

CHAPTER 3

THE MYTHOPOETIC FUNCTION AND THE EARLY HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGY

The experience of waking dreams, so well integrated into the daily life of some cultures, in our own culture has been most often acknowledged only by mystics and poets, madmen and geniuses. The history of psychology relates how the elements of waking dreams, the experiential phenomena and the attending attitudes, were slowly more popularly recognized and cultivated in the context of a “psychotherapeutic” worldview. By waking dream we mean not just an experience of dreamlike character received while awake, but an experience of the imagination undertaken with a certain quality or attitude of awareness. This conscious awareness differentiates the experience of imagination (whether conveyed through auditory and visual imagery, or activities such as automatic writing or dancing, or less translatable experiences of imagination) from daydreams and hallucinations.

The way a phenomenon is viewed and/or entered into, as well as the initial choice of phenomenon, reflects the attitudes and beliefs of the experiencer. So while the history of psychology reveals the phenomena being studied, the way it reveals it, what it reveals of it, what it deduces from what it reveals, and what uses it has in mind for those deductions reflect something about the particular myths which psychology values and views from. In this history we will be concerned with both our primary topic, waking dreams and the imaginal, and the reflections cast into it by its researchers. To discriminate these is essential to an imaginal psychology – for otherwise we continue to base a psychology on our own reflections, mistaking them for the imaginal’s.

THE MYTHOPOETIC AND CREATIVE FUNCTIONS OF
THE UNCONSCIOUS: FREDERIC MYERS AND
THEODORE FLOURNOY

Hypnosis became a basic approach to the “unconscious” mind in the 1800’s. Hypnosis (coming from the Greek word *hypnos*, meaning sleep) was considered by the mesmerists as a kind of sleep having various levels characterized by different experiences. “Under hypnosis” the subject, among other things, could have access to unconscious memories and imagery. Du Potet claimed to be able to have his subjects remain aware of and to remember the occurrences while hypnotized (Ellenberger, 1970:120)¹. If so, his subjects probably experienced waking dreams, i.e. were aware of and remembered dreamlike symbolic phenomena. In most cases, however, the hypnotized subject was not in a conscious state of awareness. His state of induced hypnotic sleep was not unlike the self-induced trance states of mediums who often did not remember the contents of their trance experience.

The parallels between these two states were drawn in the 1850’s. The psychologically-minded scientific community turned their attention to spiritism (the attempt to converse with disembodied spirits through a medium). Automatic writing, supposedly resulting from the medium’s contact, while in trance, with a spirit (*ibid.*, 120-1, 399), was their primary source of data. Most often the mediums simply found themselves writing without thinking or planning what they would write. They believed themselves to be handing over the pen to a deceased person who used their hand to convey a message of importance.

The early psychologists William James (1885) and F. Myers (1885, 1886-7) came to understand such writing as a “means of access to the unconscious” (Ellenberger, 1970:121). Since psychology was becoming based on the data derived from just such

¹ For most of this history of Myers, Flournoy and Janet I am indebted to the scholarship of Henri Ellenberger (*The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 1970).

an access, many of the spiritist methodologies were used as scientific procedures for investigating the “unconscious” of psychiatric patients. Du Potet, for instance, would draw a white chalk circle in the middle of a black floor and ask his patients to stare into it until they experienced visions or hallucinations. Mirror, crystal ball, and water gazing, formerly the media for the visions of diviners, now became used psychotherapeutically. Patients, as in Du Potet’s method, were simply asked to stare into a crystal ball or some such item and relate the visual images or dramatic play that they observed there to the doctor.

In the 1880s Myers and others of the Society for Psychical Research concluded that these methods were, as automatic writing had already been found, a “means for detecting subconscious material” (*ibid.*, 121). From his work dealing with the material arising from the “subconscious” of mediums and others, Myers postulated three functions of the “subliminal self”: the inferior, superior and mythopoetic functions. He described the mythopoetic function as the unconscious tendency to weave fantasies. It is a “ ‘middle region’ of the subliminal self where a strange fabrication of inner romances perpetually goes on” (*ibid.*, 314, 318).

Theodore Flournoy (1854-1920), a disciple of Wundt’s, studied this mythmaking propensity of the unconscious in what was reputed to be the re-enactment of past lives and other experiences of mediums. He came to feel that the weaving of myths goes on continuously in the unconscious. The states of dreaming, daydreaming, “somnambulism, hypnosis, possession, medium[istic] trance, mythomania, [and] certain delusions” reveal the underlying fictions within the unconscious (*ibid.*, 318). Flournoy’s observation of the mythopoetic activity of the unconscious led him also to delineate several functions of the unconscious. The “creative function” of the unconscious he saw as that which enables one to receive insights and wisdom not attributable to the conscious personality. For instance, “he describes a young mother who from time to time dictated philosophical fragments that were far above the scope of her

interests and knowledge” (*ibid.*, 317). Flournoy felt that the unconscious also had a protective function which would offer creatively warning and comfort. Other functions he observed in the unconscious activity of the mediums he studied were a compensatory or wish-fulfilling function and a ludic or play function (*ibid.*, 317).

