Responses

From Rhoda Isaac, Princeton, New Jersey, & Paul Brutsche, Zürich


The study published by authors Derek P. Bergeron, David H. Rosen, Randolph C. Arnau and Nathan Mascaro, Texas, USA, in their article ‘Picture interpretation and Jungian typology’ (Journal of Analytical Psychology, Feb. 2003, 48, 1, 83–99) is based on an analysis tool extrapolated from a complex method of interpreting pictures from the unconscious. This method was developed by C. G. Jung in his writings and theories. In 1977, these concepts were expanded and amplified by Jolande Jacobi in her book Vom Bilderreich der Seele, and were all further refined in Zürich by Rudolf Michel, Theodor Abt and Paul Brutsche. This method is used and taught at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zürich and in Jungian training institutes around the world to this day.

In 1990, Susan Bach published her book Life Paints Its Own Span (Einsiedeln 1990) based on the Zürich schema. In this book, she wrote about a quadrant schema. This quadrant schema is a portion extracted from the Zürich picture interpretation method referring to information, which could be found in the four corners of a drawing or painting. The authors of the study note that Bach spoke of the importance of identifying a number of other important factors to be considered in a drawing before making serious conclusions. On page 143 Bach warns of the ‘dangers of generalization and misinterpretation’.

In this article the authors state that the quadrant schema and a colour associative test are the two main tools used in their study. Probably for reasons of easier technical handling of the matter, the manifold symbolical meaning of the four quadrants has been shortened and disfigured in a completely arbitrary way. This means that the study misses the basic concepts from the very beginning. By appearing to study the question of validity of the symbolic attributes (as they are used in Jungian Picture Interpretation Method at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zürich), the authors are using a completely distorted version of the Method.
In the Space Domain Test, the ‘Participants were asked to make four drawings on one sheet of paper regarding each of the following four subjects: remembrances of mother, remembrances of father, things that occur to them when alone (to correspond with the unconscious), and things that occur to them when they think about the future’ (p. 88–9).

Does the instruction, ‘make a drawing about things that occur when you are alone’, presume that to be alone means ‘the unconscious’? ‘To be alone’ does not automatically mean ‘the unconscious’. The equation ‘alone’ equals unconscious doesn’t work.

Extracting only the four-corner information, referred to as the Quadrant schema, to single word descriptions (mother, father, unconscious and future) from extensive and complex methodology developed by Jung/Jacobi/Bach is oversimplifying a major and intricate study. Asking the participants to make four drawings on one sheet of paper with the four subjects ‘mother, father, unconscious, future’ and then verifying if those subjects appear in fact in the ‘correct’ quadrants where they ‘should’ appear, is extremely naïve as a method. It doesn’t take into account, for example, that with such a procedure the conscious mind will interfere and will place each subject according to its own logic. This means, e.g., that if the participants are asked to make a drawing regarding a memory of mother, there will be those who will not put this subject in the lower right quadrant as they are supposed to do, but they will put it in the lower left quadrant because they will realize that ‘mother’ is for them in that moment a very distant reality hidden somewhere in the past and in the unconscious. Therefore they will unconsciously put this subject on the left side of the sheet of paper. This will not mean that a correspondence between ‘mother’ and right lower quadrant is wrong, but that when asked in such a concrete way, the participant will place the mother motive ‘incorrectly’ somewhere else on the paper according to his or her present connection to the proposed subject. In general one can say that the validity of the Jungian quadrant schema cannot be tested by transcribing the symbolical meaning of the four quadrants into four terms only and by asking the participants to distribute the four corresponding subjects on the sheet of paper in an intentional action.

As an unavoidable result, the participants confronted with such a task will interfere with their own conscious strategies with their own explicit ‘method’ of organizing the sheet of paper. This means obscuring the underlying unconscious symbolism of the four quadrants.

The information in the four corners refers to archetypal material, both collective and personal. When the authors ask the question ‘Do the particular areas of a drawing have specific symbolic meanings as this schema suggests (is it valid?)’, they will find the answer in the book *Complex Archetype Symbol in the Psychology of C. G. Jung* by Jolande Jacobi (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959). She writes that, in relation to the nature of the archetype, there is some part of its meaning that always remains unknown and defies formulation.
'It is impossible to give an exact definition of an archetype and the best we can hope to do is to suggest its general implication…’ (p. 31).

Perhaps the authors are limiting their area of reference to Susan Bach’s oversimplified version used in the illustrated diagram of the quadrants, which she used to make her ideas more clearly understood. Certainly Bach understood the real complexity of the theory. Unless approached differently and more inclusively, this study in the article cannot and has not produced valid interpretative results.

