

**The Archetype of the Ape-man:
The Phenomenological Archaeology of
a Relic Hominid Ancestor**

by
Dawn Prince-Hughes

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INTRODUCTION:

The Ape-Man and Experience: Kant, Jung and the Archaic Nature of Form and Psyche

Through the ages people have had liminal encounters -- interpolitive experiences -- with "ape-like" entities that they describe as being "almost human," but at the same time "wild." Perceived encounters with these entities are often described as "magical" and "life-altering," and though often reported as frightening, these experiences can also leave the experiencer with a feeling of familiarity; that the entity was not really a stranger somehow.

What are these archaic ape-man figures in reality? What are people really perceiving and encountering? On the surface it would seem that such phenomena are the products of overactive imaginations or people seeking to increase their personal visibility and prestige by association with unusual occurrences that can be neither proven nor disproven.

However, when we look behind the popular cultural curtain which has been used to conceal any academic worth the phenomenon of the ape-man might possess, questions of the nature of the existence or non-existence of wild ape-men invites many interesting arguments from a number of different perspectives, not of least importance are questions about what it means to perceive and experience in the first place. As Carl Jung observes of our plight:

...We look out upon an enigmatic world of obscurity, never knowing to what extent the shadowy forms we see are caused by our consciousness, or possess a reality of their own.¹

The nature of reality and the forms that exist within it, whether shadowy or more readily seen as material, has been the focus of much of Western philosophy from the early Greeks to the present day. A Hobbesian view, that all phenomena are the result of various combinations of matter in motion is merely an elaboration on Democritus' position that the world and everything in it is ultimately fixed and unchanging.² Quite another extreme is the immaterial universe of Bishop Berkeley who claimed that all that we can perceive is ideas.

A less circumscribed paradigm, and one that profoundly influenced Jung, was the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, as presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.³ In the *Critique*, Kant asks how we obtain universal objective judgments about experience and by what mental operations these judgments occur. In the *Critique*, he produces the answers to these questions by claiming that all knowledge that is universally communicable involves two components. Firstly, it must have perceptual content available to our senses, and secondly, it must have mental structures to organize and interpret that content. In this middle paradigm between complete materialism and complete immaterialism, Kant conceptualized perceptual contents as material elements that must be structured by the formal elements of "concepts" and the structures of spatial and temporal organization of our experience. In Kant's view, material

elements are real things outside us that provided sense information, and formal components are given by the structures of our understanding and ability to have sensations. The form, from this position, is what we impose on experience. The synthesis of these components results in knowledge.⁴

Kant made distinctions between reflective judgments (those for which there is no pre-existing concept that is automatically applied to experience) and determinate judgments (those which involve the recognition of some set of representations) and believed that only determinate judgments constituted acts of knowing.⁵

Acts of imagination from a Kantian point of view involves a rethinking and resynthesis to constitute a new coherent concept. To put it a different way, real and currently existing entities do not require human participation in order to exist, but extinct entities buried within us as a priori forms do require our imaginative participation in order to exist again as sources of real knowledge. Kant's system of thinking in regard to reflecting imaginatively (whether consciously or unconsciously) on a series of representations in order to produce a concept under which they can be organized was germane to the body of Carl Jung's work.

Jung, in fact, devoted the whole of his life and his considerable scholarly acumen to the study of the mind's processes and the artifacts buried within them. The artifacts Jung believed could be found in the layers of these processes we now know very well as archetypes. Jung

himself defined these hidden templates within the mind as "inherited mode[s] of functioning, corresponding to the inborn way in which a chick emerges from the egg" as well as being a pattern of behavior.⁶ According to Jung:

This aspect of the archetype is the biological one....But the picture changes at once when looked at from the inside, that is, from within the realm of the subjective psyche. Here the archetype...puts the individual into a state of possessedness, the consequences of which may be incalculable.⁷

The "states of possessedness" that Jung illuminates are, as he asserts, the result of an individual gaining access to and communication with a collective reservoir of human thought, action, and form through identification with a symbol: an archetype of the collective unconscious. How are such liminal states -- states of "possessedness" on sensory thresholds between what is internal and what is external -- achieved? How does one unify oneself with this ancient inner and outer matrix of thought, behavior, and body? Perhaps by participating in a juxtaposition of thinking and behaving in an archaic way and existing in a form that has millions of years of history.

