

CARL JUNG IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

David Carter

CARL Jung is one of those rare mortals whose names have become concepts. When this happens it is usually because they have provided a unique and illuminating view of the world and the place of humanity in it. They have provided profound, enlightening and often disturbing visions of the human state. While many family names can be made adjectival, only a few have entered common parlance: Shakespearean, Dickensian and Kafkaesque, in the field of literature; Kantian, Hegelian and Marxist, in the realm of ideas; and in psychology the most common are undoubtedly Freudian and Jungian.

Carl Gustav Jung was born in 1875 in the Swiss canton of Thurgau, the child of a poor rural pastor and an emotionally unstable woman, the daughter of a wealthy professor. He studied medicine in Basel and later worked at the psychiatric hospital known as 'Burghölzli'. For some time he was greatly influenced by the theories of the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, but they eventually broke off their relationship, and Jung went on to develop his own school of 'analytic psychology'. After his marriage in 1903 to Emma Rauschenbach, Jung continued to have intimate relations with other women, most notably Sabina Spielrein and Toni Wolff, who were both patients and friends. He died in Küsnacht, on June 6, 1961.

In this anniversary year (it is 50 years since Jung's death), it is timely to consider his status. His major works were written in the first half of the twentieth century and in many respects reflect the concerns and preoccupations of that era. How have his conceptions of the human mind and his mode of analysing it weathered the iconoclastic onslaughts of all those critical theories that have proliferated especially since his death? This is not the context however in which to pursue all those obscure pathways into structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and post-modernism, etc. The present author wishes only to discover which of Jung's ideas are still relevant to understanding the world today. Are they still compatible with the current state of scientific theories, and are they applicable to the various social and psychological ills that beset the world today?

While Jung's ideas continued to influence the practice of psychotherapy during the latter part of the twentieth century, scant reference is to be found to them in literary, cultural and social theory. Nevertheless he still has his adherents and many staunch defenders of his ideas. Strong evidence has been marshalled to support his theses, and many argue for his extraordinary prescience.

It is not necessary to delve into the most obscure aspects of his thought to assess some aspects of its value to us today. We should remind ourselves that we still frequently use his terminology without giving it a second thought. It is an accomplishment indeed to have developed a conceptual vocabulary, which many of us still use when discussing the mind and human personality. Jung may not have been the first to use many of the concepts, but he redefined them to explain the nature of the human mind, or what he preferred to call the psyche, as he perceived it. Introvert, extrovert, conscious, unconscious, collective unconscious, persona, archetype: these are all terms we use freely, usually without acknowledging that we are using them in a Jungian sense. There is no scope in the present article to explain these concepts in detail, but light will be thrown on them as the need arises.

Apart from providing us with a useful terminology for discussing the human mind and consciousness, Jung's writings also cover a range of topics, which are clearly of perennial interest. A quick browse through the contents of his collected works reveals the extent and variety of his preoccupations: the spiritual life of man; the environment; war and aggression; fascist mentality; varieties of religious ideology and experience; modern myths; race and ideology; democracy and the individual, feminism and the feminine; fashion and taste; art and literature; technology and evolutionary development; civilisation and the notion of the primitive; superstition and spiritualism; and, last but not least, the fear of invasion by extra-terrestrials. When reading Jung's essays on these topics, it is tempting to shake one's head and ponder how little humanity has changed on a fundamental level.

As it will be argued, in line with contemporary modes of thought in the sciences, that the character and attitudes of the observer, the perspectives and prejudices of the enquiring mind, are central to all evaluations of scientific investigation, it is important for the present writer to give some account of the history of his own involvement with Jung. It came about indirectly: through Sigmund Freud, the

founder of the school of psychotherapy which Freud himself preferred to call psychoanalysis. Researching Freud's ideas on art and literature for a Ph.D., I naturally had to investigate the relationship between Freud and Jung and try to understand the reasons for the break-up. At that time I studied Jung's ideas only insofar as they helped me to evaluate Freud's ideas. My impression was that while Jung had many brilliant insights, he was far too mystical and obscure in his modes of argument. Freud, on the other hand, was impressively logical and would accept interpretations only if he could discover irrefutable evidence, often involving multiple causes, of their rightness (his notion of 'overdetermination'). Freud was sceptical of all things mystical, while Jung appeared to believe in the significance of coincidences and in spiritualism. Coming back to Jung many years later I realised the truth of the claim that Freud had contributed greatly to an understanding of mankind's striving for achievement and success in the first half of life, but that Jung's ideas had greater relevance to the concerns of older generations, coming to terms with death, and attempting to make sense of their presence in the cosmos. I now retain a critical distance from both thinkers, but find both their systems of thought useful, and indeed more compatible than either of them, and many of their supporters, would ever admit.

