Dialectics of Sign and Symbol and the Utterance of Archetype Theory

Raya Jones, *School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, UK*

Abstract

Debates surrounding Jung's archetype theory could be characterized as tacit attempts to contend with the concept's dual function as referring to something known to psychologists (sign) and standing for something that is fundamentally unknowable (symbol). This essay considers implications of the term "archetype," outlines and critiques some of the conundrums of categorization and scientific credibility posed by Jung's formulation of the theory, and prompts locating the archetypal "human quality" of being human in imaginaries of typical patterning of the experiential realm.

Keywords: archetype theory, categories, epistemology, innatism, Jung, symbolic representation

---

> Since for years I have been observing and investigating … dreams, fantasies, visions, and delusions of the insane, I have not been able to avoid recognizing certain regularities, that is *types*. (Jung, 1951, para. 309)

The idea of archetypes was spurred by observations, according to Jung, but its articulation as a formal theory reflects intellectual trends in his milieu and has generated a century of debates that reflect changing trends. Characterizing it as an utterance takes a cue from Bakhtin (1986), who posited "utterance" as an analytic unit definable by its communicative function. An utterance can be anything from a "short (single word) rejoinder in everyday dialogue to the large novel or scientific treatise" and has "an absolute beginning and an absolute end: its beginning is preceded by the utterances of others, and its end is followed by the responsive utterances of others" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 71). Moreover, an utterance simultaneously participates in "social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces)" and "the 'unitary language' (in its centripetal forces and tendencies)" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272). The centrifugal force throws us into attempts to reconcile Jung's theory with contemporary trends, social

sensitivities, and scientific advances while the centripetal force keeps us fixated on the semantic meaning of the word *archetype* as an "original pattern or model from which copies are made" (OED Online, 2022).

Archetype theory is characterized also by its dual life as a sign and a symbol in Jung's sense of these terms. He drew a strict dichotomy: "An expression that stands for a known thing remains a mere sign and is never a symbol" (Jung, 1921, para. 817). As a sign, the word "archetype" functions as a generic term and implies that archetypes are something known to psychologists who are trained to decipher patterns in dreams, myths, etc. As a theoretical concept, however, it functions as a symbol insofar as "the best possible expression at the moment for a fact as yet unknown or only relatively known, may be regarded as a symbol, … standing for something that is only divined and not yet clearly conscious" (Jung, 1921, para. 817). Indeed, it seems to stand for something that is fundamentally unknowable: "archetypal representations (images and ideas) … should not be confused with the archetype as such. They are very varied structures which all point back to one essentially 'irrepresentable' basic form" (Jung, 1954a, para. 417). As Neumann (1959) put it, "the archetypal as such is imageless and nameless" whereas "the form that the formless assumes, as an image arising in the medium of man, … is transient and must undergo change and transformations" (p. 92). His characterization is evocative of the *Tao Te Ching*: "The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth. The named was the mother of the myriad creatures" (Lao Tzu, 1963, p. 57). By virtue of being named "archetype," however, it ceases to be nameless. It becomes an idea created within the peculiar discourse of modern psychology and is therefore transient, and inevitably undergoes change and transformations such as numerous interpretations, misinterpretations, and reformulations.

This essay explores some of the epistemological issues surrounding the conceptualization of archetypes, beginning with the nomenclature and moving on to challenges for categorizing archetypes, conundrums of scientific credibility posed by Jung's attribution of archetypes to evolution and biology, and more. As a secondary theme, I labour towards locating the archetypal in the typical ways that human beings experience their worlds.

Models, Modules, Muddles

Jung (1919) first introduced the word "archetype" in an English-language conference where he contrasted instincts with "pre-existent forms of apprehension … viz., the 'archetypes' of apperception, which are the prior determining constituents of all experience" (p. 19). As he put it in a revision of the 1919 paper (Jung, 1948a), instincts are *typical modes of action*" (para. 273) whereas archetypes are *typical modes of apprehension*" (para. 280). Stating that he borrowed the word "archetype" from St Augustine, he

linked his own idea to a philosophical tradition from Plato's view of "archetypes as metaphysical ideas, as 'paradigms' or models, while real things are held to be only the copies of these model ideas," through medieval philosophy onward via Spinoza to Kant, who posited a limited number of *a priori* categories, and to Schopenhauer, who "carried the process of simplification still further, while at the same time endowing archetypes with an almost Platonic significance" (Jung, 1948a, paras. 275–276). His sketch implies that what began with Plato as the postulation of a supranatural order of eternal being culminates with his own idea of the archetypes as "living dispositions, ideas in the Platonic sense, that perform and continually influence our thoughts and actions" (Jung, 1954b, para. 154). As I read it, these living dispositions could be understood as pre-existing in the way that dispositions to walk or to talk pre-exist infants' learning to do it.

Jung's account of the philosophical background, however, is "less a *history* of an idea than … the *story* of an archetype, in his sense of the term" (Jones, 2003, p. 657). It seems to serve him as a kind of proof, demonstrating "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" (Jung, 1948a, para. 277). Elsewhere he claimed that "All the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes," and insisted that "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" (Jung, 1931, para. 342). His own theory is no exception. This circularity does not necessarily invalidate his insights but invites a consideration of the extent to which the theoretical formulation is a product of consciously applying and adapting an intuitive idea to the modern notion of psychological interiority.

