

# Listening to the Image: archetypal psychology in drawing and storytelling

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## Abstract

In the work with the images produced by children and adolescents under analysis, an approach based on storytelling and image overlapping was conceived, in order to allow *listening to the image*. This path sought to elaborate on the central jeopardy linked to the interpretation of drawings: the loss of the particular meaning of an image from the perspective of the person who produced it. Adoption of storytelling would establish the same resonance with the initial imaginative activity, facilitating the continuation of this movement by generating other outcomes from the narrative. Understanding the nature of this process, given by its relation to archetypal patterns, might be possible from the observation of its similarities, visible throughout its unfolding, exemplified through the presentation of a clinical case. This experience would become accessible to the analyst employing the *image overlapping method*. ■

**Keywords:** drawings; stories; overlapping; images; archetypal psychology.

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## *A escuta da Imagem: psicologia arquetípica em desenhos e histórias*

### **Resumo**

No trabalho com as imagens produzidas por crianças e adolescentes em análise, procurou-se estabelecer uma abordagem baseada na contação de histórias e sobreposição dos desenhos, favorecendo a *escuta da imagem*. Essa escolha buscou evitar o principal perigo ligado à interpretação de desenhos, que é a perda do significado particular de uma imagem na perspectiva da pessoa que a produziu. A adoção da narração de histórias estabelece a mesma ressonância com a atividade imaginativa inicial, permitindo a continuação deste movimento, gerando assim novas imagens. A compreensão da natureza deste processo, dada por sua relação com os padrões arquetípicos, pode ser possível a partir da observação de suas semelhanças, visíveis ao longo de seu desdobramento, exemplificada por meio da apresentação de um caso clínico. Essa experiência se tornaria acessível ao analista com o emprego do *método de sobreposição de imagens*. ■

**Palavras-chave:** desenhos; histórias; sobreposição; imagens; psicologia arquetípica.

## *Escuchando la Imagen: psicología arquetípica en dibujos e historias*

### **Resumen**

En el trabajo con las imágenes producidas por niños y adolescentes en análisis, se buscó establecer un enfoque basado en la narración de historias y superposición de los dibujos, permitiéndote *escuchar la imagen*. Esta decisión buscó evitar el principal peligro relacionado a la interpretación de dibujos, que es la pérdida del significado particular de una imagen en la perspectiva de la persona que la produjo. La adopción de la narración de historias establece la misma resonancia con la actividad imaginativa inicial, facilitando la continuación de ese movimiento, generando así nuevas imágenes. La comprensión de la naturaleza de este proceso, dada por su relación con los patrones arquetípicos, puede ser posible a partir de la observación de sus semejanzas, visibles a lo largo de su desarrollo, ejemplificado a través de la presentación de un caso clínico. Esta experiencia se volvería accesible al analista con el empleo del *método de superposición de imágenes*. ■

**Palabras clave:** dibujos; historias; superposición; imágenes; psicología arquetípica.

### **Introduction**

Carl Gustav Jung studied unconscious images from the earliest stages of his clinical practice as a psychiatrist, a subject he delved into in depth throughout his vast work. His unique treatment of the imagination and symbolic figures represents one of his most significant contributions to the field of psychology, as evidenced by the exceptional images and dialogues contained in both the *Red Book* (Jung, 2009) and the *Black Books* (Jung, 2020).

In Jung's writings, the interrelationship between the concepts of psyche and image is recurrent, manifested in assertions such as "image is psyche" (Jung, 1929, §75) or in the statement that "every psychic process is an image and an imagining" (Jung, 1939, §889). Thus, any Jungian approach to the psyche should consider the hypothesis of the spontaneous activity of the imagination, understood as a revealing force of the subject's emotional dimension, as explained by the author himself:

To the extent that I managed to translate the emotions into images – that is to say, to find the images which were concealed in the emotions – I was inwardly calmed and reassured. Had I left those images hidden in the emotions, I might have been torn in pieces by them. There is a chance that I might have succeeded in splitting them off; but in that case I would inexorably have fallen into a neurosis and so been ultimately destroyed by them anyhow. As a result of my experiment I learned how helpful it can be, from the therapeutic point of view, to find the particular images which lie behind emotions (Jung, 1963, p. 177).

In this context, archetypal psychology – which does not qualify itself as a new theory, but an alternative viewpoint within analytical psychology – emphasizes the relevance of psychological work being stick to the image (Jung, 1934). James Hillman, its leading figure, addressing this issue, states: “when an image is realized – fully imagined as a living being other than myself – then it becomes a *psychopompos*, a guide with a soul” (Hillman, 1983, pp. 60-62).

Therefore, from this perspective, it becomes essential to understand the underlying meaning of the image. The process of listening to the image is not limited to mere sensory perception, as it is intrinsically linked to expression from the speech, through words. An image that communicates plays a therapeutic role, as it contributes to the healing of the psyche, given that

words burn and become flesh as we speak... words that carry soul accurately, where thought, image, and feeling interweave. Then we realize that soul can be made on the spot simply through speech (Hillman, 1975b, pp. 8-9/217-218).

