Democracy and authoritarianism in the age of cyber-power

Archetypal political states of mind and their tricksters

Elias Winterton

United Kingdom

This paper discusses the potential heuristic value of Jungian psychology to the emerging relationships between humans, non-humans and technology. This reflection aims to answer the question of whether or not analytical psychology can contribute to developing the philosophical paradigm of 'post-humanism' (Förster, Ferrando, 2019). Posthuman studies (Braidotti, 2018) created and adopted a new specific methodology and praxis to overcome an anthropocentric *Weltanschaung* so as to embrace a thorough inquiry into non-human life: from animals, to artificial intelligence and its concerns with non-human experience as a site of knowledge. The Covid-19 pandemic experience has demonstrated the limits of a vision excluding non-human life from the equation. The encounter of Jungian and depth psychology with intersectional approaches linking themselves to a deconstructionist tradition of contemporary European philosophy (from Deleuze to Braidotti) has generated interesting ideas and perspectives (Main, McMillan, Henderson, 2020). The original Jungian model of the psyche, and in particular revising the idea of a *psychoid archetype* could offer new epistemological tools to embrace a Jungian post-human view of the relationships between humans with other living beings such as things, animals, plants, the ecosystem and, more important to the aim of this discussion, artificial intelligence and digital technologies. The paper briefly explores the manifold transformations of human potential following the enhancement of technological science and its applications in human interactions with Artificial Intelligence (AI) that have started to rewire the human brain and nature, triggering generational mutations already visible among Gen Z (born after 2000) and native digitals (children born after 2010). The paper discusses the revolutionary changes that cyberspace has introduced into political life at both individual and collective levels, and illustrates three cases illuminating the trickster dynamics that rule democracy and authoritarianism in the contemporary world.

Psychoid unconscious, unus mundus and post-human existence

Jung postulated a psychoid function of the unconscious, a psychic modality of processing information out of consciousness and that can be experienced only indirectly. This idea is connected with the *unus mundus* or 'one world' (1946) in which everything is intangibly interconnected. This is the visionary attempt revealing a decisive stance to move beyond the Cartesian splitting of the body and mind domain, which can echo with contemporary non-dualistic (neo) Spinozian views (Adams & Braidotti, 2017). In light of the massive technological revolution following the creation of the *world wide web* by Sir Timothy Berners-Lee (1989), the idea that the human psyche is constantly and intangibly connected with the outer realm clearly indicates that Jung's ideas cannot be disregarded as mere 'metaphysical speculations' (1944, cit. in Williams 2019). The idea of a psychoid archetype might be epistemically applied to understanding the virtual dimension or cyberspace and the transformations that information technology has introduced in human lives at both individual and collective level. Biotechnologies and neurosciences can allow an overcoming of the material limitations of the human condition by creating parallel psycho-sensorial realms, virtual realities, prolonging bodies' functionality by implanting microchips, and empowering mental and physical abilities.

On a different note, the Jungian model of psyche could be re-adjourned in its relations between conscious and unconscious by considering to what extent the daily use of technology has modified the normal patterns of functioning of brain areas so that we can re-think the psychosomatic complex of Ego in light of its virtual 'E-ness'. Jung's definition of the psychoid archetype can allow us to heuristically understand the intersection of the individual and the collective dimensions in cyberspace as well

as multiple changes with regards to the intra-psychic, relational, social and political realms.

The digitization of human life

In the last decade, starting in 2010 wearable technology has unpredictably developed to produce a fast revolution in digital health. Wearable technology refers to sophisticated electronic technologies or computers that are incorporated into items of clothing and accessories, which can comfortably be worn on the body, such as, for instance, smart glasses and watches. Wearable devices easily provide sensory and scanning features, biofeedback and tracking of physiological functions in the present moment and their accuracy of measurement depends on the hardware of the algorithms used. They are becoming pivotal for a healthy lifestyle. Digital technology can enhance the efficiency of health services making it unnecessary to physically visit a doctor, especially for simple procedures such as checking blood sugar and blood pressure. In the field of psychiatry, the potential of wearable technology use is enormous and can allow monitoring at a distance the effects of medications on psychobiological activities, mood, sleeping patterns, and helping patients to keep engaged and compliant with their cure while encouraging proactivity. Smartphones can provide accurate digital phenotypes, detecting through phone sensors, keyboard interactions and voice and speech analysis at least three main clusters of information. Phone sensors are able to detect the level of activity, location and sociality; the interaction with keyboard can measure reaction time, attention and memory, while prosody, sentiment and coherence are assessed through the analysis of voice and speech. Undeniably, digital phenotypes capture in real time behavioral patterns, cognition and mood changes, making it possible to diagnose, monitor for

remission and relapse and predict the risk of suicide and other conduct based on the data extracted via smartphone (Akeret et al. 2018; Borger et al. 2019).