Independently of Jung, the Kantian view of the mind as a set of functions that are applied to sensory inputs has incarnated in twentieth-century theories of mental modularity. Notably in evolutionary psychology, it underpins Cosmides and Tooby's (1992) Massive Modularity Hypothesis. Integrating the information-processing framework of 1980s cognitive science with the concept of Darwinian modules in evolutionary biology, they postulate the existence of multiple highly specialized domain-specific computational mechanisms that evolved to solve specific problems of adaptation such as finding food, mating, kin selection, reciprocal altruism, and more. Such modularity, however, is unlike the modularity implied by archetype theory. For example, the notion of Darwinian modules can be applied to mathematical abilities. The evolutionary basis is well-supported with evidence of number perception in nonhuman animals and preverbal human infants although formal math teaching accounts for uniquely human skills (Ferrigno et al., 2017). Number symbolism too is uniquely human but in an entirely different way. The number 3, for instance, has a unique significance. It is considered lucky in Japanese tradition. Jung (1948b) regarded it as symbolizing wholeness and discussed its religious

significance: "Arrangement in triads is an archetype in the history of religion, which in all probability formed the basis of the Christian Trinity" (para. 173). If archetypes were the product of natural selection, what could possibly be the survival advantage of imagining "3" as lucky or as having religious significance? Jung did not make such claims.

Whereas Jung's theory purports to map the invisible domain of the psyche, non-Jungian applications of the terminology tend to remain at the level of visible phenomena. In literary criticism, an archetype is "usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole" (Frye, 1957, p. 365). Unlike Jungian analyses of similar material, describing a literary archetype is not premised on assuming psychological causation. In other fields, archetypal analysis is a statistical method (Cutler & Breiman, 1994). Using archetypal analysis to classify galaxy spectra, astrophysicists define "pure archetypes [as] mixtures of the data vectors" (Chan et al., 2003, p. 790). A variant of archetypal analysis was used in agriculture towards building a typology of farm households' responses to environmental disturbances (Tittonell et al., 2020). Jung could not have known about these and similar applications but likely knew the historic application in biology. Since the 1840s, the term has been closely associated with Owen's description of the vertebrate archetype, which reportedly was "one of the most fascinating constructs of what has been called the 'morphological period' in the history of biology" (Rupke, 1993, p. 231). Descriptions of archetypes in any disciplinary context centre on the construction of typologies derived from patterns seen in phenomena of interest, where specific types are products of certain procedures (statistical, hermeneutic, even impressionistic) that are performed on raw data. Consequently, faith in the method of description sways the acceptance of the typology as a scientific fact. In biology, Richardson et al. (1999) contended that "archetypes represent no more than selected clusters of conserved features associated with a particular taxon" and that traditional archetypes, such as Owen's vertebrae archetype and similar constructs, have led to simplified representations that exclude cross-species variations; therefore, "archetypes are not real entities, but idealized constructions based on artificial selections of characters" (Richardson et al., 1999, p. 5).

Jung did not mention Owen's vertebrate archetype to the best of my knowledge, but his descriptions of specific archetypes are similarly idealized constructions based on the abstraction of a few elements shared by widely diverse sources. Furthermore, unlike the relation of limbs' forms to their functions, the same psychological function could be represented in dissimilar concrete images and ideas, and conversely, the same motif could represent a variety of dissimilar psychological functions ("for who is to guarantee that the functional meaning of the snake in the dream is the same as in the mythological setting?" Jung, 1954b, para. 103). Jungian archetypes are thus characterized by considerable fluidity of form-function relations; and yet the

semantic fixation on the term "archetype" perpetuates the assumption of structures that constitute the psyche in the same way as anatomical structures constitute the body: "Just as the human body represents a whole museum of organs, with a long evolutionary history behind them, so we should expect the mind to be organized in a similar way" (Jung, 1961, para. 522).

The Case of the Motherly City

> There are types of *situations* and types of *figures* that repeat themselves frequently and have a corresponding meaning. (Jung, 1951, para. 309)

Jung started to formulate his theory of the collective unconscious several years before introducing the word "archetypes." In the 1912 monograph and its 1952 revision, a chapter titled "Symbols of the Mother and of Rebirth" analyses a variety of religious scriptures and mythologies and, inter alia, provides examples that the "city is a maternal symbol, a woman who harbours the inhabitants in herself like children" (Jung, 1912, p. 129; 1952, para. 303). A brief comparison of the two versions indicates a maturation of Jung's thought in a direction that points more clearly to types of situations and, by implication, to embodied imaginaries.

Jung (1912) aligned his fledgling idea with Freudian principles. He echoed Freud's notion that the incest taboo diverts the flow of desire away from the mother: "This compulsion can be derived from the need to manifest an amount of libido bound up with the mother, but in such a way that the mother is represented by or concealed in a symbol" (Jung, 1912, p. 133). The 1952 revision links mother symbolisms to a desire for returning to a childlike sense of security (not incestuous relationship). Post-1912, Jung decoupled the concept of libido from Freud's notion of sexual desire and instead defined psychic energy as "the *intensity* of a psychic process, its *psychological value* … already implicit in its determining power, which expresses itself in definite psychic effects" (Jung, 1921, para. 778). While the following extract retains Freudian connotations, the reference to canalization could be understood as referring to why something has intense psychological value for someone:

> The meaning and purpose of this canalization are particularly evident when the city appears in place of the mother: the infantile attachment … is a crippling limitation for the adult, whereas attachment to the city fosters his civic duties and at least enables him to lead a useful existence. In primitives the tribe takes the place of the city. (Jung, 1952, para. 313)

The quoted extract precedes Jung's suggestion that one's present situation "reactivates the ways and habits of childhood, and above all the relation to the mother" (Jung, 1952, para. 313). In other words, something in an adult's

present life evokes yearnings for the childhood state of being loved, safe, and nurtured; and, for some, proactive involvement with the community could fulfil this need.

