A Short Sociology of Archetypes

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The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.....Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch. (Marx 1978:172).

...in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse….We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. (Foucault 1980:93)

It is therefore possible to contribute to political action not only by entering the fray but also by providing studies of official techniques of regulation, punishment, normalisation and so on to those groups which have a direct interest in their subversion" (McHoul and Grace 1993:19)

Introduction

Archetypes, as collective images representing deep psychological and spiritual forces, have long been central to understanding human thought, behaviour, and cultural production. Articulated in detail by psychologist Carl G. Jung (Jung 1980), archetypes are typically viewed as symbolic representations of universal ideas that emerge from the human psyche. According to pundits, these symbols not only answer fundamental questions about identity and purpose but also underpin narratives that guide individual and collective experiences. While much has been written about archetypes in psychology and spirituality, their sociological dimensions remain under-explored.

This paper seeks to fill that gap by focusing in detail on archetypes as sociological phenomena. It situates archetypes within the broader framework of human narratives, distinguishing between mundane narratives that address everyday experiences and existential narratives that engage with profound questions of meaning, purpose, and reality. Importantly, the paper highlights how archetypes—through their integration into religious, political, and cultural systems, can serve as tools of ideological control. It argues that archetypes are not neutral; they are shaped, elaborated, and disseminated in ways that reflect the interests of specific social groups, particularly the accumulating class.

By tracing the historical and cultural trajectory of archetypes, the paper demonstrates how these symbolic constructs are manipulated to maintain systems of privilege and power. At the same time, it explores the potential for archetypes to be reimagined and reclaimed for more egalitarian and transformative purposes. This dual perspective—analyzing both the co-optation of archetypes and their potential for liberation—underscores their practical significance in shaping both individual identities and collective social structures.

Stories and Narratives

Humans are a species of storytellers. There is no denying that. Storytelling, which I'll define simply as communication through creative narration, is a human universal (Brown 1991). The ability to tell stories emerges spontaneously in childhood and continues throughout one's entire life (Smith et al. 2017). Story telling is generally considered *functional* for humanity, evolving as way to facilitate human adaptation by providing mechanisms for internal communication (Biesele 1986) that is, mechanisms to convey information and expectations on social behaviours, norms and values and taboos, mechanisms for healing rifts and encouraging understanding (Wiessner 2014), and mechanisms for enhancing co-operation and community.

Stories themselves don't just appear out of thin air, nor are they usually novel and original. Stories are usually cut from a larger **Narrative** cloth with a host of specific conventions. According to Halverson, a narrative is a "coherent system of interrelated...stories" that share a

conflict trajectory and rhetorical form (Halverson, Goodall, and Corman 2011:14). Consider the Harry Potter story. That story is cut from what we might call the "Jesus Narrative." Harry Potter is a Jesus, a "chosen one" destined to eradicate the world of a personified Voldemort/Darth Vadar/Satan-type character. Potter has his apostles who help him, he's sacrificed, resurrected, and then battles it out with the dark forces in what we are told is an inevitable and triumphant victory for the forces of light. It doesn't matter your cultural background, whether you are Islamic, Catholic, Baha'i, Hindu, faithful, or atheist you will recognize this narrative.

Narratives themselves are not random collections of ideas. **Narratives are typically built up from archetypes.** Archetypes are ideas (like the idea that we exist in a universe where good is pitted against evil) that provide the characters and plot points used to build a narrative. We'll get to defining archetypes in a bit. Before that though, for the purposes of analysis, we can break narratives down into two categories, mundane narratives and existential narratives. A Mundane Narrative[1] is a narrative with mundane themes. Mundane narratives deal with everyday life and common experiences, like love, friendship, conflict, or personal growth. A classic example here is the movie *The Breakfast Club.* On the other hand, we have Existential Narratives[2] Existential narratives deal with existential issues. They purport to answer the Big Questions, like "What is the meaning of life?", "What is the nature of reality?", "Why am I here?", "What is my purpose?" or "Why do bad things happen in the world?" The Bible and other "sacred" literature

1 https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/index.php/Mundane_Narrative

2 https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/index.php/Existential_Narrative

are examples of existential narratives, as are Hollywood movies like *The Matrix,* which is a movie that explores issues of reality, perception, oppression, and purpose, or *Star Wars,* which offers, like the Catholic Church, a universe grounded in the interplay of light and dark, good and evil.

