

James Hillman
Archetypal Psychology
And Cities
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The purpose of this paper is to introduce you to James Hillman's archetypal psychology. Each of his "psychological" ideas helps us better understand his thinking about city and soul. Or we could say helps us experience cities as places of soul. Or helps us better see our work of city making as soul making.

Archetypal Psychology

An archetype is an inherited pattern of thought or images derived from the past collective experience of our culture. Archetypal psychology moves beyond previous strands of psychology: the clinical consulting room, behaviorism, and developmental to the culture and imagination of people. Further, it goes beyond the discipline of psychology to take in the confluence of history, philosophy, religion, art, and culture because these disciplines arise from the imagination. "Archetypal" belongs to all cultures and forms of human activity. Archetypal psychology can be seen as a cultural movement, a movement whose task is the re-visioning of psychology as rooted in imagination.¹

Archetypal psychology returns psychology to its roots in psyche or soul, which moves us beyond the medical model where psychologists lust for cure, salvation, and clean; beyond rat studies, and the scientific method. In Hillman's psychology, pathologies, including betrayal, messes and malaise, are as vital to living our character as clarity of our convictions. Archetypal psychology moves us to understand why age-old patterns and myths in the universe influence who we are and what we do. Our loves, our conversations, our hatreds, our ideas, and thus our behaviors, in part, come from well-formed, long-standing, archetypal patterns.

James Hillman – a Short Profile

James Hillman is a progenitor of the movement called archetypal psychology that combines classic and historical depth with contemporary observation. Trained under Carl Jung in the 50's, Hillman and many others have evolved archetypal psychology as an inclusive movement or "invisible college."²

In his 28 books and over 1,000 articles, Hillman loves to push the edges and make the invisible more visible. He is not interested in what we know; rather he heads for the unspoken, the unsaid, or yet to be said. For example delving into the depths of The Souls Code, the title of his best seller; or what is avoided like, Suicide and the Soul, another book.

¹ James Hillman, (2004). Archetypal Psychology. Volume I of the Uniform Edition. Spring Publications.

² The best introduction to Hillman's complete work is A Blue Fire, edited by Thomas Moore, (1989). Harper & Row. A Blue Fire is a well-organized presentation of thematic excerpts of Hillman's foundational ideas inclusive of his writings up to 1989.

Hillman reads the signs in the culture based on what is revealed in the patterns of the archetypes and myths. He left private practice 15 years ago to become “a therapist of our culture.” He now engages in a therapy of ideas.

He is an elder who is cranky, a curmudgeon, and is not optimistic about the future of our civilization. Hopeful is not a word he uses. But he still spreads his seed, throws out fresh, and often unacceptable, disturbing ideas like his recent book – A Terrible Love of War.

He is currently finishing the twelve-volume, James Hillman Uniform Edition, of his papers, talks, and interviews of which *City and Soul* is volume II, due out early in 2006.³

Entertain Ideas

He works in the world of ideas – both “manufacturing” and challenging them.

[We must] show each other how to play with ideas. Imagine an idea and move it forward. Let an idea swim way out and reel it back in again – entertain the idea. This means having respect for ideas themselves: letting them come and go without demanding too much from them at first like the origin, their popularity or logic. Why can't they be a little crazy? We admit our feelings are sometimes crazy. Maybe our ideas have arms and legs too, are crazy, and want to get out and meet other ideas, air themselves, spend time with each other in public. The ideas themselves need the people in whom they occur. Just the ideas want to appear and be received, welcomed, entertained for awhile.⁴

Hillman's European sensibilities bring us back to origins and depth, not the quickness of America. He is less interested in explaining or validating what is, or what we do based on current convention. He wants us to get inside and behind what we do, based on what we hold in our minds shaped by imagination and archetypes. “The ideas we have that we don't know we have, have us.”⁵ We seldom fathom the ideas shaping us. His writing and harangues aim to dislodge imprisoning ideas and open our psyches to entertain more liberating ideas. Hillman constantly provokes us to reconsider what we think. This is his therapy of ideas at work.

Hillman views Americans as preoccupied with action. “We do not just entertain an idea for the sake of its beauty. We rush to judgment, closing out possibilities.”⁶ Building on Jung, Hillman berets us to avoid analyzing the meaning of an image in a dream; instead “stick with the image,”⁷ allowing the image to do its necessary work. An image or idea comes with a moral imperative; it wants something of us. It will not get satisfaction until you move *with* it. Go where the image takes you; it knows what to do. Pursuing the idea or letting the idea pull you is actually one form of taking action.