The Renaissance concentration on imagination and fantasy² was revived in the Romantic period, partly as a reaction to the “controlled rationalism” of the eighteenth century (Singer, 1966:8-9).³ The idea of the creative nature of the unconscious revealed during each of these early periods was a concept Flournoy, as well as Galton (1907) and Myers, drew upon and sought to illuminate in their “psychological” work. This simultaneous study of the creative and mythopoetic functions of the unconscious had the possibility of revealing many techniques and attitudes of therapeutic value. Unfortunately psychiatry’s preoccupation with psychopathology shed a different, less creative light on the unconscious. The mythmaker of the individual was often seen as a culprit possessing the person, forcing on them delusions and fears, superstitions and maladapted world views. Not until the work of C. G. Jung is the creative functioning of the mythmaker-within fully reinstated in the history of psychiatry. However, even after Jung’s theoretical statement, in the form of his analytical psychology, there persisted a de-valuing attitude towards the unconscious psyche and its imaginative processes—one that sees its manifestations as symptoms to be eradicated or almost as food to be taken in,

² See Montaigne’s *Essais* (1581), and Muratori’s *On the Power of Human Imagination* (transl. title, 1745) for treatment of imagination and the creative unconscious in the Renaissance.

³ The work of Blake, Goethe, Hoffman, Novalis, Coleridge, de Quincey, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Baudelaire, Mallarmé show the sensitivity of the Romantic tradition to inner fantasy. In music Schumann’s song cycles, Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique*, and Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony No. 1* (“Winter Daydreams”) can be suggested to illuminate the valued creative introspection of that time (Singer, 1966:8).

consumed and digested by the conscious personality for its own uses.

L'ABAISSMENT DU NIVEAU MENTAL: PIERRE JANET

In the work of Pierre Janet (1859-1947), the two prevailing methods of exploring the unconscious – hypnosis and spiritist procedures – were notably combined. His work using these methods with patients diagnosed as hysterical contributed to the evolving thesis that the unconscious consists of one or more sub-personalities (“di-psychism” or “poly-psychism”), “images” or “ideas”. Through allowing the mythopoetic function⁴ to become manifest the contents of the unconscious parts were believed to be able to express themselves in symbolic terms.

Pierre Janet sought to discover in his patients the fundamental idea(s) or image(s) at the basis of their delirium. His term “partial automatism” denoted a part of the person which is “split off from the awareness of the personality and [which] follows an autonomous, subconscious development” (Ellenberger, 1970:359). These split off parts were called “subconscious fixed ideas” and “simultaneous or successive psychological existences.” The split off parts of the personality became separate realities, Janet observed, with which the patient interacted.

Often this interaction, resulting for instance in “hysterical fits,” would interfere with the patient’s adaptation to the more “common reality.” Janet believed that it was not sufficient simply to make this other mythic realm of personality conscious. He felt it must be destroyed or changed by means of “dissociation” or “transformation” (*ibid.*, 373).

He developed several ways of combining spiritist practices with hypnosis to allow the autonomous personality or idea(s) to be known. In the first, he would get the hypnotized patient’s conscious attention absorbed in some distraction and would then

⁴ Janet called this “mythopoetic function,” “la fonction fabulatrice” – a term later borrowed by Henri Bergson.

slip a pen into his hand. He would begin to write “automatically”; i.e., without conscious thought or interference, the unconscious was believed to unburden its story in the writing. He found that he could divide the content of such automatic writing into two categories: “on the one side the roles played by the subject in order to please the hypnotist; on the other side the unknown personality, which can manifest itself spontaneously, particularly as a return to childhood” (*ibid.*, 358-9).

On one such occasion Janet found that a patient, Lucie, had a second personality who seemed to be constantly reliving an episode which had happened when she was seven years old (Janet, 1888: 238-79). Such examples are not rare in his writings. In the case of Madame D. (Janet, 1892) he modified his technique to “automatic talking.” A third technique, also showing the influence of the spiritists, was crystal gazing while hypnotized (Janet, 1897). Janet believed that the inner conflicts, hidden identities and scenes with which the personality was dealing were projected into the ball and experienced as images and scenes coming from the ball. Janet reports that he even had one patient whose images could at will leave the ball, and become projected onto a paper where the patient could then draw the development of his “hallucination” (Virel and Fretigny, 1968). These phenomena arose during what Janet termed an “abaissement du niveau mental,” a lowering of conscious activity. This state of consciousness, where the subject is removed from his usual pre-occupations with sense data and thoughts, has parallels in other cultures, as we have seen. In the other examples, however, the emerging material is valued in and of itself—for indeed, it comes not from the “unconscious” but from a world connected with no less than the gods and the spirits.

Janet appreciated the dramatic quality of the imaginal. He observed his patients being caught up in scenes where they interacted with a variety of characters in different places. He decided to simply become another character influencing the progression of dramatic action.

Marie, a patient who suffered from blindness in the left eye,

claimed that the affliction had existed from birth. Janet knew differently. He had found through hypnotic age regression that the patient saw through both eyes when she was five years old. He went about uncovering the traumatic events around the period when her eyesight was lost. He found out, by putting Marie in a somnambulistic state, that when she was six years old, “in spite of her cries,” she had been made to sleep with a child who had impetigo on the entire left side of the face. Since that time Janet ascertained that Marie had suffered from anaesthesia of the left side of her face and blindness in the left eye. Through fantasy

[I] put her back with the child who had so horrified her; I made her believe that the child is very nice and does not have impetigo (she is half-convinced. After two re-enactments of this scene I get the best of it); she caresses without fear the imaginary child. The sensitivity of the left eye reappears without difficulty, and when I wake her up, Marie sees clearly with the left eye.

