

Archetype and the Not-Yet: Jung, Bloch, and the Politics of the Golden Flower

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Abstract: Richard Wilhelm's 1929 German translation of the *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi* 太乙金華宗旨, accompanied by C. G. Jung's psychological commentary, became one of the most influential mediations of Daoist inner alchemy in Europe. This article interprets Jung's commentary as a productive but restrictive hermeneutic translation rather than either a faithful exposition of Daoism or a simple act of distortion. Drawing on current specialist scholarship, it reconstructs the Qing spirit-writing and redactional history of the text; examines Jung's relocation of its images —light, the Golden Flower, hun and po, the spirit-body— within analytical psychology; and brings Ernst Bloch's distinction between the No-Longer-Conscious and the Not-Yet-Conscious to bear on the temporality and politics of that relocation. Bloch's polemic against Jung is reconstructed together with his own theory of utopian archetypes and his reading of Laozi: both thinkers received Daoism through Richard Wilhelm, yet drew sharply divergent temporal conclusions. A final comparative reading asks under what conditions the imagery of reversed light and transformed embodiment may carry a utopian surplus —subjecting the Blochian refunctioning itself to the critique of appropriation directed at Jung...

Keywords: : C. G. Jung; Ernst Bloch; Richard Wilhelm; *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi*; inner alchemy; archetype; Not-Yet-Conscious; wu wei; comparative hermeneutics.

Introduction

The publication of Richard Wilhelm's German translation of the *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi* 太乙金華宗旨 in 1929, accompanied by a psychological commentary by C. G. Jung, constitutes a decisive episode in the modern European reception of Daoist inner alchemy. The volume constructed a particular object of cross-cultural knowledge: a "Chinese book of life" whose images could be rendered intelligible through the vocabulary of modern depth psychology. In Jung's commentary, the Golden Flower, the circulation of light, the heavenly heart, and the spirit-body became comparable to mandalas, transformations of psychic energy, and stages in the process of individuation (Wilhelm and Jung 1962; Jung 1967, pars. 1–84).

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This encounter cannot be adequately described as an unmediated dialogue between Jung and “Daoism.” The *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi* is not an ancient and internally uniform expression of a timeless Daoist worldview: modern scholarship situates its recognizable formation in the early Qing and associates it with spirit-writing communities devoted to the immortal Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 (Mori 2002; Lai 2015; 2016; Esposito 2000; Izzo 2023). Jung, moreover, did not read the Chinese text but Wilhelm’s German translation of a late edition, together with Wilhelm’s introductions and terminological choices. The object encountered by analytical psychology was already the product of revelation, compilation, redaction, translation, and comparative interpretation.

This layered history alters the critical question that should be addressed to Jung. It is insufficient to ask whether his commentary faithfully represents Daoist inner alchemy, as though a stable original meaning stood behind every later interpretation. A more productive inquiry concerns the operations through which a historically particular Chinese text was made legible within analytical psychology, and above all the *temporality* of those operations: what happens to the future-directedness of an alchemical image when it is interpreted as the manifestation of a pre-existent archetypal structure?

To pose this question the article stages an encounter that the sources themselves invite but that scholarship has not systematically pursued from the perspective of Daoist textual and reception history: even the most substantial treatment of the Bloch–Jung polemic leaves both thinkers’ shared debt to Richard Wilhelm and the *Golden Flower* out of account (Bartning 1978). Ernst Bloch distinguished in *The Principle of Hope* between the No-Longer-Conscious —the repressed or sunken past that psychoanalysis excavates— and the Not-Yet-Conscious, “the psychological birthplace of the New” (Bloch 1986, 1:114–16). His attack on Jung was polemically extreme —“C. G. Jung, the psychoanalytic fascist” (Bloch 1986, 1:56). Yet the same Bloch developed his own affirmative theory of archetypes as vessels of “encapsulated hope” awaiting refunctioning (Bloch 1986, 1:158–65), and, what is decisive here, he was himself a reader of Daoism. *The Principle of Hope* devotes a substantial section to Laozi’s Dao as the glad tidings of the “inconspicuous world-rhythm,” and argues that *wu wei* 無為, “correctly understood,” is far from quietism and can sanction revolution (Bloch 1986, 3:1220–30). Both thinkers, moreover, drew their Daoism from the same mediator, Richard Wilhelm —Bloch from the *Tao te King* of 1915, Jung from the *Golden Flower* of 1929. The confrontation examined here is thus not the application of an external Marxist yardstick to Jung’s sinological adventure, but a comparison of two German receptions of Daoism —one archetypal, one utopian— that share a source and diverge in their understanding of time.

The stakes of this comparison are not merely historical. A growing critical literature describes the “psychologisation” of Eastern spiritual traditions —their colonization, translation, and commodification into therapeutic raw material— as a process in which Jung’s commentary was a foundational episode (Cohen 2022, 60–77; Jain 2020; Cohen 2024), while Bloch’s Not-Yet-Conscious has found new phenomenological defenders (Fuchs 2024). What has not been done is to bring these strands together at their historical point of intersection: the *Golden Flower*.

The central argument is that Jung’s commentary should be understood as a selective hermeneutic translation that simultaneously discloses and restricts the transformative imagery of the *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi*. By interpreting the text through archetype and individuation, Jung made its images meaningful to a modern European readership. At the same time, his framework subordinated historically specific conceptions of cultivation, embodiment, and religious authority to a transhistorical psychology of the Self. Bloch’s critique illuminates the temporal limit of this translation —Jungian anticipation culminates in the realization of a psychically prefigured totality, whereas Bloch relates anticipation to an objectively unfinished world. But the critique must run in both directions: Bloch’s polemic distorted Jung in demonstrable ways, Bloch’s own reading of Daoism carried a Eurocentric signature, and a Blochian “rescue” of the *Golden Flower* would risk repeating, in emancipatory vocabulary, the very universalism it condemns in psychological vocabulary. The aim is therefore not to recover a suppressed revolutionary Daoism, but to construct a self-reflexive comparison that identifies both the critical possibilities and the epistemic limits of translating Daoist alchemy into modern European theoretical languages.

A methodological delimitation governs what follows. This article does not claim to offer an independent philological reading of the Chinese recensions of the *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi*. Its account of the text’s formation, terminology, and alchemical context relies on specialist scholarship in Daoist studies,

while its primary textual analysis focuses on Wilhelm's translation, Jung's commentary, and Bloch's writings as documents of European reception.

