

Carl Jung and Thomas Merton

Apophatic and Kataphatic Traditions in the 20th Century

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Great Readers of the Century

C.G. Jung (1875-1961) and Thomas Merton (1915-1968) were two of the most popular writers of the 20th century. Their books sell around the world in many languages. Academics research their lives and ideas. People attend conferences, workshops, retreats and courses which draw inspiration from their work. There are websites dedicated to disseminating information about them and marketing the proliferating Merton and Jung spin-offs.

They both addressed, in a self-conscious manner, the dilemmas of modern man and mass man. They reflected on Christianity, eastern religions, Native American spirituality, war, evil, symbolism, myth, consciousness, meditation and solitude. They were conflicted about their power as leaders, teachers and public figures. As Porter observed: "Merton also read voraciously. Vast reading deepened and broadened his sense of self. He is, after all, one of the great readers of the century, somewhat akin to Carl Jung in his subject range, from existentialism to psychoanalysis to Sufism, from poetry to Buddhism to theology."¹

Interesting questions are generated by putting these two next to each other. For example: What is it about the narratives of their lives and the themes in their writings that have contributed to their popularity? Do they capture in uniquely accessible ways the dilemmas of late modernity? Does this appeal, which is meaningful for the middle of the 20th century, contain anything prophetic or enduring? Do they represent the last gasp of modernism or a new beginning? We cannot explore these questions thoroughly here, but they form part of the background for this essay.

¹ John S. Porter, 'Thomas Merton's Late Metaphors of the Self', in: *The Merton Annual: Studies in Culture, Spirituality and Social Concerns*, 7 (1994), 58-67, 60.

The historian, Eric Hobsbawn, has observed:

The destruction of the past, or rather of the social mechanisms that link one's contemporary experience to that of earlier generations, is one of the most characteristic and eerie phenomena of the late twentieth century. Most young men and women at the century's end grow up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they live in.²

I feel that one element of Merton's and Jung's appeal is that they grappled with this type of lack of orientation in time. Their sense of time spanned centuries. Merton linked his experience with the Desert Fathers, and Jung felt that he found confirmation of his ideas in the work of the alchemists. Merton saw similarities between Heidegger and the Desert Fathers.

After all, some of the basic themes of the existentialism of Heidegger, laying stress as they do on the ineluctable fact of death, on man's need for authenticity, and on a kind of spiritual liberation, can remind us that the climate in which monastic prayer flourished is not altogether absent from our modern world. Quite the contrary: this is an age that, by its very nature as a time of crisis, of revolution, of struggle, calls for the special searching and questioning which are the work of the monk in his meditation and prayer. For the monk searches not only his own heart: he plunges deep into the heart of the world of which he remains a part although he seems to have "left" it. In reality the monk abandons the world only in order to listen more intently to the deepest and most neglected voices that proceed from its inner depth.³

Jung was relieved to find "historical prefiguration" of his experiences in the alchemy.

First I had to find evidence for the historical prefiguration of my inner experiences. That is to say, I had to ask myself, "Where have my particular premises already occurred in history?" If I had not succeeded in finding such evidence, I would never have been able to substantiate my ideas. Therefore, my encounter with alchemy was decisive for me, as it provided me with the historical basis which I had hitherto lacked.⁴

Jung and Merton attract many who are in search of self or uncertain about their own self-worth. Their life stories have been made into ideal patterns. Merton's journey from an expatriate childhood in southern France to his foreigner's death in Bangkok, and Jung's journey from lonely parson's son to world famous

² Eric Hobsbawn, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, London 1994, 3.

³ Thomas Merton, *The Climate of Monastic Prayer*, Washington DC 1973, 34-35.

⁴ C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, New York 1961, 200.

recluse are presented as narratives through which we can read the meaning of our own lives. We are drawn by their insistence that meaning is found through the self. According to Porter,

Merton performs best when he is writing about himself and the things he loves: "ideas, places, certain persons – all very definite, individual, identifiable objects of love." And yet the mystery of Merton has always been, in sketching his own self-portrait, that he draws the faces of others who see themselves in his face. Personal statement evolves into communal statement.⁵

Inchausti makes much the same point.

By refusing the heady wine of metatheory and embracing his own personal search for meaning in our postmodern, postliberal world, Merton became the representative of a new kind of global ecumenicalism that was working itself out – not in councils or in committees, but in the souls of individual seekers. And so although he was cloistered, he found himself at the very center of the search for the interior source of species awareness that had inspired and confounded thinkers as diverse as Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Mircea Eliade, Martin Buber, and D.T. Suzuki.⁶

Woodcock also notes the similarities between the work of Merton and Jung.

One of the preoccupations which Merton shared with many contemporary Christian and secular thinkers was the alienation of man from his true self. Marx recognized the phenomenon, but blamed the capitalist system. Merton saw the cause in a spiritual malaise that could be cured only by man's reunion with the divine spirit, and for him this meant a journey into the inner self where the encounter with God that made man whole as a person, that made him a "new man", would ensue. There is a great deal in common between such a concept and Jung's idea of the process of individuation. 'Individuation,' said Jung in *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, 'means becoming a single, homogenous being and, in so far as "in-dividuality" 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."⁷

Despite the affinities between Jung and Merton, however, there are striking differences between them in their use of the notion of the self. One way to understand their difference is to see Merton as representing the apophatic tradition and Jung the kataphatic tradition. In this paper I will sketch out definitions of *apophasis* and *kataphasis* and use these categories to compare their concepts of the self. Finally, I will explore the question of the postmodern in relation to their work. To begin with, however, I will look for evidence of contact or influence between Jung and Merton.

⁵ Porter, 'Thomas Merton's Late Metaphors of the Self, p. 58-59.

⁶ Robert Inchausti, *Thomas Merton's American Prophecy*, Albany 1998, 144-145.

Doing an Autobiography

Jung and Merton both published bestselling autobiographies about which they were deeply ambivalent. Merton was about 30 years old when he wrote *Seven Story Mountain*, which ranked third in the list of bestselling non-fiction books in the United States in 1948, the year of its publication. It has been continuously in print ever since and has sold over one million copies, translated into 28 languages. Rice, a friend of Merton's, observed that,

There are dozens of books with similar themes, yet this is the only one that touched a vital nerve in modern man. What makes it different from the others is its great evocation of a young man in an age when the soul of mankind had been laid open as never before, during world depression and unrest and the vise of both communism and fascism... The war had ended when the book appeared, yet Merton's apocalyptic view of the world, of the suffering of Harlem and the slums, his hatred of war, was even more valid. *The Seven Story Mountain* was more than an odyssey into the Church. It was a confrontation of the basic alienation of man with society, with the natural and supernatural forces that had nurtured him over the centuries. But most of all it was a confrontation with Christianity, basically with Merton's own version of Catholicism. It was a great work, and it touched almost everyone who read it.⁸

Memories, Dreams, Reflections was published after Jung's death. It was not included in Jung's Collected Works. Jung wrote to his literary executor,

to confirm once more that I do not regard this book as my undertaking but expressly as a book which Frau A. Jaffe has written... The book should be published under her name and not under mine, since it does not represent an autobiography composed by myself.⁹

Nevertheless, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* is marketed and read as Jung's autobiography. It has attracted both hagiographical and critical attention. Fromm, with whom Merton had an extended correspondence, felt that the book,

⁷ George Woodcock, *Thomas Merton: Monk and Poet. A Critical Study*, Edinburgh 1978, 97.