Janet, 1889

Gradually through the intervention of the doctor the patient is able to befriend the image that has “blinded” her with fright, and impaired her adaptation to reality. Through the re-living of the trauma and a substitution of a different image and attitude the patient is able to transform the fantasy of the event such that it is no longer in a position of severe opposition to her conscious personality.

Another patient, Justine, had a fear of cholera and would shout repeatedly “Cholera . . . it’s taking me!” after which an hysterical crisis would ensure. Janet learned to enter the drama of her crisis in a dialogue fashion. “When the patient cried, ‘Cholera! He will take me!’ Janet answered, ‘Yes, he holds you by the right leg!’ and the patient withdrew that leg. Janet then asked, ‘Where is he, your cholera?’ to which she would reply, ‘Here! See him, he’s bluish and he stinks!’ ” (Ellenberger, 1970:367). By entering into the fantasy with her Janet could obtain a description of her

experience as well as assure himself of a position from which he, as a part of the drama, could also influence it. We see this process in other forms of psychotherapy, where the doctor enters the patient's drama and through his presence and "insight" helps to alter the patient's relation to the traumatic events which inhibit their "preferred" development. Here Janet accomplished this through having the patient relate the event on an imaginative level where the doctor could enter into the myth and help the patient change the basic structure of the experience. This was accomplished through the media of fantasy, not interpretation. He tried to break down, to dissolve, the fantasy through substitution: "suggestions of a gradual transformation of the hallucinatory picture." "The naked corpse [which Justine visualized next to her] was provided with clothes and identified with a Chinese general whom Justine had been greatly impressed to see at the Universal Exposition" (*ibid.*, 367-8). Janet was gradually able, through suggestions, to make the general comical rather than frightening. The whole treatment, more complicated than presented here, lasted a year.

From these examples it can be noted that the patients Janet worked with, primarily diagnosed as hysterical, experienced inward dramas, similar to dreams, that, through a lowering of conscious attention, could be elicited and shared with the doctor. The resulting fantasies expressed the other than "worldly" personalities, situations and ideas (believed to be contained in the unconscious) that the patient lived with. They were primarily understood as results of actual traumatic events and were believed to express the condition of infirmity needing to be dealt with. In a variety of ingenious ways the doctor could enter into the expressed fantasy with the patient and slowly alter the nature of the symbolic situation into which so much of the patient's energy and attention was contained. This transforming and alteration of the images in the fantasy is an important precursor of later French and German schools of the therapeutic use of directed daydreams (to be discussed in the next chapter). The fact remains, which Freud later took up, that the drama the patient was involved in

was not just a rehearsal of a memory. It had an independent nature to it. The doctor intervened in this imaginal setting and started redirecting characters, firing some, introducing new parts and feeling tones, even throwing away the script and using his own. The imaginal structure of action and image were radically disrupted according to the wishes of an “outsider.” It is important to think about what is lost here and what is gained.

FREE ASSOCIATION: SIGMUND FREUD

Breuer had evidenced the cathartic value of hypnagogic imagery in the famous case of Anna O. In Freud’s and Breuer’s *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), they note that in catharses where old memories are re-lived, the imagery is primarily visual, “often nearly hallucinatory in intensity.” Through the use of hypnosis Freud would encourage his patients to have such visual images in order to facilitate the re-living of what he supposed were repressed traumatic events in their early life.

In 1892 Freud dispensed with hypnotism for the first time and used a “concentration” technique. Bernheim had stressed that things recovered during hypnosis were only *apparently* forgotten afterwards and that, with the forceful suggestion of the physician, the patient could regain them in his regular state of consciousness. Freud hypothesized that this should be equally true for the forgotten memories of hysteria (Jones, 1961:154). In the case of Frl. Elizabeth von R., who was not susceptible to hypnotism, Freud had the patient lie down with eyes closed; he then asked her to concentrate her attention on a particular symptom and any memories that might surround it, and to form an image relevant to the time when the symptom first appeared. When progress was not forthcoming Freud would press her forehead with his hand. He assured the patient that when he lifted his hand a memory or thought would form – perhaps as a visual image – and that all the details of the image and the associated emotions should be reported (Horowitz, 1970:259-60). Sometimes it would take four presses before success, but Freud reported that images and emotions did not fail to appear. This led him to acknowledge that

... it is possible for thought-processes to become conscious through a reversion to visual residues [and] in many people, this seems to be a favorite method Thinking in pictures . . . approximates more closely to unconscious processes than does thinking in words and it is unquestionably older than the latter both ontogenetically and phylogenetically.

Were, however, these thoughts in the form of pictures really just the same as thoughts? Did they arise from the same place and express the same things only in a different form?

One day Frl. Elisabeth “reproved him for interrupting her flow of thought by his questions” (Jones, 1961:154). Freud succumbed to her reproof and allowed her to report her stream of thought without his interference. “The more confidence he acquired in the belief that relaxing conscious censoring would inevitably lead to the important memories, the less need had he to urge, press, or direct the patients’ thoughts” (*ibid.*, 155). The early work with imagery was deemphasized as Freud changed altogether from the use of hypnosis to “free association.” He did this not only because of the un hypnotizability of certain patients but because he came to see that the state of hypnosis concealed what he felt were the most essential elements of the psychotherapeutic process — the transference and the resistances. This shift from trying to evoke imagery to free-association may have been ill-advised, as Jerome Singer points out (1971a). Subsequent research (Reyher and Smeltzer, 1968) has shown that more “primary process material” and associated affect, more direct drive expression and less defensiveness, can be correlated with experiences of visual imagery than from their verbal associates. This suggests that indeed visual imagery is not simply “thinking but in the form of pictures” but has different qualities than verbal cognition.

