

# Interpretation in Jungian Analysis: Art and Technique



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# Overview and Context

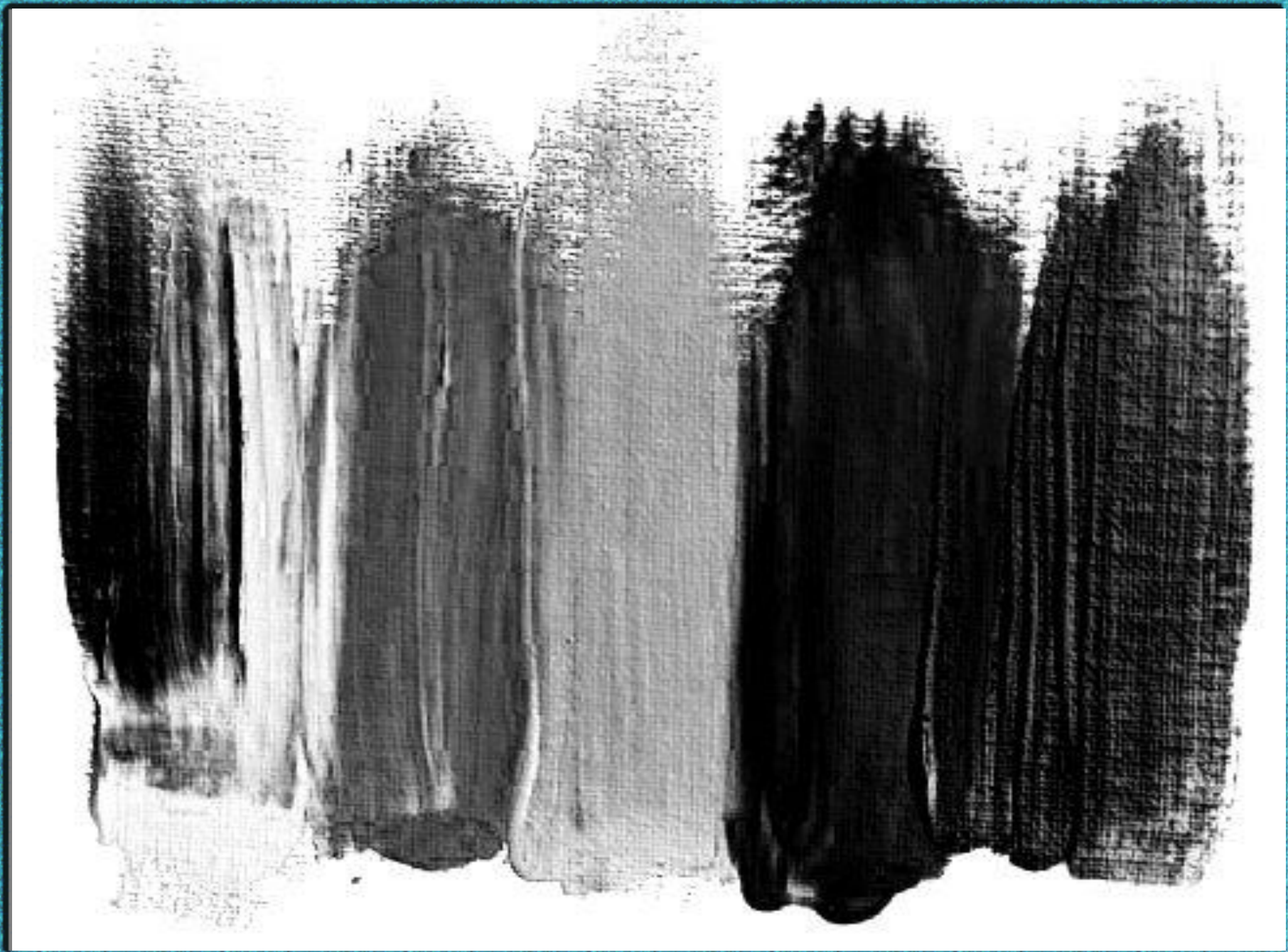
Interpretation expands symbolic possibilities by cultivating greater awareness of the *symbolic aspects of the analytic interaction.*



# **Creativity, Technique and Interpretation**







# What Constitutes Technique?

- Beginning and terminating the analysis
- Establishing and maintaining the analytic frame
- Interpretation of the analytic interaction (including the analysis of the transference/countertransference)
- The analysis of defenses and resistance
- Interpretation of dreams



# Interpretation Matters

It is on the whole probable that we continually dream but that consciousness makes such a noise that we do not hear it.

C.G. Jung quoted in *The Psychology of C.G. Jung* by Jolande Jacobi, p. 73.

