

# Critique of Archetypal Psychology

Mats Winther

<http://www.two-paths.com/hillmcrit.htm>

*Abstract.* Today there is a strong tendency towards making Jungian psychology a generic name for a diversity of systems that, although they at the first glance look related, because of similar terminology, their kernels and ideals are completely different from Jung's ideas. One of these theories is Hillman's "archetypal psychology," which radically reinterprets Jung's concept of the *archetype*, dismisses the important notion of *the Self*, renounces the process of *individuation*, devaluates the method of *introversion*, opposes Jung's notion of the moral obligation of grasping the unconscious and replaces this with the amoral, aesthetic, attitude of the *puer aeternus* (eternal youth). Despite this gross repudiation of Jungian psychology, Hillman is embraced by publishers as a "Jungian" or "post-Jungian" psychologist. But a correct denomination would be "anti-Jungian."

*Keywords:* soul-making, puer aeternus, phenomenologism, animism, subjective idealism, Archetypal Psychology, James Hillman, Carl Jung, David Tacey.

[Introduction](#)

[Addendum](#)

[Review of Senex & Puer](#)

[Comment on Tacey's critique of Hillman](#)

[References](#)

## Introduction

The American psychologist James Hillman has in his writings removed the Jungian concept of the archetype as objective inherited pattern and replaced this with the *archetypal image* as existent within the natural world. Allegedly, what decides whether an image is *archetypal* or not is the subjects level of *appreciation* of the image. Thus, if the subject "capitalizes" the image, i.e., decides that he *appreciates* the image, then it should be regarded archetypal. Hillman's theory belongs to the bizarre category of *phenomenological Neoplatonism*, which means that only what we

see should be regarded real, i.e., only what is apparent to consciousness is existent. Hillman says:

[Phantasy images are] both the raw materials and finished products of the psyche, and are the privileged mode of access—to knowledge of the soul. Nothing is more primary. (Hillman, 1992a, xi.)

[The] soul is constituted of images, [and] the soul is primarily an imagining activity... (Hillman, 1997, p.14)

The stories that myths tell cannot be documented in histories; the gods and goddesses, and the heroes and their enemies, are told about in stories inscribed in clay and carved in statues, but have they ever been physically seen? The fabulous places of myth are not in this world—all invented, just fables. The long-lasting and ever-renewing vitality of myths has nothing factual behind it. (Hillman, 1996, p.95)

It goes without saying that such beliefs flies in the face of an empirical psychology. H. repudiates the factual existence of the inherited archetype as underlying mythic content and contends that the latter are mere fables invented by imagination. Nevertheless, according to Hillman, the images painted by fantasy should be regarded as autonomous and godlike. This is, to put it mildly, an unscientific notion that depreciates the Jungian notion of an independent reality of the psyche. The archetypes are not only reduced to *images* but are also said to have their prototype, not within the psyche, but in a transcendent sphere, outside nature. Furthermore, according to H., modern psychological theories (i.e., other theories than his own) have lost their value since he himself cannot derive any sense of “beauty” from scientific terms. H. is scornful of other psychological schools and says:

Again psychology fails what it studies. Neither social psychology, experimental psychology, nor therapeutic psychology find a place for the aesthetic appreciation of a life story. (Hillman, 1996, p.35)

As evidence of this book’s attempt to exit the mortuary is the absence from these pages of the contemporary language of psychology. Except where set apart in quotation marks to keep from contaminating a sentence with psychological morbidities, you will not find any of these infectious agents [...] Little mention of “ego,” of “consciousness,”... (ibid.)

...“case material”, “ego development”, “psychotherapy”, even “animus-ridden” and “negative mother”—die on our lips. We can no longer give them belief; they have lost conviction; they no longer are speech that carries soul. This language is dead [...] Because of its own language, psychology becomes anti-therapeutic, an instrument of a new philistinism called ‘community mental health,’ spreading its kind of mental illness [...] We no longer believe that psychology speaks for the soul. (Hillman, 1998, pp.122–23)

## Phenomenological Neoplatonism

Since opposite extremes meet, Hillman's strong phenomenological viewpoint is by himself combined with Neoplatonic conceptions, thereby creating a bewildering hodgepodge, characteristic of an *aesthetic* paradigm. Hillman asserts that images acquire autonomy and operate according to their own will, similar to gods. Gods and goddesses are actually part of Hillman's "archetypal psychology." H. says:

By providing a divine background of personages and powers for each complex, it [a polytheistic psychology] would aim less at gathering them into a unity... (Hillman, 1981, p.197)

[The] archetypes of the psyche, as the fundamental structures of the imagination or as fundamentally imaginative phenomena [are] transcendent to the world of sense in their value if not their appearance. (Hillman, 1997, p.12)

Hillman reintroduces the concept of the *anima mundi*, the world-soul of Neoplatonism, and says:

[Psychology] is to hear the psyche speaking through all things of the world, thereby recovering the world as a place of soul. (ibid. p.25)

The curative or salvational vision of archetypal psychology focuses upon the soul in the world which is also the soul of the world (*anima mundi*) [...] The artificial tension between soul and world, private and public, interior and exterior thus disappears when the soul as *anima mundi*, and its making, is located in the world. (ibid. p.35)

To the phenomenologists not only natural objects but also psychological objects (contents) or "ideal" objects, like any kind of abstract principle, can be made conscious, that is, they can become fully perceivable. As such, it is not merely a representation of the psychic object—it *is* actually the psychic object made evident.

Such a phenomenological viewpoint is not consonant with analytical psychology. Jungian theorists emphasize that the archetype, as a numinous entity, cannot be made fully conscious. The archetypal feeling cannot be pinpointed in an image that will always remain accurate and persuasive over time. The manifest image cannot be regarded a psychic content that has become fully integrated with consciousness. But, according to Hillman's psychology, it is actually so.

H. is said to reduce the importance of conscious understanding. Yet Hillman's reduction of psychic content to metaphorical image has the reverse effect since a metaphorical image is entirely comprehensible by consciousness. Contrary to this, the Jungian notion of the *symbol* is more profound. A symbol cannot be fully grasped by resort to abstract conscious categories. It ought to be experienced and differentiated, using active imagination and amplification. Contrary to what H. says, a content is never merely an image. In fact, it can be understood symbolically. A symbol is always connected to other contents that lie beyond consciousness. Hillman's phenomenology implies a devaluation of the unconscious. Today, many people have acquired a thorough experience of the unconscious. They can verify

that images are amplifiable and have consciousness–transcending symbolic properties.

