept of information. The role Jung attributed to archetypes is perfectly intelligible if one uses the concepts of information theory: (1) archetypes condition, orient, and support the formation of the individual psyche according to a plan that is inherent to them; (2) whenever the psyche is disturbed, archetypes intervene by considering information received either from the psyche itself or from the environment; (3) archetypes ensure an exchange of information between the psyche and its surroundings.

Let me add that for Jung – and he was not hesitant on this point – the archetypes are inscribed in the body in the same way that all organs of information are inscribed in living matter. This implies, among other things, that archetypes are genetically transmitted.

Retrospectively, it is interesting to note that the idea about the genetic transmission of archetypes is already expressed in a text dating back to 1921.

We are forced to assume that the given structure of the brain does not owe its peculiar nature merely to the influence of surrounding conditions, but also and just as much to the peculiar and autonomous quality of living matter, i.e., to a law inherent in life itself. The given constitution of the organism, therefore, is on the one hand a product of external conditions, while on the other it is determined by the intrinsic nature of living matter.

(C. W. 6: par. 748)

There is nothing to prevent us from assuming that certain archetypes exist even in animals, that they are grounded in the peculiarities of the living organism itself and are therefore direct expressions of life whose nature cannot be further explained.

(C. W. 7: par. 109)

Archetypes, Complexes, and Symbols

Having elaborated his theory this far, Jung asked two questions which we will take up one at a time: (1) What do the unconscious organizers do? (2) How are the unconscious organizers related to genetic factors?

The distinction Jung made between the archetypal image and archetype (illustrated by the comparison of the archetype to the eye) suggests that representations come about when unconscious patterns select data and put it into form. The same hypothesis holds for the formation of imagos, complexes, and the psychic apparatus, the latter being structured around the ego complex. Archetypal images, however, differ from these other psychic entities in one major way: when the individual psyche is constituted, it begets the unconscious. The agencies that make up the individual psyche remain, in fact, partially unconscious. Their coming into existence entails deficiencies, the consequences of which are equally unconscious; and the activity of these agencies can bring to consciousness only part of the information received. Thus an unconscious dynamic different from the archetypal one is developed and structured.

There are therefore two composite entities whose reasons for being unconscious are quite different. One belongs to the species, the other is the counterpart to individual consciousness. The constitution, functioning, and history of these entities are governed by laws proper to each.

The theoretical effort of psychoanalysis has focused principally upon those unconscious dynamics that result from the individual's personal life, most probably because analysands have usually been of the neurotic sort until fairly recently. Jung found himself in a very different situation. For many years, he had to treat psychotic patients in psychiatric wards. He had to deal not with dysfunctions, but with the suffering of psyches that had failed to achieve adequate organization. This experience led Jung to pay particular attention to the biological factors that might underlie psychosis and to inquire into those archaic dynamics that are incomparably stronger than the conscious personality. Following a critical period in his own life, which we have already mentioned, Jung discovered within himself the same kind of dynamics he had observed in psychotics. He noticed, however, that these dynamics need not cause destruction, but that they could, on the contrary, exercise a positive influence. By confronting these dynamics, Jung observed that psychological growth comes from the unconscious. Jung's twofold experience of psychotic patients and of psychic maturation led him to surmise, in what he wrote between the years 1919 and 1923, that unconscious factors are at the source of both psychic illness and psychic healing.

How can archetypal factors be considered psychic organizers if they are responsible for psychic disturbances? Jung observed, first of all, that a representation, an affect, or an impulse is more powerful the less

individualized it is and the more it resembles the reactions typical of many people. He concluded that these representations, or more elementary impulses, express more directly general situations and, therefore, psychic organizations that are valid for everyone. He called these organizations 'collective' to indicate that the energy they have at their disposal and the forms to which they give life are what make us human. To the extent that life circumstances and especially heredity, the desire of one's parents, as well as social, cultural, and economic conditions do not allow a sufficiently strong conscious psyche to take up these collective dynamics, the personality risks being flooded or insidiously possessed by unconscious factors.

One can also observe in analytic therapy that consciousness can become caught in an ambivalence particularly evident in the bipolarity of images and of complexes. It can also be seen that consciousness evolves by differentiating the archetypes – for example, by differentiating the animus and the anima from their respective parental imagos. The inherent ambivalence of archetypes and their mutual contamination of each other contribute to the individual psyche's unfinished and disordered state.

The archetypes can therefore function as organizers only by virtue of the activity of conscious factors. They are, however, always present, as constant sources of information for consciousness. Through compensation, archetypes correct individual psychic disturbances and propose symbols that can give direction to the psyche.

The presence of archetypes justifies the therapeutic question as to whether it is possible to relate to unconscious organizing schemas such that they can have a positive influence on life. The search for an answer to that question is at the foundation of Jungian analysis. To become conscious not only consists in discovering and experiencing the mechanisms that simultaneously fashion and ensnare us, but also involves allowing that which can repair the psyche to do so. This is what is meant by the idea of 'relation to the unconscious,' an idea first brought to psychoanalysis by Jung.

Psychoid, Synchronicity, Unity of the World

'The direct perception of the archetypal world inside us is just as doubtfully correct as that of the physical world outside us' (C. W. 14: par. 787). The archetypes are no more capable of being made conscious than the reality-in-itself of the universe. Archetypes and the universe are unknowable except through their activities. Everything goes on as if the psyche were not entirely able to assimilate the archetypes. They seem

to be somehow 'beyond' or 'beneath' whatever is psychic in nature. This was what Jung meant by the term 'psychoid.'

I have never been inclined to think that our senses were capable of perceiving all forms of being. I have, therefore, even hazarded the postulate that the phenomenon of archetypal configurations – which are psychic events par excellence – may be founded upon a psychoid base, that is, upon an only partially psychic and possibly altogether different form of being.

(M. D. R.: 351)

Jung asked himself, then, if an encounter with the psychoid nature of the archetypes might not occur in those surprising moments when external events coincide with corresponding psychic states.

The coincidences he noted, which he called 'synchronistic phenomena,' are not merely a sort of analogical play of dates, names, and places. Rather, the experience of synchronicity is an experience of time. Events correspond to subjective states in such a way that whoever is involved in the event is touched at the level of reality. The perception of the passage of time seems to be suspended in order to allow for the perception of another organization where as-yet-unknown dynamics are articulated according to a different set of laws. The significance of synchronistic phenomena comes from the impression that not all of life can be explained merely in the framework of past-present-future, but that life also – one could say, rather – belongs to altogether another register. Concrete circumstances and psychic phenomena appear to be coordinated by a center that is outside the individual psyche.

To account for these synchronistic events, Jung proposed the hypothesis of a psycho-physical continuum. He introduced this continuum by comparing it to the light spectrum (C. W. 8: par. 367).

The psyche, which we tend to see as a subjective fact, extends outside of us, beyond time, beyond space.

(E.: pp. 540–1, tr. RGJ)

The deeper and more obscure these layers are, the more they lose their individual originality. The deeper they are, that is, the more they approach the functional autonomous systems, the more they become collective and universal and are extinguished in the materiality of the body, that is, in the chemical body. The carbon of the human body is simply carbon; at its deepest level, the psyche is but the universe.

(I. E. M.: p. 454, tr. RGJ)

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