

The Actor Working with Archetypes

SOME DEFINITIONS

... forms or images of a collective nature which occur practically all over the earth, as constituents of myths and at the same time as autochthonous individual products of unconscious origin. (Jung, qtd in Campbell, Hero 18)

Archetypes (mid 16th century via Latin from Greek arkhetupon “something moulded first as a model”, from arkhe – “primitive” + tupus – “a model”) ("Archetype" 34) are – **for purposes of this exercise** - the forms which inspire "the basic images of ritual, mythology and vision" (Campbell, Hero). In Jungian terms, they are tendencies to form representations of a motif, closely related to instincts; they are manifestations of physiological urges that have been perceived by the senses (Jung 57-80).

The term archetype, in this sense, describes neither an external, independently existing entity nor is it "meant to denote an inherited idea, but rather an inherited mode of functioning" (Jung, qtd in Stevens 17-18). The symbols, ideas, feelings and behaviours that the archetype gives rise to "occur as a result of an innate predisposition" (Stevens 18).

Campbell renders them available to us in a slightly more tangible form, suggesting that archetypes are the models for the beings who inhabit mythology, and myth functions to bring forth "a sense of awe before the mystery of being... to render a cosmology... to support the current social order", and "to initiate the individual into the orders of his own psyche, guiding him towards his own spiritual enrichment and realization" (Campbell, Masks 519-21). Mythology would appear to facilitate and to inspire the ways in which artists communicate their society's hopes and aspirations back to themselves (Laughlin 715), as well as revealing “hidden processes in reality relative to the human condition” (Laughlin 729). Tendencies to manifest oneself as, and to recognise Jung's archetypal or Campbell's mythic entities could be understood as "biological - built into the wiring of every human being" (Vogler 34). We would appear to be born with a facility which allows us to classify friends, enemies, carers, challengers. The ability to categorize, which derives from this facility, rescues us from the confusion of having to identify each new individual we meet without the benefit of prior clues. The society we are born into will affect our attitudes and decisions, but

the ability to undertake such a decision making process appears to be an innate part of our cognitive processes (Damasio 131-33).

Archetypes manifest themselves within human consciousness by means of the appearance of certain qualities that are common to particular mythic characters of legend and folklore. For example, the Trickster-figure can be recognized in the rhymes, games, stories and songs of many different societies, including hunter-gatherer, pastoral and agricultural societies (Pelton 5) and also within urban literary and cinematic traditions (Goldman 230). Nanabush (Algonquian, North America), Ananse the Spider (Ashanti, Ghana), Loki (Scandinavia) and Iba Tiri (PNG), Homer Simpson (USA) exhibit similar qualities: they are predominately devious, charming, crude, antisocial and self-seeking, but their tricks and misdemeanours often serve, perhaps unwittingly, to benefit the society they seek to undermine (Goldman 232; Pelton 2-3). Bucking the system is understood, paradoxically, as part of the system.

Of course our intellectual judgment always seeks to define the archetype in unambiguous terms and so overlooks the essential, for its most characteristic feature, which we must above all bear in mind, is its ambivalence. (Jacobi 59)

Once an archetype has approached the edges of perception, it is impossible to consider it as isolated from another archetype; the edges – as it were – are blurred. Individual archetypes cannot be “isolated from each other in the unconscious, but are in a state of contamination, of the most complete, mutual interpenetration and interfusion” (Jung, qtd in Neumann 7). The archetype is “essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived...” (Jung, qtd in Gallo 397). It is this paradoxical, ambivalent quality which seems to relate to the kind of dilemma faced by the actor, who is in some sense both herself and the character, or not herself and yet herself, and whose words are both hers and not hers (because they are the author's).

Archetypes can be described, explained and recognised but somehow the more precisely one attempts to define them individually, the more they lose their archetypal quality and become either stereotypes, or particular individuals. Because they are 'tendencies' or 'patterns', their manifestation in a definable form ceases to be an archetype, and becomes a particular manifestation. The goddess Diana manifests the archetypal qualities of the Huntress, but she is not, in or of herself, the archetype

Huntress, which is "irrepresentable" (Jung, qtd in Neumann 6).

