



MAGNUM OPUS: NIGREDO

Module 2: The Collective Unconscious and
Archetypes

QUOTE

"Every interpretation necessarily remains an 'as-if.' The ultimate core of meaning may be circumscribed, but not described."¹ "An archetypal content expresses itself, first and foremost, in metaphors. If such a content should speak of the sun and identify with it the lion, the king, the hoard of gold guarded by the dragon, or the power that makes for the life and health of man, it is neither the one thing nor the other, but the unknown third thing that finds more or less adequate expression in all these similes, yet-- to the perpetual vexation of the intellect-- remains unknown and not to be fitted into a formula." (Jung, CW, V. 9i, p. 267)

The Collective Unconscious and Archetypes
Compiled by The Centre for Applied Jungian Studies

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Transcript of Podcast

Hello, and welcome to the second lecture on Archetypes in the Nigredo programme. This lecture explores two of Jung definitive ideas, archetypes and the collective unconscious.

Introduction

Carl Gustav Jung, (1875 – 1961), the Swiss psychiatrist and academic, was an early, and key, collaborator of Freud's; and at one time, he was the heir apparent to the psychoanalytic legacy. Jung made a big impact in medical and forensic psychology, early in his career, whilst at Burgholzli Psychiatric Clinic, with his word association experiment. The word association experiment had a particular significance for psychoanalysis and was a catalyst to his association and collaboration with Freud. However, Jung and Freud split around 1913, under somewhat acrimonious circumstances, as a consequence of both personal and theoretical differences. Jung went on to develop his own school of psychoanalytic thought, initially called complex psychology and later analytical psychology (most often referred to simply as Jungian psychology).

Jung's writing is contained in the 20 volumes of his Collected Works, which offer a detailed exposition of his thought, and application of his technique both clinically and culturally. Jungian psychology, whilst for most of the 20th century was in the shadow of Freud and psychoanalysis, went on to thrive and become perhaps the most well-known and popular alternative in depth

psychology to Freudian psychoanalysis. The schism that developed between Jung and Freud lasted their entire careers, and has remained as a gulf between their two respective and competing schools of psychodynamics.

In this module, I will focus on one of key theoretical differences between the two schools, and a defining concept for Jungian psychology, Jung's hypothesis of the "collective unconscious." The theoretical point of departure is summed up quite succinctly in this statement, from the forward to Symbols of Transformation, originally published in 1912, and later substantially revised in 1952:

"To free medical psychology from the subjective and personalistic bias that characterized its outlook at that time, and to make it possible to understand the unconscious as an objective and collective psyche"¹

Above the door to his home, and later engraved on his tombstone, Jung had the following phrase, in Latin,

Vocatus atque non vocatus, Deus aderit.

Bidden or unbidden, God will be present.

That phrase expresses the essence of the collective unconscious. This statement, at least as it applies to Jungian theory, should not be read as a metaphysical assertion, positing an absolute and divine being. It is rather a recognition of the phenomenological and consequently psychological reality,

¹ Jung, Symbols of Transformation, CW. 5, p.xxiii

and ubiquitous presence, of a transpersonal, objective, dimension of the psyche, that structures and conditions our psychology.

Neither is this intended as a denial of the subjective, personal and developmental factors, and their determining influence, on the subject's psychology. In this regard, Jung follows very much in the Freudian psychoanalytic tradition. He understands and accepts the subjective experience as the central domain of inquiry for psychology. He appreciates the coordinates of the subject's personal existence and her developmental history, as not only having a significant impact on the subject's psychology but also being the first and primary field of inquiry for the psychologist.

Furthermore, Jung is largely sympathetic to the defining role of infantile sexuality and even the Oedipal Complex. Whilst he does not give it the same exclusive accord that Freud does, he is entirely satisfied that its effects can hardly be denied.

However, Jung holds that any analysis that stops at the personal, subjective and developmental factors is incomplete, and fails to recognize the objective, transpersonal, collective dimension, which plays, perhaps, an even more foundational role in determining the coordinates of the subject's psychology and subjective responses to any given situation.

Let's consider the nature of the collective unconscious first, and after that we will look more specifically at the role of archetypes in our psychologies.

The Collective Unconscious

I want to begin by sharing two short passages with you.

The first is from *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*²,

“Jung did not regard the unconscious as solely a repository of repressed, infantile, personal experience but also as a locus of psychological activity which differed from and was more objective than personal experience, since it is related directly to the phylogentic and instinctual bases of the human race... The contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness and reflect archetypal processes... Inasmuch as the unconscious is a psychological concept, its contents as a whole, are of a psychological nature... Images, symbols and fantasies may be termed the language of the [collective] unconscious”

And then this definition given by Jung in *The Collected Works, vol. 9, part 1*³,

“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-

² pp. 155-156.

