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À LA SESSION D'ERANOS À ASCONA

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ERANOS 56-1987

RUDOLF RITSEMA

THE ORIGINS AND OPUS OF ERANOS:

Reflections  
at the 5th Conference

1. *The Story in Synopsis*

Erano was founded by Olga Froebe-Kapteyn, who was born of Dutch parents in London in 1881. In her forties, after she had become a widow, her father bought her a property near Ascona on the Lago Maggiore with a centuries-old peasant house at its center, Casa Gabriella.

In the following years, she used to invite poets, thinkers and painters to stay there for periods of creative work: a way of patronizing spiritual labour that would grow to become her lifework. In the nineteen-twenties, while she was still searching for her task in life, her interest in philosophy, the religions of India and the Far East, and in depth psychology developed into a main concern. It was her intuition that still unseen and unformulated spiritual currents needed open space to unfold and manifest themselves. She wanted to provide for these as yet unknown forces and had a kind of premonition that she would become active in relation to her interests but had, as yet, no precise idea as to the form such activity might take. Her intuition moved her to build a lecture-hall in 1928, years before she knew what was going to take place there. A year later she built another house for her guests on the same ground, which was given the name of 'Shanti', Sanskrit for 'peace'. After some years of hesitation, she conceived the idea of organizing conferences where East and West might meet. When she consulted the historian of religions Rudolf Otto about her project, he suggested the name 'Erano'.

After three conferences, Olga Froebe-Kapteyn thought that the task of Eranos had been fulfilled and announced that the 1935 meeting would be the last. Both speakers and audience reacted very strongly and made her realize that Eranos already had a dynamic of its own. A few years later, when the 1940 program broke down due to the war, she decided not to act but rather to be ready for what the situation might bring up. It happened that two of the scheduled speakers had not been called up for military service. The mathematician and neoplatonist Andreas Speiser and Carl Gustav Jung decided spontaneously to come to Ascona with a little group, and together they improvised a meeting in the middle of Europe in turmoil. This happening convinced Olga Froebe-Kapteyn that her relation to Eranos had changed; though she had initiated it, she was now at the service of the spirit that moved the work.

At the 1949 conference, the Dutch philosopher of religion Gerardus van der Leeuw and C. G. Jung meditated about the then fifteen years of Eranos, and came to the conclusion that there must be a specific yet unknown spirit of the spot, to whom they dedicated a little stone monument next to Casa Gabriella which was sculpted by Paul Speck: *Genio loci ignoto* - To the unknown spirit of this place. When, before Olga Froebe-Kapteyn's death in 1962, she entrusted the work to Adolf Portmann and me, we were at a loss as to whether or not this "unknown spirit" was linked to her actual life. In that quite uncertain situation Adolf Portmann and I agreed that we should take the risk. My wife Catherine and I decided to dedicate our common life to that unknown spirit and have served it ever since to the best of our ability. The subsequent 25 years have proved its vitality beyond every expectation.

The name of these conferences, *Eranos*, is a Greek word that applies to a spiritual feast resulting from the contributions of the participants. In the colloquial language of today we might call it a surprise-party, in so far as none of the lecturers knows beforehand what the others will present and what pattern will result from the whole series of lectures. Thus the name Eranos, as an absence of program,

is the only program of 55 years of these conferences. The topic of each of the actual meetings has never been programmatic, but was rather conceived as a crystallization-point for the contributions of the individual speakers. Neither the single lectures nor the opus of Eranos as a whole have ever aimed at specific conclusions, but rather at providing further openings in many directions.

The theme and list of speakers for the first conference were the result of an free exchange between Olga Froebe-Kapteyn and her consultants Rudolf Otto and Carl Gustav Jung. This informal procedure has been followed through the years, the original consultants suggesting other consultants and so on. These advisors have never formed an institutionalized committee, but have always been a moving group from the midst of which propositions for new topics and future speakers evolved.

This particular procedure kept Eranos in contact with the spiritual currents in different countries and continents as well as in various fields of knowledge. It resulted in an organic growth and unfolding that revealed from year to year further aspects of what appeared to be the essence of Eranos. Many of the potentials of the venture initiated by Olga Froebe-Kapteyn 55 years ago have become visible in the over 600 lectures preserved in the collection of the yearbooks, the 'Corpus Eranos.'