### **Demoniac possession**

Hillman's Neoplatonic conceptions are amplified in *The Soul's Code* where he contends, among other things, that criminality derives from a *bad seed*, i.e., an overly strong demonic force of otherworldly origin, which the weak personality is unable to cope with. Hillman professes a primitivistic psychology (the "acorn theory") that can be equated with pre-Christian notions of demoniac possession. If people were to take H. seriously, it would mean the return of witch-hunts. H. says:

Finally, prevention of the demonic must be based in the invisible ground "above the world," transcending the very idea of prevention itself .... My notions of ritual suggest ways of respecting the power of the call. They suggest disciplines imbued with more-than-human values, whose rituals will be touched by beauty, transcendence, adventure, and death. Like cures like — again that old adage. We must go toward where the seed originates and attempt to follow its deepest intuitions. Society must have rituals of exorcism for protecting itself from the Bad Seed. Yet it must also have rituals of recognitions that give the demonic a place — other than prisons — as Athena found an honored place for the destructive, blood-angered Furies in the midst of civilized Athens. (Hillman, 1996, p.246)

This implies trying to come to terms with the *daemon* by reaching into the transcendent sphere with ritual enchantments. H. says:

So long as our theories deny the daimon as instigator of human personality, and instead insists upon brain construction, societal conditions, behavioral mechanisms, genetic environments, the daimon will not go gently into obscurity. (ibid. p.243)

H. dismisses modern findings of psychology, such as importance of upbringing, genetic determination, et cetera, and nicknames these as "the parental fallacy" and a "Mother-myth." H. overtly admits to his subjectivistic and unscientific stance:

If we can so readily accept the Mother-myth, then why not another myth, a different myth, the Platonic one this book proposes? It cannot be the resistance to myth that makes us balk at the acorn theory, since we so gullibly swallow the myth of the Mother. The reason we resist the myth of the daimon, I believe, is that it comes clean. It is not disguised as empirical fact. It states itself openly as a myth. (Hillman, 1996, pp.67–68)

[Archetypal psychology] starts neither in the physiology of the brain, the structure of language, the organization of society, nor the analysis of behaviour, but in the process of imagination... (Hillman, 1997, p.19 & 1992a, xi.)

A puer-inspired theory will also limp among the facts, even collapse when met with the questioning inquiries of so-called reality [...] an

archetypal psychology is obliged to show its own mythical premises...  
(Hillman, 1996, p.283)

## Soul-making

H. incessantly contests the Jungian method of introversion. The world-creating capability of the mind, i.e., the idea that images painted by fantasy become autonomous and godlike, is called *soul-making*, using Hillman's vocabulary.

The polytheistic analogy is both religious and not religious [...] The Gods are taken essentially, as foundations, so that psychology points beyond soul and can never be merely agnostic [...] The Gods are therefore the Gods of religion and not mere nomina, categories, devices ex machina. They are respected as powers and persons and creators of value [...] In archetypal psychology, Gods are imagined. They are approached through psychological methods of personifying, pathologizing, and psychologizing. They are formulated ambiguously, as metaphors for modes of experience and as numinous borderline persons. They are cosmic perspectives in which the soul participates. (Hillman, 1997, pp.44-46)

The autochthonous quality of images as independent of the subjective imagination which does the perceiving takes Casey's idea one step further [...] but then comes the awareness that images are independent of subjectivity and even of imagination itself as a mental activity. (ibid. p.15)

This soul-making, allegedly, should not be confused with introversion:

You make soul by living life, not by retreating from the world into the 'inner work' or beyond the world in spiritual disciplines and meditation... (Hillman & Ventura, 1992b, p.50)

[Therapy,] by emphasizing the inner soul and ignoring the outer soul, supports the decline of the actual world. (ibid. p.5)

H. regards the introverted standpoint as life-denying. This is contrary to Jung who regarded introverted life as having the same validity as extraverted life. He stresses again and again that the unconscious must be *lived*, not merely being analyzed. Analysis is an apt tool up to a certain point, but as the unconscious also contains the future—not merely the past—one ought to find a myth of one's own and let the unconscious develop together with consciousness by way of active imagination and by various means of expression, such as painting, for instance. This, however, does *not* imply that the surrounding world and one's fellow men should be painted in subjectivistic colours and be made beautiful according to one's own standards, as H. professes. Being scientifically objective is the best means of supporting the environment and one's fellow men. "Peace, love and understanding" stems from the ability of being objective; seeing things and persons as they really are. From such an objective understanding one can meet reality and other persons in an adaptive fashion, thus having a true effect on one's surrounding.

Our conscious abilities are not powerful enough to control reality. In the modern

world we are balancing on the edge of disaster. However, there is a powerful faculty of wisdom that we can turn to for guidance. The Self has the powers of the complete psyche at its disposal, including the age-old wisdom of the collective unconscious. Hillman, however, rejects the notion of the Self and introduces his so called "*psychological polytheism*." He contends that Jung's notion of integration of personality is an expression of Jung's monotheistic "theological temperament" and professes instead the dissociation of personality. H. says:

By providing a divine background of personages and powers for each complex, it [a polytheistic psychology] would aim less at gathering them into a unity and more at integrating each fragment according to its own principle, giving each God [and Goddess] its due over that proportion of consciousness, that symptom, complex, fantasy which calls for an archetypal background. It would accept the multiplicity of voices... without insisting upon unifying them into one figure, and accept too the dissociation process into diversity as equal in value to the coagulation process into unity. The pagan Gods and Goddesses would be restored to the psychological domain. (Hillman, 1981, p.197)

This, of course, is hardly advisable when treating psychic illnesses since neurosis and psychosis are expressions of dissociation of personality. There is one proper way of achieving healing of the world and personality. This is getting to the source of wisdom, i.e., going inwards towards the unity of being — the Self. More extraversion in today's world, following Hillman's agenda, is by no means advisable since peoples' conscious abilities will hardly be able to cope with the situation. Consciousness might be heading in the wrong direction. By turning *inwards* to the "anima mundi" the individual will be given a voice which is effective in reshaping the world outside. Otherwise, people will only have at their disposal old truths and old tools of collective consciousness. These are becoming unefficacious.

Openness to the collective unconscious will furnish people with a picture of the future and the problems at hand. Without the wisdom of the Self we travel blindfolded into the future. In these days this is quite dangerous. According to Jung, poisonous collective ideas are compensated through unconscious imagery. Thus, one must reckon with individual psychology when dealing with collective notions. Contrary to Hillman's argument, one may never heal and correct collective consciousness without looking into the unconscious of the individual. This is because the compensatory contents emerge from the unconscious of the individual. The healing power emerges (1) in the individual by way of integration of unconscious content, and (2) by the subsequent dispersal of compensatory ideas and images (in conscious differentiated form) in collective consciousness. Hence, Hillman's repudiation of the method of introversion is counterproductive.

The tendency of making a goddess out of the *anima mundi* builds on the argument that psychology alienates people from the world. By removing meaning and truth from psyche and objectifying it in an animistic manner, H. thinks that people will look outwards and treat the world as a magnanimous goddess. Jung argued against making gods and goddesses out of the unconscious figures, because we mustn't become the shuttlecock of unconscious forces (cf. Jung, 1972, par.395). It is counterproductive.

It is misconceived to look upon introversion as a threat to society, i.e., to infer that people would refrain from engaging in the necessities of life. Introversion is not the same as regression. It does not generate alienated individuals who lack care for the world and other people. Introversion is a necessary tool in learning to know oneself. In this way alienation is overcome, allowing people to better adapt to the world. In the unconscious realm they will hopefully be able to find the key to the future. Contrary to what Hillman says, introversion is really a remedy against alienation.

### The aesthetic paradigm

Nor is it truthful what H. infers, that psychology enforces ideas of goal-directedness onto the patient, e.g., "the anima must be integrated," et cetera. It's an exaggeration. Jung emphasizes that it's necessary to look at the compensating contents within the unconscious. Should the unconscious be unsympathetic toward analysis in the traditional form, it must be acknowledged. For example, if a workaholic patient needs to lie in the sun on the beach for a time, then it's necessary to listen to the unconscious and not force some rigid conceptions on the patient. *The unconscious compensates the conscious standpoint*—this is the key sentence to the understanding of analytical psychology.

