

Money and the Feminine Archetype

By Carol Schwyzer, © MoneyMuseum

Do you admire rich people like Aristotle Onassis or Bill Gates? Do you envy your brother who has just bought himself a red Ferrari? Are you proud when you earn a million on the stock exchange in a short period? Or are you even ashamed because you have inherited a lot of money? One thing is clear, money mobilises feelings and emotions. In our world money is one of the main points of dispute and at the same time a mysterious taboo. That is why many books have been written about the obviously close connection between money and psychology. Titles like "Beziehungskiller: Das liebe Geld" (The Killer of Relationships: Dear Money), "Der Mythos vom Geld" (The Myth of Money) or "Der Geist in der Münze" (The Spirit in the Coin) speak volumes. "Mysterium Geld" (The Mystery of Money), however, the book by Bernard Lietaer, takes us deeper into the world of the psyche, of myths and archetypes than any other. The finance expert, who today teaches sustainability and archetypal psychology in the USA, draws on an enormous fund of knowledge. A completely new look at our world, our currency systems and our money emerges from his creative and stimulating linkages.

Jung, yin and yang

The basis of Lietaer's psychological consideration of money is formed by the findings of the famous Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung. Jung assumes the psychological totality of man which encompasses the conscious and unconscious. The conscious is that area which is illuminated as if by a searchlight. What is situated in the dark area outside the circle of light is, on the other hand, the unconscious. Jung distinguishes between a personal and a collective unconscious. This has nothing to do with our personal experiences, but contains contents which have survived all time, thus for example, valid experiences and fundamental truths of existence which we have inherited from our ancestors.

The unconscious expresses itself concisely in dreams, fantasies, ideas, fairy tales and myths. And it is with this that Lietaer connects the centuries-old Taoistic concept of yin and yang, the two elements that characterise the fundamental order of the world. Yin and yang stand for polarities like earth–sky, shadows–light, cooperation–rivalry, egalitarian–hierarchical, intuitive–rational, feminine–masculine and so on.

What is an archetype?

The term archetype is closely connected with the collective unconscious. Jung assumes that the archetypes (primal mental images) are expressions of constantly recurring experiences in humanity, a willingness to repeatedly reproduce the same or similar mystical ideas. Thus a child bears within himself not only the image of his personal mother but also an inner image of what is generally maternal. This is made up of experiences which children have had with maternal figures since time immemorial.

Lietaer's working definition, on the other hand, is simply: "An archetype is a recurring image which structures a person's feelings and behaviour. An archetype can be observed independently of time and civilisation." ("Mysterium Geld", The Mystery of Money, p 22).

Jung, on the other hand, emphasises the aspects of the archetypes that emotionally take possession and the way in which they delude consciousness. That is important in connection with money, a subject that is very highly emotionally charged. According to Jung, all of mankind's strongest ideas go back to archetypes. All scientific, philosophical and religious ideas are variants of primal ideas that have arisen by adaptation and conscious use. It is through them that the consciousness creatively translates the world of the interior into the exterior. Seen in this way, the currency system of a society – and that includes our own – is also a method of projecting largely unconscious archetypal forces onto the visible world.

Four archetypes essentially make up the human being, as Jung's "quaternio" (a whole made up of four units) shows:

1. the Ruler (the higher self, protection, judges)
2. the Warrior (discipline, asceticism, strength)
3. the Lover (sensual pleasures, empathy, art)
4. the Magician (knowledge, technology, religion, healers)

Lietaer adds the fifth – forgotten – feminine archetype to these four: the Great Mother, the archetype of the provider, who produces, feeds and rules over the life and death of her children.

What lies in the shadow threatens us

The concept of shadow has its origin in one of Jung's dreams. In it he is walking in the fog against a powerful storm. He holds in his hands a small light which he has to protect at all costs. Suddenly he sees behind him a huge black shape. On waking up Jung recognises the little light as his consciousness and the black shape as his shadow.

