

Re-animating Psychic Habitats: *Archetypes and Ecosystems*

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Abstract

C.G. Jung often amplified ways of thinking about the systemic balance between ecological and psychological habitats. In many passages he leaves us with no doubt that 'civilized' man has trampled the wild, leaving psyche bereft of its primality, its indigeneity. Our psychic interiority becomes flattened as our sensory perceptions grow accustomed to inorganic systems and inanimate networks that alienate our animal selves. Like outer ecosystems, inner habitats have become regulated and separated from nature and the environment that envelop us. This article explores the relationship between instinct and archetype; between humans, the sacred and animal spirits, exemplified by the mythological hybrids Pan and Chiron; and invites reflection upon how we might be reintroduced to the wilderness where primordial, natural and elemental life flourish.

Keywords

Animal, Archetype, Chiron, Instinct, Pan, Wildness

Wildness inhabits both psyche and nature. It is present in the libido, instincts and archetypes of our psychic life, and in the flora, fauna, minerals and remoteness of the natural world. In the wild we become animistic, able to experience a connection to divine presences, to feel an openness to sentient life and awe at the interconnectedness of nature with our innermost essence. Wildness is akin to the spirit of nature, and the profound knowing of being part of an interconnective systemic cosmos. Jung (CW 13, 1967) summarizes this: "Nature is not matter only; she is also spirit. Were that not so the only source of spirit would be human reason" (par. 229).

When we are schooled in the sovereignty of causality and rationality, and taught to value progress, a phobia of the wild can permeate and penetrate our being. In classrooms, counseling rooms and laboratories, nature and psyche are under the microscope of the intellect, objectified and rendered soulless. These dry, sterile habitats do not accommodate symbols, mystery or otherness. Metaphorically, in the archaeological ruins of psyche, nature and animal spirits take refuge in the rubble beneath the stories of civilization.

Psychic layers are like stories of any structure. From an archaeological perspective, as Jung's famous dream of a multi-storied house suggested (1973, pp. 158-

162), we can imagine many layers and grades of psyche all entrenched with their own civilization and stories. At what layer might we find stories of primordial wilderness? of nature spirits and animate earth? When did the alphabet emerge? religion? philosophy? When did adjectives like dirty, muddy and soiled come to mean unclean rather than earthy? When did “primitive” lose its value in our way of thinking? Encrusted, encultured layers of the psyche require excavation to reanimate instinctual stories, and to reconnect us with a more indigenous knowing, before judgment of the sensuous and the wild became embedded in the layers of our language, before rationalism and realism obscured symbolic insight.

Jung (CW 7, 1953) uses the word ‘gradient’ when speaking of how psychic energy might be redirected: “Psychic energy is a very fastidious thing which insists on fulfilment of its own conditions” and “while much energy may be present, we cannot make it serviceable until we have succeeded in finding the right gradient” (par. 76). A gradient is like a natural course of psychic energy. “The libido has, as it were, a natural penchant: it is like water, which must have a gradient if it is to flow” (CW 5, 1956, par. 337). Symbolically we might reflect on the consequences of instinctual life being dammed, then redirected, dislocating the natural creatures of our inner world.

Instinct and Archetype: *Animal and Image*

In Jung’s way of thinking, the instinctual spectrum ranged from compelling, primal patterns to archetypal images, all part of the natural world. It was this idea that distinguished Jung’s notion of instinct as “a far more flexible, intelligent, and structured entity” (Kidner, 2006, p. 93). As James Hillman (1972) suggests, “instinct is more a metaphor, even if in conceptual dress, than a concept” (p. 28).

Jung’s approach reached beyond biological reductionism. He widened the lens to characterize instinct as having a psychological motive (Jung, CW 8, par.265). Located in deeper psychic habitats were animal spirits that personified human instincts. Psychic layers underpinning consciousness are the terrain of instinctual life where animals are free to roam. At night they wander through the dream landscape of sleep. We share instincts with animals, but as humans, we have the cognitive ability to formulate these into coherent patterns of meaning, which may separate us from animals and our animal nature. Jung (CW 8, 1960) reminded us that: “Instinct is nature and seeks to perpetuate nature, whereas consciousness can only seek culture or its denial” (par. 750).

