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### **“IL CORPO, L’UOMO E I SUOI DISAGI: UN VIAGGIO VERSO L’ARCHETIPICO”**

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## THE “LIGHT” OF SYMBOLS AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

In all civilizations, light has always been celebrated both as a physical phenomenon and a symbolic image endowed with a spectrum of metaphorical iridescences capable of speaking to all the shades of the soul. To mention but the best known, several and profound have been the reflections made by the Taoist, the Hindu, the Kabbalist, the Christian, the Gnostic and the Alchemical meditations, but the experience of the longing for light is that general in the human being to qualify it as a real archetypal instance, a tension that expresses the eternal game of opposites, which in the case of light, concerns its confrontation with the shadow (Frigoli, 2017). Also in the field of physics, the constitution of light shows a fundamental ambiguity that seems to prevent a precise definition: light is composed of photons that can behave as either a particle or a wave. On the psychological level, this elusive ambiguity which depends on the role of the observer, is the same that exists between consciousness and the unconscious (Frigoli, 2013); a subject that led Wolfgang Pauli and Carl Gustav Jung to confront on the reality of quantum physics and the dimension of the unconscious and its laws (Jung, Pauli, 2015).

On the assumption that light is a symbol of consciousness and that, as underlined by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (Maturana, Varela, 1987), the nature of consciousness is “sunk” in the nature of the body, the action of bringing Consciousness to light subtracting it from the shadow of the unconscious, does not only mean a psychological exploration of the traumas and delusions that have constellated our existence to confront ourselves with the archetype present in the study of light, it is necessary in alchemical terms, to sink into our body, identify the instinctual forces that support it and transform them into adequate metaphors

to express their “substance” finally made accessible to consciousness (Frigoli, 2017). The process of psychological individuation refers to this and nothing else, and this is just a pale example.

Everyone can capture the psychological afflatus of light illuminating the unknown, the light-darkness dialectic has always been described as a moral and spiritual paradigm meant to permit a dialogue with the divine on the condition of escaping that world of darkness and of «mortal shadows, a land of fog and opacity, of night and chaos in which the same light is deep darkness» (Job 10, 2010, pp. 21-22).



Guyart des Moulins, Detail of a miniature of God creating the sun and moon, Bible historiale (Grande Bible historiale complétée with prologues), volume 1, origin: France, Central (Paris), 1420 ca.

Fonte: [British Library Board, UK](https://www.britishlibrary.org/)

As a matter of fact, the relationship between light and darkness is much more complex, because the relationship between darkness and light is not only ethical - darkness corresponds to the *privatio boni* of the Gnostics, the mere essence of good, the light in the presence of the *Logos* – but endowed with



a broader ontological status well expressed by the symbolic duality of the divinities Shiva and Parvati (Coomaraswami, 2011) of Hinduism united in an eternal cosmic dance, and by the best known symbol linked to Taoism, where the principle of *yin* and *yang* are reunited in their eternal movement in an absolute totality, that of the One that embraces them (Granet, 1971).

What meaning should we give to these images in order to identify their archetypal value?

It is evident that this dance of opposites - of how Darkness is present in Light (the shadow of light) and Light in Darkness (the light of the shadow) - is to mean not only the relativity of the Light-Shadow dialectic according to which these opposites are never to be considered absolute, but also the possibility of being able to transform this apparent opposition into a more nuanced, more flexible reality. In ethical terms, we can talk about how evil can arise from good and how good can spring from evil. This reflection is the best known in the Western world, which however has not fully understood the archetypal value of this symbol yet, unlike the Eastern world where the symbol takes on characteristics of primary importance in describing the transformative "practice" of the human being towards the dimension of totality (Cooper, 1985). Not by chance, the history of this symbol which is lost in the mists of time, arises from the experiences of the Taoist seers who, like the *rishis* of the Upanishads, knew the nature of the Cosmos and of Man intuitively, through subliminal perceptions in which the mind, becoming less and less opaque thanks to the constant conscious immersion in opacity, provided a type of knowledge in which the mixture of *yin* and *yang* became the expression of the infinite forms of reality present in the human body in the form of instinctual forces. The conscious awareness of the bodily forces of the instincts made them progressively free from their automatism, allowing the renewed consciousness to discover its own transformation. For this reason, the symbol of *tàijítú* - like all the symbols in which the dialectic of

opposites is expressed - has been assumed by the Chinese alchemy to indicate the arduous path and the operational practice of identifying the spark of the

defined according to the different cultures *Immortal Embryo* and *Lapis Philosophorum* (Jung, Wilhelm, 1981).

