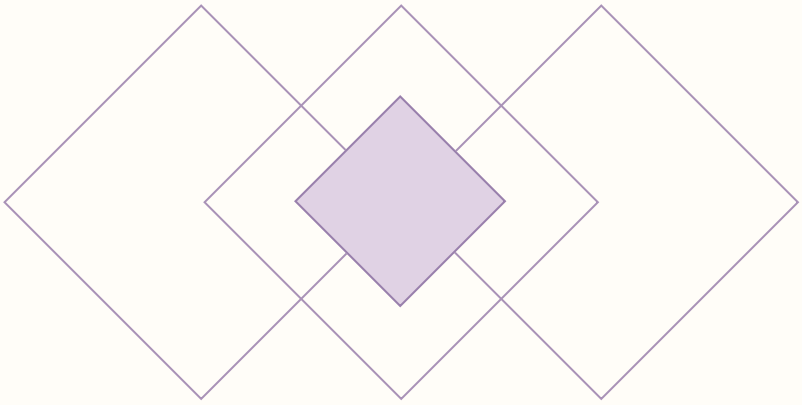


CONCEPTS FOLIO

Four concepts

A folio of distinctions

Related ideas are not interchangeable ideas. Four complete entries, placed together so that differences can be read as carefully as connections.

Edited by Rob Browton
All of You Limited

1 November 2026
Original text / complete sources

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A reference to come back to

Archetype and image, complex, collective unconscious, individuation. Four complete reference entries. This edition contains the complete authored reference text from the listed records. The immersive site's decorative scenes, audio, poems and changing interactive states are not part of this reading edition.

Archetype and archetypal image

Complex

Collective unconscious

Individuation

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Archetype and archetypal image

In Jung's later usage, the archetype is an unrepresentable organising form and the archetypal image is what that form looks like once experience has filled it. The distinction dates from 1946 and was never settled.

Editor	Rob Browton
Wikidata	Q785653
Citation / record	https://archetype.guide/concepts/archetype-and-archetypal-image. Browton, R. (ed.), 1 November 2026 edition.

Definition

Jung used "archetype" for a recurring pattern in the psyche that he believed to be common to all people, and "archetypal image" for the concrete form in which such a pattern shows up in a dream, a myth, a symptom or a work of art. From 1946 he insisted the two should be kept apart. The archetype as such has no content of its own and cannot be perceived directly; only its effects can be seen, and those effects are the images. A mother figure in a fairy tale, a dragon in a dream and a goddess on a temple wall would, on this account, be three images of one form.

The distinction matters because it is Jung's answer to an objection he faced for thirty years: if images vary so much from culture to culture, what exactly is inherited? His reply was that the form is inherited and the content is not. Whether that reply works is the central dispute in the post-Jungian literature, and this site presents it as a dispute, not a settled definition.

History

The idea arrived before the word. In the 1912 *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido* Jung analysed a young woman's fantasies against mythological parallels, and spoke of "primordial images", a phrase he took from the historian Jacob Burckhardt. By 1917 he was describing the collective unconscious as expressing itself through "dominants", nodal points around which imagery gathered. The word "archetype" itself first appears in the 1919 essay "Instinct and the Unconscious", where Jung calls archetypes inborn forms of intuition and describes the primordial image as the instinct's perception of itself.

> It is this factor that I call the archetype or the primordial image. The primordial image might suitably be described as the instinct's perception of itself, or as the self-portrait of the instinct. — C. G. Jung, "Instinct and the Unconscious" (1919), CW 8 ¶277, as quoted in Stevens (2003)

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For the next quarter century Jung used "archetype" and "primordial image" almost interchangeably. The split came with the 1946 Eranos lecture, published as "Der Geist der Psychologie" in *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 1946 (Zürich, 1947) and in English as "The Spirit of Psychology". The revised essay in the Collected Works is "On the Nature of the Psyche". There he distinguished the archetype as such, which he called psychoid, from the archetypal representations that reach consciousness, and he complained that readers kept taking archetypes for inherited ideas.

> We must, however, constantly bear in mind that what we mean by "archetype" is in itself irrepresentable, but has effects which make visualizations of it possible, namely, the archetypal images and ideas. — C. G. Jung, "On the Nature of the Psyche", CW 8 ¶417

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In the essays gathered as *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* he reached for a crystal: the axial system fixes the structure of a crystal but not the concrete shape of any individual one (CW 9i ¶155). Elsewhere he called the archetype an unknowable nucleus: "The ultimate meaning of this nucleus was never conscious and never will be. It was, and still is, only interpreted" (CW 9i ¶265).