The issue of whether there really are such things as archetypes is a matter for debate, however, the process of working in the manner proposed does not require archetypes to exist, merely that you agree to work 'as if' they exist, in a situation of common consensus as to what they may be. The performer who chooses to work in this way embarks upon a creative process of invention, to "attend to the transformation without being misled by it" (Rapp 141). When we imagine ourselves to be 'as if' we are something, or someone other than the way in which we usually think of ourselves, we draw upon an inbuilt ("hard-wired" according to Vogler) ability to conceive of the imagined entity (Goldman 9). To imagine something unimaginable is a paradox. It is the equivalent of "realising unrealisable desires" (Goldman 11). The actor endeavouring to imagine an object or a future event is in the process of dis-covering something which already exists (Rapp 142); she is "searching" for the experience of that event (Donnellan 21). This does not explain or remove the paradox. Ultimately, there is no point in trying to remove the paradox. If we accept its existence - and its right to exist - then we are free to transform.

When we attempt to define ourselves we tend almost invariably to limit ourselves. The self to be defined is so complex and unique it is virtually impossible to find a reference point with which to draw an analogy, "an evanescent reference state... continuously and consistently reconstructed" (Damasio 240), slightly or hugely different from moment to moment. It shifts its emphasis, or at least it appears to, because as soon as we turn the searchlight of our gaze upon it, it becomes what we are looking for, something akin to a sense of identity. The defined self who emerges through this process is not static, cannot be contained, packaged and regurgitated. It is a new form of self that will continue to shift and defy definition for as long as the journey continues. Not 'new' in the sense of arriving pristine, unconnected from anything which has gone before, it is new in the sense that a new moment has been allowed to come into existence, new combinations of feelings and movement and understanding allow this same body/heart/mind/voice (person) to appear to its audience as someone else, someone they may never have met before, but with whom they may have something in common.

The actor who is thinking about remembering her lines or decisions made in the rehearsal room, or who is consciously presenting aspects of her training, is unlikely to be delivering the performance of a lifetime. The actor who surrenders herself to the experience of the moment within the situation of the play is in a position to be interesting to the audience at the very least. As we speak, we articulate just that thought we are in the process of thinking, the one which gives rise to the word, but which has now (in the instant that follows) been superseded by another thought/word. When performing written text, in order to articulate the author's thought/words the actor needs to engage in the "journey between finding the articulatory truth of someone else's shaped thought in a carefully worded line and finding the reference point to a truth of our own" (Wade 138).

To attempt to embody an archetype is to attempt to embody a paradox: honest dishonesty; chaotic tranquillity; knowing ignorance; pure evil; courageous vulnerability; or any other combination of apparent opposites. To attempt to embody an 'archetype' which does not contain contradictory qualities is probably tantamount to attempting to embody a stereotype. A stereotype can be reduced to an unambiguous, non-contradictory model. An archetype will be capable of manifesting contradictory qualities.

adapted from Archetypes and the Performance of Text
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WORKING WITH ARCHETYPES

Figures 1 and 2 at the end of this handout are an approximation of the way these particular archetypes can be introduced. It will be apparent that there is a danger that these descriptions, when laid down in black and white, could be prescriptive. They should be seen as no more than a guide, an imaginative framework within which to work. At every stage of the describing process, remember that these are only ideas, images, that there is no right or wrong response to them, that you can never succeed in becoming an actual archetype, that the archetypal qualities you strive to embody are already within you, and that each individual will manifest these qualities in slightly different ways.

THE PHYSICAL QUALITY

Imagining the physical features with clarity and precision will help you to achieve clarity in the execution of the resulting physical quality. Observe and recognise the most delicate and subtle physical shifts in the body as well as the more obvious ones, so that you may begin to distinguish one state from another and to appreciate the subtle shifting process that is going on all the time in the living body.

