Jung & Film II: The Return
New Post-Jungian Reflections on Film

Edited by Christopher Hauke & Luke Hockley
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Chapter 1

The decisive image
In documentary film, in Jungian analysis

Tom Hurwitz and Margaret Klenck

True symbolism occurs where the particular represents the more general . . . as living, momentary revelation of the unfathomable.

(Goethe, 1949: no. 314)

Documentary cinematography and Jungian analysis share a deep respect for the power of images to affect, inform and transform the viewer. Each discipline prepares for the spontaneous arrival of images, each follows sequences of images and each trusts that by engaging with images, meaning emerges. In this essay, we will explore this shared pursuit, with the hope of illuminating what makes an image, in documentary film and in Jungian analysis, a decisive image.

Henri Cartier-Bresson, one of the greatest of the mid-twentieth-century documentary photographers, says in his essay The Decisive Moment: ‘To me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression’ (1952). From another discipline, C. G. Jung wrote: ‘The image is a condensed expression of the psychic condition as a whole’ (1971: para. 745). These two quotes can orient our exploration of the role of images, both psychic and cinematographic.

A scene unfolds in the desert, at the foot of a high mountain. The photographer/cameraman is filming as he walks, following an old man with a robe around his shoulders who moves unsteadily under the weight of the flat pieces of clay that he carries. As Moses slows his pace, the cameraman moves around him to see a bit of his face. It shows a growing fury. Moses has come to the edge of a small wadi. In the dry riverbed just below him, the members of his clan are dancing around an idol of a cow god.
The cameraman needs a shot that shows both Moses and what he is reacting to. He has already panned from one to the other, showing the two elements of the scene sequentially. He knows that the editor, later, could even remove the pan, placing one image next to the other in a visual sentence. But the weakness implicit in that solution is clear. It tells a story but it is not decisive. Perhaps he could move behind the old man to see the dancing with Moses in soft focus. In his heart, however, the cameraman knows that this would be the cheap solution.

Moses’ anger is forming slowly inside him. The cameraman needs to capture this reaction. It is the decisive image of the scene, the one that tells the whole story, not simply the narrative. Jumping into the soft dirt of the wadi bank, the cameraman runs down the steep slope and into the crowd of dancers. He moves around the revelers to the far side of the cow statue. Crouching, steadying his camera near the ground, the cameraman has it now—in the dusk, in the heat of the flames, through the legs of the cow, the dancing Hebrews behind it, the firelight making the nearest figures glow gold, and past them, silhouetted against the deepening blue sky, is Moses. Body shaking, mouth wide, with the firelight flickering in his now raging eyes, he raises the tablets. At once, it is all in a single image: Moses, roaring in rage, dashing his laws against the rocks; the dancers in the foreground stopping in shock; all framed by the gleaming legs of the rude idol, the cause of it all.

The anachronism of the previous vignette is not only the presence of a documentary cinematographer in a biblical scene. Mankind’s ability to conceive of recording an event in real time was two millennia away. Photography, unlike the older arts, allows us to actually record a decisive image.

Cartier-Bresson coined the term ‘the decisive moment’ to describe what his work sought to capture. We are adapting this phrase for our assertions about the nature of image and symbol in both documentary cinematography and Jungian analysis. Documentary still photographers freeze one discrete moment of the real world. Documentary cinematographers work in groups of moments adding movement and rhythm to the resources of the still photographer. Jungian analysts are also attentive to the movement of images in time within the analytic field. Decisive moment seems to describe only an event. Because our inquiry concerns the power of imagery itself, we call the subject of our essay the decisive image.

One might ask whether the idea of a decisive image can be applied to other, earlier, forms of artistic creation. Works of graphic art lack the immediacy of the photographic record. In a figurative painting, for
example, of a battle, we are asked to identify with the event through the feelings and imagination of the artist. We then undergo a process of cognition in which we match our experience of reality to his rendering. By seeing his work, we imagine the reality that he represents. Thus we experience it one step removed.

