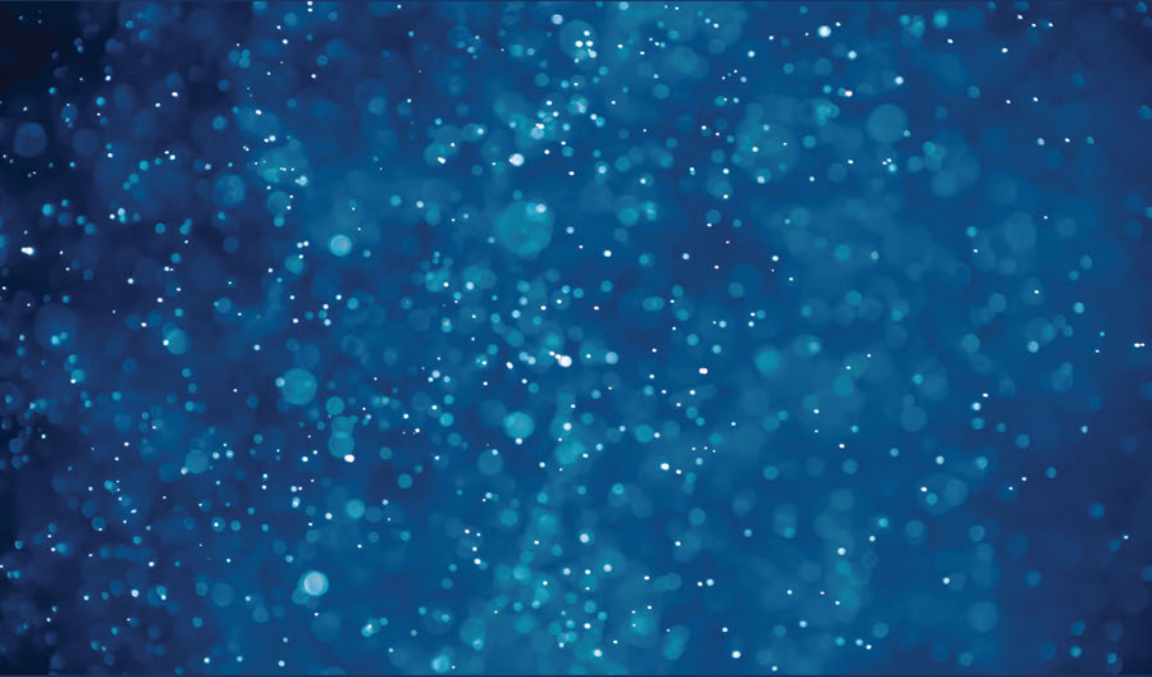


# Unfolding the Unconscious Psyche

Pathways to the Arts



EDWARD APPLEBAUM

# UNFOLDING THE UNCONSCIOUS PSYCHE

*Unfolding the Unconscious Psyche* is a study of the creative arts and depth psychology, and the threads that run between the two. Edward Applebaum begins with works of art, in media including painting, music, literature and film, and pursues aspects of each to aid understanding of the unconscious psyche of the creator.

By combining a study of the artistic work with the insight of depth psychology, Applebaum opens a dialogue between studies of works of art and their creators and the individuals who form the audience for such works. Each discussion is dictated by the artwork itself and is viewed from a variety of perspectives. Throughout the book readers are encouraged to develop their own analytical technique: to follow the clues available, link threads together and analyse what they can see. The result demonstrates the value of dialogue in blending depth psychology with the arts, through examination of work by artists including Georgia O'Keeffe, Ingmar Bergman, Frida Kahlo, Gustav Mahler and Virginia Woolf. Applebaum also seeks to correct misconceptions about the arts that have filtered into the study and practice of depth psychology since the earliest writings of Freud and Jung.

This uniquely creative and insightful work will be absorbing reading for analytical and depth psychologists, students of analytical psychology, academics and scholars of the arts and anyone with an interest in the application of Jungian ideas.

