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## octrine of the Similar

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Insight into the realms of the “similar” is of fundamental significance for the illumination of major sectors of occult knowledge. Such insight, however, is gained less by demonstrating found similarities than by replicating the processes which generate such similarities. Nature produces similarities—one need only think of mimicry. The very greatest capacity for the generation of similarities, however, belongs to human beings. Indeed, there may be no single one of their higher functions that is not codetermined by the mimetic faculty. This faculty has a history, however, in both the phylogenetic and the ontogenetic sense. As regards the latter, play is to a great extent its school. Children’s play is everywhere permeated by mimetic modes of behavior, and its realm is by no means limited to what one person can imitate in another. The child plays at being not only a shopkeeper or teacher but also a windmill and a train. The question on which this turns, however, is the following: What advantage does this schooling in mimetic conduct bring to a human being?

The answer presupposes pointed thinking about the phylogenetic significance of mimetic conduct. To determine this, it is not enough to think, for example, of what we understand today by the concept of similarity. As is known, the sphere of life that formerly seemed to be governed by the law of similarity was much larger. This sphere was the microcosm and the macrocosm, to name only one version of many that the experience of similarity found over the course of history. It can still be claimed of our contemporaries that the cases in which they consciously perceive similarities in everyday life make up a tiny proportion of those numberless cases

unconsciously determined by similarity. The similarities perceived consciously—for instance, in faces—are, compared to the countless similarities perceived unconsciously or not at all, like the enormous underwater mass of an iceberg in comparison to the small tip one sees rising out of the water.

These natural correspondences assume decisive importance, however, only in light of the consideration that they are all, fundamentally, stimulants and awakeners of the mimetic faculty which answers them in man. It must be borne in mind that neither mimetic powers nor mimetic objects have remained unchanged over time; and that, in the course of centuries, the mimetic power, and with it the gift of mimetic perception, have disappeared from certain fields—perhaps in order to flow into others. The supposition may not be too bold that, on the whole, a unified direction is perceptible in the historical development of this mimetic faculty.

This direction could, at first sight, lie solely in the increasing fragility of this mimetic faculty. For clearly the perceptual world [*Merkwelt*] of modern human beings seems to contain far fewer of those magical correspondences than did that of the ancients or even that of primitive peoples. The question is simply: Are we dealing with a dying out of the mimetic faculty, or rather perhaps with a transformation that has taken place within it? Of the direction in which the latter might lie, some indications could be derived, even if indirectly, from astrology. As researchers into old traditions, we must take account of the possibility that sensuous shape-giving took place—meaning that objects had a mimetic character—where we are today no longer capable even of suspecting it. For example, in the constellations of the stars.

In order to grasp this, we must above all understand the horoscope as an originary totality which astronomical interpretation merely analyzes. (The state of the stars represents a characteristic unity, and the character of the individual planets can be recognized only by the way they function in relation to this state of the stars.) We must assume in principle that processes in the sky were imitable, both collectively and individually, by people who lived in earlier times; indeed, that this imitability contained instructions for mastering an already present similarity. In this imitability by humans, or, as the case may be, in this mimetic faculty that humans have, we must discern what is for the time being the basis for astrology's experiential character. If, however, mimetic genius was really a life-determining force for the ancients, then we have little choice but to attribute full possession of this gift, and in particular its perfect adaptation to the form of cosmic being, to the newborn.

The moment of birth, which is decisive here, is but an instant. This directs our attention to another peculiarity in the realm of similarity. The perception of similarity is in every case bound to a flashing up. It flits past, can possibly be won again, but cannot really be held fast as can other perceptions. It

offers itself to the eye as fleetingly and transitorily as a constellation of stars. The perception of similarities thus seems to be bound to a moment in time. It is like the addition of a third element—the astrologer—to the conjunction of two stars; it must be grasped in an instant. Otherwise the astrologer is cheated of his reward, despite the sharpness of his observational tools.

The reference to astrology may already suffice to make comprehensible the concept of a nonsensuous similarity. This concept is, obviously enough, a relative one: it indicates that we no longer possess in our perception whatever once made it possible to speak of a similarity which might exist between a constellation of stars and a human. Yet we, too, possess a canon, on whose basis we can attain more clarity regarding the obscurity which clings to the concept of nonsensuous similarity. And that canon is language.

From time immemorial, the mimetic faculty has been conceded some influence on language. But this was done without foundation—without serious consideration of a further meaning, still less a history, of the mimetic faculty. Above all, such considerations remained closely tied to the commonplace (sensuous) realm of similarity. All the same, imitative behavior in language formation was acknowledged as an onomatopoeic element. Now, if language, as is evident, is not an agreed-upon system of signs, we will be constantly obliged to have recourse to the kind of thoughts that appear in their rawest, most primitive form as the onomatopoeic mode of explanation. The question is whether this can be developed and accommodated to an improved understanding.