⁸ Rice (1970) in: Allyn Smith, *Jung's Archetype of the Self as it Appears in Thomas Merton's Journey Toward Self-Awareness*, (PhD dissertation), California 1990, 45.

⁹ Paul Bishop (Ed.), *Jung in Contexts: A Reader*, London 1999, 46.

shows that Jung's emphasis on the Collective Unconscious and his opposition to Freud's personal Unconscious had the function of protecting him from becoming aware of his own repressed experiences by making his Unconscious part of a mythical entity that rules all men alike and know no good or evil.¹⁰

For Raine, however,

Jung's life, even so fragmentarily revealed, invites comparison not with profane autobiography, but with the lives of Plotinus and Swedenborg, the lives of the saints and sages, interwoven with miracles.¹¹

Merton heard that Jung was "doing an autobiography" and was interested in how the project was developing. Merton wrote to Helen Wolff, of Pantheon, and later of Harcourt Brace, whom Jaffe credits with having "conceived the idea of the book and helped to bring that idea to fruition", with her husband Kurt.¹²

(May 8, 1959) How happy I am that Jung is doing an autobiography, and that Kurt is working with him. I recently read Jung's *The Undiscovered Self* and want to say how much I enjoyed it and agreed with it. He is one of the rare men who are helping us rediscover the true shape of our life, and the true validity of our symbols.¹³

(June 22, 1959) Here is a manuscript, as yet not fully finished, which Kurt and you might enjoy. It is a new departure for me, and I think also it might interest Jung. I am incidentally very glad to hear his Autobiography is being written. I was deeply impressed by his *Undiscovered Self*, and recommend it to people as one of the most understanding apologies for religion I have read for a long time. In fact one of the only ones, because as a rule I don't waste my time reading apologetics.¹⁴

(November 16, 1959) How is the Jung biography coming along? I was in the hospital lately and read there *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, which is a beautiful and wise book, and highly civilized.¹⁵

(July 23, 1960) I hope the waters of the lake are bluer than ever, and that the sun on the mount is clear, and that there are many flowers all around you. How is the Jung autobiography coming along? What else is new, that is good?¹⁶

¹⁰ Bishop, *Jung in Contexts*, xv

¹¹ Bishop, *Jung in Contexts*, 37.

¹² Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, xiii-xiv.

¹³ Christine M. Bochen (Ed.), *The Courage for Truth: The Letters of Thomas Merton to Writers*, New York 1993, 97.

¹⁴ Bochen, *The Courage for Truth*, 98.

¹⁵ Bochen, *The Courage for Truth*, 99.

¹⁶ Bochen, *The Courage for Truth*, 103.

I have not found any evidence that Jung knew of Merton, although there is a hint in the letter of June 22, 1959 that Wolff might have been a conduit between the two writers. Perhaps the manuscript that Merton wanted Wolff to pass on to Jung was a draft of *Inner Experience*. On September 6, 1959 Merton wrote in his journal: "Reading Jung on religion (not bad) – Some rewriting on *Inner Experience* which is now, I think, a respectable book."¹⁷ *Inner Experience* was eventually published in eight instalments in 1983 and 1984 in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly Review 18 & 19*.

It is perhaps not too fanciful to imagine that Jung had at least heard of *Seven Story Mountain*, but there were no books by Merton in Jung's library and there is no citation of Merton in the index to Jung's Collected Works. Merton certainly read Jung, but it is hard to assess the extent of Jung's influence on Merton. There is no evidence that Jung really touched Merton's mind in the same way as Camus, Bonhoeffer or Fromm. For example, in an essay entitled 'Symbolism: Communication or Communion?', in which we might expect Jung to figure, Merton discusses Heisenberg, Whitehead and Tillich, but does not mention Jung.¹⁸

While he made, as we have seen, appreciative comments about Jung, Merton could also be caustic. On June 24, 1966 he wrote to a "Mother M.",

Do you remember that some time ago you sent me a book of Ira Progoff, *The Symbolic and the Real*, and asked me to comment on it for one of your friends?... Well, I am reading it now. So here is my comment, for what it is worth... His idea of a positive therapy which loosens up the flow of psychic and living dynamism is fine... The only problem I have is with the relative banality of the symbols of his patients, which seem to me to be rather a letdown. I have noticed this before with the Jungian approach. Exciting theories, and then stupid mandalas by the patients. It is true perhaps that they cannot connect with traditional archetypal material, but it would certainly be a good thing if they could. It is much richer than what these patients are digging out.¹⁹

¹⁷ Lawrence Cunningham, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monk's True Life*, New York 1997 (Journals of Thomas Merton Vol. 3), 327.

¹⁸ Naomi Burton Stone & Partick Hart (Eds.), *Loving and Living*, London 1979, 54-79.

¹⁹ Partick Hart (Ed.), *The School of Charity: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Renewal and Spiritual Direction*, New York 1990, 309.

There have been numerous books, papers and dissertations that use Jungian concepts to look at Merton. For example, Carr writes that,

Merton's many formulations of the problem of the self and his autobiographical reflections on his own identity and spiritual quest invites analysis from several perspectives. In psychological terms, there are analogies with Freudian theory... Perhaps even stronger is the correspondence with Jungian theory suggested by the pattern of individuation from the ego to the self, through conscious acceptance of the dark self or shadow (for a man, the *anima*, his feminine side) and the importance of the *persona* and religious myth in this process. One could argue that Merton's highly individuated self, both as an untypical monk and as a creative writer, exemplify Jung's psychological pattern very aptly.²⁰

While Waldron acknowledges that, "Thomas Merton's journey to wholeness does not exactly follow Jung's chronology of individuation", his *Thomas Merton in Search of His Soul: A Jungian Perspective* is, nevertheless, a relentless Jungian analysis of Merton's life.²¹

No one has, as far as I know, has used Merton's ideas to analyse Jung. I suspect, however, that Merton might well have agreed with Victor White's opinion that,

Unlike Jung, a Christian places God *beyond* all sorts of "opposites" – good and evil, male and female, etc.

Is the Jungian "self" the one God *I* can believe in or worship – "the Maker of all things visible and invisible"? Is the Jungian "self" even a God I can rationally acknowledge by natural theology, and prescinding from faith? I must confess that I doubt it.²²

The question of what is "*beyond* all sorts of 'opposites' " brings us to consider the concepts of *apophasis* and *kataphasis*, words which probably have more currency in Merton's world than in Jung's.

²⁰ Anne E. Carr, *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self*, Notre Dame (IN) 1988, 128.

²¹ Robert G. Waldron, *Thomas Merton in Search of His Soul: A Jungian Perspective*, Notre Dame (IN) 1994, 25.

Apophasis and Kataphasis

The terms, *apophasis* and *kataphasis*, were used by Aristotle to describe categorical propositions as either affirmation or denial, saying or unsaying. *Apophasis* refers to the negation and *kataphasis* to the affirmation. The concept of *apophasis* was given its radical transcendence by the Neoplatonists, Plotinus and Proclus, and introduced into Christianity by Pseudo-Dionysius, the 5th century Syrian monk, who brought together Greek and Jewish concepts of the apophatic.

