The Trickster of 2016: Understanding the Phenomenon of Donald Trump

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As of this writing, Donald Trump has managed to obtain 24.3% of the Iowa Republican Caucus participants' support and is a mere 3% below the leading contender. Popularly known as "The Donald" he has captured the hearts and minds of many in the electorate. Mr. Trump does this without any political experience, policy specifics, or cooperation with the political structure that has been in place for many decades. Furthermore, he confounds the political and social norms without losing voter support.

In this paper, I aim to show that Mr. Trump personifies Jung's Trickster archetype. I will also discuss the collective psychological dynamics that are manifesting at this unique moment in our history. I will start with a review of the conceptual framework, apply that to collective dynamics, and then relate the theory to what is happening in the current political arena regarding Mr. Trump's appeal.

Archetypes

"The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear" (Jung, 1969, p. 5 [CW 9i, para. 6]). Jung defined archetypes as "gods", "principles that rule the psyche", "organizing forms", the "psychic equivalent of Platonic ideas", "transcendentally conditioned dynamism", and "portraits of instincts", among other

characterizations. He cautioned against trying to define them too discretely given their multiple

meanings and multivalent character (Madden, personal communication, September 2015).

Persona archetype.

Jung described persona as "…a kind of a mask, designed on the one hand to make a

definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual"

(Jung, 1983, p. 94 [CW 7, pars. 305-309]). The archetype of the persona conceals the part of

ourselves that we never reveal to the people around us. It resembles an actor's mask donned to

convince others that the persona is real (Murphy, 2005).

We all need a persona. Whether it creates an issue depends on how identified we are

with it (Slater, personal communication, 2015). Problems arise when we think we are our

persona.

Shadow archetype.

Baker Roshi stated that "…we have only two ideas: either we express, or we repress" (as

cited by Bly, 1988, p. 56). That which is suitable for expression becomes part of the ego and is

available to the persona. That which we repress becomes part of the shadow.

Parental influences and society shape the decision about what is suitable for expression.

Hence, one's value systems and goals can develop in a way that is at variance with the real soul

of the individual. When this happens, the shadow is created. Shadow refers to the part of the

personality that we repress because it does not conform to that which the ego thinks is ideal

(Whitmont, 1969). "The shadow and the ego develop in parallel, creating and defining each

other from the same experiences (Zweig & Abrams, 1991, as cited by Murphy, 2005, p. 51).

Jung notes that the shadow is one of the archetypes that affects the ego most often,

carrying the most troubling influence. The shadow is the easiest archetype to access through

experience because it is contained in the personal portion of the unconscious (Jung, 1983 [CW

9ii, pars. 13-19]).

The shadow is more than just a conceptual notion. Personal unconscious contents that

form the basis for the shadow are often more than just uncomfortable; they can evoke real

fear. The more they are repressed, the more they penetrate the personality (Jung, 1964). Jung

wrote about the emotional nature of the dark characteristics and the inferior repressed feelings

that comprise the shadow, noting that they have an autonomous, possessive quality. Emotion

attaches to the psychic materials to which the personality has least adapted. The weakness of

the adaptation leads to uncontrolled emotions causing us to behave like a "primitive, who is

not only the passive victim of his affects but also singularly incapable of moral judgment" (Jung,

1983, p. 91 [CW 9ii, pars. 13-19]). Dangerous situations can result because "he never suspects

that his own hidden and apparently harmless shadow has qualities whose dangerousness

exceeds his wildest dreams" (Jung, 1969, p. 267 [CW 9i, para. 478]).

Since the repressed and distasteful qualities do not disappear, they merge in the

unconscious. The shadow wants expression in consciousness and will, over time, increase its

energy potential as repressed contents merge without release. If left for too long, this energy

potential can match the ego's drive. Shadow energy will erupt into consciousness, with its own

intention and course. "The shadow gone autonomous is a terrible monster in our psychic

house" (Johnson, 1991 as cited by Murphy, 2005, p. 51). The pathology is not determined by

the unconscious materials but by the dissociation of them with consciousness. When this

dissociation reaches a high level, a reversal can occur in which unconscious contents become

the foreground and consciousness recedes into the background (Murphy, 2005.)

Bly (1988) extends Jung's notion of shadow by using the metaphor of a long bag we drag behind us noting that it is "heavy with the parts of ourselves our parents or community didn't approve of" (p.2). The part of ourselves that we stuff in the bag regresses over time. The spontaneity, the sexuality, the anger, the freedom, the pain have all regressed. In a regressed state, they become "hostile to the person who opens the bag" (p. 19).

