

The archetype of the double in middle adolescence: Theoretical reflections based on action research

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Summary

Background: Stories written under musical induction allow studying symbolic figures emerging during the psychotherapeutic process. During multimodal arts psychotherapy, based on a combination of active music therapy and the production of stories under musical induction, the archetype of the alter ego frequently appears in texts written by adolescents. This archetype shows its different facets during the psychotherapeutic process.

Methods and research questions: With the help of a qualitative study, based on the phenomenological content analysis of the TAT and the stories written under musical induction with N=52 students suffering from emotional (subgroup I) or conduct disorders (subgroup D), we answered the following questions:

- Can we recognise in these symbols compensatory features regarding the person's initial problems?
- Do they gradually expand during the therapeutic progress, so that they reflect the integration of the hidden and split parts of the self?
- What is generally their role in the adolescents' search for identity, beyond the realm of the pathology?

Results

The results of the study opened psychotherapeutic perspectives for tertiary prevention in adolescence.

adolescence, alter ego, archetype, identity quest, music therapy, psychopathology of adolescence

1. INTRODUCTION

Without admitting Jung's assumption of the collective unconscious [1], many authors use the concept of archetype in the sense of collective representations that can be found in fairy tales and myths of every culture [2], but that are also part of the individual unconscious in the sense of symbolic figures favouring the creation of coherent representations of oneself and the other.

From the point of view of ethno psychoanalysis, the fact that the same archetypes can be

found in every culture and in every age, can be explained, on the one hand, by the cultural environment, by oral tradition, but also by the fact that the archetypes are linked to the existential situation of mankind itself [3]. Because every human being is confronted with the same anxieties and has to live through the same crises, he tends to form similar symbols.

In this acceptance, the concept of the archetype can help creating meaning during the psychotherapeutic process and during the interpretation of research results [4,5].

We present some reflections based on action research with adolescents suffering from emotional or conduct disorders. They were treated

with multimodal arts psychotherapies, based on active music therapy and on writing stories while listening to music. One of the most fascinating discoveries was the more frequent appearance of archetypal themes as the therapeutic process evolved. Students who had been limiting to banal descriptions during the first sessions wrote almost mythical scenarios at the end of the year, which centred on love, birth and death, staging the grand characters of the collective imaginary world. It was no longer about literary memories, but about an imaginary and cognitive elaboration of the personal existential situation and of the deep emotions linked to them.

Another interesting statement could be made: the appearance of these archetypal themes and figures was generally accompanied by a sudden improvement of the formal and stylistic qualities of the stories, as if these existential contents unsettled every layer of the psyche and provided the adolescents with new resources.

2. THE STRUCTURING ROLE OF THE IMAGINARY DOUBLE IN ADOLESCENCE

Already by the midst of the last century, Debesse had pointed to the structuring role of juvenile imagination [6]. Later discoveries of cognitive psychology [7,8] agreed with him: at adolescence, the development of juvenile imagination conforms to the newly acquired cognitive possibilities. Thought becomes more subjective and more objective at the same time, showing capable of making bold constructions and combinations, anticipations and plans. The adolescent organizes his psychic time in relation to the past and in relation to the future.

The texts written by the adolescents reflect this structuring role of imagination. In the stories written under musical induction as well as in the protocols of the Thematic Apperception Test, the category of the alter ego unfolds its different facets [9,5]. The content analysis of the category of the double, a character of the same sex as the author of the story, can provide us with interesting indications concerning the stages of the subjectivation process that is unfolding: They can be aligned according to the basic psychological needs that they seem to correspond to [10].

The American school of Ego Psychology, describing the development of the Self at adolescence, seem to be of particular interest in order to understand what happens in the creation of the archetype of the alter ego: In his last book "How does analysis cure?" Kohut [11] distinguishes between 3 needs that have to be fulfilled by self-objects: the need of a mirror experience (*need of narcissistic satisfaction*), the need to merge with a strong and soothing self-object (*need of an ideal*) and the need to feel the presence of a basic likeness (*need of twinning*). If the self-objects empathetically respond to these needs, which implies the presence of optimum frustrations, the Self enables the realisation of a person's central life programme, which comprises a harmonious integration of the narcissistic ambitions and ideals, in accordance with the innate and acquired talents.

3. RESULTS OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY BASED ON CONTENT ANALYSIS OF LITERARY PRODUCTIONS

In order to answer questions related to the existential significance of the archetype of the double, we present some data of a qualitative study of protocols of the TAT and the stories written under musical induction. The analysis was made in the phenomenological and structural tradition [12] with adolescents who had asked for consultation and treatment because of emotional or conduct disorders.

They were treated by the above mentioned type of multimodal arts psychotherapy. Among the archetypes emerging during the psychotherapeutic process, the category of the alter ego is one of the most interesting ones, because it is at the centre of the identity quest of adolescence.