Pseudo-Dionysius had a profound influence on medieval philosophy and theology. In his discussion of the difference between the apophatic and kataphatic in *The Mystical Theology*, he writes,

In my *Theological Representations*, I have praised the notions which are most appropriate to affirmative theology. I have shown the sense in which the divine and good nature is said to be one and then triune... how these core lights of goodness grew from the incorporeal and indivisible good, and how in this sprouting they have remained inseparable from their co-eternal foundation in it... In *The Divine Names* I have shown the sense in which God is described as good, existent, life, wisdom, power and whatever other things pertain to the conceptual names of God. In my *Symbolic Theology* I have discussed analogies of God drawn from what we perceive. I have spoken of the images we have of him, of the forms, figures, and instruments proper to him, of the places in which he lives and the ornaments he wears, I have spoken of his anger, grief, and rage, of how he is said to be drunk and hungover, of his oaths and curses, of his sleeping and waking, and indeed of all those images we have of him, images shaped by the workings of the symbolic representations of God... The fact is that the more we take flight upward, the more our words are confined to the ideas we are capable of forming; so that now as we plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect, we shall find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing. In the earlier books my argument traveled downward from the most exalted to the humblest categories, taking in on this downward path an ever-increasing number of ideas which multiplied with every stage of the descent. But my argument now rises from what is below up to the transcendent, and the more it climbs the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable.²³

The apophatic tradition in western Europe continued with Eriugena, Eckhart, the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* and John of the Cross. In the 20th century this tradition appears in the work of Heidegger, Bataille, Levinas, Derrida and Marion and in aspects of psychoanalysis. *Apophasis* can be seen

²² Ann Conrad Lammers, *In God's Shadow: The Collaboration of Victor White and C.G. Jung*, Mahwah (NJ) 1994, 224-225.

²³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works* (trans. Colm Luibheid), Mahwah (NJ) 1987, 138-139.

as a type of theology, an epistemology, a mode of discourse, a mystical practice, a quality of experience or as a hermeneutics.

In his commentary on the section of *The Mystical Theology* cited above, Rorem asserts that 'the entire Dionysian enterprise is a cognitive exercise, dominated throughout by the right interpretation of the revealed names and symbols for God, whether in the Bible or in the liturgy, and climaxed by the intentional abandonment of all such interpretations. The abandonment is itself a conscious cognitive technique.'²⁴ Sells, in his study of apophatic language, observes that

Classical Western apophasis shares three key features: (1) the metaphor of overflowing or "emanation" which is often in creative tension with the language of intentional, demiurgic creation; (2) dis-ontological discursive effort to avoid reifying the transcendent as an "entity" or "being" or "thing"; (3) a distinctive dialectic of transcendence and immanence in which the utterly transcendent is revealed as the utterly immanent.²⁵

Rather than pointing to an object, apophatic language attempts to evoke in the reader an event that is – in its movement beyond structure of self and other, subject and object – structurally analogous to the event of mystical union... At the critical center of apophatic discourse – the moment of mystical union – apophasis is "performed" through a fusing of divine and human referents.²⁶

Turner suggests that there is a difference between an apophasis that presupposes the inadequacy of language and one that discovers the failure of language, where language exhausts itself. Apophasis is not a "naïve *pre*-critical ignorance", but "a strategy and practice of unknowing".

It is the conception of theology not as a naïve *pre*-critical ignorance of God, but as a kind of acquired ignorance, a *docta ignorantia* as Nicholas of Cues called it in the fifteenth century. It is the conception of theology as a strategy and practice of unknowing, as the fourteenth century English mystic called it, who, we might say invented the transitive verb-form 'to unknow' in order to describe theological knowledge, in this its deconstructive mode.²⁷

²⁴ Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence*, New York 1993, 200.

²⁵ Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, Chicago 1994, 6.

²⁶ Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*

²⁷ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge 1995, 19.

Woodcock as we have seen has rightly noted the similarity between Merton's "journey into the inner self" and Jung's concept of individuation. It seems to me that Jung comes closest to the apophatic in his discussion of individuation. The individual is in many respects unrepresentable and unknowable; always beyond what can be said. The individual, in this Jungian apophatic sense, is the "product" of individuation, not the source or process of individuation. In Turner's terms this is not a naïve *pre-critical* individual. However, the preponderance of Jung's writings about the self and individuation are to my mind kataphatic. Turner describes kataphatic discourse as "a kind of verbal riot".

What, then of the 'cataphatic'? The cataphatic is, we might say, the verbose element in theology, it is the Christian mind deploying all the resources of language in the effort to express something about God, and in that straining to speak, theology uses as many voices as it can. It is the cataphatic in theology which causes its metaphor-ridden character, causes it to borrow vocabularies by analogy from many another discourse, whether of science, literature, art, sex, politics, the law, the economy, family life, warfare, play, teaching, physiology, or whatever... For in its cataphatic mode, theology is, we might say, a kind of verbal riot, an anarchy of discourse in which anything goes. And when we have said that much, narrowly, about the formal language of theology, we have only begun: for that is to say nothing about the extensive *non-verbal* vocabulary of theology, its liturgical and sacramental action, its music, its architecture, its dance and gesture, all of which are intrinsic to its character as an *expressive* discourse, a discourse of theological articulation.²⁸

Western Christianity is overwhelmingly kataphatic. The doctrines of creation, *imago dei*, and the incarnation imply that knowledge of God or the divine will is attainable through analogy and metaphor. In philosophy, reason is capable of knowing nature and God. Kataphatic knowledge is 'common sense'. Our senses reveal, however imperfectly, the nature of reality. Our concepts, images and symbols, however fragile or ambiguous, mediate truth.

In this paper I am applying the concepts of *aphophasis* and *kataphasis* to Jung's and Merton's writings on the self. I am suggesting that these concepts define not only approaches to God, but attitudes in science, philosophy, art, politics and literature, and that throughout history apophatic and kataphatic discourses and practices have existed in tension or open conflict.

²⁸ Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 20.

The following chart provides an oversimplified schematisation of the contrast between the apophatic and kataphatic. I do not intend to imply equivalencies between terms or relationships on the lists. For example, active imagination is not equal to gnostics and the relationship active imagination/contemplation is not identical to the relationship gnostics/desert fathers. I am not intending to comment on all the elements of chart in this essay. The chart might, however, hint at the area I am attempting to discuss in this paper.

<u>Kataphatic</u>	<u>Apophatic</u>
Active Imagination	Contemplation
Gnostics	Desert Fathers
Alchemists	Eckhart
Golden Flower	Zen
Imagination	Emptiness
Theurgy	Theoria
Collective	Individual (Jung)
Need	Desire (Levinas)
<i>Nous</i>	the One (Plotinus)
Soul	Spirit (Hillman)
<i>plaisir</i>	<i>jouissance</i> (Barthes)
Jung No. 1	Jung No. 2 (Miller)

As a Cistercian, Merton had studied Bernard of Clairvaux and the other theologians and writers in his order. The Dionysian apophatic tradition was not significant in Cistercian spirituality. McGinn notes that ‘a survey of Bernard (of Clairvaux), William (of St. Thierry), and Aelred (of Rievaulx) produces little evidence for substantial acquaintance on the part of these early Cistercians with the text of the corpus and indicates that Dionysian themes are not really significant in the theology of the three authors.’²⁹ However there is an ecstatic dimension in Cistercian spirituality and it shares with Pseudo-Dionysius the theme of ascent. In Bernard's epistemology knowledge is attained through love; he described the union between the Bridegroom (God) and the Bride (the soul) in this way.