The article proceeds in four steps: it first reconstructs the textual and editorial history of the *Jinhua zongzhi*; it then examines Jung's treatment of light, the Golden Flower, *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄, the spirit-body, and individuation; next it reconstructs Bloch's criticism of Jung, corrects its distortions, and presents Bloch's own theory of utopian archetypes alongside Jung's prospective account of symbols; finally it brings Bloch's Laozi into the comparison and asks whether the text's transformative imagery can be read as utopian without detaching it from its Qing religious and alchemical contexts.

Which Golden Flower? Textual Formation and the Wilhelm–Jung Mediation

The title under which Europe received the text suggests a stable and ancient classic; the textual record shows otherwise. The *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi* emerged in its recognizable form in the late seventeenth-century world of Qing spirit-writing: its authority was attributed to Lü Dongbin and mediated through *fuji* 扶乩, the planchette revelation transcribed by members of a religious altar (Lai 2015, 113–14). The work is the product of ritualized revelation, questioning, compilation, and editorial consolidation rather than of a single author.

Recent scholarship has substantially clarified this process. In the winter of 1668, at a spirit-writing altar called the Bailong jingshe 白龍精舍 in Wujin (Piling, present-day Changzhou), seven literati disciples received from the descended Patriarch Lü the teaching that came to be called the *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi*; the revelation was completed at the Old Red Plum Hall (Gu hongmei ge 古紅梅閣) in 1692 (Lai 2016, 52–58; Mori 2002, 167–68). The recipients signed their prefaces as “disciples of the inherited Jingming lineage”: they understood the revelation as reviving the lost transmission of the Pure Brightness (Jingming 淨明) tradition associated with the immortal Xu Xun, and founded on its basis a new sub-lineage (Lai 2016, 56, 62, 67).

The Qing text itself, moreover, already reconfigured earlier materials for a new audience — which complicates any contrast between an originally rigorous, bodily Daoism and its later reduction to European interiority. Lai Chi-tim has shown that the leading recipient, Pan Yi'an 潘易庵 — identifiable as Pan Jingguan 潘靜觀, a Wujin recluse-scholar — was the long-time disciple of the inner-alchemical master Zhu Yuanyu 朱元育, and that the *Jinhua zongzhi*'s central practice of “turning the light around” (*huiguang* 回光) by the “method of reversal” (*nifa* 逆法) descends from Zhu's teaching circle (Lai 2016, 53–63, 73). Mori Yuria has demonstrated how the text simplifies Zhu's demanding alchemical program — replacing the “capturing” of a substantial Great Medicine with the “Light of the Inner Nature” (*xingguang* 性光) and compressing the regimen into quiet sitting “for two to four hours early in the morning” while ordinary obligations continue: “a practical manual designed for literati of the Qing dynasty to integrate Inner Alchemy into their daily lives” (Mori 2025, 1, 9–14).

Nor can any single redaction claim uncontested originality. Monica Esposito identified six principal versions associated with different collections and editors; none can be considered “the” authentic text (Esposito 2008, 961–62; Izzo 2023, 83). The earliest surviving printed witness appears in the expanded 1775 edition of the *Lüzu quanshu* 呂祖全書 edited by Shao Zhilin — itself an editorial construction that reduced a reportedly earlier twenty-chapter form to thirteen (Lai 2016, 47–48, 74). The most consequential later intervention came in 1834, when the Longmen 龍門 patriarch Min Yide 閔一得 incorporated a reconstructed version into his *Daozang xubian* 道藏續編, branded the circulating text a “false text” (*weiben* 偽本), and relocated the teaching to a Longmen revelation of 1688 on Mount Jin'gai — a claim shown to be retrospective fabrication: Min's authenticating anecdote, in which the Longmen reformer Wang Kunyang recognizes the text in 1688, “must be fictitious since in 1688 both of them had already passed away.” The spirit-written scripture thereby took the place, in Min's “new kind of Longmen doctrine,” of the interrupted transmission of the precepts (Esposito 2001, 203–5; Lai 2016, 50–51; Mori 2002, 176–79; Izzo 2023, 88). The episode belongs to a broader Qing pattern: receiving a text by spirit-writing “opened for many groups the possibility to become direct disciples of the immortal Lü Dongbin and establish a lineage” (Esposito 2001, 204), and a “Longmen standardization,” resting on Wang Kunyang's ordination monopoly, compelled local traditions to claim Longmen descent in order to survive (Esposito 2001, 192; Esposito 2000, 625, 634). Paratexts, in short, regulate how practice is understood: the same instructions mean differently as Jingming inheritance, as authorized Longmen scripture, or as the foundation of a distinct Golden Flower lineage.

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Jung, finally, did not work from any early Chinese edition. Wilhelm's translation relied on a volume published by Zhan Ranhui 湛然慧 in Beijing in 1921, which paired the *Jinhua zongzhi* — under the publisher's title *Changsheng shu* 長生術, "The Art of Prolonging Human Life" — with Liu Huayang's 柳華陽 *Huiming jing* 慧命經 of 1794, a text of the eclectic Wu-Liu school (Izzo 2023, 90–91, 97; Esposito 2000, 632–33). Wilhelm's introduction added a further layer of construction: he dated the teaching to the eighth century, derived it from a religion of the "Golden Elixir of Life" founded by Lü Yan, and entertained a "strong admixture of Nestorian ideas" (Wilhelm and Jung 1962, 3–10) — none of which has survived scrutiny; Joseph Needham's verdict was that Wilhelm, "great sinologist though he was," was simply not acquainted "with the neidan tradition of physiological alchemy which was the real background" of the text (Needham, quoted in Izzo 2023, 91). Nor did the mediations end in 1929: Baynes's English followed in 1931, and Thomas Cleary later re-translated the text from a different recension, polemically dismissing Wilhelm's version as "a garbled translation of a truncated version of a corrupted recension of the original work" (Cleary 1991, 3).