This symbol, investigated starting from the grey zone between the *yin* and *yang* area, allows us to explore that grey, liminal area, where there is no longer a clear distinction between the two terms, which on the psychic level corresponds to the possibility to explore reality in a sort of *participation mystique*, where experiences become allusive, metaphorical and almost oneiric. This is the psychic zone of the "intermediate world" of images, so well described by Henry Corbin (1986), and recently taken up by the ecobiopsychological hermeneutics with the concept of the state of *mag* (Frigoli, 2017). The consciousness that accesses this state of *mag* "imagines" reality not only through sensitive data but also through dream data. The knowledge of this intermediate world and the practice of its work can lead to experience that *logos* of imagination different from the conceptual one, because it winds through symbols and images that run through myths, dreams, poetic emotions, the body and its meanings, thus nourishing the superior faculty of the psyche which operates with noesis, that is, with intuition.

If awareness concerns the upper areas of the Central Nervous System (C.N.S.) with the cerebral hemispheres, the intermediate world is that of the Vegetative Nervous System (V.N.S.), with its distinction in orthosympathetic and parasympathetic (Frigoli, 2017). When the conscience knows how to immerse itself "consciously" and explore the opacity of the internal sensations of the body, its organs and their functions, the faculty of "observation", typical of the cerebral cortex, merges with the faculty of feeling typical of the internal physiology of the body, creating a *coniunctio* that opens the mind to symbolic consciousness.

It will then appear clear that *yin* and *yang* are not two ethical oppositions capable of defining the morality of psychic life, but two

physical manifestations, of a transcendent physicality, to be discovered and amplified according to the degree of “transparency” of the exploring consciousness. Once the consciousness is able to integrate the “intermediate world” of the Vegetative Nervous System with a particular reflexive attitude, which determines in the brain a special “central” state of consciousness, between the right and left hemisphere, it can open up in the mind a capacity for knowledge that intense, extended and at times continuous, capable of making the perception of the activity of the unconscious more and more constant over time, as even in a waking state the mind will continue to weave “its perpetual dream” (Frigoli, 2016). The outcome of this psychosomatic “exercise” involves an inner expansion of consciousness, because the imagination is amplified to the point of expressing its creative potential beyond the ordinary space of the mind, consisting in time.

At this point, the mind approaches its own spiritual transmutation. Mircea Eliade (1957) states: «[...] the mystery of spiritual regeneration involves an archetypal process that takes place at different levels and in multiple contexts when it is a question of overcoming a way of being in order to arrive at another superior; or more precisely, whenever it is a question of a spiritual transmutation ». The state of this initial transmutation is perceived subjectively by a particular oneiric experience, in which the images are vivid, rich in sensory aesthetics, colored, with dazzling intuitions that in dream explain in detail the same dream images. When one explores the depth of bodily functions in a state of intense concentration, they can manifest in consciousness in the form of *luminous sparkles* that stir in the psychic field in a particular fluid manner, with no direction whatsoever. These *scintillae* (sparkles) with their *luminositas* (luminosities) represent the first inner experience of the perception of the cognition of the internal organs and their functioning; in the continuation of this concentration, the sparkles converge over time in a brighter mass tending to white light, becoming progressively more intense, almost dazzling, which signals the approach of consciousness

to the perception of the generative force of the archetype (Frigoli, 2013). As you approach this inner condition, the field of consciousness will no longer be three-dimensional but analogical and symbolic (circular), able to accommodate the information of the



Hilma af Klint, *Altarpiece, No. 1, Group X*,  
*Altarpieces*, collezione privata, 1907

unconscious as it manifests *itself*.