The affinities between image and speech can be meaningfully illustrated by a study of the

relationships between symbolic thought, cave paintings, and the emergence of language. In addition to their archetypal quality—possibly emerging simultaneously in different regions of the world—both pictorial expression and language would serve to represent “actions, states, objects and modification,” as well as “externalize internal mental states” (Miyagawa *et al.*, 2018, p. 6). The observation that cave paintings are closely related to the acoustic properties of the chambers in which they are found suggests the existence of a timeless link between these fundamental practices of humanity (Miyagawa *et al.*, 2018).

If one of the main goals of psychological analysis is to strengthen the connection between the patient’s ego and his/her unconscious images, it becomes necessary to develop a means to facilitate this process, whose precise clarification from the very first moments of therapy would contribute to understanding the direction pointed by the psyche. One opportunity for this would be provided by adopting a resource in which the images can be “listened.”

A viable approach would involve dream analysis, which, however, implies a long-term investment. In contrast, the use of artistic expression, such as free drawing, would yield immediate returns, providing an effective way to create this “other” (Abt, 2005) with which the patient can establish a dialogue. In the therapeutic setting, this opportunity serves as a direct channel for the desired imaginal expression.

Solutions of this nature have been widely used in analytical settings, especially with children and adolescents. Nevertheless, the interpretation of drawings, as discussed in the classical literature of analytical psychology, tends to rely on empirical criteria that appear to be applied quite imprecisely. The relativization of interpretation, regarding material and formal aspects and the analysis of space, color, and number, creates the risk of projecting unconscious contents onto the material that definitely do not belong to the subject.

This phenomenon has occurred, in large part, due to the fact that analysts’ interpretative basis is

still sustained by the concept of symbol, often resorting to dictionaries in search of collective meanings which clarify images. Furthermore, there remains a legitimate suspicion that the research that underpinned certain observations, considered reliable, needs to be revised in light of more recent investigation. The way to avoid this risk would be giving greater space to what the patient's unconscious has to express. In this regard, Jung observes:

Interpretation must guard against making use of any other viewpoints than those manifestly given by the content itself. If someone dreams of a lion, the correct interpretation can only lie in the direction of the lion; in other words, it will be essentially an *amplification* of this image. Anything else would be an inadequate and incorrect interpretation, since the image "lion" is a quite unmistakable and sufficiently positive presentation (Jung, 1928, §162).

So, a full understanding of the emotions involved, and particularly the analogies to which an image refers, can be achieved by considering it as a metaphor for unconscious elements and processes. This approach would represent the most appropriate way to remain with the image, aligning with the way dreams are understood by archetypal psychology (Berry, 2008). Regarding free drawing, for this action to be effective, pictorial expression must be combined with a similar medium which respects the same type of imaginative process involved in its creation, providing a kind of common harmony.

Following this line of reason, storytelling would fill the gap. This practice opens space for "the most human of all faculties—the telling of the tales of our souls" (Hillman, 1975b, pp. 217-218). The use of pictorial expression as a starting point, later combined with language, stimulated by a creative direction derived from the flow of the imagination, allows the establishment of a common resonance between the two activities, thus achieving the desired dynamic. Furthermore, the effects of this interweaving would create an expanded mental space, favoring the emergence of new images.

This approach assumes that the narrative sufficiently expresses what is present in the image, eliminating the need to seek additional information not already implicit in the drawing or the subject's story. While new amplifications brought by the patient are welcome, they must be carefully considered so as not to deviate from the original phenomenon, disregarding an associative path that is distant from the image. Symbolic knowledge remains relevant to understanding the production, but then begins to play a secondary role, functioning as a theoretical framework used by the analyst only when the path indicated by the patient's psyche is aligned with collective references.

By acting as bridges to feelings, in a close relationship, emotionally charged words "jump out of their sentences and become images" (Hillman, 1975b, pp. 14-15). Encouragement of the flow of imagination also promotes the emergence of images in a dynamic referred to their unfolding, analogous to the process of consciousness emerging during the Jungian method of active imagination. Observation of similarities between these images suggests some psychological themes with which they are associated. In this sense, analyzing a series of visual productions can reveal their affinity with unconscious complexes and hidden archetypal patterns.

This assessment can be conducted in a relatively simple manner by considering each drawing produced individually and following its development over time, through its temporal sequence. It is crucial that, during this process, the productions would not be subject to adaptations, being arranged in a way that protecting their coherence, overlapping one to another and precisely respecting the original form as they were created. The system used for this analysis was called the *image overlapping method* (Porto, 2019).

This imaginal understanding would be characterized as a less intrusive approach of working with the created material, preserving the integrity of the images against the risk of interpretative projections. Its intention is to form an intermediate image which aids in apprehending the meaning of a series of productions, focusing on the subjective

impressions aroused by the overlapping themes and the narration of the stories. Analysis of the archetypal motifs underlying the identified unconscious complexes would offer valuable information for the patient's diagnosis, as well as providing indications regarding the analysis's prognosis, based on knowledge derived from the subject's own psyche.

Thus, the objective of this article is to present a new means of comprehending drawings in the clinical context, conceived from the analysis of created stories and the observation of the unfolding images produced by patients. This proposal is justified by the desire to keep the analysis of images as close as possible to their original unconscious expressions, ensuring greater psychological reliability. The appreciation of images aims to bring them to consciousness, through the "invitation to the picture to step out of the drawing and speak" (Allan, 1988, p. xix).