Archetypal presences, having their inception in instinctual life, can modify our conscious intentions or overwhelm our encultured equilibrium. Before Jung (CW 8, 1960) used the word archetype, he referred to these patterns as ‘primordial images’

bridging the concepts of instinctual life and archetype. This is the first time he used the word archetype:

we also find in the unconscious qualities that are not individually acquired but are inherited, e.g., instincts as impulses to carry out actions from necessity, without conscious motivation. In this “deeper” stratum we also find the a priori, inborn forms of “intuition” namely the archetypes of perception and apprehension, which are the necessary a priori determinants of all psychic processes. (par. 270).

It is as if instinct and archetype, animal and divine, unconsciousness and spirit are all part of the same system. As portraits of instinct, archetypes are mediated by images, symbols and patterns of our animal soul, which invite us into their primeval mystery. Looking through archetypal images we see the natural world. As modes of perception, these images are ways of seeing, not facts or interpretations; they do not conform to logic, but speak through emotions, feelings and senses. They facilitate connection with the natural world.

As an astrologer I hold a deep appreciation for zodiacal images. The zodiac, or circle of animals, is a mandala that illustrates instinctual life, merging archaic impulses with archetypal imagery. Zodiacal images are anthropomorphic. They express instinctual life through archetypes, symbols and stories. Like the animal images that roam the inscape of the dream, the heavens are constellated with animal totems sculpted by the human imagination. As Jung (CW 7, 1953) said:

... the contents of the collective unconscious are not only residues of archaic, specifically human modes of functioning, but also the residues of functions from man’s animal ancestry, whose duration in time was infinitely greater than the relatively brief epoch of specifically human existence (par. 159).

Our ‘animal being’, which lives in us as our instinctual psyche, “may become dangerous if it is not recognized and integrated in life” (Jaffe, 1964, p. 239). While we may be the only creatures who possess the consciousness and will to imagine our instincts, we are also able to suppress, distort, and wound them. And as we know, an animal “is never so wild and dangerous as when it is wounded” (Jaffe, p. 239). While giving unreined, unconscious expression to instincts can be destructive, suppressed instincts also become destructive when we alienate the animal from its nature. Nearly sixty years ago, Aniela Jaffe wrote that “suppressed and wounded instincts are the dangers threatening civilized man”, a statement which remains ecologically and psychologically pertinent today. She stressed the necessity that “the acceptance of the animal soul is the condition for wholeness and a fully lived life” (Jaffe, 1964, p. 239).

Animal Spirits

In the preface to *Animal Presences* (2008), James Hillman suggests that “if there has been a steady line, an actual dominating narrative in my subversive service to psychology, it is ... the preservation of, even obeisance to, the animal spirits” (p. 7). But what are animal spirits and how do we pay homage to them?

Animal spirits are forces of nature, images of inborn creatures, totems of instinct and citizens of psyche. Organic, primordial powers. We pay homage to them in the sanctuary of the dream, where the covenant between animal and human is honored; where dream animals can educate the ego “or save it, or impress it with beauty and power” (Hillman, 1985, p. 8). Let’s recall that the etymology of *animal* is from the Latin *anima* suggesting soul and *animalis* implying ‘having breath’. Animal-ness is soul, the breath of life, primal characters who are still, silent and sentient. Our enchantment with our animalistic nature is timeless, painted on caves, observed in the constellations of the heavens, and reified in myths and fairy tales.

The systemic balance between ecological and psychological habitats, between inner and outer ecologies, is fragile. As psychic ecosystems and native landscapes become dislocated, animals have become less than, rather than part of, our human experience. Animal spirits appear in our dreams as ecological daimons to re-store and re-story the psychic landscape. Yet, animals remain endangered in a culture that regards them as a commodity. In dreams they are also vulnerable to being similarly appropriated or reduced to a sign of disorder.

When domesticity, rationality and urbanity suppress nature and wildness, the caged animal rebels (CW 7, 1953, par. 17). The rebellion is a reminder that wild animals are as much a part of our nature as our domesticated ones. Without balance, domestication can be soul-destroying, but without domestication, our animal nature can become destructive.