Modern photography shows us images that are contiguous with what we see in life and brings the very moment of taking the picture, of the event itself, *the actuality* – not its recounting – to the centre of the work of art. It uses the material of reality to create an image. The shock of recognition, experienced in viewing photography, is the source of its special power.

Of all the means of expression, photography is the only one that fixes forever the precise, transitory instant. We photographers deal in things which are continually vanishing, and when they have vanished there is no contrivance on earth which can make them come back again.

(\textit{Cartier-Bresson 1952: p. 4})

We know intuitively that there is something unique in a photograph. With the other visual arts, it shares artifice, organization, and point of view, but uniquely, it works with the very material of seeing. The innovation of photography and film in the history of human art is their ability to imitate perception. Rather than asking the viewer to see as I feel, the photographer asks the viewer to see as I see. In that quality of primary experience lies the power to create an explosion of meaning. Singularly, the photographic image subsumes the interpretation of the artist inside the language of reality, and of the perceived world.

The following two documentary photographs demand that we see as the photographer saw, glimpsing the fierce inevitability of aging. In Cartier-Bresson’s *Young and Old*, an old woman regards youth. The young girl passes her, turning casually in her direction, as if dancing, innocently flirting with age and mortality. In Dorthea Lange’s *Funeral Cortege*, an old woman stares out at her proscribed future. Both images may have been stalked carefully, but both were perceived and captured in an instant. Each uses circular forms in its composition. The circle is a symbol of infinity, evoking both the limits of life and also life’s endless cycles.

Notice how in both photographs there is an accumulation of meaning, from the specific to the archetypal, or as Goethe said: ‘True symbolism occurs where the particular represents the more general’ (Goethe 1949: no. 314).
A decisive image is articulate in that it clarifies the revelatory moment, thereby elevating it to symbol. By symbol, we mean the best expression of the inexpressible. As Jung writes, ‘the symbolic process is an experience in images and of images’ (Jung 1969: para. 82). In the instant, the camera captures the image, reveals it, and sculpts it out of the raw material of time and action. A decisive image makes universal that which could just pass by us as merely dramatic, or even mundane. Without the contribution of the artist, photography, and even more so
cinematography, can be an empty recording of events, simply making snapshots, or fly-on-the-wall records. Examples are everywhere of photos and films that record events, even dramatic moments, but do not come near the goal that we are discussing. The photographer/cinematographer’s task is to set a trap in which to snare the random revelation – to reveal its importance, to pull it forward from the transitory into meaning.

It is no accident that documentary photography and analytic psychology arrived in the world within a decade of each other. One of the projects of the twentieth century was to perceive the truth of the inside by seeing the truth of the outside. In another sense, it was to see the way the timeless is perceived in the moment of time. Working in the same landscape of great human progress and great human slaughter, Jung was following the implications of the association experiments – attending to spontaneous

Figure 1.2 Dorthea Lange, Funeral Cortège, 1938 (courtesy of George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film).
word images – and developing his complex theory just a few years before true documentary photography was born. The photographic document, the aims of which Cartier-Bresson described so well, arrived bit by bit as photographers explored the potential of the new medium and its new equipment. First came newspaper men, then Soviet photographers, then the French – Atget and Brassai – and the American social documentarians – Evans, Lang and the FSA photographers. Soon, Cartier-Bresson and the other Magnum photographers followed.

Motion picture technology arrived late in the nineteenth century, and with it the documentary film. However, for two generations, cameras were unwieldy and sound equipment was even more cumbersome. In the mid twentieth century, some pioneers prodded engineers to create a lightweight portable film camera, and the capacity to synchronize sound. Once a system was perfected in the early 1960s, the technology cascaded along with the advance of the form. Cinéma vérité or direct cinema – the technique of filming what is seen, as it happens, with synchronous sound – was born.


With this new form, a new role for the cinematographer was also born. Films were now not only about reality, they were made up of reality. It was the cinematographer’s job to build art out of the raw material of real life.