The idea, however, that analysis was completed when free-association was spontaneous makes it clear that Freud valued the ability to allow a free stream of images — whether they be verbal or visual. The patient was told that the success of the psychoanalysis depended upon his noticing and telling everything

that passed through his mind. He was told not to suppress a single idea because it seemed unimportant, irrelevant or nonsensical (Freud, 1965:192).⁵ Ideally, one learns to allow the contents of the unconscious to arise without pre-judgment. Such communication, whether implicit or explicit, has the effect of encouraging and training patients to allow and to be aware of whatever arises in one's stream of consciousness. The setting of the psychoanalytic session —the position of the analyst out of the patient's view, the quiet darkened room, the reclining patient —all maximized the opportunity for imagination imagery and their associated affects to arise.⁶ With the emphasis on verbal free association, however, much of the information which might have been gleaned about the role of the visual image in psychoanalytic treatment has been lost.

⁵ Ernest Jones (1963:156-6), Freud's major biographer, hypothesizes that Freud's "obscure intuition" that free association was connected not only to the undoing of the phenomenon of repression but also to the meaning of the content of the repression had an interesting source, which Freud himself never remembered. Freud related that the first author he was ever absorbed in was Ludwig Borne, whose collected works he had received as a present when he was fourteen. Among these was an essay entitled "The art of becoming an original writer in three days" (1923). It concluded the following:

Here follows the practical prescription that I promised. Take a few sheets of paper and for three days in succession write down, without any falsification of hypocrisy, everything that comes into your head. Write what you think of yourself, of your women, of the Turkish war, of Goethe, of the Fonk criminal case, of the Last Judgment, of those senior to you in authority — and when the three days are over you will be amazed at what novel and startling thoughts have welled up in you. That is the art of becoming an original writer in three days.

This example points to not only a commonality in the source of art and analysis but of a rudimentary methodology — in terms of training oneself to gain access to the "unconscious" or the "imagination" — as well.

⁶ Subsequent research has confirmed that subjects lying down report more vivid imagery (Segal and Glickman, 1967) and earlier and more frequent memories (Berdach and Bakan, 1967) than subjects sitting up.

As Singer points out (1971a:167) the implicitness rather than the explicitness of the analyst's approval for visual imaging (through, for example, the reporting of dreams which often entails a visual re-living of the dream) has produced rather unsystematic ways of training the patient in the use of his image making faculty.

Such failure to be explicit may have been due to an ambiguous attitude towards what others had termed the creative and mythopoetic functions of the individual. For though Freud was respectful of creativity, as shown in his statement "before the problem of the creative artist analysis must, alas, lay down its arms" (1952), he was also "suspicious of fantasy processes and tended to emphasize their defensive nature" (Jerome Singer, 1971:169). Because Freud regarded the unconscious as a repository for forgotten and repressed experiences, the contents (images) were reducible to infantile tendencies, repressed because of their incompatible character with the prevailing moral influences in the child's environment (Jung, 1953:127). The "image was but a symptom of something else, which again reduced the imaginal to a way of being alien to its nature and structure" (Durand, 1971:90). Freud made the common mistake of advancing a proposition and then adopting a methodology that by its nature produces results which concur with the proposition. If we envision the "unconscious" to be filled with a certain kind of concern and yet it does not express that concern, then our claiming that it is hiding what it is really concerned about (our hypothesis) under what we observe it to be expressing (manifest content), covers over the fact that we are actually studying our own hypotheses and beliefs thinking they are the dream's. The dream and its images are lost. The image was not seen as who it appeared to be but rather who we felt it was, even though we did not think we knew anything about it. One can say that by nature the image is sneaky and deceitful, but once that is our hypothesis we can find the "true nature" of the image to be anything we further attribute it to be. We can then argue that whatever else is seen to be "given" by the image is merely meaningless camouflage, supplied by the image itself in order to guard its reality (our attributions, that is).

Freud's method of investigating the unconscious (free association), however, greatly contributed to the life of the image and the fantasy behind it. By teaching the individual to allow their inner life to emerge without conscious censorship, the image and the image maker could not fail to have an increasingly receptive audience. Freud was able to draw parallels between the unconscious material that arose and myths of other times. Though he did not seek to evoke material directly from the imagination as Jung came to do, he had a sensitivity for recognizing the myths present in the actions, "memories," and thoughts of his patients as well as in their dreams. He discovered that the "memories" of sexual mishandling by parents, reported by so many of his patients, were not memories of actual events at all. They were wishes and fantasies. This meant that the childhood that analysis came to deal with was not so much the one that dwells in the actual events of a historical childhood of traumatic events, but the one that lives amid the fantasies and wishes that constellate around the actual, and in addition to the actual. So although Freud's technique did not specifically seek to evoke the imaginal, it was part of the substance of his work and a primary means through which his understanding was advanced.

