

BRAZIL – 1985

by

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One of the most interesting aspects of Brazil, when viewed from a psychological point, of view is that there is a constant and two-way crossing of the barrier between the conscious and the unconscious. We are used to films in which the unconscious aspects of the central character are manifest physically in the conscious world as either other characters or aspects of the physical environment. What is less common, and it happens with almost boundless abandon in Brazil, is that aspects of the conscious world enter the hero's unconscious and there become figures which must be dealt with.

Brazil centers around the dreams of Sam Lowery and his battle to reconcile these dreams with his everyday life. Sam is an introvert and seems perfectly content with the resulting anonymous lifestyle in, very appropriately, the government's Records Department. He is a minor minion in a post-Orwellian mega-bureaucracy. However, there is no hegemony. The society is weathering its thirteenth year of terrorist activities, including the bombing of stores selling television sets.

Sam's unconscious discontent is manifest in several ways. Ida Lowery, Sam's external mother, is active in the upper echelons of the bureaucracy and tries to get Sam promoted against his will. The introvert is quite happy just where he is with no demands on him. A wholly different and contrasting manifestation of Sam's unconscious discontent is his activation of the Great Mother archetype in his dreams and fantasies.

The film seems obsessed with "ducts," the pipes and tubes that seem to form an intestinal maze of modern society. The government controls these ducts, the conduits through which everything flows. The operation of the ducts is

essential to everyday life since the government cleverly made everyone dependent on the state through this monopoly.

While Sam consciously claims to have no desires and to have no dreams, we know better. And his dreams bring to him his perfect anima figure – a veil-wrapped ethereal woman, the manifestation of his internal feminine aspect. However, in this film, she also has an external manifestation – Jill Clayton, a truck driver under suspicion of being involved in terrorist activities. (Note here the psychological terrorism being done by the unconscious against Sam's ossified attitudes.) Throughout the film Sam slips from consciousness into his unconscious, in and out of a dream state, in and out of a relationship with Jill while his anima struggles to emerge and differentiate.

In Sam's first dream, he joins his dream girl mid-air dressed as an ill-fated Icarus. In this dream, Sam and the woman kiss in mid-air. However, the Conunctio (the joining together of opposing aspect of the psyche) is never accomplished because they must kiss through her veil. Thus, there is still interference between direct communication between Sam and his anima figure. The dream is interrupted by a phone call from his boss (a negative father figure), Mr. Kurtzman (his name is sort-of German for short man, or curt man – he is both) seeking his assistance on a problem at work. His words to Sam are, "I need you." This shows the tight connection between Sam and this negative father figure. By making himself dependent on Sam, he locks Sam into the status quo.

However, these plagues upon Sam – mother, Kurtzman, anima – have reached a crisis status. As Sam rushes to prepare himself for work, the "modern"

conveniences in his apartment begin to malfunction. Thus, Sam's internal state is reflected in the physical representation of his habitat. As with much of movie storytelling, the hero's internal psychic state is manifest physically as some aspect of the environment or an oppositional character, or, as in this case, both.

Sam's second dream again finds the Icarus-like anti-hero soaring toward his "dream girl" who now beckons him with a slightly troubled voice. Suddenly, threatening structures grow menacingly from the surface walling Sam off from his anima figure. Since the surface usually corresponds to the conscious state and the sky an elevated psychic state, we can see that Sam's conscious attitude is preventing the Conunctio with his anima.

Sam awakens from this dream to find that the air conditioning in his apartment has failed. The turmoil within him is expressing itself physically as an environmental change. An internal fire has been lit. Sam's attempt at an easy Conunctio with the anima has been interrupted by the natural alchemical process through which he must go. Here he begins to experience Calciniatio – the burning away of the unnecessary elements.

This Calciniatio leads to the next stage – Coagulatio when the ethereal dream girl coalesces into a material girl, Jill, who he meets on the way home from work one day. Attempting to locate her through the computer network in his office, he discovers that she is a "level three" terrorist suspect. And this is certainly true at the psychic level: the materialize anima figure can certainly blow up Sam's well-constructed status quo lifestyle.