The raw material: We are in the rehearsal room of one of America’s great choreographers, Paul Taylor. The cinematographer follows the dancers. Dressed in leotards and tights, they rehearse a ballet for a new performance season. Previously in the film, Taylor has spoken about taking care of the feelings of the dancers, and about the need to make use of them all in performance. At the same time, he says, there is no way to be fair.

The camera captures a dancer as she is lifted high on the shoulders of several men (Figure 1.3). At the bottom of his frame, the cinematographer sees a woman company member, watching on the sidelines. She is the understudy, learning the part, marking the movements of the lifted woman with her arms and mimicking the exalted dancer. Rather than following the dramatic lift, the cinematographer gently zooms toward the imitator. In the moment, she drops her arms, her face defeated and
The decisive image: In film, in analysis

hopeless. Without being privy to her thoughts, we still see a decisive image, the face of envy (Figure 1.4).

*The decisive image* is that central confluence of subject, action, and meaning that brings the documentary to life by making it memorable and resonant with its audience. That is the prize of the cinematographer’s struggle.

To capture the *decisive image*, the cinematographer must improvise, engaging the dramatic events of the real scene as it unfolds. His preparation for this moment has included immersion in the story, practice of his physical skills, sensitivity to the emotions and needs of his subjects, and intuitive awareness of the symbolic implications of the scene as it evolves.
The task of the documentary cinematographer varies from that of the documentary still photographer in that for him, the decisive image must refer not only to the one discrete moment, but also the moments sliding away on either side of it. The still photographer has been able to reject these subordinate moments; the cinematographer must embrace them. Because films are stories, he must capture what happens before and after the key event. He must show how Moses came to the dancing Hebrews, and also show what happens after the people see what their lapse has caused.

What did the cameraman achieve when he ‘got his shot’ at the foot of Mt. Sinai? If he had simply stood aside and framed the action in a wide shot – Moses, a small figure on the right, dancing figures below him on the left – he would have shown us a dramatic scene. However, with his composition – the cow idol framing the blurred revelers, behind them the violence of Moses’ act – he has constellated a powerful image. He has used his tools, composition, light, colour and movement, to build a

Figure 1.4 The face of envy, Paul Taylor, Dancemaker, 1998 (Four Oaks Foundation).
tension of opposing forces – law vs. transgression, monotheism vs. polytheism, civilizing vs. anarchic, Yahweh versus Hathor. In that tension, a symbol is revealed.

For the audience, decisive images are the key images. They are the ones, among the thousands of edited shots, which are held in the memory of the audience and played again and again, as they are re-viewed in mind. ‘I’ll never forget the shot of Moses when he throws the laws down,’ they might say, or, ‘remember that scene of the envious dancer?’ These are the filmic moments that interact deeply with thought and psyche. They stay in mind and in the culture; they change lives. In fact the memory of the viewer is the final component of the decisive image: essential action, artistic vision, resounding memory.

We have looked at the idea of a decisive image in still photography and film, and made distinctions between them. We have also described the unique relationship that the cinematographer has to the discovery of the image. Crucial to any art is its craft.

The most important aspect of the cinematographer’s craft within the documentary environment is improvisation. He acts with spontaneity to keep revealing the action that is taking place. Every scene has an action, a central dramatic intention. Moses reacts to the revelry of the Hebrews. The understudy longs for and yet hates the dance. The work of the documentary cinematographer is to parse this central truth out of the other distracting elements of the scene – the Hebrews around the Golden Calf talking to each other, for example, or the other rehearsing dancers. The action is continually developing and changing as the emotions of the subjects change. Within the actuality, the documentary cinematographer must improvise, continually visualizing and filming the action until luck, and his own preparation, lead him to the decisive image.

The foundation for the improvisation of documentary work is laid in the preparation of the artist. The decisive image is either taken or missed due to the quality of that preparation, which for the documentary cinematographer takes several forms.