# **Interpretation Matters**

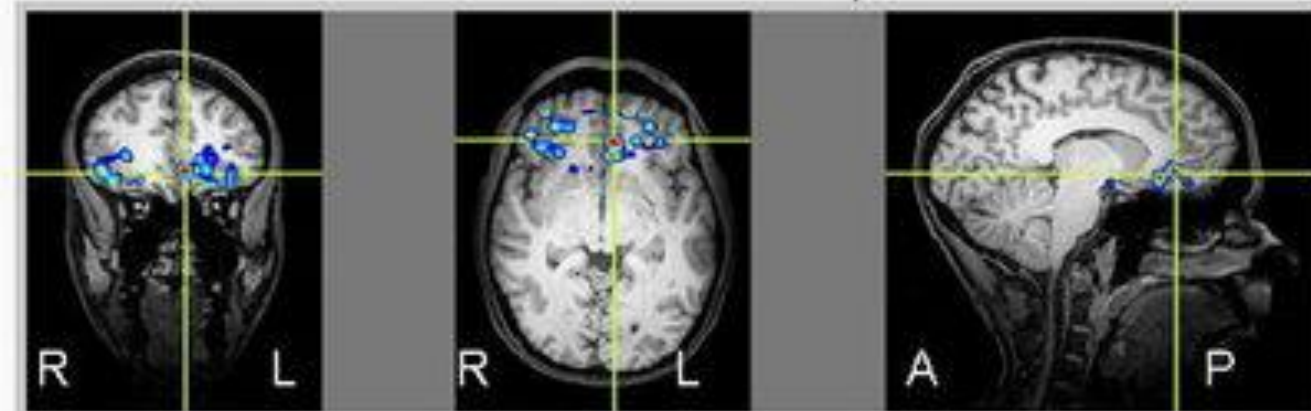
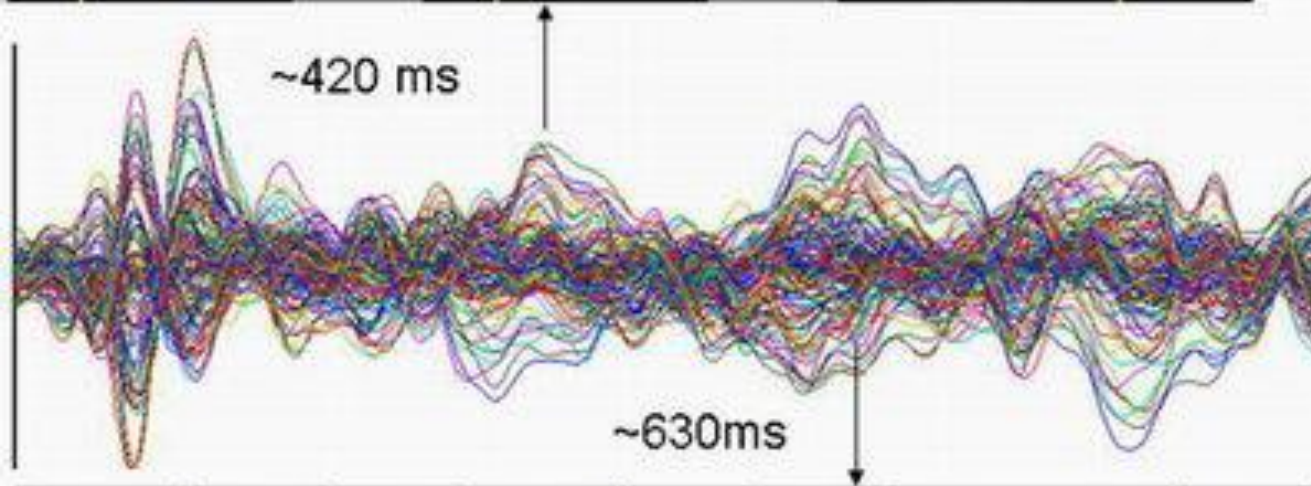
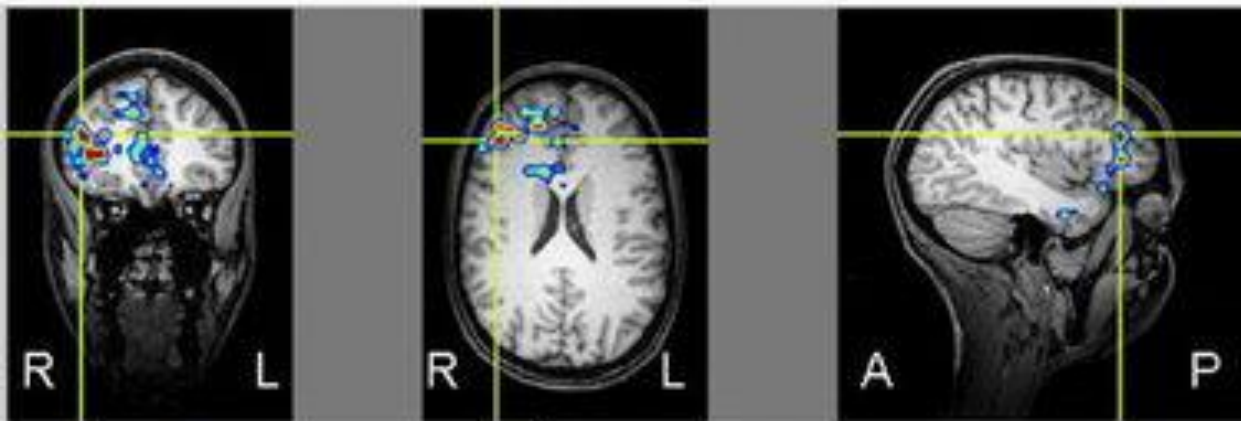
**“Dreaming the Analytic Session”**