Each stage of this chain selected and reclassified what it received. This does not make cross-cultural understanding impossible. It means that "Jung's interpretation of Daoism" is more precisely Jung's interpretation of a European translation of a late Chinese edition whose relation to earlier alchemical traditions was already historically layered — and it changes the form of the critique. Jung did not confront an intact Daoist original and replace its obvious meaning with alien psychology. He received a contested cultivation text and shifted its main field of intelligibility once more: from Qing religious and alchemical discourse to a theory of the psyche.

Jung's Hermeneutic Translation

Jung's commentary does not present itself as a philological exposition, nor does it recommend that Europeans reproduce the practices described by Wilhelm. Jung repeatedly warns against the imitation of Asian disciplines: "Western imitation is a tragic misunderstanding of the psychology of the East" (Jung 1967, par. 5; cf. Wilhelm and Jung 1962, 83). The commentary is intentionally translational rather than imitative: a corresponding transformation must be undertaken within the conditions of the receiving culture. J. J. Clarke has described this stance, sympathetically, as a Gadamerian dialogue — an "overlapping, not a merging, of conceptual horizons" that sought a "middle way" between imitation and dismissal (Clarke 1994, 11, 37–54, 81–84) — a description that captures the commentary's self-understanding; whether its terms were as reciprocal as the metaphor implies is this section's question.

Jung also states the epistemological limits of this translation. Psychology cannot verify religious claims concerning realities beyond experience, but it can study the images and transformations through which such claims become psychically effective. His procedure brackets metaphysical reference and retains what can be discussed as psychic experience — a bracketing he describes with unusual candor: "my aim as a psychologist is to dismiss without mercy the metaphysical claims of all esoteric teachings ... I quite deliberately bring everything that purports to be metaphysical into the daylight of psychological understanding" (Jung 1967, par. 73). This is not straightforward demystification. Jung does not declare gods, spirits, or immortal bodies unreal; he treats their images as autonomous psychic realities whose effects exceed conscious invention, and he insists that "the psyche is a world in which the ego is contained" (Jung 1967, par. 75; Wilhelm and Jung 1962, 128–30).

The expansive category of psychic reality protects religious symbols from reduction to error, but it also establishes an asymmetry. Almost every religious, somatic, or cosmological claim can be redescribed as psychically real, making psychology the encompassing discourse within which the other tradition becomes intelligible. Analytical psychology supplies the metalanguage; the Chinese text supplies images to be interpreted. Daoist ontology is not granted the same authority to redefine the limits of psychology. Even Clarke concedes that at such points the method slides from agnostic bracketing into reduction — no longer "A can be treated as B" but "A really is nothing but B" — and that Jung remains "vulnerable ... to the charge of 'Orientalism'" (Clarke 1994, 150–51, 187). The asymmetry is anchored in Jung's strongest universalist premise, the anatomical grounding of the collective unconscious: "just as the human body shows a common anatomy over and above all racial differences, so, too, the human psyche possesses a common substratum ... the psychic expression of the identity of brain structure irrespective of all racial differences" (Jung 1967, par. 11). In a letter of 1932 Jung drew the conclusion himself: "It is not, however, the actual East we are dealing with but the collective unconscious, which is omnipresent" (quoted in Coward 1985, 40).

The asymmetry has, finally, a temporal form, and it is here that the psychological and the political registers of the commentary meet. Jung's respect for the East coexists with a developmental scheme in which the East occupies the past of the West: India is "pre-psychological," and Eastern thought is "pre-Kantian," behind modern scientific psychology in method if ahead of it in experience (Jung, quoted in Coward 1985, 61, 187; cf. Clarke 1994, 149). Where Jung draws the line —against the ego's transcendence, against the claims of "higher consciousness"— he draws it in the name of Western scientific method, redescribing the states the tradition calls higher as the European equivalent of the unconscious (Coward 1985, 59–63, 68). The pattern recurs across Jung's Indian and Tibetan receptions, which locates the limit in the receiving apparatus rather than in any particular Asian text.

The translation Jung received had already begun the work of psychologization. Wilhelm rendered *dao* 道 as *Sinn* ("Meaning"), glossing the character as a "track" that "leads from a beginning directly to the goal" (Wilhelm and Jung 1962, 11) —a choice mediated, as Zhou Dangwei argues, by Goethe's *Faust* and the Johannine Logos rather than by Daoist usage (Zhou 2025, 8–9). The translation also prints interpolated equivalences— seed-water as "Eros," spirit-fire as "Logos," thought-earth as "intuition"—inside the translated text itself (Wilhelm and Jung 1962, 25–26). Jung's commentary elaborates on a text that was already speaking half in the vocabulary of European psychology.

This double translation is visible in Jung's treatment of the Dao and light. Beginning from Wilhelm's *Sinn*, Jung decomposes the Chinese character into "head" and "going" and concludes that Tao means "to go consciously, or the conscious way"; "'light' is the symbolical equivalent of consciousness"; and the "process of 'reversal'" is equated with "the realization of the Tao" (Jung 1967, pars. 28–30; Wilhelm and Jung 1962, 97–99). The process is not reduced to rational introspection —Jung famously credits the text's *wu wei* with giving him "the key that opens the door to the way" (Jung 1967, par. 20)— but the semantic center shifts from a specific alchemical vocabulary of *xing* 性 and *ming* 命, spirit, vitality, and cultivated embodiment to a general psychological relation between conscious and unconscious life.

The chain of renderings can be observed at the level of the single term. What the tradition calls *huiguang* 回光 appears in Wilhelm's translation, in Baynes's English, as the "circulation of the light" achieved by the "backward-flowing method" (Wilhelm and Jung 1962, 21–22, 30–31); Cleary's version renders the same operation as "turning the light around" (Cleary 1991, 9–14). Jung's psychological interpretation builds upon Wilhelm's rendering: the circulated light becomes a "movement in a circle around oneself" in which all sides of the personality become involved (Jung, quoted in Coward 1985, 50). Which layers of the practice each rendering carries is a question this article registers without adjudicating; on Zhang Danke's account, the term belongs to an ontological discourse of innate and cognitive light that neither "circulation" nor psychological reflection exhausts (Zhang 2025, 7–9).

