



The Alchemy of Symbols

Module 2: Amplify
consciousness through unlocking
archetypal structures in the
psyche.

Anja van Kralingen

The Centre for Applied Jungian
Studies



Applied Jung The Alchemy of Symbols

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Module 2: Amplifying consciousness through unlocking archetypal structures in the psyche.

Welcome to Module 2 in the Alchemy of Symbols Course. This module will introduce you to the idea of the collective unconscious and archetypal dynamics, and the affect and influence this has on you as an individual. The applications for this module explores your own myth and archetypal structures. We will explore archetypal dynamics that you experience and I will guide you in identifying the myth that lives in and through you, and what this means in terms of your individuation process.

Jung and Freud

When Freud wrote his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, Jung was intrigued. His own work on repression and Freud's approach to access repression through dreams fascinated him. His thoughts on dreams and Freud's interpretation of them, started a relationship that lasted six years. The two men exchanged hundreds of letters during their association. When they first met their conversation lasted for thirteen hours continuously. The two men were extremely fond of each other, with Freud expecting that Jung would eventually take over his work and become his heir in the emerging movement of Psychoanalysis. Unfortunately (or fortunately depending on your perspective) Jung had his own ideas that did not sit well with Freud and these ideas eventually caused a rift that could never be bridged. One of these ideas is the collective unconscious, a signature Jungian concept and one of the main reasons for the split between Jung and Freud.

The Collective Unconscious



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When Jung was working at Burghölzli, a renowned psychiatric clinic in Zurich, specializing in schizophrenic patients, he realized that the fantasies of his patients often reflect a myth or religious image from other cultures of which the patient had no conscious knowledge. This was the beginning of his research into mythology. Jung spent years researching mythological and religious themes. He came to realize that although people come from different backgrounds and cultures, their psyches often use similar images, patterns or ideas to convey what they are experiencing.

Freud believed that the unconscious was solely the metaphorical dumping ground for repressed fantasies and desires. Jung however posited that the human being shares a common unconscious heritage, independently of any repressed contents. He called this the 'collective unconscious'. The collective unconscious contains the building blocks of our human identity and character: our drives, desires, a priori conditions of experiences, how we communicate, relate and so forth. Just as birds know when to migrate, or turtles know how to get back to the beach they were born on, so does the human being instinctively or archetypally know and experience what it is to be human.

From a depth psychological perspective, it means is that you are not alone in your experiences, your obstacles, your goals etc. What you are experiencing and feeling and doing – somewhere someone else is going through the same thing, has gone through it, or will go through it, or at least something very similar. This is the nature of the archetypal patterns that make us human.



Universal or personal

In Jung's theorem all phenomenon that we experience are based on archetypes. These archetypes populate the collective unconscious. Archetypes are the blueprints of what we base our interpretation of the world on. The Archetype precedes the thought, impression, experiences or pattern of behaviour. For example, the concept of a flower is an Archetype and singular in character, but the expression of distinct, particular flowers in the world is vast and multiple. So too does this hold true for the Archetypal experience of the mother or the experience of loss and so on.

As an individual, you have access to these archetypes through the collective unconscious. Archetypes constellate in you, and express themselves through you, as complexes. As Darryl Sharpe¹ says, the complex is the flesh on the bones of the archetype². This complex is rooted in the archetype but has unique qualities that belong to you. So as an example, the mother archetype is experienced in a very specific way as your personal mother complex. Your mother complex has certain tendencies and it embodies a specific form.

On a personal level, we embody archetypal drives that live through us. Perhaps we are the orphan child, the hero, the wise old woman, the victim, the villain or a combination of two or more such archetypes. When unconscious, these patterns predetermine, and even when made conscious, significantly influence our actions and reactions to situations.

It is the same with any archetypal experience or form, i.e. your archetypal experience of being in love would be unique to you. The things that you do when you are in love, the way you feel, the thoughts that well up within you, those would all be specific and unique to you.

¹ Analyst, scholar, writer who started Inner City Books publishing house.

² Sharp, D. (2001). *Digesting Jung: Food for the journey* (Vol. 95). Inner City Books, p. 14



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In encountering any emotive experience, as a human being, you are grappling with a transpersonal situation that transcends your ego based personality. The manner in which a psychological challenge presents itself to you, the feelings that such a challenge arouses in you and the thoughts, images and ideas, that you bring to bear on the situation, follow pre-established pathways.

