

# Mixed Metaphors and Narrative Shifts

## Archetypes

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**ABSTRACT.** Jungian archetype theory exemplifies tensions between ways of questioning in psychology. Jung anchors his thesis in the contrasting discourses of biology and metaphysics, though his narrative presents a 'whole' transcending both. The present focus is on its problematic touch-down in the discourse of science. The essay considers, in turn, tensions specific to Jung's writing, tensions between Jungian theory development and the logic of scientific discovery, and tensions inherent in post-Jungian revisions of archetype theory, culminating in the relationship between saying and seeing problematized by Wittgenstein. Throughout, the essay engages with Jung's theorizing as itself a creative process, the products of which (the specific propositions debated by his followers and critics) may be viewed as crossroads requiring readers of Jung to make decisions as to which way to turn. In closing, the possibility of integrating Jung's thought with a dialogical approach is indicated.

**KEY WORDS:** archetypes, Jung, language games, science vs art

*I am inclined to think that scientific discovery is impossible without faith in ideas which are of a purely speculative kind, and sometimes even quite hazy; a faith which is completely unwarranted from the point of view of science . . . (Popper, 1934/1958, p. 38)*

C.G. Jung (1954/1960a) believed that the theory of archetypes explains scientific theories, among other things: 'All the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes . . . the central concepts of science, philosophy, and ethics are no exception to this rule' (para. 342). Judged against scientific criteria, archetype theory has barely progressed from a speculative hazy idea, such as those to which Popper refers. Yet outside 'scientific' psychology its impact has been considerable. Jung and his students elaborated it in voluminous work. It led to the school of archetypal psychology founded by Hillman (e.g. 1983), captured the 'popular' imagination through Joseph Campbell (e.g. 1993), was picked up in the history of ideas

(Pietikäinen, 1999) and literary criticism (e.g. Pratt, 1981; Rowland, 1999), and is attributed to scholars such as Northrop Frye (1957), who laboured to disassociate his 'archetypal criticism' from Jungianism. Debates about archetypes continue to liven up the current discourse of analytical psychology (Anderson, 1998; Hogenson, 1998; Jones, 2000a, 2000b; Kalsched, 1998a, 1998b; Maloney, 1999, 2000; Mogenson, 1999; Morrison, 1998; Pietikäinen, 1998a, 1998b; Solomon, 1998; Stevens, 1998).

What could be the staying power of a theory that from certain perspectives seems so wrong? A possible answer is that archetype theory is a powerful narrative. Contrasted with the scientific explanation, which requires verification, 'in the domain of narrative and explication of human action we ask instead that, upon reflection, the account . . . "feel" as right' (Bruner, 1986, p. 52). It felt right to Jung and continues to feel right to many of his followers. But it might be right in the sense that literary fiction, a piece of music or abstract art are: a whole coherent unto itself, like a spider-web held by its own connotations and suspended in virtual isolation from its surroundings apart from minimal strategic anchor-points. Jung anchored this web in two opposing discourses, biology and metaphysics—and problems of coherence ensue when we try to read the theory exclusively into one discourse or the other. The present essay will focus on the problematic touchdown of archetype theory in natural science, but it is also pertinent here that Jung linked it to a continuum of thought from Plato to Schopenhauer. His intuition thus matured from a 'hazy idea', not into a scientific theory, but into an idea with a *history*. At the same time, Jung (1954/1959a) did not provide a philosophical argument as such, and indeed characterized himself as 'an empiricist, not a philosopher' (para. 149). In the last analysis, he views philosophers' notions, too, as archetypal manifestations, and claims to have discovered archetypes empirically, although, as Hillman (1983) commented, the 'way in which the later Jung uses "empirical" is worth a study in itself' (p. 32). Jung's narrative makes contact with the experimental psychology of the time—often introducing his ideas in opposition to Wundt (e.g. Jung, 1954/1960a)—but he 'grew out' of his own early engagement with empirical procedures, and subsequently analytical psychology became far removed from scientific psychology. Jung's approach to 'doing' psychology seems related to what he regarded as the dilemma of modern psychology as a natural science. Today social constructionists raise similar comments, though with very different conclusions (see, e.g., Gergen, 1994; Harré, 1998). Jung did not eschew the natural science paradigm—an option that would be inconceivable for a psychiatrist in his era—but his narrative and argumentation compromise that paradigm in other ways. To develop his theories he relied on rhetorical devices such as simile, analogy, plausibility and 'common-sense' claims, rather than on logical deduction and critical analysis. It could be argued that 'science' served Jung as a metaphor in the

way that nowadays narrative is to some a new root metaphor in psychology (e.g. Sarbin, 1986).

The general issue addressed in this essay is the tension between Jung's ways of questioning in psychology. In this regard, archetype theory serves as a case in point. The essay is structured from the specific to the general: that is, beginning with tensions specific to Jung's own writing, going on to consider tensions between Jung's theory development and the logic of scientific discovery, and proceeding to tensions inherent in some post-Jungian revisions of archetype theory with particular attention to how these navigate the crossroads in Jung's theorizing. Towards the essay's end the relationship between seeing and saying (cf. Wittgenstein, 1953) will be identified as a crossroads implied by contemporary developments in psychology.

