



Dr. Angeliki Yiassemides: Having ,the time of our lives': Understanding Time, Embracing Timelessness

When Kristina asked me to talk to you today (that was back in July of last year) I had accepted her enthusiastic invitation before hearing the topic of this year's forum. So after hearing the title 'how life succeeds' I paused. And I wondered: Do I know? What do I know? How can I stand in front of an audience and claim that I do know, or that I can offer them something that points towards success. I found that a daunting task. But I had already accepted Kristina's invitation. And so I took it upon myself to come here today and talk to you about this nearly impossible subject!

The process of getting the translation for the motto of this conference "Was Leben gelingen läßt" was incredibly interesting: The first concept that came up while talking with Gabrielle and Kristina was success. (This, by the way, is also the translation offered by google). Then they explained that it doesn't really mean 'successes: This concept has a lot to do with fulfillment. And that was a great relief, because to tell you the truth I don't think I could talk about success, because I'm not sure what that means exactly, how it's measured, and if it actually matters! And then, I was given a very interesting additional information: I was told that this concept in German has more to do with living my life in a way that will allow me to say at the end "I did it well". And this is much closer to fulfillment than success. Another translation had to do with a complete life. I find that quite suitable to what I will try to talk about today: The idea that in order to grasp the 'complete picture' of life we have to try grasp the complete reality of Time. It seems that the beauty and depth of this expression gets lost in translation!

So with these considerations, I decided that I will try to talk about fulfillment: The feeling you get when you are 'full' or 'complete'.

Fulfillment, at least in the English language, assumes that there is a reality to be met; something that needs to be filled; there is a 'task' to be carried out; there is, in other words, an outer reality which we are called to successfully meet. I come here today as a representative of my field of study and practice, that is Analytical Psychology, the theory of the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung. My particular field of study, at least academically, has been for more than a decade 'temporality'. That is, the study of time's manifestations in the psyche, and particularly the way this manifests in the theory of Carl Jung. So in what follows I will attempt to give you my understanding of how our temporal frame of reference can play a significant role to our fulfillment in life; and I will do this through the lens of the theory of Carl Jung.

Time, I think, is the most valuable commodity. Do we 'have time'? Do we 'make time'? Do we 'use time'? Do we 'race against time'? Is time something that is given to us in finite amounts?

I believe that time is the barometer of every human expression. There is always an implicit (if not explicit) assumption regarding time behind every theory concerning the nature of human existence. Each field, approach or statement needs to rest against a temporal background; each uttered sentence assumes a temporal frame. And even though Time is an extremely obscure concept it is also an indispensable element of our experience. It is the invisible presence that governs our world: It is the stage upon which our lives unfold and end. Time is the element against which our existence is measured. Because at the end, life and death are but a different side of the same coin; death is 'the end of our time', at least on Earth in the form that we currently experience.

So I feel it is imperative to try our best to understand temporality and our experience of it, or to least say that we have done our best in trying to understand it. I have come to feel and think that the temporal background and foreground of our lives is essential in how we live, and most likely how we die.

Marcel Proust, the man whose name is associated with "the search for lost time" has said that "The time which we have at our disposal every day is elastic; the passions that we feel expand it, those that we inspire contract it, and habits fill what time remains". And those of us who have read Proust's emotional rollercoaster can attest to the severity of this statement. In fact all of us have traveled back and forth in time following the lead of an emotion, a memory, a recollection, a day-dream, a wish, a desire; so we all know that indeed you can stretch time, get lost in it and reach across its linear boundaries. In other words, Proust suggested what Einstein did, in a more poetic way: Time is Relative!