For example, in psychosomatic patients who are predominantly alexithymic, the ecobiopsychological therapeutic approach, based on symbols and analogies, opens up the possibility of accessing a significant level of psychological images, thanks to the possibility for the therapist to carry out a sort of continuous connection between the level of bodily expression in which the unconscious is like frozen, and the psychological level of awareness. As the body symptom seems to “thaw”, the mental images acquire more luminosity and liveliness, as if the continuous analogical references between the psychic and physical planes in the therapist’s mind, solicit the information structure of the patient’s somatized conflict, as if through this operative solicitation a flow of energy freed from freezing in the body structures occurred in the patient’s mind in favor of an en-



richment of the corresponding psychic images (Frigoli, 2013). On the analogical level, the hypothesis of explanation of the phenomenon of greater vividness and clarity of images in alexithymic patients who have difficult access to depth psychotherapy, recalls in atomic physics the effect of stimulation of the atom by a radiation endowed with high energy. We know from physics that the atom *itself* is neutral, because the negative charges of the electrons balance the positive charges of the protons of the nucleus.

It can be thought that in patients strongly dominated by somatization, their conflicts behave as atomic "structures" compact and impenetrable to specific questions concerning personal emotional life, as all the emotion has been, so to speak, "condensed" in the body, in the form of what neuroscience calls a "somatic marker" (Damasio, 2000). With the analogical-symbolic technique, which does not directly address the somatic marker on the information level, but fades it into "circular" analogies, we are in the presence of a psychological phenomenon comparable to what happens to a stable atomic structure when it is hit by a flow of energy that, as known, determines a shift of electrons from one orbit to another with the emission of photonic energy. This emitted energy would be responsible for the vividness of the corresponding psychic images (Frigoli, 2013).

In the case of ecobiopsychological psychotherapy, the symbol and the analogy function as "information" with high energy with respect to sign language, and as such are able to stimulate the "compactness" of the somatized conflict, "exciting" its information nodes, making them unstable to the point of releasing residual energy to make it available to images. The symbol and the analogy are endowed with "high information energy", because their meanings are multiple and bypass the defenses of the conflict, as they face it from multiple points of view, "exciting" in this way the various information nodes that sign the conflict *itself*.

As a scholar, I am always critical of the working hypotheses that go beyond the limits of verification, but on the other hand the empirical observation of what happens in the

psychotherapy processes leads me to use the methodological tools drawn from other sciences to justify the processes that happen. This does not mean that if new explanations arise in the application of the symbol and the analogy to the patients considered above, the ecobiopsychological hypotheses cannot be modified. Unfortunately at the moment we do not have any means to ascertain how the images present in the psyche are born, nor do we know how psychophysical activation is responsible for their content, nevertheless despite this undoubted limitation, every psychotherapy practice takes place in such a complex relational territory that only today begins to be sketched. In support of the hypotheses of the analogical method as a tool capable of soliciting ever more vivid psychic images once the process of transformation of the somatized conflict in the body melts, there are the psychotherapeutic observations conducted on patients suffering from serious diseases such as tumors and autoimmune diseases. In these patients, who rarely access psychotherapy if not in presence of survival anxiety or depressive situations determined by oncological treatments, when it is possible to explore the contents of their unconscious, on a psychodynamic level going beyond the defensive mechanisms, we can perceive the presence of a wealth of emotions so intense and rich as to be studded with highly significant images, plastic in their iconographic structure and strongly eloquent in their meaning. If psychotherapy in these cases continues for an adequate time, we can witness a psychological transformation so radical and profound to involve in many cases the healing *itself*. When it is not possible to achieve this optimal effect because of the severity of the disease or unforeseen complications, it is however evident a total change in the patient's mental life, even in the event of imminent death that is accepted without anxiety. In all these cases the patients present a series of highly symbolic dream with the characteristic of being strongly vivid and incessantly colored compared to ordinary dreams, generally described in black and white images, and often interpreted directly in the dream by the dreamer



himself. (Frigoli, 2014). These dreams represent the activation of archetypal processes where the images are so “powerful” on the psychic level to frequently appear in symbols and mythologems.