A few years ago, celebrating half a century of Eranos' existence, Gilbert Durand pointed out in his lecture that the longevity and impact of this spiritual endeavour reflect the "genius of the spot" and the specific propitiousness of the hour of its birth.<sup>1</sup> To this we must add that the actual realization requires the adequate person. The opus of Eranos in its duration and concreteness, as the 55 volumes of its yearbooks show, proves that Olga Froebe-Kapteyn was the right person to seize the propitious moment and thereby open the way for the *genius loci*, the spirit of the place. Giving birth is the essential feminine privilege and therefore it is most appropriate that a woman should have fulfilled the human part in the triad

<sup>1</sup> Gilbert Durand, "Le génie du lieu et les heures propices" in *Eranos 51-1982*, pp. 243-277.

of spirit, moment, and action; this triad of the *genius loci*, the propitious hour, and the foundress gave birth to Eranos. Nothing could have been more appropriate than that the woman who gave it birth should hand Eranos over to a couple. Only a man and a woman together can do justice to the requirements of a truly human endeavour.

## 2. *The Essence of the Opus*

At the end of the present conference Eranos will be on the threshold of its 56th year of existence. According to a Western astrological tradition, this Saturn-year marks the completion of a full cycle of life.<sup>2</sup> Before a new cycle starts, it may be appropriate to look over the many facets of the phenomenon Eranos. We can distinguish three main currents of thought originating in the early 20th century that seem to merge into its opus. These can be located in three decisive encounters in Olga Froebe-Kapreyn's life: with Richard Wilhelm, Rudolf Otto, and Carl Gustav Jung. In the process of merging, the thought of these three men interacted, thereby initiating a new articulation of its potential.

The importance of Richard Wilhelm's work goes far beyond his translations of Chinese philosophical and religious texts. Though he set out as a missionary to the Far East, he discovered there extra-European spiritual values that compensated underdeveloped aspects of European culture. Transformed by this experience, he dedicated his life to the inclusion of Far Eastern thought in the world view of the West. His work marks a turning-point from the academic study of extra-European thought as an ethnological object to meeting other cultures on a level of equality, as subjects in their own right. The importance of the influence of his work upon Olga

<sup>2</sup> In the system of symbolic correspondences between the years of life and the planets, the seven year period from 49 to 56 is attributed to Saturn. Each of these seven years, in turn, corresponds to one of the seven ancient planets. Thus the 56th year is the Saturn-year that brings the Saturn-period to a close. It thus completes an entire cycle of life.

Froebe-Kapreyn's endeavour appears in the original subtitle of Eranos: "A meeting place of East and West."

In his pioneering works the historian of religion Rudolf Otto moved the theocentric notion of religion to a human-centered view.<sup>3</sup> His work marks the change from the study of theological concepts to a view of religion as a specific form of human experience, the quality of which he defined as the Numinous, *numinosum*.

The third of these decisive encounters was with Carl Gustav Jung. His research and his work with patients during the first two decades of this century led him to move beyond the conscious and unconscious aspects of the individual life story. His move into the realm of archetypes and of the meta-psychical, in which the human psyche and consciousness are embedded, put man in a new perspective and promised an altogether new anthropology. Around 1930, he more and more felt the need to confront his new ways of thought with the research done in many different fields of science. Olga Froebe-Kapreyn's initiative thus coincided with a decisive phase in the life of Jung, as Aniela Jaffé<sup>4</sup> reports in her lecture at the 1975 Eranos Conference.

Of these three men only Jung contributed to the actual Eranos Conferences. Richard Wilhelm, who died a few years before Eranos started, gave it a fundamental direction through his work, particularly through his translation of the *Yi Ching*.<sup>5</sup> Rudolf Otto, who gave the projected conferences the programmatic name of Eranos, was already too ill to attend the conference itself. For some time he had been planning a similar enterprise in accord with his own studies in the mysticism of the Orient and the Occident. The

<sup>3</sup> cf. Engl. translation: Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 2nd. ed. London 1950.

<sup>4</sup> Engl. translation: Aniela Jaffé, "C. G. Jung and the Eranos Conferences" in *Spring 1977*, Zürich, pp. 201-212.

<sup>5</sup> *The I Ching or Book of Changes, The Richard Wilhelm Translation rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes*. Bollingen Series XIX, New York 1950.

coincidence with Olga Froebe-Kapreyn's project was so obvious that he decided to pass on to her his lists of potential speakers and themes. In 1933 she then organized the first Eranos Conference. In the hidden course of events this year was obviously a propitious moment, though historically it was rather ominous.