³ Visit – Springpublications.com. for a complete list of the 12 editions and each volumes papers.

⁴ James Hillman, (1986). “Entertaining Ideas” in Stirrings of Culture. Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture.

⁵ Lecture notes taken by author.

⁶ Hillman, “Entertaining Ideas.”

⁷ Lecture notes taken by author.

American minds always think about change as discarding the past, leaving stuff behind – go west. Hillman sees change for individuals, organizations, and cities, in a different way: Distinguish and name what remains changeless – immutable – and what is open to change.⁸ The soul feeds from experiencing the changeless anchors. The anchors remaining changeless grant permission to explore change.

Anima Mundi - Soul of the World

He invites us to experience the soul of the world – *anima mundi* – the large animated sphere all around us. It is an old soul deep with layers of tradition and innovation. Wake up: the soul of the world is alive. Every day things in the world pulse with life: rocks, fish, trees, and city streets. Look around. Feel the particulars. The soul of the world is our patient – not us – and it needs attention. Respecting all things as alive with soul, leads to less trashing of the environment.

For Hillman, soul and spirit are different. Spirit transcends, soars, and wants to leave behind the messes. It has a swift, ascending tone. Spirit is above where it is pure and clear. What lies below is soul and it is a murky descent. Soul is the layering of experience, mess and incompleteness, in the culture, honed over time in a mythic sense. Soul is a slower sensation than the spirit. Rough edges and quirks compose soul. Soul is vast and empty until we enter “it” with ideas, images, actions, and above all longing. “I am nothing unless you move in me.”⁹ The romantics say: “tell me what you long for and I will tell you who you are.”¹⁰

Polytheism

Hillman stays clear of anything mono. His views are polytheistic or consider the many. Hillman puts forth three realms of experience: concrete, psychological, and mythical. Each layer of experience feels distinct to the observing psyche. Each layer reveals elements of soul. The concrete is our world of facts; everything is singular and matter of fact: mono. Our needs locate here. The psychological is our world of two, a conversation with one another. We experience the presence of the other person. Our wants come to play; there can be a dissension. The third realm is of the mythic or multiplies of many. The mythic realm holds images, stories, and endless connectivity. It is the realm of the unexplainable – the poetic basis of mind. Desire and longing reside here. Cities revel in revealing the three realms to us as citizens and as members of the polis.

Hillman uses the pantheon of gods and goddesses, especially the Greeks, to help us experience the archetypal patterns governing what we think and do. The gods are a metaphor -- one window into understanding psyche of the world and thus of us.

Beauty and Aesthetics

Beauty matters to the psyche and world soul. Beauty is not just what is pretty. Beauty is not just art on the walls of the gallery. In fact, to heal the soul of the world, beauty must be released from “temporary prisons” like office lobbies and museums. Beauty is *the city*.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ James Hillman, (1975). Re-visioning Psychology. Harper and Row.

¹⁰ Lecture notes taken by the author.

Beauty is revealed in its street life, both people and place. It is present in the old buildings. It is the experience of the strange nooks and streets that twist to go nowhere. It is the look of the battered street sign. It is felt in the cries of people; the look of their weathered faces. Beauty lays waiting in all the old layers that have come before, what has made the city.

Beauty and aesthetics conjoin. Aesthetics means breathing in through our senses. Our hearts are the aesthetic valve of what we experience. Aesthetics slow us down to form a space for silence in which we imagine our self as a seat of power, connected to the soul of the world, able to take action. Aesthetics is the vibe of each particular stimulus calling for a response. We sense the “pull” of another person or a thing like the turn in a city street and respond. This response is aesthetic. Beauty and aesthetics serve as the food for the soul of the world.

Natural Beauty without Nature

For Hillman you do not have to go to the woods to find nature or beauty; it is everywhere in our cities. Hillman wants to free the definition of nature from only natural things and disentangle the need for beauty from the need for nature. Beauty is everywhere in everything we see and touch – in the office, in the funky coffee shop and the old faces of the street. When we make this move, “we no longer have to split the natural from the urban. Surely it is natural for humans to build burial grounds, market places, and form political and social communities...as it is for them to gather nuts and berries...Cities belong to human nature; nature does not begin outside the city walls.”¹¹

City and Soul

What does a psychologist have to say about cities? Why does he have such a long-standing interest? The lens of a psychologist is the psyche of people in relationship to their environment. The conventional psychological lens locates psyche inside the person or in relationship to another person. This lens is a limited intra-psychic view – what is inside us. His idea of the psyche – of self in relationship to environment – is beyond conventional consideration of “not just what lies inside, but also outside and around us as well.”¹² Thus, cities matter to our individual and cultural well being. Cities exist as a more textured psychological orientation to observe and understand what we think and do, individually and collectively.