Whilst Einstein may have revolutionized the foundations of Newtonian physics, his desire to solve the riddles of nature, his perseverance beyond initial setbacks, his cognitive processing and analytical comprehension of the problems involved, his reliance on creative imagination and ultimately the satisfaction in discovering working solutions to such challenges would have been very similar to that of Newton's.

To use another example, this is why teenagers all over the world, from different cultures and different backgrounds behave the same way when they reach puberty. This is an archetypal pattern, predetermined through our connection to the collective unconscious.

To quote Jung:

“My thesis then is as follows: in addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche (even if we tack on the personal unconscious as an appendix), there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. The collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the Archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and give definite form to certain psychic contents.”

Jung, C.G., The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, vol. 9, part 1, p. 43

Jung believed that the personality is not solely influenced by our sexual development, but more through the collective unconscious. Who we are is based on our culture, where we live, our circumstances and influences such as social factors, etc.



Symbolising unconscious content in order to make it conscious

As human beings we are influenced by archetypal patterns both individually and collectively. These archetypal patterns live in our unconscious, serves to motivate and drive us.

The modern medical and scientific fields are to a large extent influenced by the search for eternal youth. All the myths from the search for the holy grail, vampire myths, the fountain of youth, the elixir of life, these are all the archetypal influences that drive many areas of modern science and medical research³. To mention Ray Kurzweil's search for singularity – the point where artificial intelligence finally reaches consciousness – is to eventually allow human beings to upload their consciousness into some form of computer in order to live forever. Wanting to live forever is an idea and drive of one of the the key archetypal patterns that live through us.

When dealing with archetypes it is important to note that archetypes are not moral or ethical or good or bad. They just are. Archetypes from a human experiential perspective are both constructive and destructive. All archetypes are like that. To use the mother archetype as an example again, she can either be the nurturing caring mother or the all-consuming mother. So our experience of these archetypes in the form of complexes are not always constructive. This is where working with stories and myth play a powerful role. If the archetypes that live through you are not constructive, how do you move across the threshold from the destructive archetypal influence to a constructive archetypal influence?

With stories and myth you can explore the dynamic and establish where you find yourself in your personal myth and what the threshold experience in the myth means to you.

All stories contain these threshold experiences; for example, I have a friend whose story is The Ugly Duckling. This story has resonated with her since she was a small child and as an adult she

³ From The Encyclopaedia of Religion, Jones, L. (2005). Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA. p. 459



started to work actively with this story. The threshold experience in this story is when the ugly duckling looks in the water and sees his own reflection. What does it mean to see your own reflection? It alludes to reflecting on who you are and through this reflection one becomes aware of the real you, not the person you believe you are. If you remember I mentioned in Module 1 the story of Graham and Amanda and their relationship with their legend. The experience of reflecting on who you are versus who you think you are, is captured in this myth of the ugly duckling. The value and worth the ugly duckling believed he was, is confronted and shifted through the process of reflection.

Jung's research into mythology eventually led him to alchemy, which he realized was a metaphor, or myth, for psychological and spiritual transformation. Working with archetypal dynamics is such a process of alchemy. Transformation in terms of symbolic alchemy is working pro-actively with dynamics in order to bring about a movement from destructive to constructive, from stagnation to movement, from unbalanced to balanced, from death to life. As the alchemist attempted to transform lead into gold, the symbolic alchemist works to transform unconsciousness into consciousness; and the destructive into the constructive. To explain this more clearly – when we make our unconscious aspect such as negative traits which are working against us and wreaking havoc in our lives conscious, we are changing negative qualities into pure gold.

Working with Story and Myth

Collective human experience is shared and relayed through story and myth. Each of us are living our own myths through experiences and events which shape our myth. Myths express the unconscious processes that occur in the psyche. As a human being we are confronted by situations that are archetypal in nature. These events occur, sometimes only once, other times repeatedly. Depth psychology attempts to help an individual to bring the unconscious influence and beliefs into consciousness. When we speak of depth psychology (in other words psychology that deals with the unconscious component in our psyches) we talk about therapy that



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addresses the unconscious component and its effects on the individual. Jung offers a way of exploring these archetypal patterns and experiences through symbolisation; and for our purposes in this module, more specifically through a mythical analysis.