Jung's interpretation of the Golden Flower intensifies this movement. He identifies it as a mandala —"a mandala symbol I have often met with in the material brought me by my patients" (Jung 1967, par. 33)— and amplifies it through Christian, Indian, Tibetan, alchemical, and clinical parallels. Amplification reveals resonances a narrowly historical approach may miss—hence the commentary's lasting appeal. Yet it also converts resemblance into identity: a Qing alchemical flower, a ritual mandala, and a patient's drawing may all exhibit centered organization without performing the same religious or social work. Jung moves from formal recurrence to an underlying archetypal condition —the Golden Flower does not merely resemble a mandala, it *is* one— and the temporal signature of the identification is retrospective: "The unity once possessed has been lost, and must now be found again" (Jung 1967, par. 36).

The treatment of *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄 shows the chain still more clearly. Wilhelm rendered the two terms as "animus" and "anima," placing them within a Latin and Jungian field before Jung's explicit analysis began; Baynes reproduced the decision in English; Cleary later proposed the plainer "higher soul" and "lower soul" (Wilhelm and Jung 1962, 115–19; Cleary 1991, 13–14). Jung endorses Wilhelm's equivalence and refines it, preferring "Logos" for the *hun* of men (Jung 1967, pars. 57–60). The rendering illuminates psychic multiplicity but displaces other dimensions: according to Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein, *hun* and *po* are "two types of vital entities" with distinct post-mortem itineraries —at death "the *hun* disperses in heaven, and the *po* returns to earth"— categories of life, ancestry, ritual, and cosmology that cannot be exhausted by the animus–anima equivalence (Baldrian-Hussein 2008, 521).

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The spirit-body most clearly shows both the seriousness and the limit of Jung's procedure. Wilhelm's text describes the crystallization of the circulating light as producing "in addition to the body, yet another spirit-body" (Wilhelm and Jung 1962, 23) — Cleary renders the same crystallization as "the natural spiritual body" (Cleary 1991, 9–14)— and, in passages Jung certainly read, defines the "backward-flowing method" in unambiguously physiological terms, down to the conservation and redirection of seminal energy (Wilhelm and Jung 1962, 30–31, 61–63). Jung does not ignore these images. He interprets them as the symbolic birth of a superior personality whose center no longer coincides with the conscious ego: the "holy fruit," the "diamond body," symbolize "an attitude that is beyond the reach of emotional entanglements ...," a detached consciousness that "sets in after middle life" as "a natural preparation for death" (Jung 1967, par. 68). He concedes in a footnote that the instructions "were also understood in a purely physical sense" (Jung 1967, par. 76n). What changes in his reading is the ontological status of the body being produced: the alchemical body ceases to be the outcome of a cosmological and soteriological transformation involving vital forces, longevity, and postmortem continuity, and becomes a symbol of psychic reorganization. Jung could defend it as disciplinary restraint: a psychologist cannot verify an immortal body but can recognize a parallel transformation of personality. The difficulty is that the separation between experiential truth and cosmological form is not culturally neutral. In inner alchemy, cultivated embodiment and cosmological process may be constitutively inseparable: on Martina Darga's account the *shengtai* 聖胎 is not merely a metaphor within the text's alchemical ontology: it denotes "the achievement of the elixir of immortality," formed by the purification and merging of essence, energy, and spirit (Darga 2008, 883–84; cf. Zhu 2009, 496–97). By treating cosmology as wrapping around a psychologically usable core, Jung imposes a distinction characteristic of his own framework. Sinologists protested the imposition as early as 1968, when Kristofer Schipper and Nathan Sivin criticized the Jungian translator Miyuki Mokusen's rendering of "standard terms of Daoist physiology" as archetypal metaphors at the Bellagio conference (Izzo 2023, 96).

The political critique must begin from an accurate account of individuation. Jung explicitly distinguishes individuation from individualism: the individuated personality is not a self-sufficient atom, and successful individuation can produce broader and more responsible relations with others (Jung 1971, pars. 757–62; cf. Shamdasani 2003, 342–43). These qualifications do not invalidate a political criticism; they specify it. The decisive issue is explanatory scale: psychological interpretation can illuminate projection and the numinous force of collective identities, but not how economic and institutional arrangements organize the conditions under which those investments arise. Analytical psychology becomes politically conservative not because it turns inward, but when psychic integration is treated as a sufficient response to contradictions that also require institutional analysis and collective action.

Jung's commentary is thus neither an arbitrary appropriation nor a transparent disclosure of universal meaning. The critical question is what kind of future this productive but restrictive framework permits.

Bloch, Jung, and the Temporality of the Unconscious

The polemic and its context

Bloch's criticism of psychoanalysis begins from a temporal question: toward which dimension of time does the unconscious open? He does not deny the retrospective unconscious that analysis excavates; he objects to its elevation into a complete theory of unconscious life. "The unconscious of psychoanalysis is therefore ... never a Not-Yet-Conscious, an element of progressions; it consists rather of regressions ... there is nothing new in the Freudian unconscious" (Bloch 1986, 1:56). Against it he sets the Not-Yet-Conscious: contents that have never yet become conscious because they are still emerging — "the preconscious of what is to come, the psychological birthplace of the New" — at home not in the cellar but at the Front of consciousness, above all in the daydream (Bloch 1986, 1:11–13, 114–16). The category is psychological because it names emergent subjective content, but it is also ontological: the unfinished subject corresponds to a world whose tendencies and latencies are undecided. Not every wish indicates a realizable future; Bloch's *docta spes*, educated hope, names the work of distinguishing abstract compensation from concrete anticipation (Levitas 1990, 13–18). The category has recently been re-grounded phenomenologically as protentional consciousness; Thomas Fuchs notes that it was never taken up by psychoanalysis or phenomenology — a neglect this article

extends to the Jungian archive (Fuchs 2024).

It is in this architecture that Jung receives the harshest sentence Bloch ever passed on a contemporary: “This became even clearer when C. G. Jung, the psychoanalytic fascist, reduced the libido and its unconscious contents entirely to the primeval. According to him, exclusively phylogenetic primeval memories or primeval fantasies exist in the unconscious, falsely designated ‘archetypes’; and all wishful images also go back into this night, only suggest prehistory” (Bloch 1986, 1:56; German: “der psychoanalytische Faschist ... fälschlich »Archetypen« genannt,” Bloch 1959, 61–62). The charge is elaborated across the chapter: Jung, “the fascistically frothing psychoanalyst,” replaces the power-drive with a frenzy-drive (*Rauschtrieb*); his unconscious is “the five-hundred-thousand-year-old shaft beneath the few thousand years of civilization,” in which “everything new is ipso facto without value” (Bloch 1986, 1:59–61). Psychosynthesis becomes *re-ligio*, “connecting back”; and in the polemic’s most quoted image, Jung’s unconscious consigns itself to “the cellar of consciousness, since it is only there that the opium with which Fascism stupefies utopia can be smoked” (Bloch 1986, 1:61, 137).

