Middle Space:

The Wildness Between Home Space and Outer Space



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The Imaginary

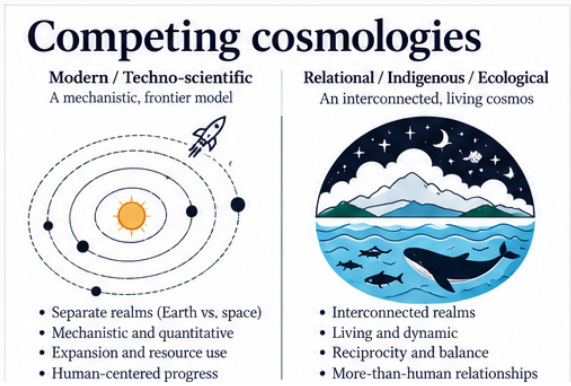
I'd like to propose that we rethink space. Instead of seeing us "sending people into space," where the astronaut is standing on the ground on minute then floating gravity-less the next, I suggest we see the process as entering a new zone that is at once familiar and terrifying. I will call this middle space. It is not familiar home space, nor is it distance deep space. It is a step into the strangely familiar.

What I propose is a new imaginary. An imaginary is an idea or concept held in common, a useful concept. It may or may not have physical referent. Europe, for instance, refers to a large peninsula, but also so much more. Asia is another imaginary. Some people argue that Asia is too large and diverse to mean anything, or that it reflects Orientalist position. Still Asia is used every day, and we know more-or-less what we mean by it.

Two other examples are the sky and the oceans. These are physical places, but in human history they mean much more. Both realms have been core human preoccupations, constants in history. The sky is seen in most cultures as the place where the gods live. It is limitless and supernatural. The sea is also a supernatural place that seems limitless. It provides bounty, yet is full of danger and mystery. Both these imaginaries are useful metaphors for what I propose, a reconceptualization the realm of space exploration. I call this Middle Space.



An All-Encompassing View

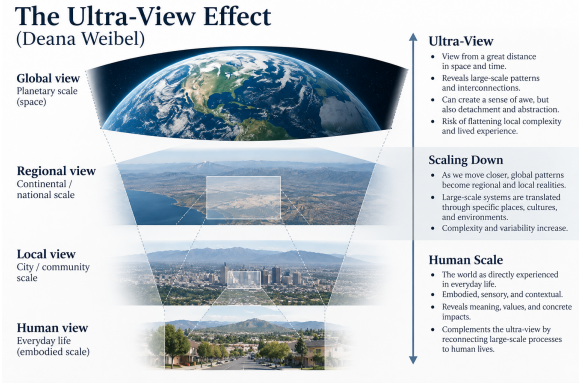


To refine the imaginary of Middle Space I will approach from four angles. First, comparative cosmologies. This is an idea I borrowed from Hae-Seo Kim's discussion of the Korean space program. The competing cosmologies usually refers to two major worldviews, one privileging technology and science, the other traditional forms of knowledge. This approach is binary and doesn't help develop a new viewpoint.

A more interesting example is provided by the Human Relationship with Our Ocean Planet report issued in 2018. The researchers developed several proposed approaches and a useful set of terminology that helps re-envision how we see the oceans. Their approach is inter-disciplinary and includes consideration of well-being and the arts. They propose a systems approach that includes management of the Blue Economy as a shared resource. They call their approach Blue Thinking.



One aspect of Blue Thinking is multiple scales. Single disciplines often get bogged down in a single scale which misses phenomena at different levels. Deana Weibel has categorized these into four levels, the human, the local, the regional, and the global, but of course we could add more, including the interstellar and the transcendental.

