



Jungian Archetypes in Generation Z: A Hermeneutic Reflection on Symbolic Manifestations in Digital Culture

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Abstract

This essay proposes a hermeneutic reflection on the possible manifestations of Jungian archetypes in the psyche of the so-called Generation Z, taking into account the sociocultural pressures of the "BANI" world and the burnout society. Based on indicators obtained from a digital questionnaire administered to young people aged 18 to 30, not as empirical evidence of archetypes but as interpretive triggers, a theoretical amplification anchored in analytical psychology was developed. The symbolic patterns observed engage in dialogue with complexes such as the persona, the shadow, the *Self*, *anima/animus*, the *puer aeternus*, and the *trickster*, suggesting contemporary forms of psychic expression mediated by hyperconnectivity. Digital culture, this article argues, catalyzes archetypal images, shaping processes of subjectivation, identity formation, and the search for meaning among digitally native youth. This work highlights the need for a clinical practice sensitive to emerging symbolic dynamics and points to the inherent limits of using conscious indicators to reflect on unconscious structures.

Conflicts of interest:

The authors state no professional or personal interest that may create a conflict of interests regarding this manuscript.

Descriptors: Jungian psychology, complex, collective unconscious, youth.



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Arquétipos junguianos na geração Z: uma reflexão hermenêutica sobre manifestos simbólicos na cultura digital

Resumo

Este ensaio propõe uma reflexão hermenêutica sobre possíveis manifestações dos arquétipos junguianos na psique da chamada geração Z, considerando as pressões socioculturais do mundo “BANI” e da sociedade do cansaço. A partir de indicadores obtidos por meio de um questionário digital aplicado junto a jovens de 18 a 30 anos, utilizados não como evidências empíricas de arquétipos, mas como disparadores interpretativos, desenvolveu-se uma amplificação teórica ancorada na psicologia analítica. Os padrões simbólicos observados dialogam com complexos como *persona*, *sombra*, *Self*, *anima/animus*, *puer aeternus* e *trickster*, sugerindo formas contemporâneas de expressão psíquica mediadas pela hiperconectividade. Argumenta-se que a cultura digital funciona como catalisadora de imagens arquetípicas, influenciando processos de subjetivação, identidade e busca por sentido entre jovens nativos digitais. Este trabalho ressalta a necessidade de uma clínica sensível às novas dinâmicas simbólicas emergentes e aponta limites inerentes ao uso de indicadores conscientes para reflexões sobre estruturas inconscientes.

Descritores: psicologia junguiana, complexo, inconsciente coletivo, jovens.

Arquetipos Junguianos en la generación Z: una reflexión hermenéutica sobre manifiestos simbólicos en la cultura digital

Resumen

Este ensayo propone una reflexión hermenéutica sobre posibles manifestaciones de los arquetipos Junguianos en la psiquis de la denominada generación Z, considerando las presiones socioculturales del mundo “BANI” y de la sociedad del cansancio. A partir de indicadores obtenidos mediante un cuestionario digital aplicado en jóvenes de 18 a 30 años, utilizados no como evidencias empíricas de arquetipos, sino como disparadores interpretativos, se desarrolló una amplificación teórica anclada en la psicología analítica. Los patrones simbólicos observados dialogan con complejos como *persona*, *sombra*, *Self*, *anima/animus*, *puer*

aeternus y *trickster*, sugiriendo formas contemporáneas de expresión psíquica mediadas por la hiperconectividad. Se argumenta que la cultura digital funciona como catalizadora de imágenes arquetípicas, influenciando procesos de subjetivación, identidad y búsqueda de sentido entre jóvenes nativos digitales. Este trabajo subraya la necesidad de una clínica sensible a las nuevas dinámicas simbólicas emergentes y apunta a límites inherentes al uso de indicadores conscientes para reflexiones sobre estructuras inconscientes.

Descriptor: psicología junguiana, complejo, inconsciente colectivo, jóvenes.

Introduction

This article discusses, from a hermeneutic-Jungian perspective, how the psyche of the so-called Generation Z can be understood in light of the symbolic and emotional challenges imposed by the contemporary context. Cascio (2020) calls this the "BANI" world — an acronym for "brittle," "anxious," "non-linear," and "incomprehensible." Add Han's (2015) notion of the burnout society, and a clearer picture emerges: digitally native young people develop strategies of adaptation and subjective expression shaped by hyperconnectivity, constant visibility, and growing identity demands.