The polemic did not begin in the 1950s. Already in *Heritage of Our Times* (1935), written in exile in direct confrontation with National Socialism, Bloch had classed Jung among “the Prinzorns, Jungs, Klages, the open or crypto-fascists of psychology,” for whom the unconscious is “no longer individual ... but a treasure of the primeval humanity starting to revive” (Bloch 1991, 312–13). He had also identified the mechanism that concerns the Golden Flower: Jung, who “from sheer depth still ‘affirms all religions,’ either brings home only fruits of antiquarian reading or discusses the depths in such generality ... as if precisely here there were pseudo-enlightenment ...” (Bloch 1991, 313). A comparativism that affirms all religions equally, Bloch suggests, takes none of them seriously in their historical specificity — anticipating, from the left, later scholarship on the commentary’s amplificatory method.

The historical context of the charge deserves emphasis rather than embarrassment: Bloch wrote as myth, inheritance, and soil were being mobilized by fascist ideology, and his fear that theories granting authority to archaic structures could naturalize historically produced conflicts was not idiosyncratic. Contemporary scholarship on Jung’s politics has reached a differentiated verdict that preserves the rational core of Bloch’s alarm while rejecting its epithet: Jung was neither a Nazi nor, on the balance of evidence, an active anti-Semite, but he was a politically myopic thinker who in the early 1930s harbored what Nicholas Lewin calls an “archetypal hope” for the archaic energies stirring in Germany; his Wotan essay of 1936 read a political catastrophe as an archetypal possession (Lewin 2009; cf. Samuels 2004, x, who nonetheless maintains that “Jung’s work was indeed anti-Semitic”). From inside the post-Jungian field itself, Ladson Hinton has argued that Jung’s privileging of “timeless” archetypes over everyday temporality meant that “‘archetypal’ thinking can at times result in a dulling of ethical vision,” the Wotan reading being the paradigm case (Hinton 2019, 253–58). Lawrence Alschuler’s political-science audit reaches a convergent verdict: Jung overstated “the psychological causes of political phenomena,” de-emphasized “the reality of politics (outer),” pathologized mass movements, and, judged by the scale of political consciousness he is measured against, himself remained at the stage of “naïve consciousness” (Alschuler 2008, 300–301, 310–11). Nor was Bloch’s outright refusal the only Marxist response available: Walter Benjamin, sharing the misgivings, nonetheless integrated a critically historicized collective unconscious into his theory of dreams (Goldstein 2006, 52–53). Bloch’s structural diagnosis — that the temporal indexing of the unconscious has political consequences — did not need the word “fascist” to stand.

Correcting the polemic

Because the diagnosis matters, its exaggerations must be corrected. Gerhard Bartning’s monograph on the Bloch–Jung polemic documents that Bloch’s reading of Jung was philologically careless: Bloch imputes to Jung the Nazi vocable *Volksgemeinschaft* and re-etymologizes Jung’s *religio* (“careful observation”) as *Rückverbindung*, “because it rhymes better that way” (Bartning 1978, 366–70). Bartning’s own thesis is that the relation between the two thinkers is chiasmic: Bloch, the utopian, harbors his own archetypes; Jung, the archaist, harbors his own futurity; and each polemically represses the other’s pole in himself (Bartning 1978, 351–409, 437–50).

Both halves of the chiasmus are documented in the primary texts. Jung does not consistently define archetypes as inherited images: in his mature formulations what is inherited is a formal disposition — “not ... images filled with content, but at first only ... forms without content” (Jung 1969a,

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par. 99)— and the “archetype in itself” is irrepresentable, distinguished from its historically shaped representations (Jung 1969b, par. 417; Shamdasani 2003, 233–37). More importantly, Jung explicitly grants unconscious symbols a prospective function. From 1914 onward his “constructive method” asked “how, out of this present psyche, a bridge can be built into its own future” (Shamdasani, in Jung 2009, 201); the unconscious “with its symbols, anticipates future conscious processes” (Jung 1967, par. 229; cf. Jung 1968, par. 65). Bloch knew at least some of this material —and his response to it is the most instructive moment of the entire polemic. In *The Principle of Hope* he quotes at length Jung’s account of the “prospective tendency of subliminal combinations” —the “very fine subliminal forward combinations, which are of the very greatest significance for future events”— and then observes that Jung interprets this dawning “in an utterly archaic and occult fashion, analogous to the prophetic sleep in the temple ... Utopian consciousness is presented as an Egyptian book of dreams”; what in Leibniz had been a barrier before the Novum “becomes a guillotine for the Novum in the final bourgeois psychology of the unconscious” (Bloch 1986, 1:137–39). The objection, at its sharpest, is not that Jung lacks anticipation but that Jungian anticipation is immediately re-archaized: the future is recognized only insofar as it repeats a pre-existent structure.

Jung’s own texts confirm that this is the accurate wedge. His formulations of futurity are consistently proleptic of a given whole: everyone “must possess that higher level, at least in embryonic form” (Jung 1967, par. 18); the unawakened “have not yet integrated their future, more extensive personality, their ‘wholeness’” (Jung 1967, par. 241). And where Bloch’s hope is in principle unbounded, Jung’s is programmatically bounded: “Complete redemption from the sufferings of this world is and must remain an illusion” (Jung, CW 16, par. 400, quoted in Clarke 1994, 148). Even a defender as careful as Mark Saban concedes the temporal point: “whatever the variations on a theme, they must always remain merely variations on an archaic original ... In effect, for Jung, there can be nothing new under the sun. This is a serious problem” (Saban 2014, 209). A post-Jungian rejoinder deserves note: on non-essentialist reconstructions the Self is not a pre-given totality but an unrepresentable regulative principle —even “an emergent property of a particular embodied individual subject” (Young-Eisendrath 2008, 245–46). The rejoinder blunts the image of a finished telos, yet the temporal asymmetry survives it: in emergentist readings the ground of emergence remains the organization of the psyche, whereas Bloch indexes emergence to an unfinished world-process —and Saban’s concession was issued from within the sympathetic reconstruction itself. The biographical record dramatizes it. When Wilhelm’s package arrived in 1928, Jung had just painted a mandala of a golden castle that struck him as Chinese; he experienced the text as an “undreamed-of confirmation of my ideas about the mandala and the circumambulation of the center” (Jung 2009, 218–19). The episode proves nothing about Jung’s theory as a whole, but it illustrates, in miniature, the Blochian suspicion: anticipation is converted into recognition when an unfamiliar symbol is received primarily as confirmation of an already established psychic structure.