We can distinguish two levels in the Eranos phenomenon. The manifest aspect, which we might call the exoteric, materialised in the collection of 55 Yearbooks that contain over 600 single essays of perennial relevance. These volumes stand as a monument of learning that justifies the endeavour of Eranos over so many years. In this collection each article is a valuable contribution to its own field of research, the relevance of which does not necessarily depend upon their being part of Eranos. Each stands on its own, though all of them contribute to the message of Eranos. However, we are more concerned here with the inner side of this story, its esoteric aspect, which at first sight is less conspicuous. This specific Eranos-quality underlies in one way or another each of that extraordinary variety of studies. A real understanding of the phenomenon of Eranos should include this more hidden aspect.

We know from biology and psychology that the early stages of a living being or an organic process prefigure the unfolding of its inherent possibilities. Jung's method of proceeding from spontaneous manifestations to the understanding of unseen, i.e., unconscious processes, may also be an adequate approach to the inner story of Eranos. In this sense, we may expect to find a clue to the opus of Eranos in the titles of Jung's first lectures here. Their place in the story of Eranos seems similar to that of initial dreams in a psychotherapeutic process or children's dreams with respect to their later life-stories.

The title of Jung's lecture at the first Eranos Conference<sup>6</sup> reads in German: "Zur Empirie des Individuationsprozesses," which we may render as: "The Empirical Phenomenon of the Individuation Process of Individuation" in CW 9/I.

Process." Now, 55 years later, the meaning of the key-terms in this title appear to go far beyond that lecture. Without anybody knowing it at the time, they forecast, as it were, the program that would unfold in the opus of Eranos. "Empirie" is the term Jung used to emphasize that his method was phenomenological rather than proceeding from any philosophical system. An unbiased approach to the phenomena we experience is a distinctive feature of the research which has been presented at Eranos. This applies to the approach to mythological images and stories of Mircea Eliade and Karl Kerényi, as well as to the way in which Heinrich Zimmer, Gershom Scholem, Ernst Benz and Henry Corbin dealt with religious manifestations in Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Through this approach trembling with fear, 'tremendousness', was eliminated from the numinous root of religious experience. The religious function was seen in its simplest form: "Man and the Invisible," in Jean Servier's words.<sup>7</sup> In depth psychology, this insistence on the empirical phenomenon culminated in James Hillman's plea for the "Speech of the Soul", as different in essence from psychological language, and for the prevalence of the psychic image over interpretation.<sup>8</sup>

The second term in Jung's title, individuation-process, focuses upon the individual human being. It leads us to another distinctive characteristic of the work done at Eranos. Underlying all the contributions to the corpus Eranos is the understanding that the materials we deal with are the images and concepts in our psyche. These images and concepts are the material out of which the contents of our consciousness are shaped. The innumerable variety of the individual human being, the realm of consciousness, is the place where things are known.

Jung entitled his second Eranos lecture<sup>9</sup>, in 1934: "About the Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious." With these terms, Jung pointed beyond psychology to fundamentals that would prove

<sup>7</sup> cf. Jean Servier, *L'homme et l'Invisible*, Paris 1964.

<sup>8</sup> cf. James Hillman, "The Language of Psychology and the Speech of the Soul" in *Eranos* 37-1968, pp. 299-356.

<sup>9</sup> English translation in CW 9/I.

extraordinarily fertile in the following decades. When he coined the term "collective unconscious," Jung thought of it as a mere description of the area of universal images. But it turned out that his thought expanded far beyond his original concept, a development that paralleled the growth of Eranos. We can see now that the phenomenological approach in all the work presented at Eranos articulated around images carrying numinous energy, whether or not they were called archetypes. This work increasingly emphasized the field-structure articulated by heterogeneous centers of energy, in contrast to the causal sequence of events which forms the basis of Western science.

Twelve years later, in his 1946 Eranos lecture, Jung described the shift in his thought since 1934 as follows:

In my previous writings I have always treated archetypal phenomena as psychic, because the material [to be expounded or investigated] was concerned solely with ideas and images. The psychoid nature of the archetype as put forward here, does not contradict these earlier formulations: it only means a further degree of conceptual differentiation. . . .

