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Negotiating the Numinous: Toward a Taxonomy of Jungian Studies

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What is the future of Jung in the university system? In his essay, 'On the Nature of the Psyche' Jung wrote:

Perhaps it would not be too much to say that the most crucial problems of the individual and society turn upon the way the psyche functions in regard to spirit and matter. (1947/1954 CW 8: 251)

This same statement could also be applied to university knowledge. How knowledge 'functions' in regard to matter and spirit, or the numinous, will determine how Jung is dealt with, how he is assessed, and where he is placed.

The modern university is not especially friendly toward the numinous, and people who respond to the numinous are sometimes described as mystics, nutters, cranks, or frauds. No one likes to be called these names, and so many of us block out the numinous in our attempts to adjust to so-called normal academic life. Even those few staff who take Jung seriously and who study his work tend to have a difficult time with the 'numinous' aspects of his psychology.

teaching styles

Over the last 15 years I have been teaching Jung in the university, as well as visiting other universities and colleges world-wide, to see how this work is being handled by other teachers. Largely, I believe, the success (or otherwise) of our efforts turns upon how well we deal with the problem of the numinous. If we ignore the numinous, as is typical of academic culture, and if we teach only the 'nuts and bolts' of Jung's theory, we are not teaching him properly. Rather, we are excluding the essence of his approach, if we take seriously his contention that 'The main interest of my work is not concerned with the treatment of neuroses but rather with the approach to the numinous ... But the fact is that the approach to the numinous is the real therapy' (1945: 377).

I would add that the 'numinous is the real study'. How do we, in a post-religious age, in a university governed by secular values and Enlightenment ideals, make the numinous convincing, real, and present? How do we deal with our innate intellectual scepticism? How do we handle our personal cynicism toward the unseen dimension? Just as importantly, how do we educate ourselves to become critical of the numinous, rather than 'fall' for it blindly, with unthinking devotion?

I have discerned four major approaches to the teaching of Jung. Each one could be seen to be governed by a particular archetypal style. I am sure there are more than four, and that I have left out others, but this at least will set the ball rolling toward a taxonomy of Jungian Studies.

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| 1. Fitting in or Conforming | ruled by the Senex |
| 2. Updating or Reconstructing | Hermes, Trickster |
| 3. Soul-Making or Overturning | Dionysus |
| 4. Keeping Pure or Standing Still | Disciple or Acolyte |

As with all taxonomic categories, these styles are almost never found in pure form. As one sketches out these archetypal styles, they invariably become somewhat clichéd and stereotypical, but we have to take that into account.

1. Fitting in or Conforming:

Here the desire is to fit Jung into the university system, rather than to challenge the system by advocating new knowledge. Analytical psychology sets itself the task of conforming to prevailing standards, expectations, and assumptions. The keyword for this approach is ‘respectability’.

The aim is to show how *respectable* Jungian psychology is, if only academic scholars took the time to understand the nature of Jungian thought. If scholars sat and reflected, they would see that the exclusion of Jung from the academy has been based on a misunderstanding. This approach is rational, cool, and collected; it is non-combative and diplomatic. It seeks to demonstrate the validity of Jungian psychology, by fitting it alongside other theories and knowledges. I have found this approach in every country I have visited.

Its aim is to demonstrate that the exclusion of Jung has been based on misconceptions. Jung is not a ‘mystic’, but a sound and worthy *scientist* of the deeper and more difficult reaches of mind. These depths are not ‘mystical’ but are accessible to scientific analysis that is properly attuned to deep structures. This approach emphasises his scientific credentials, his career as a leading-edge research psychiatrist, his philosophical education, and his empirical approach to mental illness and social problems.

Archetypally, this approach is ruled by the senex, both in its creative aspect (gathering-in and accommodating differences) and in its negative aspect (manipulation and avoidance of facts). It seems to me that this approach falls into one of Jung’s own complexes: his almost monotonous insistence that his work is always scientific and empirical. These claims of Jung manipulate and avoid the facts, which are that he was also a highly speculative and idealist philosopher in the German Romantic tradition. As he got older, the scientist persona fell away, and his philosophical and intuitive self emerged with greater force. His memoirs are almost entirely about his relationship with God. To deny this is to avoid reality.