Contemporary scholars have begun to assess bodily motion through space as an important language of its own that has been repressed by the ethnocentricities of Western philosophy and religious precepts.⁸ Proponents of this standpoint argue that literacy in body movement is important, as important questions about the intentionality involved in movement, the meanings of spatial relationships and

organization,⁹ and social action need to be asked, though a few have speculated that we are on the verge of entering a "paradigm of embodiment,"¹⁰ though perhaps not for the first time in human history. It has long been held by more esoteric sectors that moving one's body in archaic positions or in archaic poses provides one access to archaic informational systems while also invoking liminal states of consciousness.¹¹

If movement is just beginning (in the more mainstream circles of our culture) to be seen as a vehicle for archaic reunions with lost levels of conscious experience, certainly the direct interventions of hypnosis toward this aim have been known and utilized even by mainstream practitioners for hundreds of years.¹² Hypnosis as we normally conceive of it though -- wherein an trained practitioner guides a patient externally, with the end result being the complete relaxation of the patient to the point of immobility -- has only marginally to do with the experiences of people experiencing ape-men while out working or playing in a natural setting. Though occasionally ape-man experiences occur during liminal states in this category, i.e. sleeping, resting, and relaxing, most often they are fully alert. This is important to note, as many skeptics have allocated all liminal experiences of unexplained, embodied phenomena encountered during a waking state to the category of hypnagogic (drowsy) and hypnopompic (semiconscious) hallucinations.¹³ It is noteworthy that in such hypnagogic and hypnopompic episodes that bodily pressure, breathing difficulties, pain, and paralysis are

always reported in relation to unpleasant nocturnal encounters of embodied phenomena, and these physical sensations as well as descriptions of the embodied phenomena do not match with reports of the ape-man encounters.¹⁴

As we have stated, hypnosis has traditionally been associated with sleepiness, drowsiness, and relaxation. For this reason, recent experiments in the area of hypnotherapy have focused on problems inherent in relaxing patients with conditions such as hypotension.¹⁵ Results in the area of "active-alert" hypnosis have revealed that hypnotic (and therefore liminal) states can be solidly achieved via repetitive physical activity¹⁶ and claim that active-alert induction evinces characteristics both similar and dissimilar to relaxation induction, and represents a genuinely altered state of consciousness.¹⁷

The fact that most people experiencing the archetypal ape-man are in a natural context (wherein they are more alert to perceptual contents) concentrating on physical activity, usually of an archaic nature (where repetitive behaviors influence states of consciousness and formal contents) underscores the possibility that experiences of the ape-man are the result of a natural internal/external process.

Still, though, skeptical assertions about the role of imagination as a nullifying force on the worth of these experiences cannot be ignored. Ongoing arguments that the phenomenon should be ignored at best, ridiculed at worst, continue to be based on the contention that imagination does not find its genesis in "truth" (or as Kant might prefer to

articulate it, in determinate judgments) but in weak mental constitutions. Events of any kind -- let alone those that are fantastic -- skeptics charge, always suffer from biased retellings. Evidence does suggest that this is so, and that biased retellings are the result of biased memories in turn a consequence of the mind's reorganization guiding the teller's perspective, in addition to the effects of rehearsing shared information in the retelling.^{18.19} Additionally, it has been proven that those retelling narratives are influenced by current situations, conscious activities, and even the intention to remember structures memory retrieval and guides processing.²⁰ Rather than closing arguments in the skeptics favor, when viewed from the correct perspective these tendencies can be seen as evidence of the reifying nature of two-way communication in the building of archetypal narratives. When seen this way, the fact that tellers remember more of their experiences and include more information when speaking to attentive listeners^{21.22} only serves to strengthen the possibility that ape-man narratives come from a collective level; any two people can share, remember, and share the stories again, regardless of where or when those people live.

In further defense of the experience, the fact that cross-culturally participants often report that they become uneasy or feel an uncanny sense of anticipation before experiencing the figure of the archetypal ape-man²³ does not mean that the experience is an "hallucination," but it does support the proposition that the participant is having

a "liminal" experience. Although our most of our culture maintains strict divisions between what is "real" and what is "non-real," other cultures do not make these distinctions or even understand their advantage, seeing a divided world an impoverished one, whether it is the division between narrator and listener, experience and experiencer, human and nature, or the mind and the body.²⁴

But Jung has hope for us:

A high regard for the unconscious psyche as a source of knowledge is not nearly such a delusion as our Western rationalism would like to suppose...Yet today we know for certain that the unconscious has contents which would bring an immeasurable increase in knowledge if they could only be made conscious.²⁵

In conclusion, we restate our original question: What are these archaic ape-man experiences, really?

