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Psychology and Psychopathology of the Mask

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Abstract

The following are reflections of a clinical psychologist and a psychotherapist; first of all it's important to remember that the task of the disciplinary sector is to find applications of the clinical report, hence the gaps, that other scholars will find, derive from the precise professional context that does not intend to avoid drawing on other knowledge to improve the care in suffering; also the therapeutic plan, of a clear analytical inspiration, wants to obtain from the culture those necessary cues for the amplifications that make the original psychotherapy according to the thought of C.G Jung.

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1. Introduction

We approach the mask object being aware of starting a journey whose arrival is not guaranteed analogously to all the complex symbols. This journey, like all the desires of discovery, does not move in a horizontal space like that of everyday life, rather in a vertical movement, as fascinating as that of geologists and archaeologists in the depth, like those climbers of the altitude and, today, like those who go in space or observe the stars; the study of the mask urges the same demands that is required by a verticality, which is a profound life, closed in itself and therefore very lonely (Ortega y Gasset, 1923). It is necessary to understand what gives the mask a certain amount of solitude, common to who wears it (Ortega y Gasset, 1923); the mask, in its inner side, comes into contact with the womb of another human existence. The mental material needs a certain amount of intuition to unravel what the mask defends: another existence that palpitates next to us.

The method of intuition, perhaps more properly function in an analytical sense, demands to take from the thought only what is necessary for the description, from sentiment, in the Jungian sense, only what is needed to reduce injury, from feeling only the initial contact that allows percepts, to look, to listen, to touch as when we give, virtually, a caress to Pierrot, his eyes begin to tear up. The encounter with the mask, as Ortega y Gasset would say, is the encounter with the *circumstance*, the pain of belonging to a place (often tragic), to a time (sometimes joyful as in comedy), to a proper logic of the pre Aristotelian thought to which Zen Koan would respond "what face did you have before your parents were born"?

The conflict between what is primary and what is secondary then is obvious and, between the two processes, we find the mediator or the object *transeunte* (temporary) protects the first but also accepts the second in what we generically call adaptation and on the latter the psychiatrists founded their normality and their pathology which makes them acceptable in the world of the exact sciences.

In the relationship between mask and adaptation there is, as Ortega y Gasset would underline, something which we must do and / or must be, so it is a character of necessity; the material with which the mask object is built (clay, ceramic, leaves, etc.) demonstrates what the Spanish philosopher accuses "*if you want and really be, you must necessarily adopt a determined life form*"; hence the circumstance of the comfort of the mask or the speed with which the actor can change it, is according only to the mimicry as he required.

The other problematic of the mask object is also the one that generates the scientific system, or the concern to be understood; the mere fact that each generation has its own fashion precluded from another generation, to avoid seeming ridiculous, demonstrates the development of masks. Now who of us elderly would have the audacity to go out with trousers deeply torn in several places to show or hide our legs on cold winter days? Masks have their own temporal rhythm and therefore there are young masks, old masks, women's masks and even animal masks and gods. A big difference between Greek and Jewish religion (after all Islamic) lies in the unrepresentability of God; the great leap of Christianity will be in the vision of God through the Son who is not a mask in the inaccessibility of the Trinitarian mystery.

The mask has a way with silence and with what no longer moves, in the arrest of a mimic in which you can no longer speak, of hypomimia or amimia because the posture of the mask is genetically given, fixed as the extension of sound without pause, a drone on which the observer constructs his own melody. The mask contains its opposite: the anguish, the terror, the aggression that petrifies, that also was the object of reflection in the relationship with the maternal complex (Mento & Settineri, 2016). This last reflection reminds us of the great study

of the Anthropologist Lévi-Strauss that, analyzing in detail the multiplicity and the variations of the masks in their details, indicates the way to associate the interpretative study: the myth.