Early on, Jung (1912) underlined the belief that "Christians are the children of the City Above, not sons of the earthly city-mother" (p. 133). Having analysed the Christian symbolism alongside Indian sea symbolism and a few more instances, he concluded that "religious thought is bound up with the compulsion to call the mother no longer the mother, but City, Source, Sea, etc." (Jung, 1912, p. 133). The revised version features also earthly cities wherein people foster civic duties, as seen, and concludes that the "symbol-creating process substitutes for the mother the city, the well, the cave, the Church, etc." (Jung, 1952, para. 313). Unlike the early list, the revised list alludes to settings of social significance: the well as the hub of village life, the cave as home for its prehistoric dwellers, and the church for the parishioners. Jung's reinterpretation of certain religious material similarly shows a tacit shift towards considering persons' milieus. Both versions cite John's vision of the apocalypse, "where two cities play a great part," one of which is cursed and the other is blessed (Jung, 1912, p. 133; 1952, para. 313), but different elements are singled out. Jung (1912) focused on the image of a harlot riding a dragon, suggested that she represented Babylon—the biblical city of the damned—and linked it to "the idea of the 'terrible' mother, who seduces all people to whoredom with devilish temptation" (p. 134). The revised chapter has replaced it with an interpretation of the dragon's seven heads as representing seven hills and the suggestion that the image is "probably a direct allusion to Rome, the city whose temporal power oppressed the world at the time" (Jung, 1952, para. 314). Replacing the mythical Babylon with historical Rome points to the cultural and political setting in which the vision's author lived.

Overall, the 1952 chapter retains its 1912 precursor's exhaustive account of religious symbolisms. The subtle allusions to people's sociocultural embedding feature like throwaway remarks. These allusions nevertheless signpost a shift towards anchoring the archetypal in actual human experiences. Such experiences are inevitably interpreted within particular languages and semiotic systems. Since words have their own meanings as signs, they shape the symbolic expression in particular ways. The proper name Jerusalem is merely a sign when we refer to this city in the Middle East, but it becomes a symbol in the Biblical vision of "the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God" (Revelation, 21:10). For Jung, it indicated the mother archetype. Yet, the semiotic properties of the reference to a city channel our apperception of the vision differently than do other words that Jung listed as maternal symbols, e.g. sea, well, or cave.

To Categorize or Not to Categorize?

> 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. (Jung, 1948a, para. 274)

> Clear-cut distinctions and strict formulations are quite impossible in this field, seeing that a kind of fluid interpenetration belongs to the very nature of all archetypes. (Jung, 1949, para. 301)

There is an epistemological tension between the logic of categorizing and Jung's caveat that clearcut distinctions are impossible in the case of archetypes. Categorical concepts denote classes of things that are of a similar type and belong to only one category out of several logically limited ones. We may agree that "archetype" is a valid class category of psychological phenomena, but the possibility of setting criteria for designating things to subcategories of archetypes is confounded by the interpretive fluidity.

On what basis should something be classified as Archetype A and not as B or C? As seen, Jung (1912, 1952) linked rebirth motifs to mother symbolism; but in a 1939 talk he interpreted rebirth motifs, and in particular a certain Khidr legend, as an expression of individuation (Jung, 1950). The apparent inconsistency is consistent with his claim that fluid interpenetration is endemic to archetypes but poses logical obstacles if we expect a categorical system for classifying archetypal manifestations. If we come across a "rebirth" motif somewhere, should we classify it under Mother, Individuation or something else? Seeing that awareness of our mortality is a universal human condition, the wish to live forever could be regarded as archetypal in its own right; hence, a rebirth archetype. Myths and legends typically conjure supernatural events (e.g. falling asleep in a cave and waking up centuries later) or magical agents that confer longevity beyond the natural span. Khidr, "having drunk of the Water of Immortality, is now alive, and will live for evermore. He dwells in the Invisible Kingdom" (Blomfield, 1940, p. 199). There are profound differences between the spiritual significance of Khidr in Middle Eastern traditions and the socio-political significance of Silicon Valley transhumanists' prediction that advanced technologies "will allow us to transcend these limitations of our biological bodies and brains. We will gain power over our fates. Our mortality will be in our own hands. We will … live forever" (Kurzweil, 2005, quoted in Jones, 2017, p. 340). Should thematic parallels (gaining immortality, dwelling in an invisible kingdom/cyberspace) suffice to regard these utterly unrelated sources as pointing to the same archetype-as-such? This is not a rhetorical question, but the answer depends on how archetypes are conceptualized.

The urge to categorize could be viewed as loosely a Kantian legacy. Bishop (1996) reflected that although Jung often defended the epistemological

stance of analytical psychology by aligning himself with Kant, the Kantian influence is questionable upon scrutiny of Jung's writings. C. S. Peirce, on the other hand, is commonly regarded as a Kantian philosopher although scholars debate the extent to which he departs from Kant's theory of categories (e.g. Gartenberg, 2012). Whereas Jung's focus is on how or why certain symbolic representations arise, Pierce's focus is on how existing things (words, pictures, objects) convey information through their formal properties. In a 1903 lecture, he outlined a trichotomy of icon, index, and symbol (Peirce, 1998). An *icon* represents by virtue of its characteristics even if its object does not exist: "a pure icon does not draw any distinction between itself and its object. It represents whatever it may represent" (Peirce, 1998, p. 163). His example: a statue of a centaur. An *index* represents by virtue of characteristics that it would not have if its object did not exist, and which it has irrespective of whether it is interpreted. Peirce gives the example of an old-fashioned hygrometer. The instrument is designed to have a physical reaction to moisture in the air, and this connection remains even if nobody understands the use of the instrument so in effect it ceases to convey information. A *symbol* represents "regardless of any similarity or analogy with its object … but solely and simply because it will be interpreted to be a representamen. Such for example is any general word, sentence, or book" (Peirce, 1998, p. 163).

Peirce's trichotomy cannot be readily aligned with Jung's dichotomy of sign and symbol. The phrase "Heavenly City" or the sentence "Christians are children of the City Above" would be symbols in Peirce's sense but not necessarily in Jung's sense insofar as the motif might have little or no spiritual significance for non-Christians who nonetheless understand the trope's semiotic or allegoric meaning. The picture of the seven-headed dragon (Jung, 1952) would be classifiable as an icon in Peirce's sense but as a symbol according to Jung. Although dragons and centaurs (Peirce's example) do not exist, statues and pictures depicting them are real objects. These images could be said to have an indexical relation to psychological states analogous to the physical relation that the hydrometer has to moisture in the air. Their creation and the reactions they may evoke call for explications of psychological processes beyond or "behind" the information provided by these objects' formal properties. As Jung (1921) illustrated a similar point, "A bull-headed god can certainly be explained as a man's body with a bull's head on it. But this explanation can hardly hold its own against the symbolic explanation" (para. 819).