Bloch’s utopian archetypes

The polemic, however, conceals a debt, and Bloch half admits it: “Jung did stumble upon a not unimportant (as we shall see) imaginative stock here, upon that of archetypes” (Bloch 1986, 1:63). The promise of that “as we shall see” is redeemed a hundred pages later in the section “Encounter of the Utopian Function with Archetypes,” which defines archetypes as “situational condensing categories” of the imagination rather than hypostasized Ideas (Bloch 1986, 1:158–62). Their evaluation is strictly temporal: “only those archetypes in which something not worked out, relatively unexpired and undischarged still circulates are capable of utopian treatment,” while “the archetype, spellbinding backwards and held in a backward spell, additionally prevents openness to the future” (Bloch 1986, 1:162). The method that separates the two he calls *Umfunktionierung*, refunctioning: “the reutilization (Umfunktionierung), which understands how to liberate the archetypically capsulated hope” (Bloch 1988, 126; Bloch 1986, 1:163–64). The series culminates in a limit-concept aimed squarely at Jung: “the only archetype which has nothing archaic about it ... the purely utopian archetype ... of the still unknown, all-surpassing summum bonum,” whose content has never yet appeared (Bloch 1986, 1:305).

Already in 1935 the same dialectic is explicit, in terms that bear directly on the Golden Flower’s imagery of light: even in the “collective-archaically unconscious which a reactionary psychiatry plays off against Freud’s merely personally unconscious,” Bloch writes, “something not yet become known ... is itself encapsulated ... indeed in the encapsulation of some mythical images themselves, there is

occasionally a fairytale cipher of still unbecome light and of the utopian lands of happiness"; the essay ends by distinguishing the "fuel archetypes" of human happiness —for "a proper archetype presses out of the image towards existence, out of opium towards the light" — from the cinders of mere archaism (Bloch 1991, 316–18). Recent scholarship has begun to register how much this complicates the standard opposition: Bloch's hostility to Jung is "a primarily political aversion; in fact, archetypes play quite a significant role in Bloch's thought," which "does relativize somewhat the stark opposition between the two thinkers" (Ní Dhúill 2013, 156–57; cf. Boldyrev 2014, 118).

The contrast that remains is therefore not image versus concept, nor even past versus future, but two temporalities of the same imagery. Jung asks what recurrent psychic structure becomes visible in a symbol; Bloch asks what unfulfilled possibility becomes legible through it. For Jung, symbolic anticipation concerns the fuller realization of the psyche's structural totality: the organizing potential is already present. For Bloch, the *Novum* is a mediated emergence that no pre-given totality guarantees: legitimate regression exists, but "only ... when something that has not become, a future possible, is also still encapsulated in the archetype" (Bloch 1986, 1:103); even "the archetype Golden Age, Paradise — stands likewise, as something expected — in the Some Day of time" (Bloch 1986, 1:97–98). But Bloch supplies one criterion Jung's framework cannot generate: subjective transformation is insufficient while the objective conditions producing suffering remain unchanged. The promise of an image remains incomplete so long as it exists only as inward centering; it seeks embodiment in practices, relationships, and material arrangements.

Archetype or Anticipation? A Comparative Reading

Bloch's Laozi

The comparison gains a dimension that Bloch scholarship and Jung scholarship have equally neglected: Bloch's own reading of Daoism, through the same Richard Wilhelm. *The Principle of Hope* devotes a full section of its chapter on the religions of the world to the "glad tidings of earthly-heavenly balance and of the inconspicuous world-rhythm (Tao)" (Bloch 1986, 3:1220–30), citing Wilhelm's *Tao te King* of 1915. The section is no digression. Laozi is for Bloch the founder who "appeared by disappearing"; his Tao is "the religious category of wisdom, as harmony with the deep repose which fulfils wishes by forgetting them"; Chinese landscape painting shows "the alert, bright stillness of the Tao, not the deep sleep of nirvana"; and the Daodejing's polemic against morality and the state harbors "the instinct ... of a mystical democracy" (Bloch 1986, 3:1225–27). Above all, Bloch refuses the standard European reading of *wu wei* as passivity: the repose of the Tao "is not quietism in the European sense," because its trust "relates to the constant world-rhythm, not to God's providence and its acceptance"; indeed, "the correctly understood teaching of not-doing also contains a maxim which in the end can be so far removed from quietism as to be no stranger at all to concrete action, which indeed justifies revolution as a breakthrough into that which is due and right" —in the German original, *heiligt*, sanctifies it (Bloch 1986, 3:1227–28; Bloch 1959, 1447–48). The Tao even enters Bloch's own vocabulary at its most intimate point: the darkness of the lived moment is glossed with "that Tao of the world which Lao Tzu claims has no taste, and which therefore has the sharpest taste" (Bloch 1986, 1:304; cf. Bloch 2006, 126–27).

Bloch's final criticism of Daoism defines what a Blochian reading of any Daoist text must ask. The Tao, he concludes, remains "sheer spontaneity in sheer repose"; in this "divine element without god everything human is to be embedded without man, all hope embedded without anything needing to be hoped" (Bloch 1986, 3:1229–30; German: "alle Hoffnung ohne ein zu hoffen Nötiges," Bloch 1959, 1450). What Bloch finds lacking in Daoism is not interiority —the deficiency Jung's psychology generously repairs— but the *Novum*: an open future that could make hope necessary. Where Jung translates the Dao into the psyche, Bloch measures it against time.

