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THE PICTURE METHOD IN JUNGIAN PSYCHOTHERAPY*

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IN THE early nineteen thirties Jung began to refer to a "picture method" by which many of his patients expressed the symbolism of the archetypal psyche. When I was a student in Zurich during that time such pictures were called "unconscious drawings" which seems to have arisen from the assumption that an analysand in the process of therapy might use this method to discover unknown factors which could be analyzed in much the same way as dreams or other fantasy material, so as to integrate them into consciousness, which was thought to be accordingly enlarged, expanded in the sense of improved by their inclusion.

Jung (1966, pp. 135–136) himself in writing about this activity shows some ambivalence in using the term "the unconscious" to denote the content of these pictures. He refers to them as "pictorial representations of psychic processes, . . . those pictorial elements which do not correspond to any 'outside' " and "must originate from 'inside'. As this 'inside' is invisible and cannot be imagined, even though it can affect consciousness in the most pronounced manner, I induce those of my patients who suffer mainly from the effects of this 'inside' to set them down in pictorial form as best they can . . . In contrast to objective or 'conscious' representations, all pictorial representations of processes and effects in the psychic background are *symbolic* . . . The possibility of understanding comes only from a comparative study of many such pictures."

In my experience the patients who use the "picture method" most effectively are temporarily like genuine artists in maintaining a certain conscious neutrality toward the imagery that comes to them and they would not say that what they bring to light is either strictly conscious or unconscious; it comes from anywhere. Sometimes it is activated by a strong emotion and seems to explode into consciousness as Eliade (1965) observes; at other times it gradually emerges as the inevitable bearer of some old truth which asks to be remembered meaningfully in a new context.

It must by now have become clear to the reader that by speaking of Jung's "picture method" as part of a process of psychological development I am leaving on one side another possible use of drawings which really are unconscious and therefore belong to a different category. These are the automatic "doodles" we all make from time to time and the children's drawings which are dashed off without any observable psychic effect, certainly nothing that the child artist can in any way evaluate or integrate consciously. Such drawings may be interesting to the psychiatrist for their diagnostic value for his patients and to the nursery school teacher for information in understanding behavior problems of children. As such they can therefore not in any sense come to be considered as part of any method. But if such drawings are correctly used by a psychologist sensitive enough to guess their hidden meaning the patient or problem-child may suddenly and with surprising facility adopt this form of expression as a way of gaining insight and therefore help himself to overcome painful or frightening symptoms. The "picture method" is, therefore, not a prescription or pedagogic device but the recognition of a picture forming process arrived at as a natural tendency spontaneously under favorable circumstances.

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I remember one such case in particular. She was an attractive young woman with a most distressing form of obsessional neurosis. I could not conduct my therapeutic sessions with her without serious disturbances in communication. I could not, for instance, interpret a dream without her obsessional identification with the most unfavorable aspects of it and whatever interpretation I gave she was bound to think of several more which she thought must be equally true. At length I suggested that she try finger painting and she settled down to producing at least half a dozen before each session from then onward. I did not ask her much about these paintings at first so as to influence her as little as possible. Like a child she enjoyed doing the paintings and I imagined that this must only be so because she was satisfied temporarily at having an occupation in which she could so harmlessly express her obsessions and at the same time win my approval. But I grossly misjudged her. The paintings became in a comparatively short time part of a developmental process I would never have guessed she would be capable of undertaking. A still more remarkable fact emerged when, after discontinuing her therapy, a year later she became a really skilled and original painter. In this way her painting became the vehicle for transforming at least part of her neurosis into a creative expression.

Such a case is certainly not common but it is remarkable how many therapists I have met who reported cases of a similar type who became, if not painters, at least vocationally or avocationally successful in a genuinely creative activity as a result of encouragement by the picture method. It is as if neurosis in many cases turns out to be a vocational mishap, a past failure to take some important cultural turning into a road into which only later, indirectly, in response to psychotherapy, a breakthrough is made. How often does one hear people say at these times, "Why did it take so long for me to find myself, that is my real ability?"

There are, on the other hand, a group of patients where such optimism is never to be trusted even when it seems equally justified. This is the group we must call psychotic or at least borderline psychotic. Jung (1966, p. 137) describes the drawings of these people as revealing "their alienation from feeling. . . . From a purely formal point of view the main characteristic is one of fragmentation, which expresses itself in the so-called 'lines of fracture' – that is, a series of psychic 'faults' (in the geological sense) which run right through the picture. The picture leaves one cold or disturbs one by its paradoxical, unfeeling, and grotesque unconcern for the beholder." This type of patient is not at all concerned with getting or enjoying the approval of the therapist. But in spite of the grotesque, frequently banal, and sometimes shocking content of such pictures they are, as Jung (1966, p. 138) says,"full of a secret meaning . . . " beginning "with the symbol of the Nekyia – the journey to Hades and the leave-taking from the upper world. What happens afterwards, though it may still be expressed in the forms and figures of the day-world, gives intimations of a hidden meaning and is therefore symbolic in character."

