

The Mask object in psychotherapy

Presentation and Representation

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Abstract

The idea of bringing together contributions from different disciplines stems from the fact that many of the failures of psychotherapy arise from the lack of comprehension about unknown points of view, from inhomogeneous readings, from unavailability to change methods. In other words, approaches that are not sufficiently oriented to get out of an ultraspecialized perspective. The advantage of a methodology based on interdisciplinarity allowed us to put different contributions into a dialogue. This connection led to the emergence of original ideas on the considered topics. Moreover, by responding positively to the challenges of transdisciplinarity, the same contributions also turned out to be compared to the considerations that would have been posed opening up to dialogue with the multiple fields of knowledge.

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The idea of bringing together contributions from different disciplines stems from the fact that, even if it is difficult to recognize it, many of the failures of psychotherapy arise from narrow visual errors, from not having considered enough points of view, from inhomogeneous readings, from unavailability to change methods; in other words, not having sufficiently exercised the modesty necessary for the variety of individual points of view and again, as C.G. Jung (1930) mentions, to the ambiguity of the human psyche or "his authentic habitus or a mere compensation of its opposite".

The mask object aims to search for analogies that make psychotherapy more important, the knowledge of mythology, archeology, comparative religions, by the apparently irrational but not

lacking imagination appeal that Jung does not despise and returns to the "generating force of the spirit"; it is therefore a question of resorting to fantastic processes (Settineri, Merlo, Turiaco & Mento, 2017; Settineri et al., 2018). Psychotherapy therefore needs the creativity of symbols, generators of defects, of subsequent narratives, of imaginations for which Jung quotes Schiller: "man is totally a man only when he plays". The above applies to psychotherapy as well as to all the arts and sciences that imply a contribution of the unconscious (Settineri, Merlo, Turiaco & Mento, 2018), and this implies a descent "towards the low without pride, descent among the things of the world" to cite, thus exiting the field of psychotherapy, the Cruciani (2019) expert in search of objects enveloped in the earth, "archeology is an alchemical work that brings the body of the past back to life". It is a work that has to do with the mystery of birth and death; archeology is the revelation of a secret [...] there is no archaeological discovery that is not a vision". How many similarities with the work of psychotherapy. In this research, the use of the Karma term of our patient is allowed, we are the companions, companions of a small piece of road; also the psychotherapeutic exercise can be a vision, an interpretative process of what could be considered a paraeidolia because it is shapeless, it is no coincidence that McCully (1988) compares the study of the dream to the processes of decoding the Rorschach inkblots.

As for the studies of projective reactants, masks also need a method and the different disciplines have underlined the approach, hence the knowledge not only of the mask object but of the ways used to decipher their meaning; thus, for example, Lévi-Strauss (1975) invites us to start from formal observation (ritual, social and economic functions) to enter into the historical typologies on one side and from another side on the mythical typologies; for last ones it is possible to recognize the universality of some themes among which the origin of the enmity, of the jealousy, perceivable, as an example from the course of the mouths or from the grimaces. Stories of cultures, absolutely distant, make us reflect, in their crudities, on the topicality of themes that are common to modern generations, for example, adolescents (Merlo, Frisone, Settineri & Mento, 2018); an example, reported by Lévi Strauss (1975) is paradigmatic. The anthropologist reports the story of Crosta di Piaga, a boy abandoned by his father because he was covered by ulcers and who in turn generates (probably due to a process of transformation) a miraculous child who became a fisherman of miraculous fish, stolen from another mythical figure: the witch Dronokwa: the witch, first seriously wounded then cured by Crosta di Piaga, receives from him a daughter in marriage and in dowry, magical waters and great prosperities. All the goods agreed at Crosta di Piaga, thus become hero and the return to his community.

In the myth reported by Lévi-Strauss, for the typical properties of the dream, we seem to identify many themes and grammars of the dream with the variations that the anthropologist identifies in different cultures gradually distant and distant geographically from each other. An example is

the reflection on the various functions of Dronokwa that reflect on the various mimics of the mask that represents it and in agreement with the variations of the myth; similarly to the study of the mask, the leap between the formal and its content must lie in the search for a sense that creates a bridge between the individual experience and that of a community; in the study of the dream (Settineri, Frisone, Alibrandi & Merlo, 2019), in a profitable way, one of the phases of the search for meaning can be found in that extension of meaning which is amplification.

