Junji Ito's Character Analysis

Introduction of Junji Ito

"I am a horror maniac who prefers to stay at home" (Ito J., 2006). Junji Ito is an acclaimed manga artist who carved out a place for himself in the hearts of horror fans both in Japan and abroad, based not only on the merits of his manga but also his works such as 'Uzumaki' and 'Tomie'. If you've seen any of his imaginative and unsettling imagery, then you already know this Japanese horror manga artist is unforgettable.



Junji Ito was born in Nakatsugawa, Japan on July 31, 1963. He is the writer and the artist of over 100 horror stories, some of which have been adapted into films, television series, and video games. His career began in the mid-80s when he submitted a short story to a horror magazine that ended up getting serialised as Tomie. Tomie was immensely successful in Japan, running for 13 years and spawning nine feature-length movies.



He's been a full-time writer ever since and has been a huge influence on the great horror creators of today, most notably Guillermo del Toro. Ito's work has reached many different horror audiences. It's inspirational and influential.

Ito's stories often involve themes of love, familial pressure, and supernatural forces to create a sense of dread in his audiences. He tends to not use "jump-scares" as much, preferring a slow burn of a fright. The characters are often helpless in the face of overwhelming supernatural forces and hordes of brainwashed people.

Character Analysis

Carl Jung

The Collective Unconscious

About The Collective Unconscious. The deepest and least accessible level of the psyche, it is the most unusual and controversial aspect of Jung's system. Just as each of us

accumulates and files all of our personal experiences in the personal unconscious, so does humankind collectively, as a species, store the experiences of all our human and pre-human ancestors in the collective unconscious.

Whatever experiences are universal, become part of our personality. Our primitive past thus becomes the basis of the human psyche, directing and influencing our present behaviour. Jung linked the personality of each of us with the past, not only with childhood but also with the history of the species. We do not inherit these collective experiences directly, instead we are predisposed to behave and feel the same ways people have always behaved and felt. Whether it becomes reality depends on the specific experiences we encounter in life.

Certain basic experiences have characterised every generation throughout human history. People have always had a mother figure, for example, and have experienced birth and death. They have faced unknown terrors in the dark, worshipped power or some sort of godlike figure and feared an evil being. The universality of these experiences over countless evolving generations leaves an imprint on each of us at birth and determines how we perceive and react to our world. (Jung, 1953)



Evolutionary History of Human Fear. "Humans have been scaring themselves and each other since the birth of the species, through all kinds of methods like storytelling, jumping off cliffs and popping out to startle each other from the recesses of some dark cave. And, we've done this for lots of different reasons- to build group unity, to prepare kids for life in the scary world, and of course to control behaviour. But it's only really in the last few centuries that scaring ourselves for fun and profit has become a highly sought after experience." (Kerr M., 2013). When our bodies are primed for danger, we achieve the fight or flight response. Humans have evolved this reaction to scary situations because our ancestors would have died out without it. Science journalist Jeff Wise called this response the biological equivalent of opening the throttle. (*Extreme Fear: The Science of Your Mind in Danger*, 2009). While the creepy music and insidious plot line might get our hearts pumping, that's just our brain playing a game of "better safe than sorry" by triggering the fight or flight response while our conscious mind analyses the situation for any real danger.

Archetypes

About the Archetypes. Archetypes are ancient experiences contained in the collective unconscious manifested by recurring themes or patterns. There are many such images, as many as there are common human experiences, which by being repeated in the lives of succeeding generations, have become imprinted in our psyches and expressed in our dreams and fantasies. A few of these developed more fully than others and influences the psyche more consistently.

Types of Archetypes. The persona archetype is a mask, or public face we wear to present ourselves as someone different from who we really are. It is necessary because we are forced to play so many roles in life in order to succeed in school and on the job and in getting along with a variety of people. But it can also be harmful if we come to believe that it reflects our true nature. Instead of merely playing a role, we may then become that role. As a result, other aspects of our personality will not be allowed to develop.

