

Re-thinking The Germinative Point

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The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal, 11:4 (1993), 45-53.

Page numbers in the original publication are given in the text in brackets [].

I

[45] For some time now, Jungians have generally considered Jung's 1902 doctoral dissertation *On the Psychology and Pathology of So-Called Occult Phenomena* (hereafter *PPOP*) to be the *ur*-text of Jung's distinctive approach to the unconscious. In a 1955 essay, the distinguished analytical psychologist Gerhard Adler put it most succinctly: "Already [in his doctoral dissertation], Jung observed that we have to postulate 'a highly developed intellectual activity of the unconscious.' It is fascinating to see how this revolutionary idea, expressed here in a rather tentative way, has become the most powerful germinative point of his whole work, leading in its consequences up to the concept of the self." ["The Logos of the Unconscious," in *Dynamics of the Self*. London, Coventure, 1979, p. 33] Yet, now that we have had time to consider Jung's very early student lectures, the Zofingia lectures, which were published in 1983, this assessment must be substantially revised. In light of these lectures, the place of *PPOP* in the development of Jung's thinking takes on an entirely new significance.

In 1895, Jung, just shy of twenty years of age, was admitted to the medical school of Basel University. Soon thereafter, he became a member of the Swiss fraternity, the Zofingia, and was named chairman of this society in 1897. From 1896 to 1899, Jung delivered five lectures to the club which have now been collected [46] under the title *The Zofingia Lectures*. The most important of these lectures and the one decisive for this essay is "Some Thoughts on Psychology," which he delivered in May 1897. In this lecture, Jung, taking up the "vitalist" argument against the "mechanist" position, explicitly stated for the first time his conviction that the soul

[*Seele*] of the human being "extends far beyond consciousness." (Cf. Marie-Louise von Franz, "Introduction" to *Zofingia*, p. xviii.) His observation in full:

The vital principle [the soul] is more or less equivalent to the "life force" of the ancient physiologists. It governs all bodily functions, including those of the brain, and hence also governs consciousness to the degree that consciousness is determined by the functions of the cerebral cortex. Thus, we ought not to seek for the principle of life within the consciousness, and most particularly not in the consciousness of the self, as Kant did.

The vital principle extends far beyond consciousness in that it also maintains the vegetative functions of the body which, as we know, are not under our conscious control. Our consciousness is dependent on the functions of the brain, but these are in turn dependent on the vital principle, and accordingly the vital principle represents a substance, whereas consciousness represents a contingent phenomenon. Or as Schopenhauer says: Consciousness is the object of a transcendental idea." Thus, we see that animal and vegetative functions are embraced in a common root, the actual subject. Let us boldly assign to this transcendental subject the name "soul." What do we mean by "soul"? *The soul is an intelligence independent of space and time.* [pars. 95, 96; Jung's emphasis]

According to Jung, the human being is not co-incident with the conscious "I." In his words, consciousness is "contingent" and rests upon an un-conscious "transcendental subject" which is "intelligent." Thus, Jung stated for the first time: (1) that an un-conscious dimension of the human being must be posited which is irreducible to consciousness (but which embraces consciousness); (2) that this un-conscious dimension of the "soul" is a "subject"; and (3) that this un-conscious dimension of the "soul" as "subject" is "*intelligent.*" More to the point, we discover that it is this passage from this 1897 lecture that is more likely the true "germinative point of Jung's whole work, leading in its consequences up to the concept of the self."

[47] Even so, it is important not to be too hasty in drawing this conclusion, for Jung does obliquely suggest another understanding of this un-conscious dimension of the human being in the course of this lecture. Let us begin again, then, starting with some general remarks.