Naturally, being an archetypal image, the Nekyia may manifest itself in the drawings of neurotic, or relatively normal people, as well as in psychotics. The young woman's finger paintings I have mentioned is a case in point. Her first drawings were descriptive of her approach to therapy, which was tentative and full of resistances to digging more deeply "inside" herself. But gradually this deepening occurred, one sign of which was her impatience with the watery, insubstantial nature of finger paint. She thickened it by adding dry powder or tempera to the paint thus intensifying the effects she wished to produce, so that, although she was still using her fingers to apply the paint to the paper, she was really painting as seriously as a painter in gouaches or oils. The early paintings were fairly bright in color but there came a darkening as she applied the thicker paint and the Nekyia was announced by a distinct murkiness as if she were indeed leaving the day-world for the inner night-world of a descent to some sort of Hades. Jung (1966, pp. 139–140) says of this: "The Nekyia is no aimless and purely destructive fall into the abyss, but a meaningful *katabasis eis antron*, a descent into the cave of initiation and secret knowledge."

One day my patient brought a series of paintings which abruptly ended with one painted entirely in black over the whole page without a glint of color or even a bit of white from the paper. She looked at me anxiously but expectantly as I took it from her hand and I felt the tension of approaching a critical moment in her therapy. My reaction to the painting was instinctively positive and I told her how happy I was that she had been willing to acknowledge the blackest feelings about her predicament because then perhaps she could begin to come

out of it. I thought that having descended to the bottom of the cave she could now rise up again. Her immediate relief at this reaction spread over her face and her whole body seemed to relax. This was because she had got from me the exact opposite of the reaction she had expected whenever she felt depressed. Her mother was a Christian Scientist who had unfailingly tried to cheer her up whenever she felt depressed or even when she was just normally indifferent, and of course any kind of sickness was taboo. The black color of her painting became then for her not just depression or hopelessness which should be cured, but an expression of absolute evil which the Christian Scientist must deny as nonexistent but which she now felt privileged to accept. The paintings then took a new direction representing both light and dark elements together in an expression of wholeness which Jung (1966, p. 140) calls "that *homo totus* who was forgotten when contemporary man lost himself in one-sidedness."

We see then, that a much larger problem is being solved than anything so personal as my patient's rebellion against her mother. The *katabasis* is "followed by a recognition of the bipolarity of human nature and the necessity of the conflicting pairs of opposites." (Jung, 1966, p. 140). Even so, we might assume that therapy by the picture method has adequately done its work by providing the abreaction together with its correction of an early neurotic pattern of response and that now life will comfortably arrange those situations in which the patient may use her newly won insight and react as a whole person. I therefore must emphasize the fact that use of a "picture method", as in this case, did not cure the patient's neurosis; this still had to be done by the scientific method of analysis. We should promise for the picture method no more than a beginning. Jung (1966, p. 140) expresses this as follows:

"This state of things in the psychic development of a patient is neither the end nor the goal. It represents only a broadening of his outlook, which now embraces the whole of man's moral, bestial, and spiritual nature without as yet shaping it into a living unity."

This caution is especially important in connection with the psychotic patients who paint their way into the Nekyia and then, hopefully, out again. For them the bipolarity of human nature may become "a hazardous affair and can lead at any moment to a standstill or to a catastrophic bursting asunder of the conjoined opposites." (Jung, 1966, p. 140). Usually I do not even advise such potentially psychotic patients to use the picture method at all. But my advice is frequently disregarded and some of these people are already drawing like mad before they ever come to see me so there is nothing to do but to accept these products as part of the symptomatology and treat them accordingly. In the art products of neurotic or normal individuals one often suspects that there is too much self-congratulation and that instead of his "inside" self the analysand is indulging himself in producing a doubtful example of art for art's sake. This frequently ends in a paralysing resistance when he catches himself cheating in this way and he may refuse to accept even some quite genuine revelations which the therapist may see in his work. This kind of subterfuge is totally absent in those cases we regard as psychotic or potentially psychotic and of course this is true of genuine artists. If these people draw at all they do so in earnest as if it were a matter of life and death. They may go in for a sly kind of trickery at times but one never would mistake this for mere self-love nor the childish demand for attention.