According to general relativity, time is stitched together with space to form four-dimensional space-time. The passage of time is not absolute - no cosmic clock ticks away the hours of the universe. Time differs from one frame of reference to the next. In a sense, according to the theory of relativity, each observer is a different clock. The human perception of time as having a past, present and future is solely a function of consciousness, of the human mind. We live concurrently in absolute and relative time. Our temporal frame seems quite fixed: for example, we all agree that today is Friday the 28th of May 2015. And even though we share our humanity, and with it our temporal framework, for each one of us, time has a different meaning. Each one of us has a different 'relationship' to time. Time as perceived by each individual psyche differs and is subject to different laws, experiences influences. The brain's ability, or perhaps disability to process time is demonstrated in case of neurological brain damage. There have been cases of patients suffering an aneurysm who report 'time standing still'. The effects reported by such patients are very similar to the way the bullets travelled in the Matrix movie. As one patient put it, "It was like a high-speed film, slowed down". Something localized in the brain has altered these people's perception of the world, and has frozen time. Researchers suggest that it is possible that some athletes have trained themselves to perceive time more slowly than the rest of us. For instance, surfers can often adjust their angle in the split second it takes to 'catch the wave' as the water rises overhead. Reports of time standing still are also common during a life-threatening accident; people in near death experiences often report feeling that the event

occurred in slow motion. One possible explanation is that an automatic mechanism, triggered by stress hormones, might speed up the brain's internal processing to help it handle the life threatening situation. Our thoughts and initiation of movements become faster – but because we are working faster, the external world appears to slow down. So, the conscious experience of time seems to be quite fragile.

And how about Carl Jung's theory? And how about Roberto Assagioli's Psychosynthesis? How do all these fit together? There is something about psychosynthesis that I find particularly attractive, and that is in fact the common ground upon which Kristina and I have met and continue our work together. And that is the vision that analytical psychology and psychosynthesis share. You see, Assagioli was not the first to use the term 'psychosynthesis'. Carl Jung was the first to use the term as a way of revolting against Freud's one-dimensional approach that relied heavily on determinism. In a letter to Freud, Jung wrote: "If psychoanalysis exists, a psychosynthesis must exist as well, which builds a future according to the same laws. (Jung 1909)" Assagioli met Jung at the onset of his career and was influenced by Jung's work; they shared many affinities, and he considered Jung to be "the closest to Psychosynthesis, among the modern psychotherapists" (Assagioli 1967). Jung, as well as Assagioli, were able to experience another dimension. This dimension rests against a temporal background that is beyond determinism and causality. I have come to realize that both Jung and Assagioli based their theories on a non-linear, non-causal and non-traditional temporal reality. They each found an approach that encompassed the possible future, as well as the temporally relative, the eternal and the timeless elements of the human psyche and the cosmos at large. Each thinker tried to create a theory that would integrate these elements. They both lived in a temporal reality that allowed for experiences beyond the uni-dimensional world of cause-and-effect.

They chose to do so! And this is a choice that each one of us can make.

Through my research I have come to the conclusion that the overall framework of Jung's temporal understanding steered away from causality, or rather went beyond causality and favoured a non-linear, non-causal approach¹. Jung was a man who opened his horizons beyond time: he embraced timelessness.

Jung believed that in order to appreciate the whole of our experience we must reach beyond causality and linearity, we must develop an approach that allows for multidimensionality. His theory tried to encompass reality in its entirety; the physical as well as the psychic realms, and the way these interact and meet. For Jung the psyche has a temporally-relative nature at large. The psyche and the cosmos at large in all their manifestations are at their core timeless. Time in the psyche, as well as in the outer world, is relative at large. Our conscious mind is 'trapped' in linear time, but we can expand our experience by accepting timelessness as a modality of the world.

When we speak of causality, or the cause-and-effect principle we rely by default on linear time. The past causes the present which in turn causes the future. Jung's theory

¹ See for example: Yiassemides, A. (2011). Chronos in synchronicity; manifestations of the psychoid reality. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 56, 451-470; Yiassemides, A. (2014/2016), Time and Timelessness: Temporality in the Theory of Carl Jung. London & New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group. (Paperback release date: March 1st 2016); Yiassemides, A. (Ed.) (2016). Time and the Psyche: Jungian Perspectives London & New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group IN PRESS.

assumes that a principle other than causality must be in operation. And the acceptance of this assumption can lead to a different experience of time, and life. In other words, Jung's conviction in a non-traditional temporal frame, his understanding regarding the interconnection of time and timelessness, and his acceptance of the oneness in nature allowed for experiences such as future-telling dreams, synchronicity, telepathy, and other similar 'inexplicable by causality' events to be experienced and be considered plausible and even probable.

So what is non-linear time? How can we begin to conceptualize this alternative temporal model? Because if we are to embrace a different temporal reality, we must begin by attempting to understand how it operates.