To symbolise your unique experience in the world, you can relate your story to a myth, a song, a movie, a book, a picture, a painting or even a dream. This form of symbolisation, when done properly, transforms your personal experience from a pedestrian meaningless story into a myth, containing a magical, numinous quality. It will contain your experience and your story in a deeper more layered way, filled with potential and meaning. Myth contains this layered meaning and the power of myth is found not only in the stories from Greek and Roman mythology, but also in modern day stories. Any story that stays with you contains something which you are unable to consciously express. These are wonderful gifts from the unconscious.

To explain this concept, I would like you to think of a movie that you have seen or a book that you have read and often think of. It could even be from when you were a child or a young adult. Reflect on the similarities between the story and your own life. What about the characters in the story? Who do you relate to, who are the allies or enemies of the main character. Are you the main character or do you relate to someone else in the story? There are so many ways to delve into the meaning of the story and you may be surprised about what it reveals to you about yourself and the path that you are on in your own life.

I would like to use an example of working with myth in terms of an archetypal dynamic. I am sure that you are familiar with the myth of the Minotaur. Half human half bull, the offspring of a god and a mortal woman, the Minotaur lives in a labyrinth, and needs human sacrifice every year. This myth is a story about dealing with trauma. The myth explores the experience of trauma on a symbolic level. It speaks about re-injuring yourself regularly by feeding the monster with memories and ruminations. These lead you into a maze, where you get lost and find the skulls and bones of the death that you leave here every time you come. It addresses the fear of moving around in the dark, too afraid to breathe for the Minotaur will hear you and devour you. This myth also explores the approach in slaying the Minotaur. You need the help of



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a goddess, a thread to find your way back, a sword and a light. The light is the power in conscious awareness, the sword is discretion. Bringing the unconscious fears into the light of consciousness and discerning what is real and what is not. These myths contain the experiences we have as humans, Archetypal experiences of loss, of love, of sacrifice, and so forth. When working with these dynamics through symbolising it through stories, it helps us to explore the depths and layers of the experiences within ourselves in order to gain a better understanding and awareness and to ultimately transform.

Symbolising archetypal patterns

We are constantly experiencing situations and events that keep repeating themselves. You meet the same type of person, or have a similar experience in relationships. You leave your job and find the new position offers the same obstacles. You find yourself constantly thwarted or blocked. These experiences are archetypal in nature. These dynamics live within you and keep repeating themselves because they are archetypal dynamics that are expressing themselves through you.

Broadly speaking there are two principle reasons why this happens.

The first is that this dynamic is the result of a complex operating through you. To find out more about what a complex is, please [follow this link for a basic introduction to the idea](#). The complex is bringing about this experience because it is trying to accomplish its own objective (despite what the ego wants). When originating from a complex, the pattern is neurotic and needs to be related to as such. However, it is important to realise that this experience can also be an impulse from the psyche to bring about a movement towards individuation. Working with these dynamics will unearth unconscious content that needs to be addressed.

The second reason is that this archetypal dynamic is the psyche's response to an outdated inappropriate ruling attitude, which is dominating the personality. Often in life, we adopt a certain attitude in order to adapt to circumstances or to achieve our goals. But life is fluid and



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in motion, and often this ruling attitude which worked for you in the past, is now not working anymore; and the psyche will attempt to break it in whichever way it can in order to bring a more balanced and more appropriate approach. A healing illness as it were, the soul falls ill, but it does so precisely to bring about an evolution, leading to a greater and healthier unity and expression of itself.

When faced with a repetitive pattern, it is a good idea to relate to it as a symbol. In order to symbolise your experience, start by writing the experience down and then find an image, a song, poem, object, painting or anything that comes to mind whilst writing down the story. Remember you cannot consciously create a symbol, it must come to you from the unconscious. Whilst reflecting on your story, something will arise in consciousness. A song, a painting, an experience, anything that comes into your consciousness is the symbol. Take the first thing, no matter how ridiculous or stupid it may seem. This is the correct symbol. We will explore this technique in the applications document.

In this module we will look at symbolising the pattern in order to gain more insight into it, but in Module 4 we will explore working with these patterns in order to transform them.

So we have come to the end of the second module's podcast. I hope you enjoyed it and some stories or myths came up for you during the lecture. Write these down in your journal, because we will be working with them in the applications.

Please listen to the podcast on the applications or read the transcript next.

Looking forward to hearing about your stories on the forum.

