Cultures and Identities in Transition

Jungian Perspectives

Edited by Murray Stein and Raya A. Jones
Cultures and Identities in Transition

*Cultures and Identities in Transition* returns to the roots of analytical psychology, offering a thematic approach which looks at personal and cultural identities in relation to Jung’s own identity and the identities of contemporary Jungians.

The book begins with two clinical studies, representing a meeting point between the traditional praxis of Jungian analysis, on the one side, and the current zeitgeist, world events and collective anxieties as impacting on persons in therapy, on the other.

An international range of expert contributors go on to discuss topics including:

- issues of national and personal identity – looking back to a shared history and forward to novel applications of Jungian ideas.
- Jung’s cross-disciplinary dialogues with Victor White.
- what the designation ‘Jungian’ actually means.

Based on papers given at the joint IAAP and IAJS conference held in Zurich in 2008, this book will be essential reading for all Jungians.

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Contents

Contributors viii

Editors’ introduction 1

1 ‘Something wrong with the world’: Towards an analysis of collective paranoia 6
  WARREN COLMAN

2 The emergence of Moby Dick in the dreams of a five-year-old boy 17
  STEVEN HERRMANN

3 ‘Wotan’ – a political myth of the German collective unconscious: Three debates of shadow aspects of the collective identities of Germans and Jews in the Germany of National Socialism 30
  GÜNTER LANGWIELER

4 ‘Bubbe Mayseh’ (the archetype of grandparents), or: Me and my grandparents – stories and history 41
  JOANNE WIELAND-BURSTON

5 Archetypal patterns in postmodern identity construction:
  A cultural approach 53
  CHRISTIAN ROESLER

6 Creativity and art as part of the elaboration of trauma brought on by slavery 66
  DENISE GIMENEZ RAMOS
7 Traditional Coastal Sami healers in transition  
BARCHARA HELEN MILLER

8 Daughters of the devil: Feminine subjectivity and the female vampire  
ANGELA CONNOLLY

9 Jung’s art  
CHRISTIAN GAILLARD

10 Jung: Rebuilding the temple  
DAVID TACEY

11 In the end it all comes to nothing: The basis of identity in non-identity  
JOHN DOURLEY

12 Social (collective) unconsciousness and mythic scapegoating: C. G. Jung and René Girard  
PAUL BISHOP

13 The changing images of God: An anticipatory appraisal of the Jung/White encounter  
JOHN HILL

14 Jung and White on Gnosticism  
ROBERT A. SEGAL

15 Types of Thomists: Victor White’s use of Aquinas as exemplar of a dialectical synthesis  
CLODAGH WELDON

16 Bridge, amalgam, paper clip: A brief typology  
ANN C. LAMMERS

17 Reflections on the word ‘Jungian’  
THOMAS KIRSCH

18 Jungian psychology in Japan: Between mythological world and contemporary consciousness  
TOSHIKO KAWAI
19 Arguments in favour of a Jungian hermeneutic of suspicion 208
DON FREDERICKSEN

Index 217
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Editors’ introduction

From time to time it is good to return to roots and be reminded how ancestors shaped and continue to influence one’s identity. As far as a person or a field of knowledge may develop, roots continue to nourish the soul, heart and mind. Zurich, the birthplace of analytical psychology, was in July 2008 the site for a conference titled *Contemporary Symbols of Personal, Cultural and National Identity: Historical and Psychological Perspectives*. It was the third international academic conference of the International Association for Analytical Psychology (IAAP) and second joint conference with the International Association for Jungian Studies (IAJS). Held at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, locally known as the ETH, it represented a return to roots in several interrelated ways. Importantly, the ETH is where Jung himself lectured between 1933 and 1941, and which now houses his papers in the Jung Archives (www.ethbib.ethz.ch/eth-archiv/jung_e.html). The event was also a return to the place of origin for analytical psychology as a whole, since the field had received its name in Zurich when it emerged in 1914 as a new form of clinical psychoanalysis. And it was a return to roots geographically, a return to Switzerland, the Alpine lake, the ancient city of Zurich, with the mountains in the distance visible on a clear day from the ETH. This is where analytical psychology came from.