Projections of shadow.

Jung describes the dynamics of projections:

It is not the conscious subject but the unconscious which does the projecting. Hence, one meets with projections; one does not make them. The effect of projection is to isolate the subject from his environment since instead of a real relation to it there is now only an illusory one. Projections change the world into the replica of one's own unknown face (Jung, 1983, p. 92 [CW 9ii, pars. 13-19]).

The shadow is never seen directly by the individual, but we project it out into the environment. Bly describes projection as a "thin gray film rolled up in a can, out of sight, but ready to transfix us with lifelike images thrown onto a giant screen or played on a wife or husband's face" (1988, p.2).

We already know that as the individual matures, experiences are either expressed or repressed and become part of the ego or part of the shadow. As we develop, we lose contact with the repressed memories and the source of the pain that caused the repression. What is left is general anxiety detached from an identified source, which we perceive to be coming from an "other." Projection transforms the general anxiety into an identifiable fear of something

tangible in our external world (Murphy, 2005).

Trickster archetype.

As Jung notes, the Trickster is "an archetypal psychic structure of extreme antiquity. In his clearest manifestations, he is a faithful reflection of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level" (Jung, 1969, p. 260 [CW, 9i, para 465]). The Trickster's most disquieting quality is his lack of consciousness. He is known to do stupid things and get himself into ridiculous situations. Although not evil, his unconsciousness and un-relatedness lead to outrageous behavior. The Trickster manifests a dichotomy of qualities; some seem superhuman while others are inferior to the average person (Jung, 1969, p. 263 [CW 9i, para. 472]). He represents a compilation of all the inferior characteristics of individual people and continually reconstructs himself with those dynamic qualities (Jung, 1969, p. 262 [CW 9i, para.468]).

The Trickster is an "archetype whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere (Combs & Holland, 1990, as cited in Maurone, 2002, pp. 229-230.) Citing Hyde (1998), Maurone notes that the Trickster will always cross boundaries and confuse previously known distinctions. He will also readily fluctuate between extremes like "nothing" and "everything" to frustrate characterization and overstep borders. He resides at boundaries and intersections which he sometimes maneuvers and sometimes constructs. He is a troublemaker, trying to assist while also causing problems. He is both sly and idiotic (2002). The Trickster is a wanderer who wants to be free of the constraints of the collective, which only serve to bind and limit him. He opens himself to all potentials without hesitation (Murphy, 2005).

The Trickster uses his guile to defeat stronger people. The Trickster's appeal relates to

his capacity to surpass limitations, break established rules and norms and ignore structure. Championing anti-structure, he evades previously understood conditions of winning. He is free from normal constraints of the power structure and sensational in his actions (Griswold, 1983). He is amoral, recognizing neither good nor evil and is frequently unwittingly responsible for both types of results (Carp, 1998).

The Trickster is subject to the consequences of his own foolishness because he lacks the ability to feel shame. This tendency leads to hubris. However, with the Trickster's lack of shame, his tongue is not constrained and often moves us past limitations and assumptions that might otherwise restrain the collective (Maurone, 2002).

Collective Psyche

Shamdasani (2003) notes that Jung described the persona as "a mask of the collective psyche; *a mask which simulates individuality,* which makes others and oneself believe that one is individual while it is only a part being played, through which the collective psyche speaks" (p. 305 [CW 7, para. 465]).

Jung noted that humanity has a black, collective, unavoidable shadow where past and present experiences take up residence. When we don't recognize the shadow in ourselves, we risk becoming an instrument of evil through the projection of evil onto the "other" (Jung, 1983, pp. 395-396 [CW 10, pars. 488-588]).

Furthermore, Jung recognized that the typical person thinks they are what they know about themselves, having no idea about their shadow (Jung, 1960, p. 118 [CW8, para. 409]). The shadow is hostile because of a lack of attention (Bly, 1988.) The projected shadow becomes numinous and excites feelings of inferiority in the individual, which can lead to "hysterical

dissociation of the personality." When this happens, the person is compelled to look for the

dark in others and torment them for it (Jung, 1970 as cited by Murphy, 2005, pp. 52-53). The

more projections exist between the individual and their environment, the less likely the ego will

see through its fallacy (Jung, 1983, p. 92 [CW 9ii, pars. 13-19]). With this collective lack of

individuation the projections accumulate and "produce mass groupings and mass movements

that cannot be subjected to reasonable control or manipulated to a good end" (Jung, 1983, p.

398 [CW 10, pars. 488-588]). When people gather in masses and drown out the individual, the

shadow is activated and sometimes even embodied in an individual (Maurone, 2002).