Two early Freudians, Warren and Silberer, became interested in the half-dream state from their own experiences. The following were their first accounts of waking dream phenomena.

In a dark room with eyes closed a definite scene will appear before me in apparently as bright an illumination as daylight. I seem to be looking through my closed eyelids. The scene is apparently as real, as vivid, as detailed as an actual landscape. The phenomenon lasts not more than a minute. I have never been able to hold it long enough to notice any change or movement. It is a scene — not a happening. The two most vivid cases occurred quite automatically, either as I was dozing off and for some reason came

back to consciousness, or immediately on waking during the night.

Once the scene was a tropical landscape, with palm trees and a body of water. It was clear and detailed and appeared so real that I was surprised to find it unchanged by winking.

Warren, 1921

The origin of my observations can be briefly told. One afternoon (after lunch) I was lying on my couch. Though extremely sleepy, I forced myself to think through a problem of philosophy, which was to compare the views of Kant and Schopenhauer concerning time. In my drowsiness I was unable to sustain their ideas side by side. After several unsuccessful attempts, I once more fixed Kant's argument in my mind as firmly as I could and turned my attention to Schopenhauer's. But when I tried to reach back to Kant, his argument was gone again, and beyond recovery. The futile effort to find the Kant record which was somehow misplaced in my mind suddenly represented itself to me — as I was lying there with my eyes closed, as in a dream — as a perceptual symbol. I am asking a morose secretary for some information; he is leaning over his desk and disregards me entirely; he straightens up for a moment to give me an unfriendly and rejecting look.

The vividness of the unexpected phenomenon surprised, indeed almost frightened me. I was impressed by the appropriateness of this unconsciously selected symbol. I sensed what might be the conditions for the occurrence of such phenomena, and decided to be on the lookout for them and even to attempt to elicit them.

Silberer, 1951:195-6

The sense of discovery these men share show how alien such inner experiences of visual imagery had become to their culture and yet how a new movement, psychology, with its freedom for introspection and free association, allowed for observation that revealed this human capacity. Herbert Silberer indeed followed his conviction to “be on the lookout” for such “autosymbolic phenomenon.” Through such self-experiments he came to understand the hypnogogic image as relating an important symbolic representation of the state of the dreamer (1912).

ACTIVE IMAGINATION: C. G. JUNG

It was primarily through his own experience of the unconscious that Jung came to formulate his ideas concerning active imagination and the imaginal realm. After his split with Freud, Jung decided he would try to adopt an open attitude towards the unconscious, unencumbered by pre-thought theory, in an attempt to discover more about it. Jung pledged, “Since I know nothing at all I shall do whatever occurs to me” (1961:133). From 1912-1917 he acknowledged his promise by allowing the unconscious to reveal itself, working earnestly to record all that had happened.⁷ He found himself engaged in spontaneous activities — building sand castles, hewing stone, painting mandalas and pictures, seeing visual images and holding dialogues with unconscious figures. These activities offered him a “rite d’entrée” to the unconscious, as had automatic writing and crystal ball gazing to mediums and to Janet’s patients. He found, as had Flournoy, that the unconscious is always in a sense dreaming, mythmaking. Because our attention is outwardly directed we fail to notice the mythic dreams being constantly spun. In order for the imaginal world to come into our awareness, Jung found that we must look for and at its images in a particular way.

⁷ I refer the reader to Jung’s own excellent account of his experiences during this period, “Confrontations with the unconscious,” in *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* (1961).

. . . *looking*, psychologically, brings about the activation of the object; it is as if something is emanating from one's spiritual eye that evokes or activates the object of one's vision. The English verb, to look at, does not convey this meaning, but the German *betrachten*, which is an equivalent, means also to make pregnant, but it is used only for animals. . . . So to look or concentrate upon a thing, *betrachten*, gives the quality of being pregnant to the object. And if it is pregnant, then something is due to come out of it; it is alive, it produces, it multiplies. That is the case with any fantasy image; one concentrates upon it, and then finds that one has great difficulty keeping the thing quiet, it gets restless, it shifts, something is added, or it multiplies itself; one fills it with living power and it becomes pregnant.

Jung, 1967:100-1

This way of "looking," Jung showed in his researches, has an ancient and rich history.⁸

In antiquity when a man had to direct a prayer to the statue of the god, he stepped upon a stone that was erected at its side to enable people to shout their prayer into the ear, so that the god would hear them; and then he stared at the image until the god nodded his head or opened or shut his eyes or answered in some way. You see this was an abbreviated method of active imagination, concentrating upon the image until it moved; and in that moment the god gave a hint, his assent or his denial or any other indication, and that is the *numinosum*.⁹

Jung, 1937:2

⁸ See especially Jung's writings on alchemy.

⁹ For further research into this phenomenon see Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness and the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (tbp).

Interpretations of the images that attempted to resolve them into memory complexes, referring back to actual events and people, and underlying instinctual components (Freud's objective method of dream interpretation) no longer seemed to fit. Jung heard another life going on within, which had heretofore been disregarded by Freud. It could be heard only if the unconscious was approached with the possibility that it was purposive, not only repressive; only if the form of questioning about it preceded in the form of "what is it trying?", not "what is it hiding?" (Progoff, 1963:71). Rather than being just a "reactive mirror reflection" (Jung, 1953:185) of conscious activities the unconscious seemed to have an objective existence of its own, with its own values and ways of knowing — no less significant than the conscious personality. The image was able to express that "as yet unknown" by the conscious personality. Jung observed, as had Flournoy, that the unconscious performed some extraordinary tasks. It seemed at times to serve in a compensatory fashion to ego-consciousness — as if it sought to maintain a dynamic psychic equilibrium by concerning itself (in dreams and fantasies) with those underdeveloped and missing parts of the conscious personality. It anticipated "in its symbols future conscious processes," recognized consciously overlooked personal motives and meanings in daily situations, drew undrawn conclusions, admitted unadmitted criticisms and affects (*ibid.*, 177-8).