Jungian scholars reading the whole run of texts find more than one concept. Jean Knox (2003) identifies four models that recur and merge in Jung's writing: biological entities hardwired in the genes; abstract organising frameworks with no representational content; core meanings that do carry content; and metaphysical entities. Christian Roesler (2012), writing in the field's flagship journal, finds four partly incompatible framings, biological, statistical, transcendental and cultural, and concludes that Jung never produced a consistent definition. He also argues that the 1946 split does not rescue the concept, since an archetype like the hero cannot plausibly be called free of content. The most recent peer-reviewed treatment concedes that post-Jungians have not arrived at a unified definition either (Dale and Howe, 2026).

The disagreement is live. One camp holds the inherited, biological reading (Stevens, Goodwyn). Another reads archetypes as emergent patterns built on a few embodied image schemas, learned early because every infant meets the same basic conditions (Knox, Hogenson, Merchant). A third places archetypes in imagination alone and disowns biology (Hillman). This site's entries cite where each view is set out and do not adjudicate between them.

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Complex

A cluster of associations held together by a shared feeling, which behaves with a will of its own. Jung's first and best-evidenced concept, from the word-association experiments of 1904 to 1909, and the thing an archetype is said to sit at the core of.

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Wikidata	Q679989
Citation / record	https://archetype.guide/concepts/complex. Browton, R. (ed.), 1 November 2026 edition.

Definition

A complex, in Jung's usage, is a group of ideas, memories and images bound together by a common emotional tone, which acts partly independently of the person's conscious intentions. Everyone has them. They show themselves when a word, a situation or a person touches the cluster and the reaction that follows is larger, faster or stranger than the occasion warrants. Jung's own summary was that complexes are autonomous groups of associations that tend to move by themselves and live their own life apart from our intentions.

The concept is prior to the archetype and more modest. It arose from a measurable experiment rather than from mythological comparison, and Jung held onto it to the end: in 1935 he told an audience that the personal and the collective unconscious alike consist of an unknown number of complexes, or fragmentary personalities. In his later theory a complex has two parts. The outer part is personal, built from experience and often from trauma. The inner part, the core, is archetypal. A mother complex, on this account, is a person's accumulated experience of their actual mother gathered around an archetypal image of the Mother that no one taught them.

History

The word came to Jung from the Zürich psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler, and the evidence came from the word-association experiment that Jung ran at the Burghölzli clinic from 1904. Subjects heard a stimulus word and answered with the first word that came to mind, while the experimenter timed the reply and recorded the pulse and breathing. Delays, odd answers, repetitions and failures to respond clustered around certain words, and the clusters pointed to a hidden knot of feeling. Jung called it a feeling-toned complex. The studies were published as *Diagnostische Assoziationsstudien* (1906) and fill CW 2.

He gave the concept its plainest form thirty years later in London:

> A complex is an agglomeration of associations, a sort of picture of a more or less complicated psychological nature, sometimes of traumatic character, sometimes simply of a painful and highly toned character. — C. G. Jung, Tavistock Lectures (1935), Lecture Two, CW 18

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In the same lecture he defined neurosis as a dissociation of personality caused by incompatible complexes: having complexes is normal, but a complex too contrary to the conscious attitude splits off and finds indirect expression in symptoms.

The link to archetypes came later. In the 1934 essay "A Review of the Complex Theory" (CW 8) and in the writing of the 1940s Jung described the nuclear core of a complex as partly innate, and this is where the two concepts join: the complex is personal in its material and archetypal in its organising centre. Murray Stein (1998) reads the complex as an inner image, an imago, that is made of psyche and can be mistaken for the person it represents, and notes Jung's early finding that complexes run in families, with strikingly similar patterns between parents and children. Andrew Samuels (1985) treats archetype and complex together as the two halves of one theory. In the dynamic-systems reading of Saunders and Skar (2001), the complex is the primary unit and the archetype as such becomes dispensable: complexes self-organise from experience without needing an inherited form behind them.

The word-association experiment remains the one part of Jung's work that mainstream psychology adopted, in altered form, as a measure of implicit response.

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Collective unconscious

Jung's name for a layer of the unconscious he held to be shared by everyone rather than built from personal experience, and whose contents are the archetypes. A hypothesis in his own words, not a finding.

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Wikidata	Q28995
Citation / record	https://archetype.guide/concepts/collective-unconscious. Browton, R. (ed.), 1 November 2026 edition.

Definition

The collective unconscious is the part of the psyche that Jung proposed is not acquired in a lifetime. Freud's unconscious was personal: made of what an individual had forgotten, repressed or never noticed. Jung kept that layer and placed another beneath it, impersonal and the same in everyone, whose contents are the archetypes. He used "collective" to mean common to the species, not belonging to a group, and he sometimes preferred "impersonal". The hypothesis was his explanation for a clinical observation he returned to again and again: patients with no knowledge of mythology produced dreams and fantasies that matched myths closely.