Taken a step further, archetype theory itself could be view as a kind of index. Peirce (1998) maintained that an index could be "any mere landmark by which a particular thing may be recognized because it is as a matter of fact associated with that thing, a proper name without signification, a pointing finger" (p. 163). His example: a signpost stating "Here!" on the site of a historic battlefield is fixed on that ground; if it were moved, it would not direct us to

the battlefield site. Obviously, we must also be able to read the sign. Given the difference between Hebrew and Latin alphabets, if road signage in Israel were only in Hebrew (it is not), signs to Jerusalem would not direct drivers who cannot read Hebrew to this city. By analogy, one must speak Jungianism in order to follow the signage to specific archetypes—to see that "Here!" in this myth, scripture, or movie there is Archetype A or B.

Science and Credibility

> The idea that [the archetype] is not inherited but comes into being in every child anew would be just as preposterous as the primitive belief that the sun which rises in the morning is a different sun from that which set the evening before. (Jung, 1954b, para. 152)

Jung pitched his theory's credibility on the plausibility of a biological basis. If archetypes "ever 'originated' their origin must have coincided at least with the beginning of the species," and therefore they must be hereditary, "already present in the germ-plasm" (Jung, 1954b, para. 152). Germ-plasm theory was first proposed in the 1880s. As a precursor of the modern understanding of how physical characteristics are inherited, it contradicts Lamarck's theory of acquired characteristics. Jung's notion of how archetypes entered the germ-plasm echoes Lamarck: "Endless repetition has engraved these experiences into our psychic constitution, not in the form of images filled with content, but at first only as *forms without content,* representing merely the possibility of a certain type of perception and action" (Jung, 1936, para. 99). He reasoned that the "collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual" (Jung, 1931, para. 342). Notwithstanding passing speculations about hereditary and the brain, however, Jung devoted his scholarly efforts to analysing what he construed as archetypal manifestations.

A conundrum ensues for those who would pin the theory's credibility on its congruence with contemporary scientific knowledge. Unlike bodily organs, archetypes-as-such cannot be observed directly. We may believe that we are seeing their effects, but something else might account for the observed regularities. Jung's hypothesis cannot be confirmed or refuted by means of the scientific method (viz. experiments). Claims of its credibility therefore rest on persuasion and speculative inferences. Stevens (1982) speculatively held that the archetype is a "biological entity … existing as a 'centre' in the central nervous system which actively seeks its own activation in the psyche and in the world" (p. 39). Maloney (2003) argued that archetype theory is compatible with modern evolutionary theory, neuroscience, cognitive science, and more. Not all Jungians agree (e.g., Goodwyn, 2019; Hogenson, 2019;

Merchant, 2019). Sceptics too invoke the sciences, directly or indirectly, to contend that neuroscience and genetics do not support attributing archetypes to brain structures whereas conceptualizing archetypes as emergent properties of dynamic systems accords with the philosophy of science (e.g., Knox, 2003; McDowell, 2001). As Roesler (2012) put it, "we Jungians cannot go on basing our theory of archetypes on scientific assumptions which have been falsified.… It is important that we stop arguing that archetypes are transmitted genetically if we want to be taken seriously" (p. 234).

Jungians' self-repositioning does not necessarily redeem Jung in the scientific community. Unrelated to Jungian circles, Becker and Neuberg (2019) favourably read Jung in the light of evolutionary, developmental, and cognitive psychology. They cite numerous instances in which Jung's insights anticipate up-to-date trends in these fields. Based on these trends, they propose that at the phylogenetic level, "archetypes simulate and predict adaptive responses to recurring social problems" (Becker & Neuberg, 2019, p. 61), at the ontogenetic level, "archetypes are merely capacities [that] depend critically on experience" (Becker & Neuberg, 2019, p. 63), and at the cognitive level, "archetypal representational systems are dynamic, multimodal, and sub-symbolically grounded" (Becker & Neuberg, 2019, p. 66). Their article is followed by six commentaries authored by twelve psychologists, none of them Jungian. All the commentators applaud Becker and Neuberg's model but query the necessity of bringing Jung into it. Boyd et al. (2019) cite Knox and a few others but take the fact that Jungians themselves problematize the concept of archetypes as evidence that the theory is "fundamentally broken … outdated and unnecessary" (p. 95). I prefer to view the Jungians' debate as attesting to the vitality of Jung's legacy. Analytical psychology continues to evolve. Nevertheless, outside its own enclave it is unclear why psychologists should revisit Jung: "Why would one want to do that? As a backward-looking historical enterprise, or as a forward-looking attempt to bring Jung back into the future of psychology?" (Barrett, 2019, p. 81). The latter attempt, Barrett opines, requires us "to know if archetypes are, in fact, (a) psychologically real, (b) a discrete class of entities, and (c) important for understanding human psychology" (Barrett, 2019, p. 81). It could be counter-argued that archetypes are as real as attitudes, mental schemas, or personality traits are. These and similar psychological entities are created in discursive practices whereby abstractions from human conduct are talked about as if they are things "inside" people. Viewed as a discrete class of discursive entities, archetypes are irreducible to other constructs.

The staying power of the controversy about innatism could be attributed to tensions between expectations about scientific inquiries and what Jung was actually doing. As Roesler (2012) remarked, although Jung positioned himself as a natural scientist, his studies are "in line with a long tradition of hermeneutics, interpretation and cultural theory" (p. 227). For me, the

relevance of Jung's theorizing lies in his identification of something that seems to elude general psychology. The article by Becker and Neuberg (2019) deserves attention in Jungian studies, but its relevance for my present point lies in what it leaves out. In a way, it sidesteps the phenomena to which Jung applied archetype theory. For instance, they give the example of encountering a stranger who is perceived as hostile, averring that the situation usually elicits a certain kind of reactions although the behavioural expressions likely vary across cultures. The processes underlying reactions to the hostile other could be explained by reference to ideas from evolutionary, developmental, and cognitive psychology, as Becker and Neuberg demonstrate. A Jungian inquiry, however, would concern symbolic representations of being in this situation.