Drawing on the foundations of analytical psychology, archetypes such as the persona, the shadow, the Self, *anima/animus*, the *puer aeternus*, and the *trickster* are understood as symbolic images that help interpret recurring cultural and emotional patterns. Such structures are not reducible to observable behaviors, but manifest through narratives, imaginaries, affective tensions, and relational dynamics that run through both the subject and society. In this sense, the phenomena experienced by Generation Z — constant curationship of one's image, the search for authenticity, identity fluidity, humor as psychic mediation, and creativity instituted as a mode of existence — can be read symbolically as contemporary updates of these primordial images.

Considering the intensification of psychic suffering among young people, evidenced by the rise in anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion (Twenge, 2017; World Health Organization [WHO], 2021), it becomes relevant to understand how such experiences articulate with deeper symbolic patterns. The articulation among digital culture, subjectivity, and collective imagination enables us to recognize how ancestral psychic processes are updated within the contemporary technological and sociocultural environment, shaping the construction of identity, meaning, and belonging.

Given these sociocultural and symbolic transformations, it is essential to deepen our understanding of how Generation Z elaborates its psychic experience within the context of hyperconnectivity. Analytical psychology offers a lens that helps clarify such processes, articulating archetypal images and contemporary phenomena in an integrated way, allowing us to recognize how tensions and subjective resources are expressed and reconfigured in the everyday life of this generation.

By exploring the dynamics of the complexes that inhabit the psyche of digital youth, this study proposes a deep dive into the paradigms that shape generational subjectivity, analyzing their symbolic expressions and reflecting on the role of the collective unconscious amid contemporary dilemmas.

Methodology

This is an exploratory, qualitative-interpretive study grounded in Jungian hermeneutics and content analysis. The research was conducted with participants aged 18 to 30 to ensure autonomy in consenting to participate in the investigation. The primary data collection instrument was a semi-structured questionnaire administered digitally via *Google Forms*, in keeping with the participants' digital-native Character (Table 1). The questionnaire contained 22 questions structured to address different aspects: questions 1 through 20 presented statements designed to evoke responses related to the complexes, in which participants rated their agreement (Likert scales); questions 21 and 22 focused on participants' prior level of awareness of Jungian theory and their explicit identification with the archetypes presented.

In strict adherence to ethical and academic principles, the research was conducted in accordance with the guidelines of the Research Ethics Committee for Human Subjects (CAAE 90311525.2.0000.5492). All participants signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF) in digital format, ensuring anonymity, data confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty, with data collection validated through participants' electronic signature (digital acceptance).

Finally, data analysis followed a hybrid model. A preliminary analysis was carried out, using a floating reading to identify central themes. Subsequently, responses were categorized into thematic groupings. Last, the data underwent Jungian symbolic amplification, cross-referencing statistical frequencies with theoretical concepts of archetypes and sociocultural models to extract the deeper psychological meaning of the observed trends. In this way, the present approach is situated within the field of reflective studies,

using phenomenological indicators only as a starting point rather than as a basis for empirical inferences about archetypal structures.

Tabela 1. Questionnaire administered to research participants

Instrument: Manifestations of Jungian Complexes in Generation Z	
Q1	I like taking control of situations and making important decisions.
Q2	I feel pleasure in helping others, even if it comes at some personal cost.
Q3	I am always seeking adventures and new experiences.
Q4	I believe true love is the most important thing in life.
Q5	I tend to challenge rules I consider unjust.
Q6	I find it easy to make people laugh, even in difficult moments.
Q7	I constantly seek to understand the deeper meaning of things.
Q8	I believe every person has the power to transform their reality.
Q9	I prefer to live simply, without many complications.
Q10	I feel motivated to face challenges and overcome obstacles.
Q11	I am driven by creative ideas and enjoy building unique things.
Q12	I feel I do not meet society's standards.
Q13	I like planning the future with organization and leadership.
Q14	I tend to be the "shoulder to cry on" for those who need emotional support.
Q15	I feel restless when I am stuck in a routine.
Q16	I believe humor is a way of coping with life.
Q17	I value knowledge and am always reading or studying something new.
Q18	I find it easy to dream and imagine different worlds.
Q19	I avoid conflict and always try to see the good side of people.
Q20	I feel that I have an important mission to fulfill in the world.
Q21	Have you ever heard of Jung's archetypes?
Q22	Which of the archetypes do you identify with?

Source: elaborated by the authors (2025).

Foundations of Analytical Psychology Regarding Archetypes and Complexes

Analytical psychology, developed by Carl Gustav Jung, proposes that the human psyche comprises conscious and unconscious dimensions. The unconscious, for its part, is structured by archetypes — universal symbolic patterns that organize subjective experience (Jung, 1964). Complexes work differently. They are psychic formations charged with affect, constituted within an individual's personal history. Archetypes, by contrast, belong to the deepest level of the psyche and express universal forms of experience. This approach diverges from the Freudian psychoanalytic model in

emphasizing the process of individuation: the integration of psychic opposites toward the totality of being (Stein, 1998).