**Thomas Ogden (2017)**



# **Neuroscience, Metaphor, and Interpretation**

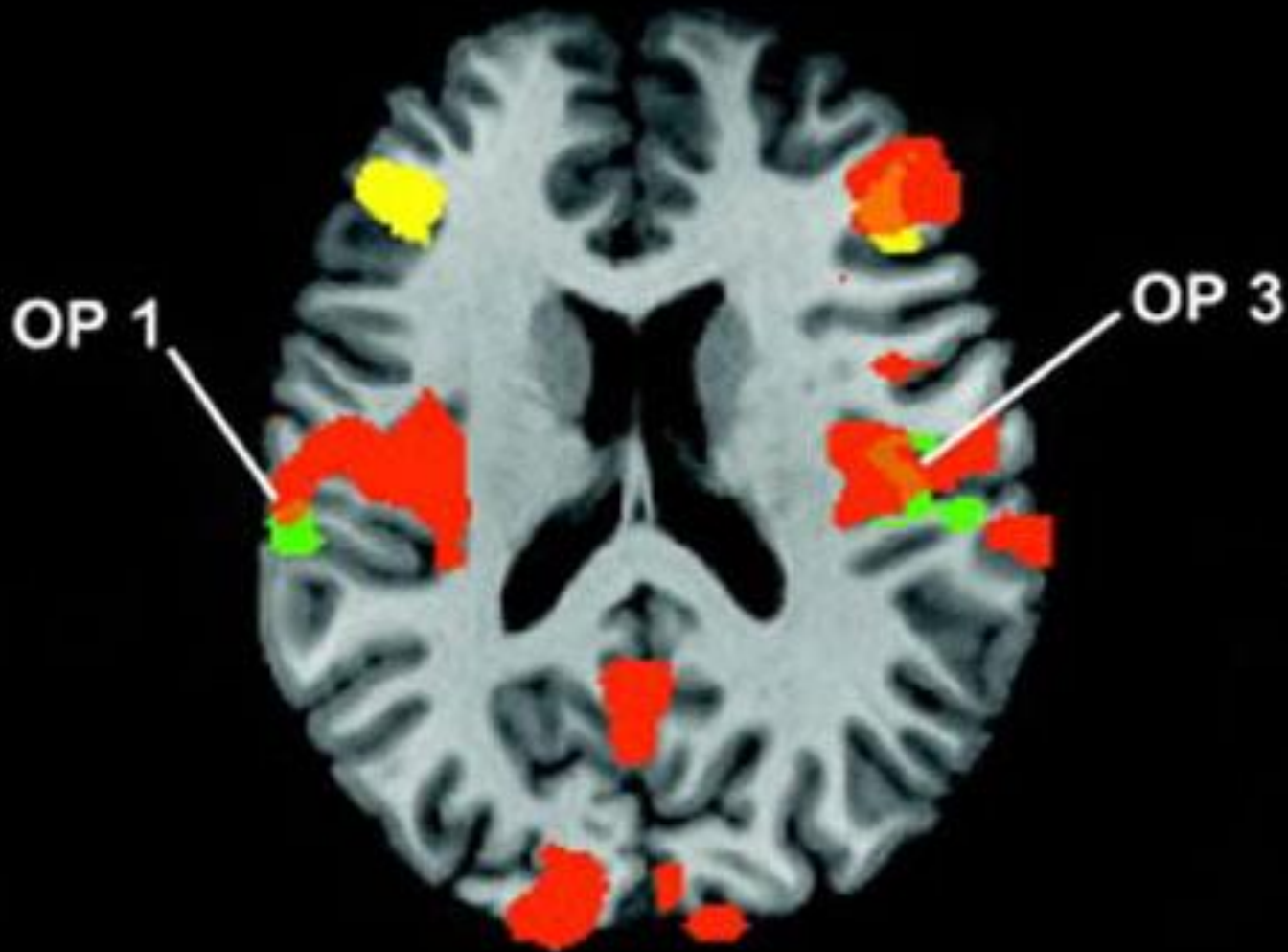
## Functional Shift Condition



Non-Metaphorical  
Language  
Response

Metaphorical  
Language  
Response





Green = regions of the brain activated by textural metaphors.

Yellow & Red = regions activated by sensory experience of textures visually and through touch

# **Metaphor - definition**

A figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them.

(Merriam-Webster)



*Metaphor is at the  
heart of interpretation.*

**What is an Interpretation?**



***Interpretation is an invitation  
for the patient to see their  
world in a new way.***

"If we are always arriving and departing, it is also true that we are eternally anchored. One's destination is never a place but rather a new way of looking at things. "

Henry Miller, novelist



May my mind come alive today  
To the invisible geography  
That invites me to new frontiers,  
To break the dead shell of yesterdays,  
To risk being disturbed and changed.

John O'Donohue, poet

# **Definition of Interpretation**

Interpretation is the verbal expression of what is experienced with and understood about the patient's psychological situation, including the field constellated by the analytic dyad.

# Michael Fordham – SAP London

- It connects together statements of the patient that have a common source unknown to the patient. So when the analyst tells the patient about the source he makes an inference that goes beyond the actual material at hand. (1978, p. 113)
- An interpretation is composed of that part of the patient's unconscious digested and thought about by the analyst. The result is then communicated to the patient in such a way as to give meaning to the patient's material. To do this it must have a clear structure and contain a verb. (1991, p. 209)



# Supportive versus Interpretive Interventions

- Supportive techniques are aspects of therapeutic interaction which reinforce the patient's perception of the relationship as helpful, accepting, understanding, and supportive - *these are not intended to or expected to increase insight.*
- Even when utilizing supportive techniques there is still an absence of advice giving, suggestion, problem solving, etc., which are the domain of counseling situations – not analytic psychotherapy or analysis.
- Interpretations are specifically intended to increase insight, expand consciousness, and provide an experience of being known and understood.

# **Analytic versus Supportive**

Psychoanalytic therapy is interpretive rather than suggestive. . . . Principally, the therapist helps through making interpretations . . . The warm relationship is the necessary context for the interpretive actions of the therapist.

Auld & Hyman, 1991, p. 19

# Supportive - Analytic Continuum

Supportive

Analytic





# Case Example

P: Oh you remembered. (from supportive standpoint could have stopped here, or I could have said "Of course, I remembered" but it would not help him know anything about himself or how he utilizes me)

T: You seem surprised that I remembered.

P: I didn't mean any offense. I just meant that none of my therapists before have ever remembered what I've said from week to week.

T: I didn't think you were making a negative comment about me.

P: Good, because I wasn't. This therapy is really important to me.

