



## Puer-et-Senex



Sooner or later everything runs into its opposite.

### Introduction

This discussion begins with the concept of **enantiodromia**. This term suggests the following: **“sooner or later everything runs into its opposite”** (Jung, 1966, p. 72). This running into the opposite then becomes an opportunity for transformation or a platform for devastation. It is being proposed here-in that this “opposite” will most productively be encountered if it is addressed intra-psychically and not inter-personally or systematically as a projection or split-off part of the self. Within the corporate structure runs a dynamic that is identified by leaving one with the feeling that things are impermanent and fleeting. There is



the spoken experience that when someone is in “reality” and has a deep experience they lose everything that was moments before residing in their awareness as a “potential.” This is revealed through the stated belief that everyone’s job is impermanent and that they could lose their position at any moment. It is possible that:

- 1.) this is a subjective experience of an archetypal energy,
- 2.) that this energy flows throughout the systematic functioning of the company,
- 3.) that this energy is seeking embodiment. How this dynamic can productively be embodied is the topic of the following discussion.

### Role Function: Senex and the Puer

Within the day-to-day functioning of the corporation there are indications of an impending struggle between polar opposites. This struggle can be placed in the metaphor or an archetypal dynamic and can be addressed as a struggle between the old man (senex) and the young boy (puer). The senex can be understood as an expression of the old man who has lived life, knows how things should be done, can break down life into manageable chunks of understanding, and is put off by change that he cannot control; “the senex, (or) the old man, is . . . a worn-out image of God and world order” (Marie-Louise von Franz, 1970, p. 291).

The puer or young man represents the possibility of an inner and creative renewal. The puer carries the image of the “new God” and brings inspiration and possibility. This renewal is expressed in the puer’s youthful ability to experience and realize the self in every moment. However, this youthfulness is also tied to the unconscious embrace of the mother. For emergence into manhood, it is necessary to have both enough ego strength and the ability to differentiate from the anima or feminine side as expressed through the mother. This is a separation from the maternal aspects of the feminine and a coming into awareness of the feminine as the “other” and in relationship with the anima as an aspect of



the self, as an adult. (If the puer energy is left to the unconscious, bound to the mother, entangled with the father, and not actualized into manhood it can ultimately have dissolving and destructive effects).

The puer can both be inspired by the senex as well as threatened. The senex can at one time be inspired by the youth of the puer as well as grieved and threatened by the perceived loss of his internal youthfulness. This relationship between these two roles can easily be played out in a counterproductive manner when individuals become identified with one of these roles. He or she can become defensive of these roles. (Keep in mind that we are talking about the archetype and the role function of the senex and the puer and the degree of potential identification with them and not about individuals within this company).

Both Carl Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz came to the conclusion that in for the young man to move into adulthood, the best and perhaps the only way to do so, was through work (Van Franz, 1970, p. 5). However, if the puer has yet to develop the ego strength to stick to task and preserver through the drudgery associated with any work endeavor, there can be problems. The burden of the workload can push the puer down into a dissolved and ineffective state. In turn, when there is interest on behalf of the puer and the work encourages his instincts and natural flow then, of course, production is easier and growth more gentle.

### Senex–Puer Polarity

The questions we are addressing are related to the dynamic when the boy energy and the old man energy are separated and perceived as separate from each other. It is problematic when the puer and the senex are perceived as other than each of them being two heads of the same coin. When they are perceived as separated and when individuals within the corporate system are imagined to be carrying one of the polar opposites, then the corporate entity is in danger of enacting a mythological struggle. This brings to the fore the necessity for understanding how the senex affects the development of the ego strength



of the puer! And what is the potential for regression and counterproductive development within the organizational structure verses growth development, and transformation, when these two positions are enacted individually and externally?

