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THE ADOLESCENT PSYCHE

JUNGIAN AND WINNICOTTIAN PERSPECTIVES

RICHARD FRANKEL

ROUTLEDGE

'Richard Frankel helps the reader explore the archetypal dynamics particular to adolescence. Through clinical vignette he is able to tutor us in the kind of insight and therapeutic presence that can make a real difference to the adolescents we work with.'

Mary Watkins, *Pacifica Graduate Institute, USA*

'*The Adolescent Pscyhe* is a welcome addition to contemporary Jungian literature. Frankel weaves concepts from Jung, Hillman, Winnicott and others to give us important new understandings and ways of viewing and working with adolescents. I highly recommend this book to practitioners, theorists and researcheers alike.'

John Allan, *Jungian analyst and author of* Inscapes of the Child's World

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The Adolescent Psyche

In the classic edition of this outstanding book, originally published in 1998, Richard Frankel explores adolescence as a crucial, unique, and turbulent period of human development. He provides guidance for clinicians working with young people as they undergo significant transformations in the way they think, act, feel, and perceive the world.

The book addresses how the disruptions manifest in adolescent behavior are upsetting and often incomprehensible to the adults surrounding them. It seeks to revision the traumas, extreme fantasies, testing of limits, etc., so endemic to this period of life through the lens of the urge toward self-realization. This allows for new and creative ways of working with the intensely confusing, and often extreme, counter-transference feelings that arise in our encounter with adolescents. It offers ways of reflecting upon the vicissitudes of our own experience of being an adolescent that helps to unlock the typical impasses that occur in the stand-off between adult and adolescent ways of seeing the world. Through engagement with the work of Jung, Hillman, and Winnicott, Frankel offers a critique of the traditional psychoanalytic understanding of adolescence as a recapitulation of childhood, thus making a claim for adolescence as a discrete developmental period with its own originary dynamics. In this light, he explores such topics as individuation, persona, shadow, bodily, idealistic, and ideational awakenings, as well as the effects of culture on development.

Featuring numerous clinical case studies and clear theoretical formulations, this classic edition is important reading for psychotherapists, analysts, parents, educators, and anyone working with adolescents. This classic edition also includes a new, extended introduction by the author that examines what effects the digital revolution is having on the contemporary experience of being an adolescent. Looking back on this work nearly 25 years since its publication, Frankel contends that the core themes of adolescence addressed in this book offer a compelling framework for comprehending both the positive and negative impacts of the digital on adolescent life.

Richard Frankel, Ph.D., is a faculty member and supervisor at The Massachusetts Institute for Psychoanalysis. He is a teaching associate and a supervisor in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. Along with the philosopher, Victor J. Krebs, he is the author of *Human Virtuality and Digital Life: Philosophical and Psychoanalytic Investigations* (Routledge, 2022).

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The Adolescent Psyche

Jungian and Winnicottian Perspectives

Classic Edition

Richard Frankel

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To Lisa, For Nurturing The Unformed In Me

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Foreword

The adolescent girl who cuts herself in secret rituals, the teenage boy who affiliates himself with a violence-ridden gang, the 15-year-old girl who rages at her parents when moments before she had expressed sweet feelings toward them, the ones attracted to cultish religious groups, the ones preoccupied with thoughts of death and suicide, the bizarrely dressed and oddly pierced young people, the teenagers held up in their rooms, watching endless hours of television … what does psychological theory have to offer us to help us understand and witness the disturbing manifestations of adolescence? Richard Frankel—trained in phenomenology and depth psychology—brilliantly exposes most of our current theories as reducing adolescence to a rehashing of the dynamics of early childhood. In this book he releases us from this reductive circling back as the only explanation of the adolescent and attempts, instead, to lay bare the archetypal landscape of adolescence itself.

Following Jung, he asks what is the teleology of this part of the life cycle. What is adolescence aiming toward? Is there anything in the often odd and dangerous, frequently idealistic, and spiritually probing behavior and attitudes of adolescents to respect, to nurture, to understand on its own terms? In this heterogeneous American culture that has eroded common custom, ritual, and expectation, is there a way for us to see adolescents fashioning—in guises that are often hard for us to recognize—their own transition rituals and offerings? Frankel asserts that much of what we witness with adolescents are their attempts—often desperate—at self-initiation; efforts to shatter their innocence through wounding; efforts to build their capacity to endure losses through the navigation of betrayals, separations, and symbolic deaths; efforts to express the purity of their idealistic visions of the possible. He argues that the extremes of adolescence are intrinsic to it, and must be insighted on their own terms, not through the lenses of childhood or adulthood.