But the senex style teaches the ‘nuts and bolts’ of Jung, without teaching that the work is ultimately about personal transformation. Students are given theories and facts, but not transformation, and they rightly complain about the dryness and aridity of this approach when they find out more about the field. This drying out effect, which many refer to as a ‘head trip’, is part of the long-standing opposition that many analysts have to bringing Jung into the academy, and I think their concern is legitimate. Divorced from lived experience, is ‘knowledge about’ Jung useful? Indeed, can Jung even be understood without the kind of experience we gain from the psychotherapeutic encounter?

Ironically, in our desire to ‘include’ Jung in the academy, we have to be careful that we are not ‘excluding’ him all over again. If our pedagogy and style are too narrow, we are not including enough of this thinker’s work. If I can use a metaphor from physics, it is as if we are trying to pull in a single particle into the university, only Jung is not a ‘particle’, but a string or wave of infinite extension. I got stuck in this style myself for some years, and so I know all about it.

This is an emotional and pedagogical problem of the senex. The senex (in either men or women) thinks of itself as being important and in control. It won’t risk the self-exposure that transformation demands, as that involves the anima, or soul. (Following Hillman, I do not see the anima as confined to the psychology of men.) The more the teacher is identified with the persona, the more unconscious and distant the anima will be. To teach the art of transformation demands that the teacher shows that he or she is vulnerable to the numinous and receptive to the soul. If the teacher is not prepared to risk something, to let the guard slip, to show vulnerability, there cannot be any teaching with soul. As Jung said of Freud, he was not prepared ‘to risk his authority’, and as a result he ‘lost it altogether’ (1963: 182).

The other problem with the senex pedagogy is that in its conservative interest in scientific standards, empirical evidence, rational proof, etc., it fails to see that the academy itself has been radically transformed by a postmodern revolution. Many of the old, academic ideals, such as objectivity of knowledge, precision and exactness in scientific method, have been overturned by postmodern thought, at least in the social and human sciences, if not in the exact sciences. To some extent, the idea of the academy that the senex approach assumes no longer exists. This is because Hermes, the central archetype of the postmodern era, has got into the academy and turned things around.

2. Updating or Reconstructing:

Hermes governs the second approach I have detected, although Hermes can also outwit himself. The emphasis in this approach is on ‘reconstructing’ Jung in the light of progressive discourses that have taken place in the behavioural and

social sciences, the arts, and humanities. If *respectability* is the keyword for the senex, here the main concern is *updating*.

Hermes is the messenger who moves between worlds, and he brings to the Jungian world messages from other knowledges, and he introduces Jungian knowledge to worlds that have not been even interested in Jung in the past. His concern is with potential connections and creative dialogues.

Hermes, the trickster, adopts the view that an unreconstructed Jung cannot be admitted to the fortress of academia. Whatever 'Jung' may signify to Jungians, he has to be deconstructed before he can be authentically brought before the academy. This approach may be paradoxical; it may even side with the established views of the academy, and argue that 'Jung' in his unreconstructed form is not entitled to be admitted to the university. This approach may be embarrassed by the unreconstructed Jung, and seek to differentiate a 'post-Jungian' from an earlier 'Jungian' position.

This approach will seek to re-read Jung with current views in mind, often sharply critical of the ways in which the classical Jungian work falls short of contemporary values. It critiques the Jungian work, especially in terms of the 'big three' preoccupations of the academy, namely: class, gender, and race. It may seek to revise his metapsychology and his philosophical underpinnings, in an effort to bring these elements into line with contemporary philosophical thought, postmodern theory, and phenomenology. This second approach might employ as its credo: 'reparation works best in the open', and it will enjoin scholars and critics of Jung to enter into dialogue with 'post-Jungians' in a mutually enriching work of cultural reconstruction.

A major drawback is that with all this fancy footwork, certain basic problems are not addressed. What happens to the numinous? Where are the gods? They are often ignored in the move to find meaningful connections between post-Jungian interests and the concerns of race, class, and gender. This approach often says: we will redeem Jung's psychology, but not bother about his religious worldview. But Hermes outwits himself at this point. Jung's religious attitude is not an 'added extra', an optional element we can do without. We can't just say his religion is a part of his conservative nature, and that as radical post-Jungians we can't be too concerned with it.