Throughout, my aim is to engage with archetype theory as itself a creative process whereby Jungian thought interfaces with the two traditionally dichotomous 'culture spheres' of psychology, science versus art. The essay should be read with two limitations in mind. First, selecting to focus on the one interface in a single essay means neglecting the other (an exploration of which is deferred to work in preparation). Second, although the present discussion is guided by an idea of where archetype theory could be taken, it is not the purpose of this essay to offer a reformulation (an indication is given in the closing section).

### **Archetypes According to Jung**

Jung's theoretical construct is presented throughout his later writings in statements that weave it across different levels of explanation. The main distinction emerging from his work is between *archetypal images* and *archetypes-as-such*, though he tends to refer to both simply as archetypes. An archetype-as-such is the readiness or tendency to create a specific kind of archetypal images. However, *image* itself has a special meaning for Jung, important to note here, for the definition of archetypes is placed under the entry for image in his 'Definitions' chapter (Jung, 1921/1971). To Jung, image neither is 'the psychic reflection of an external object' nor possesses 'the quasi-real character of an hallucination', but 'has the psychological character of a fantasy idea' that 'can always be distinguished from sensuous reality by the fact that it is an "inner" image' (para. 743). The image is consciously experienced *as-if*, that is, as a symbolic representation of something that is experienced unconsciously. It is not a projection of unconscious contents as such: 'The image is a *condensed expression of the psychic situation as a whole*, and not merely, nor even predominantly, of unconscious contents pure and simple' (para. 745). The holistic nature of the inner image accounts for its complexity and non-linear relation to any

veridical perceptions. The image is ‘a complex structure made up of the most varied material from the most varied sources’, and interpreting its meaning ‘can start neither from the conscious alone nor from the unconscious alone, but only from their reciprocal relationship’ (para. 745). Jung speculated that sometimes ‘the factors influencing the conscious situation are *collective* . . . rather than personal’ (para. 746). Images formed as representations of such situations are so-called *primordial images*—a phrase that Jung used interchangeably with archetypes. He explains that in this context image means ‘not only the form of the activity taking place, but the typical situation in which the activity is released’ (Jung, 1954/1959a, para. 152). In other words, he sees the activation of particular archetypes-as-such as akin to fixed action patterns in animals. Archetypes ‘are, indeed, an instinctive *trend*, as marked as the impulse of birds to build nests, or ants to form organized colonies’ (Jung, 1964, p. 58). The manifestation of archetypes is potential in all humans, though actualized when people experience the precipitating circumstances. According to Jung (1921/1971), the primordial image is ‘always collective, i.e., it is at least common to entire peoples or epochs’ (para. 747), which to Jung is the same as saying that the image expresses ‘material primarily derived from the *collective unconscious*’ (para. 746). He speculated that there are racial archetypes as well as archetypes common to all humans.

However, two different meanings of ‘collective’ are applicable to his thesis: (a) something that is created collectively, like a language; or (b) something that normally everyone has, like the capacity for language. Whereas meaning (a) invites descriptions of how societies intersubjectively construct symbolic representations of typical situations, meaning (b) prompts the assumption of brain structures that mediate those productions. Jung (1921/1971) seems to opt for the latter when he states: ‘From the scientific, causal standpoint the primordial image can be conceived as a mnemonic deposit . . . which has arisen through the condensation of countless processes of a similar kind’ (para. 748). It is not clear whether he endorses the causal view or merely points it out, but statements such as this channel readers’ thinking into the postulation of inherited memories, which Jung (1964) felt was wrongly attributed to him:

The term ‘archetype’ is often misunderstood as meaning certain definite mythological images or motifs. . . . The archetype is a tendency to form such representations of a motif. . . . My critics have incorrectly assumed that I am dealing with ‘inherited representations’. (p. 57)

Jung stressed that what is ‘deposited’ over countless generations is only the tendency to form certain images, not their contents as such. He reasoned that, ‘[I]ike every animal, [man] possesses a preformed psyche which breeds true to his species . . . enables a child to react in a human manner’, and must be pre-configured by the experiences of our distant ancestors:

These images are 'primordial' images in so far as they are peculiar to whole species, and if they ever 'originated' their origin must have coincided at least with the beginning of the species. They are the 'human quality' of the human being, the specifically human form his activities take. This specific form is hereditary and is already present in the germ-plasm. The idea that it is not inherited but comes into being in every child anew would be . . . preposterous . . . (Jung, 1954/1959a, para. 152)

Nowadays it is quite acceptable to assume that concepts come into being anew in every child. This has been explored in the most influential developmental theories to date, ensuing from the work of Piaget and Vygotsky. However, Jung was not directly concerned with concept forming or the genesis of knowledge. That which is pre-formed according to him (i.e. the psyche) could be understood as the total life-span interface of a sentient organism with its environment. The pivotal statement in the above passage is arguably the reference to the 'human quality' of the human being. It is to do with how we, being human, experience our world, and how we consciously know the world through symbols defining what is unconsciously experienced.

Jung's commitment to viewing the 'human quality' as the product of evolution resulted in a tension between the discourses of biology and metaphysics in his narrative. This tension is expressed in his conceptualization of the relationship between instinct and archetype. Jung (1948/1960b) defines archetypes as correlates of instincts. He states, '*Instincts are typical modes of action, and wherever we meet with uniform and regularly recurring modes of action and reaction we are dealing with instinct, no matter whether it is associated with a conscious motive or not*' (para. 273). Rhetorically, this sets up an analogy that allows Jung to develop his thesis of primordial images:

Like the instincts, the primordial images have been obscured by the extraordinary differentiation of our thinking. Just as certain biological views attribute only a few instincts to man, so the theory of cognition reduces the archetypes to a few, logically limited categories of understanding. (para. 274)

He later paraphrases his definition of instincts: '*Archetypes are typical modes of apprehension, and wherever we meet with uniform and regularly recurring modes of apprehension we are dealing with an archetype, no matter whether its mythological character is recognized or not*' (para. 280).