The concept of the collective unconscious, central to Jungian theory, refers to a psychic substrate common to humanity that contains universal forms of perception and behavior inherited from the species' ancestral experience (Jung, 1959). It is a deep layer of the mind, distinct from the personal unconscious, which manifests through myths, dreams, cultural symbols, and archetypal narratives (Henderson, 1964).

According to Jung (1964), archetypes are primordial images or universal structures that organize psychic life and influence patterns of behavior, emotion, and thought. They are symbolic expressions that emerge spontaneously across different cultures and eras, revealing profound aspects of the human condition. In dialogue with the neurosciences, Knox (2003) interprets archetypes as emergent matrices of relational and neural patterns, suggesting that these structures have a biological and evolutionary basis in addition to their symbolic dimension.

Understanding archetypes and the collective unconscious offers a powerful interpretive lens for analyzing the psychic phenomena of contemporary youth, especially in digital contexts where symbols, images, and narratives circulate rapidly and globally. This perspective will be further developed with a focus on the archetypal manifestations of Generation Z.

Complexes, in this light, can be understood as structured formations within the personal unconscious, derived not from universal patterns but from emotionally intense and often conflictual experiences. As Jung states:

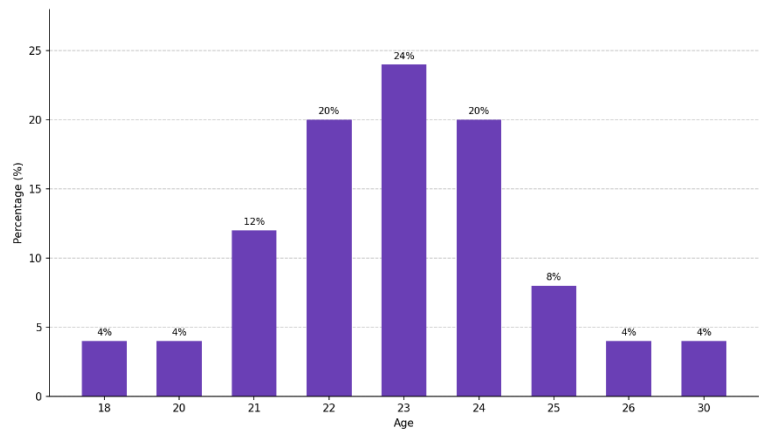
What, then, is an "emotionally charged complex," scientifically speaking? It is the image of a specific psychic situation, strongly emotionally accentuated and incompatible with the habitual attitude of consciousness. This image has a powerful inner coherence; it has its own wholeness and, in addition, a relatively high degree of autonomy, so that it is subject to the control of the conscious mind to only a limited extent, and therefore behaves like an animated foreign body in the sphere of consciousness (Jung, 1954–1958/2000, p. 20, para. 210).

According to Jung, then, complexes constitute autonomous psychic nuclei that form when consciousness cannot fully integrate an experience charged with affect. Because they are out of step with the ego's habitual attitude, these nuclei retain a certain degree of autonomy. They may emerge in slips, exaggerated reactions, repetitive relational patterns, or dream imagery. In other words,

while archetypes provide the universal structure of human experience, complexes represent the singular, biographical, and emotional actualization of these patterns in each individual's psychic life.

Results

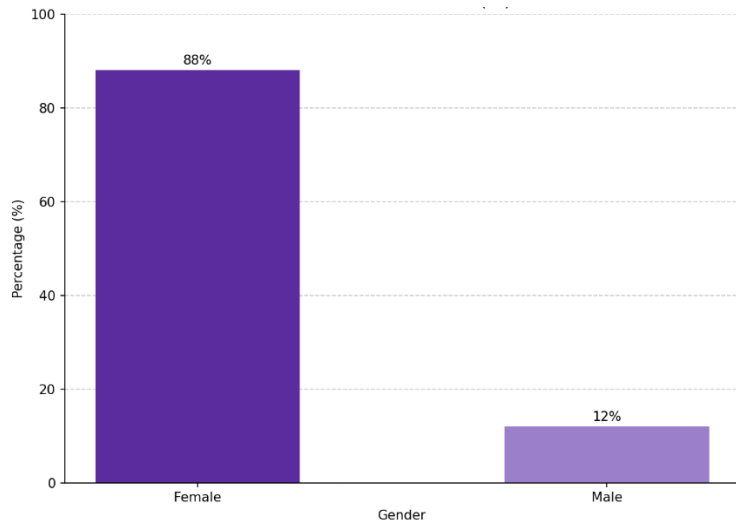
The sample universe comprised an average of 25 respondents per question (Q1–Q22), and selection was based on accessibility and voluntary participation, characterizing a non-probabilistic sample that is nonetheless qualitatively significant for identifying recurring symbolic patterns. Graph 1 presents the age distribution of the research participants, and Graph 2 shows the gender distribution.



