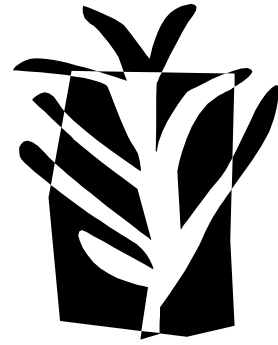


C. G. Jung Society, Seattle

# Inside Pages: In-Depth



## Terrorism

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Any Jungian interpretation of the events of the last few weeks would have to focus on the relationship between thought and image. Throughout his career, Jung emphasized that the mind thinks in images. They provide the mind not only with what it apprehends, but with the means of processing what it apprehends, as well. Furthermore, the mind also presents its findings via images.

Remember that Jung also described symbols as “valenced images”. That is, their affective value compels our attention. Gather together enough images that share in the same emotion and you have a complex. Complexes, of course, can usurp consciousness. They can do the thinking for us, thereby circumventing consciousness.

What kind of complex involves terrorism? To investigate this question, we must look to the sequelae of trauma, particularly the trauma of political violence.

## Symptoms of PTSD

People who are traumatized generally experience the following symptoms:

1. Hyper-vigilance
2. Flashbacks
3. Hyper-arousal

*Hyper-vigilance* is the phenomenon of “once bitten, twice shy.” In other words, after trauma we monitor our environments for anything that could re-traumatize us. Inevitably, we seek traces of what we have experienced, so that we can avoid the same trauma occurring again.

*Flashbacks* refer to re-experiencing the totality of a trauma in one of its manifestations. With battle fatigue, for example, combat veterans may find themselves hiding in the bushes after hearing a firecracker, or a car backfiring. A small part of their original trauma (a loud *bang*) reconstitutes the entire trauma (battle).

*Hyper-arousal* is addiction to the intensity of the traumatic experience. As some extreme sports practitioners (mountain climbers, for example) say, “you’re never more alive than when you’re close to death.” Trauma can create feelings of intensity that ordinary life lacks in comparison. Many of us, for example, felt compelled to watch televised images of the World Trade Center collapsing for weeks after the event.

### **The Jungian View of Terrorism**

Add to the symptoms of PTSD the Jungian concepts of suppression of *shadow*, and we have a potent mix for terrorism. Everything that is suppressed is empowered. Eventually, the *shadow* erupts, creating chaos for the ego. However disturbing, such chaos is essential to restoring a balance between ego and *shadow*, or between consciousness and the unconscious.

Combining the above words about valenced images with Jung’s dictum that “The psychological mechanism that transforms energy is the symbol,”<sup>1</sup> and we arrive at a psychological explanation for Hanna Arendt’s words that “Violence does not promote causes, neither history nor revolution, neither progress nor reaction; but it can serve to dramatize grievances and bring them to public attention.”<sup>2</sup> Clearly, terrorism is not simply a random event, but an attempt to adjust an imbalance.

### **Terrorism as Psychology**

The destruction of the World Trade Center was, in addition to a horrific destruction of life and property, a media event. It created an indelible image in the minds of all who saw it. Even those who only hear about it, but see no images, form an image of the event in their minds. Thus, the event was an image meant to influence, if not to control, thought. And, how well it has succeeded!

Manipulation of images to control thought is not new to the human race. We have always had censorship of images. The Vietnam War was the last war to be broadcast live to the American public. The only images that have been shown of the Gulf War and the War in Afghanistan are those that have been cleared through the Pentagon. We are even treated to the bizarre experience of hearing verbal accounts of what is happening while we are entertained with images that are presented in the weird green light of night-vision scopes. Such images are often labeled “Defense Department file footage,” meaning that the scenes we are seeing aren’t even connected to the events we are hearing about.

Propaganda is another way of manipulating images to influence thought. The famous film sequence of Hitler dancing after France fell was exposed years later as a hoax. Yet, it influenced how millions of people viewed the war. Likewise with the infamous “Gulf of Tonkin” incident: responsible for the United States’ entry into the Vietnam War, it simply never happened.