*Eranos 14-1946*, p. 462; also CW 8, § 419

Here Jung defined the archetypes which form the background of psychic images as autonomous, non-psychic, or as he called it, psychoid factors. This differentiation between the non-psychic archetypes and the psychic images they give rise to in the human soul became, through the contributions of Henry Corbin, a dominant feature of the Eranos Opus during the subsequent 30 years. Corbin introduced the term "the Imaginal," *mundus imaginabilis*, to describe the realm of images mediating between the unfathomable, unknowable spiritual agencies — Gods, angels and other archetypes — and the human psyche.<sup>10</sup> The Imaginal is the mediator between the realm of the time-less, the a-historical, the ever-present, and the realm of individual consciousness, the here and now. Corbin connected religious phenomenology with Jung's psychological differentiation and thus provided the ground for James Hillman's *Mundus Imaginabilis* or the Imaginary and the Imaginal<sup>11</sup> in *Spring 1972*, Zürich, pp. 1-19.

man's shift from 'analytical' to 'archetypal' in the field of depth psychology.<sup>11</sup>

Further on, in the same 1946 lecture, Jung extended the before mentioned differentiation in another direction:

Matter and spirit both appear in the psychic realm. . . . The ultimate nature of both is transcendental, that is beyond imagination ["unvorstellbar" in the original], since the psyche and its contents are the only reality to which we have immediate access, that is, without an intermediary ["die einzige Wirklichkeit, die uns unmittelbar gegeben ist" in the original].

*Eranos 14-1946*, p. 463; also CW 8, § 420

This description of man's place emphasizes the importance and the scope of the psyche with respect to *both* the archetypal, or spiritual, world and the material, or physical, world. With this statement, Jung forecast the inclusion of natural science in the opus of Eranos.

This differentiation between the physical universe, unknowable in its essence, and the psychic concepts it produces is the foundation of the opening towards the domain of the sciences of the last forty years of Eranos. This opening was marked by the precision and integrity of Adolf Portmann's scientific approach. Since 1946 his contributions, as well as those of numerous other scientists, demonstrated that the opus of Eranos was open to the psychoid world of matter much as to of that of the spirit.

The distinction between the psychic concepts of the physical world and the transcendental world of matter on which they are based was already foreshadowed by an early involvement with alchemy, as in Rudolf Bernoulli's 1935 lecture and Jung's 1936 presentation.<sup>12</sup> This distinction characterizes all the presentations at Eranos in the field of physics and natural science, culminating last year in Herbert Pietschmann's precise analysis of the hitherto

<sup>11</sup> cf. James Hillman, "Why Archetypal? Psychology?" in *Spring 1970*, Zürich, S. 212-219; the same, *Archetypal Psychology: A Brief Account*, Dallas 1983.

<sup>12</sup> Engl. translations: Bernoulli in *Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks 4*, Bollingen Series xxx 4, New York 1960; Jung in CW 12.

widely ignored premises of Western physics.<sup>13</sup> Such a precise evaluation of the limits of the Western position enables us, in turn, to properly value the significance of Far-Eastern science: one view takes phenomena into account that the other disregards, or leaves in the shadow. In this context, Manfred Porkert could demonstrate that Western and Far Eastern science both deal with the psychic reflection of the unknowable psychoid. The Far Eastern inductive-synthetic world view is an *image* that has the same value and significance as the Western causal-analytical *concept* of the world.<sup>14</sup> These two systems reflect, respectively, a qualitative approach through the Imaginal, *mundus imaginalis*, and a quantitative approach through the Rational, *mundus intellectualis*. Our images and concepts of the psychoid are neither scientific nor un-scientific in themselves. It is the method that is scientific in so far as it leads to a coherent, verifiable concept or theory. Porkert's medical work has shown that the polarity of Western *concept* and Chinese *image* of man and their respective emphasis upon organ or function, are equally true and necessary. They form a polarity of incompatible yet complementary images.

These incompatible approaches have as common ground the human individual to whom choice belongs. Jung emphasized this at the end of his last major work, *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (1956):

The world inside and outside ourselves rests on a transcendental background . . . . A psychological approach to these matters draws man . . . into the center of the picture as the measure of all things.

CW 14/2, §§442, 444

In accordance with this statement, all the themes of the Eranos Conferences from 1947, immediately after Jung's crucial 1946 lecture, until the death of Olga Froebe-Kapteyn in 1962 have in their titles 'man,' *der Mensch*. Here are the roots of the altogether new

13 Herbert Pietschmann, "Die Sicherheit der Naturgesetze: Polarität von Mensch und Kosmos" in *Eranos* 55-1986, pp. 85-108.