In other words, the question is whether one can establish an underlying meaning for Rudolf Leonhard's assertion in his instructive work, *Das Wort* [The Word]: "Every word—indeed, the whole language—is onomatopoeic." The key which finally makes this thesis fully transparent lies concealed in the concept of a nonsensuous similarity. For if words meaning the same thing in different languages are arranged about that signified as their center, we have to inquire how they all—while often possessing not the slightest similarity to one another—are similar to the signified at their center. Such an understanding is of course related in the most intimate way to mystical or theological theories of language, without, however, being alien to empirical philology. Yet it is well known that mystical language teachings do not content themselves with drawing the spoken word into the space of their considerations. They certainly also deal likewise with script. And here it is worth noting that script, perhaps even more than certain combinations of sound in language, clarifies—in the relationship of the written form [*Schriftbild*] of words or letters to the signified, or, as the case may be, to the one who gives the name—the nature of nonsensuous similarity. Thus, for instance, the letter *beth* [in Hebrew] is the root for the word meaning "house." It is thus nonsensuous similarity that establishes the ties not only between what is said and what is meant, but also between what is written and what

is meant, and equally between the spoken and the written. And every time, it does so in a completely new, original, and underivable way.

The most important of these ties may, however, be the one mentioned last—that between what is written and what is said. For the similarity which reigns here is comparatively the most nonsensuous. It is also the one which takes the longest to be reached. And the attempt to represent the actual essence of this similarity can hardly be undertaken without a glance into the history of its birth, however impenetrable the darkness that is still spread over it today. The most recent graphology has taught us to recognize, in handwriting, images—or, more precisely, picture puzzles—that the unconscious of the writer conceals in his writing. It may be supposed that the mimetic process which expresses itself in this way in the activity of the writer was, in the very distant times in which script originated, of utmost importance for writing. Script has thus become, like language, an archive of nonsensuous similarities, of nonsensuous correspondences.

But this, if you will, magical aspect of language, as well as of script, does not develop in isolation from its other, semiotic aspect. Rather, everything mimetic in language is an intention which can appear at all only in connection with something alien as its basis: precisely the semiotic or communicative element of language. Thus, the literal text of the script is the sole basis on which the picture puzzle can form itself. Thus, the nexus of meaning which resides in the sounds of the sentence is the basis from which something similar can become apparent out of a sound, flashing up in an instant. Since this nonsensuous similarity, however, exerts its effects in all reading, at this deep level access opens to a peculiar ambiguity of the word “reading,” in both its profane and magical senses. The schoolboy reads his ABC book, and the astrologer reads the future in the stars. In the first clause, reading is not separated out into its two components. Quite the opposite in the second, though, which clarifies the process at both its levels: the astrologer reads the constellation from the stars in the sky; simultaneously, he reads the future or fate from it.

If, at the dawn of humanity, this reading from stars, entrails, and coincidences was reading *per se*, and if it provided mediating links to a newer kind of reading, as represented by runes, then one might well assume that this mimetic gift, which was earlier the basis for clairvoyance, very gradually found its way into language and writing in the course of a development over thousands of years, thus creating for itself in language and writing the most perfect archive of nonsensuous similarity. In this way, language is the highest application of the mimetic faculty—a medium into which the earlier perceptual capacity for recognizing the similar had, without residue, entered to such an extent that language now represents the medium in which objects encounter and come into relation with one another. No longer directly, as they once did in the mind of the augur or priest, but in their essences, in

their most transient and delicate substances, even in their aromas. In other words: it is to script and language that clairvoyance has, over the course of history, yielded its old powers.

So tempo, that swiftness in reading or writing which can scarcely be separated from this process, would then become, as it were, the effort, or gift, or mind to participate in that measure of time in which similarities flash up fleetingly out of the stream of things only in order to sink down once more. Thus, even profane reading, if it is not to forsake understanding altogether, shares this with magical reading: that it is subject to a necessary tempo, or rather a critical moment, which the reader must not forget at any cost lest he go away empty-handed.

### Addendum

Our gift for seeing similarity is nothing but a weak rudiment of the once powerful compulsion to become similar and also to behave mimetically. And the lost faculty of becoming similar extended far beyond the narrow perceptual world in which we are still capable of seeing similarities. What the state of the stars—millennia ago, at the moment of their birth—wrought with one human existence was woven there on the basis of similarity.

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