Two further features of Bloch's reception matter here. First, Bloch distinguishes sharply between the "mystic teacher" Laozi and the later "miracle men," the "gold-makers and exorcists" who turned the Daodejing into formulae (Bloch 1986, 3:1225). The spirit-written, alchemical *jinhua zongzhi* would likely have fallen among these later formations. A Blochian reading of the Golden Flower must therefore go beyond Bloch's own philological horizon, applying to "magical" Daoism the generosity he reserved for the philosophical variety; his insistence elsewhere that even colportage, occult, and trivial materials carry undischarged hope licenses exactly this extension (Bloch 1991, 167, 316). Second, Bloch's attacks on the *archaizing* Tao of interwar Europe show that he recognized important political stakes in

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Daoism's Western reception: in Klages's biocentrism "teleology shrinks to the Tao of primeval times," and the occult bricolage of the 1920s traded in "the Tao of the cross" alongside pyramid mysteries and zodiacs (Bloch 1991, 309, 175). Jung's commentary of 1929 appeared within and participated in this conjuncture. The question it poses is whether the psychological translation of the Golden Flower repeats the archaizing gesture at a higher level of sophistication — or escapes it.

An irony in Bloch's selectivity should be named, because the article's own criteria require it. With its regimens of breath, body, and daily discipline, inner alchemy is in one respect closer to Bloch's concrete utopia — which insists that hope take embodied, practicable form — than the philosophical Laozi he preferred. His exclusion of the "gold-makers" sits uneasily with his own rule that utopian surplus must be sought wherever it lies encapsulated. The tension does not disqualify the Blochian reading; it is the most concrete evidence for the self-critique that such a reading must carry.

The circulation of light: return or retrieval

The practice of *huiguang* is the test case, because it combines return and transformation. "Turning the light around" is a movement away from ordinary dispersion and back toward a source; the text calls it the "backward-flowing method" (Wilhelm and Jung 1962, 21–22, 30–31), and the maxim of the tradition, as Zhang renders it, runs: "progression begets humanity, reversal achieves immortality" (Zhang 2025, 9). Jung follows this restorative structure, though without advocating literal regression — differentiated consciousness must be retained — so his reversal is closer to a spiral than a circle: excluded foundations are recovered in order to produce a personality that has not previously existed. This brings Jung nearer to Bloch than the polemic permits, for Bloch too refuses to equate progress with the simple rejection of the past.

The decisive difference concerns the authority of the source to which one returns. In Jung, reversal reconnects consciousness with archetypal structures that are psychically prior, and the reconnection is self-certifying: the mandala appears, the center holds, the unity "once possessed" is found again (Jung 1967, par. 36). In Bloch, retrieval is justified only insofar as it releases a possibility that can be reorganized toward a different future; origin possesses no privileged truth merely because it is origin. A Blochian reading would therefore distinguish restorative return from transformative retrieval, and Bloch's 1935 formula, quoted above, is tailor-made for this image: a cipher of "still unbecome light" (Bloch 1991, 316). Read in this way, the light that is turned around need not signify primarily the manifestation of a pre-existent psychic center. It may be understood as an image of a luminosity that has never yet existed — light indexed to the Some Day rather than to the Always Already. Nor does the Chinese text resist this reading as firmly as might be supposed: alchemical reversal seeks a return from the posterior to the anterior heaven, yet it does so through deliberate cultivation that produces a new state — the *Jinhua zongzhi* itself, as shown above, revised its inherited method and adapted the practice to ongoing worldly life (Mori 2025, 9–14). The practice is simultaneously retrieval and construction. A historical caution accompanies this: Bloch's revolution-sanctioning *wu wei* and the calm morning sitting that the Qing manual prescribes for busy literati (Mori 2025, 1, 14) belong to very different social textures, and a utopian reading must register, not erase, that distance.

Bloch's own late essays state the two hermeneutics as rival genres: the detective novel, defined by "the darkness at the beginning" — the un-narrated deed that precedes the first page and can only be reconstructed — and the novel of the artist, whose object is the work that does not yet exist (Bloch 1988, 245–77; cf. Rando 2016, 48–49). Jung reads the Golden Flower as a detective story, interpretation as detection; a Blochian reading takes it as a Künstlerroman of the spirit. That such a reading is not simply foreign to Jung is suggested by a late and contested episode: asked by the Zen master Shin'ichi Hisamatsu in 1958 whether one can be liberated *from* the collective unconscious, Jung reportedly answered "Yes!" — and refused permission to publish the transcript (Young-Eisendrath 2008, 235–36). A Blochian hermeneutic holds that moment open as method.

The refunctioning can be made concrete. In an economy that harvests attention — one in which the counter-practice itself has been enclosed in a billion-dollar "meditation market" (Cohen 2022, 84–85) — the turned-around light answers a determinate contemporary lack. Read restoratively, it is one more private recuperation sold back to the exhausted; read anticipatorily, it figures a reappropriation of attention that would have to be realized in shared arrangements of time and work. The fourth criterion below marks that difference.

The spirit-body: surplus and its limits

The spirit-body provides the strongest basis for utopian refunctioning because it imagines transformation as the production of a new embodiment: circulate the light long enough and “it crystallizes itself; that is the natural spirit-body ... formed beyond the nine heavens” (Wilhelm and Jung 1962, 22). Jung’s interpretation preserves the imagery of gestation and birth — the new personality is cultivated, not merely discovered — but the new body becomes a symbol of psychological organization whose horizon is explicitly thanatological: an attitude that “sets in after middle life and is a natural preparation for death” (Jung 1967, par. 68). Zhu Caifang raises a pertinent objection: the diamond body “is a pinnacle spiritual state ... realizable regardless of age,” not a developmental consolation of the second half of life (Zhu 2009, 501).

A Blochian reading asks a different question: what desire is expressed when transformation is imagined not merely as a change of belief but as another body? The image suggests that existing embodiment is experienced as incomplete, vulnerable, exhausted; salvation is represented corporeally because the deficiency to be overcome is not regarded as merely intellectual. Yet the image may carry a surplus because it refuses to imagine fulfillment as abstract reconciliation: whatever redemption means, it must become embodied. Bloch’s philosophy of nature indicates the direction such a reading would take: against a technology that treats nature as an object of violation, he envisages a “technology of alliance mediated with the co-productivity of nature,” for “nature is no bygone, but the building site which has not yet been cleared at all” (Bloch 1986, 2:690). An alchemy that aligns the cultivation of the body with cosmic process is not, historically, an ecological politics; but as an image of non-dominating co-productivity between human practice and natural rhythm it offers itself to Blochian inheritance more readily than to Jungian interiorization. The distinction from Jung remains precise: Jung interprets the new body as the symbolic embodiment of a reorganized psyche; a Blochian interpretation asks whether psychic reorganization remains insufficient while the material conditions of embodiment are unchanged.