Freed from entrenched beliefs, opinions and correctness, we move closer to the animal spirits of our instinctual nature. Jung (CW 7, 1953) described this as “a psychological function of an intuitive nature, akin to what the primitives mean when they say, ‘He has gone into the forest to talk with the spirits’ or ‘My snake spoke with me’ or, in the mythological language of infancy, ‘A little bird told me’” (par. 374).

Our primordial spirit is desensitized and derided in a domesticated, digitalized, industrialised world. How else would we be able to devastate the rainforest, ravage the rich red earth and game hunt a sacred beast? We pay a price higher than any monetary gain when we sever our connection to our animal nature. Our “primitive” essence communes with nature spirits, knows the stories of the land, dances with satyrs, attunes with plants, ensouls the starry heavens with story, reveres the seasons

and sees through the landscape like our ancestors once did. Having lost our indigeneity, we are lost, following maps that will not lead us home.

The Call of the Wild

When we vacate the noise of the industrialised world, our senses attune to the serenity of a still primeval country. When Jung was in the stillness of Africa, his psychic energy flowed alongside and into the natural environment:

My companions and I had the good fortune to taste the world of Africa, with its incredible beauty and its equally incredible suffering. Our camp life proved to be one of the loveliest interludes in my life. I enjoyed the 'divine peace' of a still primeval country. Never had I seen so clearly 'man and the other animals' (Herodotus). Thousands of miles lay between me and Europe, mother of all demons. The demons could not reach me here – there were no telegrams, no telephone calls, no letters, no visitors. My liberated psychic forces poured blissfully back to the primeval expanse. (Jung, 1973, p. 264).

Being in the majesty of nature humbles us. Yet today psychic energy is poured into creating more interference in the world. Disconnected from the flow of stillness and silence, severed from the wild, we regress to noise, smart devices and digital worlds. But the call of the wild can always be heard, no matter how indifferent we are, as it arises out of our inner emptiness in the nether regions of psyche.

This very place that we often call wilderness – at civilization's edge, in solitude and stillness – is where instinct and image reside, and to where we are invited to return. As Jung (CW 14, 1963) said: "your inner emptiness conceals just as great a fullness if only you will allow it to penetrate into you. If you prove receptive to this 'call of the wild', the longing for fulfillment will quicken the sterile wilderness of your soul as rain quickens the dry earth" (par. 190).

It is often through trauma, illness, grief, isolation, and depression that we hear the call of the wild. Using animal images, James Hillman (2008) describes how such depressive symptoms can connect us with wilderness: "Humans touch nature via depression. They drop into slowness, the muteness of animal, vegetable and mineral being, the bafflement of mind's inability to find words. Depression restores us to the dumb animal, the futility of explanation, of language itself" (p. 153).

Jung and Hillman remind us that inner emptiness returns us to meaningfulness, to nature. In hearing the call of the animal soul, we return to the habitat where silence and stillness are revered; we descend into the cave leaving our descriptions and prescriptions, reasons and categories behind. Nature is also *Thanatos*; that is, the

bringer of death (Hillman, 2008; p. 160). We are closest to nature when we are closest to death, literally and psychologically.

Inner emptiness, depression, loss, and death all return us to the wild. Our ancestors knew this natural passage, this nature that animals instinctually know and deities need not. This nature, not known through observation, but through participation in the mystery is eloquently narrated in myth and experienced through communal ritual. This connects the individual to the archetypal world where images of divine beings, part animal, part human, arise (CW 5, 1956; par. 264).

As humans, we are hybrids who have not only neglected our animal soul but demonized it. We have left Pan, God of Nature, behind in the idyllic hills of Arcady.