When I have a patient of this type I notice that my reaction to their pictures is, like their own, intensely serious and disturbingly anxious to avoid stirring up the psychotic threat which such an evocation of the "inside" self invariably exposes to view. What their pictures suggest, in the most favorable cases, is a kind of apotropaic magic by creating symbols which can be placed like charms to ward off the malevolent threat of damnation or partially to dissolve the lines of fracture or conceal them with living plant forms. In still more favorable cases a real union of opposites may occur at least in that underworld to which their descent has brought them. In one series of drawings my patient, a young man of twenty-five, showed a human figure (roughly identified as himself) undergoing a process of transformation from a lifeless creature into to a kind of a snake charmer in control of a serpent which entwined itself obligingly around a tree trunk from the top of which there appeared a leafy branch as a healing symbol, a sort of *pharmakon athanasias*, or medicinal plant symbol.

In spite of this favorable development the whole process stopped short of any real conscious integra-

tion and this was shown in the drawing itself by a grotesque version of the "outside " world with unreal childishly drawn figures of men and animals. This was a case where the "inside" world was bound to remain the real one for him; the "outside" world of people and things was essentially unreal, tragically disappointing, and mythologized to an alarming extent. Accordingly this man needed much careful watching and tending by friends and relations who knew how to handle him. But even they could not avert the explosive outbursts which occasionally overtook him without warning. In between he was exceedingly gentle and wise and humorous. Without treatment he could easily have developed megalomania and created a phony religious cult with devoted followers attracted to his knowledge of those initiatory depths to which he had descended and from which he could, more often than not, return to establish a fitful but genuine kind of life and work. It was greatly to his credit that he did not allow himself or others to exploit his inner wisdom but kept it largely to himself.

In the symbolism thus outlined I have mentioned the ambiguous and changeable role of the serpent and this image is exceedingly common today, as if it had something to do with a genuine religious problem or rather religious lack. There is no lack of spiritual symbolism in the form of angels or doves to be found in traditional Judeo-Christian art but in this type of picture it is more often the snake that insists on taking its place in the hierarchy of spiritual figures. Two very different but amusingly apt expressions of this are to be seen, one in a mural painting by Jung at his country house in Switzerland, and another by an uneducated negro woman artist, Minnie Evans, from a rural community in North Carolina. In both of their "inside" pictures we find a striking image: a snake is about to enter the front door of a church. Jung's church suggests a kind of domed chapel or baptistry and Minnie Evans' is also a small building with round arched door and formal potted tree designs on either side and two phallic-like towers. Minnie Evans calls her church a temple, and like Jung's it has a Romanesque feeling. The snake introduces a living chthonic factor into this otherwise formally Christian or Islamic place of worship as if this were the most natural thing in the world to happen.

In these paintings we are in the presence of the pure archetypal image unaffected by neurotic or psychotic distortions and obviously what we are dealing with is much larger than our therapeutic art alone can encompass, since it is part of a socio-religious need that comes from the "inside" of the whole era in which we live. It is as if we are moving out of the heaven-oriented aspect of the Christian period toward new and unknown religious forms which seem only able to announce their coming from below, from that Earth which has not been allowed full recognition since the Great Goddesses of the Neolithic Age endowed it with their spiritual wisdom. Minnie Evans' initial painting done on Good Friday 1935 could easily be confused with a neolithic vase design. Jung says, "Seldom or never have I had a patient who did not go back to neolithic art forms." Clearly he spoke also from his own experience.

One version of Jung's painting may be seen in a photograph from his Red Book in which he recorded his own subjective drawings (June, 1963). Photographs of Minnie Evans' paintings were shown at the Art Image Gallery in New York and reproduced in The Bennington Review (1969). It is noteworthy that in Jung's painting an old man with outstretched wings hovers over the temple and Minnie Evans paints a dream called *Prophets in the Air*, so in both cases the chthonic element represented by the snake is emphasized in contrast to a strong sense of spiritual uplift of the kind we may be distressed to see strongly or exclusively illustrated in our patients' drawings because of the danger of their producing a state of psychic inflation. Jung was admittedly wary of this danger and knew why he had painted the winged figure and balanced it by the serpent. As he laughingly said when showing me his mural, "You see the snake is on its way to church."

Minnie Evans maintained that "all her symbolism is unconscious" (Starr, 1969, p. 43) but she does justice to the picture method in her artistic control and when she says, "Something spoke to me like this: 'Why don't you draw or die?' " (Starr, 1969, p. 42). Jung reports the same urgency in the paintings he made during the period of his first discovery of active imagination when it seemed he was in communication with a wise but invisible guru, Philemon. He is the winged man in the Red Book painting and in the mural.