³ p. 43.

existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and give definite form to certain psychic contents.”

The mind, even at birth, is not a tabula rasa (a blank slate). The mind, like the body, is governed and structured by *a priori* forms, dynamics, imaginal capacities and cognitive pathways. Like the body or any other natural phenomena the mind, or psyche, interacts with its environment along specific pre-established channels of operation. The contents of the mind, including the personal contents, are interpreted through and subsumed by this impersonal and ‘objective psyche’.

Subjectivity is the experience of the personal self, the individual journey comprising of one’s thoughts, experiences and memories; but this, for Jung, is set against, and contextualized by, an impersonal and objective ‘collective unconscious’.

The collective unconscious in itself needn’t be conceived of as a static unchanging entity. It can, to a degree, be understood in Darwinian framework, as an evolving entity. Nevertheless, such change, if it occurs at all, would not be significant in the life of a single individual. For all intents and purposes this inherited portion of the psyche, both personal and collective, would be strictly parametrized in a similar fashion to the way an individual is born with a specific physical organism.

Following on this idea of an evolved, differentiated aspect of the collective unconscious can lead, and Jung toyed with this, to the idea of a racial, cultural, historical and familial layer to the collective unconscious. This idea is

provocative and is rightly criticized as being both socially undesirable and essentialist in nature. Nevertheless, it provides a metaphorical basis, a kind of typology, with which to better understand the overarching idea of a shared unconscious mind.

Jung's realisation that our psyche is not only personal but also collective, objective or transpersonal, has significant, and very real, psychological implications.

Very few, if any, psychological challenges are personal or unique. Whilst it would seem a folly to deny the possibility of a 'first encounter', i.e. the first time a single individual encounters and has to grapple with a psychic challenge, this situation would constitute a truly tiny percentage of the total of such encounters across human history. Someone somewhere has had to grapple with the same or a very similar situation. In encountering *this* situation, you are grappling with a *transpersonal* condition of being a human being that transcends your personal context.

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 more similar than dissimilar to Newton's.

An understanding of the collective or group consciousness in which you are contextualized provides valuable insight into the nature of your personal psychology, both in terms of issues being faced and possible solutions. There are almost invariably historical accounts, journal entries, cultural narratives or myths where an encounter of similar structure and dynamic is addressed. Familiarity and insight into such material provides a roadmap of the current dilemma.

Archetypes

With this foundation in place let us now consider the nature or character of archetypes.

I will start again with a few short quotes.

The first from *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analyses*⁴

“The inherited part of the psyche; structuring patterns of psychological performance linked to instinct, a hypothetical entity irrepresentable in itself and evident only through its manifestations.”

And then two short quotes from Jung, the first from his essay *The Structure of the Psyche*:

⁴ P. 26

"All the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes. This is particularly true of religious ideas, but the central concepts of science, philosophy, and ethics are no exception to this rule. In their present form they are variants of archetypal ideas created by consciously applying and adapting these ideas to reality. For it is the function of consciousness, not only to recognize and assimilate the external world through the gateway of the senses, but to translate into visible reality the world within us."

And this one from *Collected Works*, vol. 9.15,

"The ground principles, the archetypoi, of the unconscious are indescribable because of their wealth of reference, although in themselves recognizable. The discriminating intellect naturally keeps on trying to establish their singleness of meaning and thus misses the essential point; for what we can above all establish as the one thing consistent with their nature is their manifold meaning, their almost limitless wealth of reference, which makes any unilateral formulation impossible."

In the history of ideas, Archetypes are antedated by a number of broadly idealistic formulations. Possibly the closest to Jung's formulation of Archetypes, and the ones which had the most direct influence on him are *Platonic Forms*, and Kant's concept of *noumena*.

Immanuel Kant in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/ 1787) distinguishes between *phenomena* and *noumena*. Phenomena includes all sensible,

⁵ Par. 80

experiential and empirical content i.e. everything we can ever encounter directly. Noumena, by contradistinction, are things as they are in themselves, independently of the human mind's perception of them. They are pure abstract forms, patterning perception, cognition and reason, but devoid of any sensible content themselves; and occur *a priori* (prior to experience).

Archetypes are innate, universal and hereditary. They contain shared experiences and knowledge of our species; they are recognizable in image, idea, pattern, form or structure. These archetypal forms or structures have a profound effect on us, on our psychologies, the way our cognitive process work. They are only knowable *indirectly* through archetypal manifestations. Like Kant's idea of noumena, archetypes transcend the bounds of reason. The implication of this is that we can infer their existence but not fully comprehend their nature. They express unlearnt tendencies, they order our experiences and they are unconscious.

These Archetypes constellates in our psyches in a unique and personal way. The human experience consists of many archetypal patterns into which we tap at some point in our lives. It shapes the impersonal aspect of our personalities e.g. gender, race, culture, language. It orders our conscious and unconscious experiences. Archetypes are remarkably stable, hence the persistence of patterns of behaviours in ourselves and the world. At the heart of every complex is one or more archetypes.