Those familiar with Jungian psychology know that Jung and post-Jungians have had little to offer clinicians regarding adolescence. Jung's developmental interests were largely confined to mid and later life. Yet through Frankel's careful harvesting of the scattered insights into adolescence—provided by Jung,

Hillman, Guggenbühl-Craig, Bosnak, Wickes, Allan—he is able to present a coherent, convincing alternative to the psychoanalytic visions which have dominated clinical thinking about adolescence. Having steeped himself in both clinical experiences with adolescents and Jungian psychology, Frankel is able to expose and articulate those parts of Jung's thoughts that are invaluable when considering adolescence—for instance, the emphasis on telos, the encounter with the shadow, the ways in which adolescents engage the individuation process, the need for ritual in a culture that provides little ritual coherence, the function of trying on various personas in the search for an individual self. He succeeds in bringing adolescence out of a state of neglect in Jungian and post-Jungian psychology, showing us that it can be a fertile site for the application of Jungian theory and practice.

Winnicott is also included here as an insightful theorist of the adolescent psyche. His recognition of the value of non-compliance in adolescence for the unfolding of the personality is given voice throughout the book. Despite Winnicott's overt lack of respect for Jung, many depth psychologists work with a profound appreciation for both Jung and Winnicott. Frankel deftly weaves between Winnicott's astute sensitivity regarding adolescence and Jungian approaches, exposing their compatibility and capacity to mutually enrich each other.

Frankel's book has a therapeutic effect on the reader, as it helps us discern our own countertransference reactions to adolescents. It tutors those who want to understand adolescence to reconnect with their own transit through this tumultuous period. Our adult dreams point us back over and over again to adolescence and the puer side of ourselves. Frankel queries us, "What was born there that needs to be recalled and remembered?" As well, he helps us sort through our own "adult" emotional reactions that are overly quick to negate, deride, pathologize, and condescend to the expressions of adolescence, seeing through these as senex reactions deeply alienated from the spirit of youthfulness, the puer. Through building in us a respect for the psychological work that is being done in adolescence, and by helping us see the barrier created by our own envy of youth's vision and energy, Frankel is able to help the reader step toward what he or she initially judged as outlandish, horrific, developmentally off-track.

I especially appreciate Frankel's affirmation of therapy with adolescents, and his careful outlining of the functions of a therapeutic relationship in adolescence such as internalizing the reflective voice of the therapist, witnessing and taking an active interest in the many aspects of the teenager's personality, modeling how to dialogue with and reflect upon them, helping the patient engage a crisis in a meaningful way so that its inherent potential for transformation can unfold, reflecting back to the adolescent the grace, beauty, and power of her engagement with the spirit of youth. Through careful and interesting clinical vignettes, he is able to tutor us in the kind of therapeutic insighting and presence that can make a difference to the adolescents we work with.

Frankel's work illustrates the fruits of a deconstructionist approach to psychological theory and practice. Apart from its manifest theme of adolescence, Frankel teaches us how to work with theory. As he works on the theories of adolescence he lays bare the way in which psychological theory is a creative process of the culture, each theory revealing aspects of the phenomenon under study while concealing others, each carrying its own set of implicit values. To see adolescence in a way that allows us to manifest our caring toward the youth traversing it, he beckons us to see with clarity first from one vantage point, then from another—Freud, Jones, Anna Freud, Blos, Hillman, and so forth. Only in this way do our theories begin to serve the young people and their experience, rather than subjugating their experience to a monocular vision of our own. I am very moved by the fruits of Richard Frankel's sustained gaze on adolescence. He has not succumbed to segmenting theory from practice, the imaginal from the lived, the causal from the teleological, the deconstruction of theory from the construction of it. As you can see, I am happy to invite you into this book, and eager for its sensitivities to grow within the much needed relationships we form with adolescents.

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This book has taken shape over many years and many voices have contributed to it. I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to the following people who were an invaluable source of support: Charles Scott, who first disclosed to me the fruitfulness in wedding phenomenology and archetypal psychology—he was an early reader of my manuscript and his insights have been incorporated into the final text; Thomas Moore's eloquent presentations at the Archetypal Psycholgy Study Group stimulated my thinking, and led me to discover the links between the psychology of the puer-senex archetype and the work with adolescents; Robert Bosnak and Andrew Samuels, who read my work and offered me strong encouragement to "send it off"; my dear friend, Gregory Shaw, who was readily available for conversation and an exchange of ideas whenever I reached a snag; my editor, Roseann Cain; Mary Watkins, whose persistent voice would not let me forget that I was sitting on a manuscript which needed to go out into the world before I moved on to other pursuits—Mary has been my mentor as a psychological thinker, writer, and practioneer and has generously given of herself over the years, encouraging and inspiring the unfolding of my own thinking; and my wife, Lisa Bloom, to whom I dedicate the book. In addition to her unflagging support, while writing, she has painstakingly gone over every word, phrase, and idea contained in it. Her creativity, intelligence, and inventiveness are sprinkled throughout these pages as she is the true *sine qua non* of this work.