In the interim paragraphs, Jung (1948/1960b) traces the history of the 'theory of cognition' back to Plato, although distancing his own concept from Platonic Ideas: 'In Plato . . . an extraordinarily high value is set on the archetypes as metaphysical ideas, as "paradigms" or models, while real things are held to be only the copies of these model ideas' (para. 275). There is, however, a fundamental difference between what Plato and Jung consider

real. The point is worth expanding with a look at Schopenhauer, in whose post-Kantian theory Jung's historical sketch would culminate.

Schopenhauer (1844/1922) described Plato's doctrine as based in a dichotomy of relational and essential orders of things:

The things of this world which our senses perceive have no true being; *they always become, they never are*: they have only a relative being; they all exist merely in and through their relation to each other; their whole being may, therefore, quite as well be called a non-being. . . . The real archetypes, on the other hand, the eternal Ideas, the original forms of all things, can alone be said to have true being because they *always are, but never become or pass away*. (pp. 221–222)

Schopenhauer compares Plato's position to Kant's, and concludes that both doctrines 'explain the visible world as a manifestation . . . which only has meaning and a borrowed reality through that which experiences itself in it' (p. 222). To Kant, 'Time, space and causality are not determinations of the thing-in-itself, but belong only to its phenomenal existence, for . . . the whole of experience is only knowledge of the phenomenon, not of the thing-in-itself' (p. 221). In a way, Jungian archetypes likewise 'exist' outside human ken, at a realm knowable only through our experience of its reflections, though this realm is envisaged (contra Plato) as intrinsic to Nature. Jung (1954/1959a) asserts that archetypes 'are not disseminated only by tradition, language, and migration, but . . . can rearise spontaneously, at any time, at any place, and without outside influence' (para. 153), adding:

The far-reaching implications of this statement must not be overlooked. For it means that there are present in every psyche forms which are unconscious but nonetheless active—living dispositions, ideas in the Platonic sense, that perform and continually influence our thoughts and actions. (para. 154)

However, Jung's 'living dispositions' are ideas in the Platonic sense only at the level of ontogenesis. At the phylogenetic level, the very notion of evolution as adaptation falls under the Platonic rubric of things that 'always become', as Schopenhauer put it, existing merely in and through their relation to each other.

Like the dual meaning of 'collective' noted earlier, the relational/essentialist dichotomy is a crossroads in Jung's theorizing; and regarding archetypes, he seems to choose the road to the essence of things (regarding psychic energy, his thesis veers towards relational thinking; see Jones, 2001a, 2002a). However, his 'essentialism' is psychological—to do with what is essential to human psychological functioning—rather than meta-physical, to do with the essences of things-in-themselves. Jung (1948/1960b) claims to borrow the idea of archetypes from St Augustine. Although medieval philosophy 'still stands on a Platonic footing in this respect', Jung contends that in it we find 'the notion that archetypes are natural images

engraved on the human mind, helping it to form judgements' (para. 275). Later still, according to Jung, archetype 'became a "thought", an internal condition of cognition'; he cites Spinoza, who understood 'idea' to be 'a conception of the mind, which the mind forms by reason of its being a thinking thing' (para. 276). Kant subsequently reduced it to a limited number of a priori categories, and Schopenhauer 'carried the process of simplification still further, while at the same time endowing archetypes with an almost Platonic significance' (para. 276). Like Spinoza or Kant, Jungian archetypes imply knowledge structures intrinsic to mental operations, although Jung is not satisfied with assuming that it is so by virtue of the mind being a 'thinking thing'. To him, the existence of such a 'thing' requires an explanation such as offered by the natural sciences.

Ultimately, Jung (1948/1960b) takes the above account, which he characterizes as an 'all-too-summary sketch', less as a *history* of an idea than as the *story* of an archetype, in his sense of the term. In the philosophers' notions of archetypes, 'we can see once again that same psychological process at work, which disguises the instincts under the cloak of rational motivations and transforms the archetypes into rational concepts. It is hardly possible to recognize the archetype under this guise' (para. 277). In other words, whereas we might see in that history a story of the social construction of the psychological subject, construction spanning centuries of philosophers, Jung saw in it an affirmation of his own theoretical construction. To him, the persistence of the philosophers' theme despite its historical transformations is a 'uniform and regularly recurring mode of apprehension' (para. 274), and therefore their rational concepts are but manifestations of some primordial image. The Jungian twist to the story of archetypes from Plato onwards thus anchors cognitive universals in flesh and blood. What began with Plato at a supra-natural order of eternal being ends with Jung at the natural order of biological becoming.

### **Is Archetype a Scientific Discovery?**

To many, the answer to the above question is 'No', and to specify why archetype theory is not scientific would be to state the obvious. One of the obvious reasons is that archetypes, like other depth-psychological constructs, cannot be falsified. Yet the same could be said about attitudes, causal attributions or cognitive schemas, which in psychology (behaviourism and social constructionism notwithstanding) have enjoyed credibility akin to the credibility of atoms, electrons and other invisible entities discovered by science. The reasons why archetypes are not considered scientific by psychologists who see nothing amiss with cognitivism must lie elsewhere, in the character of Jungian knowledge as contrasted with scientific knowledge.