Graph 1. Age distribution (%)

Source: elaborated by the authors (2025).

The sample showed a marked predominance of the female gender, accounting for 88% of the total — 12% of participants self-identified as cisgender women and the remainder as female — compared to the male gender (12%). Regarding age distribution, the highest concentration of participants was observed at 23 years of age (24%), followed by 22 and 24 years, each representing 20% of the total.



Graph 2. Gender distribution (%)

Source: elaborated by the authors (2025).

Following the logic of archetypal grouping, results are first presented for the indicators associated with the *persona*. In this dimension, 70% of participants agreed with statements related to leadership and control (Q1), reflecting the adaptive and public functions of the *persona*, which is responsible for organizing how the individual presents themselves socially. The search for novelty (Q3), with 74% agreement, reinforces the complex's typical orientation toward external stimuli. Likewise, the pleasure in helping others (70%, Q2) represents the socially valued facet of the *persona*. At the same time, the dispersion of responses regarding belief in true love (Q4) points to an oscillation between idealization and pragmatism in the relational field, frequently mediated by social expectations.

In the indicators associated with the *shadow*, 72% of participants stated that they challenge rules perceived as unjust (Q5), expressing repressed content linked to the impulse to confront limits and denounce inconsistencies. The use of humor in the face of difficulties (68%, Q6) suggests defensive coping strategies, while the search for meaning (84%, Q7) and belief in the transformation of reality (80%, Q8) reveal tensions between vulnerability and symbolic potency, elements characteristic of the *shadow* when partially integrated into consciousness.

In the *anima/animus* dimension, the preference for a simple life (Q9), present in 60% of respondents, indicates an orientation toward interiority and the reduction of external noise, a movement typical of these archetypal figures, which function as a bridge to affectivity,

introspection, and authenticity. Along the same lines, motivation in the face of challenges (Q10) and orientation toward creative ideas (Q11), both with 64% agreement, point to relational and imaginative dynamisms linked to the mediating function of these archetypes. Meanwhile, the sense of social misfit (Q12), reported by 48%, indicates a conflict between interiority and collective expectations.

Regarding the *Self*, 72% of participants stated that they organize and plan for the future (Q13), expressing a search for coherence and integration — central elements of the *Self*. Emotional support for others (87.5%, Q14) reinforces this organizing nucleus of the psyche. The polarization between routine and restlessness (Q15) signals internal tensions within the process of individuation. At the same time, the consensus around humor as a life philosophy (91.6%, Q16) indicates an integrative strategy that facilitates psychic balance.

In the *puer aeternus* archetype, strong adherence was observed to continuous learning (88%, Q17) and expansive imagination (84%, Q18) — central characteristics of this archetype's youthful, visionary impulse. The avoidance of conflict (76%, Q19) expresses the puerile ambivalence between the desire for expansion and the avoidance of responsibility. Hesitation regarding one's life mission (Q20), meanwhile, points to an instability typical of this structure.

Finally, analysis of the *trickster* and of overall self-identification (Q22) showed that, although there was no conscious identification with this archetype (0%), it appears strongly in behavior. The willingness to challenge unjust rules (Q5), the use of humor in moments of tension (Q6), humor as a life orientation (Q16), and conflict avoidance (Q19) constitute classic expressions of the *trickster*, which oscillates between irreverence, social critique, and strategic escape. Consciously, however, the sample identified predominantly with the *persona* and the *Self* (35.3% each), suggesting a dissociation between what the individual believes themselves to be and the archetypal forces that actually shape their action.

Symbolic Amplification

The analysis rests on seven central complexes: the *persona*, the shadow, the *Self*, *anima/animus*, the *puer aeternus*, and the *trickster*. Each will be discussed in terms of its classical definition and its symbolic manifestations in digital practices such as social media, youth aesthetics, and identity discourses. By understanding how they are expressed among hyperconnected youth, this section aims

to shed light on the psychic processes that underlie the construction of subjectivity in the information age.

The Digital Persona

As defined by Jung (1954/2013), the persona represents the social mask that individuals use to adapt to the demands of their environment, functioning as a mediator between the *Self* and the external world. It is an archetype that allows the subject to perform social roles and construct a public image consistent with collective values.

In contemporary digital culture, this function is amplified by social media, where individuals manage their identities through the curation of idealized images, narratives, and behaviors. The virtual environment favors the construction of a highly performative persona, oriented toward recognition, validation, and belonging (Goffman, 1959; Marwick, 2013).