Mundane or existential narratives, like the stories that are cut from them, are functional, and for many of the same reasons—they convey information, they help us communicate, they socialize, they heal, and sometimes they do the opposite. We might call narratives that have a function, **Functional Narratives.** Functional narratives[3] are narratives that perform useful functions, like conveying information, reinforcing norms and values, healing social rifts, etc.

Narratives, particularly existential ones, **are ubiquitous**. Existential narratives are embedded in cultural artifacts like religious texts, statues, stained glass windows, philosophical treatises, myths, and even modern media, demonstrating their pervasive role in defining human experience across historical and societal contexts.

In addition to being ubiquitous **narratives**, particularly existential ones, **are powerful**, and this for a couple of reasons. For one, narratives are powerful because they provide answers to life's biggest big questions, thereby functioning as a symbolic framework or fabric through which individuals and societies interpret their realities, assign meaning to their experiences, navigate

3 https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/index.php/Functional_Narrative

their existence, and act in the world. These narratives operate as cognitive and emotional scaffolding for human thought and behaviour. They shape how people perceive themselves and others, dictate moral and ethical considerations, and influence actions in both private and public spheres. In other words, they offer inspiration, guidance, and direction on how to live.

A second reason that narratives are powerful is because of the dramaturgical sophistication with which they are often presented. You can hear the Jesus story a thousand times and never get bored of it if the production values are high enough. Just think Star Wars, Harry Potter, the Matrix, or Lord of the Rings. In all these stories, a Jesus figure rises up to save the world. How many times have people watched these movies? How often are they referred to in memetic culture? It is hard to imagine a better strategy for indoctrination than to create ideological products that people willingly consume over and over.

Many of us would like to think that the existential narratives of this planet offer deep spiritual truths because we like to think, as we have been told (Jung 1980), that the ideas contained therein constitute ancient, primordial aspects of our terrestrial and cosmic existence, but they don't; at least not in their current form. Even a cursory examination shows that familiar existential narratives are rooted in social class hegemony. That is, groups with special interests fiddle with and modify narratives and archetypes to suit their own material needs. Samuel Perry offers a gentle statement when he suggests that narratives and archetypes are manipulated, contested, and altered to coincide with the special interests of what he calls "interpretative

communities" (Perry 2020). Ehrman (2007) offers a similarly gentle view when he points out that representatives of the early Catholic Church entered thousands of edits into the original bible, many of which it would be safe to assume supported the elite and patriarchal prerogatives of the Medieval Catholic church. But these gentle statements really don't capture the profound extent to which certain groups, particularly the accumulating classes of various nations and epochs, have interfered with the narratives of this planet. When you crack the lid and peer inside, their influence is shockingly profound.

What are archetypes?

Now that we understand about narratives, we can "crack the lid," so to speak. On archetypes. The first thing you need to know are that archetypes provide the vocabulary and grammar for narratives. When you listen to stories you are listening to narratives told with archetypes. Given that they are so important, the obvious question at this point becomes, "What are archetypes, exactly?" According to Carl Jung, an archetype is a collectively shared symbolic representation of some idea or concept that originates from the repetitive, shared experiences of our distant, primordial past (Jung 1964, 1980). Basically, instinctually rooted imaginings. Personally, I don't like this definition. I think it mystifies and confuses. In order to avoid the mystification and confusion, I would start with a simpler definition. I would define archetypes simply as ideas that provide answers to big questions, like "Who am I?", "Why am I here?", and "What is my purpose?"

Consider, for example, the idea that we live in a universe characterized by a battle between good and evil. This idea, which almost everybody believes in some form, is an archetype because it answers at least three big questions for people, “Why am I here?” “What is my purpose?” and “Why do bad things happen to people?” The answer the good versus evil archetype provides is that bad things in the world happen because of evil, either internalized as a part of flaws in our collective identity, or personified as an external force. According to this archetype, our purpose for existence, our reason for being here, is to choose good so you can fight against, and ultimately destroy, all that is evil. If you ask the question, “Who am I?” and “Why am I here” and I answer that you are here to grow and develop and learn and triumph over your animal nature or the forces of evil, you’ve answered with an archetype.