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Abbreviations

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Introduction to the Classic Edition

One: Prelude

I've always had the sense that what made this book come alive for certain of its readers (and perhaps also what provoked its critics) was its puer sensibility. I wrote it in my thirties, when many of life's possibilities still lay ahead of me. I had not yet had children of my own, so adolescence was something I knew from the clinic but not the home. As I write this now, nearly a quarter of a decade later, having had the experience of being a father to adolescent children and training as a psychoanalyst, you may hear in what follows, broadly speaking, more of a senex sensibility. Indeed, given the advancing years, how could that not be the case. However, as I set out to show in the book, there is a lively and dialectical interplay between puer and senex; it is never a one way developmental street. So rather than an overcoming of the high flying spirit of the puer with the grounded wisdom of the senex, it is more accurate to say that there is rather a different alignment between them in the sixth decade of one's life as opposed to the third, and you may perceive something of that shift in the tone and sensibility of these new introductory thoughts as compared to the book.

In the year 2023, it's difficult to imagine an exploration of the developmental vicissitudes of adolescence that does not grapple with the major impact the digital revolution has had on the lives of young people. *The Adolescent Psyche* was written in a pre-digital era, before the introduction of the smartphone, social media and all of the novel and vertiginous possibilities for a hyper-connected life. In the early 90's, just on its cusp, most were unable to imagine or foresee what was to come. Thus, it is very important to avow that the book you are about to read was situated, culturally and clinically, in the contemporary experience of adolescence from the perspective of a pre-digital, analogic era.

In the intervening years, I have become interested in the question of the digital and have been especially taken with the ideas of the late French philosopher of technology Bernard Stiegler. In his book, *What Makes Life Worth Living* (2013), he presents a very distinct (and original) reading of

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Winnicott's transitional phenomena that has inspired me to think about what impact our digitally saturated world is having on the adolescent psyche. Stiegler writes from a pharmacological perspective, which means he sees the positives and negatives of technology and asks us to stand, unflinchingly, with a foot in both, refusing those seductive dichotomies–are the new technologies a remedy for our age or a poison?–that pushes us to prematurely settle the issue once and for all. He insists that they are at the very same time both, and their salutary and destructive effects should never be split from one another, if we are to grasp something of the whole.

In the wake of the digital revolution that has fundamentally changed so much about how we live our everyday lives, I want to use this new introduction to say something about its psychological effects on young people today. All of the major themes I develop in this book–adolescent initiation, the dynamics of puer and senex, prohibition vs. inhibition, the need for solitude, struggling through the doldrums, bodily, idealistic and ideational awakenings, the spectre of mortality, etc.–are radically impacted by the digital, such that the present-day experience of being an adolescent is, in crucial ways, very different from the era in which I was writing.

Adolescents are drawn, like moths to flames, to everything technological. As digital platforms become the new holding environment, supplanting the world of home and family, adolescents are desperate to possess the newest phone, video-game or app. Parents feel a great deal of ambivalence about how much time their children spend in front of the screen, but also know, from bitter and painful upsets and arguments, there is no fighting a tidal wave. So they do the best they can to tolerate the digital life of their adolescent and hope its remedies override its poisonous effects.

In the privacy of one's screen, outside the gaze of the parental eye, there is so much to see, learn and experience. Digital virtuality–that potential space of never-ending possibility–offers the adolescent a unique haven for psychic exploration. In the liquidity of cyberspace, a newly enlivened and impassioned eros finds safe harbor. In providing an immediately accessible platform in which desire so effortlessly becomes actualized, the virtual becomes rocket fuel, blasting off the adolescent search for self. It's pleasures, intrigues, and satisfactions are irresistible and nearly unstoppable. Ask an adolescent to put down their phone, to come away from the screen, to go outside, or just sit down and talk, and they respond as if you are inflicting real pain upon them, discharging an unending river of annoyance and irritation. Inside the caverns of what Laurie Anderson (playing with the ordinary understanding of the word virtual) movingly calls an 'almost' world–that uncanny admixture of private and public, not wholly inside or outside–adolescents discover a 'room of their own' and they are reluctant to leave it. And given the suffering, broken 'adult' world that hauntingly lies just outside, on the edges of awareness, who can blame them.

