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Psyche, Nature, Culture



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Ivanov and Jung – C.G. Jung and Russian Symbolism

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Development of C.G. Jung's Concept of Symbols

Jung wrote to Sigmund Freud on 11th Feb., 1910:

I think one has to give time to [the PSA] to infiltrate people from many centres, to revivify among intellectuals a feeling for symbol and myth, ever so gently to transform Christ back into the soothsaying god of the vine, which he was, and in this way absorb those ecstatic instinctual forces of Christianity for the *one* purpose of making the cult and the sacred myth what they once were, i.e. drunken feast of joy where man regained the ethos and holiness of an animal.

(The Freud/Jung Letters, 1939)

With this letter Jung shows that he was completely into the exaltation of Dionysus of this time. Here we can see a first parallel to Russian symbolism as represented by Vyacheslav Ivanov, who on his part stood in the stream of the philosophical uptake of Nietzsche in Russia. Nietzsche used Dionysus and Apollo as comprehensive symbols for chaos and order, feeling and intellect, movement and stagnation (Etkind 1996, p. 68).

Commenting on the letter, Etkind wrote in his book about psychoanalysis in Russia:

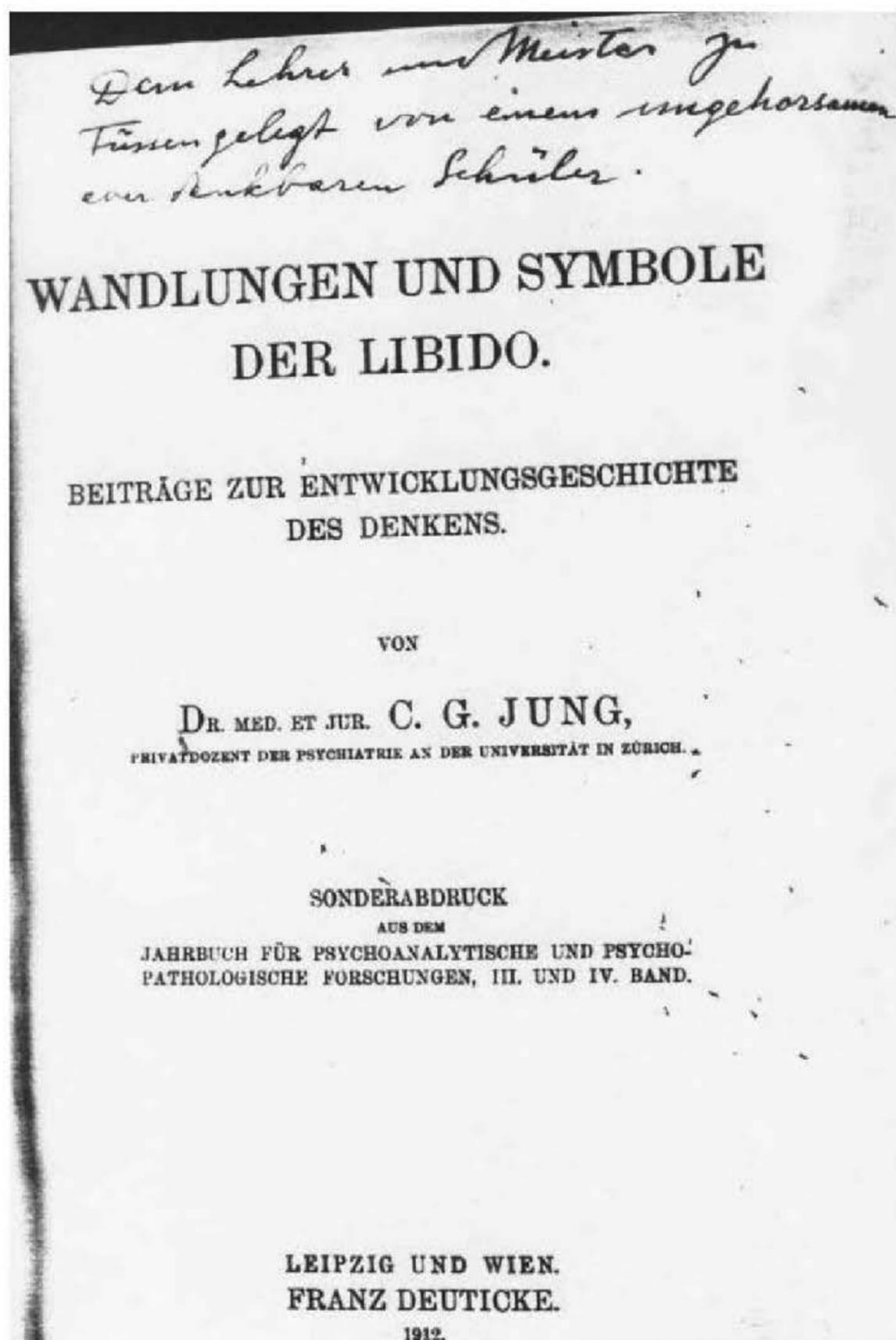
This document, distinctly different to the austere nature of the usual correspondence between Freud and Jung, seems, in respect to content and the language, to be extraordinarily akin to the thoughts and utterances of the Russian Symbolists of those years. This points less towards a reciprocal influence than to common sources. Nietzsche would of course be the first one to mention here, as almost every sentence of the letter has got to do with his ideas.