On the "Human Quality" of the Human Being

> These images are … the "human quality" of the human being, the specifically human form his activities take. (Jung, 1954b, para. 152)

Jung (1964) likened the archetype to "the impulse of birds to build nests, or ants to form organized colonies" (p. 69) but may have meant it in the general sense of instinctive behaviour, having distinguished between archetypes and instincts (Jung 1919). He suggested that there is "another instinct, different from the drive to activity," which is uniquely human and could "be called *the reflective instinct*" (Jung, 1937, para. 241). For example, since mammals are born helpless and dependent, a specialized neural circuitry with physiological and behavioural correlates ensures that infant mammals quickly attach to the mother (Moriceau & Sullivan, 2005), and yet rats, monkeys, or dogs do not form symbolic representations of experiencing maternal care and neglect. The uniquely human activity is not the instinctual behaviour associated with attachment but the formation of symbolic representations of what it feels like. This human quality is mediated by what Jung (1921) called the *symbolic attitude*, namely, an orientation to reality that partially relates to the "actual behaviour of things" but is mostly "the outcome of a definite view of the world which *assigns meaning* to events, whether great or small, and attaches to this meaning a greater value than to bare facts" (para. 819).

For example, if visitors to a cathedral such as Notre Dame de Paris experience its cavernous interior as womblike, this meaning is visceral, impacting on deep feelings independently of conscious reflection, and yet the experiencing faculty assigns meaning beyond the bare facts of the place. We may say that the visitor's experiential realm is momentarily configured into an archetypal pattern capturing the imaginary of a childhood state. Cathedrals are themselves symbolic expressions: "Gothic architects and craftsmen … crafted

cavernous interiors that aimed to reach the sky, diminishing the human scale and stressing the insignificance of man against God's loftiness" (Ramzy, 2021, pp. 379–380). Whereas the building's semiotic implications could be intellectually grasped, however, its actual impact is contingent on our physical presence there. Only when standing inside it, we may feel both diminished and contained, childlike. To say that the situation "reactivates … the relation to the mother" (paraphrasing Jung, 1952, para. 313) could be taken as referring to a pre-existing structure that is switched on under certain conditions, the way that a car is activated by the ignition key. Alternatively, the archetypal aspect may be conceptualized as a certain patterning of the experiential realm. A pattern cannot exist separately of the particular way in which things are arranged. A related distinction is between how visitors' bodies necessarily negotiate the physical space of the cathedral's interior and the probabilistic patterning of the experiential realm (not every visitor experiences the place as womblike).

A slight digression to James Gibson's ecological approach to sensory perception, and specifically his theory of affordances, may amplify the conceptual distinction drawn here. Gibson (1979) coined the word "affordance" to denote organism-environment invariants: "The *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill" (p. 127). His example: for heavy terrestrial animals like us, the ground affords support (walking on, standing on) but water does not; it is different for water bugs. The impossibility of walking on water constrains our navigation of the physical environment (Gibson's point) but it also fosters certain expectations about our own existence, and these find symbolic representation, e.g., the Gospel story of Jesus walking on water (my point). I could not find legends of walking on water elsewhere, but tales of humanly impossible feats abound in mythologies and in comic-book stories. If archetypes correspond to typical situations, the typical situation in this instance could be awareness of the physical limitations of human bodies.

That said, the spiritual significance that Jesus walking on water may hold for devout Christians is not on par with the entertainment or escapist value that a feat performed by a comic-book superhero might have for fans. Any motif that is singled out would be embedded in cultural imaginaries with their own histories. Setting out to explore how diverse sources gravitate towards the expression of some universal aspect of human experience is not the same as setting out to "prove" the existence of an innate archetype by seeking its supposed expressions in diverse sources. Making a similar point with regard to folklore, myths and legends, Goodwyn (2013) invites us to imagine all possible narratives as existing in a field where troughs represent the accumulation over time of "stories that align well with the reliably emergent universal patterns in the human mind" (p. 395). Baydala and Smythe (2012) extrapolate Searle's distinction between a "local" background (historically and culturally specific practices) and the "deep" background ("aspects of

human embodiment and human life that are pervasive among human beings everywhere") towards defining archetypal motifs as "non-conceptual aesthetic expressions of the deep background" (p. 849). Elsewhere Smythe and Baydala (2012) posit a "criterion of fit" between archetypal expressions and the personal and cultural contexts from which these expressions ensue, and—proposing that we may "dialogue not only with individuals but, also, with entire cultural traditions" (p. 71)—note that Jung's tendency to extract mythological motifs from widely diverse traditions reveals more about the assumptions underlying his own theory than about the meaning of the symbols in their indigenous contexts.

More precisely, Jung was dialoguing—not with cultures—but with the specific texts and images he chose to analyse. The perceived relevance of archetype theory from the standpoint of academic psychology depends in part on whether its subject matter falls into line with the disciplinary praxis. Should psychologists analyse myths, fairytales, ancient texts, and so forth? During the early twentieth century in Jung's milieu, such material was the subject matter of *Völkerpsychologie* (Wundt, 1916) and also attracted psychoanalysts' interest. Jung (1952) insisted that "to describe and explain symbol-formation as a natural process" and to interpret "symbol-formation in terms of instinctual processes is a legitimate scientific attitude" (para. 338). This view did not take root in modern psychology. As one British psychiatrist opined, Jung had forsaken science and "most unfortunately started upon the study of religions and myths" (Allen, 1942, p. 622). Becker and Neuberg (2019) demonstrate that current psychological science echoes several of Jung's intuitions, but the domains of knowledge upon which Becker and Neuberg draw do not recognize the analysis of myths, fairytales, etc., as a "legitimate scientific attitude" for psychology.

