

Bushwhacking Through Narcissism: The Making of a Jungian Analyst

by John Ryan Haule

Copyright © 1993

All Rights Reserved

<http://www.jrhaule.net/bushwhack.html>

Eight

Anima Mask and Lens

If the boundlessness of the sexual instinct-archetype dissolved my ability to hold the tension and continue to function as an analyst with Kim, it also contributed something useful. As a destructive force, sexual energy filled the room with chaotic energy and charged our bodies so that we could not stay consistently conscious of the work and left us intermittently obsessed with the tantalizing prospect of physical union. For orgasm is the best known, most pleasurable, and possibly most effective way to "dump" excess energy [1] -- probably the reason that sleep is often irresistible after coitus. But as long as we could struggle with that tension without the assistance of our own separate therapists, our imagination was set free, making us god and goddess to one another. We looked at one another with stars in our eyes, as anima and animus upstaged our egos.

I had long been fascinated with Jung's contrasexual archetypes, anima and animus. My unresolved relationship with Patricia had brought me to the study of Jung some twenty years earlier, leading to my doctorate on the philosophical and mystical dimensions in the work of integrating conscious and unconscious, which anima and animus mediate. But the notion of contrasexual archetypes is among Jung's most difficult and flawed theoretical notions, and my work with Kim brought me face to face with my objections to Jung's theory and forced me to rethink it.

Anima is usually understood as the unconscious feminine component in the male psyche, while animus is the unconscious masculine component in women.[2] Insofar as we identify with our social and biological gender identity, we leave the contrasexual element undifferentiated and unconscious; and we cannot be whole until we find a way of integrating it. Romantic infatuation with an individual of the opposite sex [3] is the usual means for our beginning this process. At that time, it is said, we *project* onto our partner our inner image of anima or animus. As with most truly unconscious components of our psyche, we rarely encounter anima first as an inner factor but only as a kind of *mask* that we unconsciously "hang" [4] upon another person. Consequently lovers never see one another for who they really are. We fall in love with our own unconscious image and *believe* it is our partner. Being in love is therefore no relationship at all, but only a hopeless illusion. Real relationship with a real person can only begin when we learn to "withdraw" the projection.

Apart from the mystery of what "withdrawing the projection" might mean, this traditional understanding of erotic relationship has a good deal to recommend it. It explains the disillusionment that generally follows upon hasty marriages. It accounts for the hurt feelings on both sides, when the partners complain of being misunderstood. It recommends that we take seriously our immaturity and look to unresolved issues in our own psychology before blaming our partner for the arguments and misunderstanding that arise from our mask-like projections. It is a wise and sober theory, but severely limited.

In the first place it leaves our partner almost entirely out of account. She is only there as a "hook for our projection"; she merely catalyzes an intrapsychic process in us. Surely this inner work must be done, and by both parties. But the mask metaphor addresses only the earliest stages of the love relationship: infatuation and disillusionment. Ultimately, the integration of anima is held out as a vague goal, though nothing is said about what this might mean in practice. If our beloved hangs around long enough for us to do our inner work, we are to imagine that a "real relationship" may begin; but nothing is said about that, either.

Do anima and animus return in some form other than as masks? What form might that be? Jung says only that anima is transformed "into a function of relationship between the conscious and the unconscious" (1928/35: par. 374). He reveals nothing of what we may expect of this "internal" development. The charge of solipsism would not be out of place. Furthermore, if anima and animus projection are the source of numinosity and transcendence in our involvement with our beloved, do we have to imagine a flat, profane relationship without hint of the divinity we once found in one another? One last problem. If we withdraw the projection and do the inner work, do we lose our capacity to fall in love again?

By the time of Kim's first session, I already had answers to some of these questions. I had been married for seventeen years and was delightfully aware that anima and animus were still alive between my wife and me. I was confident we harbored no significant illusions about one another and yet we were as much in love as we had ever been -- more so I thought. I could not remember that we had ever seriously misunderstood one another due to mask-like projections. Surely there had been difficulties from time to time, but nothing like what the mask metaphor would lead one to expect.

My "closure" meeting with Patricia, some nine months before Kim's initial phone call, had opened my eyes to how much anima work had been accomplished during my marriage. I could see clearly that my wife and I had been relating on all three levels (ego, persona field, and self field) and had developed a solidity that had never been present between Patricia and me. I had learned that the three dialogues can run simultaneously, and that arguments on the persona level (*e.g.*, about the tensions between our separate careers) presumed a deeper agreement at the level of the self field. I could see how we were exploring our joyous union even while negotiating day to day disagreements -- even when we did so heatedly. Anima and animus kept us grounded in the self field and contained our struggle.