It is a hypothesis, and Jung called it one. The site's entries treat it as the central organising idea of analytical psychology and as a historical claim about the mind whose empirical standing is discussed on the methodology page. The mechanism Jung sometimes gave for it, genetic inheritance of complex symbolic patterns, has been set aside by the field's own leading theorists.

History

Jung first distinguished a personal from an impersonal unconscious in the years after his break with Freud, and by 1917 he was describing the collective unconscious as expressing itself through "dominants", nodal points around which imagery gathers (Samuels, 1985). The idea had precursors he acknowledged, among them Adolf Bastian's *Elementargedanken* of 1881 and the "categories of imagination" of Hubert and Mauss, which Jung cited as independent of his own work.

He stated it plainly to a London audience in 1935:

> From these layers derive the contents of an impersonal, mythological character, in other words, the archetypes, and I call them therefore the impersonal or collective unconscious. — C. G. Jung, Tavistock Lectures (1935), Lecture Two, CW 18

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The evidence he offered in the same lecture is typical of the whole corpus: a patient's dream of a man crucified on a wheel, which Jung read as the Greek motif of Ixion and took to be beyond the dreamer's learning. He conceded at once that a single example proves nothing.

The 1939 Eranos lectures, published in English as *The Integration of the Personality*, give the clearest statement of why he needed the idea. Faced with the same symbols appearing in unrelated patients, he wrote that the most sensible explanation was "the hypothesis of the collective unconscious", meaning a universal similarity of the basic structure of the human psyche containing a number of patterns, archetypes, common to the whole of humanity. The essay "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious" (1934, revised 1954) opens CW 9i, and in *Aion* (1951) Jung drew the line between the two layers in a sentence: the contents of the personal unconscious are acquired during a lifetime, the contents of the collective unconscious are archetypes that were present from the beginning (CW 9ii ¶13).

Later writers have narrowed and reworked the idea. Anthony Stevens (2003) treats it as synonymous with a phylogenetic psyche shaped by evolution. Murray Stein (1998) separates a cultural unconscious, shared by people raised in the same traditions, from the collective unconscious proper. Jean Knox (2003) and Christian Roesler (2012) argue that what is shared across humanity is a small set of embodied developmental schemas and the stories cultures tell around them, not an inherited store of symbolic content.

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Individuation

Jung's term for the lifelong process by which a person becomes a distinct, undivided whole, differentiated from collective norms and from the unconscious alike. Defined in 1921, developed from 1928, and the frame within which every archetype is said to be met.

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Wikidata	Q109039528
Citation / record	https://archetype.guide/concepts/individuation. Browton, R. (ed.), 1 November 2026 edition.

Definition

Individuation is the process Jung proposed as the goal of psychological development: becoming the particular person one is, as a whole that includes the unconscious, rather than an ego identified with its conscious contents or a copy of the group. He derived the word from the idea of the indivisible. In 1939 he put it as simply as he ever did: by individuation he meant the psychological process that makes a human being an individual, a unique, indivisible unit or whole.

The term is the frame for the rest of his vocabulary. The persona is what must be seen through, the shadow what must be acknowledged, the anima or animus what must be withdrawn from projection, and the Self the centre that the process circles. Entries on this site that describe those figures describe them as stages or figures within individuation, which is how Jung presented them. Whether such a process exists, in the sense that could be studied, is not something any of the literature has tested; it is a clinical and interpretive frame.

History

The definition appears in the glossary of *Psychological Types* (1921). There individuation is the process of forming and specialising the individual nature, the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology (CW 6 ¶757). A second sentence in the same entry ties it to the growth of consciousness out of an original state of identity, the non-differentiation of subject and object (CW 6 ¶762).

Jung's most quoted statement comes from the second of the *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (1928):

> Individuation means becoming an “in-dividual,” and, in so far as “individuality” embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one’s own self. We could therefore translate individuation as “coming to selfhood” or “self-realization.” — C. G. Jung, “The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious” (1928), CW 7 ¶266

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The 1930s Eranos lectures, published in English in 1939 as *The Integration of the Personality*, open with a chapter called “The Meaning of Individuation” and set out the shift that drives it: the ego, once taken for the whole of the personality, is dethroned and left as the centre of consciousness only, while the whole must now include the unconscious. The two lectures on dream symbols and on alchemy from the same volume were expanded into *Psychology and Alchemy* (1944), where a long dream series is read as a record of the process.

Post-Jungian schools differ on when individuation happens. The classical Zürich reading places it in the second half of life. Michael Fordham, in London, argued that the differentiation from collective psychology that Jung’s 1921 definition describes begins in infancy, with the primary self deintegrating and reintegrating from birth, so that individuation is lifelong and its first stages are concluded by about the age of two (Samuels, 1985). Mario Jacoby (1990) set the concept against Kohut’s self psychology. Whether individuation is a universal developmental task or a culturally specific ideal of the autonomous person is an open question in the literature, and critics from within analytical psychology have raised it.

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