Bernard Lietaer now defines the shadow as the way in which an archetype manifests itself when it is repressed. While as a consequence the "normal" ruler – like, for example, King Solomon – rules, judges and protects, this archetype expresses itself in two polar shadows in a person who suppresses his Ruler inside himself: either it makes the person a Tyrant or a Weakling. Related to the Taoistic concept, one shadow is situated in the area of the yang and the other in that of the yin. The yang shadow inflates the ego: the Tyrant has an excess of a Ruler's attributes. The yin shadow weakens the ego: the Weakling reveals a lack of a Ruler's qualities. Between the two shadows of an archetype there is always a direct fear relationship: the Tyrant is afraid of acting weakly and the Weakling is frightened of appearing tyrannical.

Every archetype has a yin and a yang shadow: in the Warrior it is the masochist or the sadist, in the Lover impotence or addiction, in the Magician the unconsidered Dionysiac energy or the Apollonian hyper-rationality.

Friend or foe?

C G Jung has pointed out that the modern, rational person tends to negate the power of archaic symbols and archetypes, because, when seen rationally, they appear to be insignificant. But this is foolish, because they are important constituents of our psychological nature and vital forces in building up human society. If they were suppressed their energy would disappear into the unconscious with incalculable consequences. So tendencies that are suppressed form an ever-

present and potentially destructive "shadow" of our consciousness. But the shadow is only a foe as long as it remains in the unconscious. If we can consciously integrate it into our personality our ego is no longer ruled by it, but can freely develop: the shadow switches from foe to friend.

Money and the archetype that has disappeared

Money arouses envy, admiration, pride and disgust. So our monetary system is bound up with strong emotions. And it has obvious shadow aspects. Some endeavour to accumulate wealth incessantly. Others have to fear that their money will run out, that they will go bankrupt or become impoverished. Consequently fear and greed characterise our collective feelings in relation to money as long as we do not question them: in the matter of currency systems we are very unconscious. The emotional effect of currencies and their shadow polarities – greed on the yang side and fear of a scarcity on the yin side – suggest, however, that here a repressed archetype is at work.

Since Bernard Lietaer, however, cannot get to the root of the way people are seen to handle money using Jung's four archetypes he follows up clues like a detective that might help him to solve the mystery. He asks, for example, which archetype has the shadow sides of greed and fear of a shortage of money. His answer: the obvious shadows of our currencies suggest that here the archetype of the Great Mother – largely forgotten in our society – is repressed, since greed and scarcity belong as shadows to the feminine archetype, which symbolises fertility and abundance.

Today the shadows of the Great Mother are an unconscious, but quite natural, part of the monetary system. Not without good reason did Adam Smith, whose economic theory from the 18th century dominates economics to this day, say that money was scarce, as if this were the most normal thing in the world.

The presence of the Great Mother in early currencies

Not always has the feminine principle been situated so much in the shadow as it is in the case of our money. Since earliest times the archetype of the Great Mother, of the fertile feminine principle, has been documented in portraits. She was often depicted as a pregnant woman with firm breasts like the famous Venus of Willendorf (early Palaeolithic age, about 30,000 BC). The unrestricted worship of the Great Goddess lasted until around 3000 BC. It is logical that in a society that collectively regarded as holy and worshipped the feminine the feminine archetype also became visible in the currency – which, of course, represents a mirror of the collective attitude to life.

Cattle were one of the first means of payment. In the 8th century BC Homer always expressed wealth in head of cattle. Our word "pecuniary" comes from pecus (Latin for cattle) and the term "capital" is derived from capus (Latin for head). Even today the wealth of a cattle breeder is measured by the number of cows he owns. But in the old myths the symbol of the cow is closely tied up with the Great Creator and Mother. In ancient Egypt, for example, she was called "Hathor," the goddess of beauty and abundance, whose full udders were believed to be responsible for the creation of the Milky Way. She is depicted with cow's ears and each day gives birth to the sun, her "golden calf."