The fact that I could fall in love with Kim revealed that my marital encounter with anima had not been complete. There were areas of unconsciousness that had not been addressed in my marriage. But I saw that this did not call my marriage into question; it rather opened up a new context and helped me to appreciate my wife anew. The contrast between Kim's boundless chaos and my wife's determined industry was by no means unflattering to my

partner of seventeen years. I anticipated a new chapter opening up in my marriage, and this seemed very far from the rigid blindness that the mask metaphor would have predicted.

I was prepared to go even further, though. It seemed to me there was an eye-opening that took place when I met Patricia and my wife and Kim. I was certain that I saw deeply into each of them and knew them unusually well in a flash of emotional intuition. The mask theory would not be surprised by this claim. It would lean back and smugly wait for my disillusionment to set in. But it never did. As the months and years have gone by, I have found my initial inspired view of them to have been confirmed and deepened. Corrected to be sure, but not in its essential features. Furthermore, I saw each of them with special clarity, as though they had not been seen that well before. It was as though, in some subtle way, I sometimes knew them better than they knew themselves; and I felt seen the same way by them. I knew they saw something essential in me, and mirrored that reality back so that my implicit knowledge of myself was made more conscious. I believe that in each case we have come to know ourselves *through one another* and to know one another through ourselves.

Considerations such as these have led me to reimagine the anima or animus as a lens rather than as a mask. As a lens, my anima brings my beloved into focus and allows her to be who she is and to change as she needs to change, while a mask is a rigid, single image that demands my beloved conform and remain static. A lens clarifies our blurry vision and brings out details (eyeglasses, magnifying glass, microscope, telescope); it allows us to project (movie projector, slide projector); and it serves our memory (camera, camcorder). If we hold a lens too close to or too far from our eye, we obscure the image of our partner. Thus lenses may be misused. We may also keep a single slide in our projector and cast it onto every woman or man that we meet, very much like a mask. But the mask metaphor assumes that all erotic meetings distort the world, while the analogy of the lens assumes that anima and animus are potential assets that can assist in our appreciation of the truth and depth of our encounters. When it obscures our vision, we are abusing our anima lens. We need to learn to get the right distance from it and not to cling to specific forms but to allow the living reality of our beloved to move and change.

Thus when Kim began to work with me, the sexual energy that stirred up the atmosphere, distracted us from an orderly investigation of her issues, dissolved my boundaries, and fragmented my coherent sense of self, was also an asset. For it brought anima and animus powerfully into play and enabled me to see her clearly and essentially. To speak metaphorically, I saw through a sparkling fog down to a luminous core. What shimmered and danced like distracting gleams in a broad aura around her were her astonishing but confusingly profuse intuitions about herself and her life, the psychic readings that she gave to strangers, and the accurate comments she made about me.

The source of all these fascinating elements was the brilliant core of her personality, to which she remained largely blind -- except infrequently and implicitly. There I saw a powerful woman of great sensitivity and responsiveness, with a capacity to be deeply present to another (to me). But this also constituted her woundedness. She was wide open and completely without boundaries. It was as though we zoomed right into one another and experienced an ecstatic feeling of oneness. The sparkling fog of her aura constituted her first line of defense, if only her partner would be distracted by it. I was not. I found it an alluring and tantalizing taste of what lay beneath. For those not fooled by the fog, the way was open

directly to her core, and this she could only defend by a slashing and cruel aggressiveness that went for the heart. It was the reason I usually felt so bloodied and broken after only a few minutes in the same room with her.

I had gathered all this in a general way from our initial phone conversation and found it confirmed in our first meeting. My numinous vision of her was deepened and broadened by additional details as one session followed another. Furthermore, she felt seen. She felt I was in touch with the center she was trying to reach. She often said she did not know what we were doing and what Jungian analysis was but that she felt more able to bring her whole self to her session with me than to the other therapists she had worked with. Other therapists were "bulldozers" who tried to force her to fit the requirements of their therapies, while I allowed her to be who she was. I have now known her more than a decade and have seen her make a great deal of progress in finding her center, accommodating to the world, and tempering her defenses as she has gained confidence in her central identity. She has done an immense "inner work," largely with other therapists, all of which has *confirmed* my initial vision of her.