In America as well and with reference to the birth of the Mayan culture, the value of the materials was associated with the key elements of their cosmology, for example the green stone, for associative continuity, was connected to water and fertility and such preciousness can still be observed in specially dedicated museums such as the Denver Art Museum (USA). Masks from the origins of numerous cultures, even distant from one another, perform the function of medium, of passage and therefore of archetype for which man needs to internalize experience; in this descent into the depths, man is in need to make, paradoxically, the opposite, the introverted world that allows it. The creation of an object, which is intermediate and if we also want a transitional in the Winnicottian sense, assume a value of a process, a defense, a people's identity and conflicting needs; this attitude of synthesis gives the object the right of denomination of symbol. We would like to add the animality passage that will never be lost and in which we recognize the "puppy" of man so dear to novelists like Kipling; therefore this animality will remain so both in a phylogenetic and ontogenetic sense: in the same museum mentioned above it is possible to observe Olmec masks, from Costa Rica, whose features are based on animal elements (jaguar-like) and childish elements: in the same culture, the mask will serve to glorify the sovereigns like other symbols, such as that of the tree as a unifier of opposites (heaven and earth). It also induces reflection on the use of the mask in a funerary sense, often allusive of the subterranean, like other oriental cultures.

If the mask is auroral, the same must allow the extremes of what it represents: the internal world and the external world. Night and day, life and death, the shadow and the person; for this last aspect the mask distinguishes the "more" kingdom, the kingdom which is not accessible and which is interpreted by many religions and which they promise to defeat by placing themselves as an alternative to myth. In the Mayan heritage of knowledge the use of masks will continue through minimal but visible transformations in the classical period (200- 1000 D.C.) up to the unresolved question of the end of their culture; relevant issue for anthropologists and archaeologists; less relevant for psychological aspects but with a trait-union, amplifying, for us and therefore metaphorical: if a civilization disappears, either for socio-political reasons or for environmental reasons, a man's relationship with his mask to another is determined both by relational and environmental motives (such as the disease, the syndrome or the symptom). If

the fate of the mask is linked to the changes in the person or the people who wear them, we must resort to cultures closer to ours and visit our museums to better understand the meaning, the collective part that is the only one we can look into if we want to put a bridge between the individual (individual unconscious) and the collective (collective unconscious); if we want to use historical heritage, like genetics tries to understand the richness of genes, we must get out of the necessities of the present to turn to those of the past; this approach will have positive repercussions to better understand the present and the unthinkable phenomena such as that of globalization, those of emigration flows, just to name a few. When we teach students what a psychotherapy is, in the hope that one day they will be psychotherapists themselves, they need, in addition to attracting their attention, to propose a multidisciplinary confrontation. Like the archaeologist or the anthropologist, although we are aware that we do not want to deposit in a museum, for us it is the art of detail (in Japanese *iki*), the small detail and the rare detail through which the unconscious is manifested; the quotation from L. Imai Messina (2018) that studies Kuki with M. Heidegger, is linked to the conception of *iki*, and makes sense to the wonder of man. The wonder aroused by the mask, better than its detail, is formidable in its journey as a companion in psychotherapy. We recommend accessing the famous interview given by Eduardo De Filippo to F. Zeffirelli regarding the Pulcinella mask (which is then a half-mask) to observe how large variations are possible starting from a detail. Also the music has its masks in the compositions divergences starting from a theme. The wonder or magnificent that is then one of the most precocious emotions, if we associate it with its progenitor which is the surprise, it opens the door to both the transcendence in an analytical sense and to the activation of empathic processes which also rest today on structures discovered by neuroscience.

