

CARL JUNG "APPROACHING THE UNCONSCIOUS" (1964)

Jung, Carl. "Approaching the Unconscious." Man and his Symbols. By Jung, M-L. von Franz, Joseph L. Henderson, Jolande Jacobi, and Aniela Jaffé. London: Aldus, 1964. 18-103. Rpt. as "Symbols and the Interpretation of Dreams." Vol. 18 of Collected Works. Ed. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, and Gerhard Adler. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. 20 Vols. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953-1978.

Jung argues that a word or an image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. We use symbols to represent concepts that are beyond our comprehension. There are unconscious aspects to our perception of reality, external events becoming psychic events within the mind that are evidently unknowable. Some events, or part(s) thereof, are not taken conscious note of and later well up into the conscious, frequently in the form of a dream. The "unconscious aspect of any event is revealed to us in dreams, where it appears not as rational thought but as a symbolic image" (23). This unconsciousness within the psyche is common to all humanity. Indeed, human consciousness is a fragile thing and liable to fragmentation caused by the pressures of civilising forces.

Freud's early work was designed to research the symbolic connection between dreams and neurotic symptoms, on the one hand, and unpleasant aspects of conscious experience. Via the talking cure and the technique of free association, the patient is encouraged to discuss his dream images in particular and the thoughts that these prompt in his mind in order to ultimately reveal the unconscious background of his ailments. The goal is to uncover long-buried disagreeable topics that the patient had wished to forget, those complexes, that is, repressed emotional themes that cause psychological disturbances and neurotic symptoms.

Jung argues that dreams are not the only indicators of such disturbances and that it is more useful to focus on the actual form and content of the dream rather than pursue associations that lead one away from the dream and towards complexes that are attainable by other means such as word-association tests, etc. The text of the dream, in Jung's opinion, expresses something specific that the unconscious wants to say. Jung is less interested in tracing the complexes that cause neurotic disturbances than to know and understand the psychic life-process of an individual's whole personality. For example, a dream of inserting a key into a lock may possess an obvious sexual allegory but, for Jung, the most important thing is to determine the reason behind the choice of this particular symbol, a key, in this instance, as opposed to a chair. Only the "material that is clearly and visibly a part of a dream should be used in interpreting it. . . . Its specific form tells us what belongs to it and what leads away from it" (29).

The unconscious consists of memories, usually emotional residues, of past experiences that are located beyond the threshold of conscious recall but may be triggered at a moment's notice. The symbols of our dreams are produced from subliminal material that consists of urges, impulses, intentions, perceptions, intuitions, feelings, thoughts, conclusions, etc. that have become unconscious because there is no room for them in the conscious mind or because they are unpleasant in some way to the conscious mind. By the same token, these same contents can arise from the collective unconscious: the symbols and images that dreams contain cannot be explained solely in terms of personal memories or experiences. Rather, they frequently express impersonal thoughts that have never reached the threshold of consciousness.

Dreams are most often confusing and disorienting. Even conscious events have unconscious overtones of which we are unaware. Indeed, the unconscious is the almost

invisible root of all our conscious thoughts. Dreams are an integral part of the symbolic-making propensity of man. Many dreams present images and ideas analogous to primitive ideas, myths and rites, archaic remnants, according to Jung, psychic elements that have survived in the human mind from eons ago. These are not lifeless or meaningless remnants but vital links between the ways in which we consciously express our thoughts and a more primitive, colourful and pictorial form of expression. They appeal to the feelings and emotions more directly and are the link between the rational world of consciousness and the world of feeling and instinct. In everyday life, so many of our ideas have been stripped of emotional energy so that we need something to bring certain things home to us effectively enough to make us change our attitudes or our behaviour. The "general function of dreams is to restore our psychological balance by producing dream material that re-establishes, in a subtle way, the total psychic equilibrium" (50). Dreams warn about deficiencies in the personality and dangers in the present course of living. Sometimes dreams have a precognitive content in that many crises in our lives have a long unconscious history.