Being set up in the ETH, the conference evoked the scientific spirit that guided much of Jung’s thinking and writing. The school is famous for its Nobel Prize-winning scientists, notably in the field of physics – Albert Einstein and Wolfgang Pauli being the two prime examples. It was Jung’s good fortune to know many of these famous scientists living in Zurich. In particular, he and Pauli became close friends engaged in a fruitful dialogue between depth psychology and modern physics. Jung’s teaching position at the ETH thus placed him in a rigorous scientific milieu, which suited his temperament as a scientific thinker and his ambitions for psychology as a scientific discipline. The study of psyche was to be empirical, not philosophical (except in the sense that William James would have approved of in his ‘radical empiricism’). Jung’s vision was to build a systematic basis for studying the human soul, though not as a laboratory science: ‘Analytical psychology differs from
experimental psychology in that it does not attempt to isolate individual functions. . . . It is far more concerned with the total manifestation of the psyche as a natural phenomenon’ (Jung 1946: para. 170). This concern informs the epistemology of analytical psychology – ‘Our laboratory is the world. Our tests are concerned with the actual, day-to-day, happenings of human life, and the test-subjects are our patients, relatives, friends, and, last but not least, ourselves’ – as well as dictating the nature of its data: ‘it is the hopes and fears, the pains and joys, the mistakes and achievements of real life that provide us with our material’ (1946: para. 171). Most importantly, analytical psychology is ‘an eminently practical science’ that does not ‘investigate for investigation’s sake, but for the immediate purpose of giving help’ (1946: para. 172). To Jung, it is the therapeutic goal which drives the scientific goal: ‘We doctors are forced, for the sake of our patients, . . . to tackle the darkest and most desperate problems of the soul’ (1946: para. 170). Today Jung is recognized as the most famous Swiss physician since Paracelsus (1493–1541), a figure who fascinated Jung and about whom he wrote an important essay (Jung 1929).

Jung’s identity as a clinician was intertwined with his identity as a scientist from the beginning of his life in Zurich, where he had come in 1900 to study psychiatry at the Burghölzli Clinic, a Zurich University teaching hospital. Only a few blocks away from the ETH is the old mansion on Gemeindestrasse 27 that belongs to the Psychological Club, founded by Jung and some forty associates in 1917. Here Jung had his analytic office for many years and saw patients regularly in conjunction with his weekly visits to Zurich from his home in Küsnacht to lecture and to deliver his seminars, now mostly published as supplements to the *Collected Works*.

Science and clinical praxis are two essential roots of analytical psychology. A third is Jung and the city of Zurich itself. The conference celebrated Jung as a Zurich personality at a banquet held at one of the city’s finest houses, the Zunfthaus zur Meisen on the Limmat River. Alan Guggenbühl, a member of this ancient Guild, as were his father and grandfather before him, hosted the event and provided amusing stories about Zurich life and style in the typical fashion of a Zunftmeister. Another personal connection to Jung the man was offered in an address that opened the conference by his grandson, Ulrich Hoerni, who is presently the president of the Swiss Foundation responsible for the literary heritage of Jung and for all publications of these materials. Additionally, the conference offered the opportunity to visit Jung’s home in Küsnacht and to view his library and office there, thanks to Andreas Jung, the grandson who lives in and cares for the house today.

The conference was attended by over three hundred clinicians and academics from around the globe, who delivered and heard a hundred and eighty papers exploring ways through which contemporary scholarship and practice in the Jungian context contribute to urgent debates about the role and impact of myths, symbols and powerful narratives in culture, national identity, and politics, as well as personal life. The abstracts can be found on the IAJS
website (www.jungianstudies.org/publications/papers.php). It was clear from the outset that no single book collection could do justice to the impressive array of cutting-edge papers presented there, in terms of collating a representative cross-section of all diverse applications and their multidisciplinary range. We therefore opted for one thread – a general theme which would resonate most closely with the spirit of this unique return-to-roots event – and a selection of papers that touch upon it from various angles: personal and cultural identities, Jung’s identity, and his contemporary followers’ identities as Jungians. A committee of reviewers was formed for selecting and reviewing the papers submitted for this publication. In addition to the editors, it included Angela Connolly, Leslie Gardner, Frances Gray, and Jörg Rasche, to whom we are most grateful for their help and thoughtful advice.