Comparatively, Hillman's psychology must be branded as dogmatic, since it leads to an overestimation of the psychic *images*. It is characteristic of the *puer aeternus* (eternal youth) who has a hard time adapting to everyday reality. In *The Soul's Code* H. speaks about the artistic demon in each of us and how we must try and find beauty around us, trying to love what we see. But this is nothing new. It is the well-known concept of the artist and the poet. Western society has always swarmed with dreamers who have a subjectivistic and romantic view of the world. Many of them continue all their life to live as *puers*, sitting under the oak tree, writing poetry. This is not wrong provided that it is done in unison with the unconscious. However, in psychology there exist no patent truths. One must always regard the unconscious as a compensating force. It is necessary to approach life unbiased, try and discover what the unconscious has prepared beforehand.

Hillman shuns this apprehensive attitude towards the unconscious. Instead he builds a dogma out of a specific case; the aesthetic conception. But this is merely the remedy in special cases and, perhaps, during a specific period within an individual's lifetime. Hillman's approach is dogmatic, something that Jung strongly rejects. In fact, Hillman's notions are politically ominous and are comparable to the views of Lanz von Liebenfels who brought up Hitler on the notions of a "beautiful" and subjectivistic world which would follow the destruction of existing society. Hillman says:

The calling from the eternal world demands that this world here be turned upside down, to restore its nearness to the moon; lunacy, love, poetics. (Hillman, 1996, p.282)

As a consequence, Hillman's notion of a poetic basis of mind, which looks upon everything with the eyes of imagination, is potentially quite evil. It is an unscientific viewpoint according to which all worldviews and human actions are expressions of subjective fantasies. We live in a big phantasmagoria, so to speak. This is alluring to the artistic personality. The fanatic artist wants to create a fantasy world of his own

rather than relating to objective grey reality. In fact, Hillman aims to take his archetypal psychology “out on the street”, making it a collective dogma. Every man should become a poet who creates a fantasy world for himself, thus making the world “beautiful and pleasant.” This was actually the case during the Third Reich. Among the Nazi bigwigs were many an artist whose views of the world was thoroughly subjectivistic. The new world they wanted to create comprised of a beautiful aryan race, grand architecture in “Ceausescu style”, strange pagan rituals with elements from Norse mythology and freemasonry, et cetera.

## **Animism**

Hillman’s notion of a world–soul independent of the human soul represents a regression to a pre–Christian worldview involving magical means of healing, causing the rain to arrive by rain dance, et cetera. This is an ancient religious attitude known as *animism*, incompatible with modern science. It is puzzling that a person like Hillman, who accuses Jung of “metaphysicism,” himself subscribes to such archaic notions. If such a regress were to occur, it would have calamitous consequences. People would develop a childish relation to the world, which would defeat the notion of *introversion* as the key to the healing of collective consciousness. Preventing drought by *rain dance* is much less effective than Jung’s notion of introversion. Introversion represents a mature attitude, because the individual realizes that *I / myself* have a responsibility to integrate the compensating contents arriving from the unconscious. If more people were to follow this call, it should be possible to handle environmental threats, such as drought, by a heightened responsibility towards the environment. We would learn to foresee complicated problems, and also to give birth to compensatory images and ideas within collective consciousness. As a consequence, more people would come to embrace new ideas of environmental foresight.

“Archetypal psychology” represents a regression to naive animism and tragically removes the ascendancy of the psyche. With its unscientific conceptions it gives rise to a primitive morale. H. belongs to an outdated philosophical school of *subjectivism*. He tells us to view the world as having an independent soul akin to the human soul. But in fact, the *anima mundi* is within every individual. We all contain eternity. Jungian psychology advocates the ascendancy of the psyche. The *anima mundi* must be understood as an independent *psychic* reality. Should we choose to reify it, viewing it as a fog surrounding the earth, it is tantamount to a projection. The *anima mundi* is, by medieval alchemists, equated with Mercurius. Mercurius is a *psychic* reality, and could be regarded the archetype of the unconscious. If we choose to view the *anima mundi* as a wholly independent reality, we are making a goddess out of her. This is equal to a regression to paganism. Since modern people find it hard to digest the fact that they themselves contain all that there is to long for, they are often enchanted with modernized pagan ideas. In this obfuscatory way psychological notions are retained in watered–down form, but at the same time the moral obligation of coping with inner reality is avoided. It is merely a modern form of paganism in psychological terms. It represents the regression to a pagan belief of spirits that we today regard as psychological projections. The modern view, on the other hand, entails an exaltation of the psyche.

Should we instead go along with classical Jungian psychology, and claim the existence of the psyche as a largely independent reality, and that the psyche of the



individual contains the spirit of the world, then we are speaking in favour of the psyche. In this way the psyche acquires its proper status. If the lost individual soul of today were to realize that the psyche is quite real and immeasurable, he would cease travelling several times around the earth looking for the *anima mundi*. The medieval alchemists incessantly explained that the *prima materia* can be found directly outside your doorstep. The *prima materia* is said to contain the *anima mundi*. Thus, already during the Middle Ages, people intuitively understood the reality of the psyche.

## Phenomenology

Today there is a strong tendency towards making Jungian psychology a generic name for quite different systems that, although they at the first glance look related (because of similar terminology), their kernels are completely dissimilar. The removal of the concept of the innate archetype strikes at the kernel of Jung's psychology. It could be likened to an economist inventing a new "capitalistic" economic system that removes free price-fixing. Of course, removing the free price-fixing and replacing it with the institutionalizing of this function is out-and-out Communism.

In a similar way, Hillman points in a completely different direction than Jung. The assertion that the archetype of the unconscious, and every phenomenon whatsoever, can be fixated by consciousness, entails that the conscious mind is designed to transcend the whole of cosmos. Thus, when Hillman asserts that Jung is metaphysical, it is actually the other way round. Hillman has a cosmos-enveloping view of the brain and its conscious capability. One could argue that the Hillmanians reduce everything to images, but the reduction of any content to an image necessitates Hillman's inference that the goal is simply to make conscious what is extant in the unconscious.

However, according to analytical psychology, complete man is both conscious and unconscious, that is, a balance is to be attained. The conscious mind cannot harbour every opposite of the psyche and of the cosmos. Since the conscious mind is not designed to do this (it's not God) the goal is, rather, to attain some sense of unity of consciousness and unconsciousness by recourse to the *transcendent function* ([here](#)). In fact, in this respect Jungian psychology is akin to Eastern philosophies of Taoism and Zen Buddhism, which advocate a form of "conscious unconsciousness." To exemplify, in the Zen disciplines of the tea ceremony and archery the adept performs unconsciously with great prowess, almost like a cat. By conscious determination he has acquired a unification of conscious and unconscious so that he may perform without hesitation. It depends on the fact that the performer is unaware of an ego, and he refrains from looking at his movements with a conscious eye "above" himself, so to speak. At these "holy moments" he experiences this unity which is, in a sense, akin to a Jungian ideal. Arguably, Hillman contests the spiritual wisdom of the world.