An example of an archetype

There is an Archetype of a table. It is an abstract idea, but in reality can be found in many different shapes and sizes. It can have 1 leg, or 3, or 4, or more. It can be big or small. It can be square or round. It can be made from a number of materials and any colour. But ultimately it is a table and is recognizable as such. We can never directly point to 'the archetypal table' in the world, although we each carry such an idea in us which allows us to recognize specific tables. One could of course list innumerable other such examples.

The practical application of these ideas in Jungian analysis

I will conclude by speaking briefly about how these ideas are practically applied in Jungian analyses, including a brief vignette.

Jung's meta-psychological model is one which focuses on psychic structures, called complexes in the personal unconscious, which broadly correspond to archetypes in the collective unconscious. Each complex is a personal expression of a universal form, and has at its core either one or more archetypes, around which it is constituted.

To use a popular example from psychoanalysis, the subject has a particular relation to his mother that we can refer to as his mother-complex. This complex contains all the memories, feelings, associations and images,

constituted by his personal relationship with his mother. Where such a patient is presenting adaptive challenges, in relation to the feminine gender, for which he is seeking psychotherapy and that possibly has its roots in his relation to his mother, the Jungian analyst would proceed from the premise that a thorough analysis of the subject's relation to his biological mother would be the most intuitive starting point. His mother complex would be the primary target, or at least starting point, of such any such analysis.

The analysis of the subject's personal relationship with his mother, as the acknowledged starting point, and an appreciation of the collective or objective dimension of the subject's psychology, in such a case, affords the analyst the possibility of amplification.

The Jungian analyst, whilst in no way depreciating the value of the personal analysis, recognizes that the subject's inner image of "mother" and his relationality to "mother" is not wholly and exclusively determined by his relationship to his own, biological, or even surrogate, mother. That the designation 'mother', and in this case more specifically, the relation of a son to his mother, has, in part, an archetypal, collective or objective, character.

That the very idea of an anomalous or neurotic relationship between the subject and his mother is predicated on a comparison to a normative, functional and optimal ideal. And that both the dysfunctional and functional models of relationality between a son and his mother can be mapped onto the coordinates of a universal model (or in Jungian terms "archetype") of the relationship of a son to his mother.

In pursuing such an approach, the Jungian analyst is liberated, to a degree, from the vagaries of memory and subjective distortion that is inherent in any psychoanalytic narrative. Her analysis has at its disposal a tool to inquire into the subject's relation to the mother archetype, which whilst no doubt is influenced by his relation to his own mother, is not, as classical psychoanalysis suggests, an analogue for it. In other words, he may present certain very constructive, deeply connected, feelings, thoughts and imaginations of the mother archetype whilst the narrative of his personal history with his mother is absent of such properties. The analyst frequently recognizes a dissonance, such as exaggerated affect, between the personal-historical relationship to the mother and the relationship to the mother archetype.

Where does the material for such an archetypal analysis emerge from, you might wonder? From an analysis of:

1. The subject's relation to his own mother.
2. The subject's relationship to the cultural artefact, or meme, of mother.
3. The subject's inter-personal relationship's to the female, and in some cases even the masculine, gender, in its displaying, or the subject situating it as, motherly.
4. From the transference relation with the analyst.

And the analyst here is sensitive to dissonance between the subject's inner, imaginary, relationships and the objective coordinates of these relationships, as well as dissonance between the relation to biological mother and the universal or abstracted mother i.e. the mother archetype. Using this information to distinguish between what has arisen out of developmental circumstances and intrinsic or innate factors in the relationship to the mother archetype.

This distinction between the personal developmental history and relationship and the innate relation to the mother archetype offers the analyst a significant and partly independent coordinate, which along with the developmental history and relationship, can be used to map the subject's psychology and facilitate the psychotherapeutic process.

So as opposed to the couple of son and mother, with which the classical analyst has to work, in this model we get a triangulation of (son - mother archetype - biological mother).