The auroral dimension of the mask is placed on the covering face and, in this sense, the mask covers the miracle of life as that weak form of the dawn which is the nascent light; neither night nor day and that could not be expressed by the classical actor, nor by the technical mastery expressed by the mimicry of the modern actor. The light, metaphorically linked to consciousness, comes from above or as, poetically suggests by the Zambrano and Laurenzi (2004), from the planets. In this journey the divinity protects from the light of day and from the light of night (Psalm 121); the mask is then that object, in the inner side, which allows for the first time the look of the colors and emotions connected to them. But the light also allows the shadow both in its physical and metaphysical aspect and it is known that the Shadow is the part of us that we do not see, as long as there is a long meditation which allows us to see and sometimes to accept it (Settineri, Frisone, Alibrandi & Merlo, 2019). The Shadow, as emphasized by the Zambrano and Laurenzi (2004), is under the law *indiamento* or the union with God, an intimacy enjoyed only by some men (prophets, saints and kings), the servants of that sky of which they make proof with their presence through a word that becomes prophecy or law; the mask allows the internal versant to build it and the external side to announce it. From the word to the narration the leap is short: what are several millennia in the evolution of a species? In the narration a new form of thought is born which is the story of life, of one's life; the actor to tell the life of others needs to enter that life, this is also a function of the mask.

However we also, through our Ego, need a mask that helps the emergence of the narration that gives access to the Self: author and creator of individual life. As Vuletić (2018) points out, if the narration requires the presence of an Other (the listener, a friend, a psychotherapist, an audience, a fellow traveler, etc.) what part does the mask take in the narrative process?

As we can see in the extensive collection of masks in the Lipari museum (findings from the V - VI century: BC to II - III century AD) we ask ourselves the meaning of the discovery of the masks in the funeral outfits widely described by Bernabò-Brea (1985). From here the possibility of applying also in this context the originality of the thought of Vuletić (2018), for which the possibility of an interrupted narration and a narrative symbol (in our case the mask) should be fully understood as symbolic material; *mutatis mutandis* the mask also had the function of expanding the viewer's conscience, not to misunderstand the thought of the author, to rely on the patron god of wine, of the death of the theater (Dionysus): a hermeneutic circle that favored comprehension. Vuletić (2018) cites in a fitting way, Heidegger for whom "*the understanding is appropriately obtained of what is understood*". In reading the masks, the reading will be more

appropriate (hence the necessary return of inter-disciplinarity), the interpretation will be more corroborated by reiterating more values, and among these the:

- a) Cultural value as an interaction of a lived experience resulting from opposites (in the inner side mask - external side);
- b) Pedagogical value, that is to say formative, in what emerges from the emergency process of the Self;
- c) Therapeutic value since the form of a narration can be read only in the relationship and therefore in the understanding popularly called listening.

2. Masks as symbols

The cognitive heritage of ancient masks, such as that of the “Bernabò Brea” Museum, is an offer to the visitor, for a double exercise, an associative, as indeed for all symbols (Settineri, Merlo, Turiaco & Mento, 2017), and an amplifying one since the lesson of C.G. Jung takes up the metaphor Heraclitea transposed: as vast as knowledge can be, it does not exhaust the patrimony of the Self. The great archaeological work of Bernabò Brea (1985) was also that of identifying in the masks many motives of theatrical materials (such as that of tragedy and comedy) and others of difficult identification due to the loss of the original texts. Curiosity must take the path of wonder. Thus for example the masks of Héracles and Hades (see Fig.1). Recognizable by the wolf's skin, Hades, among the best preserved, re-propose the theme of the conflict between opposites; Hercules, recognizable in the craters of a lion's skin, conflicts with Hades in the attempt of the first to steal Cerberus, the three-headed dog of hell; the divergent masks solicit divergent emotions from which the pathos derives, and that will be taken up as indicators of disvalue, think of the animals of the first verse of Dante's Divine Comedy, of this beautiful metaphor, to which resort according to the circumstances, and which delivers us to reflect on the possible grammar that allowed the illustrious archaeologist to whom the Aeolian museum is entitled. Bernabò Brea, takes interpretative paths in the stylizations of the face, often intentionally unlikely as some hairstyles; the proto-emotions, in particular that of aggressiveness that are stylized by deformations of the face. Brilliant is the description of alterations of the physiognomy that allow the description of the pain *"expressed by the inclination of the supraciliary arches and converging towards the center of the forehead ... in a very long nose they form on the sunken eyes in the orbits, they add pathos to the figure"*; even an illustrious archaeologist cannot escape the charm emanating from the symbols after millennia. Attempts will be more or less re-enacted 25 centuries later in which emotions will be digitized in emoticons in which man needs to abandon the word to return to non-verbal expressions (Settineri et al., 2019) and which have become of