3.1. The archetype of the double in a control group of non-selected students

We will present two examples of images of the double appearing in a non-clinical population, signalling the need to integrate the split part of the Self; it is the most frequent category among the control group.

The topic of exaggerated evil and aggressiveness plays an important role with students who

are not at all inclined to act like that in day-to-day life. The forces of evil are often reflected in the description of a character of the same sex and age as the author's.

“«She» hit me and I staggered and fell. The knuckle-duster in her hand was gleaming when «she» raised her fist again and hit me on the nasal bone. A snap was heard and I felt an acute pain in my head. I felt warm blood flowing down my chapped lips... «She» was standing in front of me and smiled condescendingly. Her face seemed familiar to me; maybe I had met her several times before. «She» approximately had my age, i.e. she was still quite young. «So, is it enough now? It is fun, don't you think? », «she» asked me, almost whispering. We were so close to each other that I could feel her warm breath. Her shining eyes were waiting impatiently for an answer. «I... Please, stop! Please! What have I done to you? Please, stop!», I was babbling, full of hope. «The fact to be begged by a person in a pitiable state is really exciting. A satisfying feeling, do you understand? ». «She» was in a state of sadistic excitement. My eyes hurt because of the numerous tears that I had shed and the numerous punches I had received. Why did this have to happen to me? I could not find any plausible explanation. It was like a nightmare, much too realistic. It was reality...”

TAT Plate 9GF

With the average adolescent, the appearance of an evil alter ego seems to promote the imaginary and symbolic elaboration of his own destructive tendencies.

In the following story, the appearance of the double is used to elaborate a feeling of helplessness and weakness.

“The others were always making fun of him, mocking him and teasing him. He was somewhat different from the others. He was small and did not know how to defend himself. He never reacted to the mockeries, he never reciprocated; the others could have knocked him down, he would not have made a move. He never

ran away and gave the others their head. They did not stop teasing him and he did not try to change the situation.

One day, during recess, a little boy from his class, who was even smaller than he was, started slandering him. The little one felt very strong compared to the one he was teasing. The latter lost control and hit him hard. He hit the small one on the head and the latter fell. He had to be hospitalised. The parents wanted the boy who had hit their son to be expelled from school. And thus he disappeared from school, as discretely as he had arrived, the boy who everybody else had teased. And all of this only because he had answered back.”

TAT Plate 3BM

In the quasi-experimental control group of non-selected students, the images of the double are mostly about the dimension power-weakness or about the transgression of the forbidden.

3.2. The archetype of the double in the clinical group

The clinical group was constituted by adolescents who had asked for consultation and treatment for emotional disorders or conduct disorders (Total N= 52). They participated to individual arts psychotherapeutic sessions during at least six months. For evaluation purposes, they were included into two subgroups based on the criterion of direction of aggressiveness: inhibition and direction against oneself: (subgroup I) or disinhibition and tendency towards acting out (subgroup D). The multimodal arts psychotherapy was based on the alternative use of free instrumental and vocal improvisation and the production of stories under musical induction.

a) Initial typology

Previous research results [4] allowed assuming that the archetype of the alter ego differs according to the student's initial symptomatology and that it can acquire a compensatory dimension during the progress of therapy. We could confirm a typology based upon the formal criterion of the quantitative productivity (Table 1).

Table 1. Typology of the TAT protocols and of the stories written under musical induction (according to [4])

	Productivity –	Productivity + –	Productivity +
Group I (inhibition)	Morose type		Anxious type
Group D (disinhibition)	Factual type	Immature type	Narcissistic type

Within group I

- a **morose** type: quite unproductive, vague;
- an **anxious** type: more productive and inventive, where anxiety is freely expressed.

Within group D

- a **factual** type, intellectualising and quite unproductive;
- an **immature** type, showing raw aggressiveness, with neglected protocols from a formal point of view;
- a **narcissistic** type, very productive, showing intense emotional involvement.

The results of the longitudinal study, based on the treatment records of the adolescents belonging to the clinical group, suggest that the archetype of the double actually varies according to this typology.

As an illustration, we will present two representative examples of the archetype of the double, appearing at the outset of the therapy in the TAT protocols of the narcissistic and anxious types:

Narcissistic type:

“The violin was a part of him, it was his heart that made it come to life, and it was his soul that made it become immortal. Without this half, he was not worth more than anybody else. It frightened him to think about this, so he devoted himself to it until he could not feel his fingers any longer. Despite his ardent work, he thought that he played badly and that his music was colourless; like he was playing one single minor note for a whole song. It seemed to him that his violin was silent, that it did not tell any story... that

we was not able to move like he was supposed to. The little boy wanted to be perfect. Everybody told him that he was among the best, but for him that could not be encouraging, because it meant that he was not “the best”. This thought offended him. His life became meaningless, because, according to him, that half was dead and without it he was dead in any case. So, one day, he decided to jump from the top of the hill on the first day of autumn and to leave behind his violin that would thus remain silent.”