## Method

The model adopted in this research was based on the procedure of drawing-stories, a diagnostic instrument developed by Walter Trinca in 1972 (Trinca, 1987). Originally grounded in psychoanalysis, it has subsequently been analyzed and reinterpreted using various approaches, and was selected for this study for its ability to maintain interpretation closely linked to the image. Some subtle modifications have been proposed regarding the use, while its analysis has been profoundly reformulated in the light of archetypal psychology.

The initial intervention consisted of prior contact with the patient's parents, followed by an anamnesis interview, before direct interaction with the child or young adolescent. In the first session with the subject, a therapeutic bond was established by exploring his/her motivations for seeking analysis, gradually outlining the characteristics of the work to be developed. During this process, the procedure to be adopted was discussed, in addition of observing the subject's level of awareness of the presented problem.

After this first session, the patient was asked to produce a continuous set of five free drawings—either chromatic or achromatic. Each drawing would serve as a stimulus for the creation of a story, which would be told immediately after the completion of the drawing. Once the drawing and story were finished, the individual was asked to give a title and could also respond freely about the content of both the written and verbal production.

The choice of materials for the drawings was guided by a criterion that prioritized psychological expression, without neglecting aesthetic possibilities. Patients had access to black pencils, pencils of varied colors, crayons, wax crayons, and gouache paint. The latter material allowed both brushes and fingers to apply the paint.

Preceding the application, the analyst provided a sheet of A3 size paper (297 mm x 420 mm) laid out horizontally, placed with the long side in front of the patient. Not suggesting the possibility of changing this position, the patient was told: "You have this blank paper and can make any drawing you like." After creating the image, keeping the drawing still in place, a new task was proposed: "You, now, looking at the drawing, can invent a story, telling what happens." On completing this activity, they were asked to give it a title.

From this point on, the investigation took on a more open and exploratory feature. This phase included clarifications on the understanding of the drawing or the story's content, additional amplifications, and other related mental images. Once the investigation was completed, the drawing was removed from the examinee's sight, concluding the first stage of the test, which consisted of the free drawing, the story, the title, and related questions. This process was repeated four more times, typically over five sessions, until the task was completed.

The protocol's main idea was to stimulate sensitive areas of the subject's psyche, highlighting emotional conflicts and discomfort in the face of unstructured stimuli, enabling for an integrated view of problems through the recognition of

the complexes. The focus on the expression of the drawing, the freedom given in the creation of the story, and the establishment of an appropriate setting would favor the manifestation of archetypal themes.

The transition from Trinca's original observations to a reading supported by archetypal psychology catalyzed a valorization of the imaginative standpoint. While maintaining similarities with the initial model, the interpretation of the material was substantially changed, and based on a robust observational *corpus* provided the identification of specific axes of analysis for each drawing (Porto, 2019), details of which exposed below. This theorizing served as the basis for an unpublished study of an analyst training dissertation at the C.G. Jung Institute-Zürich, taking narration as the primary means of listening the image, while the pictorial elements of the drawing being reevaluated from the perspective of the *image overlapping method*.

In short, this elementary method consists of placing one drawing over another – without any technical adjustments or aesthetic concerns – respecting the way they were originally produced. This process aims to observe possible correlations between their contents, highlighting the presence of patterns related to form and its expression through elements such as colors, similarities and differences between the types of used materials, and the nature of the spatial occupation.

Hence, in the first drawing and story of the procedure, it was possible to observe a complexes map. In this psychic flash of the subject's initial condition, one could identify, in addition to the general consciousness' structure, an incipient inclination linked to the rising of a specific theme. Marked by a complex constellation, the second drawing and story production highlighted this trait that emerges as the main topic, in the passage from a general to a singular point of view supporting the psychological diagnosis.

The third production, in turn, was characterized by the evidence of the transcendent function, from

the emergence of a symbol. At this moment, there is an intense contact between consciousness and the unconscious, and the symbolic rise would awaken a new possibility regarding the previously constellated complex. Generally, this element would appear as an inflection point, offering at least two alternatives as to its assimilation by the conscience.

These possibilities became evident in the fourth and fifth productions, either through a repressive symbol movement or its progressive awareness. Different expressions could appear alternately, without any specific order, as an organic psychic response to the symbolic question. According to their given form, these manifestations would place a process overview, contributing to establish a therapeutic prognosis.

The original research of the present article was developed in Brazil between 2004 and 2013, with 54 Brazilian patients (38 boys and 16 girls), equaling 270 drawings and stories. From this universe, one case was selected and discussed in the next section, with ethical precautions such as written authorization from the patient and identification under a pseudonym. A second phase of this study was conducted in Switzerland, with the inclusion of Portuguese and Swiss patients. Carried out between 2015 and 2018, the investigation comprised of 13 patients (8 boys and 5 girls), a total number of 65 drawings and stories, aiming for a future intercultural comparison of results.