- **Story preparation.** In consultation with the director or producer, the cinematographer must be aware of every aspect of the story, and of the subjects that may enter the film. Every aim of storytelling – the themes of the film, the back-stories of the characters – helps determine how any given event is recorded.
- **Relatedness.** The documentarian needs to develop the trust of his subject. There is an ephemeral, active/passive, distant/connected relationship that yields a fertile environment in which the crew
becomes both witness and confessor, while at the same time remaining as invisible as possible. This allows life to proceed and the story to evolve before the lens.

• **Knowledge of editing.** A film is a structured series of shots. Fulfilling the needs of the editor in order to shape a scene – the right shots that deliver the right options for editing, close-ups, wide shots, details – is a key part of the cinematographer’s work.

The decisive image is the product of preparation and then of improvisational creation in the moment of the actuality. It takes its place in the larger work of the film and becomes yet more than itself. As it vibrates between picture and viewer, it becomes symbolic, and once it exists in the consciousness of the viewer, it interacts with the viewer’s memory, bridging into the future. For it is in the mind of the viewer that the symbol plays its role, like a rock dropped into a clear pool, radiating waves of meaning, backwards and forwards in time, engaging the archetypal. Memory is the synthetic form of the decisive image, the fulfillment of its purpose.

Jungian analysts also seek decisive moments and images. The documentary project and the Jungian analytic one are similar in this way: they both look to the material that is emerging with an eye to the latent, profound meaning-making function of image and symbol.

Both disciplines rely on the human inclination to unconsciously create narrative out of images, and both trust that the experience of engaging with the image itself not only provokes but also transforms the viewer. Further, both disciplines hold that meaning can never be imposed or constructed. It can only emerge from a spontaneous engagement, both unconscious and conscious, with the image.

What Jungians mean by ‘image’ may be somewhat different to what a photographer means. An image is the expression of something that communicates a resonance beyond the ‘thing itself’. Images and symbols are the language of the psyche – the way in which psyche communicates. Jungians insist that engagement with an image activates the movement of libido, the life force, in ways that are both unexpected and healing. As the Jungian analyst Sherry Salman says,

Symbols are living, emerging images, reflecting active psychological process and pregnant with meaning. They are capable of acting like transformers of psychic energy . . . a symbolic image evokes the totality of the archetype it reflects. Images evoke the aim and
motivation of instincts, creating links to affective experience which heals splits.

(Salman 2008: p. 70)

For example, an image of a dog connotes more than simply one’s pet, although that is there as well. An image of a dog contains all that is true for dogs in general – warm-blooded, keen sense of smell, innately trusting and inclined to be faithful, defending the humans who care for them. In addition, an image of a dog carries all that dogs have meant in human imagination – all the myths and tales of guardian dogs, from Cerberus to Lassie. How such an image might move libido would depend on the surrounding images and resonances from a person’s life.

Images take many forms – pictures, language, physical manifestations, etc. For example, an analyst might see an analysand’s rash as an image of some kind of reaction between the physiology and psyche of the patient. The rash might be both a specific medical condition and a symbol of some fiery, itchy psychic content that is too much for the analysand’s system to process. Or, an empty analytic chair, when the analysand is late, is an image that indicates more than a mere absence. It is an image signifying a particular way in which this analysand needs to be ‘seen’. As Salman puts it, ‘Images give form to emotion and emotions give a living body to imagination; the expression of archetypal possibility is both poetic and dramatic’ (Salman 2008: p. 70)

With a photographic image, such resonances and amplifications pertain as well; one does not initially need to be conscious of them in order to be affected. This is also true in much of analysis. ‘For the important thing is not to interpret and understand the fantasies, but primarily to experience them’ (Jung 1967: para. 342). While Jung goes on to extol the process of analysis that brings the unconscious into consciousness, he is clear in his theoretical and clinical avowal that experience is primary. Without experience, nothing can become conscious.