In essence, causes and effects are inter-twinned and interconnected in a non-linear, unpredictable manner. Perhaps, it would be accurate to visualize time as a multidimensional sphere where everything (causes, effects, past, present, future etc) coexists simultaneously and interacts. According to this temporal understanding the past, the present, and the future are not sequentially arranged. In the psyche the linear time's demarcations (the past, present and future) all coexist in a relative state: Everything is simultaneous and contemporaneous.

This implies that the past does not cause the future, and this in turn implies that the future is 'alive' as it were in the present moment. In other words, within this frame of reference, which is the frame adopted by Carl Jung, it is utterly possible to 'foresee' the future at the present moment. This might sound like science fiction; but as they say 'life is stranger than fiction'. Jung believed that the psyche contains the future in the present moment. And for that reason he observed with fascination instances of precognition, of prophecy, of future-telling. He welcomed future-telling dreams and visions and found them to be of great relevance. Jung's belief that such dreams can take place allowed for the development of his theory regarding the psyche's temporal manifestations. He believed that future-telling dreams could demonstrate the wholeness in nature. And because he embraced a non-linear temporality and believed in a timeless dimension of nature, these dreams were frequent in his life.

Freud, on the other hand, who was stubbornly devoted to determinism and the cause-and-effect principle could not accept such an alternative reality in which the future could be presented in the present moment. And therefore, he could not experience it. In his landmark book the Interpretation of Dreams Freud rejected future-telling dreams. For him these dreams, which were reported by his patients, were a mere projection of a wish: the patient, Freud wrote, wished for something to happen in the future, and had a dream about it. Freud's belief system, in other words, prevented him from accepting and exploring the future dimension in a non-linear way. His world-view and theoretical frame blinded him to this experience.

Jung's theoretical frame on the other hand, allowed him to expand the traditional world-view and to reach beyond determinism. Jung recorded several instances of future-telling dreams in his career, both from his personal life as well as his clients' lives. It took me a while to wrap my head around this concept. To tell you the truth I am still struggling. However, accepting the possibility that the future and the past dimensions are

dynamically active at all times has altered my perception of time, as well as of the meaning of time's demarcations (of the past, present and future). I too have witnessed through my clients and my own dreams the future in the present moment. And that is a very humbling and awe-inspiring experience.

Future-telling dreams are just an example of what I would call an 'unorthodox temporality in action'. Another example, taken from Jung's work, which is perhaps his best known contribution in the field, is the Acausal connecting principle of Synchronicity. For us Jungians, synchronicity is one of the most important phenomena that demonstrates the nature of the psyche and the cosmos as described by Jung. Through my work, I have tried to demonstrate that synchronicity can help us 'see' the workings of time and timelessness, in 'real time' as it were.

For Jung:

"[Synchronicity] cannot be a question of cause and effect, but of a falling together in time, a kind of simultaneity. Because of this quality of simultaneity, I have picked on the term "synchronicity" to designate a hypothetical factor equal in rank to causality as a principle of explanation." (Jung 1952)

The workings of Time seem to be at the core of the principle of Synchronicity. Besides, Chronos (that is, the Greek word for Time) is embedded in the term. Jung observed that there are certain patterns that occur between psychic images and objective events that are not causally connected but are nonetheless meaningful. He found these patterns particularly interesting and worth investigating. And so he devoted his attention to this phenomenon. His devotion to synchronicity led to the development of his theory, and to a deeper understanding about the working of the psyche and the cosmos, and the interconnection between the two. As the quote above suggests, causality for Jung was not sufficient in explaining the workings of nature; there had to be an additional principle; and synchronicity filled that position.

What exactly is synchronicity? Synchronicity deals with an inner experience: a thought, vision, dream or premonition, that is non-causally connected with an outer event. Let's look at an often-quoted example of synchronicity, a case presented by Jung known as the 'golden scarab' incident, which has become the symbol of synchronicity. Jung writes about a female client who was well educated and extremely rational, a woman with a 'geometrical idea of reality'. This is Jung's description:

"I was sitting opposite her one day, with my back to the window, listening to her flow of rhetoric. She had an impressive dream the night before, in which someone had given her a golden scarab — a costly piece of jewelry. While she was still telling me this dream, I heard something behind me gently tapping on the window. I turned round and saw that it was a fairly large flying insect that was knocking against the window-pane from outside in the obvious effort to get into the dark room. This seemed to me very strange. I opened the window immediately and caught the insect in the air as it flew in. It was a scarabaeid beetle, or common rose-chaffer, whose gold-green colour most nearly resembles that of a golden scarab. I handed the beetle to my patient with the words, "Here is your scarab."