Many people, coming to Jung's thought for the first time, will inevitably ask themselves, what exactly is the status of this body of knowledge? The term psychology is applied to it, but is it a legitimate scientific theory with findings that can be tested experimentally, or is it some kind of systematic philosophical system like the great edifice constructed by Hegel? One of the most lucid exponents of Jung's thought, Anthony Stevens, has argued that it is a consciously maintained fiction with explanatory value. In his book *On Jung*, Stevens borrows Freud's term 'metapsychology' to describe what Jung was doing: 'we invent a vocabulary which enables us to talk about the psyche *as if* it possessed a structure, so that we can create a working model as an aid to comprehension. But this imaginary model does not represent concrete reality. It is a metaphor. The only way in which we can *know* the psyche is by *living* it. All else is inference' (Stevens, 1999, p.27). How we understand the status of Jung's thought is complicated by the German vocabulary which he used. On many occasions he expressed the preference for describing what he was

doing as a '*Wissenschaft*' and stressed that he always proceeded in a way which was '*wissenschaftlich*'. This is usually rendered in English as 'science' and 'scientific'. But the terms have broader connotations in German. I am indebted here to the researches of a friend, Ilse Cornwall-Ross, who devoted a chapter to defining '*Wissenschaft*' in her unpublished M.Phil thesis. It denotes an organised and connected body of insights, and involves an activity more akin to the methodology expounded by Aristotle: the gathering and ordering of material, from which one proceeds to derive a logical thesis. The English concept of science is best rendered in German as '*Naturwissenschaft*', which is just one of a large number of disciplines under the superordinate concept of '*Wissenschaft*'. This is therefore perhaps best defined as a 'body of knowledge'.

After re-reading many works of Jung's recently I have come to the conclusion that there are several central concepts in his thought, on which the whole 'body of knowledge' depends. Shake belief in the certainty of these concepts and the whole edifice is in danger of tumbling down. Crucial above all are the concepts of the collective unconscious, the archetypes and what is usually translated as 'amplificatory interpretation' or simply 'amplification'. They are also concepts which differentiate most clearly Jungian from Freudian psychology. Reading what Jung wrote about Freud provides a very narrow, restricted view of Freud's theories, but this cannot be evaluated in the present context.

Freud's conception of the unconscious was different to Jung's. He did concede that certain emotional complexes were to be found in the unconscious of all human beings (this is clearly true of the famous 'Oedipus complex'), but he would not go so far, as Jung did, to claim that the unconscious was like some vast subterranean lake of inherited psychological programming that all humanity drew on and could dip into. One can go a long way with Jung in his argument for the existence of this collective unconscious, but in some of his writings he seems to be suggesting clearly that communication of information is somehow possible between individuals via this vast reservoir. As this implies a real link, telepathic or otherwise, many have found it difficult to accept this premise of Jung's, because it cannot be verified.

Closely related to the concept of the collective unconscious and dependent on the assumption of its existence are the archetypes. These are imagined to be rather like Plato's ideas, generalised notions operative in the collective unconscious which cannot be perceived directly

but only through their manifestation in consciousness. Whatever one calls them, it is undeniable that all animals, including humans, are guided intuitively by certain pre-figurations in their minds: thus offspring (be they duckling or human babies) seek immediately at birth the embodiment of the mother archetype, and the mother is likewise drawn to the embodiment of the baby archetype. The theory becomes questionable however when one starts to assume a whole range of archetypes. How can one justify the assumption that such archetypes must exist? Jung drew his evidence from their manifestations in countless myths, legends and dreams, from all over the world and throughout history. But do such manifestations exhaust the number of archetypes? Are there many which never become conscious? Where is the line to be drawn? Is there an infinite number of archetypes?

The principle of 'amplificatory interpretation' is central to all Jungian analysis and differs from Freudian interpretation in one important respect, which has already been mentioned: Freud only accepted interpretations for which there was indisputable supporting evidence in the associations made by the analysands themselves. This is most clearly demonstrated in his interpretations of dreams. Jung's amplificatory method requires the analyst to make associations freely with (to amplify) an image or figure in a dream, seeking parallels in myths, legends and concepts assumed to be present in the collective unconscious shared by both analyst and analysand. The danger inherent in this methodology is obvious: one can easily end up with meanings and significances which conveniently fit into the analyst's range of knowledge and beliefs. This point can be readily understood if one considers the pitfalls of applying the technique of amplificatory interpretation to literature, especially poetry, and the visual arts. The Jungian would argue that it does not matter whether the writer, poet or artist had in mind the particular associations made by the analyst or not, because they are present in the collective unconscious shared by both.