Hillman sees city making as soul making. The city is a place for soul to enter and be noticed. Cities live archetypal patterns. For example, our city council chamber is patterned after the theatre – the stage of democracy – of Greece. Cities are cauldrons of evolving culture. Pathologies smolder. Messes are ever-present. A city is never finished. Cities are intense Petri dishes to observe people living and working. Eyes connect. People meet. They walk together, talking, back from lunch. Old men play chess with life size pieces in an old park in Zurich. This hum of the polis – the energy of the throng – makes cities repositories of soul and culture and the people in them, deepening the soul and culture.

¹¹ James Hillman, (2006). “Natural Beauty Without Nature: Re-founding the City.” Volume II, City and Soul: Uniform Edition of the Works of James Hillman. Spring Publications (forthcoming).

¹² Hillman, Re-Visioning Psychology.

What matters to self-definition is not found inside us; what lies out there in the city are the shapers of soul. Hillman wants us to see and feel the built environment – buildings and statues as alive. Hillman wants us to know city *is nature* and not just when we go to the woods. Hillman wants us to see streets are for slow walking to feel the soul of a city.

Character forms in Community

As we have noted, archetypal psychology talks about who we are beyond the individual, beyond my problems, beyond my lost lover. Hillman displays a revolutionized view of self. Or as he would prefer to call it, character. “The idea of self is to be redefined...Self is (often viewed as) the interiorization of the invisible god beyond...I would rather define self as the interiorization of community. Thus a self is what people, ideas and things you bring in from “out there” in the soul of the world. You are with yourself only when with others and things. When alone, meditating, I separate from myself; I am estranged. What is included in ‘the other’ goes beyond people – it is buildings, animals, lampposts, and old signs. Hillman calls this community of people and things, a ‘psychic field’ of forces and particulars. If I am not in this psychic field, I am not. Or, I am (my self) because I party or that I am in a party and partake in democracy.”¹³

Cities are one kind of psychic field, shaping who we are and what we do. His rant against psychotherapy in his book, [A Hundred Years of Therapy and the World's Getting Worst](#)...is therapy has not kept up. It isolates people from the stuff of the world. It separates people from the culture and the polis – the literal throng and energy of the people – where self – our character -- has the opening to step into a sense of destiny. In therapy, instead of engaging the culture, or taking political action, we internalize “the stuff” as my problem. Therapy deadens, rather than activating us. Whereas in community – especially in cities – there is the chance that something will enliven or enrage us, bringing us in proximity of our character.

In this psychic field of a city's differences and energies, our character forms more fully and dynamically than say in the suburbs which are usually more about sameness? Character evolves more from experiencing the soul's depth through seeing and feeling the faces of many others. In the city, you know the layers of memory are there to help you remember the ghosts and ancestors who have come before and built what you are walking through at that moment. Cities provide differentiation and complexity the soul longs for. There are more rough edges, quirks and even the city's incompleteness all essential ingredients to hewn character and enliven the polis.

Applying the Ideas of James Hillman to Cities – Some Thoughts from Robert Leaver

We are experiencing a movement back to the city. Empty-nest baby boomers are returning from the suburbs to immerse in urban culture. Some say, the boomer's return to cities is a longing for community. Further, immigrants flock to our cities for work and to remain connected to their culture of origin through proximity to other immigrants. Cities have begun to seed the ground for intercultural milieu. Sprawl is

¹³ James Hillman and Michael Ventura, (1992). [We've Had One-Hundred Years of Therapy and the World is Getting Worst](#). Harper Collins.

what we keep doing to the land by continuing to push the frontier of living away from other people by buying lots of two-to-five acre minimums and build big things like “Mc Mansions” that cost more to maintain by the town than the full cost of infrastructure charged by the town. A city with its built environment – often-empty buildings waiting to be reanimated in occupation – and density is the antidote to sprawl. Technology entrepreneurs build next economy companies in the old mills of industrial cities. The most notable explanation for this marriage of technology and the old is the longing to balance the drive for innovation – the new – grounded in the stories and myth of old industrial places where previous entrepreneurs thrived. Cities are the natural incubator of new companies forming as ensembles of entrepreneurs and talent because cities can combust ideas and know-how, quickly. Cities are natural habitats to practice ecological sustainability by demonstrating in the built environment that “one person’s waste is another person’s food.”¹⁴ It could go like this: think how much usable furniture gets placed on the sidewalk each week headed for the dump. And think how many people go without decent furniture. Enter some enterprising youth entrepreneurs who set up a brokerage to pick up and circulate – for a profit – the discarded furniture to the people who need it. And the landfill stays less full for a bit more time.