## The Puer Aeternus

Hillman's psychology, which is a version of the aesthetic paradigm, is attractive to the person who lacks moral power to come to terms with outer demands of life and inner demands of the unconscious. Withdrawing projections is a painful process as it

entails losing momentum and meaning of life. Yet, according to Jung, it is necessary to withdraw projections even if it leads to *nigredo*, a medieval alchemical term denoting a kind of psychic death-experience. Out of this is born a new feeling for the world in *albedo*. When Gautama Buddha had withdrawn all his projections and was ready to enter *nirvana*, he was surprised to find that there had emerged in him a new love towards the world. James Hillman evades the moral obligation to withdraw projections. Instead he keeps them artificially alive by recourse to his *puer aeternus* psychology according to which the world is an infantile playground for individual imagination. H. advances the psychology of the *puer aeternus*, the same attitude which Jung and M-L von Franz warn against. H. says:

I tied the acorn theory with its founding image and tied the founding image yet further on to a mythical configuration called puer eternus. (Hillman, 1996, p.285)

The acorn theory of biography seems to have sprung from and to speak the language of the puer eternus, the archetype of the eternal youth who embodies a timeless, everlasting, yet fragile connection with the invisible otherworld... (ibid. p.281)

A puer-inspired theory will also limp among the facts, even collapse when met with the questioning inquiries of so-called reality, which is the position taken by the puer's classical opponent, the gray-faced king of Saturn figure, old hardnose, hardass, hardhat. He wants statistics, examples, studies, not images, visions, stories [...] This kind of self-reflection belongs to psychological method. Unlike the methods used by other disciplines when positing their ideas, an archetypal psychology is obliged to show its own mythical premises, how it is begging its first question, in this case the myth of the acorn. (ibid. p.283)

H. admits that his views are fantasies which cannot be substantiated by facts. However, he forestalls any criticism, in a rather childish *puer aeternus* manner, by saying that any opponents to his subjective views are to be regarded as "hardasses." Surprisingly, he expects his own fantasies, no doubt derived from his own personal temperament, to be adopted as truths. Must other thinkers then be regarded as "hardasses", should they choose to define their own subjectivistic fantasies and end up contradicting Hillman's ideas?

C.G. Jung warns against letting one's own personal temperament condition one's theories. He also rejects the one-sided "Platonic" interpretation of the archetype. Jung says:

In former times, despite some dissenting opinion and the influence of Aristotle, it was not too difficult to understand Plato's conception of the Idea as supraordinate and pre-existent to all phenomena. "Archetype," far from being a modern term, was already in use before the time of St. Augustine, and was synonymous with "Idea" in the Platonic usage. When the Corpus Hermeticum, which probably dates from the third century, describes God as [...] the 'archetypal light,' it expresses the idea that he is the prototype of all light; that is to say, pre-existent and supraordinate to the phenomenon "light."

Were I a philosopher, I should continue this Platonic strain and say: Somewhere, in “a place beyond the skies,” there exists a prototype or primordial image of the mother that is pre-existent and supraordinate to all phenomena in which the “maternal,” in the broadest sense of the term, is manifest. But I am an empiricist, not a philosopher; I cannot let myself presuppose that my peculiar temperament, my own attitude to intellectual problems, is universally valid. Apparently this is an assumption in which only the philosopher may indulge, who always takes it for granted that his own disposition and attitude are universal, and will not recognize the fact, if he can avoid it, that his “personal equation” conditions his philosophy. (Jung, 1969, par.149)

Jung here repudiates the naive “Platonic” interpretation of the archetype, and he rejects the “philosophers” who think in this subjectivistic way. Jung identifies himself as an empiricist, and, according to him, the archetypes belong in the psyche. (Nevertheless, Jung later came to endorse a Neoplatonic interpretation according to which the archetype, as such, underlies *both* matter and psyche. Yet, this is quite different from Hillman’s standpoint.)

In this connection another author deserves mentioning. This is Edward F. Edinger who, likewise, makes an otherworldly interpretation of the archetype. He argues that the Self is created by the ego and manages to reduce individuation to “ego-formation” (Edinger, 1985, p.218). His notion of “incarnation” implies that the individual, like an actor, should go through the different stages (anima stage, etc.) metaphorically. This is an aesthetic conception, too, but it is the individual who himself is the work of art, like a stage actor. So Edinger has roughly the same technique of evading the moral obligation as Hillman. When the Self “incarnates” in the ego, the individual puts on an act of a completely individuated individual. This is “imitating” the Self. The goal is to convince oneself that one has passed through all the “alchemical” processes and attained the end goal. According to the aesthetic paradigm there is no need to go through the process for real—instead one should imitate it. Both Hillman and Edinger professes “life-imitation.” Accordingly, Edinger went about making a “numinous impression” and the impression of “an overwhelming psyche”, in the words of one of his colleagues. Another famous person who also subscribed to the imitative paradigm was emperor Nero, who regarded himself the most eloquent actor. He was also the paragon of evil.

## **Vampirism**

Hillman rejects psychoanalysis. He even wrote a book called “We’ve Had A Hundred Years of Psychotherapy and the World’s Getting Worse.” He says that we must stop talking about *growing up* and instead *grow down* (a well-known *puer aeternus* device). H. says that other psychologists are deterministic and that they always talk about the inborn qualities that shape the future of the individual, attaching weight to acquired complexes from childhood, et cetera. Hillman abolishes all this and aims to elevate imagination instead. Allegedly, the individual ought to live by creating fantasies, avoiding the moral trial of strength that goes with the unconscious encounter. H. takes every chance to denounce Christianity. He wants to revert to a deified world, a polytheistic world, and rejects the psychological necessity of the growth of ego consciousness. The individual should remain a child, a collective being. H. says:

[When] the idea of progress through hierarchical stages is suspended, there will be more tolerance for the non-growth, non-upward and non-ordered components of the psyche....We may then discover that many of the judgements which have previously been called psychological were rather theological. (Hillman, 1981, p.198)

[When] the monotheism of consciousness is no longer able to deny the existence of fragmentary autonomous systems and no longer able to deal with our actual psychic state, then there arises the fantasy of returning to Greek polytheism. (Hillman, 1992a, p.27)

Growth offers salvation from what developmental theory has dogmatically declared to be our basic nature, the helpless and hope-filled state called 'my inner child'... Growth equals secular salvation. (Hillman & Ventura, 1992b, p.70)

However, individuation, in its true sense, depends upon detachment from collective consciousness. From this follows also a freeing from the collective shadow. It could, figuratively speaking, be envisaged as a *vampire*; an imitator of life who lacks inner life source, who must derive energy (blood) from the surrounding, including other people. The popularity and topicality of the vampire myth derives from the actual nature of today's collective shadow. The attitude of life imitation is championed by James Hillman, who professes an outgoing personality who is to be wholly subjectivistic while interacting with the environment. The surroundings is to be subjected to one's own subjectivistic views and desires, disregarding other people's objective postures. Even words and sentences are unacceptable if they aren't beautiful. H. says:

...“case material”, “ego development”, “psychotherapy”, even “animus-ridden” and “negative mother”—die on our lips. We can no longer give them belief; they have lost conviction; they no longer are speech that carries soul. This language is dead [...] Because of its own language, psychology becomes anti therapeutic, an instrument of a new philistinism called ‘community mental health,’ spreading its kind of mental illness [...] Where is dialogue? Especially, where is psychological dialogue? We long for psychic experiences yet doubt psychological language. What has happened to this language of psychology in a time of superb communication techniques and democratic education? Why has its language game departed from the soul's play? We no longer believe that psychology speaks for the soul. (Hillman, 1998, pp.122–23)

Allegedly, according to Hillman, one must draw energy from words and exterior reality, and if one doesn't get a “kick” from them, they are to be regarded as useless. If one cannot extract feeling from Jung's or M-L von Franz's words anymore, then, allegedly, they are of no value. He continually professes the subjectivistic aesthetic paradigm whereby the world is painted in subjective colours so that one can enjoy oneself at others' expense. But such a person has no inner sun. He is a living dead; figuratively speaking, a vampire. This dark figure is the horrendous shadow of Hillman's *puer aeternus*.