**Edward Applebaum** is a composer whose music has been performed in the US and abroad. He has been awarded grants in composition, neurosciences and higher education. His Symphony No. 2 was awarded the Kennedy Center Friedheim Award. He has taught at universities in the US, Norway and Australia.

‘Edward Applebaum succeeds virtuosically in transforming how we understand creativity in these close readings of how symbols are transformed between the unconscious and consciousness of representative artists. His book is therefore not only for those interested in analytic psychology but also for any layperson, artist, or academic.

Drawing on Jung’s conviction that art is a major pathway by which the psyche finds balance and integration, Applebaum achieves a “total work of *understanding*” which synthesizes the creative arts and psychology. In seeking to “unfold” the psychic processes of representative artists, Applebaum also uncovers previous misunderstandings of the creative process itself. Each of Applebaum’s case studies illuminates both a work of art and the psyche of the individual who created it. Specific artists discussed range from Gustav Mahler, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Virginia Woolf to Georgia O’Keefe, Ingmar Bergman, and Frida Kahlo – and many others.

Applebaum’s generosity is abundantly on display here. In a sense, he is giving back to those who have experienced his creativity as a musical composer, supporting those who listen and attend carefully – both to him and themselves.’

—David Brenner, University of Houston, USA.

‘Out of Edward Applebaum’s vast didactic and psychological experience comes a brilliant synthetic expression for artists, psychologists and those interested in creative process.

In this book he helps readers enter the creative experience of both the artist and the audience/recipient: the transcendent function in action. In other words, artists of all kinds are such because they can contact and express the gift in their unconscious which allows the audience to expand in a similar way.’

—Deanne Kreis Newman, Jungian Analyst, Santa Fe  
New Mexico, USA.

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Pathways to the Arts

*Edward Applebaum*

First published 2016  
by Routledge  
27 Church Road, Hove, East Sussex BN3 2FA

and by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Applebaum, Edward.

Unfolding the unconscious psyche: pathways to the arts/Edward

Applebaum.—

1 Edition.

pages cm

1. Subconsciousness. 2. Arts—Research. I. Title.

BF315.A6697 2016

154.2—dc23

2015006189

ISBN: 978-1-138-81931-3 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-138-81932-0 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-73983-0 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo and Stone Sans  
by Florence Production Ltd, Stoodleigh, Devon, UK

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# FOREWORD

From the limited purview of ordinary consciousness, the problem with the unconscious is that it is *unconscious*, which is to say we can say nothing about what we cannot know. And as Ludwig Wittgenstein reminds us, 'Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we should remain silent.' Edward Applebaum productively undertakes, however, a most ambitious project: to talk about that which cannot be talked about.

When Freud, Breuer, Jung and other pioneers of modern depth psychology began, they frequently reached the end of their branches of learning and instrumentalities, and found it necessary to find new ways to track that which remained most puzzling, most elusive, namely, why were their patients having these debilitating symptoms when no neurological origins could be found? They painstakingly realized that what happens to us, through us and in spite of us might be tracked by way of symptomatology into the places of wounding, venues of displacement and, most of all, into symbolic expressions for that which could not be articulated by consciousness alone. They made the imaginative leap that brought self-understanding to a whole new level; namely, however 'crazy' it seems at the moment, what we do is 'logical', based on the premises operating within. Such premises are often infantile 'readings' of the world, fallacious assumptions, spurious causal events – but their manifestation in somatic, cognitive or behavioural life is a logical expression of those hidden sources.

When examining artistic productions of all kinds, Freud seemed compelled to see them as the by-products of the frustrated libidinal life of the artist; and often they may be. Jung included art as one of the many ways in which the psyche seeks to find wholeness, heal itself, by bringing unconscious contents to the surface so that they might be incorporated into an enlarged conscious conduct of life. For both, the arts were symbolically significant: either manifesting blocked libidinal drives seeking vicarious, symbolic relief, or as impulses of the psyche healing itself by incorporating its multiplicitous contents.