## Flights and Roots

Jim, a 20-year-old young man, comes into the analyst's office complaining of being confused about his professional choice. He belongs to a family whose mother is a 45-year-old dentist, the father a 49-year-old electronic engineer, and the sister two years older. Living in a large capital city and studying Finance, he felt insecure on the eve of graduation, after simultaneously attending a course in Graphic Design and Industrial Design at two public universities. He had told his parents:



“I wanted to be happy before, but now I am thinking about money.”

His parents had met when his mother was taking preparatory classes to enter Dentistry School, eventually taking some of those classes with his father, still an engineering student. They began dating after a year, remaining two more years together before he traveled to work in Italy. During the year in which he lived there, they maintained their relationship by exchanging letters, until he returned. They got married after four years of involvement. The first daughter was born the following year, in an unplanned, but rather quiet pregnancy, when the mother was working as a clinical dentist.

In her second pregnancy, also unplanned, she was in the midst of a clinical specialization in orthodontics while working in clinical practice. The fact that she needed to take care of her daughter and the demands of her studies made her tenser, but she had plenty of family support. According to her reports, the child’s natural delivery was “perfect.” Her first reactions were very positive, happy and surprised to give birth to a boy. She said she was very calm because her dream was to have a girl, something she had achieved in the previous birth. The couple wanted to have more children, and although they feared being overwhelmed with two children, they were able to cope well with the situation.

For a year and a month, she nursed Jim until he had a febrile convulsion. The event took place at his house, while he was with a nanny, in the absence of the mother who had resumed her professional activities. The parents took the baby with a “horrible fever” to the hospital, where he had a new seizure, being hospitalized for a weekend. On returning home, the boy resumed breastfeeding in the same way as when he was only a few months old, refusing to accept any other type of food and was extremely attached to his mother. After two years of medical treatment, he never had any other type of seizure disorder.

He resumed eating well after he recovered from the hospital experience, undergoing a routine

that allowed him to sleep the necessary hours for his development. For some time, he suffered from the difficulties of teething, and his sleep was agitated. His motor development was normal, and he always demonstrated excellent coordination of subtle movements. He played with little figures, monsters, and dinosaurs, always keeping them close at hand. His parents knew that this was a way to feel safe, and they respected that need. He was caring, offering hugs and affection to adults close to him.

Still very little, he spoke correctly and had an elaborate vocabulary. He started attending day-care at five months of age, and after, when he went to school, he socialized easily, having good friends. When he was eight years old, at the only time the family moved home, he reacted badly, wanting to return to the old house. This kind of attachment to a familiar environment was also apparent in adulthood, while living in the main city, he traveled as often as he could to visit family and friends in his hometown, in search of what he considered an essential contact.

At the beginning of analysis, Jim’s behavior was considered by his father to be very extreme, in which things were in the “all or nothing” style. He had come out of a somewhat closed university environment, never having brought home a girlfriend. The pressure weighed him down, and his mood seemed, to his family, slightly unstable, alternating between moments of great happiness and others of enormous sadness. There was a fear of mental illness due to family history. His maternal grandmother had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, in addition to uncles and aunts, with the exception of his mother. On the paternal side, one of his uncles had schizophrenia, undergoing psychiatric treatment for years on end.

He was worried about his health, and took care of it through physical activities such as judo and jiu-jitsu. He did not use illegal drugs and drank only socially. He had a girlfriend who had a degree in law and worked in a stable job in the same capital city. He used some savings received on an

internship during his Graphic Design studies to pay for his Finance course during a leave of absence. However, in his spare time, he enjoyed making graffiti around the city, as he was very interested in street art.

## Drawings and Stories

### 1. *Vanity*

*“The story of a super beautiful girl, all boys were flattering her, but one day when they stared a lot at her, she dried up, lost her teeth and lost her admirers along with her teeth” (Fig. 1).*

The first narrative presents the figure of a “super beautiful girl” as the main character. Given the presence in this production of a photography or map of complexes, it is noted that Jim highlighted a female character, whose preliminary attribute is one of beauty. In a psychological perspective, this choice could be understood as in the psyche evokes the aspects of the *anima* archetype. The personification of specific features

related to the capacity for erotic attraction establishes an exciting relationship that goes back to the archetypal link between *eros* and *psyche* (Brandão, 1991).

The fact that she was admired by all *boys*, a group of kids – mischievous and playful street urchins –, would sum up the dynamic established between conscious elements, childlike (boys), and the unconscious complex, whose main feature is its magnetism (super beautiful girl). This relationship is marked by exacerbated attention, the result of a situation where this group “were flattering her”. The definition of the verb flatter implies a type of adulation whose objective is the obtaining of advantages, which would bring the idea of a situation at first comfortable and nurturing in the ego level.

The origin of the misfortune is from the action of being remarkably observed, until the moment she ends up drying. In everyday life, the drying process consists of eliminating the maximum moisture of a given object, either by natural means or through the use of a machine. It should be taken into account that the verb to dry, in Portuguese language,



Figure 1. “Vanity.” Personal archive.



also brings other meanings; may represent the act of looking at a person with sexual intent, as well as bringing bad luck by casting an “evil eye” on a situation or someone. Therefore, understood in an imaginative perspective, this action would involve an attitude of fascination and initial bewitchment that later, with the withdrawal of the projections, eliminates from the object everything that is connected to the feeling, of which water is a metaphor. In this way, what remains is only a dry, devalued, negative and aged element.