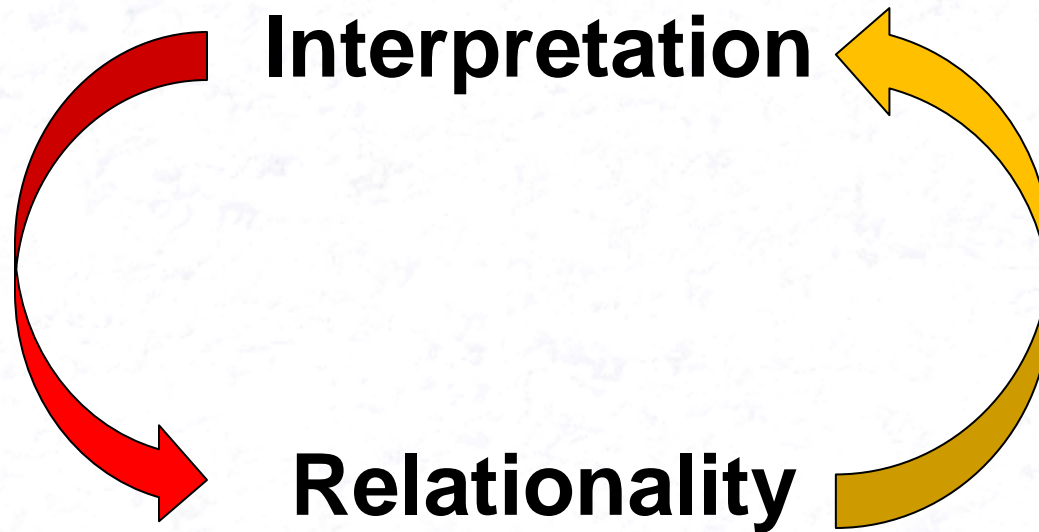
T: I think you were telling me that you don't feel memorable so it surprises you that I could hold you in my mind.

P: (he grins somewhat sheepishly as though he has been caught doing something) Well I know that you see a lot of patients and it must be hard to keep all of this stuff straight.

T: You seem to be wondering whether you're important enough to me for me to remember you as an individual among the other people who come into my office.

P: (becoming tearful) I know I'm important to you and its really important that I stay with this and finish therapy this time. I've gotten started and quit so many times. I can't do that again.

# Interpretation and Moments of Meeting (Relationality)



**Interpretation and  
Jungian Psychology:  
The Background**



# Freud, Interpretation, and Change

- **Traditional Psychoanalytic Perspective on Change** – The resolution of psychic conflicts through the use of interpretation to promote affectively engaged insight which in turn leads to lasting structural change. Traditionally, this is largely seen as being accomplished through insight.

# **Freud on Interpretation**

*The Unconscious – 1915, p. 176*

“To have heard something and experienced something are in their psychological nature two quite different things, even though the content of both is the same.”

# James Strachey

## Mutative Interpretation

“Every mutative interpretation must be emotionally *immediate*; the patient must experience it as something actual ...interpretations must always be directed to the *point of urgency*.”

The Nature of the Therapeutic Action of  
Psychoanalysis, 1934, p. 149



# Jung and Consciousness

“The purpose of human life is the creation of consciousness.”

Edward Edinger,  
*The Creation of Consciousness*, p. 57

"Man's task is ... to become conscious of the contents that press upward from the unconscious...As far as we can discern the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being.”

Jung, *MDR*, p. 326

# Intention of Jungian Interpretation

- To create an opening in consciousness that permits unconscious contents to enter into awareness.
- Increase the tension of opposites between consciousness and the unconscious which facilitates the activation of the transcendent function which in turn generates symbols to foster the individuation process.
- To enable the patient to understand unconscious contents symbolically and assimilate those contents.

# The Cycle of Interpretation

- ***Confrontational Observation***

A calling of attention to an act or utterance by the patient

- ***Inferential Clarification***

Combines confrontation with an identification, by the analyst, of a possible unconscious process.

- ***Interpretation***

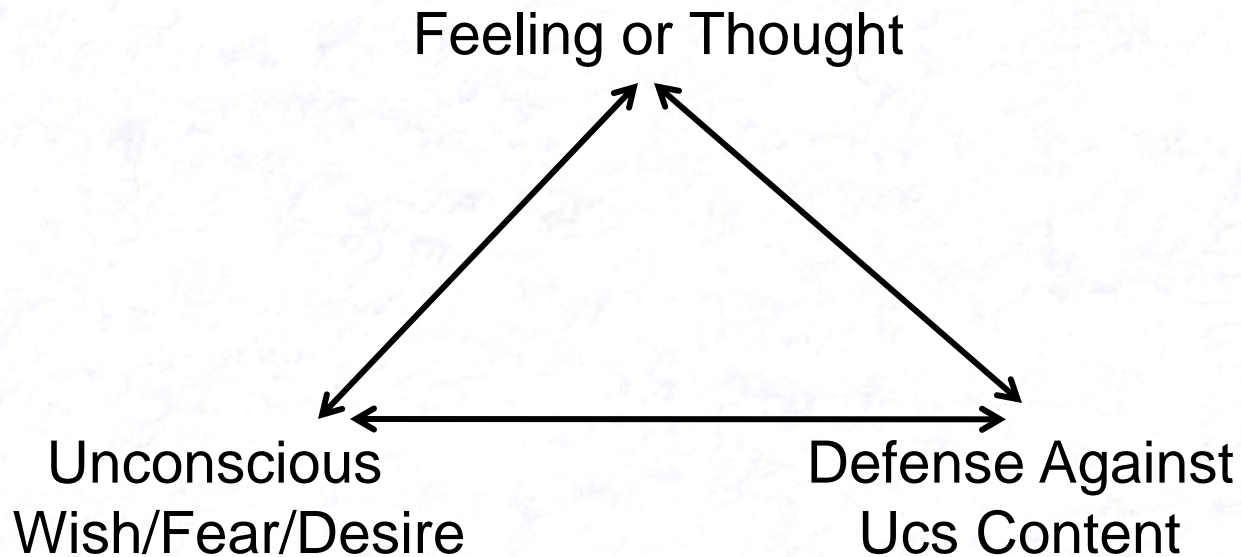
Gives meaning to events, feelings, or experiences which previously had no conscious meaning or for which the meaning was hidden. Essentially saying, "This is how I understand what you've said to me and how I understand how it relates to your interior world."