In the civilising process, we have increasingly divided our consciousness from the deeper instinctive strata of the human psyche that are an inalienable part of our psychic and genetic inheritance. These remain part of the unconscious even though they may only express themselves in the form of dream images. For the sake of mental and physiological stability and health, the conscious and unconscious must be mutually integrated in the course of the process which Jung terms 'individuation.' When dissociated from each other, psychological disturbance follows. Dream symbols are message carriers from the instinctive to the rational parts of the mind. Their interpretation enriches the poverty of consciousness by forcing to learn again the forgotten language of the instincts.

No dream symbol can be separated from the dreamer who wields it. There are, however, recurrent symbols ('motifs') that are typical and recurrent, but these must always be interpreted according to their context. Indeed, there is a whole host of symbols that are part of the collective memory of mankind that often recur in the dreams of individuals. They are "'collective representations,' emanating from primeval dreams and creative fantasies" (56). However, the further we move away from the individual and towards considerations of the whole species, the less accurate we will be concerning the specific dream and its comments on the psyche of the individual. Dream symbols are the manifestation of the psyche that is beyond the control of the conscious part of the individual. Dreams consequently express themselves as analogies, images often slide into each other, they often seem illogical. Dreams do not disguise incompatible wishes because disguise is the natural shape that all impulses take in the unconscious. It is by means of dream symbols that instinctive forces influence the activity of consciousness.

In short, "dreams serve the purpose of compensation. . . . [T]he dream is a normal psychic phenomenon that transmits unconscious reactions or spontaneous impulses to consciousness" (67). Elements often occur in dreams that are not peculiar to the individual's personal experience: these are archaic remnants that are "aboriginal, innate and inherited shapes of the human mind" (67). The mind is "no more without history than is the body in which it exists: the mind's history is the biological, prehistoric, and unconscious development of the mind in archaic man, whose psyche was still close to that of the animal" (67). This "immensely old psyche forms the basis of our mind" (67) and the trained analyst can detect the "analogies between the dream pictures of modern man and the products of the primitive mind, its 'collective images,' and its mythological motifs" (67). Jung terms these archaic remnants "archetypes" (67) or "primordial images" (67) and these can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic pattern. If archetypes originated within the individual's mind, then surely we should understand them. In the

Freudian schema, what we call the instincts are physical urges perceived by the senses; they manifest themselves in fantasies and often reveal their presence in the form of symbolic images. In the Jungian schema, on the other hand, it is the archetypes which manifest themselves. For example, the hero myth originated in an epoch when man did not yet know that he possessed a hero myth, when he did not yet reflect on what he was saying. The hero is an archetype that has existed since time immemorial. Archetypal forms are not just static patterns but are dynamic factors that manifest themselves in impulses as spontaneously as the instincts. Certain dreams, thoughts and visions suddenly appear for no apparent reason. Where conscious thought is guided by reason and knowledge, the unconscious is guided by instinctive trends represented by poetic metaphors etc.

While personal complexes never produce more than personal biases, archetypes create myths, religions, philosophies etc. that influence and characterise whole nations and epochs. Just as personal complexes are compensations for one-sided or faulty attitudes of consciousness, myths, especially of a religious nature, are often a sort of mental therapy for the sufferings and anxieties of mankind. The universal hero myth is such a one, and refers to the powerful god-man who vanquishes evil. The further we delve into the origins of such collective images, the more we uncover a web of archetypal patterns that were not the object of conscious reflection.

There are four functional types which correspond to the means by which consciousness obtains its orientation to experience: thought, sensation, feeling, intuition, that is, four basic criteria of types of human behaviour. Civilised consciousness has separated itself from the basic instincts that have, however, not disappeared but which are forced to assert themselves in a less direct fashion, such as moods, physical symptoms, etc. Man likes to believe that he is master of his soul, but as long as he is unable to control his emotions or to be conscious of the myriad secret ways in which unconscious factors insinuate themselves into his day to day arrangements and decisions and as a result of which he is not his own master. These unconscious factors owe their existence to the autonomy of the archetypes.