But there is a place where the Lord appears truly tranquil and at rest. It is the place neither of the Judge nor of the Teacher, but of the Bridegroom, and which becomes for me (whether for others also, I do not know) a real bedchamber whenever it is granted me to enter there... If, my brothers,

²⁹ Dale Courlter, *Pseudo-Dionysius in the Twelfth Century Latin West*, ORB: The Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies, 1997, 7 (<http://orb.rhodes.edu/encyclop/culture/Philos/coulter.html>).

it should ever be granted to you to be so transported for a time into this secret sanctuary of God and there be so rapt and absorbed as to be distracted or disturbed by no necessity of the body, no importunity or care, no stinging of conscience, or, what is more difficult, no inrush of corporeal images from the senses of the imagination, you can truly say: 'The King has brought me into his bedchamber.'³⁰

Merton was further attuned to the apophatic through his reading of the Desert Fathers, Gregory of Nyssa, Eckhart, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, John of the Cross, Chuang Tzu and Zen. I would argue as well that his early life history made the apophatic dynamic especially attractive to him. According to Sullivan,

Merton never denied the value of the kataphatic approach to God, but he was strongly convinced that ultimately it must yield place to apophaticism. Thus he writes: Now, while the Christian contemplative must certainly develop by study, the theological understanding of concepts about God, he is called mainly to penetrate the wordless darkness and apophatic light of an experience beyond concepts, and here he gradually becomes familiar with a God who is "absent" and as it were "non-existent" to all human experience.³¹

Woolger has written about the contrast between apophatic and kataphatic approaches with particular reference to analytical psychology.

Blake wrote: "The world of Imagination is the world of eternity", epitomising an assumption that is axiomatic in Jungian psychology. If Freud opened the royal road to the unconscious with the study of dreams only to find the potentially subversive vestiges of infantile sexuality and aggression, it was Jung who showed the deeper and closer contact with this primal psychic sludge revealed transforming symbols that could make of this road a *Heilsweg* of potential religious significance. Indeed, so impressive is the extent of Jung's demonstration of the redemptive and regenerative power of the imagination that we are apt to forget another approach to wholeness that is emphatic in rejecting the imagination *tout court*. This other approach is the mystical doctrine loosely termed the *via negativa* or sometimes "apophatic theology"... this doctrine not only contrasts with but explicitly repudiates that cultivation of the imagination so much a cornerstone of Jungian practice... Indeed, it would seem to be an attitude that is opposed to what has been called "the symbolic life" and hence to the very practice of analytical psychology.³²

Woolger's assertion that the *via negativa* is an "approach to wholeness" is questionable. The language of wholeness is not particularly evident in apophatic texts. The comment says more about the numinous value

³⁰ John R. Sommerfeldt, 'Bernard of Clairvaux: The Mystic and Society', in : E. Rozanne Elder (Ed.), *The Spirituality of Western Christendom*, Kalamazoo 1976, 72-84, 75.

³¹ William H. Shannon, *Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey: Writings on Contemplation*, Tunbridge Wells 2000, 15.

³² Roger Woolger, 'Against Imagination: The Via Negativa in Simone Weil', in: *Spring* (1973), 256, 263.

of "wholeness" in analytical psychology than about apophatic aspiration. It is an expression of Jung's theory that wholeness is an inherent aspect of the *imago Dei*.

Although "wholeness" seems at first sight to be nothing but an abstract idea (like *anima* and *animus*), it is nevertheless empirical in so far as it is anticipated by the psyche in the form of spontaneous or autonomous symbols. These are the quaternary or mandala symbols, which occur not only in the dreams of modern people who have never heard of them, but are widely disseminated in the historical records of many peoples and many epochs. Their significance as *symbols of unity and totality* is amply confirmed by history as well as by empirical psychology. What at first looks like an abstract idea stands in reality for something that exists and can be experienced, that demonstrates it's a *priori* presence spontaneously. Wholeness is thus an objective factor that confronts the subject independently of him... Unity and totality stand at the highest point on the scale of objective values because their symbols can no longer be distinguished from the *imago Dei*. Hence all statements about the God-image apply also to the empirical symbols of totality.³³

Turning now to Jung and Merton themselves, the difference between apophatic and kataphatic language, experience and sensibility comes across graphically in the following important texts by our two writers. Among the volumes of Merton's writings on contemplation, this is one of the few relatively undisguised descriptions of his own practice. It is from a letter written to the Sufi scholar, Abdul Aziz, in 1966.

Now you ask about my method of meditation. Strictly speaking, I have a very simple way of prayer. It is centred entirely on attention to the presence of God and His will and his love. That is to say that it is centered on faith by which alone we can know the presence of God. One might say this gives my meditation the character described by the Prophet as "being before God as if you saw Him." Yet it does not mean imagining anything or conceiving a precise image of God, for in my mind this would be a kind of idolatry. On the contrary, it is a matter of adoring Him as invisible and infinitely beyond our comprehension, and realizing Him as all. My prayer tends very much to what you call *fana* (*annihilation, kenosis*). There is in my heart this great thirst to recognize totally the nothingness of all that is not God. My prayer is then a kind of praise rising up out of the center of Nothing and Silence. If I am still present to 'myself' this I recognize as an obstacle. If He will He can then make the Nothingness into total clarity. If He does not will, then the Nothingness actually seems itself to be an object and remains an obstacle. Such is my ordinary way of prayer, or mediation. It is not 'thinking about' anything, but a direct seeking of the Face of the Invisible. Which cannot be found unless we become lost in Him who is Invisible.³⁴

This experience of Jung's, recorded in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, is part of the crucial "confrontation with the unconscious" which followed his break with Freud.

³³ Jung, *Collected Works* (CW), 9, II, 31. (I am following the convention of citing the volume and page number only for references from the *Collected Works*)

³⁴ Donald W. Mitchell & James Wiseman, *The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics*, New York 1999, 60-61.

It was during Advent of the year 1913 - December 12, to be exact - that I resolved upon the decisive step. I was sitting at my desk once more, thinking over my fears. Then I let myself drop. Suddenly it was as though the ground literally gave way beneath my feet, and I plunged down into dark depths. I could not fend off a feeling of panic. But then, abruptly, at not too great a depth, I landed in a soft, sticky mass. I felt great relief, although I was apparently in complete darkness. After a while my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, which was rather like a deep twilight. Before me was the entrance to a dark cave, in which stood a dwarf with a leathery skin, as if he were mummified. I squeezed past him through the narrow entrance and waded knee deep through icy water to the other end of the cave where, on a projecting rock, I saw a glowing red crystal. I grasped the stone, lifted it, and discovered a hollow underneath. At first I could make out nothing, but then I saw that there was running water. In it a corpse floated by, a youth with blond hair and a wound in the head. He was followed by a gigantic black scarab and then by a red, newborn sun, rising up out of the depths of the water. Dazzled by the light, I wanted to replace the stone upon the opening, but then a fluid welled out. It was blood. A thick jet of it leaped up, and I felt nauseated. It seemed to me that the blood continued to spurt for an unendurably long time. At last it ceased, and the vision came to an end.³⁵

These passages express the flavour of the difference between Merton's contemplation and Jung's active imagination.

The Self

In this section I will explore some of the ways in which Jung and Merton differ in their use of the concept of self, using the categories of self-experience, need/desire, proximity and matrix/destination.