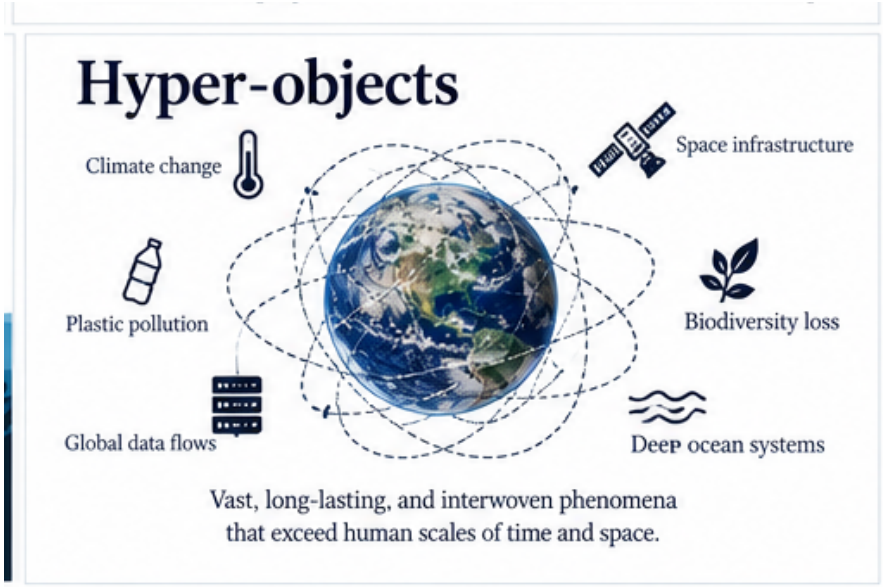


A third approach is to study hyper-objects. These are phenomena barely perceptible at some levels but powerful presences at other levels. Examples include the issues of biodiversity loss or global data. Hyper-objects are new because they have only come into view through the use of sensitive equipment. The best

example of a hyper-objecct, one explained by Timothy Morton, is climate change. This refers to a wide-ranging changes in multiple systems at many levels. Global warming, in contrast, is not a hyper-object, since it refers to a narrow measurement of temperature change over time.

I suspect the idea of hyper-objects is not new, that humans called these great forces that could only be intuited by different names, such as gods or Nature. In our age we can use technology to refine their impact and discover new forms.

All of these methodological concepts are imaginaries, ways of thinking about the world.



Architecture

I turn now to the model I propose. It assumes a “spectrum of strangeness” from our familiar earth environment, through layers of wilderness, to the colar system and deep space. I call the three basic layers Home Space, Middle Space, and Deep Space.

A Spectrum of Strangeness
(from deep space to Earth)

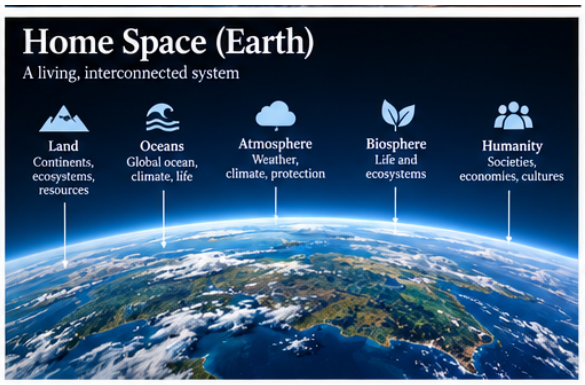


Architecture of the Three Spaces



Home Space

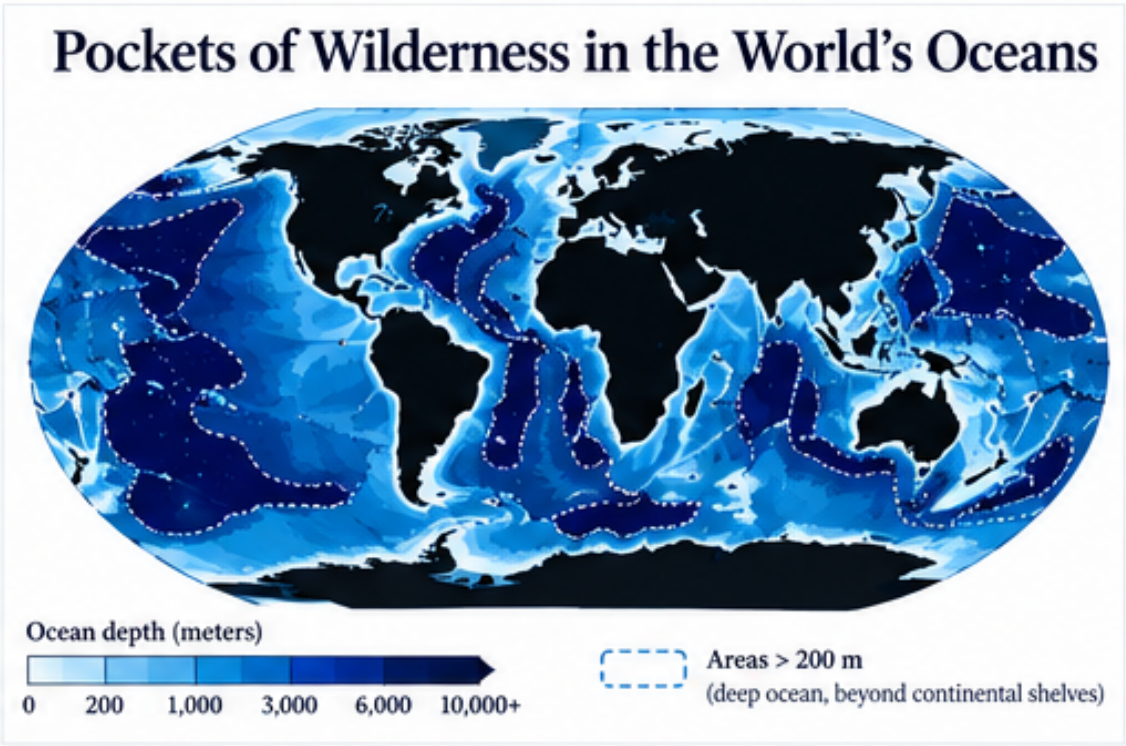
Home space is defined as familiar. It is “at-hand,” so part of our awareness that we assume its continuity. Only great disasters such as earthquakes remind us that Home Space has uncertainty and risk. In general, though, as we go about our daily lives we are able to relax our attention away from the vast Home Space environment and focus on other concerns.