Engaging and interpreting decisive images in analysis begins with the analyst preparing a space into which the material is welcomed, what Winnicott termed ‘the holding environment’ and what Jung imagined as the alchemical vas bene clausum. The space is prepared in literal ways; by furnishing an office, by setting a fee, by starting and ending on time, etc. But more importantly, analysts prepare to see and listen by opening themselves to the psychic communications that flow between them and their analysands, and within each of them.

Analysts are always seeing with multiple eyes and listening with multiple ears. They listen to the manifest content of what happened to
the analysand that day. They listen to the historic narrative of what happened in the past and hear both the literal, reductive story and the underlying interpretation that the analysand holds and cherishes. They listen for the sequence of what comes into the room: the narrative flow, the skips and diversions, the tellings and retellings. They track the images: how, for instance, an analysand might begin by talking about an encounter with a dog on the street, then his childhood dog, then a story about loyalty gone sour, then a reference to his anger being ‘unleashed,’ and so on. The analyst hears/sees an accumulating field in which the archetypal potential of ‘dog’ as loyal guardian, fierce protector, is in some important relationship to the personal experience of that instinct gone awry.

Analysis is improvisation, in that the two people truly do not know what will happen in a session; they must be willing to follow psyche’s lead. As with any good improvisation, there is an agreed upon project – the idea for a comedy sketch, the idea for a documentary film, the idea of healing – and then openness to discovering what is within.

Through all the seeing and listening, analysts, like cinematographers, are curious. That curiosity takes many forms. But the two that are similar between the analyst and the documentary cameraman are worth exploring here. One is a simple wondering and waiting in a kind of ‘advent’ attitude for an image to emerge that will usher in something new: the Transcendent Function. The other is an active dialogue with the images as they appear, what Jung called ‘active imagination’ and its attendant process of amplification.

First, let us look at the transcendent function: it is the moment when, out of the tensions of all the layers of communications, and out of the pressure from opposing gradients within the psyche of the analysand, a new image becomes a symbol. As Jung says:

If we can successfully develop that function which I have called transcendent . . . disharmony ceases and we can then enjoy the favorable side of the unconscious. The unconscious then gives us all the encouragement and help that a bountiful nature can shower upon man. Its holds possibilities which are locked away from the conscious mind, for it has at its disposal all subliminal psychic contents, all those things which have been forgotten or overlooked, as well as the wisdom and experience of uncounted centuries which are laid down in its archetypal organs.

(1967: para. 196)
The birth of a symbol is not willed; it is spontaneous and unpredictable. Analysts prepare for the transcendent function but cannot control it. Yet, like any midwife (or cinematographer), analysts have to be ready to recognize what is happening. They trust what is born will be a unique and proper movement in the individuation of the analysand.

‘The transcendent function . . . is synonymous with progressive development towards a new attitude,’ says Jung (Jung 1967: para. 159). The transcendent function always marks a moment of new consciousness. It is a decisive moment in that way. Jung’s idea of the transcendent function recalls Henri Cartier-Bresson’s words:

To me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression.

(Cartier-Bresson 1952: p. 15)

Like documentary cameramen, the analyst is scrambling down the wadi, searching through the images, seeing the patterns, offering points of view, and holding opposites in a frame for the analysand to see things differently. Analysts/cinematographers sift and sort through all the images that arrive in a session – all the symptoms, the stories, the complexes and sufferings – in order to lift up various potentially significant ones for engagement.

But from another point of view, psyche itself is the cameraman, and we are merely the viewers. Psyche is the totality of the personality, which contains consciousness, the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. Jung saw the whole psychic system as an energetic dynamic, always working to rebalance itself and to integrate its dissociated aspects and complexes.

From this energetic perspective, psyche as cameraman is creating images; psyche as editor is arranging and rearranging them. It is juxtaposing them in old and new ways so as to challenge the ego complex’s attitude, selecting just the right sequence and contrast of images to illustrate the condition of the analysand’s being at any given moment. Psyche is creating images so that we experience revelation and transformation. A dialogue forms between consciousness and unconsciousness through images, whether those images are expressed in language, drawing, or physical or neurotic symptoms. And just as the cameraman above finds the right composition of Moses, the reveling Israelites, and the Golden Calf to communicate the meaning of the event, so too psyche will call on personal iconography and archetypal story when constellationg images. If
there is any wisdom in the psyche, it is the wisdom of selecting images that, when taken together, become decisive.