Bly (1988) notes that in addition to our personal shadow bags, there are community and

national bags. The contents of the bags have similarities determined by cultural norms. All of

the energies accumulated in each personal bag become part of the community and national

projections and are available for use by our leaders. Consciously we do not intend to act

aggressively toward others, and we surround ourselves with beautiful, peaceful things, but

underneath there is aggression forming that "escapes from the bag and attacks everyone" (p.

20).

Western Culture

"Culture orients people. As a shared system of meaning embodied in symbols, culture

provides the categories and models human beings use to take the bearings and steer through

the exigencies of social and economic life" (Griswold, 1983, p. 668). In the West, we have

favored idealism, compassion, and orderly and highly civilized behavior. The opposite of these

characteristics resides in our collective shadow. Having been suppressed the shadow is enraged

at the centuries of inattention. We live in an idealistic culture in which the gentle,

compassionate face is the one we think we show the world, but underneath the beautiful veneer, there is a shadow bag that has its own personality that we cannot ignore forever (Bly, 1988).

Jung tells us that it is dangerous for us to be separated from our instinctual nature because it causes conflict between the intellectual consciousness and instinctive unconscious. Eventually, our consciousness will no longer be able to suppress the instinctual side of our personality (Jung, 1983, p. 388 [CW 10, pars. 488-588]).

The modern person depends on the state for salvation. Under usual conditions, the human being is in perfect order, and if this is not the case, it is a society that must address the problem. Individuals feel entirely dependent on their circumstances and do not take responsibility for their lives. Along with this comes a lack of introspection, because they are so focused on looking outside themselves. Under these conditions, what becomes important is externally determined rules about what is proper and allowed, taking the place of internally determined ethics (Jung, 1969, p. 267 [CW 9i, para. 479]). People lose their inherent agency. They feel like they are victims of external forces they cannot control. However, a dangerous shadow lurks inside that serves as an unseen force within the dark political dragon (Jung, 1983, p. 398 [CW 10, pars. 488-588]). Since the conscious mind seeks the cause of all problems outside itself, people start calling for political and social actions to change the system and solve the problems (Jung, 1983, p. 388 [CW 10, 488-588]). There is nothing more discordant and disaffecting upon society than a false ethical security and lack of responsibility felt by its members (Jung, 1983, p. 398 [CW10, pars. 488-588]).

Political Situation

As people fight their dark side, they create dark shadows that result in collective decisions about foreign policy and other political dimensions. As this shadow energy accumulates, it becomes available to political leaders. We can observe our shadow by noticing what the leaders are espousing about the "other." In this realm, the "other" can be another nation or another political party. Each party has its own bag of shadow contents. Furthermore, idealists don't want to look at their shadows. They wish to stay above the fray so they can feel good about themselves (Bly, 1988). Both parties, Democrats, and Republicans are running idealistic campaigns. They engage in discourse about concrete solutions that align precisely with their unrealistic goals and don't allow for the shadow side their positions. There is no appetite for a tension of opposites within their agendas. Jung talked about the great divide between capitalism and communism. He stated that "it has even become a political and social duty to apostrophize the capitalism of the one and the communism of the other as the very devil, so as to fascinate the outward eye and prevent it from looking within" (Jung, 1983, p. 380 [CW 10, pars. 488-588]). This apostrophizing is happening fervently in the US today.

Bly observed that there is a phenomenon of splitting between "cultured people" and uncultured people. He notes that there are two parts of life; the "upper (spiritual)" half, and the "lower (sensual)" half. The top half ascends over time, and the bottom half descends over time, causing the chasm to increase until they lose touch with each other. The "educated class" becomes the "Pure One" and the working class has to make do with the physical, mundane details of their lives (1988, pp. 72-73). With the 99% trying to find a voice in policy decisions through the Occupy Wall Street movement and others like it in recent years, this dynamic is critical to understanding our present environment. Our culture has a bipolar perspective on life,

which leads to extreme difficulty in understanding each other. By making all the policy decisions the "Pure Ones" exacerbate this bipolar view.

Donald Trump

Donald Trump, as a pertinent example, has been managing his campaign for president in this above-stated way. He appears to be very identified with his persona. He believes steadfastly that because he is good at business that he will be equally successful at political leadership. When asked about how he will go about educating himself on things like foreign policy, he quips that he can pick up what he needs to know in 15 minutes. He has developed the persona of a savvy, strategic, successful business person. He fervently believes that everything in life is a deal, and as a deal-maker, he is qualified to be president.