As soon as this girl dries, she immediately loses her teeth, and along with them her admirers. Understood in its organic sense, this loss represents the natural process of time and the relationship with the passage of time. The child, who has her first complete set of teeth around the age of three, begins to lose them at about five or six years of age, for the so-called permanent set of teeth. In the narration, this image could mean that the identification with the social expectations of his age – suggested by the change of objective in being happy for the one of making

money –, would be a risk concerning the dynamics constellated around the *anima*, transforming into a devitalized and soulless reference to consciousness (Hillman, 2007).

The title of the story, “Vanity,” ends up establishing an immediate parallel with the popular notion of an inflated appreciation of one’s own appearance and a desire for admiration on the part of others. However, one of its less discussed meanings concerns that which is vain, empty, or steeped in false appearance, corresponding to the problematic theme described.

## 2. Obsession

*“The story is about the little guy who collected rare birds and his obsession with catching birds got so big that he ended up stuck in a cage due to illegal animal trafficking” (Fig. 2).*

The story presents the character as a “little guy.” In certain contexts, the word “guy” is used as an informal term for a man denomination, with the purpose of emphasizing his cool personality,

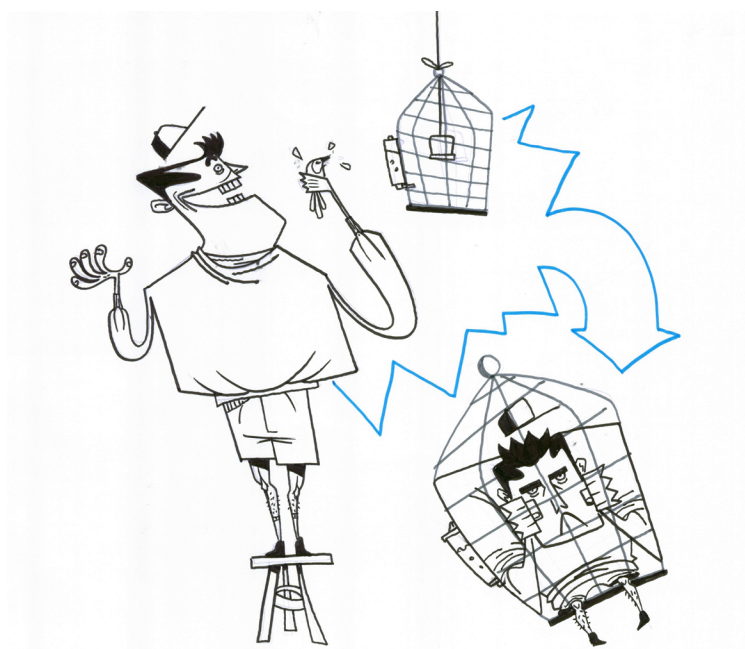


Figure 2. “Obsession.” Personal archive.

mainly when a child uses the expression relating to an adult. Nevertheless, in this situation, the use in its diminutive carries a devaluing intention, as if it gave this person a quality of immaturity or even irrelevance as a self.

The guy is a bird specialist. This activity defines him as someone who wants to capture animals whose main characteristic is the power flight. Like most hobbyists, he is mainly interested in those specimens that are considered rare. At this stage of the analytical process, acknowledging an emergence of the specific complex, it is possible to understand this figure as a part of his psyche that insists on keeping under control any tendency that may imply autonomy and freedom, attributes that find a precise allegory in a flight of a bird. The adjective “rare” gives these birds an even more unique qualification, typifying them as unique and special, which makes understandable that the characteristics they represent would be precious.

Nonetheless, there is an issue that ends up working as a turning point in this short narrative. Because of his obsession with catching birds growing so big, he ends up “stuck in a cage due to illegal animal trafficking.” This passage allows one to reflect on the dynamics involved in the role of obsessive ideas and its efforts to repress the contents of the psyche so that they remain or become unconscious again (Jung, 1918). Faced with the predominance of such standard psychological behavior, what would eventually occur to the subject is to see himself as “caged,” as if the very way he encountered to deal with this phenomenon led him to inevitable imprisonment. Therefore, he might be ending up in the same cage that he wanted to use.

The nature of the offense chosen also holds a singular significance. Unfortunately, illegal animal trafficking is a prevalent crime in Brazil, where the greed and interest of collectors—especially foreigners—associated with weak inspection and soft punishment encourage its diffusion. Leaving aside the tragic details of this type of practice,

what one has in general terms is the displacement of wildlife animals to an urban atmosphere, often located on other continents. This change could be read, in the light of the passage of specific contents between a natural and animal environment to another environment that is urbanized. Without the need to dwell excessively on this point, the amplification of the attributes would refer mainly to the course between the unconscious and the consciousness.

“Obsession,” a word used by Jim to title his drawing, reinforces the specific way in which the question presented can be solved at psyche level. The existence of a unilateral attitude linked to control reveals a situation, as a constellation of a trend, whose preservation is difficult. The energy load in these elements, represented by the metaphor of rare birds, would insist on its total and free expression.