Man's real life consists of a complex of inexorable opposites. Life is a battleground, in this sense. In the face of great uncertainty about the meaning of life, man needs religious symbols to give meaning to his life. As scientific understanding has grown, our world has become dehumanised, and man feels himself increasingly isolated in the cosmos and divorced from the close bond he formerly held with nature. This enormous loss is compensated for by our dream symbols which restore to us our original natures with our instincts and peculiar thinking. The symbol-producing function of our consciousness is an attempt to bring the original mind of man into advanced or differentiated consciousness and make subject to self-reflection. The unconscious preserves all those elements which formed part of the mind of primitive man and which the ego of civilised man has sought to overcome or forget. This explains the resistance and fear that many feel upon approaching the unconscious. The more these attributes are repressed, the more they spread through the whole personality in the form of neurosis.

The main task of dreams is to effect a recollection of the prehistoric, and not just of the infantile world. Such recollections are immensely therapeutic in effect. The consequence of assimilating and integrating in the conscious mind the lost but now regained contents of the unconscious is psychic equilibrium and wholeness. As part of the individuation process which all humans undergo, the interpretation of symbols play a key role in that symbols represent natural attempts to reconcile and unite opposites within the psyche. The great religions of the world suffer from increasing anaemia and there are no longer any gods to who we can turn to for redemption. It is to our dreams and the

interpretation of their symbols which we must turn if the psyche is to find wholeness and totality and the psychic well-being which is their concomitant. The conscious must come to terms with the unconscious, assimilate its messages into its panoply of significations.

Jung argues that his investigations have shown that the contents of the psyche of the psychotic "show peculiarities that defy reduction to individual determinants, just as there are dreams where the symbols cannot be properly explained with the aid of personal data" (65). The imagery of dreams frequently shows analogies to the motifs of mythology: "I call these archetypes because they function in a way similar to instinctual patterns of behaviour" (65) and "can be found everywhere and at all times" (65). An archetype is an "idea that has been stamped on the human brain for ages. That is why it lies ready to hand in the unconscious of every man. . . . The greatest and best thoughts shape themselves upon these primordial images as upon a blueprint" (70). Their origin "can only be explained by assuming them to be deposits of the commonly repeated experiences of humanity" (70). The movement of the sun is a common experience of mankind which, per se, is not to be found in the unconscious. What we do find, however, is the myth of the sun-hero in all its modifications which is what forms the sun-archetype. The "archetype is a kind of readiness to produce over and over again the same or similar mythical ideas. Hence it seems as though what is impressed upon the unconscious were exclusively the subjective fantasy-ideas aroused by the physical process" (70-1). Archetypes are "recurrent impressions made by subjective reactions" (71), the "impressions of ever-repeated typical experiences" (71) which "tend toward the repetition of these same experiences. For when an archetype appears in a dream, in a fantasy, or in life, it always brings with it a certain influence or power by virtue of which it either exercises a numinous or a fascinating effect, or impels to action" (71).

The archetype is not determined in regard to its content (i.e. it is not an unconscious idea). It is determined only with regard to its form: the "archetype in itself is empty and purely formal, . . . a possibility of representation which is given a priori. The representations themselves are not inherited, only the forms" (84). "In principle, it can be named and has an invariable nucleus of meaning – but always only in principle, never as regards its concrete manifestation" (84).

Where the contents of the personal unconscious are acquired during the individual's lifetime, the contents of the collective unconscious are invariably archetypes that were present from the beginning. The most important archetypes are those which decisively and disturbingly influence the ego: the shadow, the animus and the anima.

The nature of the shadow is easy to infer from the contents of the personal unconscious. The shadow is essentially a moral problem and involves the dark side of the personality. To become conscious of this side and to attempt to assimilate it into the conscious personality is the essential condition of all self-knowledge. The shadow is the "'negative' side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide, together with the insufficiently developed functions and the contents of the personal unconscious"(87). It is of an emotional nature: on this lower level, with its scarcely controlled emotions one behaves like a primitive who is the passive victim of his affects and incapable of moral judgement. It is responsible for those slips of the tongue and other psychopathological behaviour by which we reveal feelings and motives which the conscious self disowns. It can be projected onto others and include those attributes which one possesses in oneself which one would like to get rid of. Making conscious and confessing the less desirable elements of the personality does not rid us of them. The shadow is the first archetype encountered in the dreams, is usually of the same sex as the subject and is often of different colour skin.

