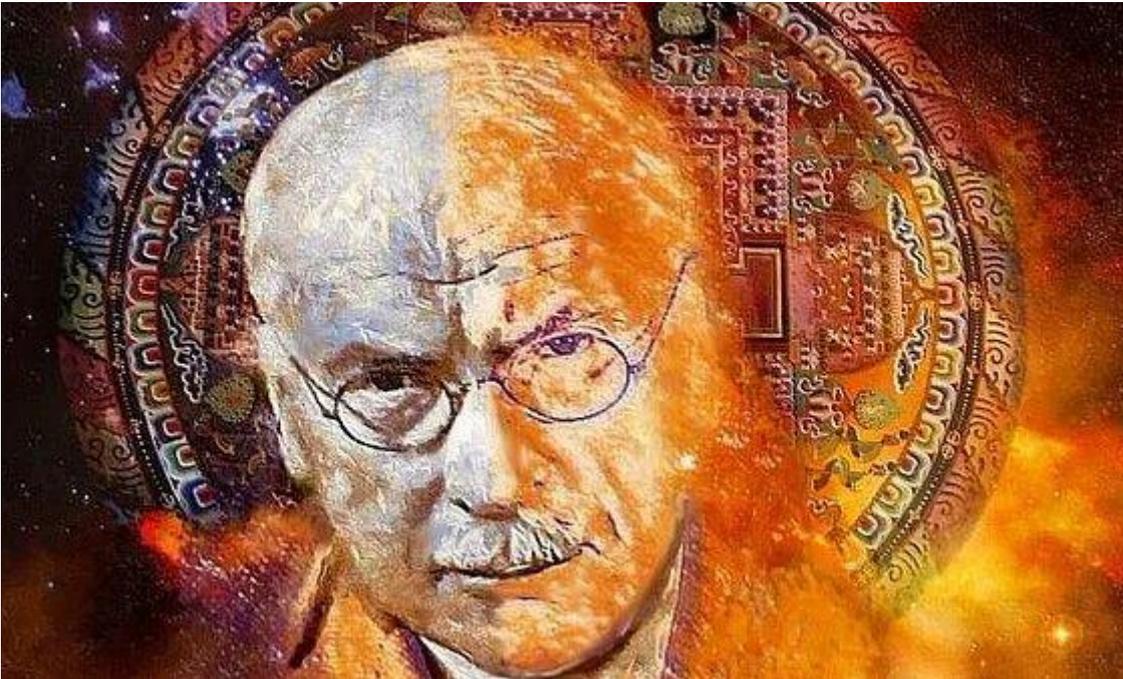


Jung and Individuation



In informal conversations with Professors at Ryerson University, one gets the impression that Jung is certainly a fringe aspect of the academic look at psychology. Though many psychologists and philosophers have attempted to purport their own articulations of individuation, Jung certainly made his own contributions to our understanding. What is the Jungian school of thought as it relates to individuation? This paper will articulate some of the key features of Jung's perspective in the hypothesis that Jung's contribution is insightful and discerning, and the process of individuation, as expressed by Jung, is a worthy endeavor.

In "Aristotle's ontogenesis: a theory of individuation which integrates the classical and developmental perspectives" Michael Horne articulates different types individuation concepts, including that which was put forth by Jung. Jung asserted that our psyches evolved due to the way that the unconscious and conscious compensated for each other. This happened for Jung through the "Transcendent Function". The

Transcendent Function can be described as the part of us that begins to recognize that the values and mores of the collective society we are a part of is separate from our own unique inherent potential. This involves an "archetypal realization", which is characterized as the realization that there is more to us than we had previously acknowledged. This can take the form of unexpressed aspects of our creativity or a challenge to the norms from our childhood that we had previously accepted without question. Whatever our potential, it is unique to us. Through this succession of realizations, we are led to encounter our "inner divinity". This is the part of us that is whole, non-contradictory, and where our conscious ego is in alignment with our unconscious drives and psychological complexes. The Self here becomes the representation of completeness. Self-realization has occurred. (2002)

Michael Horne goes on to articulate that Jung arrived at his concept of individuation through his practice of being a psychoanalyst with adults who were older in age. Jung saw the process of distinguishing the self from the societal collective as a feature of maturity, which would likely occur in adults who were in their late life development. While Jung did identify this process as possible in stages of growth throughout life, individuation becomes more of a primary concern and pronounced feature in older adults. Individuation thus becomes the integration of the ego, conscious self with the unconscious aspects of us. For Jung, the ego always remains separate. While integration can occur, as represented by the total Self, the ego maintains a defining separateness. (2002)

In "The Self and Individuation", J.W.T. Redfearn articulates that Jung had a unique perspective of viewing what he termed the "Self". Jung correlated the image of God with the concept of the Self. This expression leads to philosophical questions, but can better be understood in connection to Jung's understanding of the Divine. For Jung, God is a

mythological figure that is filled with ambiguity and yet remains the image of wholeness. When Jung thought and articulated God, he considered the obscurity, inscrutability, vagueness, sovereignty, horror, fright, and super-human power associated with the divine. It is the unknowability of the grandness of God that makes up the correlation to the Self. The Self here becomes our complete self, the vast unconscious part of us that we are yet unaware of and the minute conscious, or the part of us we are aware of, together that make up our own inner God. It is the Unconscious parts of us that most frighten us. (1977)

