

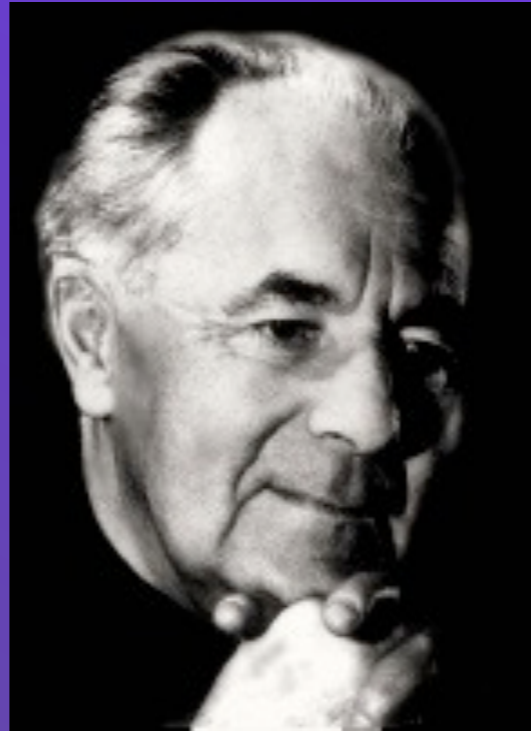
Jung and phenomenology: Images, things, and symbols

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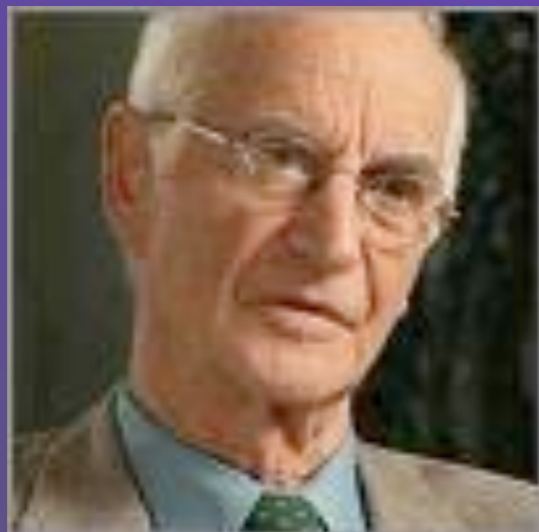
Carl Jung



Medard Boss



Martin Heidegger



James Hillman

An imaginary conversation

- Freud: A pen is a phallic symbol.
- Jung (shouting): But a penis is a phallic symbol!
- Boss: There is no such thing as a symbol.

The problem that runs through Jung's writings:

“Jung, as no psychologist before him, clearly recognized the artificiality of the mental separation of human reality into psychic subject and isolated external objects. He saw this as a malignant disease which had attacked all previous psychology in general and the investigation of dreams in particular.”

(Medard Boss: *The Analysis of Dreams*, p. 52. Trans. A. Pomerans. London: Rider and Co., 1957).

- On the other hand, Jung did not have the intellectual tools to stay with phenomena on their own terms. Hence:
- “It is my mind, with its store of images, that gives the world colour and sound; and that uniquely real and rational certainty which I call ‘experience’ is, in its most simple form, an exceedingly complicated structure of mental images. Thus there is, in a certain sense, nothing that is directly experienced than the mind itself. So thick and deceptive is this fog about us that we had to invent the exact sciences in order to catch at least a glimmer of the so-called ‘real’ nature of things.” (Jung 1926, para. 623)

Note Jung's Galilean-Cartesian assumptions

- res cogitans - res extensa (Descartes)
- Inner - outer
- invisible experience - observable fact
- meaningful - measureable
- subjective - objective

To read Jung as a phenomenologist:

- See through Jung's Cartesian language.
- Read Jung's discussions of psyche, interiority, images and symbols, NOT through the Cartesian category of mind, but as features of a world.
- For Jung, **psyche is not mind**. Psyche is the lifeworld (Husserl's *lebenswelt*): the material place of psychological life, that network of meaningful relations with which we are engaged.

Thus:

- “Whether I picture to myself the car I wish to buy or try to imagine the state in which the soul of my dead father now is--whether it is an external fact or a thought which concerns me--both happenings are psychic reality.... If I shift my concept of reality onto the plane of the psyche--where alone it is valid-- this puts an end to the conflict between mind and matter, spirit and nature.” (Jung 1931, para. 681)
- The psyche is not inside us; we are inside it.
- “As I see it the psyche is a world in which the ego [i.e., person] is contained. Maybe there are fishes out there who believe that they contain the sea. We must rid ourselves of this habitual illusion of ours” (Jung 1929, para. 75). This “habitual illusion” is, of course, heir to Descartes.

Thus:

- These three terms--things, images, and symbols--bear traces of the Galilean/Cartesian tradition, but, phenomenologically interpreted, they share the same ontological Being as the presencing and gathering of a world.
- We might understand the differences between things, images, and symbols not in terms of their Being, but as our modes of being towards their original occurrence as things (Heidegger) or images (Jung/Hillman).
- We are present to them as **things** when materially present, as **images** when present in dream, imagination, and fantasy, and as **symbols** when their presence is potentially transformative for us. But they are ontologically equivalent. (Whether I walk my dog, remember my dog, or dream of my dog, it is the same dog!)

Things and the Fourfold

Michael Sipiora has integrated Heidegger's mytho-poetic ontology of the Fourfold with Hillman's imaginal discussion of *anima mundi*, the soul of the world.

- The Fourfold -- earth, sky, gods and mortals -- does not refer to particular things, nor domains in which things occur, nor to conceptual categories for things.
- The Fourfold is the Being of all things: the gathering into presence--at once ontological and imaginal--that allows each thing to be what it is.
- Thus, for Heidegger, “A thing things.” It is a verb as much as a noun. Each thing gathers earth, sky, gods, and mortals in its own way.



Medard Boss: Mythos and logos
--the fourfold?

Conclusion

- What Jung calls a *symbol* is a thing as imaginal presence.
- What Jung says about things as “symbols” is fine, but we should not need to import symbolic meaning from elsewhere.



Vincent van Gogh, Peasant Shoes, 1887

“A pair of peasant shoes and nothing more. And yet-

“From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker shines forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles lies the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment [the shoes] is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at the surrounding menace of death” (p. 34).

“The art work let us know what shoes are in truth” (p. 35).

Heidegger, M. (1971). The origin of the work of art. In *Poetry, language, thought*. Trans. A. Hofstadter. New York: Harper and Row.

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