About the time that Jung formed the theory of archetypes, during the 1930s, Popper (1934/1958) began criticizing the ‘widely accepted view’ according to which the logic of scientific discovery should be ‘identical with inductive logic’ (p. 27). Inductive logic moves from ‘*singular statements* . . . such as accounts of the results of observations or experiments, to *universal statements*, such as hypotheses or theories’ (p. 27). The problem with inductive logic is that we could never be sure whether the known singular instances reveal the full scope of the phenomenon they instantiated. Popper recommended that conclusions from ‘a new idea, put up tentatively, and not yet justified in any way’, should be drawn by means of logical deduction (p. 32), which may proceed in four phases. First, the internal consistency of the new theory should be ascertained by comparing the conclusions drawn from it with each other, and also with other ideas, ‘so as to find what logical relations (such as equivalence, derivability, compatibility, or incompatibility) exist between them’ (p. 32). Second, the logical form of the theory—that is, ‘whether it has the character of an empirical or scientific theory, or whether it is, for example, tautological’ (p. 32)—would be investigated. Third, the extent to which the new theory constitutes a scientific advance could be determined by comparison with other theories. Fourth, the theory is tested through empirical applications of the conclusions derived from it, in order to ‘find out how far the new consequences of the theory . . . stand up to the demands of practice’ (p. 33). In the empirical application, ‘predictions’ are deduced from the theory, especially predictions that contradict or are not derivable from the theory that the new one purports to replace. If these are verified, ‘then the theory has, for the time being, passed its test’ (p. 33). Popper’s description has been itself criticized, among other things, for being unrealistic. Scientific discovery might be contingent on history, which is full of ‘accidents and conjunctures and curious juxtapositions of events’ (Butterfield, cited in Feyerabend, 1993, p. 9). It might arise from political and economic contingencies that favour certain ‘trends’ in research, and from scientists’ own motives (e.g. Collins, 1992; but cf. Koertge, 2000, for a critique of the sociology of scientific knowledge). Nevertheless, in Popper’s vision we recognize ‘science’, even if in practice his ideal is compromised or wrong in parts.

Judged against this ideal, archetype theory does not simply fair poorly; it looks like a different form of life. At a cursory glance it might seem as if Jung is merely guilty of inductive logic when he progresses from accounts of particular dreams, hallucinations, myths, and so on, to the universal statement of archetypes. There seems to be too smooth and rapid a transition from the observation of regularities to a full-blown theory:

For years I have been observing and investigating the products of the unconscious in the widest sense of the word, namely dreams, fantasies, visions, and delusions of the insane. I have not been able to avoid recognizing certain regularities, that is, *types* . . . that repeat themselves

frequently and have a corresponding meaning. (Jung, 1951/1959b, para. 309)

This is followed with a catalogue of motifs, ‘arranged under a series of archetypes’ such as the Shadow, Wise Old Man, Child, Mother, Maiden, and ‘lastly the *anima* in man and the *animus* in woman’ (para. 309). It is uncertain whether Jung is reading into the clinical material his own expectations about the organization of the psyche or deriving a model out of the material; but there is little evidence of subjecting his idea to logical investigations such as recommended by Popper. Moreover, the theory is circular: archetypes are both what it describes, and according to the theory what brings about such descriptions—as seen in Jung’s characterization of philosophers’ concepts. Such a thesis must be taken on faith. Believers see the evidence everywhere (and may understand the purpose of fieldwork as that of increasing the catalogue of archetypal manifestations). Sceptics cannot debunk the theory by pointing to cultural processes, because the believers agree that these processes enable archetypal manifestations. It is also difficult to evaluate the extent to which archetype theory constitutes a scientific discovery by comparing it with other theories in psychology, for other theories do not hold in focus the same thing that Jung does.

Jung’s most famous ‘proof’ was a patient’s hallucination that the sun has a phallus from which the wind comes, an imagery that bore an uncanny resemblance to a description that Jung found some years later in a Mithraic liturgy (Jung, 1952/1956, para. 151; 1954/1959a, para. 105). He contended that this imagery was too bizarre to have emerged in unconnected sources by sheer coincidence. Recently it has been claimed that there was an earlier German publication of the text, and that the patient’s hallucination was reported to Jung by a colleague (Noll, 1994). Jung might have been duped, but even what he took in good faith contradicts his own definition of archetypes: if the imagery were archetypal, surely it would be as common as motifs associated with the archetypes of the Hero, Mother, Wise Old Man, and so on. Rather than provide evidence in the scientific sense, the solar phallus case seems to be a significant turning point for Jung. Stumbling upon what seemed to him a remarkable coincidence was the catalyst that inspired his theory. Hillman (1983) makes a similar point, commenting on Jung’s use of the word ‘empirical’:

[Jung’s] use of the word refers to a subjective process in himself. . . . The empirical event—the solar-phallus image in a patient—releases a movement in the mind setting off a hypothesis . . . as a poem may start in a concrete perception. And, like the poet, Jung returns ever and again to the concrete world of perceptions (cases, dreams, religious fantasies, ancient texts). In this first sense he is empirical. He is, second, empirical in accumulating instances to support his hypotheses, and, third, in the pragmatist sense of evaluating hypotheses in terms of practical therapeutic heuristics. But he is not empirical . . . because the case is not the

indispensable source of his insights or the place of their proving. (pp. 32–33)