I have emphasised three aspects of Jung's theories which have occasioned doubts about some of his fundamental assumptions, but many modern Jungians have argued convincingly that there is much in modern scientific theory which makes many of his tenets feasible. Some of the weird paradoxical statements of quantum physics, for example, make Jung's theory of synchronicity seem not quite so weird after all. Fortunately it is not necessary to follow the complex abstrac-

tions of quantum physics to perceive the similarities. Any reasonably intelligent person can perceive them without having to attempt a verification of the theory.

Most people will now be familiar with the kind of paradoxical statements which make you wonder whether physicists have finally flipped their lids! In the thought experiment known as 'Schrödinger's Cat', the cat in the specially prepared box would be neither alive nor dead until observed, and then it would be only one or the other. And light can be both a wave and a particle but not at the same time. It has a 50 per cent probability of being either until we look at it. In the famous experiment involving projecting a stream of protons through two slits at some distance from each other in a vertical board, the same proton seems not only to be in two places at once but also to 'know' what is expected of it: if projected through one slit it appears as a wave and if through both as a particle. While this is far from proving Jung's theory of synchronicity, it is certainly compatible with it, for the basic supposition of synchronicity is that spatially distant objects can influence each other. The theory of synchronicity assumes that meaningful relationships can occur between events happening at the same time but in different places, in other words: coincidences are meaningful.

Incidentally Einstein would have none of these paradoxes of quantum theory. For him the assumptions of the theory relied on suppositions that violated the laws of special relativity. In a thought experiment concerning quantum theory, too complex to explain in full here, each of two electrons would have to 'know' what the other electron is doing and to communicate this information to each other, but Einstein pointed out that in order to do this they would have to travel faster than the speed of light, which nothing can do.

Jung believed that two human minds (psyches) can communicate with each other when spatially distant. From this assumption therefore he could argue that a coincidence (eg. your friend arrives just as you are thinking about him), is a meaningful event. In thinking about your friend, communication has taken place between two spatially distant objects.

Concerning the paradoxes of modern physics, some have argued that they disappear if one assumes that there are two kinds of physics: classical physics, which explains everyday reality perfectly well; and quantum theory which explains the nature of reality at the sub-atomic

level. Comparing Jung's collective unconscious to the sub-atomic level in physics is ingenious, but it is difficult to prove that it is more than a metaphor.

The same metaphor can also be applied to Jung's concept of the archetype. Some physicists have argued that what happens at the sub-atomic level appears paradoxical to us because it cannot actually be represented in terms comprehensible to the human mind. Jung said as much about the archetypes. The evidence in myths, legends and dreams compel us to accept their existence, but they cannot be comprehended by us directly. Jung himself was also very much aware that modern science was delving into realms which might well be inconceivable. In *The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man* (1928) he wrote: 'Is it again a mere coincidence that modern thought has had to come to terms with Einstein's relativity theory and with nuclear theories which lead us away from determinism and border on the inconceivable. Even physics is volatilizing our material world'. (C.W., vol 10, p.89)

Attempts have also been made to demonstrate in causal terms the relationship between the Jungian concept of the psyche and the physical brain. In her article 'Recent Developments in the Neurosciences' (in Christopher and Solomon, 2000), Hester McFarland Solomon attempts to synthesise Jungian concepts with what is known about the physical processes identified by research in the neurosciences. It must be said however, that, while she asserts the feasibility of this synthesis, she is not, in the conclusion of her article, able to claim more than the feasibility of what she describes vaguely as 'neurobiological interconnectedness'.

Jung also believed that dreams could provide us with insights into the ways in which our lives might develop in the future, and if interpreted correctly could serve as warnings and yield advice on the best paths for further development. It should not be surprising therefore to learn that in many of his essays on broader social and cultural phenomena Jung proved to be prescient himself. His analyses of his contemporary world yield insights which are still pertinent in the twenty-first century. Many of the essays collected under the title *Civilization in Tradition* (C.W., vol 10) can be read in this light.

His lifelong fascination with mythology and primitive belief systems yielded insights not only into the psychological problems of his

contemporaries but also anticipated to some extent modern concerns about the relationship between mankind and the environment.

In his travels in India and Africa and in conversations with the Pueblo Indians of Mexico, Jung discovered that these cultures had an altogether different relationship to the natural environment compared with that of the egocentric European cultures, with which he had hitherto been familiar. While they might lack the will and drive for achievement in the predominantly white civilized world, they lived their lives with an intensity of meaning and in close interaction with the natural world. When encountering some primitive cultures in Africa for example, he felt that he was actually observing the direct expression of many of the archetypes he had posited theoretically. Through this direct realisation of archetypes in their behaviour Jung believed that such peoples passed on their experience to succeeding generations.

One common and powerful realisation of an archetype he found in various embodiments of the 'Great Mother'. Still today we commonly speak of 'Mother Earth'. In various mythologies throughout the world all-powerful goddesses with the characteristics of idealised motherhood can be found. It is clear that this universal image of the 'Great Mother' is not just a projection of individual real-life mothers onto the cosmos but a symbolic representation of the Earth itself, from which we are all born and are dependent on. But the 'Great Mother' also has her dark side: Nature is destructive, devouring humanity, for she is also the dark, bottomless abyss.