This incident, Jung observed, punched a hole in his patient's rationalism, and allowed for the exploration of an alternative reality, where healing of her psyche could take place. Why?

What were the chances that a scarab would tap on Jung's window at that exact moment in time, that his client was narrating her dream of a golden scarab? Jung pointed out, and I certainly agree, that this incident cannot be understood by causality: The dream did not cause the beetle to tap on the window. And certainly the insect did not cause the dream. Nonetheless, these two events, the inner event of a dream and the outer event of the insect at the window were meaningfully connected for Jung and his patient. And for this meaning to be attributed by Jung and his patient these two events had to happen around the same time. As Jung said, this was a 'falling together in time'. Had these events happen separately in time, say for example the beetle tapped on Jung's window two weeks later, these events would not be connected meaningfully by Jung or his patient. Time's flow, and the attention given to the events that happen within each time-frame is essential.

For Synchronicity to attain such an important role in Jung's theory, he had to accept non-linear time, multidimensionality and interconnection between the inner and outer realms. Jung had to accept that beyond time, there is timelessness, there is an alternative temporal reality that operates outside linear and fixed time. The theory of Synchronicity was the culmination of Jung's attempts to articulate a single unified system which embraces both matter and spirit.

Why am I giving so much attention to synchronicity? Well, first of all because it's a beautiful phenomenon that never ceases to amaze me, and I find that many people agree. It's a humbling, awe inspiring phenomenon that tends to happen quite often. Many think of it as a 'magical' or out-of-this-world sort of phenomenon. But it's really not. In fact, it is as real and as you and I. And even though you might be able to observe synchronicity and be impressed by its workings, you might not have thought about its implications: In order to accept the occurrence of synchronicity one has to let go of causality, and with it of all things linear. Relative time must be embraced or at least accepted as a possibility. Connection of one's self with the outer world must also be accepted as not only possible, but also essential. Synchronicity is not out of this world. To say the least, Synchronicity is worth considering as a 'good enough' proof of the workings of nature, which operate beyond causality. It is also a phenomenon that can help each one of us seize the moment.

Indeed, "Synchronicity is an ever present reality for those who have eyes to see." In other words, if you 'tune into' this unorthodox and acausal workings of time, if you accept the idea that there are timeless portals through which you could enter, even for a moment, you can experience this reality.

For Jung the psyche exists above and beyond the physical reality. The psyche is a phenomenon in its own right which transcends the material world, including the realms of time and space. Jung attempted to reconnect the psyche with the world, and to demonstrate that the psyche reaches, influences and connects to the outer world, to nature and the physical end of the spectrum. The actual underlying world-process is beyond linearity. Such an approach gave birth to a theory that can explain and accepts non-linear and non-causal events. This approach implies that the future is within our reach not by accepting para-scientific explanations, but rather, by widening our scope to include a relative temporal reality, a reality beyond ordinary time, indeed a timeless reality.

We live our lives in a clock-bound world dominated by its fixed keeping of time.

Nonetheless, if we choose to pay attention, we might realize that we are also inundated by paradoxical temporal occurrences in dreams, in the analytic situation, or even in inexplicable – by causality – coincidences that defy the clock. Marcel Proust was right: Time is elastic! Time is relative. Time and Timelessness define our experiences and existence. However impossible it is for consciousness to grasp concepts that lie beyond conventional time, a sufficient way of negotiating our temporal experience is imperative. We should aim at cultivating such a temporal way of thinking and perceiving reality.

I believe that Jung's theory, and in particular its temporal implications, allows us to reach beyond the everyday time-bound world into a greater realm, rich with meaning and connections. This is a realm that can inspire a feeling of fulfillment and interconnection with the world, nature and our psyche.