The good versus evil archetype is one of the most ubiquitous and ideologically loaded symbolic frameworks in human culture. It permeates not only ancient religious narratives, such as the Zoroastrian cosmic dualism, or the Christian war between God and Satan, but also saturates contemporary secular media. In elite culture, it is foundational to imperial justifications: the “Axis of Evil” rhetoric used by U.S. presidents to legitimize military aggression is a direct deployment of this archetype. In popular culture, it finds endless reproduction in films like *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *The Matrix*, where a singular (often white, male) “chosen one” must defeat a clearly defined external evil. Even video games, children’s shows, and nationalistic sports branding (e.g., “good guys” vs. “villains” in Olympic or World Cup

narratives) draw upon this structure. It is everywhere, it is pervasive. You have been exposed to it a thousand of times.

Another example of an archetype is the Hero's Archetype (Campbell 2004) which helps build a narrative called the Hero's Journey, or Fool's Narrative or Fool's Journey, as I call it. The idea of the Fool's Journey is simply that we are here to engage a "dangerous journey of the soul," a lifetime (even multi-lifetime) journey of self-discovery, enlightenment, testing, struggle, evolution all ending in a climactic but triumphal final perfection (Campbell 2004). According to this narrative, you are a Star in a cosmic show, a hero, potentially, but one in need of tutelage, tempering, and/or karmic redemption. This journey is an ascent towards some distant pinnacle of superiority and (genetic, moral, predatorial) perfection. Along the way, you will have to pass various tests and challenges. A successful hero's journey leads to salvation, self-realization, individuation, or some other social, psychological, or *economic* reward. An unsuccessful journey leads to psychological collapse (a shattered mirror), or some other negative outcome. In secular, scientific terms, we are evolving individuals, here to complete an evolutionary ascent towards some sort of evolutionary, but probably unattainable, perfection.

The Fool's Journey archetype, sanitized and sold as the Hero's Journey, is a pervasive symbolic structure that saturates the narrative DNA of both spiritual and secular culture. In its essence, this archetype suggests that human life is a perilous, karmic, or evolutionary journey undertaken by an unformed or naïve soul (the Fool, that's you) who must struggle, suffer, and strive toward

some higher state of being. This archetype answers a variety of Big Questions ("Why am I here?", "What is my purpose?", "What must I do to succeed in life?") by offering the idea that existence is a test, a school, or a cosmic game, and that the goal is individual purification, enlightenment, or transcendence.

Who are you? You are a cosmic fool in school.

Why are you here? To learn your lessons, work hard, and possibly redeem yourself.

This archetype appears not only in Vedic cosmology and Gnostic soteriology, but also in Catholic doctrine (e.g., Earth as testing ground, heaven as the reward), in capitalist psychology (self-actualization through suffering), and in virtually every cinematic hero arc from *The Truman Show*, where an actual fool is involved (Jim Carrey tends to play "foolish" characters) to *Lord of the Rings*. Take a look at the following clip from the Truman show. Notice the hero in these shots. In particular, notice how the director actively and self-consciously constructs the "hero's shot."

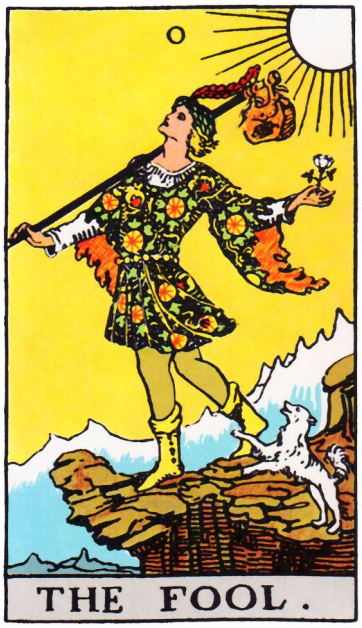
Viewing

- View this clip from the Truman Show on YouTube. "Hero's Shot" It is interesting that the actor Jim Carrey is a classic "fool" character.
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0jIwJt9QwA

- View the Binary Sunset Scene from Star Wars Episode Four

  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGUYAuAtRCk

Interestingly, the Hero's Journey, the Fool's Narrative, is deliberately configured into the Western Tarot by the Fool card, which shows an individual "hero" (here literally depicted as a "fool') about to step off a mountain to undertake a herculean journey towards perfection.



To tell the full story, this fool is jumping into a body (a "chariot", another tarot card) and his body is going to carry him through a lifetime of divine or evolutionary lessons where he will, if he is lucky, pass judgment (another tarot archetype), enter into heaven, graduate onto the next universal level, and so on and so forth. He is a "fool in school," according to this pervasive archetype, and so are you. Tarot "connoisseur" Brigit Biddy perfectly captures the narrative.