Generation Z experiences this dynamic intensely. Digitally native, they use platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter to express edited versions of themselves. The digital persona thus becomes both a tool for symbolic adaptation and a potential source of psychic conflict — it can distance the subject from their authenticity and promote constant comparison with idealized standards.

This symbolic updating of the persona archetype shows how the personal unconscious manifests in youth's digital practices, highlighting the tension between the desire for belonging and the need for individuation. Managing one's public image, though necessary, can obscure deeper aspects of identity, generating emotional suffering and a sense of inadequacy.

The data point to a generational psyche operating under high adaptive tension. The strong agreement with the need for control (70%) and the desire to help others (70%), both associated with the persona archetype, should not be read merely as altruism or leadership, but as a defense mechanism against the unpredictability of the BANI world, in an environment characterized by fragility and non-linearity, the construction of a socially accepted persona functions as an anchor of security. However, this adaptation is intrinsically bound to constant performance, reflecting an imperative of identity.

The Shadow and Virtual Conflicts

The shadow is one of the central complexes in analytical psychology. It represents the rejected, repressed, or unknown

aspects of personality. According to Jung (1951/2011), it consists of unconscious content the ego does not recognize as its own — content that nonetheless profoundly influences behavior and emotion. Not necessarily negative in itself, the shadow becomes a problem mainly through denial or projection, which can generate internal and interpersonal conflict.

In the digital environment, this archetype finds fertile ground for expression. Social media serves as a space for symbolic projection, where unprocessed psychic content is often externalized onto others. Phenomena such as virtual cancellation, cyberbullying, and hate speech reveal the workings of the collective shadow, in which undesired aspects are attributed to public figures, influencers, or social groups (Freud, 1911/2010; Han, 2018).

Generation Z, marked by overexposure and the constant pursuit of validation, experiences these conflicts intensely. The pressure toward perfection and acceptance can lead to the repression of authentic emotions, generating anguish, anxiety, and defensive behaviors. The shadow, in this context, emerges as a symbolic response to inadequacy, frustration, and social polarization.

Moreover, the anonymity and speed of digital interactions favor the impulsive expression of unconscious content, often without ethical or affective mediation. The finding that 48% of participants feel socially maladjusted, combined with the 72% who challenge unjust rules, suggests that Generation Z's shadow is not passive. Projection of the shadow onto others becomes a collective defense mechanism that reinforces relationship fragmentation and intensifies psychic suffering. By recognizing and integrating this content, it becomes possible to promote greater emotional awareness and symbolic resignification, contributing to the development of healthier, more authentic relationships.

The Self and the Search for Meaning

According to Jung (1951/2011), the *Self* is the archetype of psychic totality and the organizing center of the personality. It represents the integration of internal opposites and the process of individuation, through which the subject becomes who they truly are by recognizing and integrating the various aspects of their psyche. Unlike the ego, which constitutes individual consciousness, the *Self* encompasses both the conscious and the unconscious and serves as a symbolic guide for personal development.

In Generation Z, discourse around authenticity, purpose, and emotional balance recurs constantly, particularly in digital environments marked by high exposure. This does not necessarily point to genuine contact with the archetype of the *Self*; more often,

it reflects a socially expected positioning within the group—an expression of a persona seeking to convey coherence, emotional maturity, and alignment with contemporary values of self-care and performance. These statements evoke themes associated with the *Self*, but their predominant manifestation lies in identity presentation rather than in any internal process of psychic integration (Han, 2015; Twenge, 2017).

Social media, though often associated with superficiality, also function as spaces of symbolic circulation, where young people express values, emotional concerns, and identity tensions. Even so, such manifestations tend to operate mostly in the field of the persona — tied to public self-presentation and the pursuit of social validation — rather than any direct connection with the *Self*. In some cases, elements of the shadow surface as well — exposed vulnerabilities, self-criticism, attempts at emotional coping. Even when the content touches on self-knowledge, meditation, or psychology, it mostly reflects early movements of self-recognition, still far removed from the ego-*Self* relationship, which demands a deeper process of psychic integration.

This dynamic falls short of a genuine search for inner meaning; it is closer to a coping mechanism, an attempt to adapt to collective expectations. The pressure for authenticity, frequently celebrated as a value of Generation Z, functions more as a social demand than as an expression of interiority. The resulting sense of inadequacy and anxiety, then, does not stem from a conflict with the *Self*, but from tension between the persona — which seeks to match the group ideal — and aspects of the shadow, which expose limits, anguish, and contradictions. Here, the *Self* is not a horizon of integration but a distant reference point, one not yet accessible at these early stages of self-recognition.