- ***Construction***

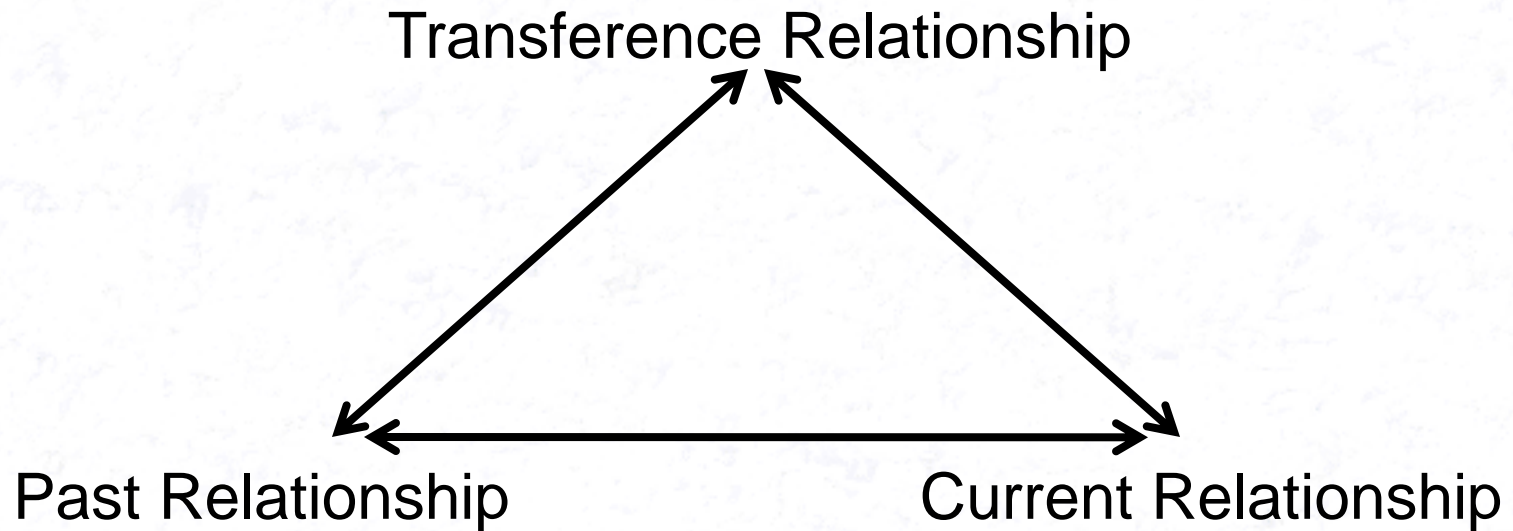
Is a pattern of interpretations, extending over time, which give a larger pattern of meaning to a patient's life. In Jungian terms this would be referred to as the creation or discovery of the personal myth.



# Triangle of Conflict



# Triangle of Relationship



# Preparing for Interpretation

- ***Gathering Data*** - Listening, Observing, Feeling, Imagining, & Reverie
- ***Organizing Data*** with Knowledge of Patient, Theory and Archetypal Patterns
- ***Generating a Hypothesis*** in the Form of an Interpretation
- ***Return to Data Gathering***



# Listening - Attending - Observing

- Verbal behavior (or lack of)
- Non-verbal behavior
- Emotional shifts
- Fantasies
- Slips of the tongue
- Dreams
- Alterations to the frame of the analysis
- Changes in the field of the session
- Shifts in physiology of the patient or analyst

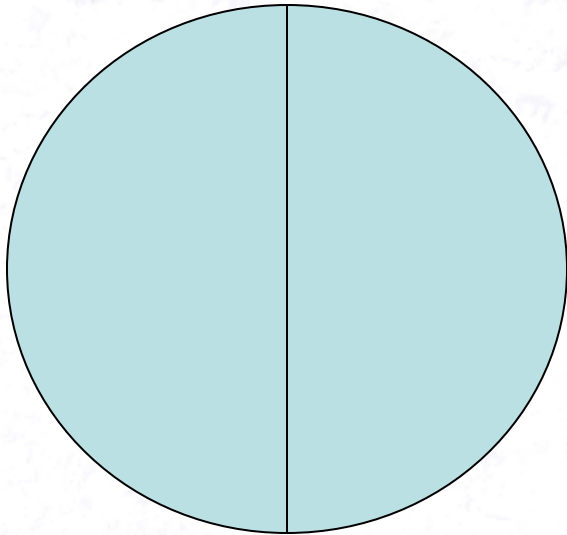
# Listening - Attending - Observing

- Patient's perception of the therapist
- Recurring patterns of behavior, verbalization, or imagery
- Temporal contiguity of thoughts or events
- Analyst's reverie
- Basically attempting to attend to the whole of the analyst's experience of the patient and themselves.

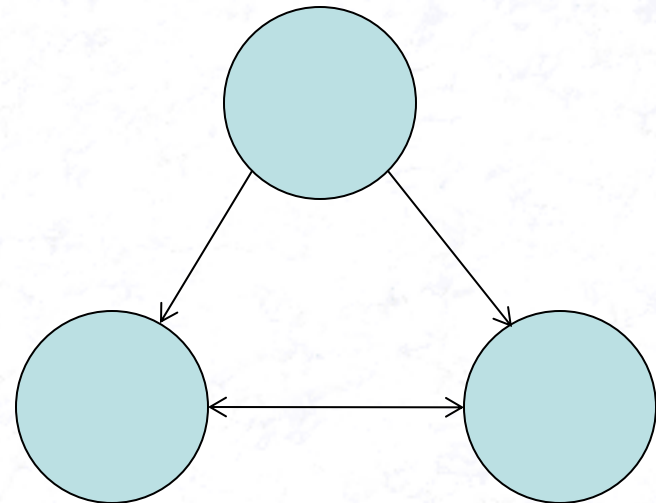
# The Analytic Ego

- Also known as the working ego or observing ego
- Essential to being able to work interpretively