The major question being asked by the authors is whether the quadrant technique is valid. The answer to such a question is an absolute NO if this partial and limited part of a larger model is used for either picture interpretation or testing. The use of the quadrant schema is only valuable when it is used as an appropriate part of a whole study.

Another problem in a quadrant schema is that it leaves out the symbolic information about the state of the ego, which is found in the middle of these four squares, or corners. Valid spatial methodology goes on to include equally important information about upper right, lower right, lower left, upper left, upper half, lower half, left side and right side. One can find further symbolic information such as specific movement within these areas, perspective, stresses and accents, materials used, objective and subjective information, colour and number symbolism, etc.

Jolande Jacobi speaks of a systematic consideration ‘of all of the aspects’ before an understanding of such pictures can be accessed diagnostically.

The authors refer to using a colour associative test. It is never made clear which associative test these studies are based on. Colour symbolism is especially complex in that each colour also contains its approximate opposite symbolism. This twofold aspect of colour symbolism points out that a colour carries equally its positive or negative aspects. This is partially determined by the prevailing conventional and collective meaning of the colour and whether the person choosing the colour makes the individual choice to oppose the collective consciousness of the current time. Therefore, it is naïve and not valid to refer to only one significance for each colour.

The article states (p. 90): ‘According to the Jungian schema, a drawing/colour associated with a quadrant should appear most in that quadrant’. For example, this article implies that there is a specific colour signifying what the authors have referred to as a ‘mother colour’. One is led to presume that the article refers to a personal mother complex with an archetypal focus. Is a positive mother complex signified by the same colour as a negative mother complex? Why do the authors presume that mother issues would be expected to be found (in colour symbolic information) only in the so-called mother corner? ‘Mother’ issues, if problematic, could certainly be reflected in the lower left, or even overlap into the upper left, etc.

Determining specific typology by limiting information found only in connection to specific quadrant corners offers dubious and definitely insufficient
proof. In reference to colours and typology, Jolande Jacobi wrote, ‘For most people in the western world, the four primary colours are associated with the four functions of consciousness’ (p. 75). She then went on to refine this statement by saying that actually a whole different set of colours could equally define what type a person belongs to. She ended her findings by stating that the question as to whether one can really tell to what type a person belongs by the picture (and colours) he/she paints is impossible to answer satisfactorily. The colours will often hint, but it would be mistaken to regard these hints as an absolute criterion.

The ideas which she wrote about are based on the fundamental concepts of the method of interpreting pictures according to Jungian theories. Unless the authors have another source of expertise which has determined specific typological colour symbolism, the rules set up in this testing model must have presumably been set up by the people themselves who created these specific tests. If specific symbolism for specific motifs is not more universally acknowledged, how can the resulting information gathered from these tests be valid?

As to strong emotional responses to test questions researched by the authors, it appears that simply taking a test rather than drawing spontaneous pictures which are unguided, already precludes that there will exist a certain amount of unusual emotion or biased intellectuality rather than responses rising directly and subjectively from the unconscious.

Jung originally conceived of the interpretation of spontaneous pictures from the unconscious in conjunction with his concepts of active imagination. The interpretation of the different symbolic material, personal, collective and archetypal, can be likened to the analysis of dream material. Active imagination is utilized as a connecting principle or a transcending function to help the analyst to further the quest for greater consciousness, to work on an individuation process and to help to loosen the hold of binding psychological complexes. The information gleaned from the interpretations of these pictures was intended to be used by analysts and therapists to help work out a prognosis, possibly a diagnosis and to find directions for future work in the analytical sessions.

A number of times in his works, Jung noted the importance and the caution required in using this material. The information could be used in the mutual work, but exactly as in dream work, too much analysis and intellectualizing could inhibit the flow from the unconscious and either stop the production or self-consciously create more intellectually formed products.

Placing extreme limitations of choice on the subjects of these tests precludes biases and limits, which cannot result in a true and valid view of the resulting psychological responses. When working with archetypal images, it is incorrect to limit the available information to either the four corners, four colours, or even four archetypes for the purpose of interpretation, as was done by the authors of the study.

It would, in fact, be interesting to do further empirical studies on the subject of the quadrant schema. But to do this, an approach would be needed which does not mutilate the schema by oversimplification and rigid systematization,
but which would on the contrary use this schema as a differentiated and subtle means of symbolic reading of pictures.

