

Jung and his search for sense

Excerpt by "Psyche and Reality"

The Jungian Symbol producer of sense as opposed to the foolishness and violence of the rationality of "the age of technology".

Jung's interpretative "matrix" seems to offer us the possibility to frame the social phenomenology concerning the loss of sense, with the consequent load of experience of widespread awkwardness, in a context of epoch-making, progressive, "one-dimensional" reduction of the symbolic.

This seems to us the fundamental matrix of the disastrous, schizoid conflict of the present day society: on one side a literalism in keeping with the logics of power and control, disheartening any possibility of individual and collective development and wellbeing; on the other side the absolute impossibility to keep together the fragments of this vision of the world, anachronistic as it appears by now, in an epoch-making realizing of what could be defined as the violence of the "monotheism" of the reason.

The pervasive social influence we are subjected to and we suffer even in the ephemeral shelter of our privacy speaks the language of literalism, rejects the oxygenating receptiveness to the metaphor, prefers the poor inclusive significance of the meaning to the deeper (and potentially enlivening source of psychic welfare) but embarrassing liberty of the sense.

The mass media society, as a sort of two-faced Janus against its will (Girard, 1999) ,presenting all and its contrary, as a sort of unexpected epoch making echoing call (tam tam) , might have led the epoch to a short circuit of the reason, a hyperbole that in some way shows more

clearly its contrary as a want (the symbolic), and evokes it in a pervasive way.

At this point one may notice the echo of a desirable possibility of emancipation, due not only to the purely cognitive realizing of the society's most of all utilitarian finalities, but also to a more "structural" rediscovery, at individual and social level, of the symbolic significance, as we described it.

Obviously the ways of such process are to be built in the practice, but it seems important to us that what we are talking about has been described and defined in our time (see for instance Foucault and Heidegger). Let's quote Heidegger (1959b, page 36)

What's really worrying is not the possibility that the world becomes a complete dominion of the technique. Most worrying is that the man is not ready for this radical change. And still most worrying is that we are not able to face in an effective way what's really emerging in our age, by means of a meditating thought.

We think it plausible the comparison between the meditating thought here mentioned and the function of the symbolic.

Heidegger has insisted quite a lot on the limits of the rational thought. He has also emphasized the danger represented, in the age of technology (*Ge - stell*), by the pervading spreading of the process that drives the existent to easy to be manipulated, measurable, one-dimensional entities, all that correlated with the possibility of a dominant utilitarian power carried by the technique or, in Vattimo's vision (1989, page 145), the information technology:

The subject, in turn, is less and less the centre of self-consciousness and decisions, reduced as he is to interpret multiple social roles that can't be gathered in unity and to make choices statistically expected.

Without taking into account the consequences on the psychological, social, political, economic, cultural and environmental levels.

Ge-stell, imposition, in Heidegger's opinion means all in all the modern technique and the specific situation of our being thrown in historical defined sense, and also indicates the possibility for beings to come to

exist in our epoch; in the *Ge-stell* both, things and the man are always possible objects of manipulation.

But it is just in the destructive planning skill of the technique that the metaphysics finds its final achievement and the *Ereignis*, the being's event, can prove itself: the being can be proved in non metaphysical way, without foundation; it's necessary anyway to pay attention to the technique's *Wesen*, its essence, better its way to express itself.

In the symbolic order in fact, beyond the mere explanation, it is possible to get a sense; in such risk the reason can't follow us; at the same time we are free from its violence, since in that case it's no more possible to interpret the psychic phenomenon according to a binary aut aut, rather it's more easily acknowledged and searched according to a finalistic hypothesis, just the Jungian hypothesis, in comparison with a causal hypothesis, Freud's for example.

We talked about the central position that Jung attributes to the fruitful *compenetration of the opposites*, skillfully expressed by the energetics of the Symbol in which the archetypal images find their expression. We think such concept may be related, among other, to the potential awareness - on the individual's part -of the one sidedness of any rigid stance.

The Jungian lesson might let us acknowledge the further significance of sense present in the Symbol, that appears as a protection against the violence and senselessness of the rationality of the technological era; as a consequence, it might also lead us to a deeper, fruitful awareness as to the rather limiting conceptions of adaptability and well being that the prevailing cultural and social models propose.