Each of us has noticed this phenomenon of something activated within which reaches the surface unexpectedly in a troubling dream, a song that imposes itself upon us, a recurrent image that brings up an affect unbidden by consciousness. For example, I have often examined why a particular lyric persists unbidden and I usually find that its content is giving expression to some issue that I may or may not be addressing consciously. When I was in training in Zürich decades ago I frequently visited the Kunsthau, or city art gallery. No matter what corridor I went down, I always found myself standing before a battered Roman statue of the flaying of the satyr Marsyas. When, after I noticed this peculiar repetition, I did some research on the subject of this tormented stone, I found amazing parallels with my inner process at that moment. In other words, something in my psyche was activated by, and responding to, the psychic disturbance of an unknown sculptor millennia ago who invested stone with the stuff of spirit sufficient to move a later soul.

We have such experiences frequently: an image comes, persists and then disappears. A dream motif intrudes, and perseverates for several weeks. Each of these occasions is a moment when the two worlds – outer and inner – meet in noticeable ways. Most of the time they are meeting in ways unnoticed by the harried ego. Jung described such meetings as examples of the ‘transcendent function’, namely, the autonomous activity of the psyche to heal itself by bringing these disparate worlds together, to anneal the splits within us that bring so much suffering to us, and through us to others.

As a psychoanalyst, my daily work is to look for such apertures into the unconscious scattered amid the visible wake we leave in the world. We swim in these manifestations: patterns of behaviour, dream motifs, sudden flashes of affect-laden imagery, imaginative productions such as art, and the like. The psyche is never silent, never passive. It is always at work, not only maintaining the multiplicitous operations of the body that no ego could manage, and furthering the possible cooperation of the conscious and unconscious worlds. On those occasions when the two worlds meet, either healing or more pathology emerges.

Edward Applebaum comes to this study with a rich and varied background. He is a world-class composer of symphonies, a gifted instructor of music history and composition in some of our finest universities, a Mahler expert, and a long-time student of depth psychology. He brings this rich experience to bear in *Unfolding the Unconscious Psyche*, demonstrating that those arts also provide pathways into the depth dynamics, and dimensions, of our own souls.

★

Armed both with scholarship and his own imaginative gifts, Applebaum brings wit, insight and a genuine creative process to his subjects. For example, while Mahler suffers his wife’s infidelity, he labours to complete his tenth symphony, a symbolic barrier (a step beyond the god Beethoven), which he believes may also presage his early death, as indeed it does. We know Freud and Mahler met briefly in an analytic session, Freud concluding that the composer’s work was, only, a symptom of the

composer's blocked sexual libido. Theoretically, had libido not been so blocked, there would be no symphony. Applebaum speculates on how a meeting with Jung might have transpired, a meeting in that the impulse to write music is most of all serving the *daimon* with which Mahler was both gifted and burdened, and a heroic effort to bring his own deeply separated soul into final harmony.

As another example of brilliant juxtaposition of these contiguous worlds we inhabit, Applebaum explores one of the finest novels of psychoanalysis ever written, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*. While the novel is a barely concealed *roman à clef*, psychiatrist Dick Diver tracks the progression of his beloved to where she is sadly unable to hold the tension of opposites and descends into a psychotic withdrawal. The normal unities of past, present and future collide in a psyche where the ego is no longer able to tell them apart. Just as Fitzgerald himself later descends into an alcohol-fuelled *catabasis*, so the ego seems pulled apart by the opposites. Reportedly, James Joyce once brought his distressed, schizophrenic daughter Lucia to Jung who said to the writer, 'Your daughter is drowning in that sea in which you learned to swim.' No one better expressed the power of the unconscious with its plethora of contents thrown up into the ego consciousness autonomously than Joyce, and no one ever maintained a greater dialogue with those spindrift images than the exile from Dublin. Both Joyce and Fitzgerald were self-styled exiles from their homelands, and both expressed their longing, their aspirations and their griefs in forms that healed because containing the opposites otherwise, daily, threatened to destroy or devour them.