### 3. Dream

*“The story of a boy who wanted to know the whole world and of wanting so much, he created wings and traveled the whole world” (Fig. 3).*

The character in this short story is “a boy who wanted to know the whole world.” If in the previous narration the original theme was the effort of such a “little guy” to capture birds obsessively, establishing an act of domination and imprisonment, what now is manifested is a contrary movement, related to freedom and openness to life. The space that is defined is also opposed to the stifling delimitation of a cage, since “the whole world” covers a vast imagined area.

The sequence established among the prominent people in the narratives also deserves attention. If in the beginning there is the supremacy of the female figure, whose immense beauty fascinates the contents of consciousness, followed by the transition to a male element obsessed with just exercising control, this is the moment that finally exposes a protagonist closely linked to Jim’s unconscious psyche, represented by the



Figure 3. "Dream." Personal archive.

boy. Though young and immature, as a constellation of his heroic and mercurial side, this character would advance in terms of a personal sense of identity. Because of this and other characteristics, such as the affinity with the act of flying (Hillman, 1979/2025), it is possible to confirm his relation with the *puer* archetype.

In this context, the appearance of the wings can be seen as an emergence of the symbol, guarding in itself the potentials for overcoming the created tension. It is fundamental to consider the creation of those wings occurs only from because the boy wanted it "so much," something that connects this event to a deep desire of his psyche. Here one finds a winged being, who instead of being imprisoned, can finally carry out his journey. The pictorial elements of the drawing, when contemplated in this perspective, transmit through their colors dynamic energy, unlike other productions. It is striking how

close the smile of the boy and the globe are as if they were entirely in love.

Therefore, against the backdrop of indecision about professional choice and the problems associated with the lack of progress and difficulty adapting to reality, the image and its description seem to guarantee that the libidinal energy for the ego's task should be available. Even having some initial difficulty on starting this journey, also noticing the challenging vertical direction of this flight, his report ends with the certainty that the boy "traveled the whole world."

In using the term "Dream" as the story title, Jim once again confirmed the affiliation of this theme to the unconscious territory, since this phenomenon would have as its source the deeper recesses of the psyche. In presenting this image and its narrative as an allegory of these psychological aspirations, the role of this topic regarding its conscious life is given its proper value.

#### 4. Stubbornness

*“The story of a guy who was so headstrong, stubborn, that he ended uprooted to the ground. Then he became an old man with motionless/stagnant ideas” (Fig. 4).*

The beginning of the narrative brings again the term “guy,” this time in a new context. Instead of describing someone cool, or in diminutive to depreciate his personality, its use here might denote an ordinary quality. The meaning would be this person is neither unique nor inferior, describing only an average character. This circumstance allows one to identify in advance a realistic acceptance as compared to the previous occurrence of the symbol, where the presentation of the human is somewhat rebalanced concerning its psychological importance.

This individual carries as a peculiarity the fact of being very “headstrong,” a colloquial expression that refers to one who does not let himself be convinced by others, holding to the same opinion on a particular subject. The imaginal backdrop of this expression suggests a rigidity of thought, charged

with a feeling of reluctance to any type of change. The consequence of this stubbornness is his being rooted to the ground. Elements that relate to a genuine and grounded attitude, implying a kind of raw view of life, could hold resonance with aspects of the *senex* archetype.

Besides the presence, in the story, of several aspects associated with this unconscious structure, the general impression of the drawing allows one to reinforce this conclusion, finding in its pictorial expression traces that provoke the imperturbability and old age. Even the appearance of man appropriates a common representation of the theme, which is the trunk of an old tree (Hillman, 1970), having on this occasion his own body metamorphosed into a vegetable form. One can assume that the emergence of impulsivity linked to the *puer* has as an unfolding the constellation of reflective aspects connected to *senex*.

The result of incorporating this perspective corresponds to the description of “an old man with motionless/stagnant ideas.” In this remark, there is a

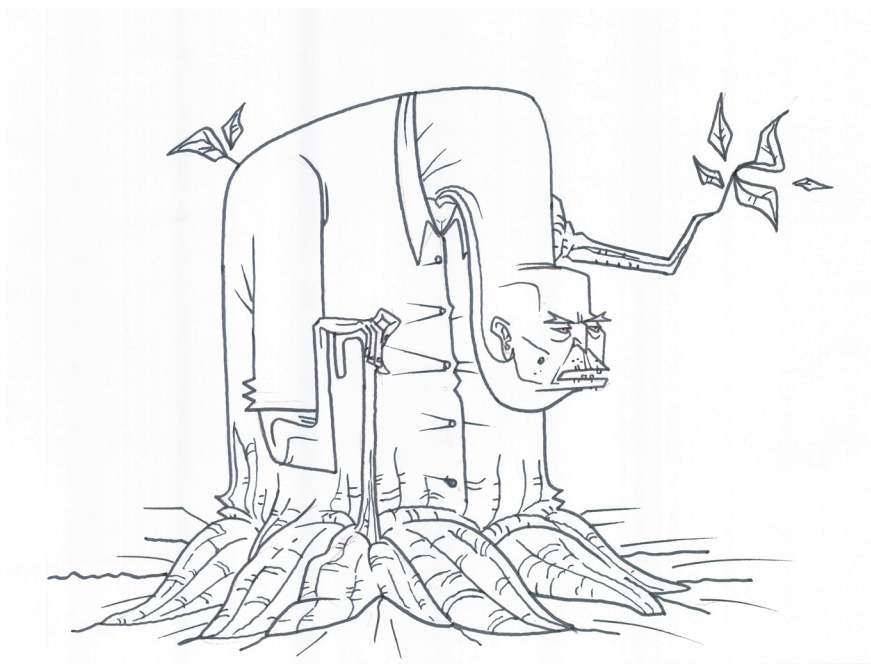


Figure 4. “Stubbornness.” Personal archive.