It is at this point that the two feminine aspects begin to interact. The Negative Mother – his real mother – and her schemes become necessary to Sam because he finds that the only way he can reach Jill is by a promotion to the Office of Information Retrieval. It is fascinating how the two aspects of the feminine seemingly conspire to get Sam out of his rut.

Kurtzman, the Negative Father, is also activated when he tries to block Sam's promotion. When Kurtzman confronts Sam with, "But this is what I thought you wanted" in reference to his current job, Sam cries, "Oh, I don't know what I want." And with this vocalization of his inner state, his first connection between conscious and unconscious, he drops back into this unconscious dream world for another dose of psychic education.

Now Sam is flying between tall and crowded buildings, navigating through what was recently an insurmountable barrier. He sees his "dream girl" being dragged by a hideous demon through the streets in a cage. He attempts a rescue. But when he brandishes his sword, he instantly returns to consciousness and finds his apartment filled with a pair of the most obnoxious imaginable workers attempting to fix his ducts.

The interaction that follows is most instructive. They tell him in no uncertain terms that Central Services will not tolerate anyone but them fixing his ducts. Any unauthorized tinkering, by himself or by someone else, will be considered sabotage. It is clear that the minions of Central Services represent the old, tired, and inefficient status quo. Thus, the conservative, anti-growth manifestation of the old psychic order, the ducts, are clearly demonstrated.

Out of this confrontation, a new aspect of Sam obtains – his possible future freedom. This is signaled by the arrival of Harry Tuttle, a free-lance heating engineer who bucks that system at every turn. He fixes Sam's ducting gratis. Harry Tuttle is that aspect of Sam's unconscious that wishes to wrest from within his ossified life a new and growth-filled, adventurous connection with the anima and, ultimately, a restructured life with a new, more wholesome balance.

Following Central Service' abrupt exit, Sam again enters the unconscious. This time he is in a back alleyway fighting for control of his dream girl/anima. And now the demon uses the voices of Sam's guilty past to control him, just as Mr. Kurtzman also uses guilt to control Sam. He hears the voices of those he questioned while working for Information Services. In particular, he is confronted by a woman whose husband was mistakenly abducted by Information Retrieval. Jill witnessed this event and formed an instant antipathy to Sam as a result. Thus, Sam's participation in the ossified system is an anathema to his anima, especially when it causes such physical and psychic damage – the man is arrested because of a bureaucratic error, is killed, and his wife is charged for the services rendered!

As his dream sequences continue, Sam is confronted by a behemoth Samurai warrior. Sam is knocked to the ground by the Samurai and instantly wakes up. A new layer of his unconscious has been revealed and, as with many eruptions from the unconscious, it is a shock. The safest escape from confrontation with the unconscious is to return to consciousness. He awakens tangled in the ducting that Central Services has left strewn about his

apartment. His psychic disrepair is beginning to manifest itself in the conscious world and is threatening to enfold him into helplessness.

Frustrated in his attempts to locate Jill, Sam accepts his mother's help by attending a high-class party which she hosts. Since she is symbolic of the Negative Mother, Sam should be very suspicious of her guests. However, and this may be his fatal error, he is so overcome with his need to find Jill that he throws all caution to the wind and approaches Mr. Helpman (sic) for a position in Information Retrieval.

When Mr. Helpman agrees to take Sam on, Sam immediately enters his unconscious where he continues his battle with the Samurai warrior, this time with some success. The warrior disappears, but Sam hears his “dream girl” crying for help. This is a complex journey into the unconscious. His success over the masculine warrior seems to be connected with taking action in the real world and accepting a job at IR. However, the price he pays for this advance in the physical world is to retreat in the psychic world by colluding with the Negative Mother and her minions, specifically Mr. Helpman. Sam realizes that the cry for help is his own cry from within and immediately returns to the conscious state to find himself standing forlornly at the doors to his new job at Information Retrieval.

In his new job, Sam's first concern is to locate Jill Layton. However, he is forced to displace this to the man in the office next door. This is another sign of impending disaster. In a psychic journey, one cannot displace the search for the anima to another internal figure for it is the ego itself that must be responsible for the contact if, once it is made, it is to lead to growth.