The cowry shell, too, one of the oldest and longest used currencies, bears feminine attributes. Its shape is like that of a vulva. It comes from the water, a feminine element, and serves as a vessel for a living creature. Traditionally it was associated with wealth and happiness, sexual fulfilment and fertility.

In China the first metal coins from the Bronze Age also integrated the feminine element. These coins are round with a square hole in the middle, so that they could be tied together for trade and transport. In the 11th century BC the description "huan fa" for the coins as "square in the centre and round on the outside" was very widespread. The reason for the rectangular hole – it would have been easier to make a round one – is to be found in its symbolism: in the Taoistic tradition the circle stands for the sky, a yang symbol, and the square for the yin element, the earth. Here Mother Earth still lay at the centre of money.

The repression of the feminine element as the price for western civilisation

If we now examine the symbolism of the first large trading currency and principal silver coin of the Greek world, the drachma, we see that here a masculine element is already dominant. For the name of the coin is derived from " what you can grasp with your hand" and goes back to the iron spearheads which circulated before coins, when tools were used as money.

Indeed, the gradual repression of the feminine element can be traced through the whole history of the western world: the Indo-European invasions beginning in the 3rd millennium BC resulted in the settled, peaceful, earthbound matriarchal civilisations being conquered by male-orientated, mobile and belligerent societies. The defeated men were killed off and the women raped and enslaved.

In Mesopotamia, too, a patriarchal society prevailed from the 3rd millennium BC in a process lasting over 2500 years. It went hand in hand with the private subjugation of women. The dependence of the men on the king and the state administration was compensated by the dominant position of men as heads of families.

Like all Indo-Europeans, the Greeks, too, were familiar with patriarchal myths, for they developed, among other things, the rational way of thinking, which repressed the senses in favour of reason and intellect – but denied that women possessed intellectual abilities.

The Jews were now the first nation to be guided by a book, the Holy Scripture. It presented the idea of a single male God, who created the world solely through the power of the word, without the help of the feminine principle. The feminine is totally demonised in the story of Adam and Eve, which makes the serpent – an ancient symbol of the Great Goddess – the cause of the Fall.

With the New Testament God's position as the absolute male monarch was firmly established – since then only male priests have been able to serve him. The archetypal triad, for example, of Isis – Osiris – Horus in Egypt, adopted a purely male form in the Holy Trinity of God the Father – the Son – the Holy Ghost. The only woman remaining is the Virgin Mary. Her Immaculate Conception, however, makes her unattainable for real women.

After the Reformation the last vestiges of the feminine disappeared from part of Christianity together with the adoration of Mary and pictures of saints. The emotional linkage to the picture of feminine holiness was severed. Parallel to this, the witch hunts dealt the death blow to the old values of the Goddess – respect for nature and the body. From now on the male hero was the ideal: he dominates our thinking to this day as crusader, samurai or superman, as king, magician, priest, scientist or missionary.

Five thousand years of patriarchal rule have, therefore, shaped a way of thinking which separates the spirit from the body and reason from nature, and that down to the last detail. For the Hero had

to learn to bear pain in silence. Thus with the passage of time he lost the feeling for his body and his feelings generally – and thus for the feminine in himself and in nature.

Yang currencies

The systematic repression of the feminine archetype has a great impact on the monetary system of a society. For if the feminine archetype is ousted currencies arise with the yang features of hierarchy, concentration, control and competition. They bear interest and all of them have in common that they favour the accumulation of money by a small elite.

The gold and silver coins that developed in western civilisation and our conventional, centrally controlled national currencies are typical yang currencies. A hierarchically structured authority (state, central bank) created them from nothing. Because they bear interest, they encourage hoarding and drive the competitive economy. Moreover, handling them also produces feelings of greed and fear of scarcity on the financial markets. And these collective perceptions are – according to Lietaer – nothing but the shadows of the Great Mother, of the repressed feminine archetype.