Analytic Ego    Participating Ego



Analyst's Analytic Ego



Patient

Analyst's  
Participating  
Ego



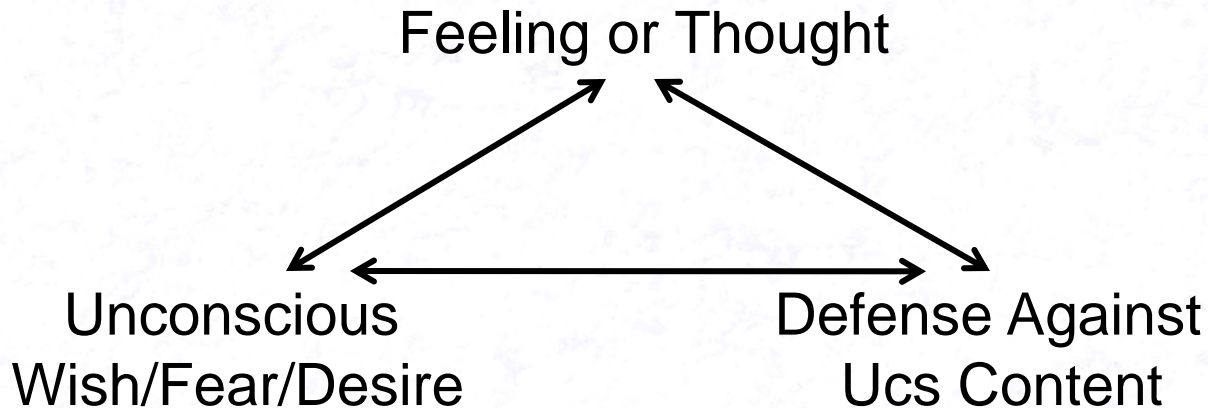
# **Conceptualization**

# Sample Conceptualization

- I feel angry
- I expect others will hurt me or reject me
- Other people will hurt me or reject me if I am angry
- I should hurt myself instead of expressing my anger