Hybrid: Animal Spirit and Divine Presence

In the first Century CE, Plutarch gave an account of a sailor, off the coast of Western Greece, who heard a mysterious voice proclaiming that the great god Pan was dead. The news spread fast throughout Tiberius' Roman Empire. The Christians interpreted this as the end of the pagan era. Under this new system, Pan's image personified the Devil, the shadow of what we must not know and that which we must repress. *Great Pan is dead* has come to symbolize institutional collapse, the nadir of a cycle, the end of an era, the impropriety of pagan rituals and the repression of nature. In his elegy to Pan, Oscar Wilde (1913) implored the god to return:

*Ah, leave the hills of Arcady,
Thy satyrs and their wanton play,
This modern world hath need of thee. (p. 243)*

It was the great god Pan who lent his name to our word *pan-ic*. At midday Pan would rest, but if disturbed, his frightening presence would create panic. Imagining his exceptionally loud voice, or the mere sight of the goat-footed god alarmed the ancients and evoked panic. What was imaginal became physiological. Pan personified the archetypal constellation of pagan power and Nature in all its beauty and savagery. Honoring Pan is pantheistic, acknowledging all the spirits who dwell in and maintain the natural world. Pan means All.

Pan is nature, both beautiful and treacherous. With Pan dead, so too is our access to Nature. Gods do not die, but they can be dislocated, denied and silenced. Trees, animals, rocks, flowers, grain, herbs, hilltops and valleys are all assigned to specific divinities - ecological deities who speak through spirits of nature whether embodied by dryads, devas, naiads, nymphs or satyrs. The voice of the elementals is

muted when Pan's landscape is no longer respected. His psychic inscape is now haunted by the massacre of nature spirits.



Woodcut engraving from "*Der Olymp oder die Mythologie der Griechen und Römer (The Olympus or the Mythology of the Greeks and Romans)*", published by August Heinrich Petiscus in C.F. Amelang's Verlag, Leipzig (1878, 18th edition).

In his beautiful tribute to Pan, D.H. Lawrence (1926) speaks of the death of Pan as if the robotic world has replaced Nature, a world now mastered by humans who locate the god in the machine. (pp. 112-3). Replaced by mechanistic gods, our pantheon no longer includes nature spirits. Nature is Pan, *all* the trees, *all* the animals, *all* the stones - *all* of us. As James Hillman (1990) emphasized, Pan still lives. He exists "in the repressed which returns, in the psychopathologies of instinct" (p. 98.) and it is these psychopathologies that assert themselves in panic. At the heart of the word 'psychopathology' is the invitation to study the soul's suffering. A hybrid, a goat-man, Pan is an archetypal figure whose image is soulful, but instinctual, not civilized. When we repress Pan, we relinquish the archetypal images in psyche's ecosystem that are able to enfold our fears and panic. Without Pan the environment deteriorates, the soul suffers.

James Hillman honors Pan in his psychological ode *Pan and the Nightmare*. He suggests that by placing instinct and image on the same continuum, "Jung offered a new entry into Pan's world" (Hillman, 2007, p.58). In other words, the instinctual worlds of Pan are not managed or controlled by rational and moral constructs. Through archetypal images and patterns arising from perception and reflection on

instinct, the God of the Wild is respected. Pan's primitive instincts are terrifying to the ideals and morals of the civilized. Yet without conscious awareness and reflection, we are trapped in the separation between the romantic and idyllic Arcadian landscape and the terrifying and dreadful lair of the Devil.

In his chapter 'Ecology', Hillman conjures up questions from Pan to those who profess to be civilized and compassionate: "Why do you blast, bulldoze, and flatten so many acres of scrub woodlands and hillsides? Why are there fewer and fewer lonely places where people may hide in nature and nature hide from people?" (Hillman, 2007, p. 71). Science, he says, fears the return of Pan, the panic of his unpredictability, his amorality, his impulsiveness. Ecosystems, environmental and psychic, are then controlled in an attempt to keep Pan and panic out of sight.

Pan encounters Psyche after she has been washed up on the riverbank after her suicide attempt. Pan recognizes the pain of love in her eyes and urges her to surrender to Eros. Psyche sees the reflection in the kind eyes of Pan of her instinct to give up, her panic to suicide; at that moment all her angst is held long enough to imagine her journey forward, the completion of her tasks. Pan has encouraged her to find the image in her instincts and animal soul. It is this openness to the images of her animal soul that inspirit her to follow her instincts. On liminal shores and in the wild, Pan still lives.

Pan and the nymphs keep nature and psyche together. (Hillman, 2007, p. 79).