The answer to whether psychologists should analyse such material remains negative when, in the spirit of postmodernity, the remit of psychology is broadened to include qualitative descriptions of human lives; that is, unless the psychologist can demonstrate some relevance for understanding human lives as lived today. Baydala and Smythe (2012) justify reading Euripides' *The Bacchae* on the grounds that ancient literature can yield new understanding of current issues in psychology. Positioning their epistemology as critical presentism, they invoke archetype theory "not as a foundation but, rather, as an approach to inquiry" (Baydala & Smythe, 2012, p. 847). Insofar as the term "archetype" serves as an analytic tool, it should be evaluated in terms of whether it enables psychologists to build knowledge in ways that other tools don't. The praxis of modern (and postmodern) psychology manifests not only in methodology but also in the rhetorical mode of argumentation. Baydala and Smythe's text and indeed Jung's own writing accord with conventions such as using impersonal language and presenting objective conclusions that are debatable in principle. This mode contrasts with a post-Jungian genre of literary-style essays that communicate their authors' feelings, life experiences,

and subjective inferences. Exploring so-called "archetypal roots" of Alcoholics Anonymous in *The Bacchae,* Hatfield (2019) invites us "to approach this exploration mythopoetically, as one would approach a dream" and to enter with her "into a Dionysian consciousness—fluid, embodied, right-brain, holistic" (p. 54), and quotes Jung's (1949) statement, "The archetype—let us never forget this—is a psychic organ present in all of us" (para. 27) as a theoretic foundation for weaving an engaging tapestry of personal experiences, contemplations of Greek mythology, and *The Bacchae*.

Both genres actualize the human quality of our existence but are embedded in disparate collective imaginaries. I take this phrase from cultural sociologist Bouchard (2017) who, following Durkheim, extends a tradition "concerned with the symbolic foundations of the social bond—namely, the values, beliefs, ideals, and traditions that are broadly shared in any collectivity and that underlie the sense of belonging to institutions" (p. 4), and describes a collective imaginary that establishes "links between familiar realities such as norms, traditions, narratives, and identities on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the deepest symbolic structures" (p. 13). A century after Jung's conception of archetype theory, its utterance ripples within the collectivity of analytical psychology differently than it does among non-Jungian psychologists, who tend to regard it as at odds with the discipline's imaginary of science and scholarship. While the irrefutability of Jung's hypothesis hinders its credibility as a scientific theory in the traditional sense, the arbitrariness of materials selected by (some) Jungians as putative proof hinders its cogency for psychologists who are attuned to the cultural-historical situatedness of human lives.

One final example may illustrate. Singer (2006), towards building his thesis that whenever "a certain level of emotional intensity is achieved in the psyche of the group, archetypal defences of the group spirit come to the forefront … determine and even dictate how the group will think, feel, react, and behave" (p. 8), listed instances such as the creation of a revolutionary flag in America during the mid-1770s, a 2005 speech by George Bush, an opera about the race to build the atomic bomb, the conflict in the Middle East, and Steven Spielberg's film, *Munich*. As Lu (2013) comments, it represents "a form of psychohistory that leaves the 'history' out" (p. 392). In my reading, Singer engages also in a form of psychology that leaves out the psychological subject, i.e., the flesh-and-blood individual person. It is individuals who feel defensive about their group. Accounting for this tendency does not require archetype theory. In-group favouritism is well-supported by Tajfel's social identity theory, which is a classic in social psychology, and its extensive experimental evidence showing conditions under which individuals are likely to identify with their group (Islam, 2014). Experimental evidence that infants as young as nine months old prefer individuals who share their own attributes or tastes (Hamlin et al., 2013) may support viewing it as an innate tendency. Other species too are territorial. We may find use for archetype theory (in

some formulation) towards describing a variety of sources that gravitate towards expressing the experience of living in a social world characterized by "us-and-them" divisions.

Concluding Reflection

Jung analysed the symbolic lives conveyed in early Christian scriptures, medieval alchemy, and non-Western mythologies towards building his theory, but the theory itself is a product of the symbolic life of secular modernity. In 1919, the year when Jung first brought the word "archetypes" into analytical psychology, Weber (1919/2009) described the "fate of our times" as "characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'" (p. 155). Jung theorized about human irrationality but believed that his insights were rational and therefore archetype theory was a scientific hypothesis. He reflected, "Since every scientific theory contains a hypothesis, and is therefore an anticipatory description of something still essentially unknown, it is a symbol" (Jung, 1921, para. 819). Yet, his emphasis on the interpretive fluidity and unknowability of archetypes seems to belie the anticipation of a scientific description. The discourse of archetype is thus characterized by tensions between intellectualization and insight, sign and symbol, the named and the nameless.

References

Allen, C. (1942). A mystical psychology. *Nature*, *149*(3788), 622–623. https://doi.org/10.1038/149622a0

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination*. Texas University Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. University of Texas Press.

Barrett, H. C. (2019). Forever Jung? *Psychological Inquiry*, *30*(2), 79–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2019.1614807

Baydala, A., & Smythe, W. E. (2012). Hermeneutics of continuity: Theorizing psychological understandings of ancient literature. *Theory & Psychology*, *22*(6), 842–859. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354312446648

Becker, D. V. & Neuberg, S. L. (2019). Archetypes reconsidered as emergent outcomes of cognitive complexity and evolved motivational systems. *Psychological Inquiry*, *30*(2), 59–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2019.1614795

Bishop, P. N. (1996). The use of Kant in Jung's early psychological works. *Journal of European Studies*, *26*(2), 107–140. https://doi.org/10.1177/004724419602600201

Blomfield, S. (1940). *The chosen highway*. Bahai Publishing.