Jung also argued that in history the matriarchal image of the Earth has been gradually replaced by a patriarchal image. Rationality and scientific modes of thought have gradually come to replace intuitive understanding of the natural world. By losing access to the collective unconscious mankind has lost contact with the creative wellsprings of imagination. Modern ecological movements can find much inspiration in Jung's critique of the relationship between mankind and its planet, 'Mother Earth'.

Two other concepts (or what he preferred to call 'autonomous complexes') posited by Jung have been found to have continuing usefulness in analysis of gender issues: the anima and the animus. The concepts are complex, but their essential nature can be expressed in the following way: the anima is the inborn image of women in gen-

eral; the animus is the inborn image of men in general. The anima in a man drives him to seek a certain kind of woman; and the animus in a woman drives her to seek a certain kind of man. The anima in a man also enables him to have sensibility for relationships, and the animus in a woman contributes to making her more reflective and analytical. These are distinctions, incidentally, which also arouse the ire of many feminists.

The debate about the uses of the terms anima and animus is very much ongoing. In recent decades it has led to divisions within the Jungian camp: between the orthodox and revisionist Jungians. Rosemary Gordon, one of the orthodox school, has argued that Jung's essay 'Women in Europe' has proved to be a prophetic vision of the development of relationships between men and women in the modern world (see Gordon, 1993). The revisionists, such as Hillman (1985) and Samuels (1989), have stressed however that both sexes have both anima and animus, as a way of reconciling Jungian thought with modern views on gender.

Another 'autonomous complex' which Jung used to account for many of the evil, destructive forces in society was the shadow. It embodies all those qualities in the individual which are perceived as unacceptable and undesirable. We often deny the existence of our own shadow and project it onto others, essentially demonising them. Jung analysed the rise of fascism in these terms in a series of essays before and immediately after the Second World War. Worth re-reading in this respect are his essays 'Wotan' (1936), 'After the Catastrophe' (1945), and 'The Fight with the Shadow' (1946), and others in volume 10 of the *Collected Works*.

Many modern analysts of the Jung school have claimed that another of Jung's concepts which they have found very useful in the day-to-day practice of analysis is that of containment. Jung believed that in every marriage there is a 'container' and a 'contained' person. The more complex person emotionally tends to 'contain' the less complex person. The distinction applies to either sex. Elphis Christopher, for one, has acknowledged the usefulness of this distinction, claiming that it has 'useful application in couple therapy, in the relationship between therapist and patient and, most importantly, mother and baby' (in Christopher and Solomon, 2000, p.40).

There is scarce room in this brief reevaluation of Jung's theories to do full justice to Jung's writings on religion, which are extensive, from

reflections on the psychological basis of the need for religion and analyses of the Christian symbolism of the Trinity and the Mass, to commentaries on yoga, Buddhism, the I Ching and The Tibetan Book of the Dead. In his article 'Jung and Christianity – Wrestling with God' (in Christopher and Solomon, 2000), Christopher MacKenna demonstrates how Jung ultimately enriched the Christian church through his critique of it by indicating ways in which it could and should re-invent itself. And in the same volume, Dale Mathers, in his article 'Spirits and Spirituality', emphasises how thoroughly opposed Jung was to fundamentalism of any kind. Jung contributed greatly to the discovery of common ground for dialogue between different religions, and stressed the need to transcend the dichotomies, both within individual religions and between them. At a time of turmoil in the Arab world and tensions between Islam and other ideologies, Jung's concerns therefore continue to be pertinent in the twenty-first century.

For Freud religious practices were akin to the rituals adopted by obsessive neurotics, but for Jung religion, of whatever variety, was central to mankind's search for full personal realisation, what he termed individuation, and the ultimate aim of his analytical psychology was to help people to the fullest possible realisation of themselves as human beings. Whatever one's beliefs and whatever one's doubts therefore, one can be led by a reading (or, as in the case of the present writer, by a re-reading) of Jung to the conviction that each individual on this planet has a duty to revalue his or her own life with a view to integrating its disparate aspects and to develop their potential to the fullest and most beneficial extent. This is a perennial challenge and not bound to a particular era and its social and political pressures.

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David Carter was a lecturer in German Studies for many years at the universities of St Andrews and Southampton, UK. He has also been Professor of Communicative English at Yonsei University, Seoul. Amongst his publications are a biography of Sigmund Freud and translations of Freud's essays 'On Cocaine'. At Southampton he conducted seminars on Freud and Jung. He now works as a freelance writer, translator and journalist, dividing his time mainly between the Far East, the UK and Europe. For further details see website at www.drcbooks.tripod.com

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