The volume begins with two clinical studies. Both represent a meeting point between the traditional praxis of Jungian analysis, on the one side, and the current zeitgeist, world events and collective anxieties as impacting on persons in therapy, on the other. Warren Colman presents a penetrating examination of a disturbing sense of alienation and paranoid anxiety in the collective zeitgeist, as manifest in a view of the world as manipulated and controlled by secret agents, through focusing on a patient who was deeply preoccupied with conspiracy theories (Chapter 1). Steven Herrmann tells a fascinating account of a troubled young child coming to terms with his anger and sense of abandonment by working through his preoccupation with the themes of Moby Dick – a study all the more fascinating for the parallels which Hermann finds between the child’s preoccupations and contemporary collective anxieties in post-9/11 USA regarding terrorism and the threat of Saddam Hussein (Chapter 2).

Next, the aperture is widened in a cluster of studies concerning general issues of national and personal identities – again, looking simultaneously back to a shared history and forward to novel applications of Jungian ideas. In Chapter 3, Günter Langwieler revisits Jung’s controversial paper ‘Wotan’, poignantly examining the political myth of the German collective unconscious, and locates it in the historical and subsequent controversies about Jung’s political affiliations at the time. We remain with the legacy of that dark period in history in Joanne Wieland-Burston’s reflections on how Jewish survivors and former Nazis tell (or not) their descendants about their Second World War experiences (Chapter 4). Extending the theme of life stories generally into the scholarly domain of postmodernist narratology, which looks at how self-identities are constructed in autobiographical storytelling, Christian Roesler reports an empirical investigation which, drawing upon Jung’s definition of archetypes, discovers archetypal story patterns in life stories (Chapter 5). Extending the thread of earlier chapters in a different setting, Denise Gimenez Ramos considers the manifestation of traumas left by slavery in the African-descent population of the Pelourinho region of Brazil, and raises penetrating questions regarding how collective
memories present in this group’s painting and music may reveal defences helpful for the survival of the group’s spirit or a split in the collective psyche (Chapter 6). The multifaceted thread of anthropological research is carried into Chapter 7, in which Barbara Helen Miller relates her encounters with traditional Coastal Sami healers in Norway to discourses of marginality and liminality. Finally, we close this cluster with a sample of a vibrant tradition within Jungian studies, a ‘stream’ that makes contact with the arts generally and with film studies specifically: Chapter 8 presents Angela Connolly’s spirited exposition of expressions of feminine subjectivity, as well as tensions around gender roles in Italian society, in film representations of women vampires.

The general theme of the arts is carried into the third cluster, in which our gaze turns to Jung himself. In a novel approach to telling about Jung’s life and the development of his analytical psychology, Christian Gaillard looks at how Jung had progressively created his clinical and theoretical approach in interaction with the arts – from his early encounters with the arts, his own artistic activities and explorations of Oriental arts, the literature and iconography of alchemy and Christian art, his reflections on the works of Joyce and Picasso, and more (Chapter 9). Jung’s lifelong ‘issue’ with religion is well known, and the topic has entered the Zurich conference in numerous contributions. Chapter 10 opens the present sampling of those: David Tacey provides a penetrating scholarly exploration of Jung’s ambivalence about religion, the idea of a new or emergent religion, and the role of the collective social order in the individual experience of the symbolic life. In a further cutting-edge scholarly contribution, John Dourley broaches Jung’s thoughts on spirituality and the mystic experience with particular attention to his discussions of the thirteenth-century Beguine tradition and later Eckhart and Boehme (Chapter 11). We close this cluster with a chapter sampling another tradition within Jungian studies, namely the comparison of Jung with other theorists, while at the same time linking back to our earlier theme of collective identities. Introducing René Girard’s theory of mimetic desire, Paul Bishop contends in his masterful chapter that Girard’s argument works best in the context of the Jungian concepts of the archetype and the collective unconscious; and, conversely, Girard’s thesis substantiates Jung’s intuitions about the identity-constituting function of myth (Chapter 12).

While contemporary scholars of Jung continue to forge new bridges into various corners of the academy in comparative studies such as Bishop’s, Jung himself was deeply engaged in cross-disciplinary dialogues with scholars, and the study of those dialogues has become a strand of research within Jungian studies. Jung’s correspondence with Victor White was a distinct topic in this conference, represented in a panel session chaired by Murray Stein. The papers sampled here – by John Hill (Chapter 13), Robert A. Segal (Chapter 14), Clodagh Weldon (Chapter 15) and Ann C. Lammers (Chapter 16) – each bring a different perspective on the Jung–White encounter, peeling back its
multiple layers of implications for the history of ideas in theology and Jungian psychology alike.