The foundation of archetype theory on poetic empiricism does not necessarily damage its scientific potential. The theory could still generate testable hypotheses, other matters being satisfactory. However, few studies have used experimental designs to test predictions arising from archetype theory; and those I have seen (e.g. Maloney, 1999; Rosen, Smith, Huston, & Gonzalez, 1991) are arguably weak. Their findings, though seemingly confirming the specific predictions, could also be explained (sometimes better) by rival theories, understood as cultural conventions, or be shown to be an artefact of the statistical procedure (e.g. Jones, 2000a). Both the scarcity of such studies and the lack of methodological sophistication in the available ones could be due to practitioners' socialization into Jungian institutions. These have not built up a tradition of rigorous research, but instead foster the ethos of what Polkinghorne (1988) called 'narrative knowing' (see Pietikäinen, 1999, on Jung's 'narrative psychology').

It is clear that theorizing archetypes did not progress along the steps of scientific discovery. This was not out of ignorance. Jung (1948/1959c) was aware that

[o]ne of the unbreakable rules in scientific research is to take an object as known only in so far as the inquirer is in a position to make scientifically valid statements about it. 'Valid' in this sense simply means what can be verified by facts. (para. 384)

Jung contended that while 'modern psychology . . . does not exclude the existence of faith, conviction, and experienced certainties of whatever description, . . . psychology completely lacks the means to prove their validity in the scientific sense' (para. 384). The dilemma of modern psychology, according to Jung, is the inaccessibility of its subject matter: 'Consequently, knowledge of the psychic substance is impossible for us . . . our subtlest lucubrations can establish no more than is expressed in the statement: this is how the psyche behaves' (para. 384). As noted above, the limitation that he so shrewdly noted did not deter him from presenting archetype theory as a quasi-scientific explanation for recurrent symbolic motifs across cultures, historical eras and individuals, including scientific theories:

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 those ideas to reality. (para. 342)

Jung saw abundant proof for this in 20th-century Europe. He pointed to the fact that beliefs in 'spirits and suchlike theories' persist in 'our civilized world' as evidence that 'the problem of invisible psychic determinants is as

alive today as ever it was' (para. 341). One way to interpret it would be that he misunderstood the nature of cultural processes (Pietikäinen, 1999), overlooking the likelihood that beliefs in the paranormal are transmitted through social practices and serve social functions in 'civilized' societies as in indigenous ones (though not necessarily the same functions). However, Jung could be making a subtler point: such superstitions survive in contemporary societies despite scepticism, because they strike a 'primitive' chord in the soul of 'modern man', so to speak. And likewise (he reasoned) the central concepts of science, philosophy and ethics take hold because they accord with images already formed at the level of unconscious experience.

On the whole, Jung's psychology is less in keeping with natural science than with the 'scientific goal' of structuralism in the human sciences. This goal involves the assumption that 'the phenomena of human experience are recurrent, systematic, and susceptible to rational explanation' (Schleiffer, 1987, p. 6). In contrast, poststructuralism posits all forms of knowledge as a 'function of language conceived as a structure of contrasts and combinations' and 'the always-present *possibility* of ever-widening contexts that the structure of language creates, possibility that undermines the *scientific* goal of the human sciences' (pp. 4–5). In accordance with structuralism, archetype theory regards the recurrent nature of human experience as emanating from the pre-formed psyche. However, Jung (1954/1960a) also realized that psychology 'finds itself in an uncomfortable position compared with the other natural sciences because it lacks a base outside its object' (para. 429). While envisioning psychology as something *other* than a natural science was not conceivable in his era, the languages of biology and physics—rather than their praxes—created for him the possibility of ever-widening contexts for a psychology of meaning.

### Post-Jung: The Issue of Innate Dispositions

To recap, the archetype as theorized by Jung has three levels: (1) a biological disposition (*archetype-as-such*), (2) its universal theme, reflecting a typical human situation (*archetypal image*), and (3) the outward manifestations of the image in contents that are culturally and personally diverse. Although these levels are conceptually discrete, it is difficult to disentangle them empirically. In actuality, there are only instances of (3): that is, particular concrete human productions. Jungian clinical and scholarly practices infer (2) along the lines of Jung's method of *amplification*, which involves the interpretation of personal imagery (e.g. patients' dreams) by comparison with similar motifs in mythology, religion and fairy tales. Whilst amplification implies reducing diverse material to some common theme, the claim that an image is archetypal hinges on showing that this theme relates to some typical human situation. If taken no further, the idea of archetypes

would be no more controversial than saying that there are many ways to tell the same story; for example, the universal ‘story’ of the mother–child relationship. Problems arise when the archetype-as-such is inferred from the archetypal image. The inference of an innate disposition redefines what ‘universal’ refers to. That is, not as (a) something that everyone is likely to experience, but as (b) something that all humans display, like a heartbeat. Interpretation (b) presupposes a physiological substratum, just as ‘displaying’ a heartbeat presupposes a heart, and thus channels archetype theorizing into a quest for the ‘organs’ generating the archetypal images.

