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C. G. JUNG AND THE ARCHETYPAL FOUNDATIONS OF SEMIOSIS

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The discipline of semiotics has long concerned itself with the structure and dynamics of signs and sign systems. It has focused its energy on the nature of the reference relation, the logic of sign linkage, and the possibility of pre-human sign systems. Throughout, the concern has been to find a conceptual framework of sufficient scope and power to encompass the rich variety of sign situations. This has entailed an analysis of the traits of nature and evolution as they serve to sustain and support all sign systems no matter how primitive in form and expression. Invariant features of the sign process have been isolated and articulated from a variety of perspectives, chief among these being the Peircean, the medieval, and the Saussurian. In this paper I propose to examine a tradition that in many respects augments and deepens the semiotic reflections just noted. In particular, I wish to defend the view that C. G. Jung (1875-1961), the Swiss psychiatrist and psychologist, advanced our understanding of the sign process through his discovery of the collective unconscious and its archetypes.

Many contemporary semiotic theories remain tied to the model of consciousness and its fundamental lucidity and precision. Insofar as the unconscious is considered, it serves as a mute backdrop for the conscious sign activity of the interpreter and his or her community. The emphasis on linguistic sign systems has often blunted the generic drive of a semiotic which would seek to understand the forces and structures which animate the human process from a domain outside consciousness. The entire evolutionary matrix, a matrix which exerts a tremendous pressure on the human, is bypassed for an account of a one-sided anthroposemiotic of conscious sign manipulation and assimilation. This bias makes it increasingly difficult to isolate and define

the locatedness of human understanding within the vast orders of nature.

In Jung's writing, the evolutionary perspective assumes priority and governs his account of the structure and dynamics of the psyche. Consciousness is seen as a mere epiphenomenon appended to the realm of the personal and collective unconscious. Whatever consciousness thinks, intuits, or images, comes from unconscious processes which antedate the ontogenetic life of the individual. These phylogenetic structures are the enabling conditions for the human process. Jung states the case as follows (1927: 158):

The collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual. His conscious mind is an ephemeral phenomenon that accomplishes all provisional adaptations and orientations, for which reason one can best compare its function to orientation in space. The unconscious, on the other hand, is the source of the instinctual forces of the psyche and of the forms or categories that regulate them, namely the archetypes. All the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes.

As part of our physical inheritance we must count those universal structures which are the patterns for our instinctual behavior. Jung took pains to show that the archetypes were not specific inherited images but were formal patterns which received imagistic and conceptual clothing from the conscious mind in its interaction with the unconscious. While the resultant images assume fairly regular and specific patterns, it does not follow that we have inherited the images themselves.

His most striking image of the true nature of these universal determinants of our semiotic life is that of the crystal (1938: 79):

Its form, however, as I have explained elsewhere, might perhaps be compared to the axial system of a crystal, which, as it were, preforms the crystalline structure in the mother liquid, although it has no material existence of its own. This first appears according to the specific way in which the ions and molecules aggregate. The archetype in itself is empty and purely formal, nothing but a facultas praeformandi, a possibility of representation which is given a priori. The representations themselves are not inherited, only the forms, and in that respect they correspond in every way to the instincts, which are also determined in form only.

Jung, as can be seen here, steers a careful course between an ontology of the archetypes which would give them some form of

substantive existence within the orders of nature and an epistemology of the archetypes which would establish their existence through a transcendental argument which goes from the observed to the necessary conditions for the observed. As an avowed Kantian, Jung insisted that we only have indirect evidence of the necessary and universal structures of our biological and mental existence. Methodologically, Jung was both a phenomenologist and an inductive empiricist. This use of both strategies has often generated confusion about the forms of validation in his overall project.

Jung considered himself a phenomenologist insofar as he carefully sifted the traits of experience in order to find those essential features which could be used to map out the contour of the psyche. While he did not deliberately practice the various Husserlian reductions, he did insist that the psyche was best understood from an essentialist perspective. In dream material, for example, he sought out those recurrent patterns which linked the individual self back to the phylogenetic heritage which is manifest across and through all personal and cultural divisions. Like Kant, he insisted that such patterns were responsible for everything from preforming the traits of bare perception to articulating the higher symbolic forms of advanced cultures. The phenomenologist of the psyche could learn to isolate those access structures which make it possible to have and endure a world at all. However, it should be remembered that Jung also considered that the results of phenomenological inquiry were without value unless they were grafted onto an evolutionary analysis of nature. Unlike Husserl, Jung insisted that the psyche is embedded in, and is a product of, the innumerable orders of a nature which in itself lies beyond our full comprehension.

Jung was an empiricist insofar as he used comparative and inductive data to reinforce his intuitions into the archetypes. His extensive researches in the history of mythology, medieval alchemy, east-asian religions, and the foundations of a physical account of time and synchronicity, all served to ramify and deepen his fundamental phenomenological intuitions into the phenomena exhibited by his patients. Psychopathology received a new grounding in the archetype theory and became located in a much vaster horizon of phylogenetic history.