In the final cluster we collectively turn the gaze to ourselves as Jungians today – beginning with the question of what the designation ‘Jungian’ actually means. Thomas Kirsch offers thought-provoking reflections in that regard, drawing upon his life experiences, and concluding that each of us in the Jungian community has a personal and intuitive grasp of what is meant by the word ‘Jungian’ (Chapter 17). However, given the international composition of this community, it might well be asked whether Jungian identities have different implications across cultures. In Chapter 18, Toshio Kawai gives insights into analytical psychology in Japan, identifying how the Jungian duality of focusing on a pre-modern mythological realm and at the same time being a modern psychotherapy resonates with the coexistence of pre-modern and modern traditions within contemporary Japanese culture, as expressed notably in the theme of parallel worlds in the novels of Haruki Murakami. The volume closes with a stimulating contribution that alludes to a different duality within the Jungian field as a whole, a duality of the ‘follower’ of Jung and the critical scholar of Jung – identities which might well be embodied in the same person. In Chapter 19, Don Fredericksen notes that Jungian scholarship has been characterized by a hermeneutic of amplification; he makes a case for a hermeneutic of suspicion – an attitude which would foster critical awareness of our own glibness in the interpretation of the symbolic register produced by the military–industrial–entertainment complex of contemporary society, and which would be distinctively Jungian by virtue of being nested within the ongoing experience of truly symbolic life.

On this note, we encourage the reader to browse through the chapters collected here and sincerely hope that this selection from the papers offered at the ETH conference will succeed in communicating the sense of excitement and creativity that we found so evident in the conference itself.

References


Chapter 1

‘Something wrong with the world’
Towards an analysis of collective paranoia

Warren Colman

This chapter takes its title from The Matrix, a movie made in the closing years of the twentieth century that depicts our world as a computer-generated illusion. The Matrix is a vast computer program created by artificial intelligence machines of the future as a means of maintaining human beings in a somnambulant state, unaware that every moment of their lives is controlled by the Agents of the Machine. In reality, human beings have become merely an energy source for the machines they once invented, ‘grown’ in huge mechanical farms, suspended in womb-like pods and plugged into the virtual reality of a world that no longer exists. The hero of the film is Neo, ‘the One’ who is destined to defeat the Machine through his power to see through the illusion. At the start of the film, he lives in the virtual world but senses that all is not as it seems. He finds his way to the mysterious Morpheus, a visitor from the real world outside the Matrix who sets out to enlighten him. It is he who describes why Neo has come – because of a feeling he has had his entire life that there is something wrong with the world. Seated facing each other in two armchairs, like analyst and patient, Morpheus explains to Neo that the Matrix is everywhere, ‘even here in this very room’ and that, like everyone else, Neo is a slave ‘born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch’ (Wachowski and Wachowski 1999).

The Matrix is one of several films such as Dark City, Pleasantville and The Truman Show, all made in the late 1990s, that revolve around the idea that there is something illusory about the world that prevents the characters from realizing the truth of their situation. The popularity of this idea suggests that it expresses an anxiety in the collective zeitgeist for which these films provide a symbolic form that both responds to and promotes an underlying sense of paranoid threat about the world we live in.

I first heard of The Matrix from a patient of mine, whom I shall call Jonah. For him, the film represented his own anxiety that the world was subtly but fundamentally changing into something for which the world of The Matrix provided a powerful symbolic image. This is a world in which an obscurely hidden but immensely powerful global elite is secretly manipulating world events in order to consolidate its own wealth and power, thereby destroying
the fabric of traditional ways of life and reducing the population to levels of poverty and servitude not seen since the Middle Ages. Jonah saw signs of this hidden agenda in a myriad of ways from surveillance cameras and the use of parking fines to generate revenue to the ‘myth’ of terrorism and the silencing of dissent by proponents of global warming.

For several years I strove to understand his concerns by interpreting their symbolic meaning in terms of his own psychology. This perplexed him since it left him with an uncertainty as to whether the world was really as he saw it or whether he was seeing it that way only because of his own projections. He would often try to convince me of the veracity of his point of view, insisting that he was not the only person who thought this way. Indeed he was not: there was certainly a good deal in his complaints that touched on recognizable socio-political concerns about the hegemony of rationalistic scientific materialism, the destructive impact of globalization and the increasing hold of a neo-liberal agenda on social, economic and political life. These were matters on which I could sympathize and about which I had my own concerns, many of them embedded in a social critique going back to the 1960s. Yet I did not share his feeling of doom, nor his belief in hidden conspiratorial agendas. In short, I did not share his paranoia.