Just as the events that are unfolding before the camera are not of the cameraman’s making, so the psychic images are uncontrolled emergent phenomena. It is Jung’s position that those images are both communications about the present psychic situation and teleologically purposive, pointing the way to a solution or resolution of the tension depicted in the imaginal event.

The second approach that analysts and documentary cinematographers share is a willingness to let the images themselves build the story. This is an improvisational attitude, which is deeply open to being surprised and confounded. It assumes that there is synergy and spontaneous transformation, and that the world, both inner and outer, is dynamic within its own reference.

One essential tool in this approach is active imagination, a cornerstone of Jungian analysis. This is a process in which one interacts with, but does not willfully control, inner figures and situations. In an active imagination, one moves from symbol to symbol, from image to image, surprised, confused, lost and found, never in charge of anything except the willingness to continue.

For example, an analysand dreams of a woman who is sitting crying in a corner. Upon waking, he starts an active imagination – talking with the woman. The analysand does not consciously imagine what the woman will say; rather he sees what the psyche will say through the woman’s voice. If the woman says, ‘Oh, I feel like I am a jewel of great worth but no one can see it’ then the question is, ‘what does this jewel look like?’ or, ‘what kind of jewel is it?’ The analysand’s imagination will start to layer in both associative and amplificatory images. If it turns out to be a ruby, then the psyche is heading in one direction; if it is a diamond, then it is another direction. Off the analytic couple goes, following the trail of images, associations and amplifications, which might lead eventually to a decisive image.

As Jung says, ‘The unconscious is continually active, combining its material in ways which serve the future’ (Jung 1967: para 197). Images for Jung and Jungians are not static; they are living expressions of psychic energy. The images themselves, with their personal and archetypal dramatic tensions, move libido. They change the direction of the psychic energy, making something new happen in the being of the analysand. Only after the experience can the analyst and analysand together gather the illuminating images. They bring them into consciousness in such a way that meaning is clarified. This organizing process can be said to correspond to the act of composition for the cinematographer.
It is important to remember that not all images are decisive. In order for an image to be decisive, either in photography or in analysis, it must gather energy in a particular way. We suggest that a decisive image must have four elements: a specific contextual relevance, an archetypal resonance, and two opposing elements with their accompanying tension. These four elements form a *quaternio* of energies that produce the symbol, which then becomes the vector for transformation.

For example, in the previously mentioned image of the understudy, the context is the rehearsal. The principal dancer, lifted by the group of men, is almost flying in an exalted pose. Visually and emotionally opposed to them is the understudy. She watches and copies the movement, until her feelings become almost unbearable. The tension between the beauty before her and her own spoiling longings reveals in our decisive image the archetype of envy.

If this sequence were a dream, the same four elements would be applicable. The dream narrative might be something like: *I am at a dance rehearsal. The principal dancers are dancing; a group of men is lifting the lead woman high in the air; she is beautiful. Suddenly I see the understudy far across the room, looking on, quietly learning the movements; she is filled with envy and despair.*

Psyche has chosen a dance rehearsal as the setting. A rehearsal is where one learns a new dance. Dance itself is wordless expression through fully embodied movement in time and space. This dance in particular involves a woman lifted high by a group of men. It is both intimate and exciting. Psyche juxtaposes this related, sensual, elevated dancer with the lonely understudy, marginalized and hopeless.

This image is the dramatic turning point of the dream, which exposes a large rift in the dreamer’s being. In her waking life, there would probably be some seemingly unbridgeable gap between the ‘dance of her life’ or her creative expression, or her sensual related femininity, and her capacity to participate in those aspects of herself. Since an understudy is an assigned position in a dance company, the dream set-up implies some fateful positioning vis-à-vis the dance. She is expected to learn the dance but may never actually dance it.