Self-experience

Part of the appeal of Jung and Merton is that they both sought authenticity in self-experience. One could understand the apophatic and kataphatic as different methods of self-experience, as technics of the self. In his paper, 'Experience as Technique of the Self', Milet asks, "How can technicity be the mark of experience?" He maintains that,

there can be no experience without transformation, above all, without transformation of the self, and that there can be no transformation without technics... Experience trans-forms in the sense that it acquires form at the end of a crossing, of a trial of endurance, apres coup. To become other

³⁵ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 179.

is to become self. In other words, one can only become (one)self through becoming other (en s'alterant), through alteration... What is there technical in this becoming other of experience? If to come to (one)self is to become other, then the relation to self has the character of a relation to another; it is here that technics appears in its constitutive role... Technics is a savoir – a savoir which has the character of 'knowing how to proceed', of familiar surety... the relation to self is technical if it can be shown that the subject of experience intervenes as a 'means', as the instrument of its own transformation. The 'subject' of experience is thus agent, work and instrument... In other words, to constitute oneself as a moral subject is to make one's life a work of art, that requires something like a technics referring back to what Foucault, following numerous authors of Antiquity, calls the "arts of existence", *tekhnai tou biou*.³⁶

As "life artists", Jung and Merton had different methods of submitting the self to experience. Where Merton wrote about emptiness, Jung reported visions. The texts cited in the previous section demonstrate how they each self-consciously placed themselves in relation to experience. They had different "savoir", ways of "knowing how to proceed". Merton waited in unknowing, "seeking the Face of the Invisible", and Jung let himself "drop" into the stream of psychic images. Each stance implies a moral decision about which aspects of existence are worth being subject to through experience. With reference to Merton, Sullivan observes,

A distinctive feature of Merton's apophatic approach to contemplation is his application of the way of darkness and negation to the discovery of our real self. His anthropology is as apophatic as his theology. For the real self, being our own subjectivity, cannot be known, because it cannot be objectified. For as soon as you attempt to objectify it in images and concepts, you have lost sight of it. You have turned it into an object distinct from your real self, the subject.³⁷

As Smith describes it: 'For Merton's theology turns on a complex of values which is ultimately and paradoxically self-referential – a psychology where the highest value is placed on the Self in the attempt to transcend the Self.'³⁸ On the other hand, Jung's connection with himself, from childhood, was through dreams and visions, as well as his experience of spiritualism mediated through his mother's family. According to Kluger, for Jung 'image constitutes experience'.

Where Freud initiates his theoretical perspective by postulating a world of desire (eros) prior to any kind of experience, Jung's originary principle is the world of images. Image makes up the world in which experience unfolds. Image constitutes experience. Image is psyche. For Jung the

³⁶ Jean-Philippe Milet, (1995), 'Experience as Technique of the Self', in: *Tekhnema 2: Technics and Finitude* (Spring 1995), 1. (<http://tekhnama.free.fr/Milet>)

³⁷ Shannon, *Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey*, 16.

³⁸ Allyn Smith, *Jung's Archetype of the Self as it Appears in Thomas Merton's Journey Toward Self-Awareness*, (PhD dissertation), California 1990, 48.

world of psychic reality is not a world of things. Neither is it a world of being. It is a world of image-as-such.³⁹

As Jung himself put it,

In the end the only events in my life worth telling are those when the imperishable world irrupted into this transitory one. That is why I speak chiefly of inner experiences, amongst which I include my dreams and vision. These form the *prima materia* of my scientific work. They were the fiery magma out of which the stone that had to be worked was crystallized.⁴⁰

From the point of view of a technic of the self, Jung took the kataphatic moral stance of subjecting himself to images and Merton took the apophatic moral stance of subjecting himself to the invisible.

Need/desire

Levinas' thoughts about need and desire form another lens with which to compare Jung and Merton. For Levinas,

Desire is sharply distinguished from need. Whereas the latter might reveal a lack or an absence which can be filled, desire is insatiable. Contrary to the myth of the Platonic hermaphrodite or the Romantic yearning for fusion, Levinas' desire does not seek to restore something (fantasized as) lost. What desire desires is transcendence, alterity, the exteriority of the Other... 'Desire is desire for the absolutely Other'. This is desire for the Other, which cannot be satisfied, rather than need for the other, which can.⁴¹

I am identifying Jung with need and Merton with desire.

Jung's theory of the self is complex. The archetype of the self is the god-image. The self is both centre and circumference. The psyche, which includes the persona, the ego, anima/animus, the complexes and the shadow, is given order by the self. Interestingly, images of the hermaphrodite and of fusion mentioned above in connection with Levinas' concept of need, feature in Jung's writings on the self, alchemy and

³⁹ Paul Kugler, 'Imagining: A Bridge to the Sublime', in: *Spring* 58 (1995), 104.

⁴⁰ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 4.

⁴¹ Colin David, *Levinas: An Introduction*, Cambridge 1996, 45-46.

regression. Compensation, complementarity and the opposites, which I would also associate with need, play crucial roles in the management of this complexity by helping the psyche achieve balance. As Stein observes,

The psychological mechanism by which individuation takes place, whether we are considering it in the first or the second half of life, is what Jung called *compensation*. The fundamental relation between conscious and unconscious is compensatory... The function of compensation is to introduce balance into the psychic system... In the lifelong unfolding that Jung calls individuation, the driving force is the self, and the mechanism by which it emerges in the conscious life of the individual is compensation.⁴²

While some post-Jungians are uncomfortable with the prominence of complementarity, compensation and the opposites in Jung's theory, particularly as applied to gender issues, these mechanisms appear to me to be cornerstones not only of his account of the psyche, but of his method or technic of the self. No doubt these same post-Jungians would be anxious about the relationship between necessity and essentialism.

While for Jung the need-fulfilling, self-regulating mechanisms of the psyche seek to restore balance, "Levinas' desire does not seek to restore something (fantasized as) lost". Levinas' "insatiable" desire resonates with Merton's longing to be "lost in the Invisible".

Merton wrote: 'Do you suppose I have a spiritual life? I have none. I am silence, I am poverty, I am solitude, for I have renounced spirituality to find God.'⁴³

For Merton it is the false self not the true self, which is driven by need. 'Two of the strongest psychological attributes of the false self are its "fear of death and the need for self-affirmation" [...]The need for self-affirmation engages the self "in a futile struggle to endow itself with significance". The false self thus acts as its own source of being and fulfillment.'⁴⁴ Jung's self is, in a sense, self-preoccupied — with its own balance, wholeness, individuation – while Merton's self is preoccupied an encounter with the Other.

⁴² Murray Stein, *Jung's Map of the Soul*, Chicago 1998, 176-177.

⁴³ Shannon, *Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey*, 96.

⁴⁴ Thomas Del Prete, *Thomas Merton and the Education of the Whole Person*, Birmingham (AL) 1990, 36.

Proximity

One concept though which to compare the views of Jung and Merton on the self is proximity, which has an important place in Levinas' philosophy. Lingis, one of his translators, describes proximity as 'the relationship with alterity, which is what escapes apprehension, exceeds all comprehension, is infinitely remote, is, paradoxically enough, the most extreme immediacy, proximity closer than presence, obsessive contact.'⁴⁵ This resonates with one element of Sells' definition of apophatic language as 'a distinctive dialectic of transcendence and immanence in which the utterly transcendent is revealed as the utterly immanent.'⁴⁶ Merton's statement that "This inner identity is not 'found' as an object, but is the very self that finds" echoes Levinas and Sells. As Del Prete (quoting Merton) observes:

The true self is 'the mature personal identity, the creative fruit of an authentic and lucid search, the "self" that is found after other partial and exterior selves have been discarded as masks. [...] This inner identity is not "found" as an object, but is the very self that finds.' 'Learning to be oneself means... discovering in the ground of one's being a "self" which is ultimate and indestructible.'⁴⁷

One common reading of Merton's life is that he changed from being a world-hating ascetic to being a life-affirming artist. This is sometimes taken to mean that Merton moved from an apophatic to a kataphatic relationship with reality. The implication is that he moved closer to humanity — his own and that of others — by "out growing" his apophatic posture. For example, Cooper maintains that over time Merton abandoned a rigid apophatic posture for a more open humanist position.