14 cf. Manfred Porkert, "Anschaulichkeit, Sinnlichkeit, Bildlichkeit als Voraussetzung für die Integrierbarkeit wissenschaftlicher Theorien" in *Eranos* 48-1979, pp. 101-132.

anthropology that has marked Eranos since Gilbert Durand joined it in 1964. His fundamental book carries the programmatic title: *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginal*.<sup>15</sup> He has been a leader in breaking up the monolithic concept of man in Western tradition, and his Eranos lectures show how this polyfaceted view sets free a variety of potentials in man. His view of the human being as the field of cultural and artistic activity fulfils the premonition of Herbert Read, who foresaw "a new humanism" that would result from the opus of Eranos.<sup>16</sup>

Olga Froebe-Kapteyn's initiative at the beginning of the nineteen-thirties resulted from a critique of the Western cultural situation and a dissatisfaction with the one-sidedness of the academic world: thus from the outset Eranos has been an endeavour against the stream. This critical attitude is a characteristic trait of Eranos and has kept it at a distance from ephemeral trends and true to itself. In the most recent decade, this ethical involvement has been expressed in the contributions of Jean Brun.<sup>17</sup> His incorruptible ethical standpoint keeps him away from any compromise with the destructive patterns of the Western cultural scene. He lays its roots bare and thus clears the way for impulses of renewal.

The biologist Adolf Portmann, whose anthropological work merged into this stream of the multifarious images of man, questioned the essence of the realm of living beings again and again. His last Eranos lecture, exactly 10 years ago, summarized his answer: "Evolution: the Openness of Life."<sup>18</sup> In conformity with the metaphor of Eranos as a living organism, we may apply this title to Olga Froebe-Kapteyn's position when she started Eranos as an open space for research and exchange. We may also see it as an anticipa-

<sup>15</sup> Gilbert Durand, *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire, Introduction à l'archéologie générale*, Paris 1963.

<sup>16</sup> Herbert Read, "The creative nature of Humanism" in *Eranos* 26-1957, pp. 315-350.

<sup>17</sup> cf. *Eranos* 44-1975 and *Eranos* 46-1977 to *Eranos* 56-1987.

<sup>18</sup> Adolf Portmann, "Evolution: Das Offene des Lebens" in *Eranos* 46-1977, pp. 501-517.

tion of the position in which we, her successors, now find ourselves as we approach the end of Eranos' first life-cycle. It is openness that carries the promise of further development.

In accordance with this year's Eranos theme we are here and now at a crossroads. At this point we must open ourselves up to the still unknown pattern contained in this theme as it will unfold in the lectures of the coming ten days. However, we can prepare ourselves for this openness, in order that it may be bestowed upon us. Martin Buber, one of the early Eranos speakers, tells a Hassidic story<sup>19</sup> which gives an answer to the question of why it reads in the Bible: "... and these words shall be upon thine heart," rather than, as one might expect, *in* thine heart. Rabbi Mendel from Kozk said:

It is because the heart is at times closed, but the words lay upon it, and then, at certain holy moments it opens and they fall into its depths.

EPilogue  
at the end of the conference

In the short overview presented at the opening session we outlined the developments that resulted from the meeting of two distinct worlds: the world of thought personified by Richard Wilhelm, Rudolf Otto, and Carl Gustav Jung, and the world of the feminine capacity to engender embodied by Olga Froebe-Kapreyn.

In the year following this 55th Conference, which anticipates the upcoming moment of completion of the traditional life cycle, we might want to go back again to the hour of Eranos' birth, to ask where its as yet unfulfilled potentials lie.<sup>20</sup> As still unrealized, these potentials may serve us as openings to the future. However, we must admit that an open future cannot, by definition, be pinned

down to the here and now. The future remains open, and Openness, as we learned from Adolf Portmann, is an essential feature of any process of growth, whether it is the evolution of life, human development, or the unfolding manifestation of the Opus of Eranos.<sup>21</sup>

19 Martin Buber, *Die Erzählungen der Chassidim*, Zürich 1949, p. 786.

20 For details about the unrealized potential of Eranos and future perspectives see: Rudolf Ritsema, "Encompassing Versatility: Keystone of the Eranos Project" in *Eranos 57-1988* (forthcoming).

21 The author is greatly indebted to Stephen Karcher for his editorial assistance.