The error of Sam's ways is shown more clearly in his next journey into the unconscious world. He now finds himself to be a wingless Icarus chasing his caged "dream girl" through the concrete alleyways. He is trying to grab a rope hanging from her ascending cage in an attempt to rise with it. This image is full of negative implications: the caged anima, the desperateness of the attempt to grab onto a dangling rope, the incorrect nature of the ascent. All this is made clear for just as Sam seizes the rope and is beginning to rise, the street opens below him, and two cobble-stone arms rise up to grab him. As he looks down at the brick-faced figure, it says to him, "Sam, don't go, please." This is the last desperate call from his old, ossified psyche calling out to keep him in the regressive state in which he has lived for most of his life. Again, faced with a tension which he is not capable of resolving, Sam avoids the confrontation by returning to consciousness and he is back at his office at IR.

By now it should be clear that Sam will be unsuccessful in his attempt to connect with his anima. These three final dreams are a clear demonstration of his utter failure. Sam has finally located Jill and has made a temporary and a basically uncomfortable truce with her. As they walk through a department store, a terrorist bomb explodes, and Sam stands up the government troops who immediately accuse Jill of complicity. And he immediately slips into the unconscious where he finds himself again battling the Samurai warrior. Sam now defeats the warrior, but when he removes the face plate of the fallen giant, he finds his own face. He has, of course, been battling himself all along. The question is whether he has now conquered his own internal negative aspects in the form of the Samurai or he has simply defeated himself. Unfortunately for Sam, Brazil opts for the latter option. The minions of the

negative Father, the government's troops, swallow Sam as he is arrested in the conscious world.

Sam escapes from the police, finds Jill, and hides in his mother's apartment/nest. Again, this is a bad choice, for not only have the governmental projections of the negative father who swallowed Sam by arresting him, now he willingly gives himself over to the Negative Mother by occupying her space and, in essence, taking her place.

Sam now takes the last step leading to his downfall: he goes to Information Services, breaks into Helpman's office, hacks into the computer, and erases both his and Jill's records and identities from the computer data base. He returns triumphantly to Jill, now clad in virginal white, to tell her that he has "killed her" by "deleting" her from the computers. She no longer exists. This may be fine for Jill in the conscious world, but what does it say about Sam's anima? He then jokingly says to Jill, "How about a little necrophilia?" While his sexual invitation is both funny and touching in the real world, at the psychological level he is proposing a *Conunctio* with an anima that is sadly dead and non-functional.

Sam's attempt to make connection with Jill in the conscious world causes him to slip back into the unconscious once again. In this last dream episode, Sam has regained his wings. But now he is completing the disastrous journey of the mythical Icarus who he has been unknowingly imitating. He is flying upward toward the sun taking the partially veil-wrapped Jill with him. Sam's flight dissolves just as did Icarus' approach to the sun when the minions of the solar-patriarchal figure – the police – break in on the couple. Sam is arrested

and, in a final coup de gras to any possibility of Conunctio with the anima, Jill is shot and killed.

With his psychic foundations in ruins, Sam – and we the audience – can no longer tell reality from fantasy, the conscious world from traveling in the unconscious. Sam seemingly escapes from interrogation at Information Retrieval under the hands to his friend, Jack Lint. He goes to the funeral of one of his mother's friends who died of plastic surgery – that is, attempting to change herself in much the same way, but by different methods, as has Sam. When his mother turns around to address him, it turns out to be Jill dressed as his mother – the positive and negative aspects of the anima have merged! She tells him to leave her alone and stop calling her mother. Apparently, Sam has asked aspects of his anima to play inappropriate roles – asking, in the conscious world, his lover to play the role of his mother.

Throughout the film, Sam has attempted to distance himself from his mother. The dead anima now enforces this attempt. Actually, this contributed heavily to his errors. One cannot distance themselves from any aspect of the anima, no matter how repulsive. The only way to conquer the negative mother is to face her and integrate her. Jung says the archetype of The Great Mother is "the first incarnation of the anima archetype [who] personifies in fact the whole unconscious." Sam's juxtaposition of Jill, his "dream girl" anima, for his mother, and his consistent inability to connect with either one, marked Sam as doom to failure from the outset of his efforts at balancing his life. Sam's inability to become conscious of the anima and to free himself from her grip of her possession prevents the maturation of his psyche, ultimately

spelling failure of his unconscious attempts at representing and living a balanced life in the conscious world.