Channelled thus, the chief obstacle for the coherence of archetype theory stems from Jung’s (1954/1959a) claim that the archetype ‘is hereditary and is already present in the germ-plasm’ (para. 152). This and similar statements are heard as implying a mechanism whereby the lived experiences of forebears are inscribed upon offspring’s DNA. Trying to circumvent Jung’s unwitting slide to Lamarckian allusions, Stevens (1999) redefines the archetype as a naturally selected ‘biological entity . . . existing as a “centre” in the CNS which actively seeks its own activation in the psyche and in the world’ (p. 39). Whilst this has been challenged within contemporary analytical psychology (e.g. McDowell, 2001), the innate-archetype thesis is worth noting here because this interpretation of Jung’s theory is the most widely disseminated and also the target of most criticisms. Arguments such as Stevens’ have relied mostly on the persuasive power of Darwinism, pivoting on the *plausibility* of specialized brain structures. A similar rhetoric is deployed by evolutionary psychologists: there is no reason to believe that ‘the human brain and the mind it houses is any less complex, any less specialized, or any less functional in design than the human eye’ (Buss, 2001, p. 965). But here the similarity ends. It is difficult to reconcile Jungian archetypes with the claims of evolutionary psychology (which are themselves debatable). Samuels (1998) identifies two competing hypotheses as central in evolutionary psychology. One is ‘a *massively modular* conception of mental architecture’ that views the mind as composed of ‘innate, special-purpose information-processing organs or “modules” that have been shaped by natural selection to handle the sorts of recurrent information-processing problems that confronted our hunter-gatherer forebears’ (p. 576). The other is that the human mind ‘possesses special-purpose bodies of information’ (p. 576), which Samuels calls Darwinian modules and defines as cognitive structures dedicated to solving a restricted class of problems, which are ‘a species of *computational mechanism*’ (p. 579). Neither hypothesis accommodates a notion of modules for ‘computing’ the Shadow, Mother, Hero, Wise Old Man, Rebirth, and other archetypal entities.

Problems with the nativist approach to archetypes make the argument for a cultural origin seem stronger. Pietikäinen (1998a, 1999) argues that cultural origination cannot be ruled out, for cultural processes are subtler and more influential than Jung had believed. Pietikäinen’s thesis is non-

psychological insofar as it treats 'Jung' as a phenomenon in Occidental thought, rather than take Jungian theory as an account of human nature to be evaluated against other accounts. He extrapolates Cassirer's concept of cultural forms to propose that Jungian archetypes would be more intelligible as culturally derived 'symbolic forms'. Yet Pietikäinen is in a kind of agreement with Stevens, whose ideas he opposes; both construe the problematic of archetypes as the nature-versus-culture question of origination (Jones, 2001b). As Wittgenstein (1953) would say, 'That is not an agreement in opinions but in form of life' (§ 241). The problem with this form of life lies in the promotion of only two options, which are set up as mutually exclusive. There is a third option. Lock (2000) points to archaeological evidence indicating that modern human anatomy evolved long before symbolically mediated behaviours. To Lock, this means that we should look at symbol systems themselves in order to elucidate how these systems create various opportunities for changes in human practices. He uses the analogy of animals' creation of paths through vegetation: the path is 'an unintended consequence of the need for easy or swift movement. This is how . . . language and any other institutions which are useful may arise. . . . In this way, a whole new universe of possibilities or potentialities may arise' (Popper, 1972, p. 119, cited in Lock, 2000, p. 115). That is, symbol systems create 'paths' in human perception—paths that 'not only establish new possibilities and potentialities for a physiological system (the brain) to use, but simultaneously provide the "notational" system that eases the "discovery" of those things that are implicit in them' (Lock, 2000, p. 116).

Jung, too, understood a symbol as something that by virtue of its creation changes perception, including the perception of the symbol itself. Unlike Lock, Jung concerned himself less with the 'macro' level of societies and their symbolic systems (although, as seen, he made sweeping statements about religions, sciences, etc.) than with symbols at the 'micro' level of the person and the particular dream, myth or other concrete production. The conflation of the two levels in depth psychology might account for some of Jung's more 'embarrassing' ideas, such as his attempt to account for the rise of the Nazis by attributing it to a racial archetype, the Germanic god Wotan (Brask, 2000). It could be reflected that the Jungian 'paradigm' does not provide easy paths for analysing political movements and historical transformations. Among other things, it seems inadequate to account for why the concept of racial archetypes is seldom mentioned anymore in the dissemination of archetype theory, and rarely features in its ongoing development, whereas a Darwinist interpretation is heard as something at least worthy of criticizing.

Jung's psychology is arguably at its best regarding the subjective interaction with concrete images, an interaction level at which archetypes-as-such (if such exist) 'present themselves as ideas and images, like everything else that becomes a content of consciousness' (Jung, 1954/1960a, para. 435).

For an image (utterance, etc.) to be perceived as symbolically meaningful, there must be a *symbolic attitude* 'which assigns meaning to events . . . and attaches to this meaning a greater value than to bare facts' (Jung, 1921/1971, para. 819). In Jung's thought, this circularity is resolved by regarding the symbolic attitude as a function of the relationship between the world as unconsciously sensed, on the one hand, and the world as consciously known, on the other. His position converges with Bakhtin's (1993) description of the dialogical act (Jones, 2002b). An arguably promising direction for archetype theory is towards a concept of universals of experience, building on Jung's (1951/1959d) claim that the 'archetype does not proceed from physical facts, but describes how the psyche experiences the physical facts' (para. 260). It is a journey that would take us into the borderland between narrative psychology and literary criticism (cf. Jones, 2002c), and is beyond the scope of this essay.