Faced with the mask object, beyond each production, we relive and that is to say we update not only conflicts deriving from the presumed biographies that generated those specific forms but also a model (pattern) that has excited a civilization and that still today thrill viewers of Syracuse, Taormina or Tindari just to mention some of the prestigious ancient theaters. Waldock in a contribution (Beye, 1974) quotes Bradley for whom spiritual values can come into conflict with each other: state, family, relationships and loves and when it is impossible to affirm divergent rights and emotions, it enters the dimension of conflict that gave rise to psychoanalysis and is for this is what the mask object, inserted in the tragedy, repropose "as if" of what is perpetuated: the energy that determines it does not reside in a scheme that the word orders in front of a logical model; perhaps and similarly to how many of the life forms come out of definite patterns and obligations that make the psychotherapeutic case not a tragedy but a show, a dramatic party, a complex manifestation that repeats the central color determined by the sadness without resolving it; it is very rare, if not impossible, that the indication of a psychotherapy is linked to

happy themes even when in a hypomanic condition a patient can ask us the question "what is this doing here?". The mask leads, deciphers, accompanies the character in normality as in the pathology, in life as in death as if in the phrase "we spread a pitiful veil". In a Liparese tomb (IV century BC) Bernabò Brea manages to identify two models, Hecuba and Taltibio (machere from the Trojan women of Euripides) which reproduce the question "what were those doing in Lipari?". Very acutely the archaeologist describes in the mask traits of pain and despair; in the modeling of the cheeks it emphasizes the contrast of the feelings; the feeling of pity assists what has caused it. The archaeologist underlines the enormous mass of artifacts found in Lipari that reports on the Dionysian cult, introduced by the Greeks to Lipari. Although the local production of mask finds is very probable, there is no doubt that the strong feelings that they solicit persisted to this day, as it could also solicit a painting or a photo-reproduction subsequent to the experience today, for example, in cinema, many centuries since the birth of the Greek tragedy. The knowledge of the mask is therefore the learning of different elements; bringing them back to Dionysus means proposing only a condensation between wine, theater and death that only symbols and art can express; we frequently find them in dreams both in a retrospective vision in the Freudian sense and in perspective in the Jungian sense. In this framework the protagonist always remains the hero as the founding nucleus of the personality in contrast to the collective.

Observing the mask from the hero's point of view means looking at its movement, the same movement even when it is imperceptible and is linked to change; the hero, both in his resolute impossibility linked to the tragic and in the happy ending of the comedy, has change as a driving force. The change, desired or unexpected, requires the hero to take on skills, some of which are impossible, others necessary but possible, others undesirable and possible. The mask helps in this path that has given rise to specific therapies, such as those of the Heros Journey in which the change takes place from "I cannot" to "I could" to "I can"; the mask could therefore help to modulate these transformations, becoming an active tool for experimenting with what is different and in the ninth case carnival has been preserved in the transition from paganism to Christianity in its central moment (Lent); if the heroes represent an ideal self-image, the mask lends itself to this process; psychoanalysis defines the ego ideal as the convergence between narcissism and primary identification figures, secondary and (note) the values of society in general. This representation is the success of the adolescent path or the emerging hero. In this process the mask lends itself as an adjuvant to make oneself more desirable (make-up, training, etc.) or more powerful (as in sorcerers) or able to achieve certain goals; the hypothesis for which the perception of the heroes starts from a process of regulation of meaning through the status symbol and among these the masks is suggestive. Moreover, the search for a sense of meaning

in life has been the subject of numerous philosophical reflections that have created ideas for reflections in clinical practice that would otherwise be difficult to understand only in terms of neuronal structures (see for example the control of impulses).

The mask would then serve both to declare a content repeatedly and in the same way, and to mask a state not otherwise reached, and to reinforce quantitatively what has been achieved, as well as to show a psychosocial identification. Heroes become a source of meaning in a collective practice.

The study of heroes, as derived from their masks in dreams, once again suggests their defensive role, however it is not clear how the same masks with different attitudes, see that of Pulcinella, can be regulated in the complexity of identity processes. Zelig's film, which has Woody Allen as its main protagonist, lets us think about how the search for the Self can reach chameleon-like imitations. The multidisciplinary vision of the mask should then induce psychotherapists, rather than proceeding with refutations restricted to the representative object, facilitating the need for the sacrifice of a subjectivity that requires uniqueness and unrepeatability for which the meaning does not have a common denominator.

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Sitography

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_9nEHVDQOE



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