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## **A Note on C. G. Jung, Heidegger, and “The Age of the World Picture”**

Some weeks ago I have uploaded to the web my essay “Forever Jung”.<sup>1</sup> I had been in a hurry to finish that essay, and in the event did not get around to quote some highly interesting passages by Jung on “Weltbilder”, “world-pictures”.<sup>2</sup> Those passages might easily bring to mind Heidegger’s famous 1938 paper “The Age of the World Picture”, and indeed there is, fundamental divergences notwithstanding, a striking parallel between on the one hand Jung’s and on the other hand Heidegger’s notion of a *Weltbild*.

Let me list the Jung passages I am thinking of, giving the German wordings first. In 1916 Jung wrote: “Wir haben es ... erstens mit dem ... wahrgenommenen Bilde der Welt [zu tun] ... – Weiter mit dem Begriff des *kollektiven Unbewußten*. ... Eine Rekonstruktion des unbewußten Weltbildes würde ein Bild ergeben, das zeigte, wie die äußere Realität von jeher gesehen wurde. Das kollektive Unbewußte enthält oder ist ein historisches Spiegelbild der Welt. Es ist gewissermaßen auch eine Welt, aber eine Welt der Bilder. ... [Es gibt] eine unbewußte Kompromißbildung ... zwischen dem Individuum und der unbewußten Welt, das heißt den historischen Weltbildern oder urtümlichen Bildern.” The English translation: “We have to do with the ... perceived images of the world... [Further with the] *collective unconscious*. ... A reconstruction of the unconscious view of the world would yield a picture showing how external reality has been perceived from time immemorial. The collective unconscious contains, or is, an historical mirror-image of the world. It too is a world, but a

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://www.academia.edu/42736672/Forever\\_Jung](https://www.academia.edu/42736672/Forever_Jung) and [http://www.hunfi.hu/nyiri/Forever\\_Jung.pdf](http://www.hunfi.hu/nyiri/Forever_Jung.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e.g. C. G. Jung, *Gesammelte Werke / Collected Works*, vol. 7, § 398 (cf. note 4 below).

world of images. ... [There is] a compromise formation between the individual and the unconscious world, that is, the world of historical images, or 'primordial images'."<sup>3</sup> In 1928 Jung argues that there is a specific direction of reflection which "führt uns ... zu uns selbst zurück als einem seienden und lebenden Etwas, das zwischen zwei Weltbildern ... eingespannt ist", translated as: "leads us ... back to ourselves as an actual, living something, poised between two world-pictures".<sup>4</sup> Now a passage that went through many rewritten and re-titled editions between 1917 and 1942: "Das kollektive Unbewusste ist der Niederschlag aller Welterfahrung aller Zeiten, daher also ein Bild der Welt, das seit Aeonen sich gebildet hat."<sup>5</sup> English translation: "The collective unconscious, being the repository of man's experience and at the same time the prior condition of this experience, is an image of the world which has taken aeons to form."<sup>6</sup> And lastly two references, from the years 1916 and 1928, to a schizophrenic patient who used to regard "*die Welt als sein Bilderbuch ... , in dem er nach Belieben blättern könne*. Der Beweis dafür sei sehr einfach: er brauche sich nur umzudrehen, dann sehe er eine neue Seite." That is, the patient fantasied that "the world was his picture-book ... the pages of which he could turn at will. The proof was quite simple: he had only to turn round, and there was a new page for him to see."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, § 507.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, § 398.

<sup>5</sup> C. G. Jung, *Die Psychologie der unbewussten Prozesse: Ein Ueberblick über die moderne Theorie und Methode der analytischen Psychologie*, Zürich: Verlag von Rascher & Co., 1917 ("Preface" dated Dec. 1916), p. 117. The passage remained unaltered in the unchanged second edition (1918) and also in the rewritten third edition (1925, new title: *Das Unbewusste im normalen und kranken Seelenleben*), as well as in the unchanged fourth edition (1936), but was extended by a significant insertion in the completely rewritten fifth edition (1942, new title: *Über die Psychologie des Unbewußten*, this piece becoming Jung's most often cited work), the insertion being: "Das kollektive Unbewusste ist als ein Niederschlag der Erfahrung und zugleich als ein Apriori derselben ein Bild der Welt" (*Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7, § 151).

<sup>6</sup> *Collected Works*, vol. 7, § 151.

<sup>7</sup> *Gesammelte Werke / Collected Works*, vol. 7, §§ 447 and 228.

So what meaning (or meanings) did Jung attach to the expression “Weltbild”? In the first passage quoted above he maintains the fundamental distinction, characteristic of his theory, between on the one hand the world as the conscious individual forms itself a picture of, and on the other hand the collective unconscious picture of the world showing how external reality was seen throughout millennia. Note that Jung speaks not of reality as it was, but of reality as it was seen. Reality as it was seen amounts to a historical mirror picture of the world, in a sense a world, too, but a world of pictures, the world of “primordial images”. Now in Jung’s terminology primordial images – “historical world pictures” – are identical with his famous *archetypes*, and they are what make up the “collective unconscious”. But as Jung regularly stressed, there is nothing *visual* about archetypes: primordial images are not pictures. However, from primordial images there emerge visually vivid dreams and fantasies whenever the individual’s conscious life clashes with desires and fears hiding, suppressed, in his personal unconscious, a life taken control of, ultimately, by patterns residing in the collective unconscious, formed by age-old experiences. We arrive at the unexpected outcome that Jung actually speaks of two different world-pictures, one visual, one non-visual, with the implication that the individual person – as the second passage quoted indeed says – is left struggling between them. The third passage quoted emphasizes and reiterates that it is the unconscious historical world-picture an adequate assimilation of which is of primary significance for the survival of humankind, with the fourth passage quoted ridiculing the sick belief that the visible world could be a valid world-picture.