# Generation of Hypothesis

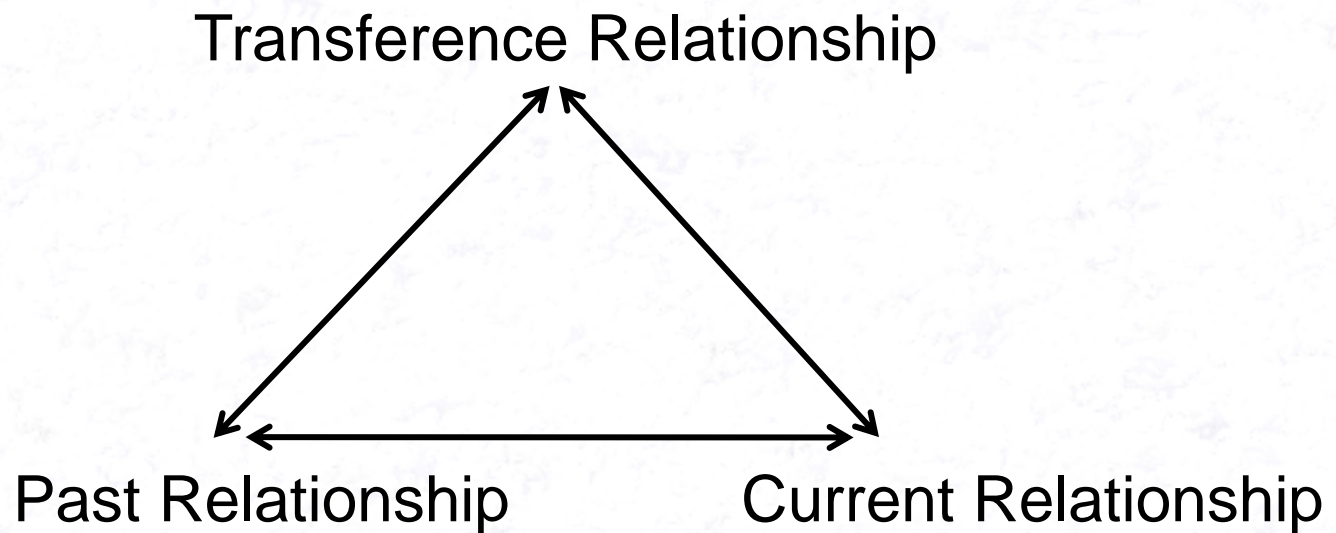
## *Triangle of Conflict*





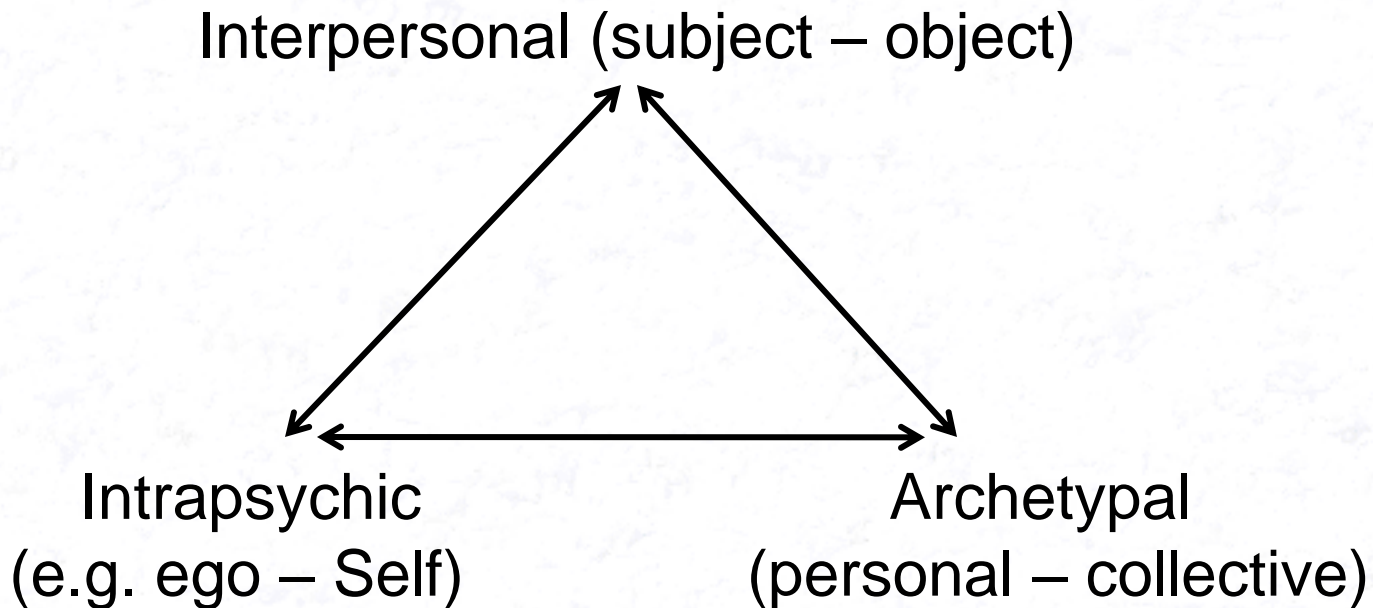
# Generation of Hypothesis

## *Triangle of Relationship*



# Generation of Hypothesis

## *Symbolic Triad*



# **Listening for Derivative or Encoded Messages**

**----**

**Robert Langs**



# **Symptom as Faulty Coping Mechanism**

The outbreak of a neurosis is an attempt at self-cure - "It is an attempt of the self-regulating psychic system to restore balance, in no way different from the function of dreams."

Jung, CW18, para 386, 389

**Gathering Data**  
**Conceptualization**  
**Interpretation**  
**Return to Data Gathering**

# Interpretive Hypothesis

An interpretive hypothesis takes into account both the theory and data which will be communicated in the form of an interpretation (e.g. I believe the analysand does, feels, thinks, or experiences \_\_\_\_\_ because of \_\_\_\_\_).



# Avoid Use of Jargon

- Kohutians talk about interpreting from an “experience-near” position.
- What this means, in part, is avoiding the use of concepts like shadow, ego, persona, anima, or individuation in formulating interpretations to the patient.
- It is more accessible to the patient to “operationalize” concepts in simple terms. For example, instead of using the term shadow in formulating an interpretation you might say, “the part of you that is difficult for you to accept in yourself” or “the aspects of yourself that you would like to disown.”

# Action Language

- Frame interpretations in terms of actions, real or imagined, both private and public.
- Actions might include feeling, sensing, thinking, or choosing.
- Actions are designated by verbs (action words) and adverbs (qualifiers to verbs) rather than nouns (terms that name) or adjectives (modifiers to nouns). Nouns and adjectives lend themselves to reification.
- Use “act” and “behave” rather than “is” or “are” because the later terms imply static, unchangeable aspects of the personality/psyche.
- Always try to locate the action being described within an intrapsychic or interpersonal context.
- Be as specific as possible. Avoid vague words and phrases like: “*something in you,*” “*a place in you,*” or “*a part of you.*”

# Use Affective Language

- Affects are the most ephemeral of all the clinical experiences. You can get back to memories, images, thoughts, ideas, concepts relatively easily but it is often difficult to re-access an affect once the initial moment has passed.
- Attempt to link behaviors (actions) you are interpreting with an affect.
- Be as specific as possible when linking an affect to a behavior or defense.
- Interpretations based on a metaphor are almost always better at involving the patient at an affective level.



# **Timing of Interpretations**

# Listening for Response to Interpretation

In general, interpretations will either be:

1. Defended Against
2. Introjected – (i.e. taken in) resulting in some kind of mutative experience.

# Listening for Response

If a mutative interpretation has been made at an appropriate time, there will be some shift or opening up:

- Patient will reveal more or remember more that is connected to the interpretation
- They will have an association (e.g. “that makes me think of...”)
- They will pause to reflect
- Their breathing or posture will shift
- There will be a noticeable shift in affect (such as tears, anger, etc)
- They will agree in some way that has an affective congruity to it
- There will be a sense of “ah-ha” in the room



# Listening for Response

- In a defended response:
  - Patient will actively disagree in a way that precludes further examination (an overtly negative reaction to an interpretation does not necessarily mean the interpretation wasn't effective).
  - Patient will shift subject matter (avoidance)
  - It will appear that the patient didn't hear the interpretation
  - Patient will continue on with what they were saying before the interpretation (incorporation)
  - Patient will agree verbally but with no sense of affective reaction to the interpretation.

# Interpretive Cycle Resumes

- **Gathering Data** - Listening, observing, feeling
- **Organizing Data** with knowledge of patient, theory, and archetypal patterns
- **Generating a Hypothesis** in the form of an interpretation
- **Return to Data Gathering**