TAT Plate 1

Like a vampire, the grandiose Ideal, symbolised by the violin, literally sucked its victim’s blood. The Self, having completely lost its own vitality, is confined to immolate itself, at the same time silencing the tyrant’s voice.

Anxious type:

*“The mountaineer
The man is climbing at the top of a cliff without seeing the peak. Has he really got a goal? For once he will see the world from above. Will the rope not be torn? Does he wonder about this? No, certainly not. In reality, it does not happen this way, the man lets the rope slip from his hands. Does he want to commit suicide? Does he want to fly? Nobody knows.”*

TAT Plate 17 BM

The mentioned state is close to a feeling of depersonalisation. The apparent affective disentanglement is expressed in a poignant manner by means of the stylistic procedure of the repeated questions destined to the reader. It is a symbolic translation of the existential fear in the face of the feeling of emptiness that the adolescent feels inside himself.

b) Changes in the category of the Alter Ego during therapy

During therapy, a converging evolution appears in the qualitative and stylistic improvement of the stories and in the fine-tuning of the playing of instruments. At the level of the improvised music, there was an increasing tendency towards controlled flexibility of dynamics and tempi, towards the integration of different musical parameters and towards complex formal structuring. At the level of the stories, there was a parallel evolution towards the appearance of more existential topics, of archetypal figures reflecting an increasing degree of affective maturing, of a deepened realisation of humanitarian and social problems, and, in general, of an expansion of the horizon of interests. Similarly, we witness a decrease of the archaic defence mechanisms like denial and splitting, a progression towards a more diverse vision of the other and of the self, towards the integration of the positive and negative aspects of the parental images, and towards a maturing of moral sense.

Thus, a compensatory evolution in relation to the typology mentioned above takes place during the arts psychotherapeutic process:

- In the protocols of the **morose** type, repression decreases, anxiety unfolds more freely; aggressive topics emerge, with a simultaneous increase of productivity and of creativity.
- In the protocols of the **anxious** type, the quality of the cognitive and artistic elaboration improves, humorous stand-off becomes possible.
- For the **factual** type, the imaginary and affective inhibitions are abolished, conflictual topics proliferate and feelings of fear and guilt increasingly appear.
- In the final phase of treatment, the **immature** type is characterised by a decrease of impulsiveness, the appearance of a better controlled aggressiveness and of increased moral and social preoccupations.
- With the **narcissistic** type, the depressive topic becomes more frequent, the needs of tenderness become more apparent and the quality of the symbolic elaboration increases.

This change is reflected in the new facets of the double:

Anxious type phase II:

"She is desperate and escapes out of the door, crying, running, in order to leave that house behind. She ran without pausing, straight ahead, without noticing her exhaustion, without thinking about anything at all, as far as possible, freed from all the thoughts and the problems that oppressed her. Because where she was going to land, there would not be any more problems. No more wracking one's brains: "What is bad? What is good? Why is it thus and not differently?" It is possible that she was always looking for problems where there were none. Why complicate one's life if everything can be easy? Unfortunately, there are no drugs against pessimism and gloom... but to live like this and to hide one's real state is difficult. The day comes when one simply says: "It's enough. I had enough." And then, one escapes... not from one's problems, but in order to be free. And if it is not possible to leave, the moment comes when one blows up. Unfortunately, she was desperate and disheartened and did not dare showing her anger. That is why she did not find any remedy other than escaping and crying. Let us hope that one day she will be happy and will discover ease and inner peace on her way."

Mozart: Symphony Jupiter

In this example, possibilities of cognitive elaboration start surfacing: the transition to taking personal responsibility is accompanied by an increase in mentalizing [13]. The destiny seems no longer implacable.

Narcissistic type phase II:

"A very long time ago, a poor little boy was looking for food in the forest. He found a violin next to a dead man. He took the violin and ran away. Arriving

at home, he started playing the violin. He admired this instrument a lot and played every day as much as he could. After some years, when he was 13 years old, he was the greatest artist on earth. He started playing in the streets in order to earn some money and give it to his mother. People admired him, and one day, when he had enough money to rent a concert hall, he gave a concert with his own compositions. All the people who had listened to him playing in the streets came to listen to this talented young man. The concert hall was crowded to overflowing. The boy gave a wonderful concert. With the money he earned, he rented an even bigger concert hall. And again, many admirers came to applaud him. At the next concert, there were even more, and thus developed the career of a great artist, who initially had been very poor."