In Jung's subjective method of analysis one seeks to see the symbolic contents not as references solely to memory and real things in the external world but to different elements or parts of the person himself. The images or people in an active imagination or dream are understood as possibly referring to a real person or object in the outside world (the objective level of interpretation); but more importantly the image is believed to appear because it represents an unrecognized or undervalued part or attitude of the person dreaming or imagining. For instance if one experienced the image of a critical woman who seeks to undervalue what the person is doing, this might indeed be related to the subject's mother or another woman in their life. But, Jung claimed, the

critical voice has become a part of the person himself. Once this happens it gets into one's life situations as well as one's dreams and fantasies. The myth seeks to express itself. Realizing that the mother embodies this attitude is good, but one must now (in the present) deal with that attitude within (and without, when projected). The external referent may disappear, the mother may die, but the introjected attitude remains with the person as before. The image moves one not only back into the conscious world but draws one into its land — the “archetypal,” the “collective unconscious.” The attitude that the image may represent belongs also to an archetypal dimension, which is more than the individual situation. It cannot be reduced to the subjective or objective. It amplifies itself, when given the opportunity, allowing one access to the world of the image. The symbol can never be grasped in terms of what we already know. The very nature of it is to take us beyond.

Jung found that patients “spontaneously reported dreams and fantasies. [He] would merely ask ‘What occurs to you in connection with that?’ or ‘How do you mean that, where does that come from, what do you think about it?’ The interpretations seemed to follow of their own accord from the patient’s replies and associations.” Soon he “realized that it is right to take the dreams in this way as the basis of interpretation, for that is how dreams are intended. They are the facts from which we must proceed” (Jung, 1961:170-1). Unlike Freud who saw the latent content of the dream as the meaningful portion, Jung gave attention to the manifest content — to the images in and of themselves. This connection between the image and the meaning was central to Jung’s psychology.

. . . interpretation must guard against making use of any other viewpoints than those manifestly given by the content itself. If someone dreams of a lion, the correct interpretation can lie only in the direction of the lion; in other words, it will be essentially an amplification of this image. Anything else would be an inadequate and incorrect interpretation, since the

image “lion” is a quite unmistakable and sufficiently positive presentation.

Jung, 1954:par. 162

Once the image relates to the conscious mind of the individual its meaning, the unconscious position towards something, the individual must do something about its “moral” connotation. That is, one must not just seek out the other side, one must bring it into a relation with his living. Jung understood this as “a moral necessity.” It is not easy to give up parts of our life, the way it is now, in order to accommodate other aspects of our being. In fact the difficulty of this is too often minimized. Even if one is unconscious of something, however, that something still lives in the person and through him in the world. Jung envisioned the process of growing into consciousness, as a progression towards becoming responsible for one’s self, for what comes to be through one’s living. Jung’s notions of the purposive and creative aspects of the unconscious (not unlike those of the Romantics) as well as its objective status, required a different attitude toward and way of working with the unconscious than previously had been created by modern psychology. An attitude was needed through which the unconscious and conscious could work together; an attitude that was a “combined function of conscious and unconscious elements, or, as in mathematics, a common function of real and imaginary quantities” (Jung, 1971, par. 184).

I have called this process in its totality the transcendent function, “function” being here understood not as a basic function but as a complex function made up of other functions, and “transcendent” not as denoting a metaphysical quality but merely the fact that this function facilitates a transition from one attitude to another. The raw material shaped by thesis and antithesis, and in the shaping of which the opposites are united, is the living symbol. Its profundity of meaning is inherent in the

raw material itself, the very stuff of the psyche, transcending time and dissolution; and its configuration by the opposites ensures its sovereign power over all the psychic functions.

Ibid., *par.* 828

Through his own experiences Jung found that he was able to wilfully withdraw his awareness from distractions and enter into the world that the mythopoetic spins. These experiences differed from nightly dreams, however, and in so doing they provided an exciting alternative method of establishing contact with the imaginal. This was of immense importance to Jung. He had found that using dreams as the only “road to the unconscious” was unsatisfactory in several ways. He felt that he himself could not adequately interpret his own dreams . . . nor his patients theirs. The dream, originating in the state of sleep,

bears all the characteristics of an “abaissement du niveau mental” (Janet) or of low energy-tension: logical discontinuity, fragmentary character, analogy formation, superficial associations of the verbal, clang or visual type, condensations, irrational expressions, confusion, etc. With an increase in energy-tension [as in the half-dream or waking states] the dreams acquire a more ordered character; they become dramatically composed and reveal clear sense connections and the valency of association increases.