The research results point to a need for stability in a landscape perceived as unstable. Emotional support, the item with the highest level of agreement (87.5%), seems to reflect less a manifestation of the *Self* than a socially internalized expectation — tied to the role of being available, empathetic, and reliable. It is, in other words, an expression of the social persona, organizing how individuals believe they should act to meet the group's values and demands. Such behavior points more to adaptation and social acceptance than to any process of deep symbolic integration. Even if this dynamic could eventually open space for more authentic contact with interiority, at this stage it remains within the early levels of self-regulation rather than within the realm of the *Self*.

Anima and animus in Gender Fluidity

The archetypes of *anima* and *animus* have nothing to do with gender identity as such. They are symbolic and energetic principles that structure specific forms of relationship with interiority. In Jung (1954/2013), *anima* represents the dimension of sensitivity, imagination, and affective bonding, while *animus* expresses direction, discernment, and intellectual orientation. Both constitute complementary aspects of the psyche and symbolize an internal polarity whose integration is fundamental to the process of individuation.

In contemporary times, marked by critiques of rigid binarisms and by the expansion of forms of subjective expression, these complexes have not changed in nature — only in how they manifest symbolically. In questioning social norms of expression and expanding identity repertoires, Generation Z does not redefine *anima* and *animus* as gender categories. Instead, it shows how these symbolic principles can emerge in a more flexible, plural manner, less tied to socially prescribed roles (Bauman, 2001; Butler, 2004).

This cultural transformation can be understood as an archetypal manifestation. The principles of *anima* and *animus* cease to be rigidly associated with traditional social roles and come instead to operate as symbolic forces of integration, creativity, and psychic freedom. Gender fluidity challenges conventions, yes — but it also opens up the potential to expand consciousness and reconnect with inner dimensions that were once repressed and standardized.

On social media, this symbolic expression shows up in discourses about identity, aesthetics, affectivity, and belonging. Influencers, artists, and young activists become spokespeople for a new language that reframes the masculine and the feminine as coexisting, complementary potencies.

The manifestation of these archetypes in the data bears out precisely this expansion. The preference for a simple life (Q9) and motivation in the face of challenges (Q10 and Q11) do not map onto traditionally feminine or masculine attributes. They point instead to the contemporary circulation of psychic qualities that were once kept rigidly apart. Just as receptive, simple masculine images exist — the artisan, the caregiver — so too do feminine images marked by action, direction, and courage: the warrior, the leader, the huntress. In short, *anima* and *animus* do not describe gender identities but psychological modes of functioning that alternate, combine, and transform according to subjective and cultural experience.

This flexibility in the manifestation of *anima* and *animus* can be read as an adaptive response to the identity conditions of contemporary life — fluid, multiple, in constant renegotiation. These principles do not reaffirm fixed roles. Instead, they operate as symbolic forces of integration and psychic freedom, allowing different aspects — introspection, imagination, action, determination — to coexist and reorganize according to the subject's emotional and symbolic needs.

***Puer Aeternus* and the Culture of Instantaneity**

The archetype of the *puer aeternus*, described by von Franz (1970), represents the youthful impulse toward inner freedom, creative imagination, and renewal. It is a symbolic figure marked by spontaneity, enthusiasm, and openness to possibility — characteristics that distinguish it from merely infantilized or spoiled behavior. Although the *puer aeternus* may show difficulty dealing with limits and rigid structures, this tendency should not be confused with an immature refusal of responsibility, which belongs more properly to the *puer* complex as an unelaborated personality trait. At the level of complexes, the *puer* manifests precisely these difficulties of rootedness, emotional oscillation, and avoidance of commitment; in its archetypal expression, however, it mobilizes visionary potency and creative sensitivity, functioning as a psychic force that inspires movement, transformation, and new perspectives, while simultaneously challenging the individual to balance lightness and responsibility.

The culture of instantaneity, fueled by social media and the logic of rapid content consumption, favors behaviors of experimentation, mobility, and resistance to conventional models of stability (Lipovetsky, 2005; Twenge, 2017). The data confirm the priority given to expansion over rigidity: the value placed on continuous learning received 88% agreement, and ease of imagining new worlds reached 84%. These rates point to the creative and exploratory nature of the *puer*, constantly seeking innovation and pushing boundaries.

Young people of this generation tend to value ephemeral experiences, multiple possibilities, and alternative lifestyles, which can be interpreted not as a direct expression of the *puer aeternus* in its creative form, but as a manifestation of the *puer* complex, characterized by impulsivity, difficulty putting down roots, and oscillation between enthusiasm and dispersion. At the same time, challenges emerge regarding building lasting bonds and defining life projects — aspects that demand greater emotional stability and inner sustenance. The presence of the *puer* in the psyche of digital youth reflects, at once, an imaginative and exploratory potential

and a vulnerability in a world marked by instability, rapid change, and continuous stimulus overload.