This problem is linked to other, larger issues. In the academy, religion is often relegated to the right wing of politics, and social progressives concerned with *updating* are forced to engage a leftist agenda that is allergic to religious problems. But I don't believe that the religious dimension is extraneous to Jung; it is integral to his psychology.

Jung's work calls for a 'religious left' that does not seem to exist on campus. The religious are often very conservative, while the politically aware are often very

secular. The major exception to this rule is Western Buddhism, which seems to be politically progressive. I know that many progressives like to typecast Jung as irredeemably conservative, but the implications of his psychology are radical. As Otto Gross said in 1913: 'The psychology of the unconscious is the philosophy of the revolution'.

3. Soul-Making or Overturning

The third approach focuses on the numinous dimension, but often has little to say about social and political aspects. Its interest is in the inner life and cultivating the soul. A spectacular exception to this is the work of James Hillman, which seems to engage in a late-life 'conversion' to the political. But during his major and influential years, Hillman was primarily a soul-maker, with an almost haughty disregard for politics and society. As far as I can see, this third approach is mainly found in America, and is an American problem. But it should be everyone's problem and it should be found everywhere if we are going to do justice to Jung. The typically American hunger for transcendence makes it almost impossible for Americans to leave out the spiritual dimension of Jung's work.

Soul-Making is iconoclastic and rebellious. Its god is Dionysus, the 'loosener' or 'overturner'. It accepts that the work of bringing Jung into the university is a subversive act, i.e. a counter-cultural enterprise. It is not interested in conforming Jung to existing paradigms, but in challenging the models that have kept Jung out of the academy in the first place. Its concern is not *respectability* or *updating*, but *revolutionising* the system. In some ways, this third approach is disrespectful, rude, and impolite: but as the *I Ching* might say, 'No blame', because everything is done in name of soul.

The third approach likes to employ archaic language that flies in the face of the academy, using terms like 'gods', 'goddesses', 'soul' and 'spirit', and then watching on while one's colleagues squirm. The revolutionary approach often decides that the academy 'lacks soul', that it privileges knowledge but not wisdom, that it is repressive toward 'what counts', that it avoids an encounter with 'ultimate questions'. This approach is what Jung would call 'inflated', or what the world calls arrogant. But whether arrogant, inflated, or inspired, the style fails to see that the academy has been secular for hundreds of years, and if it wants to bring the numinous into the system, it has to be tactful, and present an appropriate 'apologetic' for the gods, based on reasoned philosophy and not on flights of imagination or assertions of belief.

I wrote to one soul-maker who had recently retired from academic work, and he lamented:

I've come to feel that the university as an institution is completely dead. There are, here and there, interesting people working in the quickly closing cracks. I am sure you are one of those people, but academic Jung studies is dull and programmatic, locked in to old academic structures, lacking freedom or spirit.

I have found this to be a typical expression of the soul-making approach: jaded idealism, world-weary attitude, and the view that things are getting worse. Such people are especially horrified to see what the ‘senex’ is doing with Jung studies.

Scholars of the third approach often scorn what is current and contemporary, and often devalue these concerns as merely fashionable. They hate the contemporary and are in love with antiquity. Their models of how to live are usually premodern, ancient, or primordial. Favoured sources of inspiration are the Florentine Renaissance, the Perennial Philosophy, or Medieval Alchemy – which all look like hocus pocus to the university. The third approach believes that a primordial ‘truth’ can be found, and this is an inspiration for championing such traditions as alchemy, shamanism, Neoplatonism, metaphysics, and wisdom literature.

Scholars who follow this way have difficult and often lonely careers. Their colleagues generally do not like them, but their close associates frequently adore and idealise them. They generate ill feeling and rivalry in the workplace. They may exacerbate the problem by their repeated criticisms of mainstream knowledges. Because they celebrate soul and spirit they are often given a high profile by the media, and this rubs salt into the wounds of their colleagues, who can be beset by envy, since their hard work in narrow research fields do not generate media interest at all. However, such teachers are often highly successful with students, who view them as inspired prophets on campus. They form the ‘Dead Poets Society’ of the Jungian world, but they often get too entangled in the emotional currents and complications of students’ lives. The senex persona is dropped in the name of ‘soul’, but sometimes propriety and professional boundaries are dropped as well.