Another important dimension of this anima work going on between Kim and me has to do with its bringing *my* self into focus. True enough, I felt seen by Kim through the lens of her animus; but she was mostly unconscious of that. She saw me accurately, albeit fragmentarily, and used what she saw to hurt me and drive me away because she felt overwhelmed and suffocated by the sense of fusion that was unavoidable between us. I knew that in isolated moments she truly saw me, but she had little conscious awareness of what she saw and could not remember what she had seen from one session to the next. I knew about the fragmentary nature of her perceptions but habitually underestimated her inability to hold onto them. Thus I *did* enjoy a mirroring from her, even if it often seemed to come through the distorted glass of a fun house. There was always truth in what she saw, and very often it was painful for me.

The more important facet of this experience for me was that the anima brought willy-nilly into play between Kim and me enabled me to see my own self anew. I saw my dullness and stupidity. I recognized the truth in her accurate accusations that the feelings I wanted to gloss as a genuine concern for her, a desire to support and hold her fragmenting self, frequently contained a desire to be held and affirmed myself. Our *participation mystique* was wide spread. I saw that her fragmentation was not simply a pathology located in my patient but that my own self was far more wounded than I had formerly allowed myself to believe. In comparison with Kim's constant struggle to hold herself together, I could see that my self was blessed with a natural cohesive force that was due to no personal merit of my own. Thus my habitual cohesiveness had a new meaning in view of my new found vulnerability to dissolution.

This new capacity for and depth in appreciating my own unconscious foundations is very likely the fact Jung refers to when he says that anima mediates between ego and self. But Jung seems to imply with his notion of "withdrawing the projection" that it is only possible to acquire anima as "a function of relationship between conscious and unconscious" when we separate from one another and go into the isolation of our own private inner work. This did not seem to be true in my work with Kim. I found myself immediately thrust into a numinous *participation mystique* that made me acutely aware of unconscious events directly

involving me, who I was at the level of the self field. Fragmented but resilient and never entirely losing my ego-observer's perspective, I began to notice how much I had been leaving out of account in my habitual view of myself.

In seeing Kim I also saw myself; in seeing myself I also saw Kim. Furthermore, a decade of reflection and reality-testing has demonstrated to me that this was not a muddled vision that distorted us and mixed up our identities in a hopeless confusion, as the metaphor of the mask would expect. Rather, there was an essential clarity that suffered the passing clouds and fog-banks of confusion without being distorted itself.

If anima is a lens that brings both of us into focus simultaneously, it must be trained upon the realm in which we are not wholly separate. It must be that anima brings the *self field* into focus. When I hit upon this formulation, several facts made more sense. As Kim and I were falling apart and gathering back together, what I glimpsed through my anima lens was our struggle in the self field, where the two vortices of our individual selves were assembling, dissolving, and influencing one another with the rippling disturbances we were creating in the field that contained us. The notion that anima brings the self field into focus also sheds new light on my work with Joe, and on my third analysis in Zrich. In both of these cases, as with Kim, I had felt thoroughly depressed, abandoned, and inadequate at the point of sudden termination. It seemed now reasonable to suppose that what was mourned in all three cases was the loss of connection to the self field.

Living connection with the self field gives one a numinous foundation in life. When it is cut off, one feels it profoundly. Evidently this was why, in my depression after Kim's departure, I had interest only for my analytic work with my clients. Only through them did I find my connection with the self field restored. It reminds me of the many stories Eliade and other scholars of shamanism have told about shamans who "become sick" if they cannot shamanize regularly. Once directly exposed to the destroying, vivifying reality of the self field, the shaman cannot leave it for long without feeling his or her vitality shriveling up.

This recalled the puzzlement I had felt in Zrich at the end of many sessions with my third analyst. There were always difficulties between us, but they had seemed unimportant -- not unlike the clouds of confusion that passed over my vision of the self field during my work with Kim. Frequently I would be angry with my analyst for receiving telephone calls during my hour or for cutting our time short without explanation; and in spite of it all -- I could hardly think *because of it all* -- I left his office with a feeling of elation, veritably flying down the hill to the tram stop for my journey home. I can find no dependable evidence of homosexual desire; but something numinous was occurring beyond the edges of consciousness.

Surely not everything numinous is sexual, even though it was the disordered instinct-archetype of sexuality between Kim and myself that opened my eyes. For if the boundaries that had kept me closed off from Joe had not been dissolved in Kim's boundless sexuality, I would not have made the discovery that anima and animus are lenses onto the self field.

The self field is always a significant influence upon who we are and how we feel. Most of our lives are passed in ignorance of this dimension of our psychic life because we are afraid of it or because our attention is too much taken with the events of consciousness and the pressures of the persona field. Generally we become interested in the self field only when we feel our life depends upon it -- as when we find our coherent sense of self fragmenting. Erotic involvement is often experienced as one of these dangers.