The anima and animus archetypes are Jung's recognition that humans are essentially bisexual. On the biological level, each sex secretes the hormones of the other sex as well as those of its own sex. On the psychological level, each sex manifests characteristics, temperaments and attitudes of the other sex by virtue of centuries of living together. A man must exhibit his feminine as well as his masculine characteristics and so should a woman otherwise these vital aspects will remain dormant and undeveloped leading to a one-sidedness of the personality.

The most powerful archetype, the shadow contains the basic, primitive animal instincts and therefore has the deepest roots of all archetypes. Behaviours that society considers evil and immoral reside in the shadow archetype and we must at all times restrain, overcome and defend against these primitive impulses. Shadow is the source of evil but also the source of vitality, spontaneity, creativity and emotion. Therefore, if it is totally suppressed, the psyche will be dull and lifeless.

The self archetype represents the unity, integration and harmony of the total personality. It involves bringing together and balancing all parts of the personality. The opposites of conscious and unconscious processes must become assimilated so that the self shifts from the ego to a point of equilibrium midway and material from the unconscious comes to have a greater influence on the personality,

Analysis of Junji Ito and his works with Carl Jung's theory of the Collective Unconscious and the Archetypes

Fascination with Horror Genre from Childhood. He has been interested in horror as a genre since he was 4 or 5 years old, his two older sisters would read Kazuo Umezu and Shinichi Koga (horror magazines) and he would read them too. He was hooked and would also watch horror movies when he was young like Dracula or Frankenstein as they showed it on

TV. In the 70s, when the occult boom began, he saw the Exorcist, and many other occult films like Dario Argento's Suspiria.



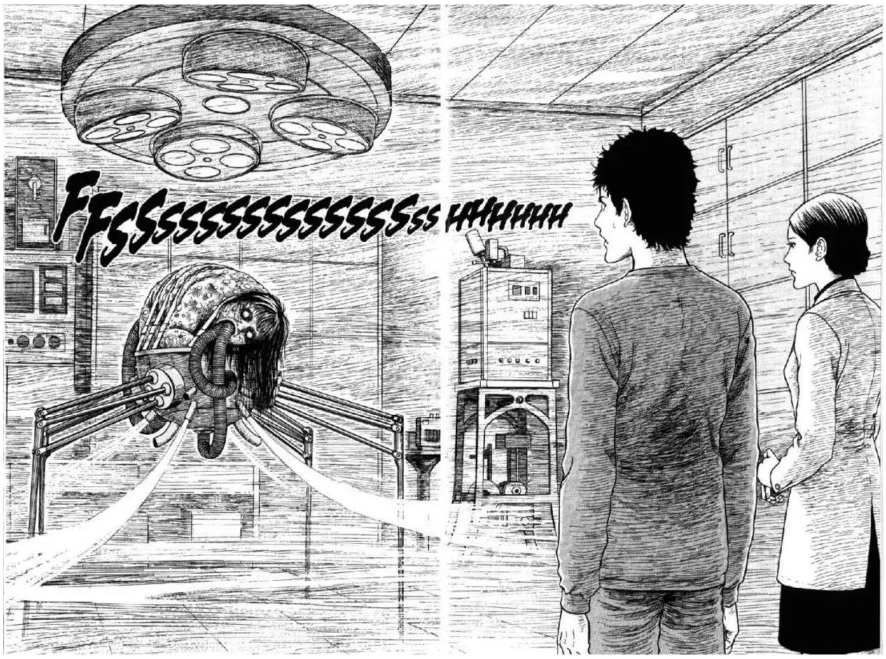
He began reading and soon afterwards wanted to try it for himself. So, he took a pencil and paper, or sometimes the back of advertisements, he would draw frames, imitating the manga he had read. He had started before even entering elementary school initially just for fun. For him, the manga he was reading wasn't that scary but the TV shows where they went into haunted houses or had a medium to summon spirits, he thought those to be very scary, yet interesting. He couldn't go to the bathroom by himself, especially since the bathroom in his house was at the end of an underground tunnel. Strange creatures, and grotesques fascinated him and he enjoyed reading his manga. All of those experiences were later reflected in his manga. These can be seen as manifestations of archetypal fears deep into the collective unconscious - these fears evoke a sense of disgust, resonate with primal human instincts as reflected in his works. He said that most of his works are based on the experiences he had on the information he learned in his childhood.