Nor is the utopian charge of the text purely a modern importation. In the Longmen circles around Min Yide that canonized it, the *Jinhua zongzhi* came to be described as a “blueprint for healing the world” (*yishi zhangben* 醫世掌本), and its “orthodoxy” was celebrated “in a time of crisis when the Longmen patriarchs were living under a foreign dynasty” (Esposito 2001, 205, 219). This language suggests that at least some transmitters attributed to the work a salvific relevance extending beyond private cultivation — a dimension that vanishes when the text is read as a manual of individuation.

The utopian potential of the image is not unambiguous, however. Dreams of incorruptibility can become fantasies of purity, invulnerability, and elite exemption from vulnerability; they may devalue ordinary bodies or establish hierarchies between initiated and uninitiated persons. Utopian surplus cannot be identified with immortality as such. It lies, if anywhere, in the demand that transformation acquire embodied reality and be related to shared conditions of flourishing.

Criteria, and the critic criticized

Four criteria help distinguish utopian surplus from arbitrary political projection. First, the symbol must be related to a historically specified lack—such as the dispersal of attention and vitality just described (Cohen 2022, 78–96; Jain 2020, 5–9). Second, anticipated transformation must not become the restoration of an idealized origin; a critical use of the image must resist fantasies of an undivided Eastern wisdom capable of healing the West. Third, the promise must remain open to collective and material mediation: private experiences of wholeness do not automatically alter the conditions through which fragmentation is reproduced. Fourth —and this criterion the article applies to itself— the refunctioning must not become what Darren Webb calls the domestication of utopia: a scholarship in which “traces of hope are simply pointed to or pointed at” while no project follows, so that “structures of power have nothing to fear” from the analysis (Webb 2020, D8–D9). A left appropriation of Daoist imagery that merely gestures at emancipation is, as Cohen remarks of the left critique of mindfulness, “simply another form of appropriation” (Cohen 2022, 102).

The language of “rescue” must therefore be qualified on Blochian grounds as well as sinological ones. Bloch’s own reception of the East had a Eurocentric signature: he could write that the teachings of “Lao-Tse ... and Buddha ... cannot be taken out of their own country,” reserving portable universality for the Bible (Bloch 2009, 11; de Berg 2024, 122–23). When applied across cultures, Blochian inheritance can reproduce the hierarchy it opposes: the European theorist decides which elements of a

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Chinese tradition are living, progressive, or worthy of preservation —Jung’s structure of universalization with the signs reversed. A responsible refunctioning must direct critique against itself and decline to treat spirit-writing, ritual authority, hierarchical transmission, and aspirations to transcendence as disposable shells around a more authentic emancipatory content. They are part of the historical existence of the Golden Flower.

The comparative reading therefore claims neither that Qing practitioners intended modern political meanings, nor that Daoism is inherently emancipatory, nor that Blochian theory has privileged access to the truth of the text. It claims only that the symbolic sequence of reversal, luminous growth, and transformed embodiment can participate in a contemporary critique of forms of life organized by dispersion, exhaustion, and instrumentalization —provided that this use presents itself as constructive, selective, and historically situated. The Golden Flower should consequently remain an incompletely translated symbol: it cannot be returned to a pure Chinese origin, whose place is already occupied by revelation, redaction, and lineage appropriation; it cannot be fully contained within Jung’s psychology, whose Self its cultivated embodiment exceeds; nor can it be absorbed without remainder into Blochian utopia, whose historical emancipation its religious aims are not.

Conclusion

Jung’s commentary on *The Secret of the Golden Flower* made a Daoist alchemical text speak within modern European psychology, through a chain of prior mediations: a Qing spirit-written and multiply redacted work, a late Chinese edition, Wilhelm’s German translation, and a comparative vocabulary already oriented toward universal human meaning. Recovered, this history replaces the image of a pure original corrupted by psychology with a sequence of translations of which Jung’s was neither the first nor the last.

Jung’s contribution was substantial: he recognized the text as a document of transformation and supplied a language through which European readers could relate it to psychic conflict and development. The restriction lies in the hierarchy and the temporality of the interpretation. Daoist categories become intelligible within analytical psychology, while psychology’s universal authority is not subjected to an equivalent reconstruction; and the future disclosed by the symbols is the realization of a totality structurally anticipated within the psyche. Bloch’s Not-Yet-Conscious names exactly this limit —anticipation re-archaized into recognition— and his own encounter with Daoism shows that the alternative was historically available: a reading of the Dao that found in *wu wei* not a technique of adjustment but a figure of concrete action, up to and including revolution, while criticizing in Daoism precisely what Jung reproduced in psychological form, a fulfillment without future.

Yet the confrontation disciplines Bloch as much as Jung. His polemic misdescribed its target; his own thought is saturated with archetypes awaiting refunctioning; his Daoism stopped at the philosophical Laozi; his criterion of portable universality was biblical. What survives the mutual correction is not a victor but a method: the demand that every inherited image be interrogated for its encapsulated future, and every act of inheritance —psychological or utopian— for its politics.

The principal contribution of the comparison is thus the demonstration that theories of symbolic transformation are also theories of time, and that theories of time are politics. Jung’s archetype organizes transformation through inherited psychic form and future individuation; Bloch’s Not-Yet organizes it through subjective anticipation and an unfinished world. The Golden Flower makes the difference visible because it can be read both as the realization of an underlying center and as the emergence of a form not yet given —and because its modern career, from the Weimar vogue for the archaic East to the contemporary “meditation market” (Cohen 2022, 84–85; Jain 2020), shows what is at stake in the choice. A critical cross-cultural hermeneutics should preserve this unresolved tension: make its exclusions visible, allow the translated tradition to challenge the receiving theory, and refuse the fantasy that one final conceptual language can eliminate historical and ontological difference. The politics of the Golden Flower lies in the acts through which the image has been transmitted, universalized, psychologized, historicized—and may yet be refunctioned..

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