Ape-man experiences are those of a directly experienced, externalized archetype; informed by biological memory and contextualized and made increasingly material in the remembering and retelling of the experiences to receptive and contributing listeners, who are themselves effected by their own memory matrixes. In other words, people out in the woods, going about their business in a natural setting, really do "experience" encounters with the ape-man. They are not hallucinating, they are externalizing -- during states of "possessedness" -- a set of feelings, ideas, and actions to make sense of a set of internal and external representations.

When they relate these experiences to a listener who holds the same archetype within themselves (as we all do), the experiences take on additional life. The Narrator is not confabulating or inflating the story, per se; it becomes more "real" in the collective sharing and in turn reifies the memory of the ape-man in the experiencer in a continuous layering of retrieval and reification.

These phenomena, so often derided for their qualities of liminality and embellishment and relegated to the dustbins of popular culture, can be better evaluated as important collective experiences: we are the ape-man, and the ape-man is an artifact made up of many smaller artifacts, and lies buried just under the surface of the human mind.

The Archaeology of the Mind:
*Human Evolution in the Buried
 Ground of the Collective Unconscious*

Theories that see experiences as "real" pathways to collective memory and their details as artefactual assemblages add an integrated dimension of psyche to any archaeological endeavor and open new opportunities toward the reclamation of our past and our understanding of the evolution of thought and perception.

Archaeological terms in a material tradition, such as "the site," (the specific area where an excavation is undertaken) "the datum point," (the point from which artifacts found at a site are given context) "the grid" (a dimensional map that records artifacts in relation to one another) and "the strata," the archaeologist selects where to begin

excavation in a particular locality by taking into consideration the features he or she will be working with and must be familiar with the actual elements of the terrain. What is likely to be present there? What artifacts are being sought? It is after these determinations are made that a site is defined and designated for excavation.

Within our field -- the collective unconscious -- the site of interest to us as archaeologists of the ape-man archetype would be human evolution and its physical and psychical traces.

Traditionally, the archaeological survey of a field takes place without consideration of the psyche's deeper participation in its psychic and temporal qualities. However, if we consider these dimensions, it becomes clear that not only does our field have matter that has a history in a material and linear sense, but within that same field also exists a history that could be experienced as an archetypal and translated into an additional material record. With this shift in thinking, we can add an unexplored dimension to the archaeology of human history. As archaeologists of the mind, we are not only surveying our field; as human beings inextricable from our evolutionary history, we are participating in it.

Throughout evolution, interacting patterns of energy have in turn followed patterns that rest on the interactions previous to it, and so on from the beginning, in a kind of holographic deposition leading back in time and crossing and connecting with other trails in a timeless web of occurrences that

still exist as present realities within the collective unconscious. All patterns of existing matter and biological systems of form, thought, action and memories become present in any subsequent similar system by way of cumulative influence over space and time.²⁶

In this theory, systems are organized in the way they are because similar systems were organized that way in the past. All organisms are built from archaic templates that retain a kind of memory of form and action across time and space. We ourselves are made from, connected to, and adding to these biological memories; in our evolution through collecting matrixes of form and thought.

For the primates, this process of evolving began at the end of the Mesozoic, after the mass extinction of reptiles terminating that era, when mammals began to diversify to fill the vacant ecological niches becoming available. During the Paleocene epoch (ca. 65-52 MYA), the earliest ancestral primates begin to appear: known as Plesiadapiformes, these archaic primates lacked many features used as criteria for inclusion in the primate order.

During the Eocene -- 53-36 MYA -- a profusion of primates with definitive primate features begin to develop. These specimens lived throughout present-day North America, Europe, and Asia.

Specimens ancestral to living anthropoid apes may appear during this early push, but later, in the Oligocene, more solid evidence presents itself. The Oligocene, lasting 37-22.5 MYA, was an important time for the evolving primate

order: all primates can trace their ancestry to this epoch though the debate continues as to the accurate lines of descent.

The Miocene, spanning ca. 22.5-5 MYA, is of particular importance; the complicated history of human origins and those of the anthropoid apes takes shape at this time. A radiation of many forms occurred across Asia, Africa, and Europe during the Miocene.