## The shadow of the Puer Aeternus

Let's look closer at the shadow of the puer aeternus, using mythological language. Drawing on the myth of the vampire, we may deduce that such a person does not lead a true life. His soul is dead since he has denounced introversion, i.e., life within. Instead he goes along imitating life like an actor, painting a subjectivistic worldview. Such imitators of spiritual life go along with Hillman and denounce introversion as *narcissism* (which is a projection). Instead they endeavour to make a religion out of the whole outer reality. The vampire is a collectivistic mass-man, always prone to bullying as soon as he detects any sign of individual consciousness. He elevates poetry to true reality and even relates to the words of authors as if they were poetry and never quite understands what analytical psychology is all about. He wants psychology to be an object of religious fervour, and if the psychological terms have lost their religious meaning, then they are of no value.

Along with sincere congregants, Christianity has earlier harboured spirit-imitators of this kind, quenching their blood-thirst by allowing them the blood of Christ in the Eucharist. But as Christianity lost its grip, the spirit-imitators have, so to speak, poured out of the Church and started making the whole of reality into a religious space; a place for imitation of life as a whole. This is *vampirism*, the devilish evil which the Church has hitherto held at bay. Hillman advocates making the whole outer world a religious space, painting it in subjectivistic colours, imitating life like an actor. Although Hillman is not particularly important, his ideas are compelling to the life imitator who in these ideas can find a way to evade the moral obligations bestowed upon the individual by life itself.

The problem of collectivistic psychology is immense today. By recourse to introversion we should be able to really understand and appreciate other people. The life imitator, however, rejects true introversion. The sun of collective consciousness shines so strongly, today, that most people aren't aware of an alternative to the imitated life. Thus, they see any expression of individual consciousness as pathological. The followers of this evil and antiquated paradigm become spiritual dwarfs as the individuation process definitely grinds to a halt. Any person following the true path of individuation is immediately identified as an outcast. That's why the path of individuation is so cumbersome in the modern era of narcissism.

## Conclusion

Hillman's psychology should not be referred to as Jungian psychology, nor as post-Jungian psychology. One should give things their proper name, otherwise the whole matter becomes obscured and students bewildered. H. subscribes to a completely different paradigm, akin to religious dualistic conceptions, drawing on teleology, whereas Jung is (or tries to be) scientifically empirical. Jung and Hillman point in different directions, leading to completely different views of man and therefore to different kinds of morality. Hillman's philosophy is the heavily criticized and completely outdated subjective idealism. H. rejects the scientific method, instead advocating a method of subjectivistic fantasy, encouraging people to stay in a *puerile* relationship to the world. Despite Hillman's repudiation of the scientific paradigm, it has nevertheless proven effective at curing people in traditional

psychotherapy, sometimes aided by psychopharmacologic medicine. Although there exists a need for a renewal of today's scientific paradigm, it would be like jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire if we were to adopt Hillman's antiquated polytheism. What is wanting today is a *new* paradigm, but not an antiquated one.



© Mats Winther, 1999.

## Addendum

Archetypal Psychology is the fast food variant of Jungian psychology. It is superficial and lacks nourishing value. The following dream from my early twenties exemplifies what I mean.

I attended some form of New Age congregation in the middle of the night. Together with other people I entered a flying saucer that threw us about in the air in violent movements. During this experience I became conscious for a while. When I went home from the celebration I felt unmoved by the experience and slightly disappointed. Wending my way through the dark wood, I passed a little bridge over a brook. My trouser leg touched a lonely little flower, a Chickweed Wintergreen (which is a little flower that grows in northern Europe, *Trientalis europaea* L., "Skogsstjärna" — forest star). It was Linnaeus's favourite flower. On being touched, the forest star immediately unfolded its petals, something that made a strong impression on me.



This formally insignificant *forest star* felt much more meaningful than the grand spiritual congregation with flying saucers, etc. It means that collective spirituality has played out its role, and I should search after the lonely forest star. Perhaps Hillman plays a role in a person's spiritual development, during a budding phase of spirituality, but at a point in time one must depart. It is pagan and polytheistic spirituality, because it represents a sophomoric form of spirit, which corresponds to a stage in spiritual growth. The passing to a higher spiritual level does not signify a collective realization of spiritual truth. It's the reverse; it is finding the little forest star that has been forgotten in the dark wood, waiting to be touched. The forest star signifies a personal form of spirituality, conducive to individuation. The spiritual mystery is a "little mystery", easily underestimated and overlooked. This notion is central to medieval alchemy and mysticism. In this way it differs from the general spirit of religion.

The valuable Stone (*lapis*) is the insignificant thing that can be found outside one's doorstep. Had this realization taken root in psychology, it would have benefitted

patient health greatly. Since psychotherapy makes up for the decline in the religious formula of mental healing, it is necessary that it makes use of its particular strength, today lacking in religion, namely the personal spiritual path. Hillman and Archetypal Psychology endorses the obverse form of spirituality, rooted in grandiose and airy-fairy ideas. It represents a regressive solution, which Hillman readily admits:

[When] the monotheism of consciousness is no longer able to deny the existence of fragmentary autonomous systems and no longer able to deal with our actual psychic state, then there arises the fantasy of returning to Greek polytheism. (Hillman, 1992a, p.27)

However, to return to an outdated religious standpoint is not a lasting solution. From the perspective of psychology, the only proper way is the personal spiritual path, on lines of the inward-looking mystic. However, what complicates the issue is that many people in the Western world, and a majority of people in the world, have no propensity to walk the individual path. Therefore religion remains essential to them. Individuation is not a choice for the majority of humanity, because they must belong to a group and remain part of the collective. Factors of indigenous psychic economy invalidate the notion of individuation, which is problematic from a theoretical perspective. Individuation, which is a central theme in psychology, is only an alternative to a portion of the population. Regardless, a regress to the antique frame of mind, on lines of Hillman, spells disaster, as evident from the Flower Power experiment of the sixties. Arguably, Jungian psychology has a romantic bias, which is quite detrimental. But this is exactly what Hillman capitalizes on and magnifies to monstrous proportions. The effect is that the romantic perspective becomes the basis of his psychology.

The calling from the eternal world demands that this world here be turned upside down, to restore its nearness to the moon; lunacy, love, poetics. (Hillman, 1996, p.282)

Hillman draws on romantic philosophers of the 19th century, such as J.G. Fichte (1762–1814). According to Paul Roubiczek (1898–1972), 19th century Romanticism is responsible for the madness that befell the modern world, in terms of totalitarian ideologies and unrestrained materialism (excerpt [here](#)). While Hillman champions a return to the ancient polytheism, he seems to have no insight into historical facts. People in that era had lost faith in the traditional form of religion. Christianity walked into a religious vacuum and lacked real competitors. The Romans tried to promote a cult of the emperor, but it didn't work. Centuries earlier the Eleusinian mysteries were forced to recruit proselytes from prostitutes and vagabonds, because people had lost interest in the mysteries. They were as interested in them as we moderners are of the Freemason mysteries.