deepening of the attributes fomented by this archetypal dynamic, which refers to the cold rationalism, the obsessive ruminations and its fundamental concern with the temporal question. Motionless ideas could reveal the need for stability, while the stagnation would place its unchanging dynamism related to the matter of time.

The title of the story, “Stubbornness,” reflects one of the details of this frame. Jim commented that he found, both in his father and himself, manifestations of this subject as an obstacle to undertaking any life project; like a blockage that bothered him, as noted in the negative tonality of his narrative. However, this seemed to be the necessary way of dealing with the problem, assuming that knowledge about oneself only comes from the experience of this mental state, where the poison would be the antidote itself (Hillman, 1975a).

## 5. Callus

*“The story of a dog and his owner, in which the dog was very troubled and wouldn’t stay still, and the owner always scolded the dog for being so*

*messy, that sort of thing. Until the day the owner scolded the dog so much that the only thing it did was lie down” (Fig. 5).*

The encounter between the dog and its owner, the main characters of this fifth narrative, expresses in a metaphorical image the approximation between *puer* and *senex* polarities. It has been discussed previously that in the two last productions it is expected to find both the incipient awareness of the constellated symbol and a psychological reaction that would seek its repression. In the present case, this last alternative shows the most accurate reading in what refers to the routing of this psychological tension.

In taking the characteristics of the two figures, there is in the dog a kind of behavior identified by exaggerated agitation, to the point it “wouldn’t stay still.” This description raises a series of attributes: curiosity, freedom, chaos, fantasy, and impulsivity; on the other hand, there is its owner whose attitude, markedly repressive, is fighting “for being so messy, that sort of thing.” Its exposition also evokes specific attributes: banality, interdiction, order, reality, and prudence. Also, the adjective always, linked to the

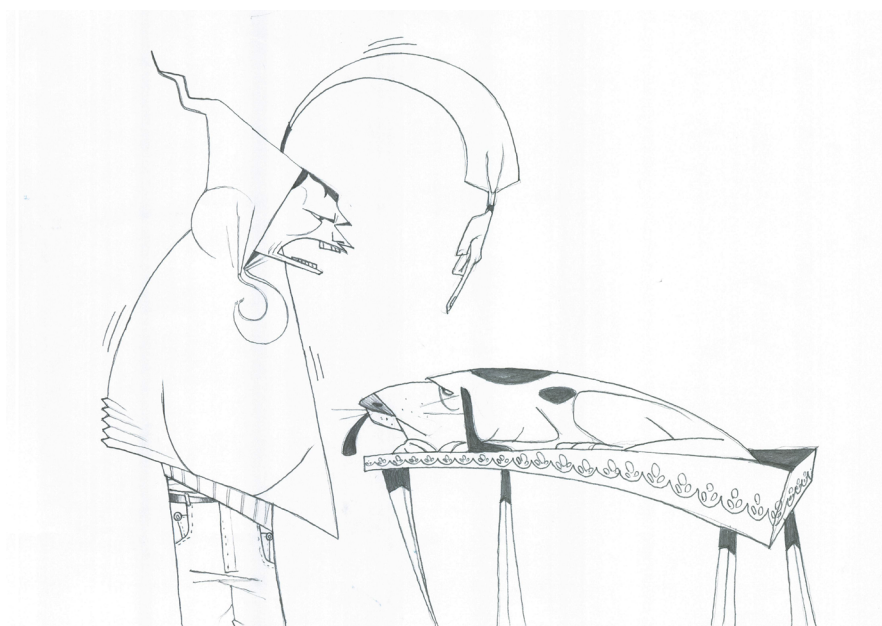


Figure 5. “Callus.” Personal archive.



noun scolded, shows that this was a typical reply of one attitude toward the other.

Therefore, the exercise of listing the various characteristics of each of the beings would allow one to perceive that in this context, both parties are in opposition, like two enemies. As involved in a singular clash, it seems evident that one side is to be defeated, or at least to give up. It could be an incomplete solution, ignoring that both polarities are part of the same kind of experience, in which the fulfillment necessarily comes through the co-participation of their properties. About this experience, Hillman writes:

The puer cannot do with indirection, with timing and patience. It knows little of the seasons and of waiting. And when it must rest or withdraw from the scene, then it seems to be stuck in a timeless state, innocent of the passing years, out of tune with time. Its wandering is as the spirit wanders, without attachment and not as an odyssey of experience... Like the senex, it cannot hear, does not learn. The puer therefore understands little of what is gained by repetition and consistency, that is, by work, or of the moving back and forth, left and right, in and out, which makes for subtlety in proceeding step by step through the labyrinthine complexity of the horizontal world (Hillman, 1979/2025, p. 32).