The persona is the system of relations which exist between individual consciousness

and society, a "kind of mass, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual" (94). It signifies a "formidable concession to the external world, a genuine self-sacrifice which drives the ego straight into identification with the persona, so that people really do exist who believe they are what they pretend to be" (95). The persona is, in short, an identification with a certain social role which necessarily often brings about certain neuroses etc. There is a dissociation of the personality into inner and outer, mask/persona and soul (i.e. certain attitudes are adopted in public which differ from those expressed in private).

In men, the inner component of the personality is feminine, which acts as a kind of compensation for this outward identification with the persona, i.e. with the social role associated with manhood. In men, to "the degree that the world invites the individual to identify with the mask, he is delivered over to influences from within. . . . An opposite forces its way up from inside. . . . Outwardly an effective and powerful role is played, while inwardly an effeminate weakness is played" (96).

Jung offers us some definitions: the psyche is the "totality of all psychic processes, conscious as well as unconscious" (97). The soul is the "personality" (97). Any personality is subject to a certain degree of character splitting, a division between an orientation towards the expectations and demands of society and another orientation towards the social aims and aspirations of the individual. The persona is the attitude of the personality projected outwards towards external reality, a "functional complex which comes into existence for reasons of adaptation or personal convenience" (99) to social reality. The inner personality is the "way one behaves in relation to one's inner psychic processes; it is the inner attitude, the characteristic face, that is turned towards the unconscious" (100). The anima (or, as the case may be, the animus) is complementary to the personality and contains, in a compensatory fashion, all those common human qualities which the conscious attitude lacks. Men have, inwardly, feminine traits, while women have masculine traits. The character of the anima can be deduced from the personae in that it consists of everything conspicuously absent in the outer attitude. The inverse of the individual's main personality traits are assembled in the anima; while one's persona is one's social role. An image of the anima/animus is produced by the unconscious in dreams: the anima/animus is usually represented "by definite persons with the corresponding qualities" (103) and may take the form of unknown or mythological figures. The anima of the male evidently usually takes the form of a female. This figure is usually the "object of intense love or equally intense hate (or fear). The influence of such a person is immediate and absolutely compelling, because it always provokes an affective response" (103). For the male (and vice-versa for the female), the mother and the beloved becomes the carrier and the embodiment of the omnipresent and timeless image which corresponds to the deepest reality in man: she is loyalty, she is compensation, but she is also "the great illusionist, the seductress, who draws him into life with her Maya – and not only into life's reasonable and useful aspects, but into its frightful paradoxes and ambivalences where good and evil, success and ruin, hope and despair, counterbalance one another" (110-1).

In short, the autonomy of the collective unconscious expresses itself in the figures of anima and animus and personify those contents that need to be and can be integrated into consciousness. The psyche is a "self-regulating system that maintains its equilibrium just as the body does. Every process that goes too far immediately and inevitably calls forth compensations" (181) without which there would be no normal psyche. It is an affair in which the attitude of consciousness is compensated for by the attitude of the unconscious. The principle way of discovering the latter is via dream-analysis because the dream describes the inner situation of the dreamer which the conscious mind most often

does not want to acknowledge. It brings to light those otherwise ignored or repressed components of the personality. Equilibrium in the psyche can be brought about only the "through a conscious assimilation of unconscious contents" (180), that is, the "mutual penetration of conscious and unconscious" (180). The goal is to interpret the dream not via unlimited free association but "by a careful and conscious illumination of the interconnected associations objectively grouped around particular images" (177). Jung argues that the "treatment of the dream symbolism demands that we take into account the dreamer's philosophical, religious and moral convictions. It is far wiser not to regard dream-symbols semiotically, i.e., as signs or symptoms of a fixed character, but as true symbols, i.e., as expressions of a content not yet consciously recognised or conceptually formed" (184).