During his student years at the University of Basel (1895-1899), Jung appears to have been virtually unfamiliar with the major developments in psychiatry during the

last two decades of the 19th century. In particular, the five Zofingia lectures do not make any references to the work of Charcot, Janet, Bernheim, Binet, Breuer, or Freud. Jung was, of course, familiar with other scientific figures of the 19th century, including Wundt, although he had little use for the "mechanism" of the "stubborn Wundt, the slippery Carl Ludwig, and the spiteful [Emil Heinrich] DuBois-Reymond." [par. 108]

Jung's overriding "scientific" concern in "Some Thoughts on Psychology" was with the work of those 19th century thinkers sympathetic with the spiritist phenomenon. In particular, he sought to rescue from oblivion the work of Zöllner, Crookes, Weber, and others who were among the earliest researchers into spiritist phenomena. Thus, the youthful Jung had come to the conviction that the human being is not identical with consciousness quite independent of the work of the major psychiatric researchers of the latter part of the 19th century. The basis of his conviction was the occult-spiritist literature, and *not* the psychiatric literature.

The student Jung in 1897 was especially excited by the notion of an un-conscious dimension of the soul because it could help explain instances of *heightened* psychic functioning such as telepathy and telekinesis. Indeed, such phenomena led him to speculate boldly that this un-conscious dimension of the soul must be a kind of higher "intelligence." In particular, he cited the phenomenon of "materialization" and argued:

But most people are incapable of marveling at their own existence and thus cannot properly appreciate the notion of man as a materialization of soul, and thus we must look about for other phenomena whose spontaneous and instantaneous manifestation compels us to deduce an intelligent being as their *spiritus rector*. The phenomenon we seek is the wondrous materializations observed by Crookes, Zöllner, Wilhelm Weber, Fechner, Wagner, Wallace, and many others. [par. 117]

[48] After citing several examples of materialization taken from the studies of these authors, he concluded:

It would be easy to go on and on citing pieces of evidence that substantiate the idea of the *intelligent organizational activity of the soul*. But. . . the examples I have already cited must suffice. [par. 118; my emphasis]

Thus, Jung argued that the soul is "intelligent"—and further suggested that there is a dimension of the soul which, while "intelligent," is not equivalent to consciousness; this irreducible un-conscious dimension of the soul is "intelligent" and "purposeful" in a higher or more comprehensive manner than consciousness.

Nevertheless, we need to consider that in another place in the lecture he indirectly suggested a different possibility for understanding the nature of this un-conscious dimension of the soul. In discussing a certain hypnotic telekinetic phenomenon, the *Doppelgänger* phenomenon, whereby certain individuals in extreme situations often materialize "doubles" with which they can communicate, Jung noted that:

During the appearance of an authentic *Doppelgänger* (eidolon), the agent is generally in a deep, self-induced somnambulistic trance. However, this is not always the case. There are cogent reasons to believe that the degree of awareness characterizing the *Doppelgänger* is inversely proportional to that of the living agent. [par. 127]

The understanding of spiritist phenomena implicit in this observation is at odds with the position we have just discussed. On this reading, the materialized phenomenon is understandable as a content of consciousness which has in some way become lost to consciousness. That is, in an extreme situation the individual's consciousness narrows, forcing a content of consciousness to find expression in an extraordinary manner. Consequently, although inadvertently, Jung was close to considering the spiritist phenomenon as pathological: the un-conscious phenomena (the materializations, for example) are reducible to conscious contents which have become cut-off from consciousness. Such a position would deny to the un-conscious dimension of the soul the nature of an autonomous, superordinate "intelligence," which was Jung's fundamental speculation in this essay.

What is also noteworthy about this observation of Jung's [49] is that it roughly parallels the position reached by Pierre Janet in his work of this period. Janet had been arguing during the 1890s that such strange psychic manifestations are fundamentally pathological phenomena; they are best understood as properly conscious contents that have become "split-off" or "dissociated" from consciousness

because of a "restriction of the field of consciousness." [See especially Janet's lectures delivered to the Harvard Medical School in 1906 (*The Major Symptoms of Hysteria: Fifteen Lectures Given in the Medical School of Harvard University* [in English]. New York, Macmillan, 1907 and 1929) for a remarkably concise summary of his principles developed during the 1890s.] Yet, despite Jung's approximation to Janet's line of thinking here, it is important to keep in mind that Jung had not begun to wrestle with the work of Janet at the time this lecture was written. It is possible, then, that Jung had some inkling of a pathological element in the spiritistic phenomena before he took up in earnest his study of the work of Janet and the other psychological researchers.