However, when I began to investigate some of the conspiratorial beliefs and ‘alternative narratives’ which filled his analysis, I discovered that there was virtually nothing in what he said that was his own invention – almost all of it could be found, sometimes word for word, all over the Internet. If these were fantasies, they were not personal fantasies but collective ones and therefore the sense of paranoia must be collective too. It was only as I came to grasp this collective paranoia, and the deep sense of social alienation that it expresses, that the either/or quality of his perplexity began to dissolve. Only when I could see that the ‘reality out there’ concerned not the content of his beliefs but a collective emotional complex in which he was deeply enmeshed, could he begin to feel that I understood him enough to stop trying to convince me. Once I could acknowledge the collective element, he could acknowledge the personal one and the impasse in the analysis could be transcended.

In this chapter I hope to elucidate something of the dynamics of this collective phenomenon through an exploration of my patient’s personal psychology. Although collective cultural phenomena cannot be reduced to explanations in terms of individual psychology, I think it is possible to maintain a dual focus that recognizes the way collective issues impact on the internal world of the individual while at the same time acknowledging the way the internal worlds of individuals shape the construction of the social world. From one point of view the question is what sort of person is likely to espouse conspiracy theories; from the other, the question is what kind of socio-political and cultural circumstances are likely to foster the development of collective paranoia.
Some conspiracy theories

Perhaps the most far-reaching current conspiracy theory is the belief that 9/11 was an ‘inside job’ as the so-called 9/11 Truth Movement calls it. In a survey conducted in 2006 no less than one-third of the United States population admitted to being suspicious about the official view of the attack on the World Trade Center. These suspicions include the belief that the US government and/or unknown others deliberately blew up the World Trade Center in order to frighten the population into accepting the need for international war and domestic control (Hargrove 2006). This belief has been widely promoted through the dissemination of the home-made film Loose Change across the Internet (Avery 2005).

Similarly, my patient, Jonah, disbelieves the supposed causes of climate change, seeing the global warming lobby as a front for pushing through punitive tax regimes that will, among other things, prevent people being able to travel freely. This is also the reason why many British pubs and post offices are being closed down: as places where people can meet and talk, they constitute a threat to an agenda that seeks to deliberately fragment communities so that people cannot organize any opposition to the draconian control that is being secretly planned.

One of his major concerns is the way that corporate interests are destroying the link between towns and the people who live and work in them so that while they appear to be similar to towns in the past, they are really no more than dead empty shells that Jonah refers to as ‘facsimile towns’. As small independent retailers are forced out by astronomical rents and profit margins with which they cannot compete, every town becomes a uniform ‘clonesville’ of globally owned outlets such as Starbucks, McDonalds and HSBC. Jonah sees this as a sign of a larger process of ‘bovinization’ in which, as citizens are transformed into consumers, we become passive ‘cash cows’ for global corporations who ‘milk’ us for our money, siphoning off profits to benefit a remote international elite.

Although the precise nature of these sinister global powers operating behind the scenes is inevitably obscure, one fairly popular conspiracy theory focuses on the alleged clandestine operations of a regular meeting of global leaders called the Bilderberg Group. This group is ostensibly an international forum of influential figures from politics, business, finance and academia that meets annually in order to discuss world events. However, many people believe the Bilderberg meetings to be the source of a proposed New World Order, a sinister cabal called The Syndicate which is behind all the major events of the past century and whose aim is the establishment of world government (Hagger 2003; Estulin 2007).

Many people in Britain see the European Union as responsible for these changes and anti-Europe propaganda plays directly to this paranoid sense of conspiracy, deliberately highlighting it for political ends. A good example is a
documentary called *The Real Face of the European Union*, made by Philip Day (2004), who also campaigns on alternative medical treatments for cancer and promotes the view that global warming is an ‘utter farce’, a ‘scam’ with ‘financial and sociological implications’ (Day 2007). The film opens with a clip from a previous anti-Europe video that was circulated to five million UK households by Sir James Goldsmith’s Referendum party in 1997. The narrator (Gavin Campbell) is pictured against dark looming shadows with accompanying music that would not be out of place in a suspense horror film:

It’s the true story of Europe. It’s the story the politicians don’t want you to hear, because it shows how they’ve deceived us and betrayed our nation. Only in 1994 did Chancellor Kohl’s foreign policy spokesman speaking on behalf of the ruling party of Europe’s dominant nation, Germany, clearly reveal the true plan. The plan is to create a federal European superstate.... That has been the plan all along. But those who favoured it knew that the people of Europe would never . . . willingly surrender their freedoms to become just a province in a vast European super state. So what did the politicians do? They conspired to keep the truth from the people.