Middle Space

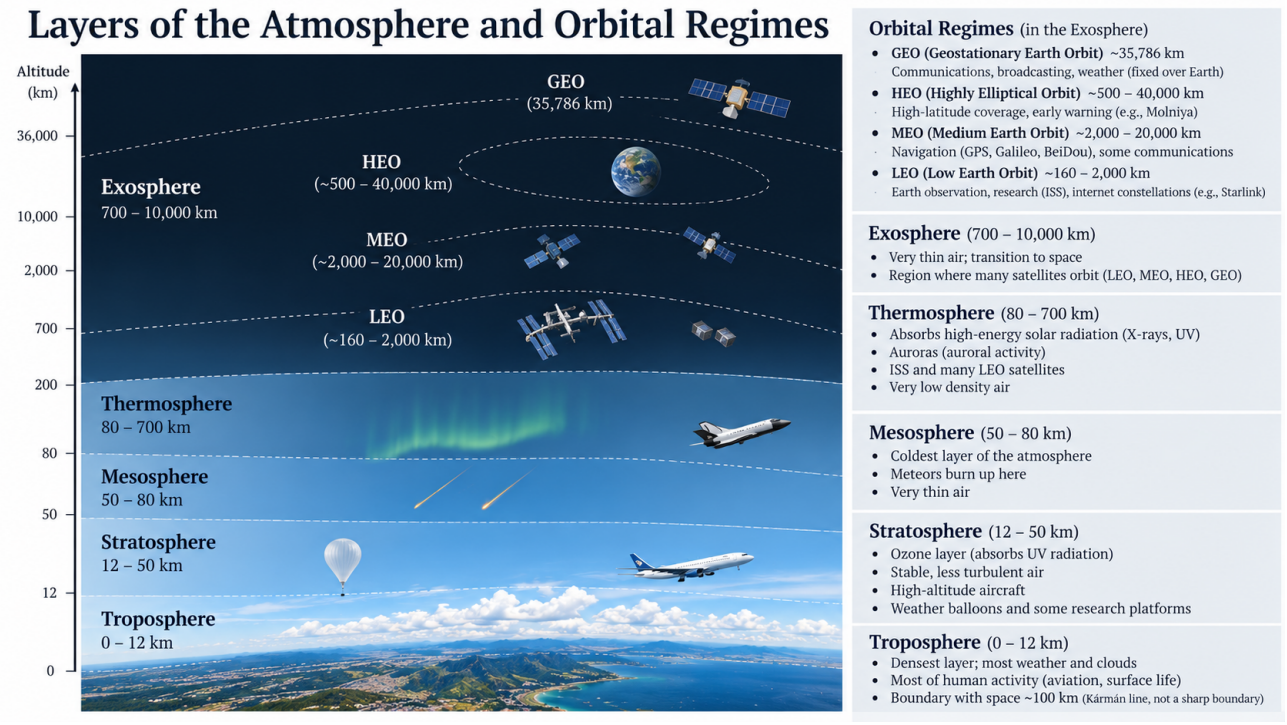
Middle Space, by contrast, demands our heightened attention. Middle space is filled with uncertainty and risk. As a space of transition and movement, the human presence is constantly being tested. Experience itself is different than in Home Space, since the contexts are constantly novel and shifting. Humans in Middle Space quickly realize that its contents are near-infinite.