Bouchard, G. (2017). *Social myths and collective imaginaries*. University of Toronto Press.

Boyd, R. L., Pasca P., & Conroy-Beam, D. (2019). You're only Jung once: Building generalized motivational systems theories using contemporary research on language. *Psychological Inquiry*, *30*(2), 93–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2019.1633122

Chan, B. H. P., Mitchell, D. A., & Cram, L. E. (2003). Archetypal analysis of galaxy spectra. *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society, 338*(3), 790–795. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-8711.2003.06099.x

Cosmides, L., & Tooby, J. (1992). Cognitive adaptations for social exchange. In J. Barkow, L. Cosmides, & J. Tooby (Eds.), *The adapted mind*. (pp. 163–228). Oxford University Press.

Cutler, A., & Breiman, L. (1994). Archetypal analysis. *Technometrics, 36*(4), 338–347. https://doi.org/10.2307/1269949

Ferrigno, S., Jara-Ettinger, J., Piantadosi, S. T., & Cantlon, J. F. (2017). Universal and uniquely human factors in spontaneous number perception. *Nature Communications, 8*, 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1038/ncomms13968

Frye, N. (1957). *Anatomy of criticism*. Princeton University Press.

Gartenberg, Z. M. (2012). Intelligibility and subjectivity in Peirce: A reading of his *New List of Categories*. *Journal of the History of Philosophy, 50*(4), 581–610. https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2012.0071

Gibson, J. J. (1979). *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Houghton-Mifflin.

Goodwyn, E. (2013). Recurrent motifs as resonant attractor states in the narrative field: a testable model of archetype. *Journal of Analytical Psychology, 58*(3), 387–408. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5922.12020

Goodwyn, E. (2019). Comments on the 2018 IAAP Conference on Archetype Theory: defending a non-reductive biological approach. *Journal of Analytical Psychology, 64*(5), 720–737. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5922.12543

Hamlin, J. K., Mahajan, N., Liberman, Z., & Wynn, K. (2013). Not Like Me = Bad: Infants prefer those who harm dissimilar others. *Psychological Science, 24*(4), 589–594. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612457785

Hatfield, F. (2019). Caught in the net of the divine: Archetypal roots of Alcoholics Anonymous in Euripides's *Bacchae*. *Jung Journal, 13*(4), 53–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/19342039.2019.1676144

Hogenson G. B. (2019). The controversy around the concept of archetypes. *Journal of Analytical Psychology, 64*(5), 682–700. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5922.12541

Islam, G. (2014). Social identity theory. In Teo T. (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of critical psychology* (pp. 1781–1783). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_289

Jones, R. A. (2003). Mixed metaphors and narrative shifts: Archetypes. *Theory & psychology, 13*(5), 651–672. https://doi.org/10.1177/09593543030135008

Jones, R. A. (2017). Archaic man meets a marvellous automaton: posthumanism, social robots, archetypes. *Journal of Analytical Psychology, 62*(3), 338–355. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5922.12316

Jung, C. G. (1912). *Psychology of the unconscious*. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubnner & Co.

Jung, C. G. (1919). Instinct and the unconscious. *British Journal of Psychology, 10*(1), 15–23. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8295.1919.tb00003.x

Jung, C. G. (1921). *Psychological types*. CW 6.

Jung, C. G. (1931). The structure of the psyche. *CW* 8.

Jung, C. G. (1936). The concept of the collective unconscious. *CW* 9i.

Jung, C. G. (1937). Psychological factors determining human behaviour. *CW* 8.

Jung, C. G. (1948a). Instinct and the unconscious. *CW* 8.

Jung, C. G. (1948b). A psychological approach to the dogma of the Trinity. *CW* 11.

Jung, C. G. (1949). The psychology of the child archetype. *CW* 9i.

Jung, C. G. (1950). Concerning rebirth. *CW* 9i.

Jung, C. G. (1951). The psychological aspects of the Kore. *CW* 9i.

Jung, C. G. (1952). *Symbols of transformation*. CW 5.

Jung, C. G. (1954a). On the nature of the psyche. *CW* 8.

Jung, C. G. (1954b). Psychological aspects of the mother archetype. *CW* 9i.

Jung, C. G. (1961). Symbols and the interpretation of dreams. *CW* 18.

Jung, C. G. (1964). Approaching the unconscious. In C. G. Jung & M.-L. von Franz (Eds.), *Man and his symbols* (pp.18–103). Aldus.

Knox, J. (2003). *Archetype, attachment, analysis*. Brunner-Routledge.

Lao Tzu. (1963). *Tao te ching*. Penguin.

Lu, K. (2013). Can individual psychology explain social phenomena? An appraisal of the theory of cultural complexes. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, *18*(4), 386–404. https://doi.org/10.1057/pcs.2012.43

Maloney, A. (2003). Archetype theory, evolutionary psychology and the Baldwin effect. A commentary on Hogenson's paper. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, *48*(1), 101–107. https://doi.org/10.1111/1465-5922.t01-1-00Res

McDowell, M. J. (2001). Principle of organization: a dynamic-systems view of the archetype-as-such. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, *46*(4), 637–654. https://doi.org/10.1111/1465-5922.00271

Merchant, J. (2019). The controversy around the concept of archetypes and the place for an emergent/developmental model. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, *64*(5), 701–719. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5922.12542

Moriceau, S., & Sullivan, R. M. (2005). Neurobiology of infant attachment. *Developmental Psychobiology*, *47*(3), 230–242. https://doi.org/10.1002/dev.20093

Neumann, E. (1959). *Art and the creative unconscious*. Princeton University Press.

OED Online. (2022). "*archetype, n.*" Oxford University Press. www.oed.com/view/Entry/10344

Peirce, C. S. (1998). The categories defenced. In Peirce Edition Project (Eds.), *The essential Peirce, Volume 2*. (pp. 160–178). Indiana University Press.