(Goldsmith 1997, featured in Day 2004)

When Jonah saw this film he was, not surprisingly, convinced that the European Union was the real source of the hidden agenda responsible for ravaging the traditional England he once knew and loved. It is ironic that the film attempts to frighten the viewer by drawing comparisons between the European Union and Nazi Germany since its manipulative propaganda techniques are disturbingly similar to those used by the Nazis to blame Germany’s ills on a Jewish-run international banking conspiracy.

One source of concern about Europe concerns the increasing control of natural resources by global corporations. In the area of health, natural remedies used for decades in the UK have now been banned by the European Union, allegedly working to the agenda of the pharmaceutical companies who foist their dangerous products on a supine medical profession under the banner of ‘science’. Similarly, the promotion of genetically modified (GM) crops enables global corporations such as Monsanto to take control of agricultural production, rendering farmers completely dependent on them and destroying the natural environment. Thus our food is full of poisons and conventional medicine will only make our condition worse.

This link between health, nature and global conspiracy is not fortuitous. Another campaigner who has taken the same route is Ellen Hodgson Brown. After writing several books about alternative medicine, she has produced a book on the conspiracy behind the international banking system (Brown 2007), another popular concern with which Jonah had already familiarized me. Likewise, Jonah’s first target was the medical profession who seemed not
even to acknowledge, let alone cure, various obscure but debilitating ailments from which he suffered. He turned to various alternative treatments, many of them scorned or openly attacked by the medical establishment but some of which were undoubtedly effective. This link, to which I shall return at the end of the chapter, seems to me to do with the threat posed by an increasingly globotechnical world where the environment for living is no longer the natural world but the human-made world of socio-technical organizations. Thus those who are concerned with ‘natural remedies’ find themselves at the sharp end of opposition to the immense power of globotechnical organizations, especially industrial corporations.

It is apparent that there are many different threads in these concerns and beliefs. Some of them veer off into the blatantly fantastical while others are rooted in a core of evidence and argument that is the stuff of live political debate: while I was writing this chapter, a senior British politician (David Davis) resigned his parliamentary seat to fight an election on the dangerous erosion of freedom represented by forty-two-day detention for terrorists, DNA databases, identity cards and the proliferation of security cameras that is often described in the mainstream media as ‘sleepwalking into a surveillance society’. Jonah is far from alone in his paranoid gloom. It is, after all, well known that just because you’re paranoid, it doesn’t mean they’re not out to get you. However, the reverse is also true: just because they’re out to get you, it doesn’t mean you’re not paranoid.

**Jonah: anger, fear and powerlessness**

It is not difficult to see how the circumstances of Jonah’s personal history predispose him to distrust the ‘mainstream narrative’ of the social world and to feel a deep sense of foreboding about the future. For him, the crucial event of his early life was being left with strangers for a few days at the age of two and a half while his sister was born. Nothing was explained to him either before or afterwards, leaving him with a sense of fear, confusion and having been punished for something without knowing what he had done wrong. This complex of feeling generated a suspicious watchfulness that had to be buried beneath an outward facade of being ‘pleasant’, leaving him feeling isolated and uncared for.

This childhood situation was represented in a dream whose significance has reverberated through several years of Jonah’s analysis.

The dream takes place on the embankment of the River Thames. By the river, on his right, is a mermaid in the shadows, an obscurely menacing figure whose baleful glance Jonah is anxious to avoid. On his left is a large building that reminds him of the government building where his father worked. Directly in front of him is a small pool surrounded by a fence and an area of grass. In the
pool, there are three heads inside a sort of plastic skin, revolving in a cease-
less turmoil where first one, then another takes precedence, as if struggling
to get out.