The social impact of wearable technology can be impressive[1]. Wearable systems are also used to augment the intact portion of sense in individuals with different degrees of sensory impairments (Shull & Damien, 2015). In this case, haptic wearable devices have been created and are defined as untethered, ungrounded body-worn devices that interact directly with the skin in natural environments and/or in laboratory settings. At the moment wearable haptic devices have been shown to improve function for a variety of clinical applications including: rehabilitation, prosthetics, vestibular loss, osteoarthritis, vision loss and hearing loss and, in the future, new devices might support amputees as well as blind or deaf individuals.

Scientists have found evidence of the effects of neurotechnology on brain neuroplasticity, demonstrating how the daily use of smartphones can produce the extension of neural networks between visual and sensory neocortical areas (Gosh, 2015) compared to individuals who do not use smartphones. These neural transformations can be dramatic and irreversible when microchips and body-mind prosthesis are applied. The downsides of using plasticity and brain-computer interfaces to enhance human life have yet to be accurately investigated.

In view of the irreversible technological transformations that have challenged human limitations over the last decade, the symbolic stance of the Ego bridging the

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[1] For example, the mobile app Khushi Baby (www.kushibaby.org) helps community health workers to motivate and monitor the health care of mothers and children in remote areas of the world. The app was born out of a classroom project at Yale University and works by interfacing with a digital necklace worn by patients via Near Field Communication (NFC). All the data is stored on a tiny NFC chip worn in a form of a pendant that is synced to the cloud and displayed on an analytics dashboard where insight can be acted upon by health officials.

real and the unreal archetypal states of mind entails new tasks and functions. Jung's definition of the archetype allows us to heuristically understand the intersection of the individual and the collective in cyberspace in relation to the orientation of political attitudes and choices. The use of the Internet and social media through algorithmic manipulation has shown its pivotal grip potential in both democratic, populist, authoritarian and revolutionary movements.

Cyberspace and the collective unconscious

A unique study conducted in 2014 by Adam Kramer and colleagues[2] brought experimental evidence of a massive scale of emotional contagion through social networks on a sample of 689,003 Facebook users. This study sets in stone the Jungian notion of *participation mystique* as an 'unconscious identity in which individual psychic spheres interpenetrate to such a degree that is impossible to say what belongs to whom' (Jung, 1958: 851-52). It provides a clear description for many collective phenomena of emotional contagion through the use of social media. In a previous study (Fowler & Christakis, 2008), researchers had proved that emotional states could be transferred to others via emotional contagion, leading people to experience the same emotions without their awareness. Emotional contagion is well established in laboratory experiments, with people transferring positive and negative emotions to others. In their work, the authors collected over a 20 year period data from a large real-world social network and showed that that longer-lasting moods

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[2] Kramer et al. (2014) have set an experimental design with people who use Facebook to test whether emotional contagion occurs outside of in-person interaction between individuals by reducing the amount of emotional content in the News Feed. When positive expressions were reduced, people produced fewer positive posts and more negative posts; when negative expressions were reduced, the opposite pattern occurred. These results indicate that emotions expressed by others on Facebook influence our own emotions, constituting experimental evidence for massive-scale contagion via social networks.

(e.g., depression, happiness) can be transferred through networks although the results were controversial. The study by Kramer and colleagues also suggests that, in contrast to prevailing assumptions, in-person interaction and non- verbal cues are not strictly necessary for emotional contagion, and that the observation of others' positive experiences constitutes a positive experience for people. Of note, this study was conducted without the informed consent of the participants while using data extracted by Facebook, raising serious questions about its ethical standard.

Citizens of the cloud: archetypal political states of mind and their tricksters

Technological transformations have reshaped the relationship of individuals and groups with power (Qvortrup 2007; Development, 2004). Cyberspace and social media have become key tools to influence, direct and mediate social representations, political attitudes and crucial determinants of elective choices. Three situational cases demonstrate the deep archetypal dynamics that influence political behaviors taking place in the virtual realm of the Internet at the intersection between individual and collective states of mind. The first is the constitution of the Five Star Movement (Movimento Cinque Stelle) in Italy as a form of direct democracy through the Internet. The second focuses on the use of personal data by Cambridge Analytica to orient the Republican elections in the US; lastly there is the use of social media in revolutionary movements and potentially violent political upheavals. These three examples are intended to clarify the importance and value of Jungian concepts in the contemporary world and call for a creative re-elaboration of Jungian psychology for its application at the intersection with other fields of knowledge and disciplines.