Contemplation-as-asceticism [...] gave way to a new emphasis on contemplation-as-rehabilitation. Merton evolved, then from a sapiential, apophatic theory of contemplation – in which the self is lost in darkness as the soul plunges into the abyss of God's unknowability – to a kataphatic, therapeutic, more practicable view of solitude where the 'authentic self' breaks through a surface of false social selves and is affirmed in the light of its true being.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, Pittsburgh 1998, xxv.

⁴⁶ Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 6.

⁴⁷ Del Prete, *Thomas Merton and the Education of the Whole Person*, 33-44.

⁴⁸ David D. Cooper, *Thomas Merton's Art of Denial: The Evolution of a Radical Humanist*, Athens (GA) 1989, 250.

This interpretation demonstrates a misunderstanding of the nature of the apophatic and is to my mind a misreading of Merton's story. I would argue that Merton, far from relinquishing his apophatic stance followed it to its logical conclusion, and that his humanism is a natural expression of his apophatic dynamism. Becoming human need not require a repudiation of the “abyss of God’s unknowability”. Sociality and transcendence are not necessarily opposites.

As Sells points out, part of the dynamic of *apophasis* is the simultaneous presence of absolute transcendence and absolute immanence. Taylor, ending with a citation from Levinas, describes the dynamic nature of proximity as

the voice that approaches through the neighbor is the discourse of the Other, which ‘tears’ (*arrache*) the self from itself. This wound that never heals renders desire infinite. Through the infinity of desire, the Infinite itself draws near. The interplay of presence and absence in the desire of the Other marks the proximity of the Infinite as an infinite proximity obsessing the subject [...] Like Heidegger's near, which is neither present nor absent, the proximate is nearer than every presence yet more remote than any absence [...] ‘Proximity is not a state, a repose, but precisely restlessness, non-place, outside of the place of repose [...] Never close enough, proximity does not congeal into a structure.’⁴⁹

So Merton writes: “This inner identity is not “found” as an object, but is the very self that finds’. For Merton the self is at once the most intimate personal subjectivity and ‘ultimate and indestructible’. Merton wrote of man's need to ‘transcend his empirical self and find his *true self* in an emptiness that is completely *awake* because completely free of useless reflection’. For Merton the heart is ‘the deepest psychological ground of one's personality, the inner sanctuary where self-awareness goes beyond analytical reflection and opens out into metaphysical and theological confrontation with the Abyss of the unknown yet present one who is “more intimate to us than we are to ourselves.”’⁵⁰

How does the issue of proximity appear in Jung's theory of the self? In the context of Jung's theories, one speaks about *the* self rather than *my* self. The self is a distant impersonal shaper of life. For Jung the self is

⁴⁹ Mark C. Taylor, *Alterity*, Chicago 1987, 214.

⁵⁰ Shannon, *Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey*, 195.

an *other* with whom I must learn to live. Murray Stein describes how the self is experienced through the individuation process.

Each of the archetypal images that appear in the developmental sequence from birth to old age – the divine infant, the hero, the puer and puella, the king and queen, the crone and the wise old man – are aspects or expressions of this single archetype. Over the course of development, the self impacts the psyche and creates changes in the individual at all levels: physical, psychological and spiritual.⁵¹

Jung emphasised the distance between ego and self.

But again and again I note that the individuation process is confused with the coming of the ego into consciousness and that the ego is in consequence identified with the self, which naturally produces a hopeless conceptual muddle. Individuation is then nothing but ego-centredness and autoeroticism. But the self comprises infinitely more than a mere ego.⁵²

There is little hope of our ever being able to reach even approximate consciousness of the self, since however much we may make conscious there will always exist an indeterminate and indeterminable amount of unconscious material which belongs to the totality of the self.⁵³

As Stein says in summing up Jung's view on the self: 'The self is the center, and it unifies the pieces. But it does so at a considerable distance, like the sun influencing the orbits of the planets.'⁵⁴ Papadopoulos has elaborated on the theme of distance in the relationship between self and other in Jung's life and work. He has argued that it is key to understanding the structure of Jung's theory. 'However, once having climbed the problematic of the Other, the centre shifts from the Ego to the Self. Then the ladder should be dropped, for at the new centre is the Self, and being the ultimate unity and wholeness of the total personality, no problematic any longer exists, nor any "Other".'⁵⁵ At first this might appear to be an apophatic statement. However, if we recall Sells' statement that 'apophysis is "performed" through a fusing of divine and human referents'⁵⁶, we are forced to ask whether Papadopoulos is not describing an eclipse of the Other by the

⁵¹ Stein, *Jung's Map of the Soul*, 194.

⁵² Jung, CW 8, 226.

⁵³ Jung, CW 7, par. 274.

⁵⁴ Stein, *Jung's Map of the Soul*, 169.

⁵⁵ Renos K. Papadopoulos, 'Jung and the Concept of the Other', in: Renos K. Papadopoulos & Graham S. Saayman (Eds.), *Jung in Modern Perspective* (pp. 54-88), Hounslow 1984, 88.

⁵⁶ Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 10.

Self, rather than ‘a distinctive dialectic of transcendence and immanence in which the utterly transcendent is revealed as the utterly immanent’.⁵⁷

While Jung's self displays an elaborate architecture and hierarchy — a word invented by Pseudo-Dionysius — Merton's self is existential. Jung, in an early version of internal object relations theory, describes the spatial relationships between complexes and archetypal images, while Merton seeks ‘proximity closer than presence’.

Matrix/destination

Another way to explore the difference between Jung and Merton is to ask, Where does the unknowable appear in their theories of the self? In my view almost all references to the unknowable in Jung refer to the origin, source, matrix of the self; he speaks primarily about the Great Mother or the Collective Unconscious. Most references to fusion or dissolution are framed in the context of regression. For Jung the unknowable archetypes are *a priori* categories of experience. This is not *apophasis*, unsaying. Merton, on the other hand, is in line with the apophatic tradition that refers to the unknowable as the destination: after expressing oneself, one unsays oneself and plunges into the Beyond.

I am presenting a lengthy quotation from *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos*, followed by a section of *The Mystical Theology* of Pseudo-Dionysius, in order to bring out the kataphatic structure of Jung's thought. In *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos*, written in 1916 and which contains seeds of his later theories of the self, Jung wrote about creatura, pleroma and Abraxas. The pleroma and Abraxas contain the opposites.

Harken: I begin with nothingness. Nothingness is the same as fullness. In infinity full is no better than empty. Nothingness is both empty and full [...] This nothingness or fullness we name the PLEROMA. Therein both thinking and being cease, since the eternal and infinite possess no qualities. In it no being is, for he then would be distinct from the pleroma, and would possess qualities which would distinguish him as something distinct from the pleroma [...] In the pleroma there is nothing and everything. It is quite fruitless to think about the pleroma, for this would mean

⁵⁷ Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 6.

self-dissolution [...] CREATURA is not in the pleroma, but in itself. The pleroma is both beginning and end of created beings. It pervadeth them, as the light of the sun everywhere pervadeth the air. Although the pleroma pervadeth altogether, yet hath created being no share thereof, just as a wholly transparent body becometh neither light nor dark through the light which pervadeth it. We are, however, the pleroma itself for we are part of the eternal and infinite. But we have no share thereof, as we are from the pleroma infinitely removed; not spiritually or temporally, but essentially, since we are distinguished from the pleroma in our essence as creatura, which is confined within time and space... Yet we are parts of the pleroma, the pleroma is also in us. Even in the smallest point is the pleroma endless, eternal, and entire, since small and great are qualities which are contained in it. It is that nothingness which is everywhere whole and continuous [...] The pairs of opposites are qualities of the pleroma which are not, because each balanceth each. As we are the pleroma itself, we also have all these qualities in us [...] hard to know is the deity of Abraxas. Its power is the greatest, because man perceiveth it not. From the sun he draweth the *summum bonum*; from the devil the *infimum malum*; but from Abraxas LIFE, altogether indefinite, the mother of good and evil.⁵⁸

This contrasts with the structure delineated by Pseudo-Dionysius.