What I describe is the Wild. Middle Space is a form of Wild-ness, or Wilderness. It stretches not from the borders of earth. Instead it includes the remaining places of Wilderness on earth. One example is the deep oceans. Extreme depths appear to cover only a fraction of the earth. But because of their depth, by definition over 200 meters, they collectively contain 90% of the earth’s water. And they remain largely mysterious to humans. We have barely begun to explore these extreme environments.



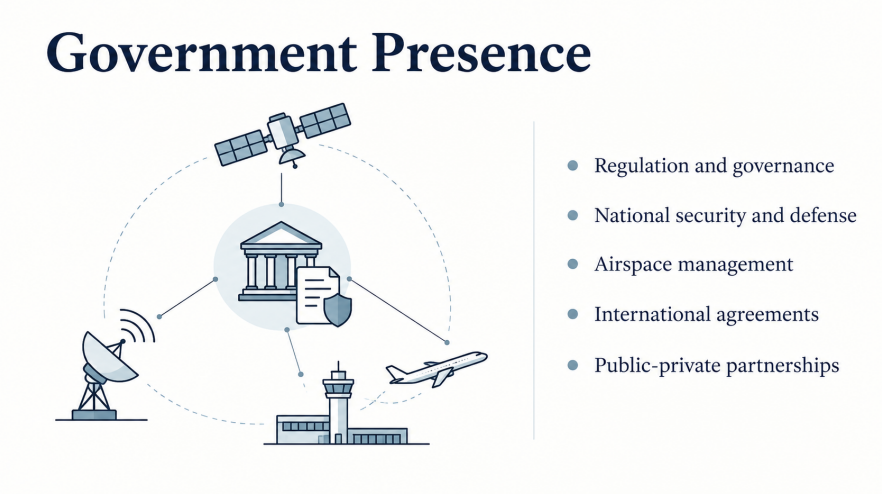
Another type of extreme environment is the atmosphers surrounding the earth. The different layers, from the Troposphere to the Exosphere, contain many unknowns and mysteries.

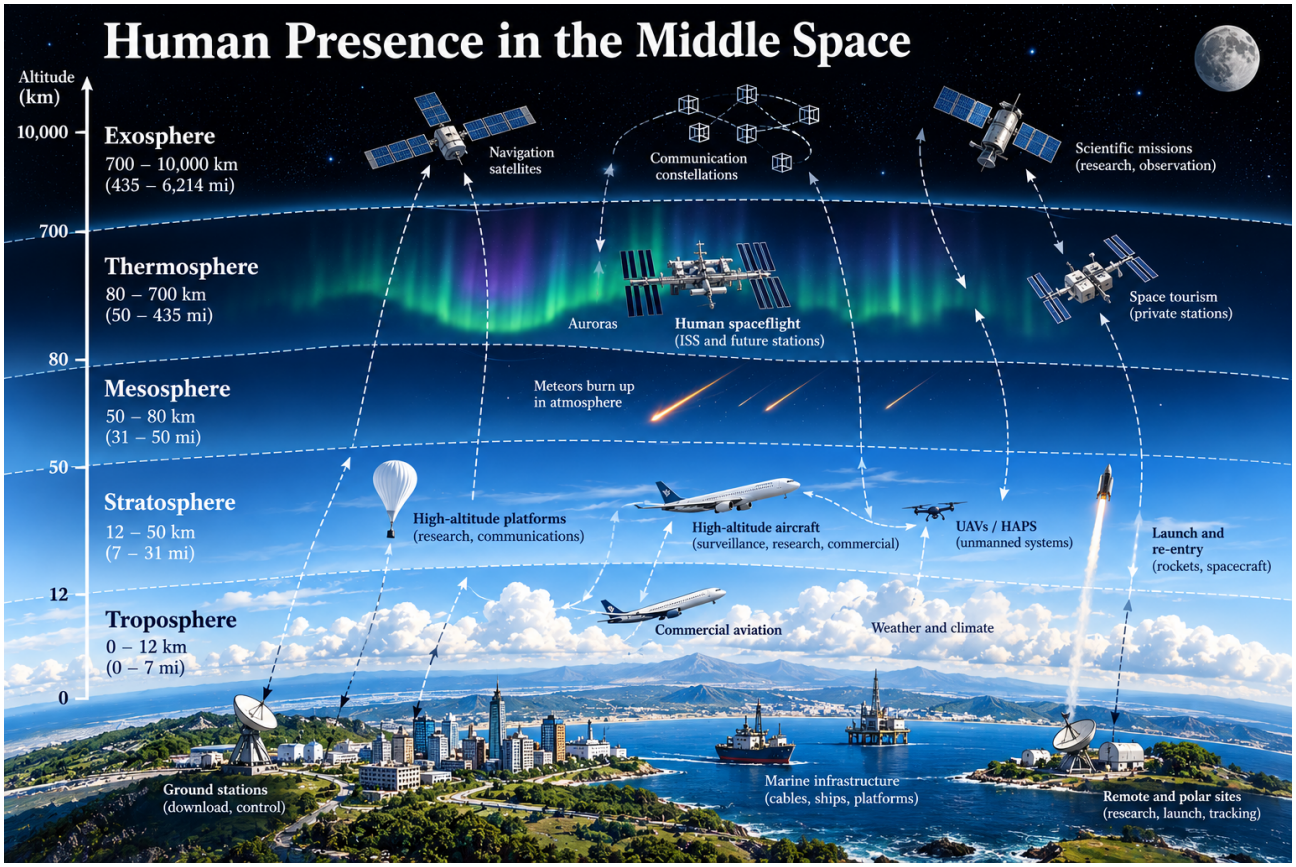
The idea of Middle Space, then focuses on these spaces of mystery, danger, and wildness that we have not fully understood. Granted, Middle Space is a zone of transit on the way to Deep Space. Yet is is much more—a threshold of understanding and exploration.