Now it is precisely a kind of sickness Heidegger’s notion of a world picture, too, describes, though not the sickness of some individual as rather the sickness of an age. This sickness consists in the phenomenon that “the essence of humanity altogether transforms itself in that man becomes the subject”<sup>8</sup>. But when “man becomes the

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes” (1938), here quoted from the translation by Julian Young and Kenneth Hayes in Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 66.

primary and genuine *subiectum*, this means that he becomes that being upon which every being, in its way of being and its truth, is founded. Man becomes the referential center of beings as such.”<sup>9</sup> Man as having become the *subiectum* rises up “peremptorily”, “the world, as conquered, stands at man’s disposal ... completely and comprehensively”.<sup>10</sup> Now Heidegger stresses that the world which is taken to be at humanity’s disposal is of course the *modern* world; and the fundamental point he wishes to make is that only the modern world does at all have a world picture.<sup>11</sup> “What is it – a ‘world picture’? Obviously, a picture of the world. But what is a world? What does ‘picture’ mean here? ‘World’ serves, here, as a name for beings in their entirety. ... Initially, the word ‘picture’ makes one think of a copy of something. This would make the world picture, as it were, a painting of beings as a whole. But ‘world picture’ means more than this. We mean by it the world itself...”<sup>12</sup> And Heidegger continues: “Where the world

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66 f.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>11</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 67 ff. and 71.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67. – Let me here insert a reminder to the effect that the Heidegger referring at this point to notions like “picture”, “copy”, “painting”, etc. has in his 1929 book *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* offered a brilliant nutshell philosophy of images, a fact very rarely noted in the literature either on him or on the topic generally. I have quoted a few lines from that work in my online volume *Visual Meaning* ([https://www.academia.edu/40212898/VISUAL\\_MEANING\\_Essays\\_on\\_Wittgenstein\\_Image\\_and\\_Time](https://www.academia.edu/40212898/VISUAL_MEANING_Essays_on_Wittgenstein_Image_and_Time)) and am repeating that quote here: “It is possible to produce a copy (photograph) ... from ... a likeness, [a photograph] of a death mask for example. The copy can now directly copy the likeness and thus reveal the ‘image’ (the immediate look) of the deceased himself. The photograph of the death mask, as copy of a likeness, is itself an image – but this is only because it gives the ‘image’ of the dead person, shows how the dead person appears, or rather how it appeared. ... – Now the photograph, however, can also show how something like a death mask appears in general. In turn, the death mask can show in general how something like the face of a dead human being appears. But an individual corpse itself can also show this. And similarly, the mask itself can also show how a death mask in general appears, just as a photograph shows not only how what is photographed, but also how a photograph in general, appears” (*Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, transl. by Richard Taft, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 66). I have corrected a misprint or mis-

becomes picture, beings as a whole” are what man “intends to bring before him, have before him, and, thereby, in a decisive sense, place before him.”<sup>13</sup> The phrase “place before him” is a translation of “vor sich stellen”: that is, Heidegger exploits the possibility to interpret the German word “vorstellen” – *to imagine* – along its meanings “to present”/“to represent”: “beings must set-themselves-before, present themselves”<sup>14</sup>. Heidegger’s main contention, formulated some passages earlier in his paper, seems, then, entirely intelligible: “Understood in an essential way, ‘world picture’ does not mean ‘picture of the world’ but, rather, the world grasped as picture.”<sup>15</sup>

Now the striking parallel between the positions of Jung on the one hand and Heidegger on the other consists in their rejection of the modern self-image of the human being. Heidegger is critical of the age in which man becomes the centre of the world. Jung – see pp. 12 f. of my essay quoted above by way of introduction – elaborates the notion of “das Selbst”, the all-encompassing self we should aim at becoming, transcending the narrow borders of the *I*, “das Ich”, the personal ego.<sup>16</sup>

Dunabogdány, May 4, 2020

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translation in the edition here quoted: the phrase “The copy can now directly copy the likeness” there has “only” instead of “now” (i.e. “nur” instead of “nun”).

<sup>13</sup> *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 67.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69. Compare *ibid.*, p. 69: “If, then, we wish to clarify the pictorial character of the world as the representedness of beings, then in order fully to grasp the modern essence of representedness we must scent out the original naming power of that wornout word and concept ‘to represent’: to put forth and relate to oneself.”

<sup>15</sup> *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 67.

<sup>16</sup> Compare “A Note on Heidegger and C. G. Jung on Wholeness as the Telos of the Human Being” (2019, [https://www.academia.edu/38251968/Heidegger\\_and\\_Jung\\_on\\_Wholeness\\_as\\_the\\_Telos\\_of\\_the\\_Human\\_Being](https://www.academia.edu/38251968/Heidegger_and_Jung_on_Wholeness_as_the_Telos_of_the_Human_Being)) by Richard Capobianco. I am grateful to Professor Capobianco for the interest he showed for my “Forever Jung” essay, an interest without which the present note would not have been written.