The aim of this process is not to ‘get it’, but to aim for it; what we actually want to ‘get’ is not to be a particular archetype, which is impossible, but to experience the qualities which that archetype manifests itself as, and – even more importantly – to train ourselves in the art of letting go of any sense of failure; to speed up as much as possible the process of ‘having another go’ whenever we feel we have ‘lost’ what we were aiming for. We are trying to balance on the point of a needle, to reside for as long as possible (even though it may only be for a nanosecond) in the place of no-place, “the void” as John Wright calls it (J. Wright), and to strive constantly to return there.

THE VOCAL QUALITY

The open, energised, flexible and fully embodied voice which is accessed or rediscovered in your warm up is part of the physical process. Just as the quality of your movement reflects the archetypal qualities you are aiming for, so will your voice

reflect, or resonate with those qualities. Rather than “build it, and it will come”, let us work with “allow it, and it will be”.

THE MANTRA

The 'secret' of the mantras, that which underlies the intention of each mantra, is to say what one means and to mean what one says – and nothing else. The aim is to own the words utterly, there must be no other agenda, no *pretending* that they are one's own words: **they are one's own words**. The Mantra is not explanatory, it is not insistent or particularly self-assured; it is simply a statement of fact. Once this has been experienced, it is possible to recognise the difference between this quality/feeling of being "behind the words" (Berry) and the feeling of 'doing', or 'acting' the words. Say what you need to say for no other reason than that it happens to be so in that instant.

It is essential to strip away any 'meaning' or interpretation which is extraneous, and that means any interpretation over and above the simplest 'meaning' which the words of the mantra contain. Words already have ‘meaning/s’, whatever we do or don’t do to them. They already mean what they mean – to you, or to a listener. When I say: “mean what you say, say what you mean” I want you to allow the words to mean whatever they are going to mean, in spite of you, at that moment in time as you utter them. Allow yourself to DISCOVER how they sound, and – if you must – what they mean (to you, in that moment) as you say them. Allow the words to be articulated from whatever physical, emotional and mental state you happen to be in at the time. Trust yourself to be capable of this apparently unconsidered act.

The process of embodying an archetype is constantly changing; when it stops changing, stereotype results. Rather than stating “I’ve got it” when you feel the shift into a new state of physical, vocal and/or emotional being, note the sensation of transformation, acknowledge what you are doing and feeling and allow yourself to continue to transform, to respond with new feelings and actions. The ‘archetype’ is alive, it is you, you are alive and in a constant process of transformation. This is your opportunity to observe yourself in that process, to recognise when you either consciously or inadvertently block it, or stick in a particular state, so that you may work at letting go again.

Figure 1 The Masks

Feature	Hero	Fool	Child	Huntress	Maiden	Mother	Trickster	Hermit
Forehead	High, strong, ridged; slightly knitted brow	Lumpy, bumpy, with a strong vertical line between brows	Broad	High, smooth and strong	Soft, smooth	High, broad, smooth	Low, broad	Deeply furrowed, full of pain, tension
Eyes	Clear, wide, farsighted, some tension lines around eyes	Hooded eyes, large upper lids, strong creases outside of eyes (laugh lines)	Open, clear and curious	Highly arched eyebrows, open alert eyes	Wide, rounded brows, almond shaped eyes, hooded lids, sidelong look	Wide brows, slightly hooded eyes. A downward crease at the outside of the eyes. Strong, sad, lived in (seen a lot)	Protuberant, almost platform like eyebrows, one higher than the other; asymmetrical, quizzical quality; large wide eyes	Heavily ridged brows, smooth, filled in eye sockets (he is blind)
Nose	Handsome, strong, slightly flared nostrils	Slightly skewed, broad nostrils	Straight, pert, a little snubbed	Straight	Pert, upturned	broad but protuberant, strong with a broad base	Small and neat, slightly skewed	Slightly hooked
Cheeks	Deeply furrowed	Broad, bulbous, puffy, droopy cheeks	Full cheeks	high wide cheekbones (symmetrical face)	High, full cheekbones (attractive, youthful face)	Rounded, strong cheeks	Prominent cheekbones	Wrinkled (old face, with lots of pain and tension)
Mouth	welshaped firm, not smiling	Wide upper lip, mouth slightly open, lower lip sagging but not sad	Cupid-bow lips	Wide, generous mouth, full lips, ready to smile	Cupid-bow lips, very full, potentially pouting lower lip	Wide upper lip. Long, full mouth, gentle smile.	Raking mouth held (mm, mm)	Sunken lips
Chin	Strong, cleft	no chin	delicate, well-shaped	firm chin	small, well-shaped, slightly dimpled chin	firm chin	cleft chin, neither strong nor weak	Tense cleft jaw