This discussion is about the relationship between; “Father Time” and “Eternal Youth.” To be involved with these figures as separated archetypal energies is to be drawn into an enactment of history itself:

To be identified with either is to be dominate by an archetypal attitude towards history: the puer who transcends history and; leaps out of time, and is as such a-historical, or anti-historical in protest and revolt; or the senex who is an image of history itself and of the permanent truth revealed through history. (Hillman, 1979, pp. 8-9)

From an archetypal point of view, the senex and the puer are each important components of the very natural cycle of development. “Any attitude as it comes into being can take on the wings of the puer and streak skyward; any attitude as it passes its ripeness can lose touch with revelation, cling to power, and be out of (balance)” (Hillman, 1979, pp. 9-10). From this description we can see that all things; new thoughts, inspirations, and possibilities will become conceptualize, embodied, grow old, and pass into history. How this happens and that it is accomplished because of the psyche’s own timing, is what is so important. This needs to be a natural progression and by in large an internal and intra-psychic experience.

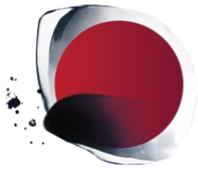
The senex and puer can be seen as polar opposites, yet each informs and is held in tension by the other. The holding of this tension with the understanding that both are necessary requires a capacity for understanding the psychology of all polarities and that they hold the potential for conflicting antithesis and harmonious co-operation in any given moment. This suggests the capacity to embrace both the ambivalent and the paradoxical nature of the psyche, “embracing both spirit and nature, psyche and matter,



consciousness and unconsciousness; in it the yea and nay are one” (Hillman, 1979, p.12). To expect that the daily functioning of the corporation can be the platform or the “body” within which these dynamics seek a balance is fraught with risk. These dynamics are best played out and mediated in a more controllable environment of the executive heads or the executive team where issues can emerge, be open for discussion, made sense of and then done away with.

What we are looking for in the executive team are those functions that play into the corporate structure at the level where polarity and ambivalence can play out and into a dynamic balance and in which they are productively handled to allow for the continued growth and development of the company. It is important to understand that when polarities split into contradictory positions they tend to strive against each other and develop struggles through this split. When such a split occurs it is impossible to speak well of one polar opposite without speaking negatively about the other. The corporation is best served when opposing energy is facilitated through relationship and not in an external struggle generated because of the splitting. Again, this relationship or marriage of opposites is best enacted internally, whether within the individual corporate head or within the corporate executive team. This is a form of union or marriage where the brilliance of vision and possibility is embodied in a well experienced and healed daily production.

The potential for problems increases when the polarity is actuated externally: “the archetype divides into polar co-ordinates and the two people each pick up only one half: male/female, good/bad, healthy/ill, life/death. Then the archetype by the necessity of its dual nature binds the people to each other in their half-roles, paralyzed, repetitive, [and] unredeemed. Therefore, in the senex/puer, one or the other will show features of such polarities as brightness/darkness, above/below, fire/earth, new/old, love/power, dynamus/order, etc” (Hillman, 1979, p. 33). This tension of opposites is held together and turns one to the light, the other to the dark, two faces of the same as the split spirit reveals.



## Healing Into the Puer-et-Senex Identity

The key to healing a split or a potential for splitting is gentle and day-to-day growth where complementary and conflicting aspects of the self are held in momentary confusion and tension and given the opportunity for resolution and integration through relationship and communication.

Relation with any archetype involves the danger of possession usually marked by inflation. This is particularly true of the puer, because of his high-flights and mythical behavior. Of course, possession through the senex brings an equally dangerous set of moods and actions: depression, pessimism, and hardness of heart. Even a minimum of psychological awareness – that I am just what I am as I am – can spare complete archetypal possession. This awareness is made possible through the reflective, echoing function of the psyche. This function is the human psyche's contribution to spirit and to meaning, which noble as they may be can also be without psyche, runaway destructive possessions. So, the main puer problem is not lack of worldly reality but lack of psychic reality. Rather than commitment to the order of the world the puer needs to be wedded to psyche, to which he is anyway naturally drawn. Rather than historical continuity and roots in the horizontal, he needs devotion to the anima. First psyche, then world; or through the psyche to the world. The anima has the thread and knows the step-by-step dance that can lead through the labyrinth and can teach the puer the subtleties of left-hand/right-hand, opening and closing, accustoming and refining his vision to the half-light of ambivalence. (Hillman, 1979, pp. 29-30)