At this time Jung lived through a crisis, which was caused by his relationship with his Russian patient Sabina Spielrein (see Chapter 5), and thus was standing right in the middle of the balance between

Dionysian and Apollonian which he communicated directly to Freud who placated him ironically: 'Yes, inside you it's storming and thundering again today and I can hear the rolling thunder from afar.'
(*ibid.*, p. 70)

Returning to Jung himself we can see that concerning the subject of symbols his research developed and deepened. In this respect too, the publishing of his work *Psychology of the Unconscious* ('*Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*') in 1911 and his breaking up with Sigmund Freud constitutes a key date.

The inscription to Sigmund Freud on the title page is very moving: 'Laid at the feet of the teacher and master by a grateful but disobedient student.'



Comparing Jung's utterances before this and after, Jung's defence and appreciation of Freud's theories in his successive publications are becoming visible (Jung 1961, para. 334). Let me quote at this point from his nine lectures at Fordham University, New York, in 1912. Jung wrote:

If I have made the attempt to illustrate the principles of the psycho-analytic method by means of dream-analysis it is because the dream is one of the clearest examples of psychic contents whose composition eludes direct understanding. When someone knocks in a nail with a hammer in order to hang something up, we can understand every detail of the action; it is immediately evident. It is otherwise with the act of baptism, where every phase is problematic. We call these actions, whose meaning and purpose are not immediately evident, symbolic actions, or symbols. On the basis of this reasoning we call a dream symbolic, because it is a psychological product whose origin, meaning, and purpose are obscure, and is therefore one of the purest products of unconscious constellations. As Freud aptly says, the dream is the *via regia* to the unconscious.

The meaning of 'obscure', as he used it in this lecture, Jung elaborated on, both in 1911 and 1912, in his work *Psychology of the Unconscious*, originally called *Metamorphoses and Symbols of the Libido*, published first in 1911, distinctly dissociating himself from the position of Sigmund Freud. Yet, if we wish to understand the progress of his research, it is imperative and of great importance to consider the distinct differences between the first and later editions. In 1911/12 he wrote for example:

The ambiguity of the tree can be explained without difficulty, since such symbols are not to be understood [anatomically], but psychologically as simile of the libido. It is thus not feasible to regard a tree as simply being phallic, for example because of its shape, it could also signify a woman, the uterus or the mother. The unity of meaning is only in the simile of the libido. You would get from one dead end into another, if you were to say, that this one symbol stands for the mother and that one for the penis.

(p. 214)

In the revised edition (1956, para. 114) we can then find a more mature definition of the symbol:

Symbols are not allegories and not signs: they are images of contents which for the most part transcend consciousness. We have still to discover that such contents are real, that they are (78) agents with which it is not only possible but absolutely necessary for us to come to terms.

And further down he elucidates on the sexual symbols:

... they are not to be understood semiotically, as signs for definite things, but as symbols. A symbol is an indefinite expression with many meanings, pointing to something not easily defined and therefore not fully known. But the sign always has a fixed meaning, because it is a conventional abbreviation for, or a commonly accepted indication of, something known. The symbol therefore has a large number of analogous variants, and the more of these variants it has at its disposal, the more complete and clear-cut will be the image it projects of its object.

(ibid., para. 80)

Even further down there is the shortest and most developed definition of that time, which is then present throughout this whole work:

... The symbols it (the psyche) creates are always grounded in the unconscious archetype, but their manifest forms are moulded by the ideas acquired by the conscious mind. The archetypes are the numinous, structural elements of the psyche and possess a certain autonomy and specific energy which enables them to attract, out of the conscious mind, those contents which are best suited to themselves. The symbols act as transformers, their function being to convert libido from a 'lower' into a 'higher' form. This function is so important that feeling accords it the highest values. The symbol works by suggestion; that is to say, it carries conviction and at the same time expresses the content of that conviction. It is able to do this because of the numen, the specific energy stored up in the archetype. Experience of the archetype is not only impressive, it seizes and possesses the whole personality, and is naturally productive of faith.