### Seeing and Saying

Any contemporary reformulation of archetype theory seems inevitably to compromise some aspects of the original. As seen, a Darwinian revision selects Jung's assumption of innate dispositions, but excludes his assumption that archetypes continue to evolve with cultural experiences. A revision that attributes archetypes to cultural processes excludes the innate hypothesis. Dwelling upon the origination of archetypes, in turn, neglects Jung's teleological or functional approach. Jung's teleology is comparable with Aristotle's (Horne, 2002), positing personal development as unfolding towards the fulfilment of the 'natural function' of human beings. Yet Jung (1928/1960c) contested the teleological fallacy of final causes, and strove instead towards an explanatory framework comparable with field and systems theories in psychology (Jones, 2001a, 2002a).

Two recent 'Jungian' papers independently draw upon the idea of self-organizing systems, though not in the field-theoretical sense. Saunders and Skar (2001) emphasize the analogy between the psyche and physical systems. Theirs, in a nutshell, is a 'plausibility' argument: inasmuch as self-organization is a widely demonstrated property of physical systems, the psyche, too, must have this property. McDowell's (2001) thesis is sophisticated and well argued. He rejects the possibility of cultural transmission by finding similar motifs in a patient's childhood dream and various myths; and, looking at current neurocognitive science and the results of the human genome project, he makes a strong case for rejecting the innate-archetypes hypothesis. In his account, this leaves archetypes to be conceptualized as principles governing the spontaneous organization of themes or motifs into archetypal images. Implicitly, the systemic 'turn' involves rephrasing the ontological question. Rather than the question of what causes archetypal

images (evolution versus culture), it becomes a question of their function within the dynamical whole of the psyche.

Systemic thinking nevertheless begs 'causal' questions such as what precisely is self-organizing. Jung (e.g. 1952/1956) posited that fragments of things seen, heard, and so forth, are rearranged by the mind according to an internally imposed order. Experiential fragments coalesce and hold together inasmuch as the composite whole is apprehended as meaningful, that is, an object of consciousness with its own integrity. And since the principles holding together the composite object do not arise in phenomena 'out there', Jung reasoned that those must arise from the inner structure of the psyche itself. '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*' (Jung, 1931/1960d, para. 342, italics added). Jung thus assigns to consciousness not only the task of processing sensory input according to internally generated principles, but also the creative function of making these principles cognizable. Echoing the social constructionist critique of cognitive psychology (e.g. Gergen, 1994), it could be argued that Jung overlooked the extent to which the translation of subjective experience into visible reality is an intersubjective construction. To follow this line of argument, the answer to what is self-organizing would be not psyche or mind, but systems of symbols at the level of the collective: 'the vast network of interpersonal communicative acts that constitute the lived reality of human experience' (Harré, 1998, p. 31).

The relationship of seeing to saying was problematized by Wittgenstein (1953): 'Don't we talk of a white rose in the dark and of a red rose in the dark? And don't we say for all that that they can't be distinguished in the dark?' (§ 515). We habitually see roses as red or white, the grass as green, and so forth, because these concepts are linked together in our language. Whilst the Jungian 'project' could be characterized as an effort to map out what lies outside language for the human being, the emerging consensus at the cutting edge of philosophy seems to be that there is no such world. Robinson (2000) sums up Wittgenstein's thesis: 'the connection between language and world is a *practical* one in which changes in language grow out of, and at the same time codify and facilitate changes in practice' (p. 282). Robinson contends that the 'picture of a single, separated world . . . waiting to impose itself on all humanity, on every human language and the system of belief of every separate people'—descending from Plato—is not only 'incoherent in itself' but also incapable of accounting for cultural diversity (p. 290). The Wittgensteinian position informs also the social constructionist rejection of psychoanalytical thinking—the 'lingering assumption' that the unconscious is 'a reality apart from discursive and conversational practices' (Varela, 1995, p. 365). However, exposing the fallacy of a world outside language does not remove the epistemological gap between experience and expression (Jones, 1997, 1999, 2002b; O'Connor &

Hallam, 2000). Wittgenstein and his interpreters do not address this gap: 'The question is not one of explaining a language-game by means of our experiences, but of noting a language-game' (Wittgenstein, 1953, § 655).