But as so often, one person's sorrow is another's joy: the currencies of the highly developed patriarchal civilisations are – much to the pleasure of the numismatists – made of lasting materials and decorated with beautiful symbols which glorify a ruler, a town or an empire.

Yin currencies

In the few societies which, unlike ours, honour the feminine, two complementary currency systems can and could frequently be observed coming into existence, namely a yang currency for long-distance trade and a yin currency for local use. The yin currency here operates purely as a means of exchange and payment. It circulates on all levels of society without restriction, is available to all and results in long-term investments.

Let us take an example from history: the bracteates of the high gothic (11th-13th centuries) were recalled every year and replaced by new ones with a tax collected in the process. So it was not worth hoarding this money. At the same time the people revered the Virgin Mary, especially as the Black Madonna, and built hundreds of cathedrals in her honour. Cathedrals are, in turn, the prototypes of a long-term investment, as they are built over several generations.

A similar means of payment, the ostrakon, or potsherd – actually a receipt for the goods to be stored – are also found in Egypt of the 13th century BC. The value of these receipts decreased in the course of the years, because the costs of storing the food were deducted. So here, too, there was no incentive to hoard. Parallel to this women enjoyed a high status and there were female deities.

Yin currencies have essentially four effects:

1. They bring about economic prosperity for broad sections of society.
2. They encourage cooperation and investments with long-term prospects.
3. They emerge in societies in which the feminine is honoured.
4. They are a forerunner of the present-day movement for local currencies, like, for example, Time Dollars.

The money of the future

Bernard Lietaer observes that civilisations disappear or change when they come up against the archetype they repress. The peace-loving archaic civilisations, for example, fell victim to the Indo-European warriors because they had not developed their aggressive nature. Our civilisation also finds itself in a state of upheaval, because the repressed feminine archetype has awoken. The present crisis of the West is characterised by the return of the feminine. The purely masculine and reason-orientated way of thinking, although admittedly our technical and many cultural developments would have been impossible without it, is losing its absolute claim. A fundamental change in consciousness has set in. It can be seen in the feminist movement, in a heightened environmental awareness, in the interest in holistic medicine or in the chaos theory in physics. Hierarchical structures are being replaced by networks (internet). In addition to intellectual intelligence emotional intelligence is now being discovered and called for.

In brief, we are resorting to the yin energies, which up to now our civilisation has rejected. This also manifests itself in the currency system: the complementary local currencies have exploded, so that today there are over 2500 yin currencies.

Lietaer stresses, however, that a balance between the yin and yang economy is indispensable if the economy is to function sustainably. His model for the integrated economy of the future therefore comprises two complementary cycles: a national currency for business transactions and alongside it complementary currencies for transactions inside the community to promote it.

With his books Lietaer essentially wants to show that we can change our currency systems positively if we become aware of the way money works. How he proposes achieving his aim – creating sustainable prosperity for us and future generations – is certainly worth reading.

On the author

Bernard A. Lietaer knows our monetary system better than most. He is committed to sustainability and a better future for the currency system as well. In the seventies he advised the Peruvian Government on optimising currency transactions. During the five years when he worked at the Belgian Central Bank he was responsible for the introduction of the ECU. After working as the President of the Electronic Payment System in Belgium he managed a successful hedge fund from 1987 to 1991. Today he is again devoting himself to research and has written numerous controversial books on the subject of money. He currently teaches archetypal psychology at Sonoma University and sustainable management at the Institute for Sustainable Resources and Agriculture of Berkeley University. He is the author of the books "Die Welt des Geldes" (The World of Money), published by Arena Verlag, Würzburg, 2001; "Das Geld der Zukunft" (The Future of Money: Beyond Greed and Scarcity), published by Bertelsmann, 1999; and "Mysterium Geld" (The Mystery of Money), published by Riemann/Bertelsmann, 2000.