Pan and Psyche by Edward Burne-Jones, 1872-4 Fogg Museum, Harvard

From Pan's habitats in Arcadia, let's travel further north to the wilds of Thessaly, to meet another beloved hybrid, the Centaur Chiron. Chiron's habitat was Mount Pelion, known in antiquity as the 'healing mountain' because its slopes were prolific with medicinal and magical plants. Crystal-clear mountain streams nourished the carpet of herbs that covered Pelion: meadow saffron, hemlock, henbane, nightshade, mandrake, St. John's wort, mullein, yarrow. Chiron's name from the Greek *cheir* means 'hand'; at hand was the natural world of healing plants.

As the horse-man hybrid son of Chronos, while physically similar to the other centaurs, Chiron was not from the same family line. In contrast to Chiron, the other Centaurs were wild, unpredictable and barbaric, brandishing tree trunks, boulders and firebrands as their weapons, intolerant of culture and disrespectful of its laws and customs, especially marriage. Like Chiron, they inhabited the threshold between the primitive past and the civilizing present. To the autochthonic Athenians, the centaurs epitomized the iconic barbarian, sculpted on the metopes and friezes of classical temples as an anti-cultural mnemonic, reflecting the belief that civilization would always triumph.

As a misshapen remnant from the prehistoric past, Chiron was an ambivalent figure at the dawn of Greek civilization. In myth Chiron survives as wise and just, the virtuous mentor who reminds his students of the values of the past. Personified as a healer, Chiron was a teacher of both hunting and healing, a philosopher and a foster father to disenfranchised and homeless youth. His elder wisdom became difficult to acknowledge when the rise of rationalism cleaved its distance from the primordial.

Chiron is accidentally wounded in his animal leg by Heracles with a poison-tipped arrow, laced with the Hydra's blood. It is fatal. Eventually, he is released from his pain, descending into Tartarus in exchange for Prometheus's release. Chiron embodies the archetypal images of suffering that confront our feelings of powerlessness and our compulsion to fix. Sensing Chiron's image rewilds suffering and its acceptance as part of psychological topography. In Chiron's cave, away from the domestication of medicine, we hear the wisdom in the wound. In his cave, the instinct to fix it and feel better is *hand (cheir)*-held long enough for the soulful images in our symptoms to be appreciated as images of healing.

Like Pan, Chiron is surrounded by spirits of the wild. Both Pan and Chiron invite us into the wild, into the instinctual, not to control or resolve or even understand, but to participate in nature.

Into the Wild

Both hybrids, Pan and Chiron, are the child of a god, semi-divine. The divine and the sacred are critical to natural and psychic ecosystems. In sacred activity we experience

inclusivity in a non-dual, holistic system called nature. The sacred is found in the stillness and the silence, the undisturbed. So how might we reintroduce ourselves to the wild? to the sacred? to the animals? Since I am focusing on psychic wildness, I will conclude with a few reflections regarding how our primordial sentience might be awakened and our psychic habitats re-animated.

Let us consider first and foremost our communion with the natural world by engaging receptively with it, rather than imposing ourselves upon it. To practice this, we might imagine returning to a nocturnal landscape, a darkened world lit not by artificial light, but by the starry night sky. We might linger there long enough, in some uncertainty and discomfort, so our senses can become accustomed to the dark. We might see unrecognizable shapes, smell sweet fragrances from night-scented plants, or feel spirits on the wind as they brush past. Or like Psyche herself, who was befriended by the ants, the reeds in the river, the thorn bushes, the eagle and the tower, we might be enthused by Pan to be responsive to our animistic Self.

Listening, we might hear Athena's owl, her wise animal self who embodies her primeval past. Before Zeus devoured Athena's mother, Metis, Athena was an animal embryo in her mother's womb. Born fully conscious from his forehead, the temples of intellect and mental powers, Athena was enmeshed in Zeus's way of knowing. Her primal mother Metis, a Titaness and archetypal personification of elemental feeling and instinctual wisdom, was gobbled up by impatience, control and fear. Let's stay here for a moment to reflect on ways our wild wisdom is appropriated, often consumed, by theories, training and principles (and principals) of a daylight Olympian world.