Human Elements in Middle Space

What exactly is in Middle Space? Besides its physical phenomena, water, ice, chemicals, gases, it already holds many human traces. Governments are present to varying degrees, now often in partnership with private entities. Thus there is a human institutional presence. And to support that presence there is a large infrastructure, the New Space sites that are being build on earth. In the physical realm, the human presence is largely technological.





Soft Infrastructure

“Every nut and bolt creates a new form of relationship with humans.”

Includes the imaginaries we import and create while in relationship with middle space.

Emotional contexts

Yet we bring much more than machinery. We bring soft infrastructure, such as our imaginations and our emotions. And the physical and non-physical interact; every nut and bolt creates a new form of relationship.

And there are pre-existing entities in Middle Space. Besides the pockets of wilderness mentioned in the oceans there is the moon. The moon is included in middle space because we are so intimate with it. The moon was part of the earth at one time. She has been a constant presence in our awareness. She helps stabilize the earth’s axis. And she taught us how to tell time. Some say the moon set the conditions for all of human evolution.





In terms of human emotions certain habits of feeling come to the fore in Middle Space. When faced with wilderness humans are often caught up in awe. This unique bundle of feelings leads us to dissolve the self and sense that we are part of something larger than our habitual sense of self.

Speculative Realities: Imagined Possibilities

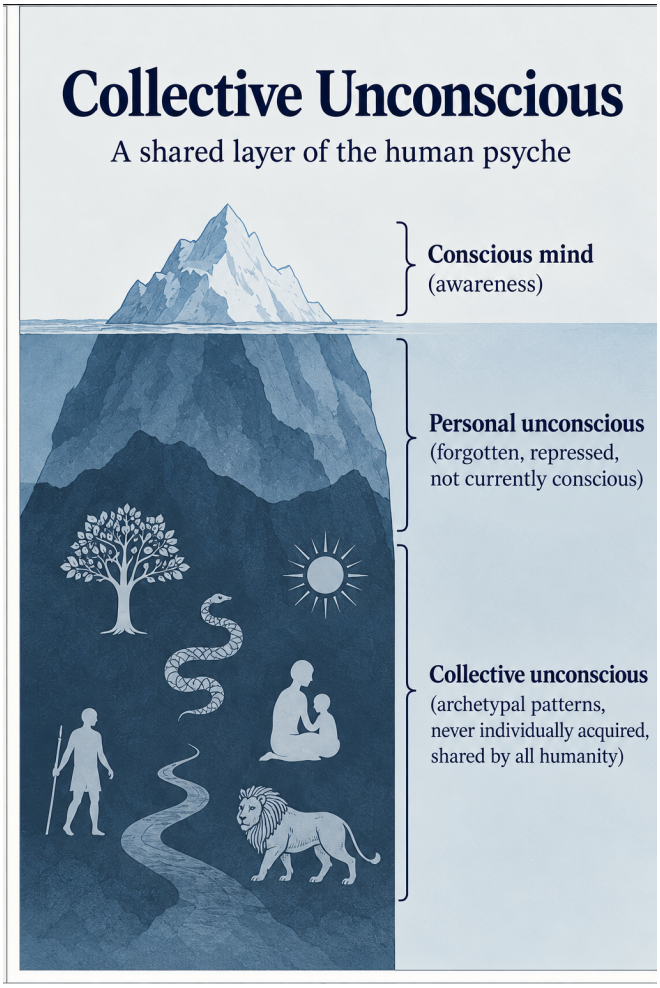