Again, as we climb higher we say this. It is not soul or mind, nor does it possess imagination, conviction, speech, or understanding. Nor is it speech per se, understanding per se. It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by understanding. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. It is not immovable, moving, or at rest. It has no power, it is not power, nor is it light. It does not live nor is it life. It is not a substance, nor is it eternity or time. It cannot be grasped by the understanding since it is neither knowledge nor truth. It is not kingship. It is not wisdom. It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is it a spirit, in the sense in which we understand the term. It is not sonship or fatherhood and it is nothing known to us or to any other being. It falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing nor of being. Existing beings do not know it as it actually is and it does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of it, nor name nor knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth – it is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of its pre-eminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; it is also beyond every denial.⁵⁹

These two texts present contrasting litanies. Jung repeats over and over: It is this *and* that. Pseudo-Dionysius proclaims again and again: It is *neither* this, *nor* that. Jung affirms both, Pseudo-Dionysius denies both. There is a clear contrast between *both/and* and *neither/nor* in these texts. Pseudo-Dionysius states that "It falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing nor of being". This contrasts with Jung's "The pleroma is both beginning and end of created beings".

⁵⁸ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 379-381

⁵⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, 141.

Jung writes that "The pairs of opposites are qualities of the pleroma which are not, because each balanceth each". Here is an early expression of the principles of complementarity and compensation which he adhered to throughout his career. I would associate Jung's collective unconscious with the neoplatonic *nous*, a perspective supported by Stein's account of psychic energy. This echoes, in simpler language, the world of *Septem Sermones*.

It can move mountains, but it is nebulous and unfathomable, too. So the descent through the layers of psyche from the highest levels of idea and ideal and image through the concreteness of the ego's existence and the body's reality into the chemical and molecular composition of our physical being leads finally to pure energy and back into the realm of ideas, which is the world of *nous*, of mind, of spirit.⁶⁰

I have used an extract from *Septem Sermones* to demonstrate that Jung's kataphatic approach is to affirm the origin and end of phenomena, in contrast to Pseudo-Dionysius' negation of "every limitation".

Summary

In this section of the paper I have amplified the contrast between Jung's kataphatic self and Merton's apophatic self using the categories of self-experience, need/desire, proximity and matrix/destination.

Postmodernity

Jung and Merton have both been presented as precursors of postmodernism and prophets of a new cultural paradigm. With reference to Merton, Senqvist writes,

Now to my question: is Merton postmodern and in what sense? If I look at the phenomenon of postmodernity and its situation in time; no, Merton is not postmodern. What we now view as postmodernity was not fully articulated and labelled as postmodernity while Merton lived, although there are expressions like "post-Christian" in *Contemplation in a World of Action*. But if I look upon postmodernity as something in the air; yes, Merton was postmodern. He was not postmodern in a strict philosophical sense as the French philosophers like Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault and Kristeva. But Merton was not a philosopher! He was a well-educated, well-read Trappist monk with a keen interest in his time and curious about what was going on, but as that,

⁶⁰ Stein, *Jung's Map of the Soul*, 167.

never losing his identity as a monk. He always speaks and talks as a monk, even though his awareness of himself as a monk shifts, transforms and deepens. But I dare to say, it is exactly in this sense that Merton is most truly postmodern: he develops his own thinking, he stands on his own two feet, he challenges old ways of thinking and beliefs, he is bold in his move into Zen Buddhism, firmly believing that the truth of yourself is always truer than the truth of objectivity and what is imposed on a person. Merton's postmodernity is a lived example of what postmodernity might do to you!⁶¹

Inchausti is critical of this sort of effort to recruit Merton for a postmodern project.

It is hard to gauge how Thomas Merton might respond to specific contemporary issues if he were alive today [...] He wasn't a system builder but a dissident; and he employed a rhetoric of discovery checked by a contemplative appeal to conscience to oppose positivist assertions [...] We do know, however, that he sought to expose the myths of modernity [...] And so it is tempting to draw analogies between Merton's call for a postontological monasticism and the radical critique of classical metaphysics offered by postmodern and poststructuralist theorists. But it is *not* an apt comparison [...] Merton's ideas are totally antithetical to recent theoretical trends in the humanities and social sciences. His work is contextual, specific, unflinchingly existential. His continuing relevance to our time as a thinker, an activist, indeed as a metaphysician and moralist, grows out of the fact that he does not abandon reasoned ethical inquiry in order to expose false thinking. Schooled in the *nada* of St. John of the Cross, he begins from a position of absolute skepticism toward the Cartesian *cogito* and so finds the displacement of the bourgeois subject from the center of the self hardly revolutionary... In fact, from Merton's Trappist point of view, any essentialist definition of the self misreads the human condition. Not because essences are in themselves folly, but because in essence we are all one.⁶²

While Merton scholars have a range of views on Merton and postmodernity the debate does not have immediate practical consequences. The debate about Jung and postmodernity is, however, urgent, heated and fraught with more than theoretical consequences for clinical practice, analytic training, university appointments and professional affiliation. Some post-Jungian theorists feel that the establishment the postmodern element in analytical psychology is crucial to securing the legitimacy of analytical psychology as a practice and discourse. From the point of view of this essay, one interesting aspect of this process is what I would describe as the drawing out of the apophatic dimension of Jung's work. While not referring explicitly to *apophasis*, the people looking for a postmodern aspect of Jung have explored the ways in which Jung discusses the unknown and the other, and have discounted of familiar Jungian fare such as

⁶¹ Catharina Stenqvist, 'How Postmodern is Thomas Merton?', in: *Thomas Merton: Poet, Monk, Prophet: Papers from the 1998 Oakham Conference of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, (pp. 129-136), Abergavenny 1998, 136.

⁶² Inchausti, *Thomas Merton's American Prophecy*, 131, 134.

archetypes and complexes. Key figures in this development are Giegerich, Kugler, Miller, Casey and Hauke.

In a rare use of the term, apophatic, Dourley has a chapter in one of his books on Jung's ideas about religion, entitled "Toward an Apophatic Psychology", in which he comments on the Jung/Eckhart connection. Dourley concludes that

one cannot avoid the feeling that Eckhart experienced some void beyond even the archetypal world in that experience he calls the breakthrough. Obviously Jung could appreciate and was manifestly aware of this dimension of reality in his linking Eckhart with Zen, and again in the work that led to his break with Freud, where the image of the unconscious as oceanic comes to the fore as it does in some of his alchemical imagery. But the experience of so radical a self-loss is only questionably a component of Jung's model of the psyche and its working [...] Although time has closed over the possibility of recovering the personal experience that lies behind the heritage Eckhart left us, Jung himself would claim that such speculation is far from idle and that we neglect it at our peril.⁶³

I am suggesting that "such speculation" plays an important part in fueling post-Jungian engagement with the postmodern. I am not implying that one can equate postmodernism with *apophasis*, only that the question of the apophatic arises in fresh and unexpected ways in discussions about deconstruction, difference and the other. According to Kugler: 'For me the question is whether we are going to "ground" the meaning of a psychic narrative through appeal to a transcendental signified, a meaning transcendent to the psyche/text, or whether we are going to ground the meaning in the unknown (unconscious).'⁶⁴ There is more than a little *apophasis* in Giegerich's search for the 'ground' of his Jungian identity.