Ramzy, N. S. (2021). Concept cathedral and "squaring the circle": Interpreting the Gothic cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris as a standing hymn. *Frontiers of architectural research*, *10*(2), 369–393. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foar.2021.02.001

Richardson, M. K., Minelli, A., & Coates, M. I. (1999). Some problems with typological thinking in evolution and development. *Evolution and Development*, *1*(1), 5–7. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1525-142x.1999.00112.x

Roesler, C. (2012). Are archetypes transmitted more by culture than biology? Questions arising from conceptualizations of the archetype. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, *57*(2), 223–246. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5922.2011.01963.x

Rupke, N. A. (1993). Richard Owen's vertebrate archetype. *Isis*, *84*(2), 231–251. https://www.jstor.org/stable/236233

Singer, T. (2006). Unconscious forces shaping international conflicts: Archetypal defenses of the group spirit from revolutionary America to confrontation in the Middle East. *San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*, *25*(4), 6–28. https://doi.org/10.1525/jung.1.2006.25.4.6

Smythe, W. E., & Baydala, A. (2012). The hermeneutic background of C. G. Jung. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, *57*, 57–75. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5922.2011.01951.x

Stevens, A. (1982). *Archetype*. William Morrow & Co.

Tittonell, P., Bruzzone, O., Solano-Hernández, A., López-Ridaura, S., & Easdale, M. H. (2020). Functional farm household typologies through archetypal responses to disturbances. *Agricultural Systems*, *178*(102714), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.agsy.2019.102714

Weber, M. (1919/2009). Science as a vocation. In Gerth, H. H. & Mills, W. C. (Eds.), *From Max Weber* (pp. 129–159). Oxford University Press.

Wundt, W. (1916). *Elements of folk psychology*. George Allen & Unwin.

Translations of Abstract

Les débats entourant la théorie des archétypes de Jung peuvent être caractérisés comme des tentatives tacites de lutter contre la double fonction du concept, qui fait référence à quelque chose de connu des psychologues (le signe) et qui représente quelque chose de fondamentalement mystérieux (le symbole). Cet essai examine les implications du terme « archétype ». Il expose et fait la critique de quelques problématiques de la catégorisation et de la crédibilité scientifique posées par la formulation de la théorie par Jung. L'article incite à localiser la «qualité humaine» archétypale de l'être humain dans des imaginaires de modèles typiques du domaine expérientiel.

Mots clés: Jung, théorie des archétypes, représentation symbolique, catégories, innéisme, épistémologie

---

Debatten rund um Jungs Archetypentheorie könnten als stillschweigende Versuche charakterisiert werden, sich mit der Doppelfunktion des Konzepts auseinanderzusetzen, nämlich sich auf etwas zu beziehen, das den Psychologen bekannt ist (Zeichen) und für etwas zu stehen, das im Grunde nicht erkennbar ist (Symbol). Dieser Aufsatz untersucht die Implikationen des Begriffs 'Archetyp', skizziert und kritisiert einige der Rätsel der Kategorisierung und wissenschaftlichen Glaubwürdigkeit, die Jungs Formulierung der Theorie aufwirft, und regt dazu an, die archetypische 'menschliche Qualität' des Menschen in Vorstellungen von typischen Mustern des Menschen aus dem Bereich der Erfahrung zu verorten.

Schlüsselwörter: Jung, Archetypentheorie, symbolische Darstellung, Kategorien, Innatismus, Erkenntnistheorie

---

I dibattiti attorno alla teoria degli archetipi di Jung possono essere visti come tentativi di affermare la duplice funzione del concetto, come riferimento a qualcosa di noto agli psicologi (il segno) e come indicatore di qualcosa che è fondamentalmente inconoscibile (il simbolo). Questo articolo considera le implicazioni del termine 'archetipo', delinea e critica alcuni dei dilemmi della categorizzazione e della credibilità scientifica posti dalla formulazione teorica di Jung, e suggerisce di individuare la 'qualità umana' archetipica, propria dell'essere umano, in immaginari pattern tipici del reame dell'esperienza.

Parole chiave: Jung, teoria degli archetipi, rappresentazione simbolica, categorie, innatismo, epistemologia

---

Дискуссии вокруг теории архетипов Юнга можно считать негласными попытками освоить двойственность этой концепции, связывающей то, что известно

психологам (знак), с тем, что является принципиально непознаваемым (символ). В данной статье рассматривается значение термина "архетип", приводятся и критически рассматриваются некоторые дилеммы категоризации и научной достоверности Юнговской формулировки этой концепции и предлагается искать истоки архетипического "человеческого качества" человеческого существования в представлениях о типичных структурных категориях эмпирической сферы.

Ключевые слова: Юнг, теория архетипов, символическая репрезентация, категории, иннатизм, эпистемология

Los debates en torno a la teoría de los arquetipos de Jung podrían caracterizarse como intentos tácitos de lidiar con la doble función del concepto: referirse a algo conocido por los psicólogos (signo) y representar algo que es fundamentalmente incognoscible (símbolo). Este ensayo examina las implicaciones del término "arquetipo", describe y critica algunos de los enigmas de categorización y credibilidad científica que plantea la formulación de la teoría de Jung, e incita a situar la "cualidad humana" arquetípica del ser humano en los imaginarios de patrones típicos del ámbito experiencial.

Palabras clave: Jung, teoría de los arquetipos, representación simbólica, categorías, innatismo, epistemología

符号与象征的辩证法和原型理论的表述
　　围绕荣格原型理论的争论具有以下特征， 即默然地试图在这一概念的双重功能上进行相互的抗衡。这一概念即指的是心理学家已知的东西 (符号)， 又指根本不可知的东西 (象征)。这篇文章考虑了 "原型 "一词的含义， 概述并批判了荣格的理论表述所带来的分类和科学可信性的难题， 并提示， 应该将人类原型性的"人类品质"， 定位在对关于经验领域的典型模式的想象中。

关键词: 荣格, 原型理论, 象征表征, 类别, 先天性, 认识论