(ibid., para. 344)

Short Description of Russian Symbolism and its Inner Relationship with the Thoughts of C.G. Jung

Andrei Tarkovsky, to whom Russian cinematic art owes numerous great works like *Andrei Rublev*, *Stalker*, *Nostalgia* and *the Sacrifice*, quotes in his book *The Sealed Time* – (1996) in which he wrote about his art, a Russian symbolist who wrote at the same time as Jung and thus showed that he dealt thoroughly with the stream of the development of Russian culture. With this quotation of Ivanov he put me on the trail:

The symbol is only then a true symbol, if its meaning is inexhaustible and boundless, and if it expresses, in its secret (hieratic and

magic) language, hints and suggestions to something unspeakable, something which cannot be put into words. It has many faces, has many meanings and is always obscure in its very last depth. It is of organic nature like a crystal. It even is like a monade and in this differs from complex and multi-layered allegories, the parable or the comparison. Symbols are incomprehensible and cannot be put into words.

(Ivanov 1912)

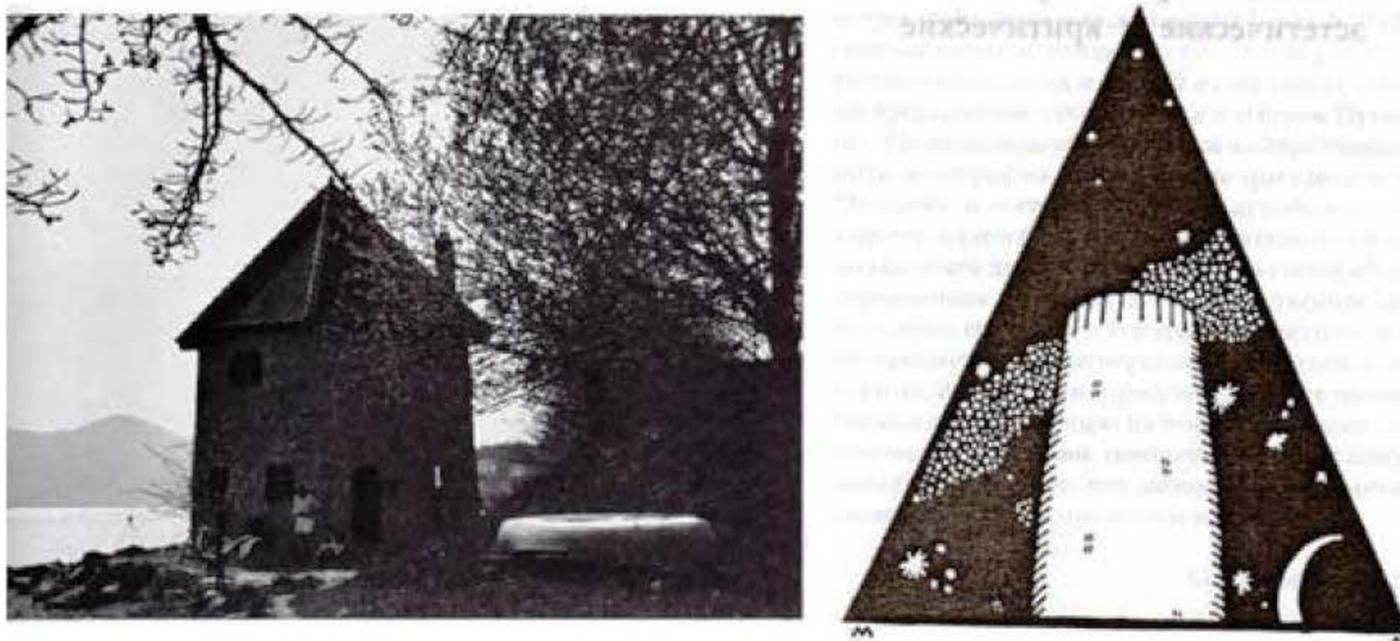
The parallels to Jung's conceptions are obvious and we have to address this kind of statement that was important enough for Tarkovsky to quote it in his chapter on the cinematographic picture. Vyacheslav Ivanov committed these words to writing in his treatise *Trudni i Dni*, published in 1912. Vyacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov lived from 1866 – 1949. He died in exile in Rome after he left Russia because of the October Revolution. He was known to and befriended Emil Medtner, who in 1914, as well as before and after the October Revolution, was first working analytically with Jung, before he himself worked as a psychoanalyst. Their correspondence which began in 1917, marking the beginning of their friendship, has been given to the National Library in Moscow by the heirs of Jung. Medtner was a German-Russian, brought up in Russia, who tried all his life to find his identity in both cultures. He reported in his not-known contribution to Jung's 60th birthday, that Jung said to him during his analysis: 'You have got the psychology of a German of the 18th century and alongside with it the modern, but also archaic psychology of the Russians' (Medtner).