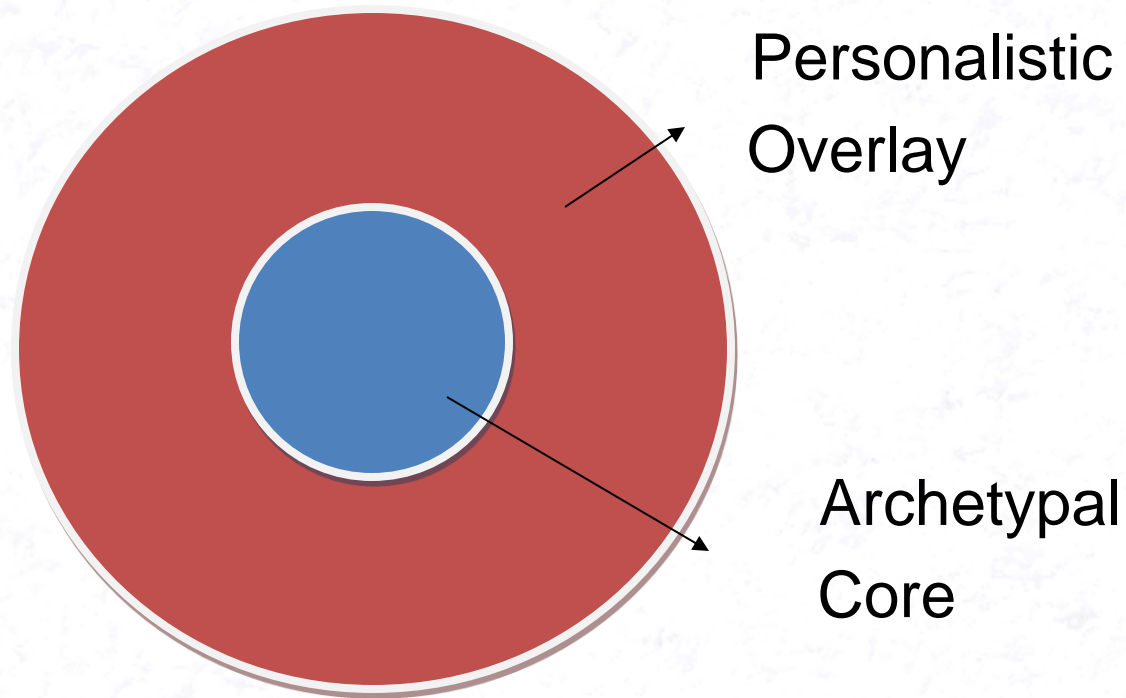
# **Complex Centered Interpretation**



# Interpretation of Complex with Psychotic Patient

- 1) When you feel that you can't keep your daughter from coming into your house and taking your things,
- 2) I think there is also a sense that this is also happening inside of you as well.
- 3) It feels as if you can't keep the feelings and thoughts of others from invading your mind and stealing away with bits and pieces of you.
- 4) I think this reminds you of the situation you grew up in where there were no boundaries, no personal space, so sense of personal possessions, and no room to have your own thoughts.

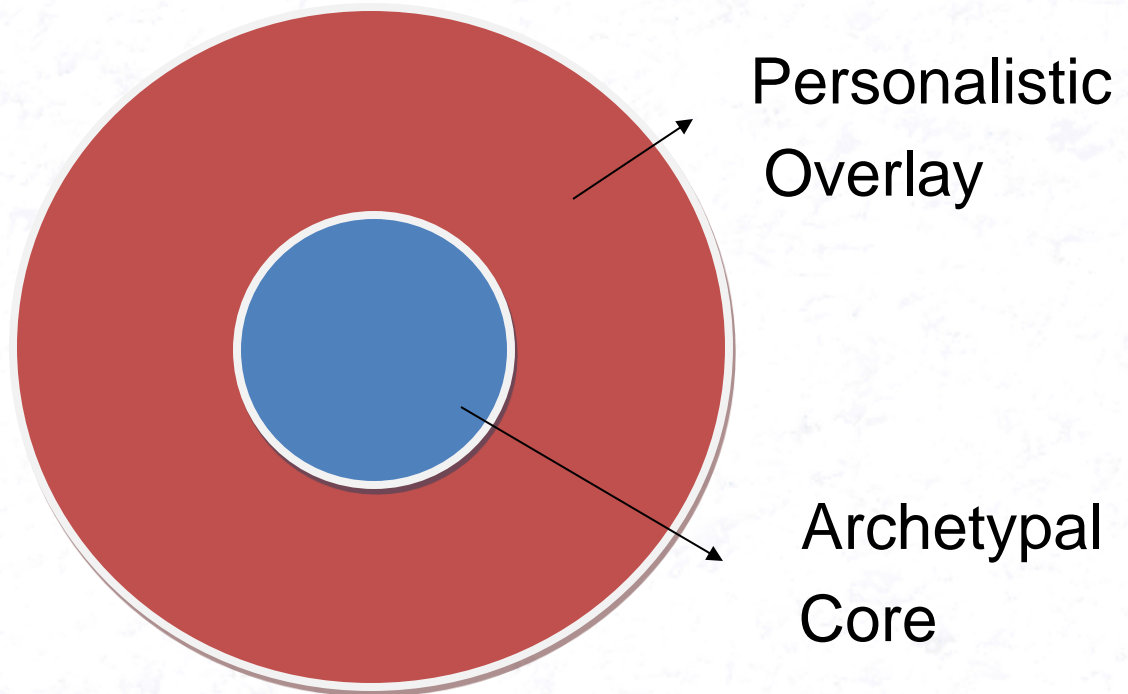
# Simple Complex



# Simple Complex

## Personalistic Overlay

1. Memories
2. Images
3. Feelings
4. Behavioral  
Patterns
5. Defenses
6. Cognitive Sets
7. Specific Values or  
Attitudes
8. Physiological  
States
9. Patterns of Object-  
Relatedness





# Examples of Complex Focus

- “It seems that the part of you which feels abandoned...”
- "The child-like part of you..."
- "The part of you that can seduce and the part of you which can be seduced..."
- "This seems to be an instance in which you can behave towards yourself in a very domineering and aggressive way towards yourself..."

# Circumambulation of the Complex via Interpretation

- Ability to recognize cues which signal the activation of the complex.
- Recognition of how the complex relates to inter-personal problems. This allows patient to distinguish what he/she brings (via the complex) to relationship problems versus what other people and events bring to them.
- Recognition of the power of the complex
- Insight into origins of the complex.
- Understanding of secondary gain aspects of symptoms as well as the symptom as effort of self-cure.
- Diminishment of the power of the complex and an acquisition of greater range of emotional and behavioral patterns.

# **Time Focus of Complex Interpretation**

The tense of the interpretations around a complex can vary across interpretations and sessions:

- Past – how the complex developed
- Present – how the complex impacts the patient's current experiences
- Future – where the complex is taking the patient



# Personal versus Archetypal Interpretation

- **Example 1** (Personalistic): You had no boundaries growing up so now you have trouble setting them with others, so now you want me to do that for you.
- **Example 2** (Archetypal): In the unfolding of your life it doesn't appear that your capacity to experience yourself as a warrior, and hence to protect yourself, was ever constellated and now you want me to carry the function of the warrior for you.

# **Symbolic – Archetypal – Metaphoric Interpretations**

This type of interpretation is frequently used in dream interpretation but can also be used in interpreting the patient's public (observable) and private (internal) behaviors.

# Conclusion

The analyst must register the session with the eyes, ears, and heart of a sensualist while translating those experiences with the mind of a philosopher and the voice of a poet.