Even so, in this lecture, Jung had no such reservations about spiritist phenomena explicitly in mind. The youthful Jung of 1897, soul aflame and eager to be initiated into the mysteries by the spiritists, was captivated by the theoretical speculation of an un-conscious dimension of the soul irreducible to consciousness and structured as a superordinate "intelligence." The exuberant 22-year-old concluded the lecture:

The new empirical psychology ... enables us to glimpse nature's abyss, to gaze into an intelligible world where the eyes seek in vain for any shore or any limit. Nowhere do we feel as keenly as here that we are living at the boundary between two worlds. Our body formed from matter, our soul gazing toward the heights, are joined into a single living organism. We see our lives coming in contact with a higher order of being. The laws governing our mental universe grow pale before that light, emanating from the metaphysical order, which it is granted us to dimly divine. The human being lives at the boundary between two worlds. He steps forth from the darkness of metaphysical being, shoots like a blazing meteor through the phenomenal world, and then leaves it again to pursue his course into infinity. [par. 142]

What the publication of the Zofingia lectures reveals is the decisive importance of the occult-spiritist literature of the 19th [50] century in the formation of Jung's distinctive understanding of the unconscious. Spiritistic research, and not psychiatric research, was clearly the wellspring of Jung's life-long theoretical and clinical preoccupations.

II

As Jung recalled it in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, he became committed to a career in psychiatry upon reading Krafft-Ebing's *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie* just before his graduation in 1899. In December of 1900, he took up the post of assistant physician at the Burghölzli Mental Hospital in Zurich under the directorship of Eugen Bleuler. In 1902, he completed his inaugural dissertation for his medical degree which was also to be his first published work, *On the Psychology and Pathology of So-Called Occult Phenomena*, until now the *ur-text* for all Jungians.

On reading *PPOP*, one is almost inclined to believe Jung's report that upon arriving at the Burghölzli in 1900, "I locked myself within the monastic walls. . . .and read through the fifty volumes of the *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Psychiatrie* from its very beginnings." [*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffé, translated by Richard and Clara Winston. New York, Random House, 1965, p. 112] He did seem to have absorbed—all in the scope of some two years—virtually all of the most important psychiatric scholarship of the last half of the 19th century. In particular, the work of Janet and the other dissociationist psychologists is central to Jung's analysis. Certainly, this was a dissertation that would satisfy an academic requirement.

Yet even in *PPOP*, Jung was still concerned with spiritist phenomena; he sought to understand psychologically the rather fantastic behavior and articulations of a 15 ½-year-old female medium (actually, his cousin Helene Preiswerk) whom he had carefully observed during the years 1899 and 1900. [In fact, he had joined seances with her as early as 1895, and she had quite a crush on him. See James Hillman's "Some Early Background to Jung's Ideas," *Spring*, 1976, pp. 123-136.] Yet, in comparison with the Zofingia lecture, in *PPOP*, his interest in these phenomena changed significantly.

Recall that in the Zofingia lecture, Jung had made the implicit suggestion that unconscious phenomena may be construed as split-off or dissociated contents of consciousness. In [51] *PPOP*, he took up this interpretation explicitly and moved it to the forefront of the discussion. Jung's fundamental understanding of the "subconscious" was now along these lines:

The patient's subconscious uses these simple perceptions for the automatic construction of complicated scenes which then take possession of his restricted consciousness. [par. 25]

It [one of the medium's subconscious personalities] was probably a dissociation from the already existing personality, and this split-off part seized upon the nearest available material for its expression. [par. 97]

The thought process sinks into the subconscious and only its final terms reach consciousness directly as hallucinations or as vivid and sensuously colored ideas. [par. 98]

. . . many ideas which, in themselves, would be worth preserving in consciousness, sink below the threshold, associated trains of thought get lost and, thanks to psychic dissociation, go on working in the unconscious. [par. 119]

These passages bear the unmistakable influence of the work of Janet on Jung's thinking. [See also John R. Haule, "Archetype and Integration: Exploring the Janetian Roots of Analytical Psychology," *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, Vol. 28, 1983, pp. 253-267, and "From Somnambulism to the Archetypes: The French Roots of Jung's Split with Freud," *The Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 71, no. 4, 1984, pp. 635-659.] Jung appears to have adopted Janet's general psychological point of view; that is, spiritist phenomena are fundamentally pathological psychic phenomena which are best understood as "dissociated" conscious contents brought about by a "restriction of consciousness."