Given the identification with his persona, I would suggest that he has a weak ego structure. He has been remarkably insensitive to how other people feel about him, basking in the glow of Vladimir Putin's admiration. He is carrying a very bloated shadow bag, the weak adaptation of which causes him to be overly susceptible to flattery and to react emotionally when challenged. Further, he seems incapable of personal responsibility for his actions. For instance, he has threatened to sue the Iowa Caucus organizers based on his claim that there must be fraud since he didn't win. Based on his outrageous behavior, one wonders if he is acting consciously at all, or whether his unconscious completely takes over for a time. It is as if his persona has become a vessel through which the instinctive, impulsive, irrational, unconscious collective psyche expresses itself.

One of Mr. Trump's signature characteristics is his insistence on blaming entire populations of people for the actions of a few. His goal of building a massive wall (constructing

a boundary) to keep the 'bad' people from Mexico out of the country, his suggestion that

Muslims should not be allowed to enter, and his claim that those who already live here should

register, are precise examples of projections. In essence, the stimulation of his shadow causes

extreme anxiety that finds relief through irrational thoughts and behaviors.

The Trickster archetype fits Mr. Trump in many ways. First, his undifferentiated

consciousness seems evident, as he has tweeted more than 500 insults since June 2015.

(Leonhardt, 2016, January 28). He makes infantile statements: "I could stand in the middle of

Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn't lose any voters, OK?" (Cohen, 2016, January

25), and displays outrageous behavior. Despite these antics he has managed to attract a

surprising amount of popular support, giving him a superhuman quality; someone who is not

subject to the same universal rules that everyone else is (like decent manners, consistent policy

positions, holding opinions with substance). He also crosses boundaries and confuses previously

known distinctions. He changes his mind so frequently that Stephen Colbert, the late night talk

show host, held a debate in which Mr. Trump argued against himself, in the form of clips of his

different positions over time (Colbert, 2016, January 28).

Trump speaks in extremes, wanting ALL Muslims to register. He talks in generalities

about "everyone" knowing that people in New Jersey were celebrating 9/11. He is both sly

(getting the networks to provide free campaign coverage because of the entertainment value of

his candidacy) and condescending, suggesting Hillary Clinton spent too much time in the ladies

room during a debate. He seems to be open to any position depending on what the situation

evokes.

As Gail Collins (2016, January 22) wrote in a New York Times Op-Ed recently "his

positions are more like thoughts of the moment, or opening bids." He has repeatedly broken

standard protocols for campaign management. David Axelrod, Chief Strategist for Barack

Obama's 2008 presidential campaign remarks that he "has broken just about every rule of

conventional campaigning. Short on policy prescriptions and long on provocation, he has

serially-and joyfully-insulted Mexicans, women, Muslims, P.O.W.s, people with disabilities and

virtually all of his opponents" (2016, January 25). He is campaigning as an outsider, which is

true from a political perspective. However, he has amazingly attracted most of his support from

people of limited means, despite incessantly flaunting his lifetime of wealth. With impeccable

Trickster style, he is running against decadence (Douthat, 2016, January 30), while being one of

the most decadent people in the US. Although running on the Republican ticket, Mr. Trump's

bullying style is also attracting both existing and former Democrats "who are drawn to

authoritarian leaders" (Edsall, 2016, January 6).

Finally, Mr. Trump apparently lacks the ability to feel shame. He boasts about his

business ventures and financial acumen while completely ignoring the bankruptcies he has

taken advantage of and the people that have been hurt by his business developments. He

accuses people of outrageous acts, and criticizes them personally without any apparent

remorse.

In summary, our current environment is a clear example of a collective shadow that has

manifested the Trickster archetype in Donald Trump. Jung indicates that:

As Radin points out, the civilizing process begins within the framework of the trickster

cycle itself, and this is a clear indication that the original state has been overcome. At

any rate the marks of deepest unconsciousness fall away from him; instead of acting in a

brutal, savage, stupid, and senseless fashion, the trickster's behaviour towards the end

of the cycle becomes quite useful and sensible (Jung, 1969, p. 266, [CW 9i, para. 477]).

The archetype, through the blurring of boundaries and transcending of norms, is able to

bring about real transformation if the cycle completes. Edsall (2016, January 6) notes that Mr.

Trump has seized on the feelings of resentment and deprivation present in a significant number

of white voters. Economic stagnation and xenophobia have caused fear and anger in the

electorate. While Mr. Trump does not have the psychological maturity to complete the

Trickster cycle, his campaign has brought attention to this hidden element of the electorate

that demands, much like the suppressed shadow, to be included in the political discourse.

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