> In the Fool Tarot card, a young man stands on the edge of a cliff, without a care in the world, as he sets out on a new adventure. He is gazing upwards toward the sky (and the Universe) and is seemingly unaware that he is about to skip off a precipice into the unknown. Over his shoulder rests a modest knapsack containing everything he needs – which isn't much (let's say he's a minimalist). The

> white rose in his left hand represents his purity and innocence. And at his feet is a small white dog, representing loyalty and protection, that encourages him to charge forward and l*earn the lessons he came to learn*. The mountains behind the Fool symbolise the challenges yet to come. They are forever present, but the Fool doesn't care about them right now; he's more focused on starting his expedition.(Brigit 2020: italics added)

Why Study Archetypes?

Now that we know what archetypes are, i.e., answers to big questions, we can ask the question "Why study them." I can think of three reasons.

The first reason is their global ubiquity. As Jung, Campbell, and others have observed, many archetypes appear in roughly the same form in the experiences of adults and children all over the world. They are, he argues, universal features of human experience that remain identifiable despite their variable historical or cultural context. For scholars interested in humans or some aspect of their existence (like psychologists, sociologists, neurologists, historians, etc.) and even artists wishing to tap into deep, meaningful structures, this is undeniably interesting.

The second reason that archetypes are interesting is because their experience, especially during powerful mystical experiences, is often attended by psychological and emotional healing, even transformation (Miller 2004; Vaillant 2002). Archetypes are not merely random outbursts of an

over-imaginative psyche; they sometimes bear considerable psychological and emotional weight. Jung understood this. According to Jung, archetypes function to facilitate individuation (i.e. mental and emotional maturation) and healing. Carl Jung said archetypes help us understand things we cannot understand, deal with realities (like death) that we would rather not deal with, and add meaning to an otherwise meaningless existence. Archetypes provide "mental therapy for the sufferings of anxieties of [humankind] in general [like] hunger, war, disease, old age, death." (Jung 1980:11). This Jungian perspective on archetypes as potentially healing/transformative has triggered a significant psychological literature on using archetypes found in various "sacred" sources for psychological and spiritual development (Jayanti 1988; Metzner 1971; Semetsky 2000).

The third reason archetypes are interesting is because, as Jung recognized, archetypes are powerful, so powerful in fact that he claimed, and I agree, that **archetypes shape reality.** Jung did not mince words here. He said archetypes underlie and "create myths, religion, and philosophies that influence and characterize whole nations and epochs of history." (Jung 1964:76). Consider the good versus evil archetype. This archetype is adopted by atheists, agnostics, and devotees the world over. These forces may be personified into powerful cosmic forces, like Satan or Darth Vader, or they may be secularized as powerful and unconscious psychological or instinctual structures (Regardie 2004), like Jung's Shadow and Animus or Freud's selfish little id. Many individuals adopt some version of this archetype and when they

do, it exerts a powerful influence over their lives. It influences how they see the world, how they seem themselves, and how they act in the world. Those who adopt this archetype inevitably see themselves to one degree or another as actors on the side of good in some cosmic struggle against evil. They also inevitably see the operation of these forces in the world. Nazi Germany? School shootings? Taliban oppression? American Imperialism? Monsanto greed? The fall of New York's Twin Towers? When we adopt the good versus evil archetype, we see in these events the operation of evil. Finally, those who adopt the good versus evil archetype act a certain way towards others. Those we think of as "evil" get rejection, disdain, and even physical violence. Those who are deemed as good get to be included and supported within the community.

Why are Archetypes so Powerful

To review, archetypes are interesting. They answer big questions and they have significant psychological, sociological, and political import. If you accept all this, and in particular if you accept that archetypes are powerful, then the next question is what gives archetypes their power? Their potency stems from four interrelated dimensions: a) what they are, b) how they feel and c) what happens when people experience them, and d) how they are presented.

As for what they are, archetypes are answers to big questions. Answers to big questions are powerful because, as Maslow (1943) and others observed, humans have a deep, biologically rooted drive to make sense of their world. Ideas that promise to satisfy this existential need have

inherent psychological gravity. Archetypes are attractive because they offer frameworks for understanding suffering, death, morality, identity, and destiny. They give shape to ambiguity and offer orientation in a confusing world.