4. Keeping Pure or Standing Still

There is also a purist approach, and this group tries to have as little to do with the intellectual life of the academy as possible. They don’t stir the pot like the Dionysian soul-makers. They hope that if they confine themselves to a Jungian bubble, the rest of the world will go away. They are suspicious of postmodernity, don’t like Derrida or Foucault, ignore the post-Freudians, and try as hard as possible to keep themselves pure for Jung. Their job is to inform people about Jung – a kind of informational bureau on campus.

I can’t think of an archetype that governs this approach, but I can think of a stereotype: the disciple or acolyte. This style, as Jung observes, is secretly identified with the master, and hides this under a mask of subservience to the Jungian teachings. Such teachers do not talk about Jung’s scientific research, but only about his ‘findings’, as if they are commandments written in stone or brought down from on high. The problem with this approach is that it is not doing Jung

any favours. It is keeping him hermetically sealed off from the world, away from the critical debates, making him 'gloriously irrelevant' to intellectual life.

Teachers in this mode often behave as converts and their students are often expected to become 'Jungians', rather than critical readers of Jung. Students often complain that this approach is claustrophobic, although it may suit the kind of student who is looking for something to believe in. Teachers in this mode are not always liked by their colleagues, who see them as priests or nuns of a secret cult. Often this style is short-lived, because it is sometimes a phase people go through, a moment in which they fall in love with the numinous as revealed by Jung. Researcher Richard Noll savagely attacks this tendency of the work.

Again, this is largely a religious problem: how to incorporate the numinous in a secular academy? Jung evokes and stirs our spiritual complex; some reject him out of hand as a mystic, others revere him as a prophet. Converts don't know how to gain the necessary critical distance, since criticism is viewed as a transgression or heresy, signs that our spiritual complex has been activated. If Jungian purists are incapable of genuine criticism, their leftist colleagues will argue that they are indoctrinating the students, making them incapable of living politically aware and astute lives. This sets up the conditions for fundamentalism and intolerance, and arguably education should work in the opposite direction.

Concluding Remarks

These four approaches I have outlined cannot be pinned down to particular personalities in the world, but rather represent 'leanings' or 'biases' in our work. The first approach seeks to *conform*, the second to *reform*, the third strives to *transform*, and the fourth seeks only to *inform*. It is sometimes the case that the one academic will experience elements of all four styles and approaches. They can be further reduced to two larger categories: 1 and 4 are 'static' styles, while 2 and 3 are 'dynamic'. 1 is the static and 2 is the dynamic form of adjusting to the academic world; whereas 3 is the dynamic and 4 the static form of adjusting to the numinous.

Hostility between our camps could be attributed largely to these different styles. The fast-moving Hermes or trickster finds the disciple or acolyte to be dull, static and uninteresting. The senex finds the trickster to be slippery and deceitful. The Dionysian soul-makers find all the other types to be superficial and defensive. The Jungian purists argue that the others are in danger of betraying Jung and losing the plot. Sometimes soul-makers push the system too far, and are in danger of losing their jobs. The university might decide that soul-makers are actually trouble-makers, and it can get on better without them. Soul-makers can reinvent themselves as updaters or reformers, where at least they can hold down their jobs, and where passions are cooled by the need to enter into dialogue with contemporary concerns. The acolytes are also nudged onward to new styles, partly

due to criticism from others, since the university will not tolerate an exclusive bubble world for very long. A Jungian 'information booth' is arguably best dealt with by amateur Jung clubs, and not by universities.

But the field is new and is still being born. There will be other styles to discover, and more problems to elaborate. We must expect this diversity in Jungian Studies, and if possible, hold the tension between conflicting positions.

In conclusion, we serve Jung best not by turning his work into an ideology, but by playfully deconstructing it for the new era. We have to deconstruct his ideas about the numinous, but we cannot *eradicate* the numinous to suit the needs of a secular academy. Using one of Jung's own terms, we have to 'dream the myth onward' (1940: 76). As we move the work into the academy, we have to avoid many pitfalls, including getting stuck in the senex and leaving out the soul; getting caught up in updating and leaving out the numinous; getting intoxicated with the soul and condemning the real world; or getting stuck in a ghetto and ignoring everyone else. These problems are not unique to Jungians; they are found wherever the numinous raises its head in a secular context.