

Mask as an epiphenomenon of the complex in psychotherapy

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Abstract

One of the pitfalls in the psychotherapeutic field can be traced when working on the patient's complexes. In order to highlight the implications offered by the function of the mask, capable even of being revealed as a true epiphenomenon of the complexes in the psychotherapeutic path, the work presented, starting from the analytical theoretical framework, highlights the semantic peculiarities offered by C.G. Jung in reference to the concepts that the analytical psychologist himself offers on the themes attributable to the mask and the complex. The methods through which analytical psychology moves in the therapeutic path allow us to grasp the originals of - as they are not produced with a conscious intention - the therapeutic possibilities offered by the analysis of the dream. Indeed, it will be through the interpretation of dreams, that the highlighting of a patient's psychotherapy complexes will be most possible. In the final phase, the conclusions will be drawn on the principal limits and resources of the analytical therapeutic pathway.

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1. Introduction

Referring to the function of the mask, highlighting in particular its ability to act as an epiphenomenon of the complex in psychotherapy, means to emphasize the fact that the predilection of a particular individual to make use of the possibility of masking his Ego in the psychotherapeutic path, other than the collateral manifestation of a phenomenon, which finds its real origin in the genesis of one or more complexes (Jung, 1931b; 1976; 2014b).

With 'complex' we refer to a generic term that indicates the presence of a nucleus around which psychic facts related to a theme rotate (Jacobi, 2013; Jung, 1914).

Remaining faithful to the canons of conceptual clarification linked to analytical psychology, it is good to immediately operate a fundamental distinction between what concerns individual complexes, which produce a personal tendency, and what concerns archetypes, whose influence

is visible when we consider issues capable of influencing entire generations and national organizations (Jung, Freeman, von Franz, von Franz & von Franz, 1991; Settineri, Merlo, Turiaco & Mento, 2017).

Taking into consideration the personal complexes, they can be referred to by comparing them to attempts to make compensations with regard to attitudes connected to a specific topic that are difficult to manage on a conscious level.

An example of a complex is the maternal one, which can be diagnosed in the light of the ideational or affective preponderance towards the mother, for imaginative redundancy or, again, for the association linked to cultural aspects related to the same theme.

The central nucleus, in this case the mother, defines the name of the complex, which is given by all the elements that revolve around it (Jung, 2014a).

The complex opens the door to understanding the disorder because in itself it is not physiological or pathological, what really defines it is its entity.

2. Analytical psychology

This work aims to set itself the objective of making people understand why they tend to mask their complex in psychotherapy (Wilmer, 1987).

To do this it is necessary first of all to clarify the meaning of 'person' (Edinger, 1985).

Looking at the conceptual definitions offered by Jung in the *Psychological types* (1969), it is possible to see that the 'person' item refers to a further entry: that of 'Anima'.

Here Jung initially chooses to determine a distinction between the concept of 'Anima' and that of 'Psyche'.

The whole psychic system will be counted with 'Psyche', thus including both conscious and unconscious psychic processes.

The 'Anima', instead, comes to coincide with the 'personality'.

With respect to the possibility of offering a complete definition of what is meant when reference is made to the concept of personality, Jung invites us to reflect on the fact that this peculiarity brings with it the impossibility of being static.

As Jung himself observes, it is sufficient to look at the same person in different circumstances to notice how his personality, changing environment, changes itself considerably, giving light to a character clearly different from the previous one (Jung, 1969).

In keeping with this definition, one would therefore have to ask what the true character of a person is, the true personality.

The same analytic psychologist arrives to answer that, probably, a man is not endowed with a single character, and without responding to individual but collective criteria, his personality varies according to the expectations and circumstances of life.

Being identified with the required expectations, the true character cannot be any longer identified; therefore, it is as if a mask were assumed, whose dual and alternative function makes the individual correspond both to his intentions and to the environmental needs.

This attitude *ad hoc* Jung calls him *Persona*, inspired by the name of the mask used by the actors of antiquity (Hudson, 1978; Jung, 1969).

The person, therefore, for reasons of a mainly adaptive nature, will modulate himself on the basis of the relationship that he will be able to establish with certain psychic objects (Settineri, Merlo, Turiaco & Mento, 2018), defined by psychoanalysis as sources and goal of the drive (Pontalis & Laplanche, 1973).

And the relationship he will have with external objects, will be considered by polar analytical psychology with respect to what he will have with the "internal object", which is, his own unconscious (see Fig. 1).

This polarity leads Jung to indicate with the term 'Persona' the attitude towards the outside, hence the external character, and with the term 'Anima' the attitude towards the inside (Jung, 1969).

According to a principle of complementarity, therefore, the more the person appears deficient with respect to certain characteristics, the more they will be contained by his Anima.

And that is, to the extent that a person takes traits related to intellectual propensity, it is likely that his Anima will be sentimental.

Also, the complementarity of the Anima will be valid also taking into consideration the body image (Merlo, Frisone, Settineri & Mento, 2018) and the character of the gender (Hill, 1998).