Around the times of the birth of Christ, people tended to be quite dreary and gloomy, as if they had lost all faith in life. They wrote horrible things on the gravestones, to the effect that their lives had been completely meaningless. The Romans compensated this dreariness with superficial cultic practices, imperialistic expansionism, careerism, money and riches, opulence and orgies. Of course, this was bound to have deleterious consequences. In *Satyricon*, Federico Fellini depicts an age which is forlorn of hope, ravaged by debauchery. It was lacking in spiritual direction, as if waiting for a Redeemer to emerge. We wouldn't wish a coming again

of this epoch. At Dinner Key Auditorium in Coconut Grove in March 1969, Jim Morrison, singer in The Doors, exhorted concertgoers to have sex with each other, which many of them responded to. It took only a few years, after the return of the romantic *puer aeternus*, in the form of Flower Power, until it transforms into the same kind of debauchery, coupled with dreariness, which possessed the people in the beginning of our era. Hillman attempts a regressive solution. It is a blind alley in spiritual and psychological theory. It has already been tried out and it doesn't work. Don't fall for this chimera.

*M. Winther, 2012.*

## Review of Senex & Puer

Hillman's book "Senex & Puer" introduces a new archetype, namely the 'senex-*puer*'. Empirical evidence is scarce. One would expect a theoretical underpinning in the form of dreams, clinical examples, or the ideas of other authors, but Hillman has rejected scientific notions such as "facts". Nor does he regard it necessary to build on the bedrock of older theories. Thus, it is a theoretical edifice erected upon the clouds, in typical *puer* style.

He says that the *senex* is the "root of ego-formation", creating the archetypal ground of the ego, which is the 'senex-et-*puer*'. Whereas positive attitudes and behavior reflect its unity, negative attitudes arise from the splitting of the archetype into two archetypes, namely *senex* and *puer*. Maintaining the unity of the archetype is equal to maintaining the wholeness of the ego, because *senex-*puer** is constitutive of the ego. Unity is preserved by short-cutting the ego by means of an endless monologue, or rather, dialogue between the constituent parts of the archetype:

In answering one's own question one is *puer-et-senex*. In questioning one's own answer one is *senex-et-*puer**. The two faces turned towards each other in dialogue. This unending dialogue with oneself and between oneself and the world is that which holds one in meaning [...] Any solution originating from the usual mind would be one-sided; it would be a solution imposed by either the *senex* or *puer* components of the ego. Thus the ego must first undergo an archetypal therapy of its split root. (Hillman, 2013, Kindle loc. 1001-28)

After having thus replaced traditional psychological theory with an edifice predicated on his own neurotic constitution, Hillman goes on to repudiate "the psychologist's maxim of integrating the shadow." Instead, the shadow must be allowed to sink down and pollute other archetypes ("syzygic tandems"), such as Hades, Zeus, Athena, Aphrodite, and Dionysus: "It is within these tandems that shadow can be integrated, not by us, but into them" (ibid. Kindle loc. 1818-19). This, of course, flies in the face of Jungian theory. Since the shadow is no longer a problem for the ego, he makes the conclusion that one must allow free rein to *puer*-inspired opportunism and lying:

In *puer* consciousness the tendency to lie, to do the devious, to cut out and around the system, would seem a moral problem. Analysts consider the opportunism to belong to the shadow and to result from a weak ego that cannot take a stand and face consequences (as a hero



should). But if opportunism has archetypal substrate, having archetypal necessity within the puer structure, then we must re-assess the psychological function of puer deviousness and opportunistic duplicity independently of our preconceptions of right and wrong [...]

Now we can return to opportunism from another vantage point. It manifests not merely the chancy provisionality of puer existence. Opportunism is a way of living the world, creating a Mercurial cosmos [...]

The puer spirit is the voice of the moment and the puer spirit seizes the situation in an instant. The ethics are situationalist. A situationalist ethic permits one to move in accordance with a constellation as it is (not as it should be), so that for puer consciousness no situation ever becomes “wrong” or “impossible.” There is always a way, or way out. Every human complexity and every psychological complex, perceived from the puer perspective, is a situation serving its own purposes. There is intentionality in all psychic life, when perceived in terms of the puer. Every situation is always headed somewhere. (ibid. Kindle loc. 1788–1838)

How can I evaluate Hillman’s book *Senex & Puer*? He has complicated his puer-inspired theory, but it is essentially the same idea of elevating a neurotic personality structure as an ideal for psychic health. In fact, should the ego identify with an archetype it has neurotic or psychotic consequences. It matters not whether it’s the anima, Self, or the “senex-puer”. It is evident that it is a neurotic solution, since Hillman regresses in the book and starts advocating puerile ways of relating to the world: one should lie and be opportunistic. The noble character of the *hero* is repudiated. The hero has no value anymore, because it is the harbinger of new consciousness. Instead, the unconscious must be shut out by way of an endless neurotic monologue.

The responsibility to integrate the shadow (the dark aspects of personality) is also renounced. But the shadow does not belong in the “syzygic tandems”. (It’s a rather ludicrous notion, by the way.) They do not even exist as archetypes proper. Hillman gives no evidence to the existence of the senex-puer archetype. If the senex-puer is constitutive of the ego, why don’t I experience it? And why haven’t other theorists discovered this foundation of ego-consciousness? It is an appalling book: immoral, illogical, and full of ad hoc propositions that we are supposed to take at face value.

*M. Winther, 2014.*

### **Comment on Tacey’s critique of Hillman**

M-L von Franz regards identification with the ‘puer aeternus’ (eternal youth) as a neurosis belonging to the narcissistic spectrum (cf. von Franz, 2000, pp.65; 148; 231). James Hillman, however, elevated it as an ideal, bringing him into a collision course with von Franz. David Tacey has in two articles in JAP formulated a praiseworthy critique of Hillman (Journal of Analytical Psychology, Vol. 59, Issue 4, 2014).

It was about time! Hillman is an extremely controversial author and very destructive,

to boot. After all, he has repudiated all the central tenets of psychology. Individuation is depreciated as a way of building “ego”, not “soul”. The Self and the drive towards wholeness is regarded as authoritarian and monotheistic ideal that devalues the “multiplicity of souls”. The archetype is reinterpreted as a mere image painted by consciousness, and it has therefore lost its metaphysical foundation in the unconscious. In his later work he also contests the method of introversion and regards the introverted standpoint as life-denying. He even turns against the discipline of psychotherapy itself.

Yet, it is counter-productive to repudiate the notion of the Self, because it is necessary to retain a sense of wholeness in face of the multifarious unconscious and of life overall. It is this very factor that allows us to hold the reins, thus enabling us to meet the “multiplicity of souls” in a constructive way. The Self does not exclude multiplicity but allows us to relate to it.