Exploring artists as disparate as Ingmar Bergman, Beethoven, Kahlo, Rivera, Munch, Woolf, Durrell, the timeless zone of the *Märchen* known to us as 'the fairy tales', O'Keeffe, Ibsen, Strindberg and modern filmmakers, Applebaum demonstrates over and over the ineluctable force of something buried within the creator that is wishing expression through them. This parturient process comes, as any baby arrives, as a painful but profoundly powerful encounter with the divine forces that move us.



So often we ask of the world, 'What do you want from me?' What do parents want? What does the teacher want? What does the employer want? What does the partner want? What does the tribe want? These are reality-based questions and demand the development of a capable ego capacity to meet these demands as best one can. Such is the agenda of the first half of life. However, somewhere along the way, something else begins to stir within each of us. The more we have done what we are supposed to do, the more we have met the demands of the world – with more or less success – the more disturbing this insurgency from below. For some it will appear as a nagging dis-ease, a lack of satisfaction in what has been achieved. For others it will arise as an affective disturbance such as depression or an anxiety disorder. For others it will come as a jarring dream, or waking at 'the hour of the wolf' and feeling the desolation of an otherwise abundant life. It is in

those moments that another question begins to emerge: *what does the soul want of me?* or *what wants to enter the world through me?*

Just as most of us expect that our 'success' in life will arise from meeting the world's expectations with as much accomplished energy as we can manage, or we ask more directly, 'what do I want from the world?' so this different question comes as an affront, a challenge, a threat even. Yet, the wisdom of the second half of life asks all of us, why, in addition to the puny but understandable agenda of ego consciousness, are we here? In service to what, really? To begin to ask oneself what wants to enter the world *through* me is to be called humbly before a mystery.

Applebaum appreciates fully the fact that the artist, like all of us in our different ways, is a vehicle for energies transcendent to the ego state. He knows that, as for most of us along life's anfractuous path, every artist is called to struggle, sacrifice comfort and control and, most of all, is summoned to service. In fact, one may say again that the chief summons of the second half of life is to be compelled to address the question: *not what does the world want of me, but what does the soul ask of me?* What is worthy of my service, whether it brings me recognition by others, or comfort, or happiness? In fact, most of the figures in history we most would admire suffered greatly, and left behind as their gift the tangible contributions of their soul's summons. So it is for the artist; so it is for the rest of us.

Whether triggered by pain, conflict, yearning, moments of sublimity, the end of art, Applebaum asserts, is to bring the unconscious world into the conscious, in the hope that the latter be enlarged, and the two worlds reside in some greater concord. In psychoanalytic terms, the meeting of these two worlds always collides in some sort of *image*, and the task of analysis is to track the image until we can discern what this meeting may mean to us, and even more, what it may be asking of us. When we recall that symbols are the means by which the inexpressible may be expressed, or at least presented to consciousness, then we realize that only the experience of, followed perhaps by the interpretation of, the symbol allows these two worlds to meet in non-pathologizing forms. We may not know the anatomy of any given effect, or how art does its work on us, but we are moved and changed by it, and brought into an enlarged space.

Years ago I had the privilege of knowing a very gifted painter, Nancy Witt of Ashland, Virginia. Nancy had her paintings in museums, corporate headquarters and in the hearts of so many of us. One night when we were talking about her work, she said that the review that meant most of all to her occurred when her work had been installed in a New Hampshire hotel for a conference on psychoanalytic themes. She overheard one of the workers, unlettered in the nuances of artistic techniques, and not an habitu  of museums, call his colleagues over with excitement, saying to them, 'Come here, you have to see this. These are religious paintings.' Such a comment on her surrealist oils was for her the highest possible accolade: she knew that that arrangement of colour and texture on canvas, arising from what unknown places in her soul, reached across the cultural gaps and touched the souls of others on this planet. When we can further enlarge consciousness through some sense of the meaning of any work, however idiocentric to us,

consciousness becomes all the more capacious. It is that goal that Applebaum pursues in this study, and the gift that this book brings to the reader.