The Jungian analyst, Mary Williams⁶, suggests that repression only occurs because the ego is threatened by the archetypal power of the content⁷. In a brief vignette she mentions the case of a doctor who had learnt to deal in a professional and detached fashion with his biological mother's attacks of mania. He was however terrified of his wife's temper tantrums, and had some difficulty overcoming his fear in the transference relationship to his female

⁶ Williams, M. (1963), 'The indivisibility of the personal and collective unconscious.' JAP, vol. 8

⁷ Ibid, p. 2

analyst. In working through his initial fear of the analyst, in the transference he was able to access his fear of:

“the terrible archetypal mother, which was attached to the repressed fear of his mad mother from his childhood; attached also to his fear of the maniacal aggressor in himself based on his identification with her.”⁸

The Jungian idea here, being that what the subject was relating to in all three cases, his mother, his wife and his female analyst, whilst having its roots in his early relationship to his mother, is informed, at the level of the imaginary, by the relationship to a primal archetypal being, the consuming mother. The dark feminine, portrayed in fable by the witch, the Baba Yaga character. In the subject’s imagination, coloured by the archetype, his mother and later the feminine gender, were displaced by an inhuman, one sided, monstrous character.⁹

“Experience suggests that the integration of this image by the ego leads to its humanization; it becomes a suffering human being, a mixture of loving and hating propensities, instead of a one-sided monster that has to be repelled and repressed. As a result, the patient is humanized too and ceases to project this one-sided image. If, however, the personal and collective aspects are divided, the collective aspect alone cannot be integrated and may remain a threat to all relationships.”¹⁰

⁸ Ibid

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ Ibid.

In recognising the presence of this archetype in his inner world, his imagination, and its projection onto the feminine, in this case the subject was able to form a more human image of his mother and his wife, and develop a more balanced and warmer relationship with them.¹¹

Conclusion

That brings this lecture to a close. As always, our focus on the Magnum Opus programme is on the practical application of these psychodynamic ideas for the purposes of your own growth, increased consciousness and individuation. Please read through this modules' applications carefully, and use the Facebook forum for any questions and or feedback you may want as you work through these applications. Remember both myself and a number of other facilitators are always available on the page, for any guidance you need as you work through each module.

Until we speak again, adieu,

Stephen

¹¹ ibid

¹⁶ <http://appliedjung.com>
<http://facebook.com/Appliedjung>

Applications Introduction

The ideas of the Collective Unconscious and Archetypes, although seemingly quite abstract, are actually very fertile for valuable insights into your identity, unconscious dynamics, and possible individuation path. The two applications in this module work with two different aspects of the Collective Unconscious. The first considers how much, and in what way, your unconscious identity is bound up with the various groups to which you belong, identify yourself with, or from which you have emerged. Understanding this to the best of your ability (as one's capacities for self-reflection in this regard are not unlimited) is perhaps the 101 of conscious self-knowledge. The degree to which our collective identities determine our psychodynamics, our psychological make-up, is quite shocking, much more than one would like to believe. Naturally, understanding this does not liberate one from its effect. It does, however, create the possibility of working more consciously with these influences and components of our identity.

The second application accesses and examines models for our personal mythology (our individuation process). It is subtle and requires some fairly searching self-reflection. Its rewards, though, are not inconsiderable. These are perhaps the first breadcrumbs on the path to identifying what your individuation process looks like.

As a general guideline for both these applications and others to come in the future, I make the following suggestions:

- Spend as much time on them as you can reasonably afford. Usually a few hours (two to three) on each application is sufficient to give you some major insight.
- It is a good idea to tackle these as early in the module as you can, because whatever comes up will need some time to percolate, before you are going to be ready for the next set of applications.
- More than anything else on this programme, doing the applications is what will lead you toward your own individuation; the value of doing these applications cannot be overstated.
- Try and counter any unconscious resistance by creating a structure and set routine for doing the applications; doing them with a partner, if possible, makes it much easier.
- All the above noted, try to avoid becoming obsessive about finding the answer, or solution, to the questions these applications will undoubtedly create for you. Rather, allow these questions to live in you without obsessively wishing to answer them finally and conclusively.

Applications

1. Consider in your personal context how you may share and be affected by group psychologies. Consider the following groups, and what unconscious ideologies you have assimilated from your membership of such groups. Consider how taking into account such collective predispositions may aid in your understanding of yourself and your journey to creative living:

- The family you were born into, immediate and extended.
- The culture you belong to.
- The national spirit/soul of your country of birth or residence.
- Your race or tribe.
- Your gender.
- The historical era in which you live.

2. Recall a fairy tale, fable, movie, book or any other story that was a favourite of yours as a child or young adult. It typically works better to choose a story from your youth, as this often picks out your own mythological journey. However, if you feel strongly inclined to select a story you encountered as an adult, then do so. Once you have identified the story, consider these following aspects:

- What archetypes (characters) are represented in it, e.g. hero, saviour, wise man, etc.
- What archetypal story is told, can you relate it back to a classical myth or fable?
- Which character did you identify with most strongly?
- Do you recognize the archetype of that character within yourself?
- If you can recognize the myth of the story, where do you find yourself in the timeline of the myth?
- Do you recognize the other archetypes, especially the negative ones?
- Do you accept this archetypal role/pattern that you are in?
 - a. If you feel a strong aversion to living this myth, how do you propose to retell the story in a different way, with an alternate outcome?
 - b. Or is there another story that resonates as strongly, that you could look at, as your personal myth? If so, repeat the application with that story.