As for how they feel, archetypes feel special**.** They do not feel like normal thoughts, they feel "greater than." Jung suggested that archetypes have a "specific energy" (Jung 1964:79). "We can perceive the specific energy of archetypes when we experience the peculiar fascination that accompanies them. They seem to hold a special spell" (Jung 1964:79). We might say archetypes have an intellectual and emotional valence that normal ideas do not. This holds even when you personally have not had a visionary/archetypal experience. You can recognize the special character of an archetypal idea even when it is told to you by another person. For example, images on the Tarot have a liminal edge to them; they appear as doorways into greater meaning.

As for what happens when people experience them, humans have experienced "archetypal communications" in dreams, vision, and various forms of mystical experience for millennia, in every culture and in every space (Blacker 1999; Carmody and Carmody 1996, 1996; Harner 2013; Huxley 2015; Sosteric 2018). Jung argues these are primordial and powerful. When directly experienced, these archetypes are often accompanied by profound emotional, psychological, and spiritual shifts. They can catalyze healing, insight, and transformation (Jung 1980, 1980; Miller and Baca 2001). They aren't just ideas in your mind. They make a difference. They can change the way we think and feel about things in an instant.

As for how they are presented, archetypes might start out as individual/visionary experiences, but they don't stay that way. Because they are special they are often picked up and represented by other people. In these situations, their natural resonance with human consciousness is deliberately amplified in a presentation process that sociologist Clifford Geertz calls sacrilization (Geertz 2004). Sacrilization is the process by which certain objects, symbols, or actions are invested with sacred or religious significance within a cultural or social context. Sacrilization involves elevating things beyond their everyday or utilitarian functions to imbue them with deeper meaning and spiritual importance. Interestingly, this dramaturgical manipulation is self-consciously pursued in certain esoteric organizations like the Golden Dawn which uses something called Ritual Drama[4] to elevate the power of archetypes and accomplish a psycho-spiritual change in those chosen for viewing (Cicero and Cicero 2004). When a priest lifts a fancy gold cross in a beautiful Gothic church with a choir singing beautiful music and an elaborate altar as a backdrop, literally elevating that cross above the people below, that priest is deliberately, and probably consciously, sacrilizing the cross. When an ethnocentric psychologist writes a book on archetypes with long-winded arguments and pretty pictures, telling us how important they are and using words like "ancient" and "primordial," they are sacrilizing the archetypes they describe. When a Hollywood director hires John Williams or Hans Zimmer to score a film, and that composer uses French horns to write a triumphal melody, and then that melody is attached to the actor playing "the hero," they are sacrilizing the hero archetype.

4 https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/index.php/Ritual_Drama

In summary, archetypes are powerful because they (1) satisfy deep cognitive needs, (2) feel emotionally and spiritually charged, (3) often transform those who experience them, and (4) are routinely sacrilized by cultural, religious, and ideological institutions to maximize their impact. In this way, archetypes function as the foundational symbols through which entire civilizations are narrated, moralized, and (as we shall see) controlled.

Where do archetypes come from?

Arguably, archetypes are significant and important, powerful, and worthy of detailed study. The question at this point becomes, where do archetypes come from? First and foremost, archetypes come, and we should never forget this, from the *imagination*. For an archetype to exist, it must be imagined in some way. There are different ways people imagine archetypes. Sometimes archetypes are imagined in gentle meditative states. Sometimes they are imagined in dreams with deep meaning. Sometimes they occur in powerful "mystical" visions. Sometimes they are made up in a writer's meeting, or by committee. Note that this imagining of archetypes is not uncommon. Everybody has archetypal experiences at one point or another in their life. We find archetypal elements in the dreams of children (Jung 1964), in the *Dreamtime* of Australian aborigines (Lawlor 1991; Mudrooroo 1995), in the dream quests, vision quests and power quests of Indigenous North Americans (Broker 1983; Frederick Johnson 1943; Harner 2013), in the mystical experiences of Christian mystics (Jantzen 1995; Julian of Norwich 1901), and in the

output of artists like Michelangelo or Pink Floyd (for example their The Wall album has overtones of the Hero's Journey).