There is an interesting contradiction, or rather distinction, which Redfearn articulates. As children, we need to form a God-like image of ourselves. Our earliest experiences become one where we are the center of our mother's universe. This is the stage of our early life that the ego begins to formulate. It is in our early childhood that we begin to appreciate that we have a distinct self and form a sense of our identity. The problem occurs when we take this identity and overly identify with it to the exclusion of other aspects of our psyche. We become overly self-identified with external aspects of our lives right into adulthood. The process of individuation involves the recognition that we are not solely the conscious parts of ourselves, nor are we only the absolute center of our world. There are other forces at work in our lives that we may not be consciously aware of. These forces determine our motivations and the state of our emotional contentment. The willingness to contact those hidden parts of us and begin to move away from the strict identification with only our ego is the first steps towards the integration that characterizes individuation. (Redfearn, 1977)

Individuation requires that we be willing to slowly bring to light those aspects of ourselves that we deny. Jung articulates that what we most reject as a part of our psyche can be found in the aspect of the unconscious he termed the "shadow". Bringing these denied, rejected,

and frightening aspects of ourselves up to light for consideration is a significant part of the individuation process. The process involves paying special attention to one's dreams, for it is in the dreams that Jung understood the unconscious seeking to communicate with the conscious psyche. But the process requires more than simple willingness. For Jung the process of working towards the wholeness and integration that individuation demands is also one that entails self-honesty. It takes honesty to actively examine the hidden messages and motivations in an attempt to find synthesis and live a more authentic, integrated life. (Redfearn, 1977)

In "individuation: finding oneself in analysis- taking risks and making sacrifices", Martin Schmidt defines some of the aspects of individuation and documents some of the process involved in the pathway towards individuation. Schmidt understands individuation as the progression towards self-realization as it contributes to the unearthing and understanding of significance and reason in life. Individuation involves the methods by which one discovers oneself and becomes the person that one really is. It is dependant on the interaction and amalgamation of opposites, as represented by the conscious and unconscious. Psychoanalysis is an important contributor to individuation as it aids to accelerate the process and facilitates the rare opportunities to witness and smooth the progress of transformation of the self which otherwise may not happen. (2005)

Schmidt identifies some key features of individuation. These include the integration of the collective and personal. Jung believed that one very important part of individuation involved the removal of masks that we take on as false wrappings. The persona we hold is something we learn early in our lives as survival mechanisms and rarely reflects our authentic, inner selves. The collective, societal values we integrate as part of our psyche is a contributor to the persona we have chosen.

Letting go of the mask and recognizing our false values are important to living a more integrated life. (2005)

Jung believed that our lives are separated into 2 distinct parts. In our early life we are primarily concerned with expanding our ego identity and building our sense of personal status in the world in which we live. It is only in the second half of our lives that we begin to recognize the falsity of our aims and start to consider the finite nature of our existence. It is in the realization that we will die and as we confront that reality that the motivation begins to live a more full, authentic, and whole life. When we embrace these processes that we can find ourselves in a better place to take efforts towards authenticity and integration. It is when we resist this natural flow of psychological evolution that neurosis based in the fear of engaging in life or facing death begin to arise and display themselves in our lives. (Schmidt, 2005)

Individuation is also the recognition that who we are is largely in relation to others. This assertion brings up the interesting contradiction in Jung's body of work. On the one hand, we need to interact with people to fully know who we are and the fullness of the aspects of our psyche we deny and hide from ourselves can only be presented through being honest in how we actually interact with those around us, particularly those we have and sense strong emotional ties to. The self here becomes not who you are, but more significantly, the self that you demonstrate. If the self makes itself evident in our actions, then our actions are always present in our relations to other people. But at the same time, the full development of the self and the process of individuation requires that we detach from others and see ourselves, and our journey, as distinct from those around us. When people are able to detach and see themselves as solely responsible for their own emotional well-being, then they are well on the pathway towards the integration that characterizes individuation. (Schmidt, 2005)

In "The Eden Project; In Search of the Magical Other", James Hollis draws an interesting diagram to explain how communication occurs and how it is in communication with others, particularly those in which we have a romantic investment, that facilitates the self-awareness that is an important feature of individuation. Hollis speaks of how we speak with others on conscious, ego levels, but we are also communicating with them on unconscious levels with all of our inherent psychological complexes. In this way, we are speaking not only ego to ego, but also ego to unconscious and unconscious to unconscious. The other person is likewise speaking to us. In these interactions, if we strive for awareness, what arises within us can be valuable information in contribution to our personal individuation. This facilitation of our personal individuation process occurs when we recognize that what we are experiencing is for us alone, to aid in our journey towards wholeness. It is when we keep the focus on the other and project our inner psychic needs onto them that we can impede our own progress. (1998)

Another aspect of individuation, as articulated by Schmidt, is the recognition that it can be understood as both a state and a process. Individuation is a state when we are living our complete, authentic, and integrated self. But at the same time, this is an ongoing process for the unconscious is so vast. Just when we think we know, more information presents itself to alert us to the fact that there is yet more within the unconscious psyche to integrate to our consciousness. (2005)

The process of individuation is not linear. It involves a circular, spiral pathway that leads back towards the center of us. It is a journey that demands sacrifice. The constant sacrificing of aspects of us that we may have overly identified with in the past but no longer represents the most authentic expression of our truest self. This can be painful and uncomfortable, but the rewards are vast (Schmidt, 2005). To undertake the willingness to integrate all aspects of ourselves, the honesty to look

at what we most deny, and the self-love to live a life most in line with who we really are at the core of our being, are all acts of great courage and bravery. The bravery of individuation can lead to the most rewarding of lives.

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