great interest, for example, for thesis degree (Di Pasqua, 2009); the tendency to classify emotions through the style of the traits (for example the emoticons of whatsapp), has illustrious precedents as in the *Onomastikon* of Giulio Polluce to which Bernabò Brea (1985) recognizes many types observed on Lipari with interpretative documentation that also derive from others Sicilian centers, such as Morgantina, and other pictorial representations of the sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

The general tendency of man to classify thus extends over time from myths to masks, to the later classifications of Linnaeus, to Mendelieff's periodic table to today's emoticons in which even the East is not spared as the Japanese version of the emoticon (keomoji); opposites and their archetypal tendencies, in time and space, have a tendency to attract each other, as if to demonstrate that individual transcendence is preceded by an earlier dialogue with the collective.

The archaeological observations of the school of Bernabò Brea can be borrowed to move from an iconic reflection to mythical variations; theatrical companies, having a limited range of mask objects, could improvise the change of the text with modest craft changes; for example, very distant characters such as Priamo and Archelao could be converted to each other or they could be made to spring from the ears of the horns to get satyr characters. Partial objects, such as masks, lend themselves well to this type of transformation. The logical conclusion of the process finds in the "personifications", the change of form in the permanence of the substance (emotion); then from the infinity of form to the finiteness of emotions, as from the infinity of musical creativity to the definite quantity of notes. It is also in the reduction that the masks are not subtracted similarly to other research; to resume the philosophical meditation of the Zambrano (Zambrano & Laurenzi, 2004) the passage from the dawn to the dawn (the passage from the specific mask to the standardized and interchangeable one, the passage from the natural to the temperate scale, the passage from the actor's mask to the exercised face) determines the birth of a new power that the Zambrano (Zambrano & Laurenzi, 2004) condenses into "one would say that the sun is without being born".

3. Mask psychopathology

Among the most famous icons of melancholy is that of Dürer which is a summation of partial masks and their opposites in which the largest mask is that of the angel, whose face weight is supported by the hand in a posture that becomes one of the acknowledgments of sadness.

The structure of the masks can lead us to hypothesize that primitive authors treated emotional experience as something to be built in the uncertain form, like modern emoticons based on a

rigid paraeidolia to the limit of perception. They can postulate the qualities of the images that, like the paraeidolia Rorschach, carry the characteristics of psychopathology and want to convey to the viewer some types of experiences among these:

- a) Devitalization where the intuition of the lack of energy is learned from sensation rather than from the intuitive function which cannot be exercised without the vital element which, precisely, characterizes it;
- b) The animal stereotype in which the element is given by the incapacity of being shared by the human; in the animal, where everything is regulated by instinct, there is the prototype of what is extinguished without the possibility of deferral;
- c) the reduction of the psychic object to anatomical matter of which the properties to form are preserved, without that vital breath underlying their functioning; what is missing, therefore, is that vital breath that transforms dust into a living and that allows transformation into will; the psychology of dry bones is the example of what the anatomy is without the breath of life (Ezekiel 37-14);
- d) A particular type of thought, convergent, in which the only source is the perception, that due to its obviousness is defined banal and therefore normopathic; this last meaning, which has had little success in nosographic psychiatry, is frequently found in depressed psychotherapy. The mask, to the extent that everyone recognizes and generalizes the deep, is normopathic.

In Dürer's iconic description, a special place is occupied by an hourglass as an image of circular time (the hourglass must be precisely turned at the end of the emptying of the sand) in which the effectiveness of perpetual motion is ensured by the health of those who care about turn.