He was the head of Musagetes, one of the most important art publishing houses in pre-revolutionary Russia, in what is called the Silver Age of Russian Art. His brother was a well-known composer who married the woman whom Emil Medtner loved above all. Since then Emil reacted allergically to any kind of music. In Moscow he already took part in association-tests of Jungian students, but then contacted Jung via Bleuler. He played an important part in the publishing and translation of Jung's works into Russian in the nineteen-twenties. Since he was a friend of Jung and his wife as well as to Vyacheslav Ivanov and his wife he also played an important role in the conveyance of Jung's ideas to Ivanov and vice versa¹.

Why not?

Vyacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov was a leader of Russian symbolism. He and C.G. Jung are connected by the symbol of the tower. Under this symbol his works were published around 1909. He also lived in a tower-like building.

¹ I owe to Elisabeth Marton, who made the great film about Sabina Spielrein, the cue to the Swedish researcher Magnus Ljunggren. He wrote a precise study in the biography of Emil Medtner and thus about Medtner's connection to C.G. Jung.



The literary scholar Svetlana Dimitrijevic Titarenko compared the development of the archetypal ideas of C.G. Jung and Vyacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov in her essay, 'From the Archetype to the Myth: The Tower as a symbolic shape in the works of Vyacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov and Carl Gustav Jung'; she used the symbol of the tower, which is so important to both of them, as a symbolic bridge (Ljunggren 1994). Ljunggren also made parallels between the works of the Russian symbolists and C.G. Jung and provides the chronological key:

Ivanov defines in *Trudi i dni, Myisli o symvolizme* (p. 6) the symbol as follows: 'the symbol is an inscrutable expansion of the entirety of a personality and of the empirically limited selfconsciousness'. And in 1909:

The Symbol is a sign or rather a honorific title. You cannot simply say that a snake has the meaning 'wisdom' or that the cross is a symbol for expiatory sacrifice. On the contrary the symbol is – unlike a simple hieroglyph and the union of several signs – an epitome of something, an encrypted message ... If the symbol is a hieroglyph, then it is a mysterious one, with many meanings and many significations.

In his analysis, which took place five times a week, Medtner discovered similarities between 'Psychology of the Unconscious' and the symbolist writer Dimitri Merezhkovsky. He wrote in 1935 (p. 569):

Very soon we got to talk about Merezhkovsky. I was pleased to learn, that my analyst had in his younger years admired this important poet and writer as much as I had. Jung let me know at the time that whilst preparing many parts for his first principal work 'Psychology of the Unconscious' he had often thought about Merezhkovsky.

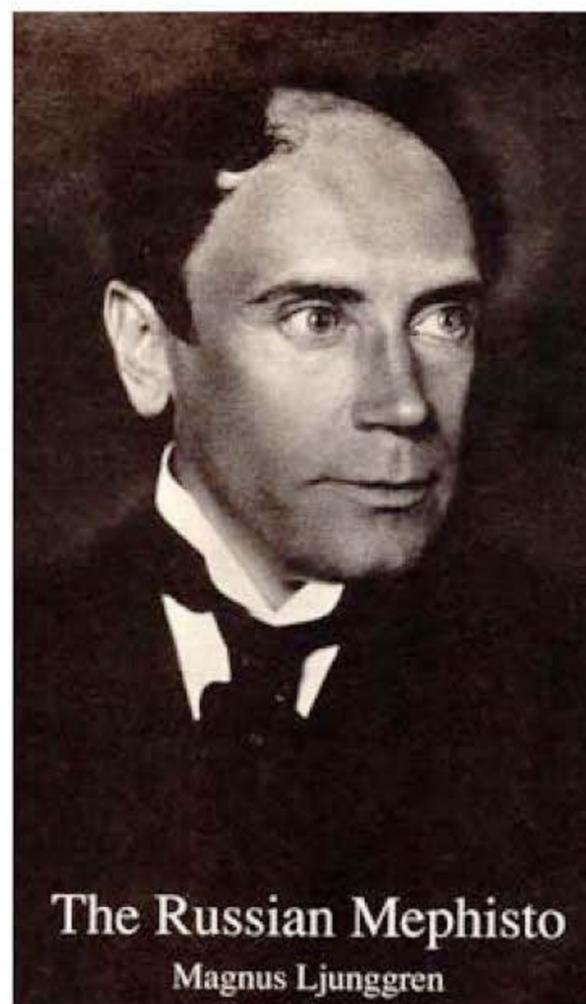
So, Jung told him, while he was planning the first part of his book, he often had him in his mind. At the time he had read Merezhkovsky's book on Leonardo da Vinci. The process of transference and

countertransference between Jung und Medtner must have been quite intense, as Ljunggren quotes from a letter of Medtner (Ljunggren 1994, p. 92 f). Medtner himself wrote that one of the reasons for this was that they both discovered to have had, between December 1899 and January 1900, the same distressing dream (p. 569).