Tacey shows that Hillman, according to all evidence, got stuck in a neurosis deriving from childhood, predicated on the well-known pattern of absent father, domineering mother. The *puer* neurosis had as consequence that Hillman threw out all things fatherly and orderly, including scientific rigour. He could not derive any sense of “beauty” from the scientific terms. Instead Hillman advocated the amoral and aesthetic attitude of the *puer aeternus*. Tacey says:

Hillman advocated what Jung warned against: an enthrallment to anima and a fascination with the unconscious at the expense of conscious development. Letting anima rule meant abandoning the goals of development, social adaptation, normative morality and allowing a Dionysian ecstasy to dictate the terms of life—and of clinical practice. This Dionysian libido is what got Hillman into trouble. (Tacey, 2014a)

Intellectual interpretation and understanding wasn't to his taste, because this is the way of “gray-faced king of Saturn figure, old hardnose, hardass, hardhat [who] wants statistics, examples, studies, not images, visions, stories” (Hillman, 1996, p.283). Tacey says:

Hillman wanted us to observe and enjoy images as aesthetic productions, and not to integrate their meaning. Jung argued that the point of psychological life was to understand the productions of the unconscious, and not to admire them. Jung thought that understanding the images built consciousness and soul, whereas Hillman thought it only built ego and control. (Tacey, 2014a)

Yet, Hillman's creed of fantasy and aestheticism is not generally endorsed by the unconscious psyche. I provide my own example. In the early twenties my unconscious instructed me to interpret my dreams. For instance, I was encouraged to solve rebuses. So, in the dream I found myself translating images to words. In another dream I was listening to Bob Dylan. A voice told me that “you mustn't only listen to the music—you must take heed of the words!” Thus, the dreams encouraged me to overcome my aesthetic attitude, characteristic of a daydreamer. While I was enchanted by the Siren's song, the unconscious directed me to the dull intellectual analysis of gray-faced old hardass, hardhat. Hillman, however, was

rarely, if ever, concerned with such clinical matters, and there are no case studies in any of his works. Tacey says:

In the wave of interest generated by *The Red Book*, advocates have forgotten that Jung denounced this work as belonging to his 'aestheticising' phase: 'I gave up this aestheticising tendency in good time, in favour of a rigorous process of understanding' (Jung, MDR, p.213). This aspect of Jung's experience is not featured in the cult of *The Red Book*, because its promoters are more interested in aesthetics than understanding. (ibid.)

It is remarkable the way in which "the fatherly aspects" of psychology are experienced as an encumbrance, among post-Jungians, generally. Of course, the archetypes are the "dominants" of the unconscious; individuation is a "prescribed path"; the Self is a "demanding goal". Thus, these aspects are experienced as regulatory decrees from the fatherly spirit, as it were. In the present day, many intellectuals embrace relativism in all its forms, and take exception to the scientific attitude, which is very analytic, regulatory, and lawful, indeed.

My own take on this is that there is a longing to achieve transcendence from the necessities of life. Jung is seen as making matters worse by adding even more "necessities". Thus, they want Jung without the "necessities". Tacey shows that this is what Hillman has done: he has retained the aesthetic, fanciful, exotic Jung and removed the fatherly side. In doing this, he has unabashedly appropriated certain of Jung's thoughts as his own, such as the ideas around 'anima mundi'. In fact, Hillman is not much of an original thinker—he also copied much from romantic idealism and its descendant, namely phenomenological philosophy. Tacey says:

Hillman was Jung sans individuation, sans development, and sans masculine principle. There was an early stage in Jung's career where he was mesmerized by the wonders of the unconscious, and by the seductions of the anima and her ability to draw a man into unfathomable depths. (ibid.)

Hillman takes exception to the idea of development, that is, to become aware of the powers of the unconscious for the purpose of conscious integration. Tacey says:

Hillman's 'faithfulness' to images was impressive. However, the result was an ideological refusal to 'interpret' the unconscious, because he felt this was too heroic. This is a side of his work which I am less impressed with, as it was as if Jung's 'stick to the image' had become for Hillman, 'stick to the unconscious', or rather, 'remain in the unconscious'. Hillman wanted us to observe and enjoy images as aesthetic productions, and not to integrate their meaning. (ibid.)

I hold that the longing after transcendence, including the evasion of life's obligations and responsibilities, takes a turn for the worse in the development of a puer aeternus neurosis. It is a neurotic solution to the problem of transcendence, which should really be understood in terms of Eastern philosophy, Christian mysticism, meditation and contemplation. If that had been the case, then the post-Jungians would not have had this urge to throw out the demanding ideals of psychology.

Classical Jungian psychology interprets transcendence, the 'mors voluntaria', and the 'nigredo', as the immersion in the unconscious. However, it is an enterprise no less demanding than following the dictates of society. The Jungian Self is a towering ideal, demanding adaptation to the outer as well as the inner world. Arguably, it is what causes the theoretical deterioration in post-Jungian psychology. There is no notion of transcendence proper, capable of diverting the regression to the aesthetic and daydreaming attitude of the puer aeternus.

Jung is all about 'integration' and that's why he claimed that 'God wanted to become man, and still wants to'. But is this the whole truth about the Christian myth? In the bible the Father and the Son have a longing for each other, and their union is also what is achieved. We tend to see it as the myth of incarnation, but it is primarily the myth of *apotheosis*, that is, the transcendence of a human being. Jung disregards this.

I have proposed that Jung's "Self of immanence" be complemented with a "Self of transcendence" (cf. Winther, 2011, [here](#)). Since there is no transcendental ideal of Self, the puer aeternus tends to fulfil this role in modern culture. This is essentially what Hillman has done; he has substituted the puer aeternus for the Self.

Late in life, Hillman experienced a remarkable turnaround, which Tacey accounts for. After having championed the feminine ideals of 'anima mundi' his values suddenly become overly worldly and masculoid, centering around social activism and angry, assertive, masculinity, in the way of John Wayne. Von Franz says that this development is characteristic of the neurosis:

Then, instead of being a brilliant puer, such a man suddenly becomes a cynical, disappointed old man. The brilliance has turned into cynicism and the man is too old for his age. He has neither belief nor interest in anything any longer. He is absolutely and thoroughly disillusioned and thereby loses all creativeness and *élan vital*, all contact with the spirit. Then money, ambition, and the struggle with colleagues become paramount, and everything else disappears with the romanticism of youth. There is very often an embittered expression on the face of such a man. (von Franz, 2000, pp.135–136)

This is probably why he has in the book, "Senex & Puer", created a dichotomy of his earlier puerile ideal of Self, now claiming that the "senex-et-puer" is constitutive of personality. (The senex is gray-faced old hardass, hardhat.) Moreover, senex-et-puer is foundational to conscious life, which consist of an endless dialogue between the two aspects of our psychology. Yet, in the book he soon returns to advocating the ways of the puer aeternus: to be opportunistic, to lie, to do the devious, to cut out and around the system (cf. Hillman, 2013, Kindle loc. 1788–1838).

The *senex* is a companion to the *puer* from Hillman's earlier work. Hillman has himself referred to these writings as "a prolonged and still incomplete defense of my traits and behaviors" (Hillman, 1992a, xiii.). Yet, archetypes refer to collective traits. One cannot claim that one's own traits and behaviours are archetypal. Thus, it appears that his theoretical edifice is predicated on his own neurotic constitution,

because this is the only empirical source of his theory.

Against von Franz's view, Hillman argues that the *puer* is not under the sway of a mother complex but that it is best seen in relation to the *senex* or father archetype. However, Tacey says that the *puer* cannot be dissociated from the mother by intellectual reconfiguration. "If these figures are archetypally bound, why would intellectual trickery separate them?" The wrenching of the *puer* from the mother to the father is "a display of intellectual deceit, for a self-serving purpose" (cf. Tacey, 2014b).