A ‘suddenly’ moment in a dream signals a decisive image. In this case, the dreamer’s experience of the sensual, powerful choreography that lifts the woman into the air is abruptly interrupted by another aspect of the dreamer’s personality – a disempowered, hopeless and envying part. This part appears doomed to learn the dance but not to dance it. In this example, one would assume that there is some immediate personal experience, either inner or outer, which has prompted this dream – some
situation which pulls on and exacerbates the inner gap. This element will include the dreamer’s personal complexed reaction to the situation. At the core of that personal complex will be an archetype – in this case, envy – which roots the dreamer’s emotions into the deep earth of the collective unconscious and the psychoid realm.

By placing the dancing woman in the arms of the men, sailing high in the air in the foreground, and then revealing the little, lonely understudy in the background, psyche counterbalances the elevated female with the undervalued one. This depicts a split in the psyche of the dreamer herself, a field in which she both overvalues and undervalues herself. It also indicates that the split, at the time of this particular dream at least, is very far from being integrated, since the only way for the understudy to ‘get in the dance’ is for the principal woman, the elevated one, to be injured. There is no inherent reconciliation in this image. The tension of the opposites does not move towards transformation. Envy spoils.

The first element of the quaternio, then, is the personal situation in which one part of the dreamer is feeling consigned to the margins – either by an actual waking-life situation or an inner complexed reaction. The archetypal field of envy is the second element. The tension between the positions and experiences of the two women are the third and fourth elements in our decisive image. The four elements combine in such a way that a precise image of the dreamer’s psychic situation can be seen. Once it can be seen, it can be engaged; once an image is engaged, it can lead to consciousness, and the possibility of transformation and meaning.

The documentary cinematographer and the Jungian analyst are both attending to the emergence of the symbol. As we have said, they both share a clear-eyed curiosity about what is happening. Because it is clear-eyed, it can also be detached. The cameraman, while discovering the decisive image, cannot be taking sides with either understudy or dancer. His job is to find the image that will illuminate the situation. Likewise, the analyst is essentially impartial. She truly doesn’t know what will happen to the analysand, or what should happen. The analyst’s task, like the cameraman’s, is to lift up what is actually happening in the inner and outer reality, and then to trust that the individuating instinct will use this truth for consciousness, healing and growth.

Perhaps the last similarity between the two projects is a grand goal: to add to the common good by affecting something new. Jung was clear that the individuation process must include a return to the community. In Memories, Dreams, Reflections, he speaks to this idea:

It is . . . a grave mistake to think that it is enough to gain some understanding of the images and that knowledge can here make a halt. Insight into them must be converted into an ethical obligation . . . The images of the unconscious place a great responsibility upon a man. Failure to understand them, or a shirking of ethical responsibility, deprives him of his wholeness and imposes a painful fragmentariness on his life.

(Jung 1961: pp. 192–193)

Cartier-Bresson put it this way:

I believe that through the act of living, the discovery of oneself is made concurrently with the discovery of the world around us which can mold us, but which can also be affected by us. A balance must be established between these two worlds – the one inside us and the one outside us. As the result of a constant reciprocal process, both of the worlds come to form a single one. And it is this world that we must communicate.

(Cartier-Bresson 1952: p. 15)

There is a moral imperative at the heart of the Jungian project, not merely a personal one. The outcome of an encounter with one’s self should not be personal growth alone. It should also compel one to live in the world with clarity, compassion and integrity. A profound encounter with the psyche includes the obligation to act from one’s emergent self-knowledge. Likewise, an encounter with strong documentary film images ought to add something new and compelling to a viewer’s psyche, moving him or her toward a greater engagement with the world. A decisive image, in analysis and in a documentary, resounds in the lives of the viewers. It clarifies their shared humanity and, one hopes, prompts action that builds upon it.

References