Two: Individuation

One central idea that winds its way through all the others in this book is that of individuation. How, in passing through these very tumultuous and disorienting years–no longer a child, not yet an adult– does one learn to contain, and thus grow from the grand collision of internal affects, bodily awakenings and the utterly new encounter with externality? How do we step aside and make room so that what is moving inside the adolescent can unfold of its own accord, in its own time? Creating the right kind of conditions–at home, in school, on-line–that promote the advancement of the individuation process is a rather complex affair. There is the strong sense that we have to shield the adolescent psyche from having the world prematurely crash in upon it. This can happen in the face of uncontained, destructive acting-out, so endemic to this period of life, as well as external demands and expectations forcing a premature adaptation or a position of compliance. There is an on-going and often tumultuous dance for the adult between the protective impulse of boundaries and the setting of limits and a necessary yielding and letting go.

One of the critical tasks of adolescence is the creation of an enlivening relationship with potential space. Whereas in childhood, it manifests in the specificity of a transitional object, in adolescence it becomes a processive movement that opens toward the world. The transformative moments in adolescence bring one into contact with difference, radical otherness, the not-me, i.e. the vast, chaotic, and undifferentiated realm out of which subjectivity emerges. There is an acute awareness of loss and the passing away of things, which calls forth an originary encounter with mortality. The sense that life is meaningful and things feel real relies upon the formation of a sustaining, non-destructive relationship with this incommunicado core at the center of one's being.

Adolescence is not merely a recapitulation of childhood (an idea that informs my critique of a certain set of assumptions embedded in psychoanalytic theory in relation to this period of development), for it offers the possibiliy of a far-reaching reconfiguration of one's earliest psychic structures in service of a deep transformation of who one is and who one is to become. In the context of breaking away from parents and moving out into the larger world, a new mode of object relations is instantiated. A profound link gets established between a newly developing capacity to bear contingency and difference and the adolescents' embrace of their own singularity.

In this book, the claim is made that adolescents find their Winnicottian true self, their Jungian individuated self, by attending to the emergence of their own psychic productions: dreams and reveries, the writing and artwork found in their journals, the music they are making or listening to, their idealizations and passion for action and justice in the world. This is an inwardness that is continually moving outward, as the imaginaries that could not be lived out when they were children now have the possibility of

actualization. Yet bringing one's fantasies to the world involves taking risks, putting something on the line, and entering the relatively unprotected territory of chance, upset, disappointment and heartbreak.

There is an especially strong connection between the encounter with the autonomous psyche and the awakening of instinctual life, as adolescents come into a new relation with their hungers, passions, and satisfactions. Moving through the world in rhythm with an internal force that has its own independent spirit, its own sources of spontaneity and creativity, means giving sway to an inner directionality all its own. This is one way of understanding the intensity of the conflicts that arise as the adolescents' attunement to what is moving inside clashes with what they are being told–by parents, teachers, friends, and the unconscious messages of their cultural surround–on the outside.

The earliest experiences of potential space required an attentive mother to feed the world to the infant in small enough doses, so that in being gradually let in, the infant/child learned to play with reality. But in adolescence the world floods in, in large, and often unmanageable doses. In the face of all that, the adolescent has to develop his or her own formula for keeping the internal flow of psychic reality open to the unpredictable fluctuations of externality. The lack of such a capacity results in either a precipitous withdrawal of one's fantasy life back into the self or its being extinguished by the brutal realities of an unforgiving world.

Frankel and Krebs (2022) read Winnicott's potential space, that intermediate area of experience where fantasy and reality, self and world, are held in a life-vitalizing tension with one another, as pointing to what they term *human virtuality*. Here the virtual is understood as the very source of psychic emergence, that place of possibility and spontaneity, where things come alive and seem to move of their own accord. In adolescence, it turns on that chaotic moment when desire touches down in the world. If we think of the unfolding of human virtuality in developmental terms, adolescence manifests its embodied and wordly dimensions. Coming through its whirlwinds, the adolescent psyche learns to bear what is unbearable about living, and thus, to be positively transformed by its encounter with the contingent and mortal movements of the virtual.

Three: Digital Individuation

For the adolescent of this era, the individuation process is initiated less from inside themselves, in obeisance to the inwardness of psychic life, and more from the virtual spaces of digital life. The border between the "I", one's individual subjectivity, and the 'We', the new forms of collective consciousness that dwell in the networked connectivity of our communication technologies, has become quite porous. This enables the mercurial release of an "I" into a "We" which is an important part of why the social media world becomes so tremendously