Beethoven: Violin Concerto

In this story, the narcissistic needs and the aspirations towards the idealising summits of the Ideal Self meet and lead towards a happy evolution. The topic of the poor boy that becomes rich and famous thanks to his own efforts, and not by means of the intervention of an exterior magical power, reflects the hope of a happy future and confidence in one's own capabilities.

Immature type phase II:

"Rancho was a little boy who lived with his family in Mexico. His family was however not of Mexican origin, but of European origin. Rancho's father had set up a children's hospital in Mexico, and that is why the whole family had emigrated. Rancho is proud that his father sticks up that much for the poor children. Even though there is neither television nor computer in this region, he is comfortable. He also made new friends; he attends the same class. Luckily, his mother spoke Mexican; she could thus easily help him.

Rancho gradually grows up and his parents are no longer very young. One day,

the boy would have to succeed his father as the director of the hospital, after the former's death. In the meantime, Rancho had met a young girl who he married two years later. After three years they had a child. They called him Jacques, like Rancho's father. Rancho's father became seriously ill. At the beginning he had had a mild cold, but some days later, only machines could keep him alive. Two weeks later, it was over. He died. Rancho became director of the hospital."

Magic of the flutes of the Andes

This story, produced by a boy who was formerly immature and unstable, shows a heightened sense of the succession of the generations and of the problem of filiations as well as the identification with positive paternal values.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of the study allow giving answers to the questions asked during the preparatory phase of the study:

Can we recognise in these symbolic characters compensatory features regarding the subject's initial problems?

In the different facets of the Alter Ego, imaginary self-objects, in Kohut's sense, used for fulfilling the basic needs of a Self in the making can be recognised. The creation of negative heroes, who are exaggeratedly bad, corresponds to the imaginary and symbolic elaboration of violence that the adolescents carry within themselves. The abundance of topics centred on aggressiveness is not surprising, because, according to developmental psychology [14], acquiring a personal moral conscience is one of the central tasks of adolescence. The process of subjectivation is hence appearing through the archetype of the double by confronting the adolescent with his own hidden parts, as well as with his ideals and his unmet objectal and narcissistic needs.

Do they gradually expand during the therapeutic progress, so that they reflect the integration of the hidden and split parts of the self?

The phenomenological content analysis allowed us establishing a typology among the different categories of the double and the fact that

the latter are related to the subject's initial problems, defending thus the hypothesis that they comprise specific compensatory features and that the subsequent transformations of the double can allow us following the progress of therapy in relation to a certain type of pathology.

If the adolescents from the control group often playfully mention the monsters inside of themselves, the adolescents suffering from emotional or conduct disorders linked to a borderline organisation of the personality seem to have lost the internal freedom and flexibility vis-à-vis their own imaginary creations [15,16] They completely adhere to them, not being able to cognitively or humorously elaborate. These are qualities that they gradually acquire during therapy, depending on the expansion of the archetype of the double. In Kohut's words [11], we witness the evolution of partial and distorted images of self-objects towards more humanised representations of the self and the other. Our examples illustrated this process.

What is generally their role in the adolescents' search for identity, beyond the realm of the pathology?

As the stories can function like a mirror of the self, the archetype of the double with its different facets can help to enhance self-awareness [17], which is a crucial factor in the development of a coherent representation of oneself and the other during the identity quest of middle adolescence.

What can be the contribution of the content analysis of archetypal figures to traditional models of verbal psychotherapy?

The use of stories written under musical induction favours the mentalizing capacities [5, 16]. Mentalization is a promising concept for the understanding of the psychotherapeutic process, even if its neuropsychological implications need further investigations [18-20]. It could help understanding why a combination of an artistic mediation with a verbal approach belonging to the cognitive-psychodynamic tradition [13,21,22] or to the existential one [23] is especially efficient with adolescents.

At the level of epistemology, the analysis of the different facets of the double can make a valuable contribution to the meaning-making approaches of the psychotherapeutic research [24], and especially with adolescents suffering from

emotional disorders, conduct disorders or from an identity quest complicated by character pathology [25].

5. CONCLUSION

The archetype of the double is a message sent to the therapist by the client, a testimony of his drive for life, i.e. of the self-healing power that he finds within himself. This symbol allows us to communicate with him in an analogous language, by means of the code suggested by the client himself.

Many questions still need to be answered, but in any case, the study of the archetype of the Alter Ego seems to be promising from the point of view of basic research in developmental psychology and in psychopathology of adolescence [26].

The interpretation of the results is all the more fascinating that the concept of the archetype inserts itself into a long cultural tradition [2,27,3], exceeding the area of clinical psychology and allowing making links with philosophy, musicology, ethno psychoanalysis and cultural anthropology and understanding in a different way the identity quest of middle adolescence.

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