Historically, it was the task of the theologian and the mystic to track the movement of the invisible world through the ceremonies of the visible world. And it still is. As existential philosopher/*Daseinsanalyst* Karl Jaspers indicated, our modern task is ‘to read the ciphers’; that is, to discern the clues of personal and cultural distress, to see the compensatory movements of symbolic expression, and to learn which values are missing, which are crying out for expression or embodiment in the world, and which are seeking the healing of person or tribe. Over the last two centuries, it has increasingly fallen to the student of the arts, and to the depth psychologists, to undertake the same project.

Our examinations of such transports and transformations of energy were perhaps best articulated a century ago by Jung in his 1912 *Symbols of Transformation*. This is the seminal work in which he broke from Freud, where he averred that the spontaneous act of symbol-making was less in reductive service to blocked instinctual drives than to the psyche’s effort to heal itself and to further the dialectic between the visible and the invisible world. I can think of no higher praise for this book than to say that *Unfolding the Unconscious Psyche* follows Jung’s impulse, and like Jung’s work, adds so much to what we can know about that invisible world that courses through us, through history and through the souls of the artists.

James Hollis, PhD  
Jungian analyst and author  
Washington, DC

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# PREFACE

Otto Rank once referred to an important film he had seen as a ‘romantic drama’.<sup>1</sup> The idea stemmed from a section in the book cited that introduces the basic concept of the relationships between psychoanalysis and the arts: using manifest conscious material to uncover the latent, the unconscious. The complexities inherent in utilizing psychoanalytical concepts to explore the arts – and vice versa – are beautifully described in a thought of one of the characters in Durrell’s *Balthazar*, where he attempts to weave together the many events and characters who are continually reappearing.<sup>2</sup> The interweaving of the arts and the psyche are explored in the language we choose to use. We will encounter this in all of the media discussed.

Pathways into the arts illuminate our understanding of them – if only we allow them to develop a language that does not deviate from their reality. But we have difficulties in accepting the artist’s reality and constantly attempt to (re)define it in language that is often meaningful to everyone except the person on whose art the discussion centres.

*Example 1:* In a recent interview, filmmaker Joe Wright in discussing his recent film *The Soloist*, as well as earlier films that he directed (*Atonement*, *Pride & Prejudice*), described how dyslexia informs his artistic process. ‘It means you’re forced to think about things in different ways and create different connections. I don’t think in words so much. I think more in moments of film.’ ‘I think in moments of film in relationship between sound and image and how they come together in temporal moments.’<sup>3</sup> Wright was undiagnosed until relatively late in his life. He was considered lazy or stupid.

*Example 2:* Oliver Sachs on the mystery of creativity: ‘Scientists can confirm that musically creative people continually have tunes in their heads, and they’re

incessantly playing with music themes. But I don't think that neuroscience can do more than confirm what talking to any composer would tell you.<sup>4</sup>

The clearest presentation of this issue appears in a review of Frame's *Towards Another Summer*. New Zealand rehabilitation physician Sarah Abrahamson notes: 'From an early age, Janet (Frame) developed a strong interest in poetry, which was to become a lifelong interest. This appears to have been sufficiently intense to be considered an autistic "special interest".<sup>5</sup> Poets and novelists, who persist in the pursuit of those 'interests' of theirs, may seize on that passage as evidence that a segment of the psychological community would want to pathologize genius.

Yes: I can imagine all of these examples. I've lived with them all my life.

As if we lived in a digital world where the brain now becomes a metaphor for the computer, science continually poaches on territory where it must redefine a world it does not know, and then quote itself as if it does.



All of the works of art that I will discuss are variations on a single theme. That theme is bringing the unconscious into consciousness through the creative arts. In their various genres, they form a journey of discovery. They dramatically extend the boundaries of their respective artefacts: words become music, vision becomes poetry, sounds become colours. Senses are redefined as we retrace the passages and symbolic transformations from the unconscious psyche to consciousness.

What are these transformations, and how do they occur?

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to those at Routledge who were so helpful in the process of bringing this book to life. In particular, Helen Hunt's Editorial Department and Kelly Derrick's consistently patient aid, Paris West's quick responses to my questions regarding marketing, and most of all, my Editor Susannah Frearson – mere words are impossible. Thank you all.