The depressive mask is, in our opinion, an interrupted narration, at least in the sense in which Vuelic speaks; according to the latter the interruption would reside in the unawareness, in the discontinuity, in the indifference of the involvement, in the inability to understand that breaks the bridges of transcendence. The interrupted mask corresponds to that of the statue and is the one that Judaic thought corresponds to the idol, whatever the material that constitutes its structure.

From the Rorschach practice, in agreement with Rorschach himself, the emergence of a rare response, or at least infrequent response, gives us the indication of a difficulty in assimilation. The mask response to the Rorschach often results from a summation of an apperception, formally constructed as a mask, where the fissures (white intramaculars) in correspondence of the eyes and the mouth are respected. The white, intramacular components are commonly interpreted as a resistance to the world. The mask has eyes that see and speak only from one

side, a dissociation with the rest of the mimic that strongly limits authenticity. In the Rorschachian interpretation there is a convergence with the reading of C.G. Jung which finds the genesis of an affective tonality of people acting according to their unconscious and who can personify it; the personification of the mask is the emergence of a complex and, since in the art (including the dramatic one) there is the need for many personifications, the mask must be sufficiently plastic to be adapted according to the cases. An apotropaic way of seeing which- in the example of Jung, depend on the Lares and the Penates, promoters of the serenity of the domestic hearth- is the serenity of death (hence the need to equip the tombs with masks) and, even today, to buy as a souvenir, clay masks to hang in buildings. In the relationship between mask and complexes, the first to be emotionally efficient must arouse anxiety like everything that comes from split fragments (Jung), a residual condition that derives from ritual phenomena that form and form part of the structure of the unconscious psyche.

3. Dionysian mask and psychopathology

In *Psychological types* (1969), Jung C.G. dedicates a chapter to the "Dionysian" with a consideration that takes up the quality of the impulse, compared by Nietzsche to the intoxication, being the effect of alcohol, of which the god is the protector and the liberator of the impulse as we can see nowadays; it is proved, in psychopathology, in a maniacal way with all the gradations proper to the mood, the ease of contact with the other that makes the drunk extrovert. In the Lipari tombs, whose wealth of masks is linked to the cult of Greek origin and that Christianity from the 2nd century BC progressively elided with various practices of inhumation (burial) and therefore abandoning the tradition of entrusting the defunct to the mask. It is very difficult to separate the collective unconscious from the Dionysian experience from the manic experience; the religious experience that characterizes the Dionysian cult is what even today allows us to see the tragic extremism of the pain that is still observable in Holy Week demonstrations in Sicily rather than in Spain. Music also celebrates the Dionysian ritual. The spring saga of Stravinskij is an example of a pagan celebration of the rebirth of the impulse that is externalized after every closed, meditative, profound winter. In the saga of spring, in a pagan Russia, the one that, thousands of years later, was represented in the tragedy (the latter in autumn) in every Dionysian activity, the mask is at the service of the two instinctual phases: excitement and consummation; as for the passion of wine, the tragic work repeats the destiny of life (excitement) and death (consummation). In the spring saga, to find combinations, associations and amplifications, it would be sufficient to follow the booklet of the choreographic work divided into the implementation of a theme (phase of instinctual increase) and the sacrifice (consumption phase).

The final model of the saga affirms the possibility of archetypal interpretations, or rather of the collective unconscious that will give rise to the birth of a myth. The ritual euphoria, the panic element, the cyclical nature of Dionysian time. The use of the Dionysian mask is to be guessed whenever the perception is interrupted (undoubtedly favored by alcohol) causing a confusion between the Self and the object; we could say in an analytical sense (confusion between self and Ego) that it generates a complex necessary to the demonic, the sacred caused by the inevitability and tragic end of death; among the various forms of suicide that of the manic can be supported by an unintentional and by the means used (for example drugs) that justifies the term of extroverted suicide; a type of death, the extroversive one, which enjoys the participation mystique, almost universal because it is present in more primitive populations; Hillman (2015) writes, in another psychopathological context, "when existence is experienced through instinctual levels of fear ... images take on their own irresistible vitality". From the inner side the mask filters the excitement that is typical of the instinctual, sometimes favored by the abuse of the substance as in the drug addict, sometimes increased by the same pleasure as in the ludopathic. This world, continue Hillman, is divine, polytheistic, capable of distancing himself from reality (which the statistical improbability of winning would say to the ludopathic), from its dimensions of space (which would tell the LSD abuser that man without wings cannot fly), of time (which would tell the pedophile the impossibility of the body to relate to a body of a very different and distant generation); the Dionysian deals with extreme issues with the construction of mental masks in which reality is both filtered and diverted into impossible but above all partial objects. Happiness becomes ephemeral because it requires the construction that cognitive and Aristotelian logic imposes.