The process of utilizing these potentially conflicting, yet harmonizing roles requires living life as a process and utilizing energy to transform, heal, renew, and redeem as one moment follows the next. This change requires listening and feeling and moving step-by-step, and realizing not that one is getting old and that one may have to reject the young,



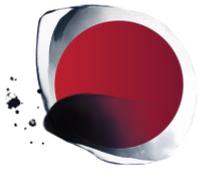
but that it is important to embrace the two as two sides of the same face. It is not necessary to reject one for the other but to allow for an identity of the two while embracing the ambivalence and confusion that may arise. The tension of opposites as they arise in a climate of ambivalence is the structure and a pre-condition for change. It is most important to know that by; “continuing [to be] true to one’s past puer spirit and consciously affirming it one has already assumed the senex virtue of responsibility and order” (Hillman, 1979, p. 32).

There is the old maxim from the Renaissance which states “make haste slowly.” This requires holding the opposites in tension in a third place of awareness. This awareness allows for an appreciation of the fact that whatever face we are looking at is backed by one we cannot see. This understanding allows for an embrace of the two faces as same and this union brings out the positive qualities of each face. This is an embrace of a two-fold-truth. “Throughout individual histories, [the] puer merges with senex, the eternal comes back into time, the falcon returns to the falconer’s arm” (Hillman, 1979, p. 3

## Analysis

The key to “healing” requires a return to a moment-to-moment awareness and acceptance of the self as is. This life-as-is experience of daily corporate functioning refers to allowing for continuity and constancy to life as perceived. One indication of a dominance of puer energy is an everlasting switching behavior in which all of a sudden there is a better plan than the one that is currently in place. The ability to “stick it out” or to “see it through” requires a capacity for balance and mediation of these potentially opposing influences within the same moment. This life as perceived posture is a third position of awareness that allows for conscious and perceived difference in consciousness, this polarity, as this is the very indication that one is evolving and not splitting.

There is attractiveness to introducing the senex-embodied into the corporation through the hiring of individuals who may carry only one of the aspects being discussed.



However, by splitting the polarity of puer-et-senex functioning out of the internal world and into “reality” or daily functioning, there is a potential for relational conflict to evolve. Be that as it may, there would occur an immediate and present relief of internal anxiety by projecting that this individual will assume this position of the senex and be responsible for all that that involves. However, if this is done through a split the struggle shifts externally and is now at play in the corporate environment where it is more difficult to handle. This presents unknowable complexity.

As changes are made externally and new employees are hired, with regard to the puer-senex dynamic, an environment that supports the internal anima or feminine, as experienced through relationship with one’s own psyche, is best advised. The question to ask when considering a new hire for an important position within the corporation is; “does this person provide a relational field in which I (the person who will be working with this person) can follow the natural thread of my internal self-unfolding as I walk step-by-step along with this person?” This is a shift away from the external and projected puer-senex struggle and toward the internal puer-et-psyche relationship.

“In answering one’s own question one is puer-et-senex. In questioning one’s own answer one is senex-et-puer. The two faces turned towards each other in dialogue. This unending dialogue with oneself and between oneself and the world, is that which holds one in meaning” (Hillman, 1979, p. 36).

## Conclusion

The executive team, as individuals, is in the process of evolving and becoming. Evolution, change, development, and transformation can come to fruition through relationship as opposed to struggle. Any struggle can be contained and facilitated as an internal dynamic and is not best served through implanting a complex individual into the corporate functioning to invite external struggle. In hiring a CCO the search should be for an individual who can do the job and who can sustain relationships! This individual cannot



carry the projections or split off parts of the puer-senex dynamic without causing very problematic day-to-day functioning.

The evolution and the individual development of key personnel within the company are best served through relationship and not through struggle. These dialogues between potential conflicting and complementary aspects of the internal psyche can and are currently being facilitated in this third place of daily involvement, clear communication, and respect for relational involvement. Resources should continue to be made available to each individual on the Executive Team so as to facilitate this internal and relational growth. The corporate evolution will best be served if the “heads” of the corporate “body” are happy and internally whole and integrated.

## References

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