From D. Bergeron, D. Rosen, R. Arnau & N. Mascaro, Texas A & M University

Reply to R. Isaac & P. Brutsche

In science we create hypotheses in order to test them. While it may appear to Rhoda Isaac and Paul Brutsche that we have ‘disfigured’ or ‘distorted’ the symbolic meaning of the four quadrants used in Jungian picture interpretation, that was not the case. In fact, we thought Jung’s basic theory involving the quadrants would be supported. If there is truth to the theory, then it ought to hold up to scientific investigation. It is a common method in scientific research to isolate components of a theory and test individual hypotheses in succession, with the intent of ultimately building a comprehensive set of empirical evidence. Hence, we yield to the scientific results of our research. Our study (Bergeron, D. P., Rosen, D. H., Arnau, R. C. & Mascaro, N. ‘Picture interpretation and Jungian typology’, Journal of Analytical Psychology, 2003, 48, 1, 83–99) was a first attempt at empirically studying this issue and we had to operationalize the constructs. Perhaps future research could improve on the terms used to delineate the constructs. However, it is noteworthy that a cross-cultural study (Yuanhong, J., Sakaki, T. & Rosen, D. ‘A Symbolic Meaning of Space Domain in Jungian Picture Interpretation’. Paper accepted for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Honolulu, Hawaii. August, 2004) done in Japan, also with undergraduates, also utilized the same operational definitions as our original study, but employed only a space domain test and not the additional colour associative test. These researchers found results that were very different from, but complementary to, those of the original study. The original research, only in the space domain test, affirmed one of four quadrants: the unconscious—lower left quadrant. The Japanese study affirmed three out of four quadrants: only the lower right quadrant (mother space domain) was not affirmed. Thus, the cumulative scientific research—from both studies—suggests that there is cross-cultural evidence (within Japanese as well as American samples) for the validity of the unconscious quadrant (lower left) of Jung’s picture interpretation schema, and there is partial support, within a Japanese but not an American sample, for the masculine (upper left) and future (upper right) quadrants. This is how science progresses and underscores the need for further research. The consistencies and inconsistencies between the two studies answer some questions but generate many more and they emphasize the need for additional research in this area, particularly the need to explore such issues in other cultures, such as in Europe where this schema was developed.
Rhoda Isaac and Paul Brutsche seem to have misunderstood the colour associative test part of our paper. We did not assume any specific colour for any construct, such as ‘mother’. Instead, the colour we looked for in the ‘correct’ quadrants was variable, depending on the subject, and previously chosen by the subject as a colour they associate with that subject. We did not assign significance to any particular colour. The significance was explicitly assigned by the subject. Each subject chose for themselves what colour signified ‘mother’ for them. So the colour we looked for in the ‘mother’ quadrant varied by subject as defined by the subject.

We also investigated psychological typology to see if certain types of individuals would be able to link the correct symbolic meanings to the quadrants. Again, we were not able to find that any such type had an advantage in doing this.

We agree that more research is needed. One study (or even two or three studies) should never be interpreted as providing the final conclusion. Again, we would argue that we did not ‘mutilate’ the schema, but provided a first attempt at operationally defining the constructs discussed in the schema with sufficient clarity that they could be studied using the scientific method.

In sum, Rhoda Isaac and Paul Brutsche suggest that our study, Bergeron et al. (2003), utilized an overly simple method for determining the validity of a technique often used in Jungian analysis and interpretation of art. This is perhaps correct. A method more subtle than the one used, which is conscious of the enormous complexity of Jungian theory, might better be able to determine if there is any iota of validity to the Jungian picture interpretation schema. A better statement describing our study might be that it is a test of the utility and breadth of the Jungian picture interpretation schema. The quadrant schema may be valid only under certain circumstances, for certain individuals, in conjunction with certain complex and quasi-metaphysical, Jungian considerations. However, if the method is considered to have any utility at all, it must have some normative application (in so far as it is to be deemed ‘a method’), and the psychological processes into which the method purports to tap ought to be detectable even by methods as simple and ‘naïve’ as those used in the criticized study. Isaac and Brutsche say that our study did not account for the fact that ‘the conscious mind will interfere and will place each subject according to its own logic. This means, e.g., if the participants are asked to make a drawing regarding a memory of mother, there will be those who will not put this subject in the lower right quadrant as they are supposed to do, but they will put it in the lower left quadrant because they will realize that “mother” is for them in that moment a very distant reality hidden somewhere in the past and in the unconscious. Therefore they will unconsciously put this subject on the left side of the sheet of paper’. If the conscious mind and the unconscious can interfere in the criticized study in such a way, covering up the psychological processes the Jungian quadrant schema purports to assess, then why should this not happen in the context of analysis or in the creation of art outside of a research context? Why is it that such processes are proposed
to have universal, archetypal significance, yet they are not so universal and archetypal as to be detectable via quantitative research? The fact is, the cited Japanese study did affirm three out of four quadrants, suggesting that the Jungian picture interpretation schema as described in the criticized study indeed reliably penetrates into interesting psychological phenomena within a young Japanese adult population.