At this point it's obvious that a woman whose behavioral manifestations denote a great femininity, will be mainly endowed with a male Anima. Vice Versa, a man outwardly endowed with manhood features will host in his unconscious most of his female features invisible to the external eye.

Through the lenses of polarity it would be possible to navigate the process of awareness-raising, since the integration of the opposing parts would give the possibility of reinforcing the Ego and

favoring what in analytical terms is called the *Process of Individuation*, whose goal is reflected in the possibility to further develop one's personality.

Not surprisingly, Jung presents the process of individuation as real only to the extent that the individual learns to be aware of it, establishing a vital relationship with it (Jung, Freeman, von Franz, von Franz & von Franz, 1991).

However, the process of individuation in Jungian terms expresses by far something that goes beyond the mere dialectical relationship with what man is and the events that concern him. This can be seen every time, for example, that one feels the sensation that the path of one's life is being traced by something unconscious, to be followed as if it were a secret design of which no one can actually know.

For this reason, therefore, in order to have the possibility of relying on this process, it is necessary first of all to completely separate everything that concerns personal intentions and convictions, abandoning oneself to the becoming of one's own self-realization path.

During the process of amplification of the conscience (Frigoli, 2016), therefore, it will be necessary to deal with the unconscious dynamics, recognize them and be able to accept them, also making use of the help offered by the dream, since the manifestations of the unconscious can acquire criteria of decipherability above all through the analysis of dreams, which make it possible to highlight the consciousness of the *Shadow* (Jung, Freeman, von Franz, von Franz & von Franz, 1991).

The function that symbolizes dreams is defined by Jung as a maneuver operated by the original mind to pour itself into the "advanced" state of consciousness, whose prerogative is that of never having known the entire psyche of man, thus remaining anchored to a purely conscious and superficial dimension.

Through dreams it is possible to become aware of aspects of the personality that are otherwise unknown, since everything that we try to put aside in a conscious state, the unconscious tends to register it.

The fact that Jung uses the term 'Shadow' to refer to the unconscious part of the personality places us before an illustrative image.

Although, in fact, the Shadow represents only the qualities of the personality that we try to keep away, in a dream its manifestation appears, and often does so in a personalized form.

When it comes to identifying aspects of one's own Shadow, one often feels shame, because all those attributes poured into others and denied to oneself, are recognized as their own, "spit

out" from one's dreams to be unmasked and integrated; this surely will prove to be a great contribution to start the slow and painful process of self-knowledge.

The importance of the dream life, therefore, allows us to broaden the therapeutic journey, also taking into account the multiple meanings that are masked behind the function of the symbols.

This path will allow to attribute maximum importance to the Self of an individual, avoiding the error of focusing only on the Ego, since the latter, compared to the other, constitutes only a small part of the psychic life (Jung, Freeman, von Franz, von Franz & von Franz, 1991).

«Teaching man the art of seeing» (Jung, 2006), taking the words of Jung, means being able to make the patient, through his story and his way of conceiving it, have the therapeutic journey as the ability to polish the lenses he uses to live with and expanding his knowledge of his personal resources.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, like psychoanalysis, analytic psychotherapy has also been at the center of various criticisms.

In fact, just as the *reductio ad causam* has caused Freudian thought to be resolved within the explanatory model of the natural sciences through energy models that can be subscribed to biological development, Jungian thought has often received the same collocation (Brooke, 2015; Galimberti, 2006).

Especially because the Jungian archetypes and primordial images that precede the idea and are the basis of all experience (Jung, 1969), are often traced back to a way of psychological understanding resolved within a psychic determinism (Botta, 2007; Galimberti, 2006; Jung, 1931a).

However, one cannot be entirely sure that the therapy suggested by the analytic psychology can be considered exonerate from what pertains to "human science", thus devoid of deterministic canons.

Because as Jaspers highlights, Jungian's thought, to the extent that it includes archetypes as fundamental human possibilities without falling into the deterministic trap, still allows not to fix individual existence, giving it an effective possibility of opening up to a process of free individuation, unique, disconnected completely from common or pre-established standards.

Fig. 1 Filottete e Paride, characters of the lost tragedy of Sophocles “Filottete a Troia”.



As was noted during the guided tour of the museum of Lipari "Bernabò Brea", the polar and complementary dimension carried out by Jung, understood in its paradigmatic sense as a way through which to draw a substantial source of enrichment of knowledge of Self and the way to understand the reality that has always characterized man, can come to appear under different forms of identity.

Taking inspiration from what is present at the Lipari museum, in fact, it was possible to reflect on how even the masks themselves have always represented two faces of a single reality (tragic / comic, Apollonian / Dionysian).

The Figure proposed as an example in this work compares *Filottete* and *Paride*, faces whose polarity brings out wild and distorted traits that characterize the suffering of Filottete, in contrast to the particularly delicate characters of Paride.

The intent to observe reality, paying particular attention to the traits that characterize its substantial polarity, therefore, is connoted within the same Jungian dimension in which everything takes on meaning at its opposite: conscious / unconscious, introvert / extrovert, rational / irrational, Persona / Anima etc.

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