In the revised edition of 'Psychology of the Unconscious' Jung refers to Dimitri Merezhkovsky and it is becoming quite obvious that he did not only read Merezhkovsky's *Leonardo*, but also his *Peter und Alexeij*. Reading this he was moved by the description of the symbolism of antinomy right up to enantiodromia (1956, paras. 576, 581).



Vyacheslav Iwanov



Emil Medtner (Mephisto)

At the psychoanalytical Congress in 1913 in Munich Jung had presented the base lines of his typology. In 1921 their elaboration was published and together with this, Jung's mature definition of the symbol. Again Medtner found in this definition the one of another leading symbolist called Andreij Belyi who had already likewise talked about a 'world-self'. In 1912 he described in an article about circular movements the cosmic identity as 'Your Self'. Even the term shadow appears in his work already. As early as 1904 Medtner had described the relationship between himself and Belyi Beziehung as a problem with his Mephistophelian shadow (Ljunggren 1994, p. 135).

Whereby it is obvious that essential elements of the Jungian terminology were present very early in Russian Symbolism.

The relationship between Jung and Medtner loosened after a while

as the letters show. But Jung's knowledge about Russian symbolism can be taken for granted at least since he became acquainted with Medtner. But also Ivanov seems to have been touched by Jung's body of thought since he had emigrated from Russia. He met with Emil Medtner, but never with C.G. Jung himself. At least since then Jung's works were known to him. Differences and relations between them were the object of research by Russian literary scholars, for example in the work mentioned above. In an essay about two Russian poems on the death of Goethe, which he wrote in 1934, Ivanov remarked on a female figure as an angel of death with regard to the gender of the Russian word for death which is 'smertj' (Ivanov, p.698). The connection to the archetype of the Anima in Jung's terminology is strikingly apparent.

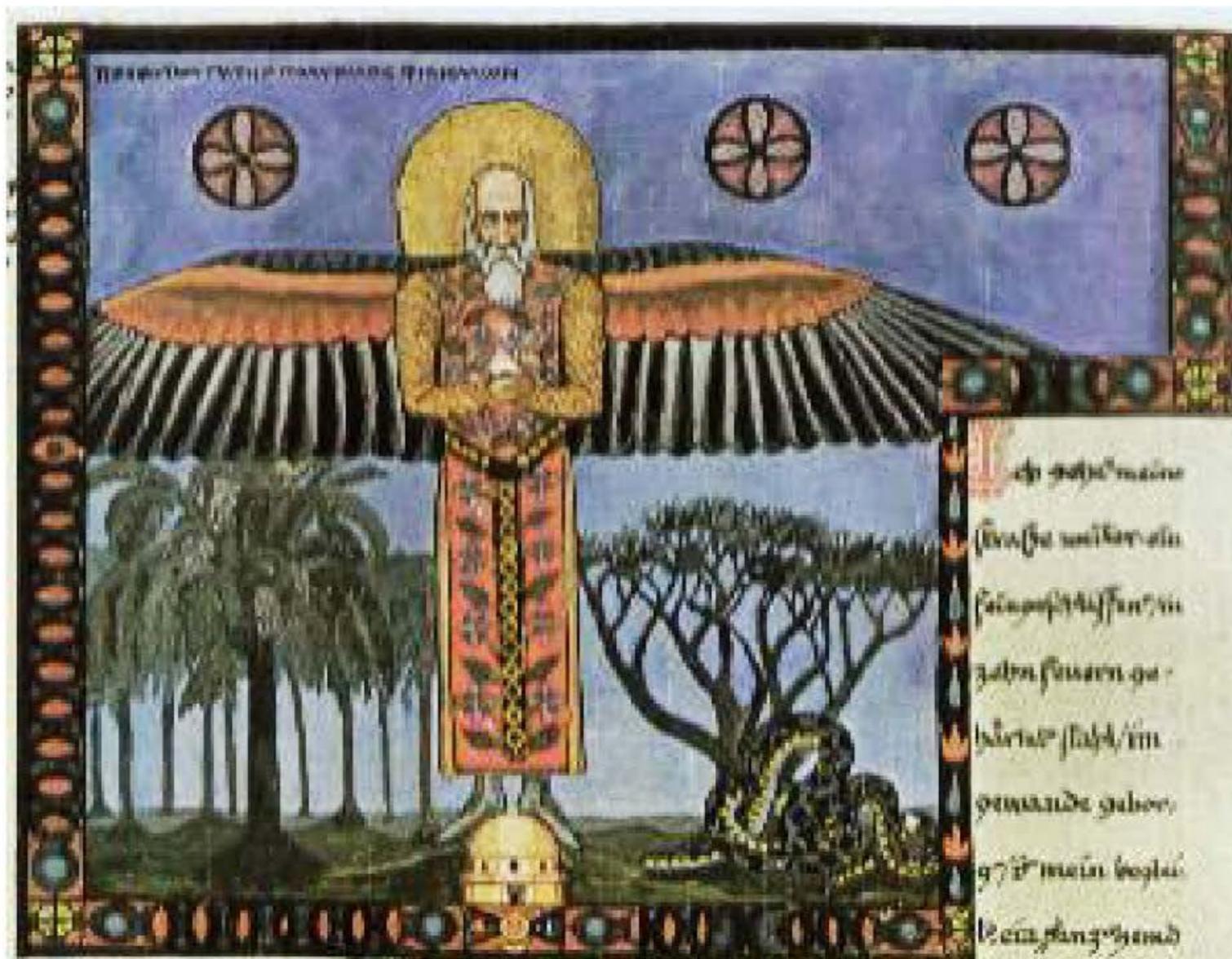
In 1935 his essay 'Anima' was published. It has the chapters: I. Ecstasy and Religion, II. The Anima as Maenad, III. Anima and Animus, IV. About the self, V. Lyrical Interlude, VI. Transcensus sui, VII. About Mystical Dying, VIII. About mystical Reason, IX. Theology, X. The Sacrificed Anima.