One need only watch television to see nightly displays of images that are manipulated (propaganda) at the expense of those that are suppressed (censorship). Sometimes, it is impossible to differentiate advertising from news reporting. We even have a name for it: “infomercials.”

So, if we would like to know what the effect on our psyches is of the constant barrage of manipulated images, we might ask ourselves the following questions:

1. What does collective consciousness believe?
  - a. “We were attacked because we are a freedom-loving nation.”
2. What is the *shadow* of the collectively conscious attitude?
  - a. “Why do they hate us?”
3. What is trying to emerge?
  - a. Here we must use our imaginations. If we look carefully at the images we saw, two elements stand out:
    1. The vertical becoming horizontal
    2. There was a lot of fire

The implications of the vertical becoming horizontal may nowhere be better explained than by these words of Hanna Arendt:

In a fully developed bureaucracy there is nobody left with whom one can argue, to whom one can present grievances, on whom the pressures of power can be exerted. Bureaucracy is the form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to act; for the rule by Nobody is not no-rule, and where all are equally powerless we have a tyranny without a tyrant.<sup>3</sup>

How can countries whose economies are decimated by the rulings of the World Trade Organization fight back? How can they reach those who control their lives? Consider Jamaica, where thriving local milk production was destroyed by cheap, subsidized, powdered milk from the United States, the price of which skyrocketed once the local supply was put out of business. What can the small milk producer do about that?

Jungians are ideally situated to bring answers to these questions. Consciousness-raising, particularly in relation to the unconscious (both personal and collective), has always been the goal of analysis. If there is an unconscious dialogue occurring between terrorists and societies, how can it be brought out of the *shadow* into consciousness? We might consider the following four steps:

1. Simply by engaging in it: individually and institutionally
2. Incubating the opposite (differing viewpoints)
3. Encouraging the transcendent function
4. Monitoring the unconscious
  - a. Dreams
  - b. Behaviors
  - c. Fate

## Finally

We shall always be unable completely to see *shadow*. It will always erupt with a force directly proportional to the degree to which it has been suppressed. Consequently, the Jungian lesson is:

### Don't Suppress It!

Jung was well aware of the problems that exist between individuals and groups when they project their *shadows*. In Volume XI of the *Collected Works*, for example, he says:

Since everybody is blindly convinced that he is nothing more than his own extremely unassuming and insignificant conscious self, which performs its duties decently and earns a moderate living, nobody is aware that this whole rationally organized conglomeration we call a state or a nation is driven on by seemingly impersonal, invisible but terrifying power which nobody and nothing can check. This ghastly power is mostly explained as fear of the neighboring nation, which is supposed to be possessed by a malevolent fiend. Since nobody is capable of recognizing just where and how much he himself is possessed and unconscious, he simply projects his own condition upon his neighbor, and thus it becomes a sacred duty to have the biggest guns and the most poisonous gas. The worst of it is that he is quite right. All one's neighbors are in the grip of some uncontrolled and uncomfortable fear, just like oneself. In lunatic asylums it is a well-known fact that patients are far more dangerous when suffering from fear than when moved by rage or hatred.<sup>4</sup>

How often we fail to appreciate Jung's wisdom! Our worst approach to terrorism is fear. Fear forces us to rely for our defense on those with power. But, of what use is power against that which can strike seemingly at random, in any place, at any time? Not much. The use of military force against terrorism may have its place. However, I fear that it more closely approximates the following description, written by Joseph Conrad early in *The Heart of Darkness*:

Once, I remember, we came upon a man-of-war anchored off the coast. There wasn't even a shed there, and she was shelling the bush. It appears the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts. Her ensign dropped limp like a rag: the muzzles of the long six-inch guns stuck out all over the low hull; the greasy slimy swell swung her up lazily and let her down, swaying her thin masts. In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech—and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in sight; and it was not dissipated by somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives—he called them enemies!—hidden out of sight somewhere.<sup>5</sup>

## Endnotes

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1. C.G. Jung, *Collected Works*, VIII:88.
2. Hanna Arendt, *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 176.
3. *Ibid.*, 178.
4. C. G. Jung, *Collected Works*, XI:85.
5. Robert Kimbrough, ed., *Joseph Conrad: Heart of Darkness* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 14.