I should not like to give the impression that all products of the picture method define a religious problem or present an historical pictograph corresponding to a certain mythologem (i.e., well known

myth). Sometimes the imagery represented in these pictures expresses some kind of mathematical problem associated with the symbolism of numbers, and further drawings attempt various solutions which usually result in the formation of geometrical forms interacting to form centers of the kind Jung has described by the Tibetan term, *mandala*. These forms may be circular, ternian (threefold), or quaternian (fourfold) or combinations of all three. These drawings are less like art products than they are like scientific experiments. The goal for all such activity is essentially a philosophic one, suggestive of the Pythagorean theory of numbers of the Axiom of Maria in the symbolism of alchemy. The psychological relevance of this type of experimentation is well stated in G. Adler's *The Living Symbol,* in an account of an initial drawing by a patient presenting herself for analysis. Against an oval patch of blackness she painted a rod of yellowish-white metal, at one end of it was a monogram of the figures 1, 2, and 4 superimposed on one another. Adler (1961) tells us:

"So far as the sequence '1, 2, 4' is concerned it represents the development of the mandala symbol, and of psychic totality. The number 1 represents an original preconscious totality; 2 is the division of this preconscious totality into two polarities, producing two opposites . . . And the further subdivision – corresponding to the synthesis and antithesis – would produce the four parts of the circle, and with its center, signifying the mandala: ⊙, ⌀, ⊕. The sequence of the three numbers 1, 2, 4 would thus represent the 'formula' of the mandala."

Adler then quotes Jung as saying: "This unspeakable conflict posited by duality . . . resolves itself in a fourth principle, which restores the unity of the first in its full development. The rhythm is built up in three steps, but the resultant symbol is a quaternity." Thus E. Edinger (1972), in a recent work, commenting on Adler's and Jung's statements concludes:

"It is clear from these quotations that Jung does not consider the quaternity a completely satisfactory symbol for totality. Rather a union of the quaternity with the trinity in a more complete synthesis is required."

In contrast to this "philosophical" problem the mandala symbolism may be expressed in a social form as represented by the drawings of Perry's (1953) psychotic patient in *The Self in Psychotic Process.* Here the ternian and quaternian entities are represented by warring political parties between which the patient as ego-figure has to mediate so that the centering process can take place. The schizophrenic person is by the nature of his illness suffering from social alienation so that a mobilization of meaningful human alignments, as political parties in a democarcy may represent, may serve as a particularly apt symbolic compensation.

There is one further aspect of the picture method I should like to mention and this is the evaluation of its place as art by art historians and critics. Most products of the method are clearly unartistic, in the sense that they are badly drawn and fail to satisfy the criterion of being even true "primitives". As defined by Peter Fingeston (1971), "In all art works there is an indissoluable unity between form, meaning, and expression." In contrast to this, symbolic drawings as such "transfigure objects by imagining beyond them to meanings which, in some cases, are not even implicit in them. The visible, immediately available datum, therefore, is no more than a first step of a more or less long chain of creative transformations." There are, however, a large number of symbolic drawings that do qualify as works of art. Such were Jung's and those of Minnie Evans. Jung's might be described as neo-Medieval paintings such as might be found on the walls or in the illuminated manuscripts of medieval monastaries. Minnie Evans paintings are described by Nina Howell Starr (1969, p. 41) as surrealist art:

"In Minnie Evans we have an American surrealist without conscious aestheticism and without intellectualism . . . "

Yet each of these criteria is sadly uninformative because these "artists" do not paint as artists but only as themselves. Apart from those categories of art into which we might wish to place these drawings something freshly spontaneous and uncharacteristic comes to light, old yet indescribably new as all archetypal painting should be.

In some modern artists this archetypal painting may be recognized as timely and become fashionable as Paul Klee's work did in the nineteen twenties and thirties or as Morris Graves' painting in the nineteen forties and fifties. But for the most part archetypal painting is either ignored or misjudged

because it does not technically fit in with the usual trend of the times; it does not break new ground because of its innate conservatism of content. The same images reappear over and over again defying excessive innovation. But occasionally, as in William Blake's art, painting of this type enjoys a posthumous fame. That is why I usually advise my patients to keep their drawings to themselves, live with them and continue to learn from them and if they do attract interest from outside to be sure that they have delivered all the message they have to convey before allowing them to be shown as works of art.

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