In this essay Ivanov quotes Henri Brémont, member of the Académie Française, writing about symbolism and religion, Paul Claudel and C.G. Jung. He wrote the interesting sentences, following below, which in turn raise the question whether and if so Jung was part of an intellectual cultural sphere which reached from France to Russia and how in this sphere were the inner connections as well as the respectively genuine. Especially if we bear in mind that in 1934 Jung gave his Eranos lecture on 'The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious'. Ivanov (p. 374) wrote:

Can you seriously talk about the antagonism of Animus and Anima – as Henri Brémont does, in which he even sees 'le dogme fondamental de la psychologie mystique' about the character of their coexistence and about all its irregularities and crises, which, leaving aside the respective allusions in mystical literature, not only poets like Paul Claudel, but also scientists like C.G. Jung have occasionally overheard and revealed, then the assumption won't appear strange, that ecstatic states, which require a heightened receptiveness, have at first to be seen as effects of the female part of our mental and psychic being: especially since in orgiastic cults the element of rapture is mainly represented by women.

In no index of Jung's works I find the name Brémont. Thus I have to assume that in this case it is for Jung a congenial nomenclature. Jung's stay in Paris and his general education got him into contact with the developments of French culture and especially with French symbolism. In any case we have to assume that by 1935 Ivanov was familiar with Jung's work about the archetypes of the collective unconscious.

And yet he is never mentioned in any of the Jungian works, just as Medtner is not, which, considering the results of Ljunggren's research, is quite odd. In this regard we would have to note that if Medtner's later leaning to the Duce and then to the German Führer has been conceived as so awkward he was passed over even when he was giving his contribution in 1935 to Jung's birthday.



The hypothesis has to be:

Jung and the Russian symbolists were culturally related. In connection with the development of Swiss psychiatry and psychotherapy Jung himself was part of the basis of Swiss symbolism, as Valentina Anker explains in her work on the subject. As we can now see, the development proceeded simultaneously. Russian symbolism came to Jung and met there, prepared by Sabina Spielrein, obviously with similar developments in Jung's theory construction and research. Via Medtner the exchange in the other direction was probably set up in the time of Ivanov's emigration. As a last example the Russian philosopher Pavel Florensky may serve. From 1923 – 1926 he wrote his book with the title *Names*, in which he defined the substance and effect of names very similar to Jung's definition of the archetypes. It is Svetlana Dimitrijevic Titarenko's opinion that both trends developed independently and then later on, in the Twenties, possibly joined, as

she demonstrates by the example of the tower, a symbol Jung was also working on.



Considering the subject from its tangible side, Jung's mode of painting is a possible starting point.

He describes in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1963) the appearance of the figure of Philemon in his dreams at the time of his own vehement development. For Jung Philemon represents a symbol of the Old Wise Man. He depicts and portrays him (see *The Red Book*, 2009).