Jung, 1960:77

The dream does not provide for direct dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious. It is the acts of recalling, recording and associating to the dream that provide the points of meeting. In these activities, however, there is a discontinuity even in terms of time. There is a lack of balance and simultaneous interpenetration. When one is dreaming the unconscious and its attitudes have the upper hand. When one is recalling and

interpreting the dream, most often the conscious ego is inflicting its attitudes on the dream. The confrontation with the unconscious through dreams is not often a direct experience, full of affect, but a remembering often distorted by the translation from symbolic visual terms to words, from their own terms into the ego's. The dreamer has limited control over his dreams (except by learning to recall them and in some cases to influence and to incubate them).¹⁰ They happen to him. If he has no other direct active way of getting in touch with the unconscious, he must simply wait for a dream. Some maintain it is hopeless to wait for a dream if one has drifted toward a wrong attitude — for wrong attitudes can in some instances keep “the releasing dream” away (Hannah, 1967:21).

There needed to be a more active means of approaching the experience of mutual penetration of the unconscious and conscious worlds. Jung felt this need particularly for his patients in the latter part of or after the termination of their formal analysis. He found that the ability he had observed in himself to allow the unconscious and conscious to speak together while awake could also be helped to develop naturally in the second half of his patients' analyses. This ability of actively imagining also would emerge at critical times in analysis when the polarities of the psyche sought some image of integration.

He had found that the acts of allowing the images to arise while conscious and aware, and of participating with them, invested “the bare fantasy with an element of reality, which lends it greater weight and greater driving power” (Jung, 1954b:par 106). Through the use of awareness and participation the daydream, “passive fantasy,” was transformed, as was the conscious personality. The images became psychically real.

¹⁰ Henry Reed (1974), Richard Carroll (1973), and Carl Meier (Jung Institute, Zurich) have done some fascinating and encouraging work in the area of incubating dreams.

The piece that is being played does not want merely to be watched impartially, it wants to compel [the imaginer's] participation. If [the imaginer] understands that his own drama is being performed on this inner stage, he cannot remain indifferent to the plot and its denouement.

If you recognize your own involvement, you yourself must enter into the process with your personal reactions, just as if you were one of the fantasy figures, or rather, as if the drama being enacted before your eyes were real. It is a psychic fact that this fantasy is happening and it is as real as you — as a psychic entity — are real.

Jung, 1954b:par. 706,753

Active imagination was not a part of the therapeutic hour. Jung would often let it arise naturally from the patient's own work with his dream material. Othertimes he would make more direct suggestions.

The point is that you start with any image, for instance, just with that yellow mass in your dream. Contemplate it and carefully observe how the picture begins to unfold or to change. Don't try to make it into something, just do nothing but observe what its spontaneous changes are. Any mental picture you contemplate in this way will sooner or later change through a spontaneous association that causes a slight alteration of the picture. You must carefully avoid impatient jumping from one subject to another. Hold fast to the one image you have chosen and wait until it changes by itself. Note all these changes and eventually step into the picture yourself, and if it is a speaking figure at all then say what you have to say to that figure and listen to what he or she has to say.

Thus you can analyse your unconscious but also give your unconscious a chance to analyse yourself, and therewith you gradually create the unity of conscious and unconscious without which there is no individuation at all. If you apply this method, then I can come in as an occasional adviser, but if you don't apply it, then my existence is of no use for you.

Jung, A letter to Mr. O., 1973:459-60

It is in the creation of fantasies that we find the unitive function we are seeking. All the elements engaged by the active tendencies flow into the imagination. The imagination has, it is true, a poor reputation among psychologists. . . . Imagination holds in itself an irreducible value, for it is the psychic function whose roots ramify at the same time in the contents of the conscious mind and of the unconscious, in the collective as in the individual.

Jung, 1953:286

Jung came to believe that turning willfully to the unconscious while awake, "purposive introversion," was the "basic condition for the act of creation" (1959a: 180) and the integration of the personality.

This purposive introversion, the meditative attitude discussed in Chapter 2, is the means by which one can initiate active or creative imagination. Although the contents of this process are "expressed in the same picture-language as the dream, they are, nevertheless, nearer to consciousness, and as such more readily interpreted. Furthermore, active imagination, in which consciousness [through awareness] and the unconscious have collaborated, does not call for the same degree of criticism as does the dream, but primarily for understanding; and in this respect is a considerable advance on dream analysis as a means of arriving at a working partnership between consciousness and the unconscious"

(Peterson, 1971:162).¹¹

This does not mean that Jungian analysis always leads to active imagination. Often the goal of the person in analysis is different from the process that Jung described as the individuation, and for which active imagination was considered to be so important. At a lecture in Zurich (Spring, 1951; see Hannah, 1967:13) Jung gave six reasons for introducing active imagination to the patient.