I once thought organizations mattered more than the places in which they existed. I now see place as important as organization. I have lived in two cities: Providence and Newport. I left Newport in 1993 after ten years to return to Providence. Newport was pretty, but did not speak enough to my soul. The evening I first slept in Providence, I cried unexplainably and uncontrollably as I watched the wind in the trees and felt the hum of the city below. That evening I learned to read the signs of the places that feed me. Providence was now my city – my sense of place. Her destiny is my destiny. As a place, Providence matters to me. I was born here. I will die here. It is “my client” for the rest of my life. At the same time, I am dedication to cities everywhere. Help heal our cities so the cities have a chance to practice soul making and serve the soul of the world.

After moving back to Providence in 1993, I embarked on a different profession as a community psychologist engaged in city making. I now see places and organizations as mutually dependent— symbiotic. The fate of our places depends on the vitality of its people, of its organizations – all kinds – and the fate of people is shaped by places with soul. Thus, my calling to cities is a call to begin with soul making. As a community psychologist, I focus on crafting community through the convergence of diverse disciplines. For example, creating more places to practice (get ready for) and exercise (actually do) democracy blends aesthetics, the built environment and justice. Richard Sennett¹⁵ describes the two building blocks of Athenian democracy as the agora, the marketplace, for the practice of democracy and the Pnyx, today’s city council chambers, as the formal place for exercising democracy. Active citizens need more new places to practice and then to act democratically than we got now.

City making is activating our places and ornamentation in cities to be intensely aesthetic and practical as they serve the people. A soulful place creates the conditions for releasing more characters into the polis so the polis hums more. Keep the old and new

¹⁴ Michael Braungart, (2001). Natural Capital

¹⁵ The Spaces of Democracy. Harvard Design Magazine. 1995.

stories told. Three timeless Hillman principles guide my city making with soul making at the core.¹⁶ Strive for...

More justice as our continuous attempts to make our co-existence and co-participation more possible

More beauty experienced as aesthetic sensing of a city by its people, who as they walk the city, breathe in its life

A city living its destiny – our realization, as citizens in a city, something is meant, wanted of us – moments of feeling necessary as a city, as the people in it – beyond our immediate personal concerns

Cities matter because they are home to more and more people in the world. It is time to heal the city, so we have a try at evolving the culture again – a culture that expresses democracy, beauty, destiny, cooperation, and community. At this time on the earth, many distinct professions are again focused on cities and community. And they will be the readers of Hillman's ideas in *City and Soul*. New Urbanists are designing cities that are walkable with buildings that have mixed uses like retail on first floor and residences upstairs. This emphasis makes cities transit oriented. New Urbanists bring back the front porch to make cities for walking. Socially minded business people form the Alliance for Local Living Economies to bring attention to the power of character in neighborhoods and the need to understand local spending of your dollar matters. For example, every \$100 spent locally, \$45 stays local; compared to \$13 staying local spent in a chain store.

Psychologists, like my colleague Erik Muten of DramaWorks, leave the consulting room turning to place and community as his patient. In this way, his psychology is one of community building by identifying and amplifying assets to build communities from the inside out. Progressive educators, like Elliott Washor, cofounder of the MET School, foster agency and activism in the citizens -- parents and kids – to take charge of their education instead of education done to you. Practitioners of building network-based, creative economies like my partner at New Commons, Larry Quick, focuses on nurturing authentic places as incubators of next economy businesses. These professions are doing some of the work of archetypal psychology and cities without fully knowing it. Each profession has a piece of the future of city making with soul. Cities like Providence animated with soul – and hundreds more that are walkable and manageable – are where these professions will most likely converge.

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¹⁶ James Hillman, (2006). "Justice, Beauty and Destiny as Foundations for Ecological Psychology." Volume II, *City and Soul: Uniform Edition of the Works of James Hillman*. Spring Publications (forthcoming).