It is accurate to suggest that archetypes are sourced in human imagination and underlined by special experiences, but this does not get to their root. The question remains, where does human imagination come from? Carl Jung suggested archetypes were "archaic remnants" or "primordial images of our primordial human experiences, present in an "immensely old psyche" that still forms the basis of our modern mind (Jung 1964). He suggested these primordial ideas are expression of our "instincts" and "physiological urges" that "manifest themselves in fantasies and often reveal their presence only by symbolic images" (Jung 1964). They are "the unconscious image of the instincts themselves, in other words...they are *patterns of instinctual behaviour." (Jung 1980:44: italics in original)*. According to Jung, archetypes represent the way our primitive, but curiously more powerful, unconscious mind "thinks;" as Jung says archetypes, as representations of a powerful symbolic unconsciousness, "paves the way for solutions" (Jung 1980:33) to issues, fear, problems, etc. More recently, but in the same vein of thought, evolutionary psychologists and neurologists have suggested that archetypes are "core representations of social instincts" (Vaughn and Neuberg 2019) that arise as a consequences of the challenges our ancient ancestors faced. As Becker and Neuberg note (2019:61), "Archetypes arise from complex adaptive systems that have been selected to solve social and biological problems."

There is certainly truth to the notion that archetypes are at least partially rooted in biological systems. But they are more than that. **On the one hand**, if one is prepared to put aside materialist presumptions for a moment, it is possible to suggest that archetypes might also be sourced in conceptual/symbolic communications from a consciousness that exists independent of the individual human mind and body, from what Dossey (2015) calls a non-local mind. In this case, archetypes would emerge in dreams and meditative/mystical experience as communications with this non-local mind. This will appear a controversial statement to some, and we're not going to deal with it here except to say that some scientists, even very famous ones, acknowledge that consciousness may exist outside the body (Wilber 2001). My suggestion to you is, don't be dogmatic; keep an open mind.

On the other hand, while archetypes may be rooted in biology and imagination, they never remain in a pure or original form. As soon as they emerge, whether through dreams, visions, or spontaneous insight, they are picked up, interpreted, and reshaped by human minds and human hands. That is, archetypes are always *filtered*, *expressed*, and *materialized* through specific cultural, psychological, and social lenses. Carl Jung called this process **elaboration** (Jung 1980), noting that the final form an archetype takes depends heavily on a person's biography and past experiences. To this we must add elaboration is also shaped by one's social context, ideological conditioning, and class position.

So, archetype may have biological roots, but they may also be bigger than biology. They are also never found in original form. They are always elaborated in some fashion, filtered through personal and collective lenses.

For analytic clarity, it is useful to distinguish between primary and secondary elaboration. Primary Elaboration of archetypes occurs when the individual who experienced the archetypes interprets and talks about the experiences themselves. Primary elaboration occurs, for example, when a child has an archetypal experience and then shares that experience with their dad or school mates. Secondary Elaboration occurs when someone else takes over the interpretive process. For instance, the parent of that child might relay the story to a psychologist, who then writes about it in a published text. If that text becomes widely distributed—as in the case of Jung's own works (Jung 1964)—the secondary elaboration becomes a kind of canonical interpretation that persists across generations. In such cases, the original experience is refracted through someone else's ideological, cultural, or scholarly lens.

Elaboration, both primary and secondary, is important for two reasons. One, because elaboration can lead to distortions in our understanding of archetypes. Jung realized this. He said that elaboration could result in something "entirely different" from the original experience (Jung 1980:9). This can occur via both primary and secondary elaboration. Humans are biased. Without proper training (even with proper training) they can easily spin and distort archetypal experiences. They can do this unconsciously as would be the case if a child or adolescent were

elaborating their experience within a Christian framework, or it could occur consciously, as for example when the Freemasons took a bunch archetypes and elaborated those onto a deck of Italian playing cards for the purpose of indoctrinating the population with ideas that support and harmonize with the capitalist system emerging at that time (Sosteric 2014).

Speaking of the tarot, the second reason elaboration is important is because is a primary mechanism of ideological capture. Archetypes, once elaborated, can be embedded into wider symbolic systems by institutions with specific interests. As we have seen (Sosteric 2014), the Freemasons took a set of preexisting archetypes and elaborated them into what we now recognize as the Tarot, transforming a mundane deck of Italian playing cards into an instrument of capitalist indoctrination.

In short, archetypes may begin as spontaneous symbolic insights, but they do not stay that way. Through elaboration, filtered by biography, class, and ideology, they are woven into the symbolic infrastructure of society. Understanding this process is essential for any serious inquiry into how archetypes shape, and are shaped by, systems of power.