Russian Symbolism – an Outline

For a better orientation I will give a short description of Russian Symbolism.

But first a poem by Vyacheslav Ivanov (p. 42):

Wintersaat:

*Wie heilger Wintersaaten Gabe
Im Herbstfrost schwelt, so strebt empor
Geheim der Geist aus schwarzem Grabe;
Und nur das feinste Seelenohr*

*Hört das noch nicht erbebte Beben
Trotz Schollenträgheit, – so verstand
Dem stummen Tod zu wiederstreben
Dumpf fortzeugend mein Russenland ...*

Like the holy winter seed's gift
Smoulders in the autumn frost – so aspires
Secretly the ghost out of the black grave
And only the subtle ear of soul

Can hear the not yet trembling quake
Despite the sluggishness of clod – so it knew
To withstand silent death
Dully fathering on and on my Russia

Russian Symbolism is composed of poetry, philosophy, painting and music. In poetry it is divided in two periods: the older one as represented by Merezhkovsky, Valerij Brjussow, Konstantin Balmont Zinaida Hippus, Fjodor Sologub and the later one represented by Aleksander Blok, Andreyj Bjelyj and Vyacheslav Ivanov. They base themselves mainly on the Russian philosopher W. Solovyov and on Nietzsche.

As for the music there is Stravinsky's 'The Firebird' and 'Le Sacre du Printemps'. In respect to painting, 'Le Style Russe' amongst others represented by Viktor Vasnetsov, Boris Kustodiev and Mikhail Nesterov. Especially strong was, as Alexander Etkind found out, the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche. In Russian symbolism most notably, Dionysus, in Nietzsche's perception counterpart to Apollo, blazed his trail as the dominant archetypal force. Dionysus was a symbol of an ecstatic and enraptured experience of God, as a force to create new life and new human beings. The credit belongs to Etkind to have pointed out that this aspect of Russian symbolism prepared the way for Soviet communism with its utopian visions.

Now follows Andrei Bely's *Discovery of Symbolism* (p. 62).

The third one is the symbol; when constructing a symbol I am overcoming two worlds: the chaotic state of fright and the object of the outer-world which is given to me; both worlds are not real; but there is a third world, and I completely vanish into the perception of this third world, which is neither given to the soul nor to the external object; the creative act, the linking, is what is turning my perception into a special insight; the result of this insight, the spoken verdict 'this is something of crimson colour' makes me gain ground on my way up to the third world.

This approach has been theoretically thought through by Vyacheslav Ivanov. In the anthology *Following the Stars* he published the essay 'Two Streams of Symbolism'. From him Alexander Etkind borrowed the title of his book about the history of psychoanalysis in Russia, *The Love of the Impossible*, whereby in his opinion he is connecting Russian symbolism very intimately with the development of psychoanalysis (ibid., p. 62). Etkind also remarked that V. Ivanov's interest in Jung must have been even more clearly pronounced later on:

All this could only 'strongly strengthen' Vyacheslav's interest in Jung. He always kept an eye on Jung's works and there actually are cross-references to Jung in his later works, for example in his study on the Anima written in 1934. And, at last, in an essay about Lermontov, written in 1947, not only the characteristic Jungian terminology but now also his general understanding of psychoanalysis are manifest. (ibid., p. 76)

Russian symbolism comprises different art forms. In 1908 Modest Gofman published an anthology of symbolist Russian poets and commented on them. In this he explains the following about the question of what are art and symbol:

How is an artistic piece of work created? The artist takes a material item – a stone, marble, paint, canvas, words or sounds and fills the stone with the ideas living in his soul. Artistic work is only possible, when the artist trusts in the form, becoming the carrier of the content, that the artistic form will refer to the content which it is meant to describe, if the artist believes in the union of the material with the spiritual. Only then a picture can symbolise and unite this spiritual content. The Greek word *symballein* means in Latin *religare*. (Gofman 1908, p. 20)

And further on:

... and symbolism in art not only comprises that it displays reality in it, but also that it expresses in an image whose symbol it is. In symbolism a deep, creative content is finding for itself a deep, rich, creative and artistic form. Symbolism proves to be the carrier of

art. The symbol proves to be an artistic form – a sign of the soul. In it it evokes a kind of chanted prayer, an approach to a secret border of delightful beauty which is leading to exhilaration and ecstasy ... In our opinion symbolism contains the union of the deepest reality with the deepest mystical insight and in it there is everything creative and lively in the work of art.

(*ibid.*, p. 23)

To round up the picture round I would like to go back to the influence of Nietzsche on symbolism and I would also like to go back to Sabina Spielrein. In the process I will use the deliberations of Alexander Etkind whose research in the field of the history of psychoanalysis in Russia is constitutive.