1. When it is obvious that the unconscious is overflowing with fantasies
2. To reduce the number of dreams when there are too many
3. When there are not enough dreams remembered
4. When someone feels or seems to be under indefinable influences, under a sort of spell
5. When the adaptation to life has been injured
6. When someone falls into the same hole again and again

Active imagination was felt to enable an individual to take responsibility for himself by providing him with a means of coming to terms with his own unconscious material. In attempting active imagination and the subsequent processes of seeing the relation of the material to one's life the patient is given the "inestimable advantage of assisting the analyst with his own resources and of breaking a dependence which is often felt as

¹¹ The question of whether or not to interpret active imaginations, and if so how, is a controversial and crucial one to which we will continue to return. In contrast to Peterson, however, Humbert (1971:105) says "the analyst does not participate and, particularly, does not interpret. It would be wrong to treat the reports presented by active imagination as if they were dreams, for in dreams consciousness does not at all play the same part."

humiliating. It is a way of attaining liberation by one's own efforts and of finding courage to be oneself" (Jung, 1960:91). This has a profound effect on the phenomenon of transference. Jung understood the transference not as a projection of infantile erotic fantasies, but rather as "a metaphorical expression of the not consciously realized need for help in a crisis" (*ibid.*, 74). Jung asked himself what kind of mental and moral attitude the patient must have in order to receive the help he needs from within. Once again "the answer consists in getting rid of the separation between the conscious and unconscious" by recognizing the significance of contents of the unconscious in compensating the one-sidedness of consciousness. Analytical treatment can be described in these terms "as a readjustment of psychological attitude achieved with the help of the doctor" (*ibid.*, 72-3). Through analysis the patient is often able to acquire the psychological attitude necessary for active imagination. Through this he comes to learn to use his own directive principles and sources of inner guidance. In the beginning of analysis the analyst often takes on the role of the guide for the analysand. The myths within the patient and the doctor are projected into their relationship together — transference and countertransference. As the analysis progresses, however, the analysand becomes increasingly able to feel his portion of the drama and strength coming from within himself.

In analytical psychology the ability to actively imagine is seen as a sign that one has developed the "capacity to be alone, in a positive and creative sense, without isolation and without retreat from the outer world or absorption in a world of fantasy, or without otherwise being cut off from outer relatedness" (Fordham, 1958:73). Jung believed it to be the "touchstone by which one can tell whether someone is genuinely aiming at psychological independence and individuation or whether they are content to become a satellite, i.e., to push the responsibility of their lives onto someone else" (Hannah, 1953:4-6).

In later stages of analysis, the objectification of images replaces the dreams. The images anticipate the dreams, and so the dream-material begins to peter out.

The unconscious becomes deflated in so far as the conscious mind relates to it. Then you get all the material in a creative form and this has advantages over dream-material. It quickens the process of maturation, for analysis is a process of quickened maturation.

Jung, 1968a: 194

As Janet and Flournoy before him, Jung recognized the positive expressive and communicative value of the inner myths and fantasies of mediums and psychotics. The “successive psychological existences” that Janet found living in the lives of his hysterical patients, Jung was able to identify within himself. He became aware through his own self-experiments that in fact the psyche itself — not just a part(s) of it that may become exaggeratedly split off in hysterical or psychotic-like crises — has an objective autonomous existence. The unconscious he observed operated independently from the person we think of ourselves as. Psychological integration in Jung’s terms depended on the recognition of this independent objective psyche and the taking of active steps to become aware of its values and qualities, its reactions and needs. Instead of attempting to eradicate the subpersonalities or independent ideas and images which arise, Jung believed that one must come into closer relation to them. “Image is psyche.” It must not be abused. The allowing of oneself to participate with the images of the unconscious through wilfully creating an *abaissement du niveau mental* with sustained awareness and the recognition of the need to live in a connection with the meaning of these movements and images, was Jung’s contribution to helping modern man have a way to become at home once again with his soul and its imagination. The processes of such dialogues and of allowing oneself to be moved, as we have seen, were not in themselves new. But modern man needed a way to recognize the need for this again, a method for beginning, and a conceptual framework (a schema of the psyche) that could begin to chart the way for him, encouraging him to travel in the imaginal. To these needs Jung’s work adeptly spoke.

CONCLUSION

As had others before them, the early psychologists discovered ways to elicit images through the cultivation of a half-dream state. They too viewed these waking dreams as coming from a source outside of who the person knows himself to be. For the psychologist, however, this source was not divine. It was the “subconscious” — an unknown region of the person lying *below*, not above. The people they observed having these visions were not honoured shamans or holy men, but mediums and hysterics. The contents of the visions were not guarded as being sacred knowledge through which healing and guidance were given, but were more often taken as the proof that something had gone wrong, was off the track (into superstition and delusion). Instead of wilfully attempting to establish the vision within the day world in order to bring one’s activities into relation to it, the young psychology more often sought to elicit waking dreams in order to impose the seemingly more important day world on them.

Flournoy, however, was impressed by some of the activities of the “unconscious.” It knew how to play, to create wonderful stories, to warn and comfort, and even to think often better than feeble conscious attempts. This sounded a bit more godlike. As Janet’s work proved, this world of fantasy was surely present and, if one took a bit of patience and care, it would express just what it was experiencing and was up to. Janet and Jung both valued the ability of the unconscious to express itself dramatically in waking dreams. Jung, however, did not try to transform and destroy what arose as had Janet, but rather to bring the reality of the unconscious into the conscious’ view.

In other times the world of visions was considered to be autonomous and was at least as, if not more, important than the material daily world. One went to it, prepared for it, and sacrificed to it. When a vision was brought into the day world, it was done so on the vision’s own terms. It was brought into the activities of the day world not to abolish or to belittle the realm from which it came, but to allow the day world to pay tribute to it

and to grow closer to it. Although there was a tendency with some of the early psychologists to see value in the world of images, one feels that it generally was not equal to the importance attributed to the non-dream world. There was a current created which drew the dream and the half-dream worlds into the conscious in an effort by the ego (of doctor and patient) to kill it, transform it, or use it for the more efficient functioning of the conscious personality.