Key Terms

Before closing up this section of Unit Two I would like to introduce four concepts that we can use to better talk about the sociological dimensions of archetypes, these being symbol factory, system architect, ideological institution, and contested space.

First, we'll start with system architect. A System Architect[5] is any individual (theologian, philosopher, esotericist) that works to actively generate, refine, and encode the archetypes and master narratives that shape human consciousness. Marx had a term for this. He called them **Conceptive Ideologists**. According to Marx, a Conceptive Ideology is an individual who uses what he called the Means of Mental Production to control human thought and behaviour (Marx 1978) The folks who created the modern Tarot deck were system architects because they used the means of mental production (cultural capital in the Lodge, book publishing) to create narratives that would shape thought and behaviour in directions favourable to emerging capitalism.

A Symbol Factory[6]is a specialized institutions devoted to the creation, manipulation, and strategic deployment of archetypal content. Symbol factories are the cultural workshops where system agents do their conceptual/archetypal work. When a bunch of Freemasons got together and created the new tarot, they were operating as system architects inside a symbol factory (the Masonic Lodge).

Finally, Ideological Institutions are structures and social systems tasked with the *dissemination*, normalization, and enforcement of the narratives, beliefs, values, and worldviews created by system architects. These institutions include families, schools, churches, social clubs, media conglomerates, entertainment industries, state bureaucracies, and so on. Ideological institutions translate the abstract symbols and metaphysical blueprints of the symbol factories into curricular

5 https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/index.php/System_Architect

6 https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/index.php/Symbol_Factory

standards, cinematic blockbusters, moral education, liturgical performance, professional ethics, and even scientific paradigms. This translation renders the raw material into socially intelligible, routinized, and self-reinforcing practices. Schools teach obedience, competition, and hard work. Religions preach obedience and suffering while congregation kneel in obeisance. Films reproduce good/versus evil tropes (Star Wars). Each of these institutions integrates archetypal content elaborated upstream, filtering and adapting it for consumption at various social levels of society. By embedding symbolic frameworks into everything from bedtime stories to PhD dissertations, ideological institutions lock archetypes into the collective imagination and play a pivotal role in maintaining psychological, emotional, spiritual, and economic alignment with the interests of the accumulating class.

Contested Spirituality

When examining archetypes from a sociological perspective, we can discern a four-step process that archetypes can go through on their way to becoming established in the spiritual lexicon of a culture. **Step one** is the actual experience. **Step two** is the primary and secondary expression and then elaboration within elite driven symbol systems. **Step three** is the production of archetypes for wider distribution (creation of cultural artifacts like Tarot, a Star Wars movie). **Step four** is the distribution of these archetypes to the intended consumer, i.e., the masses going to church or attending a Star Wars movie.

Cultural elites, system architects, play a central role in the elaboration and dissemination of archetypes, but they are not the only agents involved. Archetypes, and the narratives constructed around them, operate within a **contested symbolic space** (Nesbitt 2020). This space is not passively occupied by the masses, particularly these days; rather, it is actively negotiated, subverted, and reconstructed from below. Grassroots actors, often marginalized or oppressed, can generate, reclaim, and reconfigure archetypes to challenge dominant ideological formations and offer emancipatory alternatives.

A paradigmatic example of such grassroots reconfiguration is found in the emergence of Wicca and contemporary Paganism. As Margot Adler (1986) notes, these traditions emerged in direct response to the perceived authoritarianism and spiritual sterility of Western monotheism. Within these counter-traditions, practitioners construct alternative archetypal systems rooted in earth-centered spirituality, divine immanence, and feminine power. We see this quite clearly when we consider the archetypal figure of Aradia, drawn from Charles Leland's *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches* (1899). In Leland's text, allegedly derived from Italian witchcraft traditions, Aradia is portrayed as a messianic daughter of Diana, a *female saviour* sent to Earth to teach the oppressed the arts of resistance, healing, and magical liberation. In this mythos, Aradia functions as an archetype of divine rebellion and sacred insurrection. She answers the big question "What do you do with all the bad people." She is a spiritual liberator who empowers the downtrodden through the transmission of forbidden knowledge—sorcery, herbalism, divination, and ritual, all

explicitly directed against the institutions of priesthood and aristocracy. This is a profound reversal of elite narrative logic. Where elite-encoded archetypes (e.g., the meek Christ, the obedient wife, the passive mystic) function to induce submission and ideological acquiescence, the archetype of Aradia represents a **revolutionary feminine divinity** who calls for the binding of oppressors and the destruction of tyrants. Her symbolic valence is not one of quietism or transcendental withdrawal, but of embodied, insurgent praxis.