To understand what happened between Sabina Spielrein and C.G. Jung, I think the words of Vladislav Khodasevich are very helpful, which Alexander Etkind (*ibid.*, p. 59) quotes:

We were living in a fierce tension, hysteria, as in a fever. At the end we were all most intricately entangled in one big web of affairs and feuds, private ones as well as literary ... You were allowed to be obsessed if you chose to: the only important rule was, that the obsession knew no bounds.

In just a few sentences Etkind reveals the unity of European culture at the time:

The eternal Russian 'longing for world-culture' could be assuaged for a short time, when Ossip Mandelstam and Boris Pasternak, Vyacheslav Ivanov and Andrei Bjely, Nikolai Jevreinov and Sergej Diaghilev, Ivan Iljin and Lev Shestov, Lou Andrea Salomé and Sabina Spielrein were living, studying and working for a while in foreign countries ... It is hard to imagine today, how closely interlaced Russian intelligentsia had been at the time with the intellectual life of Western Europe. (p. 10)

Etkind also links Sabina Spielrein's writing about destruction as the origin of becoming with Russian symbolism:

In composition and kind of the related material Sabina Spielrein's treatise reminds us of Solovyov's well-known writing 'The Meaning of Love' ... he also said: 'The God of life and the God of death are just the same God' – even if his conclusions went into another direction ... Sabina Spielrein owed to the traditions of Russian symbolism, which was based on the philosophy of Nietzsche and which was in fashion in her adolescence, obviously essential insights. It is thus not surprising that she quotes Nietzsche's dream of the never-ending renaissance extensively, a dream many exponents of Russian culture

(beginning with Fjodorow up to Merezhkovsky) dreamt on – yet she only did this to give it a new psychological meaning. (p. 189)

Later on Etkind makes a direct link to Vyacheslav Ivanov:

The spiritual father of Nietzscheanism in Russia, Vyacheslav Ivanov, had, as we know, mainly referred to Dionysus and the ‘Religion of the suffering God’ and in this he came very close to Jung. In his manifest ‘Following the Stars’, published in 1909, he is mostly concerned with the relationship of sensuality and death ...

It is not possible to say with certainty that Sabina Spielrein had read Ivanov and how she related to him. It is only certain that at the time a whole generation, even a complete cultural environment – from grammar school pupils to elitist philosophers and poets – delved into his books ... Ivanov’s hazy symbolism ‘merged the Decadent with the Neorealists, Symbolists and Idealists into one flock’, it seemed to constitute a common denominator for the Russian Modern. (p. 190)

These findings suggest the assumption that Sabina Spielrein was the first means of contact for Jung with Russian symbolism, especially since he attests himself that at the time he loved Merezhkovsky’s novels very much.

Timetable of possible contact of C.G. Jung with the ideas of Russian symbolism

Year	1910	1920	1930	1940
C.G. Jung 1875 – 1961	Treatment of Sabina Spielrein	1912 – <i>Psychology of the Unconscious</i> 1913 <i>Psychological Types</i>	1921 – Publication of <i>Psychological Types</i>	<i>Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious</i>
Sabina Spielrein 1885 – 1941	1904 Zürich – Influence of V. Solovyov / V. Ivanov	1911 Case of Schizophrenia 1912 Destruction	Work on child psychology	Child drawings
Emil Medtner 1872 – 1936	1914 – Analysis with Jung: Self-Analyst	1914 – Zürich Translation of Jung’s works	1929 – 1st vol. of the Russian translation of Jung	1939 – Vol 2 and 3: <i>Psychology of the Unconscious</i> , Boris Wyschewslawzew
Vyacheslav Ivanov 1866-1949	1909: Manifest: <i>Following the Stars</i> 1912: <i>Trudi i dni, Work and Days</i>	1929 – Meeting between Medtner and the Ivanovs in Davos		1935: Anima, Self etc.

Conclusion

To the question of how the astonishing concurrence regarding the concept of the symbol between C.G. Jung and Vyacheslav Ivanov came to pass, you cannot; in my opinion there is no final answer. I assume that C.G. Jung with all his personal and professional experiences was embedded in a stream of psychic energy which was then called European symbolism and which needed the meaning of the true symbol to express its perception of reality in the psychic field in opposition to the reduction made by Sigmund Freud and others. Out of the spiritual atmosphere of this stream, which shaped his collective and individual conscience, he came in his practical psychotherapeutic work to very similar definitions as the contemporary Russian symbolism. This paper has the aim to open our eyes and our cultural conscience a little bit to the realities which have vanished out of the conscience of the West because of Soviet Communism and the Second World War.

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