I believe Tacey is right. Comparatively, Winnicott accounts for his own horrible neurotic symptoms that coincide finely with his theoretical notions, which have been put forth as normal psychology. Thus, one could argue that Winnicott's theory is genuinely a neurotic edifice that could help to understand the narcissistic pathology as it comes to expression in himself and in his colleague Masud Khan. Khan made himself guilty of many transgressions resulting in his expulsion from The British Psycho-Analytical Society and the International Psycho-Analytical Association (cf. Kahr, 2003).

Hillman's psychology isn't even that. It can't help us understand the *puer aeternus* neurosis, because the *senex*-*puer* dichotomy is an intellectual fabrication. I believe it builds on the alchemical theme of the winged and wingless dragon, forming a circle by biting each other's tail. However, this symbol really points at something quite different.

Intellectual deceit, and any form of deceit, is characteristic of the *puer aeternus*. In this sense, Hillman's theory is wholly predicated on his neurosis. Characteristic of the *puer* is "false pretensions", says von Franz. Hillman is sheer fake, through and through.

I think that his speech at the symposium on "C.G. Jung & The Red Book" ([here](#)) is very telling. He does not contribute much to the understanding of The Red Book but only talks about his own reduction of the psyche to "fantasy". One would expect Jung to be in the limelight here, but it revolves around Hillman himself. He had brought a white lily to Jung's vigil, which is supposed to prove that he was now ready to abandon Jung's intellectual achievements. Allegedly, The Red Book verifies that concepts of psychology, such as ego, anima, and shadow, lack veracity, and that the psyche cannot produce such contents — only fleeting fantasy.

Evidently, he has no qualms about his self-centeredness, because there is no ego, anyway. Although he is wholly unintelligible (and quite boring) he gets applause. It remains to explain his popularity. Tacey argues that the Americans, on account of a cultural complex, are enchanted with the ideals of the *puer aeternus*. I would add that they, and increasingly the Europeans, are also obsessed with its shadow, namely money, status, and opulence, because *senex* and *puer* go hand in hand. (Other speakers at the symposium can be viewed [here](#).)

The question is why people buy this deceit, as when he betrays no interest whatsoever in The Red Book, as such, but merely takes it as an excuse for talking

about himself. Comparatively, Masud Khan found that Winnicott's ideas tallied with his own traits and behaviours, which had the consequence that he lived out his neurosis to the full, thinking that it's wholly normal.

Arguably, then, Hillman's popularity can be accounted for by the prevalence of the puer aeternus symptom, especially in America. Hillman gives the *pueri aeterni* an excuse to live out their neurosis to the full, and thus relieves them of the responsibility to take root in grey reality. However, according to Jung, the only cure is to devote oneself to life's obligations and necessities, especially in the form of hard work.

Instead they are persuaded to appropriate deceit as their means of transport through life, something which Hillman himself has been very successful at. It accounts for the inferior quality of the intellectual products in the field. The puer aeternus may sail through life by seating himself on the diffuse cloud of Archetypal or Jungian psychology. It is very convenient, but not much in the way of qualitative literature is produced that can make an impression beyond the Jungian bubble. It doesn't take much work to produce such books as Hillman's, since there is no requirement for the demanding and exhausting toil of research, scientific rigour, and logical coherence. It is good enough to babble nonsense.

Hillman claims that Jungian concepts are based on nothing factual. Yet, people do experience anima and shadow projections. (At least, I have had such projections. I can't explain why the Freudians don't experience these, however.) He explains that there is no such thing as the ego, because he has never met one! (I don't understand what he means, because I've met egos larger than a house.) Thus, it seems that he has acquired some Eastern wisdom, but he hasn't. The realization that the ego is an illusion is something that one can acquire while meditating on a mountain top.

Yet, in our life's struggles the ego is a very useful chimera, which we couldn't do without. The fact that we experience ourselves as separate beings, accounts for our success as a species, and as individuals. Separateness and detachment is a necessary ingredient in life. That's why the psyche has created this illusion, because it increases our survival value and facilitates communication. Without ego there would be no Other. In fact, the "God delusion" is also associated with higher survival value. It leads to "increased positive affect, higher health perceptions, and increased mental health status" (cf. Smith, 2012, [here](#)).

I hold that ego transcendence is a central aspect of individuation, but it can only be achieved if we stand aside from life, which isn't always possible. Thus, there are two contradictory demands of individuation that we have to cope with: on the one hand there is development and conscious enhancement; on the other hand there is ego transcendence. But we can achieve neither by following Hillman's call to repudiate all the intellectual concepts of psychology. For more on the transcendental concept, which should in some form be added to psychology, please listen to Alan Watts: "The Nature of Consciousness" (YouTube, [here](#)).

*M. Winther, 2014.*

## References

'Carl Gustav Jung & The Red Book (part 1)'. (2010) (YouTube, [here](#).)

**Edinger, E.F.** (1985). *Anatomy of the Psyche*. Open Court.

**Franz, M-L von** (2000). *The Problem of the Puer Aeternus*. Inner City Books.

**Hillman, J.** (1997). *Archetypal Psychology: A Brief Account*. Spring Publications.

----- (1992a). *Re-Visioning Psychology*. Harper Collins.

----- (2013). *Senex & Puer*. Spring Publications (Kindle edition).

----- (1996). *The Soul's Code*. Random House.

----- (1998). *The Myth of Analysis*. Northwestern University Press.

----- (1981). 'Psychology: Monotheistic or Polytheistic?' *in D.L. Miller: The New Polytheism* (Revised Edition). Spring Publications.

**Hillman, J. & Ventura, M.** (1992b). *We've had a hundred years of psychotherapy - and the world's getting worse*. Harper Collins.

'James Hillman on The Red Book of Carl Gustav Jung'. (Vimeo, [here](#))

**Jung, C.G.** (1972). *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. New York: Princeton University Press. (CW 7)

----- (1969). *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Princeton/Bollingen. (CW 9)

**Kahr, B.** (2003). 'Masud Khan's Analysis with Donald Winnicott'. *Free Associations*, 10B:190-222.

**Sharp, D.** (1991). *Jung Lexicon*. Inner City Books. ([here](#))

**Smith, J.F.** (2012). 'An Investigation of Psychological Underpinnings and Benefits of Religiosity and Spirituality'. Texas A & M University. ([here](#))

**Tacey, D.** (2014a). 'James Hillman: The unmaking of a psychologist. Part one: his legacy'. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*. Volume 59, Issue 4, pp.467-85.

----- (2014b). 'James Hillman: The unmaking of a psychologist. Part two: the problem of the puer'. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*. Volume 59, Issue 4, pp.486-502.

**Watts, A.** 'The Nature of Consciousness'. (YouTube, [here](#)).

**Winther, M.** (1999). 'Paul Roubiczek's critique of Romanticism and Phenomenologism'. ([here](#))

----- (2011). 'The Complementarian Self'. ([here](#))

See also:

**Winther, M.** (2000). 'Critique of idealistic phenomenologism'. ([here](#))

----- (2000). 'Critique of Neo-Hegelianism'. ([here](#))

----- (2002). "The Plastic Preachers" - On inferior psychology and religion'. ([here](#))