The sexual instinct-archetype alternatively dissolves our coherent self and inflates us with grandiose feelings about our self and our relationship. We are afraid of losing our identity, and perhaps we are afraid of losing our beloved. We become hypervigilant about how things are going between us. We want to possess her, have her as a companion, add her magical being in some way to our own. In such an erotic situation, anima and animus focus immediately on the waves and ripples of the self field for clues regarding the fulfillment of our hopes. Sexual desire heightens our need to take up anima as a tool mediating between ego and the unconscious field. But anima and animus are available to do the same focusing work also when sexual desire is not a factor.

Anima and animus are our constant apertures onto the self field. We are more apt to *notice* them when our boundaries are swept away with sexual emotion, but they are available at all times if we only know how to gain access to them. Before Kim, I did not know how to apply my anima-enhanced vision unless sexual attraction was part of the interpersonal exchange. But this did not leave me unaffected by events in the self field -- particularly evident with Joe and my third analyst. Disturbances in the self field elated and depressed me, made me defensive or expansive, awakened my empathy, and the like. But during the whole process I remained unaware of what was going on. I had only the vaguest hints, which frequently I could not identify or name.

When I say that Kim "taught me how to be an analyst," I mean primarily that she taught me how to see through the lens of my anima. Patricia and my wife had already taught me a good deal, but I had not been in a place where I needed to have my boundaries swept away; and Kim was an expert at that. Furthermore, my relationship with Patricia took place in my early twenties, and my association with my wife began in my late twenties. Now I was in my forties with some seven years of work as an analyst behind me, and Kim was nearly my age and had been a patient in just about every form of therapy known to the twentieth century. There was a great deal of experience, struggle, and pain behind us on both sides when Kim appeared for the first time in my consulting room. If the issues I had faced with Patricia had "come back to haunt me," they came back grown up and more powerful; and they required much more of me just to keep my head above water, not to mention my obligation to be conscious of what was going on.

I believe that the lens metaphor for anima and animus begins to make sense of Jung's unexplicated claim that anima becomes "a function of relationship between the conscious and the unconscious." By opening up for us the events taking place in the self field, the anima lens brings into focus the unconscious foundation of our personal life as well as the interpersonal field in which psychic life is embedded. Anima and animus reveal what is happening *between* individuals and enables us to escape the solipsistic slant of Jung's mask metaphor so that we can talk psychologically about *interpersonal* processes. Analysis itself is an interpersonal process. Even when we imagine that its aim is solely to clarify the interior

dynamics of the patient, we nevertheless assume that this clarification requires some kind of dialogue. Imagined as a mask, anima blocks dialogue and distorts interpersonal dynamics. As a lens, it assists.

There is, however, one peculiarity. A lens implies *sight*. But anima brings *emotion* into focus. The self field is an emotional domain, more primitive than imagery, something that is felt in the body like tremors and flushes and the electrical conductivity of plant leaves. The image of the lens and seeing is therefore very much metaphorical. But this is a metaphor with which we are familiar in our everyday speech. We say we *see* deeply into someone or that we feel accurately *seen* by another. The peculiar "seeing" of the anima and animus lens is what we refer to in these figures of speech.

-
1. This formulation resembles the psychology of Pierre Janet, whose work influenced Jung possibly as much as Freud's. In my language, Janet would say that when the tendency to perform the sexual act is not contained by the tension of the self field, the individual is flooded by an abundance of energy trying to discharge in every direction. The individual will be uncomfortable until he can either (a) raise the tension of the self field sufficiently to contain it or (b) "dump" the excess energy that is overloading the self.
 2. Much of the discussion Jung has generated with his terms, anima and animus, has centered around the nature of gender differences. I find most of this literature highly dubious and treacherously studded with political and sociological landmines. Jung's own observations were conditioned by his 1875 birth in Europe's most conservative country, where women were not allowed to vote until a decade or so after his demise. Consequently I find both Jung and his critics unreliable in matters of gender. As I use the terms *anima* and *animus* here, they are virtually interchangeable. These two archetypes have far more in common than they have separating them. I have often longed for a term like *anim* that has no gender designation at all and applies equally well to women and men. (Cf. Janet, 1919, 1926).
 3. Not an inconsiderable problem with this theory is that it makes no provision for homosexual attraction.
 4. Jung says there is never a projection unless there is a "*hook* to hang it on." Anima Mask and Lens