(adapted from "The Voices of the Archetypes of Myth", (J. Wright, and Frankie Armstrong)

Figure 2 The Qualities

Archetype	Centre of Gravity	Mantra	Specificity
HERO	High – lower chest	“Of course I can”	Walk tall, willingly shoulder immense responsibilities without regard to personal cost; have a keen sense of the correct way of doing things; only draw your weapon if you intend to use it (and always strike true); act from the purest of possible motives; polite and well-mannered; simplest action is construed as conflict – it takes immense strength to be frivolous.
FOOL	Very low - groin area	“I don’t understand”	Soften the knees, lower the centre of gravity, make a low crude gesture in front of the groin and laugh; focus on objects in the room without recognition; give body away to gravity; be lost inside your head, in a world of your own, with a very short attention span; emotionally open, uninhibited; high pain threshold.
CHILD	Quite high – upper chest	“Ok”	Live in the present; be direct, factual attitude; accept everything at face value – no sub-text; truthful; no opinion; no self-doubt; spontaneous and free.
HUNTRER	Centre – belly area	“I am very strong”	Walk tall, lightly, run and leap (as if over brooks, or fallen logs in a forest); take pleasure in leaping and listening; feel strong, powerful, with feline stealth and agility; confident of physical powers, confront everything on your own terms, no compromise, no ties, prefers independence; enjoy emotional and physical strength; beholden to no-one and fearing no-one.
MAIDEN	High – centre of chest	“I’m ready”	Slightly incline head to one side, with eye-line towards floor; take small light steps across floor, then rest and smile slightly; change direction with unconscious, natural grace; transformative tendency; living with a secret, on the cusp between innocence and knowing, neither child nor adult; innocence and physical assurance, unaware of sexual potency (hence possible confusion of messages)
MOTHER	Centre	“I understand”	Imagine carrying a large, not too heavy bundle. Find a way of carrying it, which would be endurable over a very, very long distance. Carry it with great concern, care. Strong and direct; capable of enormous hard work and inner sacrifice, with knowledge of inner strength, she can face the world with dignity. Enduring acceptance of the inevitability of change. Difficult to shock, harder to frighten. Greatest weakness is inability to take risks; prefers careful security. Disarmingly honest, realistic about people.; honesty, propensity for forgiveness; deep overwhelming love to humankind; part of eternal cycle of life; Keen sense of grim inevitability of life.
TRICKSTER	Low – lower belly	“Maybe”	Smile, move across to a wall and lean; languid; smile through life – ambiguous quality (are you laughing at, or with others? – don’t let on); outwardly charming, amusing, jolly, full of fun; never shows true feelings; highly manipulative.
HERMIT	Centre – belly area	“I know”	Think of space beneath pelvis; move around room with strong sense of pain in the body, change direction on the sound of the secret message which only you can hear – and which you must act upon immediately; vary responses (urgent, delicate); be skilled at being blind; preoccupied with world of shadows, spirits, messages; erratic and unpredictable; detached from physical quest; challenge is to stay on the path; aware of ALL, beyond dogma.

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