The Miocene fossils we have currently are classified as hominoid, which means "human-like." This term is used to designate all apes and humans extinct and living from the time of the divergence between New World monkeys and all subsequent Old World Forms. The similar term, hominid, refers to the successful form of Hominidae which includes all bipedal hominoids. Traditionally, this definition includes the distinction "back to the time of divergence from African great apes." However, the exclusivity of this distinction illustrates the prejudiced assumption that bipedal locomotion is a recent adaptive artifact. In actuality, African anthropoid apes also engage in bipedality in differing degrees of habituality (from only occasional bipedality to total bipedality) and leads to questions about biological/behavioral continuums and the possible arbitrary nature of nomenclature and categorization.

Be that as it may, we can take as self-evident that these continuums do exist and are the result of multi-dimensional interactions with the past and present. This process of accretion in its formal and behavioral aspects would both have been factors in the community of

organism and environment, and also within the individual; the self.

The Datum Point: The Integrated "Self"

In traditional archaeology, the datum point serves as a fixed point in space from which to measure the position of any artifact found in an excavation. The human being, integrated in mind and body, itself serves as the point from which we apprehend and process all things in relation to (and in connection to) ourselves. As the products of millions of years of evolution in the integrated environment, we are constantly monitoring that environment as we continue to act in it and become an enfolded part of it.

As Jung pointed out, the basis for the processing of all our perceptions is ego-consciousness.²⁷ Our sense of self, as differentiated individual organisms, begins as we move through and separate from a set of archetypal sets, beginning with our differentiation from our parents:

The [parent] inevitably embodies the archetype, which endows this figure with its fascinating power. The archetype acts as an amplifier, enhancing beyond measure the effects that proceed from [them], so far as these conform to the inherited pattern.²⁸

This inherited pattern of internal and external archetypal force eventually, Jung asserted, propelled the self to move beyond its germination in the parent to become individuated. Of great interest, however, is Jung's assertion toward the end of his life that he had realized that

in the end, we find ourselves in the center, the point of origin, once more:

The self, I thought, was like a monad which I am, and which is my world...There is no linear evolution; there is only circumambulation of the self. Uniform development exists, at most, only at the beginning; later, everything points toward the center.²⁹

From Jung's point of view, the archetypes of the collective unconscious are parts of the self and are activated both internally and externally to accomplish the aim of integration.³⁰ Thus, "wholeness" is achieved. This integrated state, wherein we have access to the collective while experiencing it as individuals is an operation that the psyche naturally engages in:

Although "wholeness" seems at first sight to be nothing but an abstract idea...it is nevertheless empirical in so far as it is anticipated by the psyche...What at first looks like an abstract idea stands in reality for something that can be a *priori* experienced, that demonstrates its presence simultaneously.³¹

These are the archetypes that we have access to: representations of our evolution, our own stages, and those of collective humanity as well. Archetypes then embody parts of the self; the individual self and the collective self in the unconscious.

...it contains , besides an indeterminable number of subliminal perceptions, the deposits from the lives of our ancestors, who by their very

existence have contributed to the differentiation of the species. If it were possible to personify the unconscious, [it would be] a collective human being.³²

Jung goes on to say that such a collective human being would transcend youth and age, birth and death, and, because it would be made of millions of years of human experience, it would be practically immortal. And, Jung says poetically, it would be a dreamer of age-old dreams.

And so, the self and the archaic contents of the collective unconscious reflect each other as mirrors, the figures reflected to each other both dark and illusive, and constantly awaiting perception.

The Grid: Human Perception and Attentional Shifts

The parameters we will employ for the purpose of our archetypal mapping are those of perception and the attentional shifts that orient us on the grid system.

We can conceptualize perception as systems of environmental orientation and attentional shifts as an organism's prioritized response to the stimuli those systems apprehend. There are many ways in which we shift attention, both consciously and unconsciously. These shifts occur as a result of a conscious or unconscious realization that a shift in directed perspective is necessary for the moment at hand, or for ongoing integration of the information from varying perceptual points on the grid. The huge amount of

activating stimuli from the unconscious and the environment would quickly inundate and overwhelm us if we did not have set systems that guide our attention and mold our subjective experiences. As Anthony Stevens observes:

Biology, like Jungian psychology, asserts that we receive knowledge of the world through perceptual processes which are mostly inaccessible to consciousness and which have evolved in a manner appropriate to our environment of evolutionary adaptedness (i.e. the environmental circumstances in which our species originally evolved.³³

Ethological research has confirmed that species are highly selective of stimuli from the environment and will only respond to a limited range; all organisms are programmed to perceive their environments in certain ways and respond only to key stimuli that evince special significance within the organism's environment. These biological programs are archetypal in nature and thus provide the organism with a set of template stimuli for which to scan, and provide us with the capacity to apprehend in reality what is present a priori in the psyche.