Jung further transformed psychopathology by showing that all neurotic and psychotic symptoms exhibit a high degree of intelligibility and illuminate the inner working of the unconscious as well as pointing toward a possible restructuring of the psychic situation. Jung insisted that the psyche is relentlessly teleological and that any so-called illness is actually designed to further the growth process. The hermeneutics of illness becomes the hermeneutics of the potential future self. This insight into the goal-directed nature of the psyche enable Jung to find intelligibility structures within the unconscious

itself. The material of dream analysis, combined with that of cultural analysis and active imagination, all point toward sign structures which can be made transparent to the trained analyst. Jung, contra Freud, insisted that nature did not like secrets and that the unconscious, whether personal or collective, was driven to manifest its truths without the necessary intervention of some kind of censor mechanism. Hence Jung rejected the Freudian distinction between latent and manifest dimensions of dream material.

It is not sufficient to simply posit Kantian fore-structures of intelligibility. Specific analyses must be made of how these structures actually unfold within the conscious life of the individual. Kant's analyses of the transcendental imagination and the schematism are notorious for being beyond the reach of phenomenological probing. Jung advances beyond Kant by using a variety of indirect methods to show the inner logic of the form generating process. In general terms he discovered that the unconscious is constantly forming new patterns from its wealth of phylogenetic material. He states (1917: 270-71):

Moreover, we know, from abundant experience as well as for theoretical reasons, that besides this the unconscious contains all the material that has not yet reached the threshold of consciousness. These are the seeds of future conscious contents. Equally, we have every reason to suppose that the unconscious is never quiescent in the sense of being inactive, but presumably is ceaselessly engaged in the grouping and regrouping of so-called unconscious fantasies.

The unconscious seems to abhor any kind of radical diremption which would keep the archetypes and complexes from forming stable patterns. Psychic energy, which is not, for Jung, psycho-sexual but neutral in its expression and origin, serves to keep the conscious and unconscious dimensions of the psyche working toward common goals and norms. Unlike Derrida's economy of difference, the psyche works toward an economy of unity in which each subaltern component serves to illuminate the dominant themes of the self.

We need not detail the specific formal powers and structures within the collective unconscious, chief among these being the shadow, the anima and the animus, and the Self archetype. Suffice it to say that Jung lavished great care on the delineation of these archetypes and thereby secured them for conscious apprehension and analysis. What we need to show in the remainder of this paper is how these structures relate to a general semiotic and to what might best be called the metaphysics of the human process.

As noted above, semiotic has concerned itself with the problems of sign linkage, the reference relation, and the

structure of pre-human sign systems. In what remains, I will attempt to show that Jung's analysis of the archetypes sheds great light on these issues and solves some knotty problems in our analysis of the evolutionary dimension of sign function.

The relation between and among signs has been studied from the standpoint of conscious comparison of iconic, indexical, and symbolic features of given signs as they already operate within communal sign series. Peirce and Royce, to name just two figures, advanced our understanding of the public logic of this process. For Jung, the process of amplification serves to show the unconscious counterpart of what I have elsewhere called serial ramification. This underside of the sign series is best allowed to become unhidden through the use of analogy. Jung states (1917:291):

The essence of hermeneutics, an art widely practiced in former times, consists in adding further analogies to the one already supplied by the symbol: in the first place subjective analogies produced at random by the patient, then objective analogies provided by the analyst out of his general knowledge. This procedure widens and enriches the initial symbol, and the final outcome is an infinitely complex and variegated picture the elements of which can be reduced to their respective tertia comparationis.

A given symbol will contain its own penumbra of meanings which shadow it wherever it goes. The process of amplification brings in subjective and objective analogies which serve to fill in the elusive contour of the symbol. The linkage itself is not reducible to common iconic features between and among the various subaltern symbols. The analyst can utilize his or her general knowledge of invariant and cross-cultural phylogenetic structures to illuminate the given symbol under analysis.

The mechanism for sign linkage in the unconscious is that of the "feeling toned complex" which serves as a psychic magnet for stray and otherwise random semiotic material. Strictly speaking, the complex is located within the personal unconscious while the archetype is within the collective unconscious. Yet any given feeling toned complex may have an archetypal core which serves to give it even greater power and autonomy.

Each complex has its own orbit and energy charge. Hence it can function outside of all conscious sign systems and serve to assault them from below. Jung repeatedly emphasized that these internal sign systems could break into the sign material of the community and create great inter-personal semiotic tension. In primitive consciousness, these complexes become personified as individual souls and receive an outward projection. In the extreme and rare case of split personality we see how autonomous complexes function as discontinuous semiotic systems. The

principle of unity for each system is the central feeling tone which serves to hold sign fragments into one self-contained system. The logic of sign linkage is different for the unconscious and the conscious dimensions of the psyche.