Instead of promoting this kind of association, the dispute between the parties would eventually lead to the suffocation of one of the polarities. Thus, on the “day the owner scolded the dog so much that the only thing it did was lie down,” one has a picture of *senex*’s obsessional energy in promoting its predominance. It has the cost of the complete surrender of *puer*, which remains in a state of passivity, accurately the greatest of its risks related to consciousness.

For this reason, the title “Callus” can be interpreted in two different levels of understanding. As expressed by Jim, he intended to express the act of callous, as if the dog after dealing with its owner’s orders

gained the calluses of experience. Nonetheless, in the Portuguese language, the term “calo” also refers to the inflexion of the verb to shut up in the first person, representing an attitude of forced silence. Such dumbness would be an act of submission and annulment of this vital part of his psyche.

## Image Overlapping

The initial transition, between drawings 1 and 2 (Fig. 6), is composed of distinct blends: the first, the most central left, between the beautiful girl and the bird collector. The second, on the right, formed by the union of the girl without teeth and the cage in the upper part, and by the flight of the boys and the hobbyist trapped in the lower part. In both drawings, there is a preliminary situation and its development, indicated by the arrows. It is interesting to note that both the mirror and the bird in the characters’ hand have the same effect of fascination, reinforcing each other from their overlap. The result of the acts is presented as unfortunate, exposing the consequences of the specific constellation of a complex.

One can see, in the passage of drawings 2 and 3 (Fig. 7), the display of the winged boy figure and the globe contributes to an approximation that was absent between the bird hunter and the cage. Besides, the fusion between the trunks and arms of the two human characters puts the bird in the boy’s hand, which snuggles up against his face in a delicate gesture. The globe is outside the cage’s confined space as if coming out of it, setting itself up as the background for the bird.

Skipping to the transition between drawings 4 and 5 (Fig. 8), one can find excessive coagulation of the different traits, composing almost a single image. The dog owner seems—as in the example of the previous image—to have gained an arm that holds his staff against the ground. His hand also points to the rooted man’s head, reinforcing the impression that both figures put pressure, or a weight on the animal, that reacts with a posture at the same time both obedient and bored.



**Figure 6.** Overlapping 1 and 2. Personal archive.



**Figure 7.** Overlapping 2 and 3. Personal archive.

The presence of the same pair, seen in the complete transition between drawings 1 and 5 (Fig. 9), concentrates the overlap movement on the figure of

the beautiful girl and her admirers. It is this character who ends up mingling with the owner of the dog, where the curved arm of the latter seems to point to



**Figure 8.** Overlapping 4 and 5. Personal archive.



**Figure 9.** Overlapping 1 and 5. Personal archive.



**Figure 10.** Overlapping 3 and 4. Personal archive.

herself. The orientation of the animal is also defined in terms of this direction, making the other elements of the image less impacting.

Lastly, in following the passage between drawings 3 and 4 (Fig. 10), there is a measure of how Jim must proceed to overcome his conflict. In this fascinating overlap, there is a complementarity that unites the two figures. While one of them directs itself into the air, driven by his wings to the world, the other one remains connected to the earth, to the point that part of his body is transformed into roots. Even the colors, seen from the perspective of the mixture created by their combination, present a contrast that is harmonious; at the exact moment when two branches with their leaves arise from the wings.

This final transition deserves to be highlighted by demonstrating that in the face of this problem, Jim's psyche constellated precisely what he needed to advance in his conscious life, avoiding both the dangers of apathy and the escape into fantasy. In this way, it is evident that the solution should go through the co-participation of these polarities.

## Conclusion

The central aim of this investigation was to find an appropriate approach to working with images produced by children and adolescents undergoing analysis, preserving their unconscious nature and thus avoiding contamination by the analyst's projections and rationalizations. After extensive research, the research culminated in the formulation of a methodology conceived on storytelling and image overlapping.

This path sought to elaborate on the central jeopardy linked to the traditional interpretation of drawings in analytical psychology, which is supported by interpretation methods guidebooks on the material, form, symbolic space elements, color, and number: the loss of the particular meaning of an image from the perspective of the person who produced it.

The meaning of a drawn figure, as a metaphor for a personal psychic event, can only be revealed by the person, or more precisely, by something innermost that refers to this subjective experience, charged with feeling and value. In this sense, symbolic amplification, as described in theoretical textbooks, loses



relevance when compared to the vitality of the representation and the unique attributes of each image.

However, to find its essence, it is necessary to promote attentive listening to the images, putting them into action with the use of a similar harmony to which they came to light, in the form of the drawing. The adoption of storytelling would establish the same resonance with the initial imaginative activity, allowing the continuation of this movement by generating other outcomes from the narrative, which is nothing more than a mental space for the emergence of new images.

Understanding the nature of this process, given by its relation to archetypal patterns, might be possible from the observation of its similarities, visible throughout its unfolding. This experience would become accessible to the analyst employing the *image overlapping method*, which confirms the presence of a specific unconscious theme.

In this way, this approach brings privileged access to the psychological dynamics linked to the patient's complaint, offering information regarding patient's diagnosis and establishing a leading direction concerning the analysis prognosis. ■



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