Tomie as an Archetypal figure. One of his most famous works and debut work was 'Tomie'. When he was in junior high school, a boy in his class died in a traffic accident and it just felt so odd to him that a classmate, so full of life, should suddenly disappear from the world. He had the strange feeling that his classmate would show up again innocently. Ever since then, he wanted to express that feeling in his manga. That's how he came up with the idea of a girl who was supposed to have died but then just shows up as if nothing had happened. She manipulates men, drives them crazy, yet comes back to life again and again no matter how many times she is hacked into pieces or killed in any number of violent ways. Such a character was so popular with the primary audience of girls who read it in the magazine. Junji Ito thought that immortality or never dying is something everyone longs for. At some point, everyone wished they could be immortal but Tomie lives her life completely as she wishes. Women have this desire to act like a princess so they envy Tomie's freedom. Tomie embodies the archetype of the eternal feminine or the femme fatale as she manipulates men and evokes envy in women, tapping into collective fantasies and fears surrounding immortality and the power dynamics between the sexes.



Gyo and war-related fears. Another work 'Gyo' where ultimately the creatures seem to take over Japan and it's implied that they will eventually take over the world. In the beginning, they were born out of chemical weapons experiments. So Junji Ito says that when he was a child, his parents who were of the war generation, would tell him tragic and frightening war stories so he naturally developed a strong awareness of war as a scary thing. As a boy, he was afraid he would be drafted as a soldier when he grew up so this fear naturally developed into anti-war feelings and got reflected in his work 'Gyo' War is what really frightens him in real life. In the end, it all boils down to a fear of death, Mysteries which hint at death, situations where he fears there is impending danger, where something unknown lurks ahead, things that heighten his insecurity. These tap into collective anxieties surrounding war and its consequences. "Halloween is not scary, the war is" (Yana Rudenko, 2023). War is a recurring theme in human history and fear associated with it is deeply ingrained in the collective unconscious. Also, Ito's acknowledgement of feeling shivers at his own works, highlights his awareness of the psychological impact of his art. Jung emphasised the importance of

confronting and integrating the shadow aspects of the psyche for personal growth and artistic expression. Ito's willingness to delve into dark and disturbing themes is suggestive of his willingness to confront the shadow within himself and his readers.



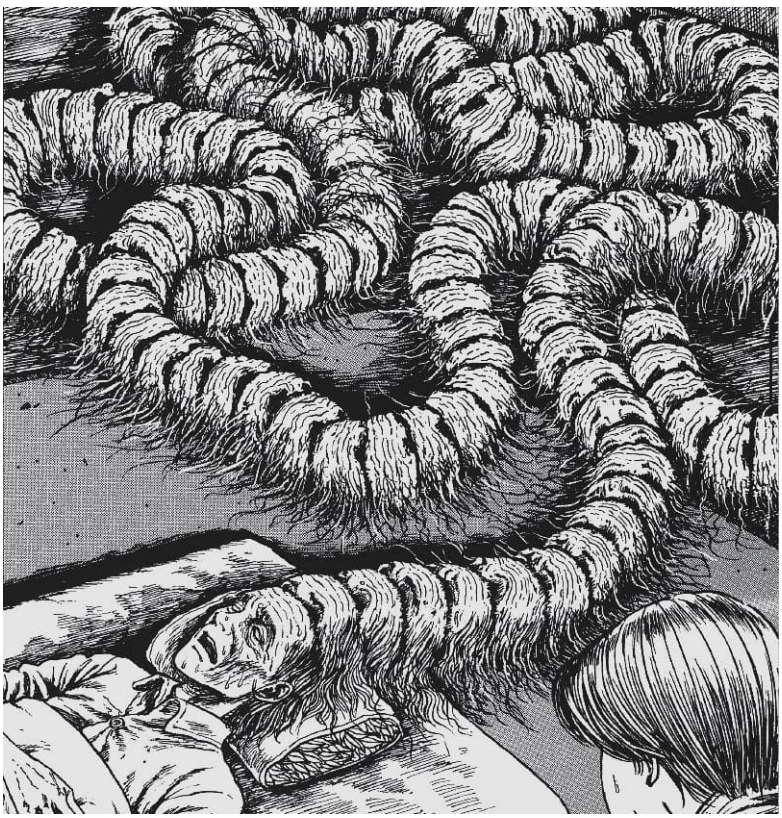
Uzumaki and the symbolism of spirals. One of Ito's most popular manga series is Uzumaki, a supernatural story about a small town's frightening obsession and paranoia surrounding spirals. The spiral symbol is represented in many ways throughout Ito's artwork, and as the manga continues, the images become more omnipresent and sinister. He considers it the most complete demonstration of his artistic ability and imagination. It talks about the archetypal symbols of infinity, transformation. The pervasive and sinister nature of spirals is reflective of Jung's archetypes in symbols beyond cultural boundaries.