Only if I plunge into non-identity with myself, only if and inasmuch as I also am not myself, but encounter my own inner 'Zarathustra', as it were can I find my identity as, e.g., Jungian. As long as I am totally identical with myself in accordance with the formula $a=a$, I take myself as a positive fact and am essentially closed, irreversibly locked into myself. Only when the solid ground opens under me and I fall into my own unknownness, into the inner infinity of *my* 'Zarathustra', am I at that point at which I can truly be at one with Jung; just as in general an identity between two different ones is only possible in infinity, such as in the love between two people. The example of love, which after all is a real, a possible experience, shows that I am not speaking of an other worldly infinity, but of that infinity that can be known and experienced on this earth. This is an infinity that belongs to me as finite man and that can be encountered in concrete shapes, such as

⁶³ John P. Dourley, *A Strategy for a Loss of Faith: Jung's Proposal*, Toronto 1992, 134-135.

⁶⁴ Karin Barnaby & Pellegrino D'Acerno (Eds.), *C.G. Jung and the Humanities: Toward a Hermeneutics of Culture*, London 1990, 332.

Zarathustra, Philemon, *lapis*, totem animal or however, if one plunges from his self-identity into his own unknownness. I am speaking of that unknownness that is usually referred to by the term 'unconscious', especially 'collective unconscious', a name that has however long become dulled. The fact that love is the pre-eminent mode of the identity of different ones, makes it likely that our identity as Jungians too is just as any transference relationship, not possible without the element of love.⁶⁵

Miller plays with the theme of Jung No. 1 and Jung No. 2 to tease out *his* postmodern Jung.

At the end of his autobiography, this Jung said, quoting Lao Tzu: " 'All are clear, I alone am clouded.' " This Jung was postmodern before the times. He knew unknowing before Derrida's version of Heidegger's insight that the most crucial moment is the deconstructive one. Indeed, the other Jung invites us into the "cloud of unknowing", to forget our Jungian concepts and categories (No. 1) in order that we may be truly Jungian (No. 2), listening not to Jung but to the soul, in order that – in the manner of the saying of Coomaraswamy – we too may have written on our tombstone: *Hic jact nemo*, "Here lies no one".⁶⁶

Rowland takes Jung into the world to literary theory.

To perceive in Jungian theory a challenge to the metaphysics of presence and logocentrism is to manoeuvre Jungian discourse into a relationship with deconstruction, especially that practiced by Jacques Derrida. To do so is not to argue that a deconstructive Jung is a more accurate version of Jungian theory than the humanist construction which have resulted in traditional literary criticism. Instead, it is to detect 'another Jung' haunting the writings. Such a shadowy and fragmented figure has been evoked by post-Jungian theorist whose characterisation indicates both an adherence to, and a critical distance from, the master's texts.⁶⁷

While the "shadowy and fragmented figure" of a postmodern Jung is sifted out of the Collected Works, new historical research and applied analytical psychology by some post-Jungians, others treading the very different paths of evolutionary psychology and object relations are also claiming Jung as a trailblazer.

Love or Consciousness

C.G. Jung and Thomas Merton were prolific writers who turned their minds to a huge range of topics. In this paper the concepts of *apophasis* and *kataphasis* were use as tools to explore their writings on the self. I

⁶⁵ Wolfgang Giegerich, 'Jungian Psychology: A Baseless Enterprise. Reflections on Our Identity as Jungians', in: *Harvest: Journal for Jungian Studies* 33 (1987-88), 91-103, 98-99.

⁶⁶ Barnaby & D'Acierno, *C.G. Jung and the Humanities*, 326.

have argued that Jung's theory of the self is kataphatic and that Merton's is apophatic. Among the many important issues which could not be addressed in this essay are the relationship between psychology and metaphysics, the doctrine of *summum bonum*, the quaternity, symbolism and ritual.

Near the end of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* Jung writes,

When Lao-tzu says: "All are clear, I alone am clouded," he is expressing what I now feel in advanced old age. Lao-tzu is the example of a man with superior insight who has seen and experience worth and worthlessness, and who at the end of his life desires to return into his own being, into the eternal unknowable meaning. The archetype of the old man who has seen enough is eternally true. At every level of intelligence this type appears, and its lineaments are always the same, whether it be an old peasant or a great philosopher like Lao-tzu. This is old age, and a limitation. Yet there is so much that fills me: plants, animals, clouds, day and night, and the eternal in man. The more uncertain I have felt about myself, the more there has grown up in me a feeling of kinship with all things. In fact it seems to me as if that alienation which so long separated me from the world has become transferred into my own inner world and has revealed to me an unexpected unfamiliarity with myself.⁶⁸

In this remarkable statement Jung demonstrates his archetypal theory, using himself as a case of someone under the influence of the archetype of the old man. He had the presence of mind and self-awareness to practice his technic of the self until the end.

On the day he died Merton gave a lecture to fellow monks in Bangkok entitled 'Marxism and Monastic Perspectives'. He managed to bring in Marx, Marcuse, Garaudy, de Chardin, Feuerbach, Fromm, the Dalai Lama, Trungpa Rimpoche — and Jung.

Both Christianity and Buddhism agree that the root of man's problems is that his consciousness is all fouled up and he does not apprehend reality as it fully and really is; that the moment he looks at something, he begins to interpret it in ways that are prejudiced and pre-determined to fit a certain wrong picture of the world, in which he exists as an individual ego in the centre of things. This is called by Buddhism avidya, or ignorance... Christianity says almost exactly the same things in terms of the myth of original sin. I say "myth of original sin"... using "myth" with all the force of the word that has been given to it by scholars like Jung, and people of the Jungian school, and those psychologist and patristic scholars who meet, for example, at the Eranos meetings annually in Switzerland, where they understand the vital importance and dynamism of myth as a psychological factor in man's adaptation to reality.⁶⁹

He develops this theme further drawing on patristic and monastic fathers.

⁶⁷ Susan Rowland, *C.G. Jung and Literary Theory: The Challenge from Fiction*, Basingstoke 1999, 18.

⁶⁸ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 359.

You find, for example, the Cistercians of the 12th century speaking of a kind of monastic therapy. Adam of Perseigne has the idea that you come to the monastery, first to be cured. The period of monastic formation is a period of cure, of convalescence. When one makes one's profession, one has passed through convalescence and is ready to begin to be educated in a new way — the education of the “new man”. The whole purpose of the monastic life is to teach men to live by love.⁷⁰

For Jung the highest value and achievement was consciousness. For Merton the true self is grounded in love. It might appear counter-intuitive to associate the way of affirmation, *kataphasis*, with consciousness and the way of negation, *apophasis*, with love, but that seems to be one unexpected conclusion of this reading of their work.

⁶⁹ Merton, *The Climate of Monastic Prayer*, 332.

⁷⁰ Merton, *The Climate of Monastic Prayer*, 333.

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