Galimberti seems clear about the Symbol's emancipating power :

Claiming by means of the symbolic vision of the world that further sense that is in the end "greater than the sense usually attributed to the factual reality so as it appears", Jung indicates the possible way to escape the control and supremacy of the *rationality* of the technique, the functionality of its language, the exceeding efficiency of its conformist-style ethics, by offering the individual existential possibilities that the rigidity of the rationality doesn't provide for.

As regards this point, the *existential possibilities* might develop along an axis substantially open to the emerging of the et-et of things, for instance to the acknowledgment of being at the same time *man and woman, father as well as son*.

Leaving man worried and hurt as to a world of lost certainties but potentially enriched by the holistic "veracity" of the symbolic; furthermore, by the disenchanting way one might look on oneself and the reality, a condition that defines in itself an important nucleus of the results of a psychological work on oneself, together with greater tolerance and receptiveness with reference to a natural active contemplative mood, rather than an attitude intent on the sterile and senseless efficiency of an utilitarian aim.

The following lines from Heidegger (1953a, page 27) seem enlightening to us:

Since the essence of the technique is in no way technical, the essential meditation on the technique and the decisive comparison with it must take place in an ambit on one side similar to the essence of the technique, on the other totally distinct from it.

Such ambit is art. Obviously when the artist's meditation doesn't withdraw in front of the truth's constellation about which we pose our questions.

For the philosopher Gianni Vattimo (Vattimo, 1999, pages 119-129) :

In such way the language is the site of the being's happening, as opening of the historical openings where the being is thrown, and Heidegger thinks of the structure of the Ereignis on the pattern of man's relation with the language....The language is essentially something we have at our disposal, yet in another way it conditions us, it is given us since, with its structure, it defines just from the beginning the field of our possible experience of the world. Things can appear to us only by means of the language, and only in the way the language allows them to appear. "It's the word that makes the thing come to be". That means that any concrete speech presupposes that the language has already opened up the world and has positioned us too into it.

Any problematization of the language and, all the more so, any concrete real use of the language presupposes that it has already talked to us.

Thought is fundamentally listening to the language in its original poetical form, that is in its founding and creative force: that's why the element inside which our existence unfolds is the affinity between thought and poetry.

It seems to us that the ambit of thought as defined by Heidegger unfolds along an axis *completely different* with respect to the power of rationality and that by nature it finds its foundation in reference to a dimension of the symbolic; possibly a way to evocate the symbol's fruitful nocturnal region, just as Jung conceives it.

A Jungian matrix, we think, fit to point out a situation of the Symbol's progressive decline in the social field and the progress of an extroverted and unilateral "literalism" that metaphorically favours and pays homage to the Goddess Athena, the goddess of reason.

It's a sort of extroverted collective thought, that leaves out from the official character of everyday life the psyche's further expressive possibilities; in this way they can't balance, both collectively and in the individual psyche, the dangerous unilaterality of the experienced conscious attitude, casting in some way a "shadow" - in Jungian sense - "fraught" with explosive, being repressed, tensions.

The individual therefore hasn't got many possibilities to avoid this collective "becoming": in psychotherapy it is in fact problematic to consider the individuals as isolated "monads". The following is Jungian psychotherapist Robert Strubel's thought on the purpose (1981, pages 210-211) ;

Whether he wants it or not, whether he knows it or not, he (the single individual) depends on the good and the evil of society.

Not only he is favoured by the healthy life of his community but he himself must contribute to the social welfare. The (single) individual must analyse the collective conflicts he is involved in and must present to the society his creative solution, if he himself is to remain healthy. The individuation always includes a reciprocal exchange by the individual and the collective researches, according to the sense of life. There's no individuation

unrelated to the research of identity of the groups and, in the final analysis, of the society in its whole.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, our work postulates that to the radical question (Migliorati, 1995) :

What's the relation between the psyche and the present day world?

the Jungian matrix can offer a plausible and heuristically fruitful way. To Jung in fact it is impossible to analyse the psyche as essence not only objectified, as said, but not even permanent.

Is for instance the psyche of the reason era the same as that of the mythological era? Jung's answer seems to be a negative one, with the consequent difficulties from the epistemological point of view and the relative reverberations on the clinical work.

Von Franz (1980, page 101) writes:

When a neurotic patient comes to us nowadays, quite often he is only partially suffering from problems of personal nature. Many, and most of all young people, choose to undergo the analysis because they suffer from the lack of meaning and the want of hope typical of our time.

There's still one way of producing sense that can be ascribed to the Symbol: the synchronistic ambit, of which we wrote at the beginning of this work and that we are going to develop in the last chapter.