The questions that inevitably arise in the therapist concern the possible psychological meaning of such vivid, vital and unexpected images in comparison with the suffering of a sick body. With regard to images, Jung (1976) came to distinguish personal images from primordial ones. The former characterized by subjective unconscious contents and states of consciousness determined by personal experiences and the latter with an archaic character, particularly rich in mythological representations. These primordial images are the expression of the activity of the archetype and are constellated as unconscious experiences embracing the whole life process. They can be conceived as a precipitate memory that aggregates, reuniting the inner dispositions of the spiritual life and in equal measure the experience of the sensoriality of the world. When these images accumulate in dreams or daydreams, they are always evidence of an intense mobility of the collective unconscious forces, which can either inflate the conscience or produce a beneficial effect when the Ego is sufficiently willing to assimilate them.

Recent studies by Erich Kandel (2007) and the innovative positions of neurosciences are providing the biological basis for representing the unconscious as belonging to implicit memory in which memories of perceptual motor strategies and primary emotions are sedimented. According to these studies, the activation of implicit memory would free the images sedimented in it. Kandel claims that psychotherapy to be effective and make these images emerge, should activate the neuronal structures responsible for long-term memory. Recent neurobiological observations conducted on animals indicate how by modifying the implicit memory a modification of gene expression can be obtained. It can therefore be hypothesized that “working” on the unconscious that rests in implicit memory, it is possible to modify the gene expression and ultimately the behavior

itself. In fact, the brain is a plastic structure, subjected to the reworking of learning that acts on brain synapses, and the psychotherapist, as a learning figure, can alter the strength of synaptic conditions and therefore the gene expression. It has long been known that the sequence of a gene, its function as a “template” for DNA replication cannot be modified by environmental experiences, but the transcriptional function of a gene - its ability to drive the synthesis of specific proteins - is certainly sensitive to environmental factors and regulated by these influences (epigenetics) (Cena, Imbasciati, 2014). Although these studies are still too preliminary to come to definitive conclusions on the automatic transition from the experiences conducted on mollusks and lower mammals, it is believed that they can also be referred to man and the complexity of his psyche.

The ecobiopsychological hypothesis explains the transformation into mental images of the psychosomatic condition of the emotional conflict sedimented in the body, as a process of transcription of the body “matter” into mental “energy”, which assumes the character of luminositas just as happens according to atomic physics in the excitation processes of atoms. Receiving energy the atoms undergo the physical effect of moving electrons from the steady state of their orbits to a higher energy level, with the consequence that the electrons returning to their natural position end up returning the energy absorbed in the form of emission of photons. In other words, we can think that a psychotherapy conducted in depth goes far beyond the hypotheses supported by neuroscientists of an influence on neurons and their synaptic connections, because the ecobiopsychological psychotherapy work involves all human “matter” and not just the brain. The ecobiopsychological hypothesis argues that in analogical-symbolic psychotherapy the cognitive-affective information field of the therapist and the patient acts so deeply as to influence the atoms that make up the protein molecules responsible (the microtubules?) of the cellular structure of the somatized conflict, operating a continuous movement of electrons on external orbits which, retur-



Hilma af Klint, *Primordial Chaos*, No. 16,  
The WU/ROSEN Series. Group 1, collezione privata, 1906-07

ning to their usual stationary orbits, continue to release photons, that is, light energy.

It is known that the energy of each photon is proportional to its frequency, that is to the vibration in the unit of time, and exactly these frequencies are activated in somatization by the informative energy of symbols and analogies. These reflections suggest that the brightness of mental images can be a subjective proof of therapeutic efficacy, according to which the chromatic vividness of the images corresponds to a level of depth of the therapeutic action itself. At present, it is not possible to support this working hypothesis, as the methodological assumptions are lacking to explore the relationship that exists between cellular bodily activation and the corresponding psychic perception. However, the clinic seems to orient us in this direction, because the healing process of tumors or of a serious psychosomatic disorder, on the psychic level is always accompanied by an increase in mental images that take on an increasingly accentuated vividness during the course of therapy, with the subjective consequence of a greater trust in the healing forces of the unconscious.

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