Trickster: Humor, Critique, and Transgression

The *trickster* archetype, as described by Jung (1956/2011), is an ambiguous, irreverent, and transgressive figure that operates at the boundary between chaos and order, challenging conventions and revealing hidden truths through humor and irony. Present in the mythologies of diverse cultures, the *trickster* embodies cunning, instability, and the capacity to provoke symbolic ruptures.

In digital culture, this archetype finds expression especially in the communicative practices of Generation Z, such as memes, satire, comedic videos, and ironic commentary. These elements function as symbolic outlets for social critique, the deconstruction of authority, and the confrontation of everyday tensions (Han, 2018; Shifman, 2014).

The digital *trickster* operates as an agent of transformation, using laughter as a tool of resistance and resignification. By poking fun at normative patterns, exposing contradictions, and provoking reflection, this archetype contributes to the symbolic elaboration of psychic content that would otherwise remain repressed or un verbalized.

Among young people of Generation Z, humor is frequently used as a strategy for emotional coping, identity expression, and the construction of a sense of belonging. Here, irreverence is not limited to performative superficiality: when it produces subjective transformation — allowing young people to reframe experiences, reduce emotional tension, or question established norms — it operates as a legitimate tool of psychic elaboration. Otherwise, it remains merely a reproduction of the group's jokes, without producing internal displacement or critical reflection.

Although 0% of participants consciously identified with this archetype, behavioral data suggest that it operates implicitly in the everyday lives of these young people. The massive adherence to humor as a life philosophy — possibly functioning as a rebellious strategy typical of adolescence that contests norms through irreverence (91.6%) — and the capacity to laugh even in difficult situations, which requires a certain degree of emotional maturity to transform tension into lightness (68%), reveal the *trickster* as a homeostatic regulator of the contemporary psyche.

Understanding the role of the *trickster* in the psyche of digital youth lets us recognize the symbolic power of humor as a tool for individuation, critique, and transformation. The figure of the court

jester deepens this understanding. Historically, the jester was the one who could expose uncomfortable truths through laughter — revealing contradictions, testing the excesses of power, making delicate topics thinkable. The role was never limited to entertainment; it also meant mediating conflict and restoring emotional and social balance.

Likewise, the contemporary *trickster*, present in memes, irony, and the irreverence characteristic of Generation Z, challenges norms and expands possibilities for interpreting reality. By promoting symbolic and emotional displacements, it contributes to the construction of freer, more conscious, and more creative subjectivities, updating the ancestral function of the court jester within the psychic dynamics of the digital world.

Archetypes and Contemporaneity

This analysis demonstrated how the symbolic structures proposed by Carl Jung remain vitally active and are updated in the psyche of Generation Z amid contemporary digital culture. The digital persona reveals the constant tension between authenticity and performance; the shadow is projected onto virtual conflicts and polarization; and the *Self* emerges as the incessant search for meaning and wholeness in a fragmented world. Notably, gender fluidity expresses the detachment of *anima* and *animus* from rigid social roles, integrating them as forces of psychic freedom. In parallel, the *puer aeternus* manifests in the speed of the culture of instantaneity, bringing with it both creative potency and vulnerability in the face of instability. Finally, the *trickster* acts as a powerful agent of critique and transformation, using humor and digital transgression as outlets for resignification.

Generation Z is, in fact, the first generation to be fully digitally native, whose experience is marked by hyperconnection, fluid identity, and psychic vulnerability. Its mode of functioning is intimately bound to the BANI world paradigm, given that its members live these dimensions directly. For this reason, understanding the psyche of this generation requires integrating both Carl G. Jung's analytical psychology and contemporary sociocultural models.

According to Cascio (2020), this model translates the experience of a fragmented, volatile psychic time, in which uncertainty becomes the dominant emotional state, favoring the emergence of archetypal patterns of defense and adaptation in the face of chaos. Zygmunt Bauman (2001) speaks of liquid modernity, in which human bonds, institutions, and identities lose their solidity, becoming fragile and transitory relationships.

This social and affective fluidity generates a sense of existential precariousness that reverberates in the psyche of Generation Z, whose identity is constantly reconfigured on digital networks and marked by the absence of symbolic stability. Byung-Chul Han (2015), for his part, describes in his work "The Burnout Society" the neoliberal paradigm of self-exploitation, in which the contemporary subject internalizes the logic of performance, simultaneously becoming both exploiter and the exploited. Among hyperconnected young people, this imperative of productivity and visibility produces emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and a sense of emptiness, configuring a crisis of meaning and psychic integration.