4. Apollo without a mask?

The opposite of Dionysius, Apollo, addresses the interior; knowledge of the opposite is always necessary to fully understand the extremes; also the statisticians resort to the correlation formulas to know the sense of the verse (coefficient r). The mask is worn by a face that is still a sign and a symbol of itself; as it is known, the face is one of the known constituents of identity (trivially present in identity documents) which leads to Synnott (1989, 1990), author who has largely influenced these conclusions, to remember that the face is capable of over seven thousand expressions and quotes Gloria Swanson "*We didn't need dialogue. We had faces*". Classical psychiatry has turned to the body even in challenging diagnoses, such as the schizophrenic ones, with the Praecox-Gefühl which is not a ratio but a feeling. Then the face, without its mask, has its psychopathology that revolves around the beauty from excess cosmetics to

dysmorphophobia. Synnott (1989, 1990) speaks of a mysticism of beauty, quoting Plato, but mysticism has its foundation, at least from the phenomenological point of view, in the fusion between subject and object and what is obvious for other paths of the deep, in which the emergence of inequality aesthetics is only the epiphenomenon of the suffering of the soul.

The duality of the face passes through the recognition of the face and the different completion through the mirror in the uncanny (Freud, 1919); starting from this way the relationship between aesthetics and therefore between beauty and unconscious value, remains linked to the self-esteem that some Anglo-Saxon authors distinguish in a self-liking and a self-competence; the task of the image of the face would reside primarily in the first, the role of the function primarily in the second. Aesthetics and technique are not necessarily associated today and it is possible to suffer from perception of beauty or lack of competence. It must be noted, however, that the image frequently associated with self-esteem is that of a spiral whose ascending value is in the cliff that repeats the lower point. An attempt to reconcile opposites is often found in dramaturgy (and Synnott cites Macbeth), giving life, in social psychology, to the concept of role; however, the author cited continues is the mask that fulfills the expression, self-expression and self-creation. A facial make-up that returns to being Dionysian in the sense that it changes faces as much as they are expressions of self. Which would not seem to be in line with the unitary dimension of analytical thinking; in our opinion the multiplicity of roles corresponding to a multiplicity of oneself has to do with a split world, a world of characters in which the envelope has a prevalence over the content. Social disciplines tend to find gender specificities. Reflections that create a bridge between gender and face are those observed with regard to women who frequently change fashion accessories unlike men who instead have a tendency to appear always the same; then would the mask be linked to the mutability of the woman and to the constancy of the man? Today it resounds that *vanitas vanitatum, et omnia vanitas* is what remains beyond the mask (Qohelet): the use of uniforms (such as belonging to an army, to a body, association, religious community) indicates emergence of the collective on the individual, a bridge (or a wall) between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. The fact that there is a profound and ancient evolution in aesthetics suggests forms of symbolic transformation in the way of representing oneself and perceiving oneself and others.

From the psychotherapeutic point of view this can be part of that alchemical research and therefore of a process of individuation (Settineri et al., 2018) or, on the contrary, of an archetypal regression such as the behavioral bizarre that the schizophrenic patient seems to suggest.

Naturally the observation of the mask, the masks, our and others' masks remains a primary source of understanding our countertransference and of the transference of our patients, a

contribution which, if well brought to the conscience, illuminates our authenticity. And this is why the theme, undoubtedly cultured and intellectual, deserves to be explored in places of psychological formation.

Fig. 1 Herakles e Hades



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