Chat again next week

Anja



Module 2: Applications

The following applications will help you uncover your archetypal myths and dynamics. These are examples of how to access these myths and dynamics and not limited to these applications only.

Please note: The magic of symbol work is unleashed through the application of the concepts. If you have the time, work through all of these applications, if your time is limited, focus on Application A only.

We welcome your input and ideas on this week's work on the Forum. Please share your questions, ideas, thoughts and inspirations on this platform.

Application A: identifying a personal myth

The following application is designed to help you uncover either the, or one of the, defining myths (archetypal story) that live in your psyche and constitute a part of your individuation potential.

Reflect on a story that you loved as a child. It can be a TV programme, a book, a myth, a story someone told you, or a movie you saw as a child. This period can be from toddler to young adult, before the age of 21.

First capture the story in your journal to the best of your ability without referring to the original version. So in other words, capture the story as you remember it.

Once you have done this, reflect on the following:

- What is the key theme of the story?
- Who are you in this story? For example, are you the main character, or do you identify with another character more?
- What is the telos of this story (where is it going)?



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- What do you think the essence of the story is?
- Can you identify some element of this story in your own life?
- What is the threshold experience in this story, i.e. the point where it changes direction, offers redemption or changes dynamics.
- Investigate the original version – does your version differ, and if so how? What does this say about your memory of the story?
- How would you like this story to end? Can you imagine a different outcome?
- How can you cross the threshold in the story? If there is no threshold in your story, what could it be?
- How do you feel about this story and its relationship with your own story?

Application B: identifying a current archetypal story in your life

Identify a story or event in a story that is currently on your mind. A book you are reading, or just finished, a TV series that you are watching, a movie you saw recently. Perhaps the whole story affected you or just an event or incident in the story.

Capture this story in your journal.

Reflect on the following:

- What is the key theme of this story/event?
- Who are you in this story? Perhaps the main character, or is there another character you identify with?
- Why do you identify with this character? Explain what it is that you admire about them.
- Is there another character in the story that you dislike? Explain what it is about them that brings up negative emotions.
- What is the telos of this story (where is it going)?



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- Can you identify this theme in your current life?
- How does it reflect in your current life, does it point to something that is lacking, or that you desire, or that irritates you?
- If there was a negative character in your story, can you find that character's qualities in yourself in relation to your current situation?
- What does the story reveal to you about yourself?

Application C: symbolising an archetypal dynamic

Reflect on a repeating pattern in your life, or an obstacle that keeps occurring.

Write this pattern down in your journal. Write it in as much detail as possible, especially how you feel about it.

Now you are going to actively symbolise it.

Allow the symbol to appear. Remember that you cannot consciously select a symbol, it must arise spontaneously from the unconscious. Being active as opposed to passive in this respect is focusing fully on the intention and expectation of an appropriate symbol. Take the first thing that pops into your mind, no matter how stupid or banal it may seem. Even if it seems to be too literal, work with it. After all your unconscious has decided to represent this dynamic with this image. Capture it in your journal.

Remember that the symbol can be absolutely anything – a song, a poem, a photograph, an object, an animal, etc.

Once you identified your symbol, reflect on the following:

- Describe the symbol in detail in your journal.
- Where is the symbol in relation to your body or your person? (In other words, is it something you could touch or carry or wear or is it removed from you?) What do you think that means in term of your relationship with this dynamic?



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- Does the symbol remind you of something – such as a place or a person or a memory?
How does this relate to your dynamic?
- What feeling does the symbol evoke in you?
- Can you interact with the symbol in some way?
- Explore the objective meaning of the symbol. Does it reflect anything to you about this dynamic?

Conclusion

As I mention in the lecture, this work touches on the transpersonal, the aspect of you that is not directly linked to your upbringing and what moulded you into who you are today. This aspect of you is linked to the collective unconscious and brings into being a force greater than your ego. We are not masters in our own house, Jung said, and what that means is that we do not have complete control over our lives. This archetypal work attempts to make sense and understand the effects of these forces. The course is not about how to gain control over these forces, because it is impossible, but rather to align oneself with these forces. The archetypes that live through you are after all wholly part of you; and from an authentic perspective you need to incorporate these drives into alignment with who you are. From a Jungian perspective, whatever is repressed or unconscious acts against the ego, so a healthy psyche is determined by your ability to incorporate and contain these archetypal forces into your concept of self.