The conjunction of the BANI world (Cascio, 2020) with the concepts of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2001) and the burnout society (Han, 2015) outlines the symbolic backdrop that shapes the subjective experience of Generation Z, producing a psychic climate of emotional vulnerability and archetypal intensification. Digital culture acts as fertile ground for the emergence and transformation of archetypes, translating universal images into visual and interactive languages. According to Marshall McLuhan (1964), technological media do more than convey messages — they shape the very way people think and feel, amplifying the symbolic expression of the collective psyche.

Jungian archetypes are updated in media narratives and contemporary youth aesthetics through characters, influencers, and digital icons who embody symbolic figures of the collective psyche — the hero, the rebel, the sage, and the *trickster* — reproducing ancestral myths in new forms (Campbell, 1949; Jung, 1964). Social media, meanwhile, becomes a space of symbolic projection and experimentation, where the collective unconscious manifests through image-based language and sharing rituals (Han, 2015).

Theoretical Integration: Psychic and Sociocultural

Archetypes are not out of fashion. They manifest in new digital symbolic forms — influencers, memes, avatars — that aid psychic elaboration in the face of an unstable world. Modern identity fluidity and the fragility of social institutions act as a symbolic terrain in which this generation's psyche seeks roots and meaning. Uncertainty activates defensive mechanisms, such as archetypal regression, and adaptive ones, such as the construction of multiple and transient identities.

Digital culture is more than a vehicle. It is a formative symbolic environment for the contemporary collective psyche, one in which Generation Z is simultaneously subject and object of technology,

blurring the boundaries between producer and consumer of meaning. Technological overexposure, the pressure toward visibility, and the fragility of bonds contribute to a hostile psychic terrain, marked by chronic anxiety and existential precariousness. These conditions favor the emergence of archetypal defenses and new forms of symbolization.

These manifestations carry relevant clinical implications. Psychological interventions with young people should consider the tension between persona and authenticity, promoting reflection on digital identity and strategies to reduce dependence on external validation. The integration of the shadow can be fostered through approaches that welcome repressed affects and work through projections, preventing them from turning into interpersonal conflict. Strengthening the Self requires practices that encourage the construction of meaning, especially in scenarios marked by the logic of self-exploitation. The *anima/animus* dynamic points to the importance of therapeutic spaces that validate plural expressions of identity, while the *puer* demands a balance between creative freedom and tolerance for frustration. Finally, recognizing the *trickster* as a symbolic resource allows humor to be used therapeutically, transforming tensions into shareable language and fostering processes of individuation.

By integrating these dimensions, contemporary clinical practice can offer responses more attuned to the demands of digital youth, thereby reducing symptoms of anxiety, exhaustion, and maladjustment and promoting adaptive strategies that sustain autonomy and well-being in an unstable world.

Final Considerations

This article sought to understand how certain phenomena experienced by Generation Z can be interpreted symbolically in light of analytical psychology. In a context marked by hyperconnectivity, the fragility of sociocultural reference points, and the emotional pressures of the BANI world and the burnout society, young people construct modes of existence permeated by tension, ambiguity, and constant reinvention. The conscious indicators presented throughout this work served only as a starting point for reflective exercise, functioning as elements that invite symbolic amplification and theoretical articulation. From this reading, it became possible to recognize that themes such as the search for authenticity, the contestation of norms, humor as a coping strategy, identity fluidity, and the valuing of creativity resonate with archetypal images that run through the human psyche across time, without implying empirical or causal inference.

The symbolic interpretation presented here suggests that Generation Z experiences a psychic field deeply marked by paradoxes: the simultaneous need for freedom and belonging, for singularity and recognition, for stability and reinvention. Analytical psychology, by offering an expanded understanding of subjective dynamics, helps identify both the potentials and the vulnerabilities that emerge from this context.

Declarative information does not allow direct access to unconscious layers, and the non-probabilistic nature of the sample precludes generalization. Furthermore, symbolic amplification does not aim to explain phenomena causally, but to offer interpretive pathways that broaden meaning and deepen understanding of contemporary youth experience. Future research may deepen these questions through qualitative approaches sensitive to spontaneous symbolic productions, such as personal narratives, image-based materials, and clinical reports, allowing for even more refined dialogue between the challenges of youth and archetypal dynamics.

In this light, the article reaffirms that complexes, far from constituting distant abstractions, continue to run through and reshape the practices, tensions, and subjective expressions of contemporary life. To understand them is to recognize how these symbolic images illuminate the process of individuation and how young people construct meaning, belonging, and identity in a constantly changing world.

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