How can we understand Jung's rather complete conversion to the psychological principles of Janet and the other dissociationist psychologists? One explanation might be that Jung desired to become a respected member of the psychiatric world, and he could hardly have done much better than to embrace the work of the much respected Pierre Janet. Nevertheless, we must remember that Jung did, at least remotely, suggest a similar interpretation of such un-conscious phenomena in 1897, some three years before his engagement of Janet's work.

This explanation will not altogether suffice, then. In the [52] end, Jung's change of direction may be better accounted for by considering his clinical training under Bleuler's supervision at the Burghölzli. The shocking and painful experience of working with severely mentally ill human beings can only have tested and tempered the enthusiasm of the young professional man. In the face of such suffering, he was looking for an understanding of the unconscious which could help account for such human brokenness; his solution at that time was to retrieve his own earlier implicit suggestion of a possible pathological element in the occult experience and to join it to the very substantial work of Pierre Janet in particular.

In any event, the critical observation is this: In *PPOP*, Jung fundamentally *abandoned* his principal position of the 1897 Zofingia lecture that the un-conscious dimension of the soul is irreducible to consciousness and structured as a superordinate "intelligence." The passage in *PPOP* which Adler and others have cited does not represent a breakthrough to a new position at all; in fact, it represents only the *remnant* of Jung's thinking in the Zofingia lecture. Only near the end of *PPOP* did Jung approach the line of thinking of the Zofingia lecture, and then ever so gingerly. Indeed, he issued a caveat by which he seemed to chastise his own youthful naiveté and exuberance:

In this field, we meet with a not altogether unjustifiable skepticism on the part of the scientific pundits. Even Dessoir's conception of the second ego aroused considerable opposition and was rejected in many quarters as too enthusiastic. As we know, occultism has claimed a special right to this field and has drawn premature conclusions from dubious observations. We are still very far indeed from being able to say anything conclusive, for up to the present our material is nothing like adequate. If, therefore, we touch on this question of heightened unconscious performance, we do so only to do justice to all sides of our case. [par. 137]

Covering himself further, he then proceeded to reduce purported cases of heightened unconscious performance to "cryptomnesia," a notion he borrowed especially from Theodore Flournoy. [Jung also devoted a short article to the phenomenon in which he specifically cited Flournoy's contributions. "*Kryptomnesie*," *Die Zukunft*, Berlin, 1905, pp. 325-334. Translated as "Cryptomnesia" in *Collected Works*, Vol. 1.] On this reading, even the most fantastic articulations of certain people can be traced back to material read or heard in the person's [53] lifetime. Only at the very end of this discussion in *PPOP*, after summing up his observations, did he add the comment that Gerhard Adler was to take special note of later:

Finally, there are cases of somnambulistic heightened performance which cannot be explained solely by the hyperaesthetic unconscious activity of the senses, or by the concord of associations, *but which postulate a highly developed intellectual activity of the unconscious*. To decipher the intended tremor movements requires an extraordinary delicacy of feeling, both sensitive and sensory, in order to combine the individual perceptions into a self-contained unit of thought—if indeed it is permissible at all to make an analogy between the cognitive processes in the unconscious and those of the conscious. . . . *I am inclined to regard the mystical system devised by our*

patient as just such an example of heightened unconscious performance that transcends her normal intelligence. [par. 148; my emphasis]

In fact, then, this very important passage in Jung's early work was but a chastened footnote to a long study on the pathology of occult phenomena. In *PPOP*, Jung's distinctive voice was fundamentally weakened—not awakened. Indeed, Jung's own voice—the voice of the Zofingia lectures—virtually disappeared altogether in his subsequently published work during his Freudian years, only to re-emerge—and once and for all—in the years just before his break with Freud and in his published theoretical work after 1911. [See my "In the Beginning: Jung and Freud on Introversion," *Psychological Perspectives*, Vol. 20, no. 2, 1988, pp. 244-255.]