The dream represents the situation in his inner world where he is caught
between a threatening mother-figure and a blank impersonal father-image,
neither of whom is human. He saw the three heads in the skin as being to do
with his internal struggle between fear, anger and powerlessness that continu-
ally oscillate and cannot be expressed. The threat of abandonment means
that expressing his anger feels too dangerous, thus generating a sense of fear
and powerlessness which in turn arouses his anger and rage. It is this trium-
virate that constitutes the emotional core of his paranoia.

For all infants, abandonment and powerlessness go hand in hand. They
have no power to a
ff
ect their environment except through the emotional
impact they have on their caregivers. When this fails, the infant feels both
abandoned and powerless, generating fear and rage whose expression serves
to further alert the caregiver to the need to respond. Eventually though,
through repeated abandonments and lack of response, the infant becomes
traumatized and gives up, as was movingly demonstrated in James and Joyce
Robertson’s films on early separations. In one of these, a two-year-old boy
called John, left for nine days in a residential nursery, becomes increasingly
distressed and eventually sinks into hopeless apathy. When reunited with his
mother, he turns away from her. The film ends with a close-up of the chilling
and unforgettable expression on John’s face: an image of suspicion, resent-
ment, fear and betrayal. It is clear that things will never be the same for John
and his mother again (Robertson and Robertson 1969).

A key element of such attachment traumas is the infant’s loss of belief in
their capacity to have an impact on others. Jean Knox (2007) has shown how
crucial this is to establishing a sense of self-agency and the capacity to form
internal representations of others as agents with their own separate minds.
Without this, the individual feels at the mercy of others whose intentions are
equated with the impact of their behaviour on oneself. That is, a passive and
powerless self is confronted with the actions of incomprehensibly powerful
and potentially dangerous others. In this situation intention and consequence
cannot be separated so that a hurtful action, for example, is construed as a
hurtful intention. The child grows up with an internal world dominated by
a sense of threat and suspicion, feeling isolated and persecuted and unable to
feel secure in relation to others.

Jonah has described a series of childhood memories that express this sense
of being unable to have an impact on his parents, such as being taken to a
pantomime for a treat but without the glasses he needed to be able to see the
stage, and having a painting chosen for an exhibition but his parents not
being interested in going to see it.
He was also suspicious of his parents’ motives and true feelings, which were almost impossible to fathom behind the family facade of pleasantness. As he put it, he is always wondering about ‘the real deal’ behind the facade. In the analysis, this has often made Jonah feel suspicious and defensive towards me, convinced that I am only pretending to understand him. As for caring about him, that is not even on his radar.

With all this in mind, we have come to understand the dream of the three heads as representing his internal struggle to break out of what he has described as his emotional fortress – a struggle where anger, fear and powerlessness are continually fighting against one another and cancelling each other out.

The plastic tree and the ‘real deal’

Jonah’s sense of a ‘real deal’ that lurks behind the facade makes him particularly distrustful of the persuasive manipulations of a media-dominated world promoting the values of a neo-liberal market ideology where presentation becomes more important than substance and persuasion more important than true value. As he says, quoting Oscar Wilde, the world seems to be run by people who know the price of everything and the value of nothing. Everywhere he looks he sees more evidence of ‘bovinization’ and ‘facsimile town’.

One day, a particularly immediate example of facsimile town turned up outside my consulting room when Jonah arrived for his session to find a plastic bay tree on the doorstep. I work above a shop in the centre of an attractive town with historical connections going back to Roman times. Recently, a firm of recruiters had moved in to the same building and had been making their presence felt in a number of ways, leaving me feeling manipulated and powerless to prevent these intrusive changes to my carefully controlled analytic environment. The plastic tree was the latest of these unwelcome innovations.

Jonah scoffed at the hollow artifice of this ‘tree’ which he saw as representative of such empty phrases as ‘thank you for your custom’ and ‘have a nice day’, a false pleasantness whose purpose is merely to manipulate and sell, devoid of genuine personal contact. Not only is it a tree that has been pruned into an artificial shape, it is not even a real tree – a double artifice. On this occasion, though, we were able to move beyond the futile question of whether his picture of facsimile town was real or merely a projection of his inner world. Knowing that he was in fact dead right about the recruiters downstairs, I suggested that the plastic tree might be seen as both a cultural symbol of facsimile town while at the same time having a personal meaning for him as a representation of his own feeling of not being allowed to grow in his own way and being forced into an outward show of hollow artifice. This interpretation enabled him to connect his feelings of anger, fear and powerlessness towards the destructive changes in the social world with his own personal