Aradia is not the only example of grassroots archetypal resistance. We can find additional evidence of this contest in the various stages of archetypal production identified earlier, in the artistic renderings of Tarot decks or in the artistic output of writers, musicians, painters, mystics, and others working to create alternative symbol systems. For example, the animated series *Stephen Universe* subverts several traditional archetypal conventions.

Conclusion

Archetypes are foundational symbolic structures that shape how individuals understand themselves, their purpose, and the world around them. Far from being inert or purely psychological, archetypes are powerful sociological instruments—capable of organizing meaning, regulating behaviour, and naturalizing ideological systems. Whether encountered in dreams, mystical experiences, or popular media, archetypes function as deep answers to life's

Big Questions, and as Jung observed, they underlie and "create myths, religion, and philosophies that influence and characterize whole nations and epochs of history" (Jung 1964:76).

However, as this paper has shown, archetypes are not neutral. Through processes of elaboration, sacrilization, and institutional reproduction, they are frequently co-opted by system architects working within elite symbol factories to serve the ideological and material interests of the Accumulating Class. The result is a planetary symbolic infrastructure saturated with archetypes that promote obedience, suffering, subservience, and false transcendence. These archetypes distort consciousness, impair healing, and obstruct both personal development and collective liberation.

Nevertheless, archetypes remain a contested space (Nesbitt 2020). As the case of **Aradia** demonstrates, grassroots actors can and do reclaim symbolic sovereignty by creating or reconfiguring archetypes aligned with healing, Connection, and planetary balance (Leland 1899; Adler 1986). These counter-archetypes often emerge from below, in response to both spiritual alienation and structural oppression, offering alternative answers to the same existential questions elite systems distort.

The task before us, then, is to deliberately re-enchant the symbolic field—but this time on a foundation of psychological integrity, humanistic principle, and collective healing. This will require at least three steps. First, we need a rigorous historical, psychological, and sociological

analysis of archetypal systems that exposes how elites have manipulated them for political and economic control (Ehrman 2007; Perry 2020). Second, we must engage in the conscious elaboration of new archetypes grounded in connection, needs satisfaction, and planetary well-being. Archetypes must support life, not capitalism. Third, we must democratize their production and dissemination, leveraging digital tools to diffuse symbolic authority beyond elite institutions (McHoul and Grace 1993).

Importantly, this project of archetypal reform must also confront the complicity of science in the symbolic disenchantment of the modern world. As Krippner (1988:131) notes, science played a part in this disaster by "disenchanting the world and stripping it of deeper meaning and ritual." To this, we can add that science has also helped destroy the human psyche by erasing mystical experience—a critical source of archetypal insight. The result is a spiritual and symbolic vacuum, one that has allowed elite-created meaning systems to dominate the human imagination. Given that humans clearly need answers to existential questions, and clearly respond to archetypal depth, this vacuum demands urgent scholarly intervention.

Note that his call for re-enchantment is not new. Comte (1852) tried to found a new "positive religion" to replace corrupt ecclesiastical systems. More recently, scholars have called for a re-enchantment of science through cosmological narratives and depth discourses that provide meaning without reverting to superstition (Krippner 1988; Laszlo, Grof, and Russell 1999; Swimme 1988). But such projects risk failure when they unconsciously import elite-encoded

archetypes. Laszlo (2006), for example, adopts a secular language of systems and coherence, but still smuggles in the archetypal dualism of good versus evil—an elite symbolic relic with roots in the Persian Gathas and the Sassanian high priesthood (Sosteric 2018). Without a critical sociology of archetypes, even the best-intentioned projects will remain contaminated.

That is why a new symbolic foundation must be developed. Whether we draw on suppressed Indigenous wisdom (Lawlor 1991; Some 1994), develop fresh symbolic grammars, or combine both, the essential criterion is this: archetypes must be anchored in human needs, psychological insight, and planetary reality. The archetypes we live by will either sustain and deepen the crisis or seed the cure.

The future of human meaning, and planetary survival, depends on which path we choose.

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