Grotesques and the concept of Individuation. Grotesque really appeals to him. It could be that his curiosity is stronger than fear or perhaps he just has bad taste. Something which is a bit different from human, not animal either and yet exists in our world. It spreads in rumours and remains a mystery. In the past, rumours about such things as kuchisake onna (an urban myth about a woman with a split mouth who kills passersby) were common. With things like that, rumours spread first before facts which is quite thrilling for him, rather than scary and fascinating. It's the mystery of it that he finds interesting and the fact that these are products of his imagination. Demons, for example, may have a model inspiring them, but Japanese monsters come in so many varieties and their forms can be very interesting. It is said that they are inspired by particular human characteristics which are then exaggerated. There's something fun in peeking into a world which exists outside of our everyday experience. Junji Ito's horror manga stories focus on the uncanny, body horror, cosmic horror, and the grotesque. His horror imagines strange and unsettling things happening in realistic settings that feel uncomfortably close to our own worlds. This clearly explains Jung's concept of the shadow and the collective fear of the unknown. Humanity's collective fascination with the unknown and the incomprehensible. This resonates with Jung's concept of individuation which is the process of integrating unconscious aspects of the psyche into conscious awareness. Characters in his

stories undergo psychological and physical transformations mirroring Jung's notion of the psyche's potential for growth and evolution.

Insects and Creatures. Sometimes, he does get shivers at his own works like he had a manga about a man with a severed neck and there's a scene where a cockroach is inserted in the cut - that was awful. In his house, when he went down into the tunnel, they had a storage shed with an earthen floor. In those days, it was exposed to the earth and spider crickets would often be there. They had spotted bodies, rounded backs and very long legs with which they would jump all over the place as soon as you got near them. Those really frightened him. Insects and creatures evoke a primal fear response in many people as they symbolise fears and anxieties related to contamination, decay, death, and the unknown which are archetypal symbols deeply ingrained in the collective unconscious.

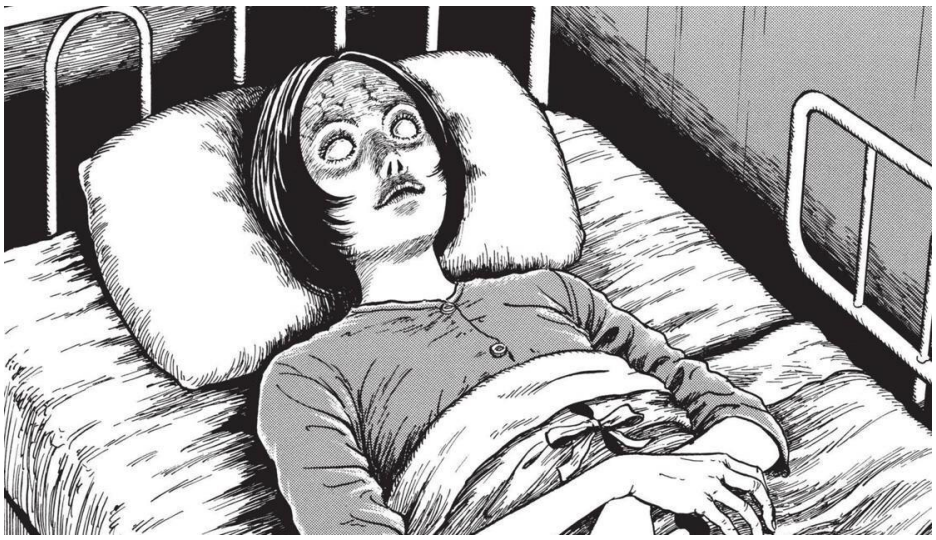


Influence of Childhood dreams. For example, 'The Hanging Balloon's was based on a childhood dream he had. The impressions he had as a child were very strong and stayed with