Athena holding a helmet and a spear, with an owl. Attic red-figure lekythos

One of the ways that instinctual knowing reappears from underneath these layers of beliefs is through personal dreams and collective myths. Both have their origins in unconscious depths, in organic and primeval processes that guide us into the wild. They restore and re-story meaning. This is nothing new, but it does remind us of how important dreams and myths are as portals to our psychic wilderness. Synchronicities, reveries and memories, not as justifications or reasons, are also intrinsic to our natural world.

Creating pathways between psychic habitats is not a linear process, but divergent and cyclical, preserved by image, analogy, metaphor, symbol, myth, reflection and stillness. Stories sustain these pathways, renewed by each voice that tells the tale, enhanced by silence and listening. In the wilderness we lose our habitual orientation. Unsigned pathways, mysterious turns and inevitable returns, not mapped by human hands evoke our primal nature. We backtrack, returning to deepen our familiarity with the landscape. It is an open-ended process, a dis-course in its truest sense.

In the wild, the wisdom of inferior functioning comes to the fore. Astrologically, 'inferior' signifies the planets Mercury or Venus, as their orbits are closer to the Sun than Earth's. When they are between the Earth and the Sun, not on the far side of the Sun, they are closest to Earth and will backtrack from our perspective. The root of the word 'inferior' refers to low, like the lower regions, the inferno. It is not a judgment – inferior is closer to earth, to matter and moving in a direction converse to custom. Metaphorically, like Mercury and Venus, the inferior function is closest to earth and backward in movement. Animal spirits who inhabit the inferior function can be numinous by nature and when at home, in the lower regions, an "ontological shift, an initiation" (Hillman, 2021, p. 35) is possible. Being in these lowlands is where we re-encounter the spirits of our indigenous self.

Being aware of how we use language is also essential for reanimating psychic habitats. Unreflective use of language reinforces bias, judgment and control. In contrast, the soul speaks through imaginative, symbolic language which is psychologically resonant. Imagination helps unblock psychic impasses by heightening our sensual awareness to be able to hear, feel, smell, taste and see through the density of the concrete world into other worlds, including unconscious realms. Conversely, as imagination becomes levelled, we flatten nature with concrete. Jung spoke of a flat world, well before digital technology flattened the globe with computer screens, smartphones and smart TVs. He reminded us with potent imagery that the wild is encountered through the body and its shadow:

we have a body which, like all bodies, casts a shadow, and that if we deny this body, we cease to be three-dimensional and become flat and without substance. Yet this body is a beast with a beast's soul, an organism that gives

unquestioning obedience to instinct. To unite oneself with this shadow is to say yes to instinct, that formidable dynamism lurking in the background (CW 7, 1953, par. 35).

Institutionalizing, domesticating and formulating psyche flattens and demystifies its dynamic nature. Wildness is a way of seeing, a perception, not tamed or compartmentalized by rational thought; it is genius, in an ancient way of thinking, as it affirms shadow and its divine nature in every individual, place, animal, plant and mineral. Wildness is natural to both physical and psychic life. It is not something we need to escape to, or conceptualize, or find outside ourselves as it is intimately part of nature. Being wild acknowledges that we are inseparably part of the ever-changing ecological systems that support us.

While we might feel helpless to change the tides of corporate and commercial ecocide, we are not powerless in terms of rewilding psyche and re-storing and re-storing its natural ecosystems. Jung (1953 b) reiterated that “every civilized human being, whatever his conscious development, is still an archaic man at the deeper levels of his psyche” (p.144). In these deeper levels, in the wilderness of psyche, is where we find meaningful and restorative stories.

Encountering wilderness in psyche challenges our perceptions of what we consider advancement. Progress is not a linear, growth-oriented, chronological process. In the wild, we exist before dualism and the domination of the rational. In the wild there is no literal worldview, no measuring sticks or progressive ideologies; there are sounds, smells, sights, songs, and senses that envelop and engage us.

Like any wilderness expedition, we must backtrack, leave behind the flat world, speak in a tongue that engages our environment, petition our indigenous self to guide us and honor the stories of our ancestors. Telling and listening to the ancient stories of how our world was born, or how the gods came into being, how creatures wounded and healed us, as well as myths of the natural world and tales of wars, wonderings and wanderings engage our animal selves, our many-storied selves, our natural selves.

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