In psychology, the question is arguably not one of noting a language game, but of explaining the dialectical relationship between the language game and people's experiences. This could be illustrated with dream interpretation. Wittgenstein (1953) comments that reporting dreams is a language game, which begs the question, 'Does this mean that it is nonsense ever to raise the question whether dreams really take place during sleep, or are a memory phenomenon of the awakened?' (p. 184). Philosophers unpacking this comment return to the overlap between saying and seeing. Schroeder (2000) defends a claim that 'the temporal location of dreams as occurring in one's sleep is not an empirical fact, but determined by grammar' (p. 70). Clearly the *experience* of a dream—what is being remembered (upon waking up)—is not the same as the neurological correlates of dreaming as brain activity. The conundrum extends to people's reports of past thoughts and other mental events: 'there is no empirical way of distinguishing the reported event from the report' (Hanfling, 1998, p. 344). Hanfling concludes, contra Schroeder, that our inability to settle the question 'did it really happen?' by empirical observation does not mean that the *question* is unreal. He thus maintains Wittgenstein's separation of the inquiry into language games from inquiries into people's experiences. Such philosophical investigations present a persuasive case for viewing the contents of dreams and other mental events as organized by virtue of networks of concepts arising in discursive practices. Dream contents of linguistic origin, notably puns, have long been recognized in depth psychology. For example, Stevens (1995) reports that in the Chester Beatty papyrus, 'we learn that to dream of uncovering one's behind means one is about to lose one's parents. This is incomprehensible unless one knows that the Egyptian word for buttocks closely resembled the word for orphan' (p. 15). In Jungian clinical practice, knowing the pun (and its culture specificity) could be instrumental to 'reading off' a subjective situation from the dream imagery. In my reading of Jung's theory, he seeks to link universal subjective situations—such as experiencing loss or abandonment—and the imagery that makes the situation visible to us, such as the bare-bottomed orphan in Ancient Egyptian and other metaphors elsewhere.

### Closing Comments

Concluding his section concerning dreaming, Wittgenstein (1953) seems to echo Jung's envisioning of scientific knowledge. To Jung (1921/1971), 'Since every scientific theory contains an hypothesis, and is therefore an anticipatory description of something that is still essentially unknown, it is a

symbol' (para. 817). Having given examples of scientific metaphors, Wittgenstein (1953) says,

What this language primarily describes is a picture. What is to be done with the picture, how it is to be used, is still obscure. Quite clearly, however, it must be explored if we want to understand the sense of what we are saying. But the picture seems to spare us this work: it already points to a particular use. This is how it takes us in. (p. 184)

Jung's work could be characterized as an inquiry into how such pictures take us in. What is to be done with the picture that Jung himself presented is open to interpretation, but clearly should be explored if we want to understand what we are saying as psychologists. Jung's picture might not take us in, so to speak, when it is 'framed' in the discourse of scientific discovery. Indeed, archetype theory could serve as a cautionary tale about the risks of mixing metaphors. Jung modelled an understanding of how people's experiences become meaningful on the root metaphor of natural science, and thus ran the risk that his theory would be framed as an incoherent attempt in scientific explanation. But coherence/incoherence is a function of the interaction between a reader and the text: 'The event of the life of the text, that is, its true essence, always develops *on the boundary between two consciousnesses*' (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 106).

Problems arise also from framing archetype theory in the discourses of the humanities. In literary criticism, for instance, archetypes become subverted into narrative genres. Commenting favourably on Northrop Frye's 'archetypal criticism', Ricoeur (1985) asserts,

We should not rush to denounce the latent 'Jungianism' of the archetypal criticism. . . . What is first emphasized by this term [archetype] is the recurrence of the same verbal forms. . . . It is this recurrence that contributes to the unification and integration of our literary experience. (p. 18)

But Jung—first and foremost a psychologist—was concerned with our *bodily lived* experience. He was therefore less concerned with identifying recurrent forms of imagery (verbal or iconic) than he was with identifying their function as meaning-making tools. Jung (1954/1959e) cautioned against assuming rigid bonds between forms and functions:

It does not, of course, suffice simply to connect a dream about a snake with the mythological occurrence of snakes, for who is to guarantee that the functional meaning of the snake in the dream is the same as in the mythological setting? (para. 103)

He viewed the form–function bond as context-specific ('the symbols must not be torn out of their context'; para. 103), and since contexts for human life are ever-changing, the form–function bond is best regarded as contingent or 'fluid'. This opens up the possibility of integrating Jung's theory with the

contemporary attention to discursive practices and, furthermore, Bakhtin's dialogism (Jones, 2002b).

To close the argument of this essay is not to provide definite answers to questions about archetypes. I have attempted to construct Jung's theorizing as a creative process of questioning what it means to be human. The products of this process—the specific propositions and hypotheses debated by his followers and critics—could be likened to crossroads requiring readers of Jung to make decisions as to which way to turn. Jung does provide answers, but the answers depend on how we read him. New crossroads come into being when his work is examined afresh in view of the 'postmodern' movement in psychology, with which it shares a concern with issues of selfhood, subjectivity, signification and embodiment (Jones, 2003). New roads open up because the gravity centre of theorizing those issues has shifted. The 'problems and facts of the old theory which are still remembered [are] distorted so as to fit into the new framework', as Feyerabend (1993, p. 157) points out, challenging Popper's account of the scientific method. In passing, the problems and facts of the 'new' psychology include a heightened sensitivity to the history of ideas and politicizing the old. The much-publicized allegations of Jung's Nazi sympathies have impacted upon his 'reception' in the discourses of the new psychology: 'For political reasons I cannot allow myself to read Jung with pleasure' (Billig, 1999, p. 6). Personally, I am persuaded by the repudiation of those allegations (Shamdasani, 1998; Stevens, 1999). However, psychologists' opinions are not psychological theories.

In terms of a contribution to matters of psychological theory—selfhood, subjectivity, and so on—Jung's voice is as authentic as are the voices of Foucault, Wittgenstein, Bakhtin, and others whom the new psychology sanctions. Guiding the 'project' of this essay has been the conviction that hearing all these voices and more, be it as a concert or cacophony, constitutes the scholarly praxis of psychology. This praxis involves mixing metaphors, shifting narratives and striving for meaning by transcending contradictions among the discourses envisioning human nature.

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