This framework, according to Konrad Lorenz, applies also "to the relationship between our innate forms of potential experience and the facts of objective reality which these forms of experience make it possible for us to experience."³⁴

Recent laboratory research has tested the early hypotheses of W.B. Pillsbury³⁵ and O. Kulpe, who believed that "impressions which repeat or resemble ideas already present in consciousness are especially liable to attract attention."³⁶ These studies conclude that we do

involuntarily scan for images brought to consciousness,³⁷ and that attention is drawn to anything even associatively related to the contents of consciousness.³⁸

If we are able to identify an archetype as it rises to conscious attention -- as it begins to be scanned for and apprehended as a deep association in the contents of consciousness -- we can then trace it as an artifact down through layers of consciousness to determine its place in the stratigraphy of time.

*The Strata: Layers of Archaic
Consciousness*

The layers of deposition are a key factor in determining the history of an archaeological site. The law of superposition in archaeology states that the oldest layers are the deepest and ascending layers are those more newly deposited, and so it is with the mind. Waking consciousness alone has many subtle layers, though as Jung illuminated, these are only thin deposits which rest on even deeper layers.

In the Jungian model, the most archaic -- the "deepest" -- components of our selves, perception and what is perceived become more and more collective in nature, but in theory are accessible to the individual human being. In other words, the information inherent in these collective archetypes is exactly the same as it has always been, in its primordial form, but it is recognized and reinterpreted. In most cases, however, these archaic images and symbols are either ignored or suppressed, rarely having the opportunity to be assessed in

their raw and literal form due to modern cultural filters. The brain itself has accreted successive layers through which to synthesize environmental information that is both primordial and contemporary.

As we have stated, human beings are the product of millions of years of evolution, constantly adapting in response to a changing environment. These participatory changes manifest and translate information as a result of successive accretion and specialization of the three upper layers surrounding the spinal chord. After each evolutionary enhancement, the pre-existing portions of the brain still function and work in some capacity in tandem with the newly evolved portion. In this way, we can think of the layers of consciousness as having their genesis in the layered formations of the brain. This conceptual framework is illustrated in the work of Paul MacLean.

Paul MacLean, former chief of the Laboratory of Brain Evolution and Behavior of the National Institute of Mental Health, arrived at an intriguing model of human brain structure and evolution referred to as "the triune brain."³⁹ According to MacLean, information from the environment is processed through the successive layers of the brain beginning with the earliest and most primitive portions, filtering up from very old inarticulate centers to the more advanced portions that are capable of assigning meaning to the information. In this model, our consciousness and perceptions would be processed by these interconnected biological systems, each conscious and perceiving in a different way.

At the center and most ancient part of the human brain lies the spinal cord: the medulla and pons, which makes up what we know as the hindbrain and midbrain. The pons lies in the frontal section above the medulla and is made of a connection bridge of fibers that connect the two halves of the cerebellum, joining the midbrain with the medulla. The medulla lies between the pons and the spinal cord and is what might be considered the "translator" of vasomotor, cardiac, and respiratory functions. These connected areas are the neural chassis, which translates into manifestation the most basic of our functions. Surrounding the midbrain we find the olfactostriatum, the corpus striatum, and the globus pallidus. This is the portion called the R-complex, and we share it with all other mammals as well as reptiles. It is thought to have evolved several hundred million years ago. The R-complex plays an important role in aggressive behavior, territoriality, the establishment of social hierarchies, and rituals.

Surrounding the R-complex is the limbic system. The limbic system probably developed more than a hundred and fifty million years ago and is comprised of several small bodies. The limbic system in its totality is believed to be the translating seat of emotion and the organizer of social interaction in its most primitive forms. Experiments in which areas of the limbic system have been electrically stimulated have produced fear, rage, and sexual urges.

Surrounding the limbic system are the cerebral hemispheres, covered by the neocortex. The cerebral hemispheres