him for the rest of his life. He would occasionally go to the town when he lived in the countryside. He would see ad balloons floating above the buildings and they were symbols of the big city life which he aspired to. He liked flying saucers as a kid, UFOs - those strange, unidentified, mysterious objects in the sky so he combined elements which he liked and incorporated them into his work.



One of his works 'Long Dream' has a strong science fiction element to it. When he was a kid, his eldest sister told him something she had learned. She said that dreams are viewed in an instant, so when you're sleeping and have a dream, you feel time passing by, but for someone looking at the dreamer objectively, the dream only takes an instant. He did some research online recently and found that this used to be a major theory called the 'instantaneous generation' theory. He imagined that if you could have a dream that lasted for a considerable duration, it might be possible to have a very long dream in an instant as well. Jung often said that dreams contain archetypal imagery and symbols that reflect deeper psychological truths.



Strengths and Criticisms

Jung proposed archetypes as universal, deeply ingrained patterns within the collective unconscious and Ito's horror thrives on exploiting these primal fears. He emphasised the shadow as the repressed aspects of our personality and Ito's characters often confront monstrous versions of themselves which can be seen as the shadow coming to life. Jung believed individuation as crucial for psychological wholeness. Ito's characters, forced to confront monstrous representations of their inner struggles can be seen on a path toward potential individuation even if the outcome is bleak. Ito's stories often have a dreamlike quality with distorted body forms and illogical situations - Jungian analysis helps interpret these symbols effectively.

Jungian archetypes tend to be more symbolic and abstract whereas Ito's horror hinges on the grotesque and the physical transformation of the body. Also Jung's theory developed in the early 20th century, Ito's work reflects modern anxieties about technology, body image and societal pressures so Jungian lens might not capture these contemporary fears that nicely. Jung's archetypes were derived from Western Mythology and psychology whereas Ito's work draws heavily from Japanese folktales and societal anxieties so Jungian analysis might miss these cultural differences and force a western interpretation onto the stories.

Interventions

Due to the nature of Junji Ito's horror, interventions wouldn't be directly applicable within the fictional narratives but considering the psychological impact his work can leave on our minds, there are few things to be careful of. His work is undeniably creepy but also incredibly well-crafted. So take time to appreciate the intricate details in his panels, the way he uses shading to create a sense of dread and the overall composition of his pages. How he uses visual metaphors to convey complex emotions and ideas. Horror is meant to make you afraid, scared and uneasy and Ito's work is no exception but we are supposed to be mindful of how we are consuming his stories. If you feel overwhelmed or particularly anxious, take a break and come back to the story later. Otherwise, you might be more susceptible to the disturbing aspects of his work. Many websites and book introductions offer content warnings for horror stories to alert you to disturbing elements like extreme violence, gore or body horror. Consider recommendations from friends, horror fans online or trusted reviewers, so that you can increase your chances of finding his stories that you'll appreciate without being overly disturbed.

A 2022 study published in Digital Geography and Society that investigates the role that the collective unconscious may play in our thoughts and behaviours while interacting on social media platforms. Thus, Jung's ideas continue to be assessed to better understand the collective unconscious and how it works.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while science has replaced ancient myths and symbols in explaining the physical world, Jung argues it has left a void in understanding the human psyche. This "secret unrest" stems from neglecting the deeper, symbolic aspects of existence. Just as primitive man found meaning in interpreting natural phenomena, we too need a psychology that acknowledges the

unconscious and its powerful archetypes. By recognizing and integrating this "deeper mind," we can move towards a more complete sense of self and fulfilment.

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