Encounters with Middle Space also invigorate our speculative instincts. We are able to imagine new possibilities in a way familiar to speculative fiction. We see the contradictions embedded in Middle Space, we see how Home Space and Middle Space seem to fold into each other, and we have a heightened sense of futurity, the past seen as a version of the future. Middle Space allows us to revise our awareness of time.

Sources of Middle Space

Jung's Collective Unconscious

Let me turn now to how Middle Space came into being. Again, this is an imaginary, a concept that is widely-shared. This development will use the insights of two psychologists, Jung and Winnicott, and their theiroies of the collective unconscious and potential space.

Jung taught that reality has both physical and a spiritual aspects. Further, the human psyche has conscious and unconscious areas. We are usually unaware of the unconscious elements. In addition there is another form of the unconscious, the collective unconscious. This is a vast area that is not formed by individuals. Instead it is passed down from past to present as a kind of heritage. In Jung's words:



"The collective unconscious is a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a person unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition. While the personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity."

C. G. Jung, "The Concept of the Collective Unconscious."

Archetypes

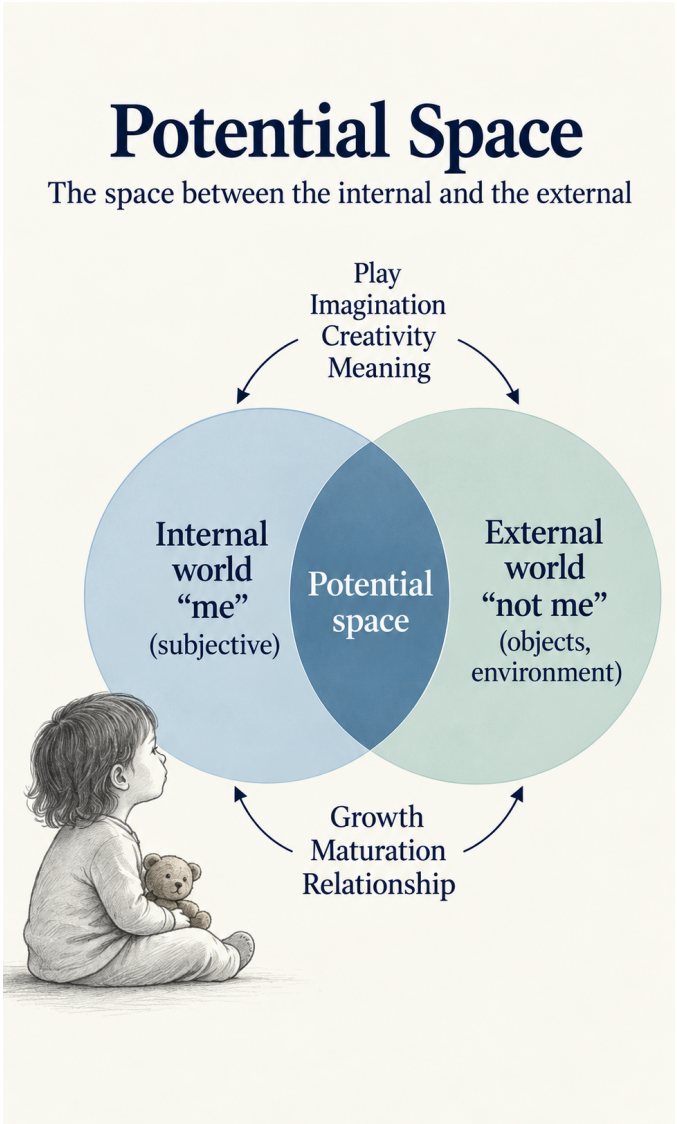
Jung did not exhaustively spell out the contents of the collective unconscious. But he was clear that there it contains pre-existent forms that are products of the collective unconscious, called archetypes. We can perhaps conceive of these are templates or energetic centers. Some examples of archetypes are:



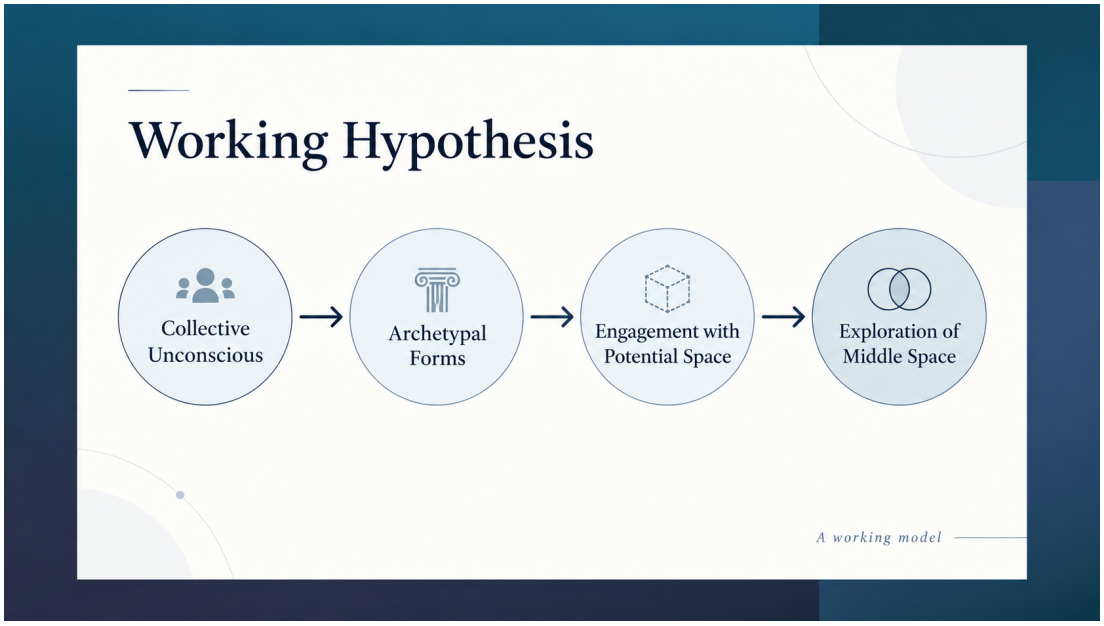
Potential Space

I turn now to the second part of the model, potential space. Potential space conjures up the idea of multiple possibilities or pathers available to individuals. But Winnicott's definition was much more narrow. He saw the creation of potential space as natural result of the maturation process in children. Children begin assuming that every experience and sensation is theirs, that there is nothing else. This includes the presence of the nurturing mother. However over time the child becomes aware of a difference between self and mother, and a movement toward separation begins. Outside images and sensations are then categorized as being separate from self.

Then a third space opens up which is between the outside world and the self, potential space. Winnicott saw this as a safe space of exploration and play. This is where the child learns about the world and, eventually, social life.



My proposed model is that Potential Space becomes a way of interacting with the world that is always accessible. For some people Potential Space is present in the world as a locus of exploration, risk and vastness. This is how the imaginary of Middle Space comes into existence. And humans recongnize its contours as the same Potential Space they knew as an infant. But it is now filled with an unlimited array of objects—wild environments, technological challenges, deep emotions and those ever-present archetypes. Potential space may in fact open us up to the entire collective unconscious.



Conclusion

From the perspective of Jungian psychology, humanity's effort to go into outer space can be seen as an operation of the transcendent function. The transcendent function, playing out in middle space, allows each person to fuse and assimilate both the inner and outer worlds, the unconscious and the conscious, the real and the imaginary. Middle space is not a transit zone. It is a necessary site of transformation in our journey into deep space.

Ability to deal with transitional phenomena is crucial when we encounter hyper-objects in middle space.