Insofar as a given complex has an archetypal core, it reaches back into the phylogenetic structures which govern and measure the psyche. In non-Jungian language we can see this as the process whereby autonomy becomes quickened and deepened by a theonomy which provides the measure for the autonomous expression of sign and symbol material. While a complex in itself may appear to be unruly from the standpoint of conscious sign systems, it actually functions according to a deeper logic than that appropriate to the precise and highly delineated signs of the community of interpretation. A complex, for good or ill, stabilizes and maps a semiotic field which would otherwise not prevail. When this sign matrix receives archetypal validation, it reaches beyond the personal feeling tones of the individual and carries universal structures into the realm of consciousness.

The collision between the conscious community of interpretation and the unconscious archetypes is as eternal as it is potentially controllable. Jung, witnessing to the horrors of the Nazi period, argued that certain one-sided archetypes, if not balanced by their own internal opposites, could destroy the rational and highly controlled sign systems of the community. The emergence of the archetype of power, as embodied in the god Wotan in many of his German patients, convinced Jung that the social orders could be assaulted by mighty powers from below. Each such irruption contains its own self-validating semiotic systems which serve to alter and distort the conscious signs of the community.

However, with proper control, autonomous unconscious sign systems can serve to balance and correct conscious attitudes in the individual and or society. The mechanism whereby unconscious realities become integrated into the life of the personal or collective ego is the individuation process. In this process, the unconscious functions to overcome deficiencies in the conscious attitude. Whatever is lacking in the overall contour of the conscious sign systems can be found in the underside of the semiotic process. Sign linkage on the conscious level is paralleled by archetypal linkages in the unconscious. As noted, subaltern symbols or archetypes are linked to the dominant symbol through a feeling tone of great intensity. Whenever this integration between conscious and unconscious sign systems avoids demonic irruptions, whereby the mind is simply overwhelmed by unconscious contents, the individuation process can be seen to be functioning properly. Individuals and communities both require a successful navigation of the individuation process if the hidden sign systems of the psyche are to reveal their semiotic wealth without destroying those very structures which they wish to serve. Jung states (1954: 40):

Accordingly, the therapeutic method of complex psychology consists on the one hand of making as fully conscious as possible the constellated unconscious contents, and on the other hand in synthesizing them with consciousness through an act of recognition. Since, however, civilized man possesses a high degree of dissociability and makes continual use of it in order to avoid every possible risk, it is by no means a foregone conclusion that recognition will be followed by the appropriate action.

As we can see, Jung interjects a pessimistic moment into his account of the individuation process. Sheer cognitive recognition of unconscious sign systems does not entail that the ego, whether collective or personal, is in a position to integrate them into the larger contour of psychic life.

Sign linkage thus functions on three levels. On the first level is the conscious and iconic, indexical, and symbolic linkage between and among signs available to the community of interpretation. On the second level is the emotive linkage between archetypes and their subaltern symbols in the collective unconscious. On the third level is the individuation process in which conscious and unconscious sign systems seek to complement and enrich each other. While the first process takes place according to conscious and communicative hermeneutic rules, the second functions silently according to autonomous principles. The third process is the one which is most fraught with difficulty. Most human tragedies come from a breakdown in this third dimension of potential sign linkage.

Moving to the difficult problem of sign reference and the status of the interpretant, we can see how Jung's account avoids some of the more difficult aspects of this dimension of sign function. Methodologically, Jung refuses to embrace either naive realism or constructivist idealism. He insisted that his analysis of the archetypes could take place without begging the question of the literalness of the reference relation. That the archetypes are real and that they are the major source for the formation of the human process, both biologically and psychically, should be obvious from his account. Insofar as the self cannot prevail without these autonomous and energized contents, it follows that archetypes are the originating structures for those interpretants which govern our life. However we come to understand the relation between sign and interpretant, it is clear that both receive their ultimate measure and validation in the phylogenetic heritage which provides the encompassing perspective for the human process.

The archetypes of the collective unconscious are deeply embedded in the whole of nature and are manifest in all pre-human systems. In his late reflections on the principle of synchronicity, Jung struggled to find those categories which would express the constitutive or originating meaning structures which

prevail in the very interstices of the orders of nature. While subsequent reflection has not been kind to his notion of synchronicity, it has become obvious that sign systems and their meaning values are found throughout the innumerable orders of the world. Jung advanced semiotic reflection by tracing out those dark impulses which animate and guide sign linkage on every level of evolution. The ramification of signs in the unconscious of nature, if we may use such as expression, stands as the enabling condition for those semiotic processes which punctuate and define the elusive human process. Jung's writings give us the most complete roadmap yet made of this hidden territory and can serve to reground semiotic theory in a more encompassing and adequate perspective.

ENDNOTES:

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