The Five Star Movement (M5S) was born as a joke between two 60 plus year old billionaires, both following the dream of absolute participatory democracy –"1 vote= 1 person". They sought to demolish what they considered to be a corrupted and unequal elite leading the political system and to replace that corrupt elite with new political blood coming from the whole society. Their experiment seems to have failed after the Five Star Movement became an institutionalized political party not only losing its original revolutionary power but showing paradoxically authoritarian behaviors to control its members. It appears that all the activities of elected parliament members are controlled, regulated and sanctioned through a digital platform 'Rousseau', which is owned by a private company Casaleggio S.P.A.. The fact that a private entity controls so closely the choices of elected PMs is clearly a violation of constitutional rules and rights of elected representatives (Iacoboni, 2018).

The Arab spring represented an outstanding turning point for "liberation technology" (Diamond & Plattner, 2019) by helping to mobilize citizens' protest and oust autocracies. The power of simple communication apps, such as WhatsApp, to assemble in a few minutes thousands of netizens to advocate for their freedoms appeared to overcome the control of the government. On the other hand, authoritarian governments can also use technology to stifle protest and to target dissenters in order to stay in power. The tricksterish nature of e-democracy reveals its perturbing influence on human relations in cyberspace as they take place in an ethereal, immaterial and unbounded environment where imagination and projections can be manipulated by algorithms which can direct and orient identities and group movements, based on simple selective principles of human cognition that opt for convergent information rather than considering divergent data (Hommel, B.

2012). The documentary 'The social dilemma'[3] provides an approximative discussion of this issue. If authoritarian governments can legislate censorship, install firewalls, remove or manipulate contents, use high-tech surveillance to detect, arrest, and persecute critics and ban certain information, as reported by Freedom of House in 2018[4], democratic and liberal countries can exploit the illusion of digital democracy in more subtle ways. Cambridge Analytica used illegal data mining to manipulate public opinion and shape the outcome of the US elections in 2016[5] and the Brexit referendum in UK (2018). This scandal was exposed and explained to a wide audience by 'The Great Hack'[6].

Conclusion: Jungian reflections in a post-human present

The epistemic potential of analytical psychology and psychoanalysis (Johansen et al., 2016) to explore in depth the current relationships between human and non-human realms appears to be quite underestimated. In light of the fast-paced technological changes, it seems essential to widen the original Jungian model of psyche in order to analyze and integrate the impact of new technologies on the overall psychic functioning and in particular on the development of the Ego complex. With the term E-ness ('E' as Ego and Electronic), we could describe the virtual dimension of agency. The relatedness of humans with artificial intelligence and

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[3] *The social dilemma*, Netflix Official Series, 2020 by Jeff Orlowski.

[4] Freedom House (2018). The raise of digital authoritarianism. Available at https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2018/rise-digital-authoritarianism. reported about China's model of internet control that in 2018 implemented the Cybersecurity Law centralizing and upgrading surveillance to extreme human rights violations.

[5] https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election

[6] *The Great Hack,* Netflix Official Series, 2020, by Karim Amer and Jehane Noujam.

technological devices should be considered an important mission pursued by Jungian scholars and clinicians. The effects of the virtual realm on individual psyche, cultural consciousness and collective unconscious have been proven by the political archetypal states of mind and their tricksterish dynamics. Several venues of research can be identified for those who want to apply Jung's ideas in the post-humanities and to contemporary scenarios where human and artificial intelligence will interact and develop mutually. In particular, Jungian psychology might serve the purpose of rethinking the ethical challenges of these relationships to include a new accountability and responsibility for devices invented to replace human activity (self-driving cars and drones for example). These new frontiers of post human communication require the supervision of regulations and policies so as to ensure ethical conduct, transparency, and consent for the huge population now using social media.

Elias Winterton is an analytical psychologist and psychotherapist, dedicated to expanding Jungian and post-Jungian ideas beyond the clinical setting. Their interdisciplinary approach aims to apply depth psychology to emerging fields of knowledge and experience.

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